

Obama backs bloodbath in Egypt

Bill Van Auken
3 February 2011

The Obama administration bears full political and moral responsibility for the state terror and bloody violence that have left scores dead and thousands wounded in Cairo's Tahrir (Liberation) Square and elsewhere in Egypt.

The attacks unleashed by mobs of armed men led by plainclothes secret police and the thugs of Hosni Mubarak's ruling National Democratic Party followed close on the heels of what officials in Washington described as a "frank" and lengthy telephone conversation between Obama and Mubarak. The telephone call came directly after Mubarak's televised speech announcing his intention to remain in office until the September elections.

The US president then delivered his own televised remarks praising the Egyptian military, affirming that Mubarak understood that a "change must take place," and calling for an "orderly transition" in Egypt. Amid the flowery and hypocritical rhetoric extolling the masses who have risen up against the dictatorship, Obama declared, "We stand ready to provide assistance that is necessary to help the Egyptian people as they manage the aftermath of these protests."

In other words, the protests are over. Get off of the streets and leave it to the US State Department and the Egyptian army to determine Egypt's future!

Whatever the White House claims Obama told Mubarak, the Egyptian president got a clear message: if the masses refused to accept his offer and cease their insurrectionary challenge, he had a green light from Washington to restore the power of his military-run dictatorship and use naked violence to drive them from the streets of Cairo, Alexandria, Suez and other cities and towns throughout Egypt.

Mubarak would hardly have mobilized thousands of cops and criminals to carry out attacks with knives, clubs, spears, molotov cocktails and horse and camel charges if he thought it would provoke US retaliation.

And the day's events have shown he had nothing to fear. While the White House and the State Department issued statements formally deploring the violence—while suggesting that somehow it was unclear who was

responsible—Obama's press secretary, Robert Gibbs, pointedly refused to answer whether Mubarak is a dictator and made it clear that there is no intention to suspend the \$2 billion in annual US aid that goes to the Egyptian regime, the lion's share to the country's military and repressive forces.

Nor has there been any demand from Washington for Mubarak to resign, with US spokesmen dancing around questions as to whether the Obama administration wants him out. Washington suffered no such reticence, it should be recalled, when it came to the various "color revolutions" orchestrated for the purpose of installing pro-US regimes in countries like Georgia and Ukraine.

In Egypt, however, it is another matter entirely. Decades of corruption and repression together with vast social inequality, deepening unemployment and grinding poverty have combined to create a mass revolutionary uprising against what has been US imperialism's chief ally in the Arab world, the universally proclaimed "linchpin" of its pursuit of hegemony in the Middle East.

As US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton put it over the weekend, the Egyptian regime has served as the "partner of the US for over three decades" and a vital asset in "trying to stabilize a region that is subject to a lot of challenges." That it sought to enforce this stability and to suppress these "challenges" by torturing and murdering its opponents was understood and caused no qualms in Washington.

The support for Mubarak within the US political establishment found a particularly noxious expression in a *New York Times* editorial Wednesday, describing the US stooge as a "proud nationalist."

In her statement, Clinton claimed that Washington's concern in relation to Egypt was to bring about a "real democracy" and not a "so-called democracy that then leads to what we saw in Iran." In other words, the sole criterion for a democracy is not the will of the people, but subordination to US interests.

How is the Obama administration promoting such a "real democracy?" First, it chose as its envoy to Egypt the

former ambassador to the country, Frank Wisner. Among Wisner's democratic credentials is his experience serving on the boards of both Enron and AIG and, most critically, having gone from being US ambassador to Egypt to Washington lobbyist on behalf of Mubarak and his regime.

Wisner's message from Obama was that Mubarak should hang on to the presidency until after elections are held toward the end of this year, precisely what the Egyptian dictator promised in his televised address. In all likelihood, Wisner also relayed the message that, if the Egyptian people failed to accept Mubarak's offer, he had Washington's backing for imposing his authority by whatever means necessary.

At the same time, the Obama administration has relied heavily on the US military and its connections with the Egyptian military command. Admiral Mike Mullen, the chairman of the US joint chiefs of staff, spoke to his Egyptian counterpart on Wednesday, for the second time in a week. He said he urged the senior Egyptian officer to ensure a "return to calm." The Pentagon said that Mullen "expressed his confidence in the Egyptian military's ability to provide for their country's security, both internally and throughout the Suez Canal area."

This followed a call Tuesday by US Defense Secretary Robert Gates to Egyptian Defense Minister Mohammed Hussein Tantawi—also the second call in a week—and coincided with a call by Hillary Clinton to Omar Suleiman, Mubarak's longtime head of military intelligence and torturer-in-chief, whom he tapped as his vice president last week.

What have all these discussions been about? The Pentagon has nearly 700 personnel inside Egypt and is fully informed about every action taken by that country's military. The role played by the army in Cairo Wednesday, opening up Tahrir Square to the massed squads of secret police and regime thugs to carry out their brutal attack, was worked out in advance with Gates, Mullen and the rest of the US military brass.

Whatever ideas there are in Washington about an "orderly transition" in Egypt, they are totally subordinate to maintaining a US-backed regime controlled by the Egyptian military and capable of smashing the insurrectionary movement. As one participant in the emergency National Security Council discussions being held at the White House told the Reuters news agency, "What the US isn't saying publicly is that it's putting its power behind (Egypt's) generals. The goal is to stack the deck in favor of the status quo—a scenario that removes

Mubarak, yet is otherwise more about continuity than change."

This is the "real democracy" advocated by Clinton. It can be achieved only by suppressing the uprising of the Egyptian masses. If there are to be elections, they will be held only after Washington has been able to rig their outcome, ensuring the victory of a US-backed puppet controlled by the Egyptian military.

If the Egyptian masses were allowed to express their genuine aspirations at the ballot box it would spell an end to the country's role as a servile client of Washington and Israel. A poll conducted by the Pew Global Attitudes Project last year showed that just 17 percent of the population had a positive view of US policy, on a par with Pakistan in registering the greatest hostility to Washington. This is hardly a surprise after more than three decades of US-backed dictatorship and US-sponsored economic "free market" policies that have devastated living standards.

The path of "orderly transition" upon which the Obama administration wants to lead Egypt cannot be taken without the kind of bloodbath that has already begun, its official statements deploring violence notwithstanding.

The revolutionary struggle begun by masses of Egyptian workers and oppressed against the Mubarak regime has led inevitably to a confrontation with US imperialism, the dictatorship's principal base of support. Victory in this struggle can be won only based upon the fight for the socialist transformation of existing property relations and the transfer of political power to the working class.

The workers of Egypt will find support for such a struggle not among the self-styled democrats of the national bourgeoisie, but within the international working class and among the workers of the United States itself. The most burning task is the building of a new revolutionary leadership based upon the perspective of international socialism defended only by the International Committee of the Fourth International.

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