

# Munich Security Conference defends the Egyptian regime

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The annual security conference held in Munich is the military equivalent of the Davos World Economic Forum. Both events are officially classified as “private”, but serve as a meeting place for the political, economic and military elite. Aside from the official discussions, there are many opportunities for informal meetings to discuss current world political issues in a more intimate setting.

Attending the 47th Security Conference last weekend were more than 500 invited guests and observers, including 22 heads of government or state, 22 foreign ministers, 24 defense ministers and commanding generals and 67 other ministers. Representing the German government were Chancellor Angela Merkel and the foreign, defense, finance and development ministers. The delegation from the US included Secretary of State Hillary Clinton; from Russia came her colleague Sergey Lavrov and from the UK, Prime Minister David Cameron. The general secretaries of the UN and NATO, as well as the president of Afghanistan were among the invited guests.

The official theme of the conference was “International Security faces new challenges—from financial crisis to cyberwar”. But the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt overturned the official agenda. The assembled leaders, ministers and generals realized that the popular uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East represented a far greater threat to their “security”—i.e., to imperialist rule—than the lack of public funds or electronic attacks from the Internet.

Accordingly, they searched intensively for ways and means to save the endangered autocratic rulers. They placed themselves so openly behind the hated Egyptian regime that several editorial comments felt obliged to issue warnings.

In the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Tomas Avenarius, who

had observed the insurgency in Egypt as the paper’s correspondent, wrote: “By placing too much confidence in the vice-president [Mubarak’s longtime intelligence chief Omar Suleiman] the Americans and Europeans could soon find themselves once again on the side of autocracy in Egypt, new face, old procedure. This will provoke the Egyptians even more. Then there is the threat of another revolution: anti-American, anti-Israeli, anti-Western and perhaps Islamic”.

Careful not to provoke the Egyptian masses even further, the participants at the Munich conference adopted the slogans “change has to be organized” and “orderly transition”. They were agreed upon by Secretary of State Clinton and Chancellor Merkel and accepted by virtually all participants, including the foreign ministers of Russia and Turkey.

The meaning of these slogans is as follows: The existing social system and the present form of rule must be maintained and defended against the insurgents, while new mechanisms and political parties are built to divide, paralyze and suppress the mass movement.

The conference participants were in agreement that the massive Egyptian security and military apparatus, the privileges of the wealthy upper class, the massive exploitation of the working class and the country’s pro-Washington foreign policy must be preserved at all costs, while some cosmetic changes are made on the surface.

It was stressed in Munich time and time again that new elections should be delayed as long as possible in order to prevent a “radicalization” and gain time to build a more stable regime.

Minor tactical differences emerged over the issue of whether the “orderly transition” should be carried out under 82-year-old Hosni Mubarak, or whether this task should be left to his longtime henchman Suleiman, or

another man of confidence of the Western powers and the Egyptian bourgeoisie.

Nobody in Munich argued for the immediate resignation of Mubarak fearing—as was the case with the resignation of the Tunisian ruler Zine El Abidine Ben Ali—that this would encourage insurgents in other countries. There were proposals to phase Mubarak gradually out of office, short of official resignation, by having him retreat to his estate in the resort of Sharm el-Sheikh or to a German hospital, where he has been treated medically before.

US President Barack Obama's special envoy to Egypt, Frank Wisner, who spoke to the conference in Munich by video, objected to this option. Wisner warned against abandoning the experience of a dictator who has ruled for 30 years. "President Mubarak has served his country for 60 years and now faces the task of leading Egypt into the future," he insisted.

Mubarak had to organize the change, Wisner said. His leadership continued to be of critical importance. In Egypt, there was still a functioning government, a president and an authority that should not be sacrificed to "complete chaos".

Wisner is one of the most experienced US intelligence officials. His father helped found the CIA after World War II. In Germany the elder Wisner set up the Gehlen Organization, the forerunner of the German Intelligence Service, which recruited old Nazis to spy on the Soviet Union. In 1953, his CIA office was instrumental in organizing the coup in Iran that overthrew the democratically elected prime minister, Mohammad Mossadegh, and replaced him with the dictatorship of the Shah. Wisner junior carried out similar activities in Kosovo and Iraq.

German Chancellor Merkel explained the strategy of "orderly transition" by referring to her own experience during the collapse of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the autumn of 1989.

Merkel, who lived in East Germany at the time and joined the right-wing civil rights movement Democratic Awakening, said she was acquainted with the feeling that a revolution could not proceed fast enough. However, when the unification of Germany was completed she was glad that "somebody had prepared it properly", she added. "Change has to be organized", she concluded.

With remarkable openness, Merkel admitted that

Democratic Awakening, which favored the introduction of capitalism, had absolutely no support amongst the masses fighting against political oppression and for better living conditions. "I then belonged to a new party that had all the right ideas. And at the election we received a full 0.9 percent", Merkel said. The conclusion she drew from this experience is that it was wrong to set an election at the beginning of a "democratic process". New forces needed time to establish themselves.

In 1989/90 Merkel was able to rely on the West German state apparatus and the old Stalinist apparatus from the GDR (East Germany) in order to realize her "right ideas". Above all the Stalinist SED (Socialist Unity Party) was convinced, in the words of its last prime minister, Hans Modrow, that "the road to unity was absolutely necessary and had to be pursued with determination." For millions of East German workers, however, the road to German unity meant the loss of their jobs and a life of insecurity.

In Egypt, the only force capable of curbing and suppressing the revolutionary enthusiasm of the masses is the existing state apparatus. This is why Merkel is so keen to retain this apparatus. Western governments were obliged to support "universal freedoms" such as freedom of the press and free speech, she proclaimed in Munich. However, it was up to "the Egyptian leaders"—i.e., Mubarak and Suleiman—to ensure such freedoms. A vacuum of power had to be avoided.

In assuring this, Europe will cooperate closely with the United States, Merkel concluded. This was the arrangement she had agreed in Munich with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.



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