# WikiLeaks exposes US complicity in murder, torture by Egyptian government

**Tom Eley**
**29 January 2011**

On Friday, WikiLeaks released dozens of diplomatic cables that together reveal the US has long been aware of the criminality of the Mubarak regime in Egypt and its savage abuses, including torture, random arrest, and extra-judicial killings. The documents also reveal that plans for the military-supervised transfer of power from Hosni Mubarak to his son, Gamal, were presented to Washington.

The document release, which coincided with mass demonstrations and clashes with police in Cairo, Suez, and other cities, will only serve to further discredit Mubarak, and is a major embarrassment to the Obama administration, whose leading representatives, including President Obama, Vice President Joe Biden, and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, have continued to insist that the Mubarak regime is not a dictatorship, while hypocritically calling for "restraint."

The documents, diplomatic cables from the US embassy in Cairo from 2009 and 2010, make clear that the Obama administration was well aware that the Mubarak regime held onto power by terrorizing the population. But Washington tacitly supported the dictatorship and its crimes because Egypt is considered the most important component to US strategy for a wide region encompassing the Middle East, the Maghreb, and the Horn of Africa.

Perhaps the most damning cable is from Ambassador Margaret Scobey, dated January 15, 2009. The letter calls police brutality "routine and pervasive" and states that "police using force to extract confessions from criminals [is] a daily event." Embassy informants "estimate there are literally hundreds of torture incidents every day in Cairo police stations alone."

The rampant abuse of alleged criminals extends to political opponents, the cable notes. One activist, part of what the embassy referred to as "the April 6 Facebook strike," was arrested on November 20, 2008. "[T]he GOE [government of Egypt] is probably torturing him to scare other 'April 6' members into abandoning their political activities," it adds. The cable also refers to the "sexual molestation of a female 'April 6 activist." Scobey reported that another blogger said security forces stopped torturing him only "when he began cooperating."

The same cable refers to "standing orders from the Interior Ministry between 2000 and 2006 for the police to shoot, beat and humiliate judges in order to undermine judicial independence."

The Mubarak regime arrests journalists, even poets. A July 28, 2009 letter from the Cairo embassy notes that "a recent series of selective [government] actions against journalists, bloggers and even an amateur poet illustrates the variety of methods available to the GOE to suppress critical opinion, including an array of investigative authorities and public and private legal actions."

A cable from the Cairo embassy dated January 12, 2009 gives the lie to Obama administration's claim that the Mubarak regime is not a dictatorship. It refers to the quasi-legal basis of the government, which has ruled through "emergency powers" for decades: "Egypt's State of Emergency, in effect almost continuously since 1967, allows for the application of the 1958 Emergency Law, which grants the GOE broad powers to arrest individuals without charge and to detain them indefinitely." It adds that the regime "has also used the Emergency Law in some recent cases to target bloggers and labor demonstrators."

The cable describes the law. "The Emergency Law creates state security courts, which issue verdicts that cannot be appealed, and can only be modified by the president," the note explains. "[It] allows the president broad powers to 'place restrictions' on freedom of assembly. Separately, the penal code criminalizes the assembly of 5 or more people in a gathering that could 'threaten public order.'"

© World Socialist Web Site

US diplomats appear to have been most preoccupied with "succession" after the death of the elderly Mubarak. A cable dated July 30, 2009, entitled "Military will ensure transfer of power," reveals that the State Department was banking on Egypt's army overseeing a stable transition of power, most likely to Mubarak's son, Gamal.

"NDP [National Democratic Party] insider and former minister Dr. Ali El Deen Hilal Dessouki dismissed public and media speculation about succession," in discussions with embassy officials, the cable notes. "He said Egyptian military and security services would ensure a smooth transfer of power, even to a civilian… His assurances that the Egyptian military and security services would ensure a smooth succession to a civilian [by implication Gamal Mubarak] were unusually straightforward and blunt."

"Dr. Dessouki's most important message, he said was to always keep in mind that 'the real center of power in Egypt is the military,' a reference he said included all security forces," the cable concluded.

In the same conversation Dessouki called opposition parties and democracy "a long term goal."

A number of the cables deal with an easing of tensions between Egypt and the US in the wake of Obama assuming the presidency.

A May 19, 2009 letter explains that Mubarak had been "encouraged" by Obama and Clinton and that he was anxious to demonstrate Egypt remained the central US ally in the region. Mubarak "railed" against the US invasion of Iraq under George W. Bush, which he viewed to be a disaster not because it destroyed more than a million lives and an entire society, but because he believes it strengthened Iran's position. The dictator also blames the US for the strength of Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine's Gaza Strip.

The cables suggest that Mubarak has an almost pathological fear of Iran, that he opposes negotiations over its nuclear energy program, and favors "confrontation through isolation." One cable suggests this fear dates to the 1979 Iranian revolution. "He can harken back to the Shah of Iran: the U.S. encouraged him to accept reforms, only to watch the country fall into the hands of revolutionary religious extremists."

A March 30, 2009, cable reveals the Mubarak regime's preoccupation with the dangers posed to it by the Internet. The government "has arrested and jailed bloggers who have" insulted either "President Mubarak or Islam." The cable observed that "Egypt has an estimated 160,000 bloggers who write in Arabic, and sometimes in English, about a wide variety of topics, from social life to politics to literature… [A] solid majority of bloggers are between 20 and 35 years old, and that about 30 percent of blogs focus on politics. Blogs have spread throughout the population to become vehicles for a wide range of activists, students, journalists and ordinary citizens to express their views on almost any issue they choose. As such, the blogs have significantly broadened the range of topics that Egyptians are able to discuss publicly."

There was a dim awareness in the US embassy in Egypt that the economic crisis was destabilizing the Mubarak regime. "[E]conomic problems have frustrated many Egyptians. Egypt's per capita GDP was on par with South Korea's 30 years ago; today it is comparable to Indonesia's. There were bread riots in 2008 for the first time since 1977. Political reforms have stalled and the GOE has resorted to heavy-handed tactics against individuals and groups," a March 30, 2009 cable notes.

The cables demonstrate the courage of the Egyptian demonstrators in the face of the brutality of the Mubarak regime, as WikiLeaks editor Maria Luisa Rivera notes in introducing them. "As an Internet blackout imposed by the state covers the country, every citizen and grassroots organization will now be exposed to arbitrary police forces," she writes. "As secret documents from US prove, during the demonstrations today, authorities might use physical threats, legal threats and extraordinary laws such the Emergency Law as an excuse to persecute and prosecute activists during the pacific demonstrations taking place in Cairo and other cities."

She continues, "Excessive use of force by police during the protests [has already] led to arbitrary executions and detentions in a vast array of abuses, a situation that is known and acknowledged in the past by US diplomats based in Egypt. It is important to bear in mind the long record of police abuse and torture by Egyptian police forces."

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**wsws.org/contact**


© World Socialist Web Site