

THE U.S. GOVERNMENT has arrogated to itself the right to rain down death on countries in the Middle East, Central Asia, and Africa... to continue to hold thousands in prisons all over the world without trial and utilizing torture... to step up repression against those who within the U.S. attempt to organize against this... and, now, under the cover of “humanitarianism,” to carry out military intervention, with European allies, in Libya to reassert its dominance.

We sense there’s a lid on response to these crimes from people within the U.S. who don’t want the U.S. endangering the world, but who see the growth of oppressive Islamic fundamentalism, and fear strengthening it.

The resulting paralysis is morally unacceptable, as is the support some progressives have given to U.S. military operations in Libya. Meanwhile, Islamic fundamentalism, presenting itself as an “alternative” to Western domination, continues to assert itself, including in the recent popular uprisings in the Middle East. And so in Egypt, we see attempts by fundamentalist forces to put a brake on the radical aspirations of people, especially women.

Is there an alternative to both empire and Islamic fundamentalism? At a time when the uprisings in the Middle East have given renewed hope to many, there is a chance to break through this impasse and to explore, debate and frame the possibilities of a different way, adding to the urgently needed political oxygen that the peoples of Egypt, Tunisia, and elsewhere have injected into the atmosphere.

Through this exchange, we seek to create space to engage, wrangle, and test the ideas of a diverse panel of prominent artists, scholars, and political thinkers about alternatives to these two unacceptable options – in a world crying out for fundamental change.

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SINAN ANTOON, a poet, essayist, novelist, and Associate Professor in the Gallatin School at NYU is the author of *I’jaam: An Iraqi Rhapsody*, and *The Baghdad Blues*, a collection of poems. He lived in Iraq through the Gulf War, and directed a documentary in 2003 about the occupation of his native Baghdad. He was nominated for a PEN Prize for his translation of poet Mahmoud Darwish.

Iraqi-born artist **WAFAA BILAL**, an Assistant Arts Professor at New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts, is known internationally for his on-line performative and interactive works provoking dialogue about international politics and internal dynamics. Bilal’s work is constantly informed by the experience of fleeing his homeland and existing simultaneously in two worlds – his home in the “comfort zone” of the U.S. and his consciousness of the “conflict zone” in Iraq.

LAURA LEE SCHMIDT is the East Coast Assistant Regional Coordinator for the Platypus Affiliated Society and an editor of the *PlatypuF’s Review*. She gained her master’s degree from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture and will continue her graduate work as a PhD student in Harvard’s History of Science program.

SUNSARA TAYLOR is a writer for *Revolution* Newspaper, a host of WBAI’s *Equal Time for Freethought*, and sits on the Advisory Board of World Can’t Wait. She has written on the rise of theocracy, wars and repression in the U.S., led in building resistance to these crimes, and takes as her foundation the new synthesis on revolution and communism developed by Bob Avakian.

GREGORY WILPERT works for the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation as Coordinator of its Venezuela projects and is author of the Verso book, *Changing Venezuela by Taking Power: The History and Policies of the Chavez Government*.

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