

Democrats on the Mubarak payroll

Patrick Martin
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The extraordinary endorsement of Egypt's longtime military strongman Hosni Mubarak by the US special envoy to Egypt, Frank Wisner, has put the spotlight on the close ties between the Egyptian regime and an array of Washington lobbyists with close ties to the Democratic Party.

Wisner is himself a veteran State Department official who served the interests of American imperialism in both Democratic and Republican administrations, under eight presidents, including stints as US ambassador to Egypt, Zambia, the Philippines and India. After retiring from the government, he went to work in 2009 for the law firm of Patton Boggs, the premier Democratic lobbying group in the US capital.

The "Boggs" in the title of the giant, 600-attorney firm is Thomas Hale Boggs, Jr., son of the late House Majority Leader Hale Boggs and former congresswoman Lindy Boggs and brother of longtime ABC commentator Cokie Boggs Roberts (herself married to former *New York Times* reporter Steven Roberts).

Veterans of the firm also include former Democratic senator John Breaux, the late Ron Brown, one-time chairman of the Democratic National Committee and secretary of commerce in the Clinton administration, and Republican Benjamin Ginsberg, a lead attorney for the Bush-Cheney campaign in the 2000 presidential election litigation in Florida.

According to a report by Robert Fisk in the British newspaper *The Independent*, Patton Boggs "openly boasts" that it works with "the Egyptian military, the Egyptian Economic Development Agency, and has handled arbitrations and litigation on the government's behalf in Europe and the US." The firm's lawyers also "represent some of the leading Egyptian commercial families and their companies" and "have been involved in oil and gas and telecommunications infrastructure projects on their behalf."

A Patton Boggs partner served as chairman of the US-Egyptian Chamber of Commerce, which promotes investment in the Egyptian economy, and the firm has also handled contractor disputes under the US Foreign Military Sales Act, which governs much of the lucrative US arms trade with Egypt (in which purchases of US arms are paid for by US government military aid to the Mubarak dictatorship).

When Wisner joined Patton Boggs two years ago, the firm said he would provide clients with "strategic global advice concerning business, politics and international law," adding that, "it looks to Ambassador Wisner to use his expertise in the Middle East and India to assist its American and international clients."

When Secretary of State Hillary Clinton selected Wisner as the special US envoy to Egypt, giving him the responsibility to be the American interlocutor with Mubarak, this amounted to a back-channel assurance to the Egyptian ruler. The man being sent to deliver the Obama administration's message was a man who had been on Mubarak's payroll for the previous two years!

It is little surprise then that Wisner privately reassured Mubarak of American backing, and then said so publicly, at a US-Europe security conference over the weekend in Munich, Germany.

Wisner and Patton Boggs are not the only prominent and politically connected lobbyists under retainer from the Egyptian regime. A total of six other lobbying firms were registered as agents of the Egyptian government, helping secure billions in military and economic aid and dispel any criticism of the bloodstained dictatorship on human rights grounds.

These include former Democratic congressman Toby Moffett and longtime Democratic lobbyist Tony Podesta, brother of a top White House adviser, John Podesta, who served as transition chief for the incoming Obama administration in 2008-2009. Moffett

and Podesta joined forces with a top former Republican congressman, Bob Livingston of Louisiana, in 2007 to create the PLM group, specifically devoted to international lobbying, with Egypt as a major client.

As the bloodshed has mounted in Egypt, Moffett has spoken repeatedly to the Washington media, defending his firm's ties to the dictatorship, for which PLM receives an annual retainer of \$1.1 million. He declared Egypt "is a very important strategic ally of the United States and it's about the country not flipping over into the hands of somebody who wants to make it anything other than a secular state," adding, "It is an honor to serve Egypt. We feel very good about it. We feel good about what we're doing."

PLM typically set up meetings with visiting delegations of Egyptian officials and military officers with congressmen, government officials and executives of defense contractors, including, among others, BAE Systems, General Dynamics, General Electric, Raytheon and Lockheed Martin. PLM also has contracts to lobby for many of these companies as well.

Other lobbyists for Mubarak include the big public relations firm Hill and Knowlton, with close ties to the Republican Party, as well as the Chlopak, Leonard, Schecter and Associates, with a \$550,000-a-year contract plus expenses for PR work. Robert Chlopak is a former executive director of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, while Charles Leonard worked for the 1988 Bush presidential campaign and the Republican National Committee.



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