

Obama's crocodile tears over Egypt's violence

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“We pray that the violence in Egypt will end, and that the rights and aspirations of the Egyptian people will be realized, and that a better day will dawn over Egypt,” President Barack Obama solemnly intoned at the beginning of his remarks to the National Prayer Breakfast Thursday morning.

This annual celebration of official righteousness is, appropriately enough, convened by the Fellowship Foundation, a shadowy, politically connected group with a long record of organizing “prayer circles” that bring together foreign dictators, American politicians and military contractors. Defending the practice, the group’s organizer noted, “the Bible is full of mass murderers.”

Obama’s prayer follows a series of White House and State Department statements “deploring” the violence in Egypt and expressing moral indignation over the attacks by the regime of President Hosni Mubarak on peaceful protesters and the media.

Who do they think they are kidding? For 30 years, US administrations, Democratic and Republican alike, including that of Obama, have backed Mubarak precisely because of his ability to impose policies supported by Washington against the overwhelming opposition of the Egyptian people. That this required systematic and relentless violence was well understood.

If Obama is crying crocodile tears now over the violence that has left hundreds dead and thousands wounded in the streets of Cairo, Alexandria, Suez and across Egypt, it is only because this violence has stopped working, and the Egyptian people continue to resist and struggle.

He wasn’t crying when he delivered his speech in Cairo in June 2009, which included not a word of criticism of the Mubarak regime. Instead, he praised the Egyptian dictator as a “stalwart ally” and a “force for

stability and good in the region.”

Like his predecessors at the White House, Obama has sent an estimated \$2 billion annually—second only to US aid to Israel—to prop up Mubarak’s dictatorship. The vast bulk of this money has gone to the army and police forces for the purpose of repressing the people of Egypt and the entire region.

That the president and other top US officials were hardly unaware of the violence carried out daily by the regime has been substantiated by documentary proof thanks to the secret diplomatic cables from the Cairo embassy released by WikiLeaks. A cable sent to Washington by the US ambassador in Cairo just months before Obama’s speech noted matter-of-factly that police brutality in Egypt is “routine and pervasive”, with “literally hundreds of torture incidents every day in Cairo police stations alone.”

This was hardly news. The Egyptian government has ruled through a virtually uninterrupted state of emergency over the course of Mubarak’s entire presidency. This allowed administrative detention without trial, the criminalization of strikes and the outlawing of any non-sanctioned gathering of five or more people.

In practice, this has meant that workers who have dared to strike have been met with riot police and troops, subjected to mass arrests and beaten with clubs and rifle butts. Leaders of workers’ protests have been hunted down, jailed and tortured. Those who the regime has bothered bringing to trial have frequently been hauled before special state security courts supposedly meant to deal with cases of armed terrorism.

Neither Obama’s nor any other US administration has found these actions troubling. They have helped create the most profitable conditions for the Egyptian

bourgeoisie and transnational banks and corporations. Certainly no US official suggested withholding a single cent of US aid over the brutal repression of the Egyptian workers.

While Washington is now expressing its indignation over the arrests and intimidation of US and other foreign journalists covering the events in Egypt, it took no action against its client Mubarak as his regime arrested, tortured and “disappeared” journalists over the years, including for such offenses as “misquoting” his ministers, raising questions about his own health or writing derogatory reports about his son and chosen successor, Gamal.

The US viewed with approval the rounding up and detention without charges of thousands of members of the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups.

Washington likewise made no issue over the barbaric forms of torture meted out against thousands upon thousands of political prisoners, which ranged from burning people on their chest and legs to attaching electrodes to their tongues, nipples and genitals, to hanging them upside down to beatings and rapes.

On the contrary, the US government and its intelligence agencies viewed Mubarak’s torturers as a resource. It is likely that CIA officials watching the televised coverage of the goon squads attacking the protesters in Tahrir Square would have recognized some of their ringleaders, having rubbed shoulders with them in the torture chambers of Cairo’s Lazoughli Street secret police headquarters or Maulhaq al-Mazra prison.

Under an “extraordinary rendition program” begun under the Clinton administration in the 1990s, alleged terror suspects abducted by the CIA elsewhere in the world were flown in hoods and shackles to Egypt for the express purpose of being interrogated under torture. This grisly arrangement, which established a seamless unity between the Egyptian torture regime and US imperialism’s intervention in the Middle East, was worked out between US intelligence and the head of Mubarak’s secret police, Omar Suleiman. Recently named as vice president, Suleiman has been in regular telephone discussions with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Vice President Joe Biden and other US officials.

Moreover, the role of the Egyptian regime as the “stalwart ally” of both the US and Israel has facilitated

massive violence, from the US invasion of Iraq to the Israeli wars in Lebanon and the Gaza Strip.

This is the objective and historical context in which Obama’s prayer for an end to violence and his crocodile tears over the repression in Egypt must be evaluated.

Behind its pseudo-democratic posturing, the US administration is playing for time. Within ruling circles and the US military-intelligence apparatus, there no doubt exist divisions and conflicting assessments over whether Mubarak can succeed in suppressing the masses or whether immediate steps must be taken to refurbish the regime.

What concerns every section of the US ruling elite, however, is what Senator John McCain referred to recently as the “Lenin scenario”, i.e., that the mass demonstrations against Mubarak will develop into a direct revolutionary challenge to imperialist domination and capitalist rule in Egypt.

All the talk from Washington about a “transition to a democratic regime” is aimed at forestalling this threat. Such a US-backed “transition” has no credibility whatsoever. Its sole purpose would be to re-stabilize the existing military dictatorship so that it can continue enforcing policies that benefit US imperialism and a narrow and corrupt Egyptian financial elite, while subjecting the masses of workers and oppressed to unemployment, poverty and repression.

Egyptian workers and youth should reject both Obama’s hypocritical expressions of concern and US promises of a “democratic transition” with the contempt they deserve. The burning need is for the development of an independent revolutionary movement of the working class to effect the transfer of power to the workers and the oppressed and organize the socialist transformation of Egyptian society. A genuine democratic transformation of Egypt, an end to oppression and social inequality, can be achieved only by means of socialist revolution.

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