

Egypt's President Mubarak comes to the aid of Bush

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President George W. Bush is a man in serious trouble, who faces widespread resistance to the US occupation of Iraq. His first action has been to rally his closest and most trusted allies to his side in order to win their agreement for an escalation of his brutal repression of the popular uprising of the Iraqi people.

For this reason, it is a matter of great political significance that visits by Israel's Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Britain's Tony Blair are book-ended by the official April 12 reception for Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak and Jordan's King Abdullah II on April 21.

Mubarak's response to the crisis facing the US administration provides a case study of the venal role played by the entire Arab bourgeoisie. In his hour of need Bush needed two things from his Egyptian ally in order to further his predatory ambitions in the Middle East: *carte blanche* for his bloody suppression of the Iraqi people and the endorsement of his sordid manoeuvres with Sharon in efforts to suppress the Palestinian *intifada*.

Mubarak did not disappoint on either score.

After being wine and dined at the president's ranch in Crawford, Texas, Mubarak joined Bush in a high-profile press conference and in issuing a joint statement on Middle Eastern affairs that stressed their common purpose.

With Iraqi casualties rising to close to 1,000 during this month alone, bringing the overall total to above 10,000, Mubarak's sole comment to the world's media was to explain, "On Iraq, I conveyed to the president our serious concerns about the current state of affairs, particularly in the security and the humanitarian areas."

He then stressed the importance of restoring Iraq's sovereignty as soon as possible while preserving its territorial integrity. This is little more than a tacit endorsement of Bush's plans to hand over formal power to Washington's hand-picked puppet administration on June 30. Mubarak's sole caveat was a polite request that the United Nations—and through it the other imperialist powers—be given a greater role in Iraqi governance so as to provide a fig leaf of independence and legitimacy to a US stooge regime.

Bush was not troubled by such platitudes, replying that US military forces had acted against "lawlessness and gangs" trying to derail the transition to democracy and therefore to

ensure "that a transition can take place."

Equally obscene was Mubarak's giving a green light for Bush to accept Sharon's plan for a so-called unilateral separation from the Palestinians. Both parties declared that Sharon's proposal to withdraw from the Gaza Strip was a positive development so long as it is part of the US-backed peace "road map" envisioning a Palestinian state by 2005.

Bush said that if Sharon "were to decide to withdraw from the Gaza, it would be a positive development" if it did not replace the road map, while Mubarak said "any withdrawal from the occupied territory is very highly appreciated."

He added, "We both are in agreement that if Israel makes the decision to withdraw, it doesn't replace the roadmap. It is a part of the roadmap, so that we can continue progress toward the two-state solution."

In the joint statement issued afterwards, Mubarak vowed cooperation to build a peaceful Iraq, to fight terrorism, spread democratic reforms in the Middle East and to end the Arab-Israeli conflict.

It declared, "We believe that an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and parts of the West Bank can, under the right conditions, and if it is within the context of the implementation of the roadmap and President Bush's vision, be a significant step forward."

Such talk of the "road map" and whether Sharon's plans match up with a formal commitment to the creation of a Palestinian state it contains is a wilful deception of the Arab masses and a gross betrayal of the Palestinian people.

Sharon's "unilateral separation" is more correctly described as a land grab that would result in the permanent annexation of up to 60 percent of the West Bank by Israel.

He has offered to evacuate 21 Zionist settlements in the Gaza Strip, but this is merely a cover for his expansionist aims. There are only 7,500 Jewish settlers in the Gaza Strip, who are surrounded by 1.3 million Palestinians. In contrast, about 240,000 Jewish settlers live in the West Bank, rising to 400,000 if East Jerusalem is included. Sharon intends to cement this settlement policy by erecting a giant security fence lopping off the bulk of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

He has pledged to remove only four isolated settlements on the West Bank and has promised that the six biggest—Maale

Adumim, Hebron, Kiryat Arba and Gush Etzion in the south of the West Bank, Ariel in the north, and Givat Zeev north of Jerusalem—“will remain under Israeli control.” Collectively they house 120,000 Israelis.

These moves will render the creation of any form of contiguous Palestinian state impossible, which is Sharon’s intention. This week he told a settler gathering in Maale Adumim that their homes would “continue to be built as part of Israel, for all eternity.”

In a recent interview with *Maariv*, he stated openly, “In the unilateral plan, there is no Palestinian state. This situation could continue for many years.”

He added, “When you fence areas and communities in the West Bank, you end a lot of their [the Palestinians’] dreams.... My plan is tough on the Palestinians. A mortal blow.”

Finally he again threatened to assassinate Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, describing him as “a marked man.”

As for the supposed withdrawal from Gaza, this will do nothing to weaken Israel’s grip. Sharon has made clear there will be no Palestinian control over any ports and that Israel will control a patrol road in the south of the Gaza Strip on the border with Egypt. Even the vacated Zionist homes will be handed over to an unnamed international organisation, rather than be destroyed—and could therefore be reoccupied at any time.

Bush understands Sharon’s intentions all too clearly, hence his warning at the joint press conference that “there will never be a Palestinian state, in my judgement, if terrorists are willing to kill. And so, the first step we’ve all got to do is to work on the mutual security concerns of the region.”

He is expected to agree to fund Sharon’s colonial policy with an extra \$1 billion and to sign a joint statement accepting that Israel’s final border will not be the 1949 armistice line between Israel and the West Bank of what was Jordan, granting Israel the right to “pursue terrorists,” including in areas from which it has pulled out and to deny the right of return of Palestinians to Israel.

It is in full knowledge of these vile intentions that Mubarak not only pledged that Egypt would do “whatever it takes” to revive peace efforts, but also offered to police the border with Gaza—which Egypt administered before the 1967 war—in order to prevent the Palestinians from securing weapons. Mubarak also offered to train any Palestinian security force that will be charged with clamping down on dissenting militant groups such as Hamas.

And what does the Egyptian regime get in return? In the first instance, it is the bought and paid for servant of Washington. The US sends \$2 billion in aid each year to Egypt, making it the second biggest recipient after Israel, which receives \$3 billion of which \$2 billion is spent directly on its military. (Jordan’s Abdullah II gets \$250 million in economic support and \$198 in military financing.)

It is estimated that Egypt has received over \$50 billion from

the US since 1975, the vast bulk of which goes directly into the hands of Mubarak and his cronies.

But this financial arrangement is only one manifestation of the organic connection between the bourgeoisie in the oppressed nations and the imperialist powers. It has been a long time since the Arab regimes made any plausible pretence of anti-imperialist sentiment. The pan-Arabism and socialist pretensions of the Nasser era have left only a few decaying fragments such as the PLO. Its Egyptian epigones, however, have led the rapprochement with US imperialism—abrogating the Soviet-Egyptian Friendship Treaty in 1976, ending the state control of foreign trade and opening the door to US corporations and finally signing an official peace with Israel in 1979 after US-sponsored talks at Camp David.

The bourgeois regimes in the Middle East fear the threat posed to their opulent existence by the working class and peasantry of the region far more than they object to their direct subordination to the dictates of the imperialist powers and the global corporations. Despite their ever more infrequent outbursts of anti-US and Israeli rhetoric, there is not a single Arab government that would today consider taking a stand against even the most brutal excesses of Washington—for fear that they would arouse a popular social movement that may get out of control.

These well-paid flunkies share fully in the exploitation of the region’s resources and peoples by the western oil giants—receiving sums that dwarf what they receive in US aid—and will not bite the hand that feeds them. All they ask is that Washington allows the present arrangements to continue, in return for which these autocratic and police-militarist regimes promise to police their own subject peoples by denying them any and all independent democratic expression of their will.

A successful struggle against US imperialism’s subjugation of the region—one that can unite those fighting heroically against the occupation of Iraq and for the realisation of the democratic aspirations of the Palestinian masses—is only possible through a political break with the likes of Mubarak and all other sections of the Arab bourgeoisie. What is required is the forging of a united movement of the working class of the entire Middle East to take forward a common struggle to build a democratic and socialist society.



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