

Hillary Clinton in Tahrir Square

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US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's Middle East tour, capped by a stroll through Cairo's Tahrir Square, presents an unparalleled profile in hypocrisy. It also underscores Washington's determination to re-stabilize the US-backed dictatorships in Egypt and Tunisia and squelch the spread of revolutionary struggles elsewhere in the region.

Surrounded by a phalanx of US and Egyptian bodyguards, Clinton paraded briefly through the central Cairo plaza, where millions of Egyptians defied the regime for 18 days until Mubarak was forced out. Speaking to accompanying media, she declared, "To see where this revolution happened and all that it has meant to the world is extraordinary for me." She added that it was "just thrilling to see where this happened." Afterwards, she described her visit as "very exciting and moving."

Clinton must believe that the Egyptian people suffer from severe short-term memory loss. It was only seven weeks earlier that she pronounced her fulsome support for Hosni Mubarak. The date was January 25, which marked the onset of the revolutionary struggles that forced the ouster of the hated US-backed dictator.

As tens of thousands of young Egyptians were confronting the armed violence of riot police and paramilitary troops in the center of Cairo, Clinton declared from Washington: "Our assessment is that the Egyptian government is stable and is looking for ways to respond to the legitimate needs and interests of the Egyptian people."

Barely one week later, as the demonstrations grew in size and spread throughout Egypt, the US secretary of state praised the Mubarak regime for having served as the "partner of the US for over three decades," and for "trying to stabilize a region that is subject to a lot of challenges." At that very moment, Mubarak was trying to "stabilize" Cairo by unleashing the regime's armed thugs against the demonstrators.

In a further unmistakable signal of US support for Mubarak, Clinton selected former US ambassador to Egypt Frank Wisner as the Obama administration's special envoy to Cairo. Wisner had spent the previous two years as a top Washington lobbyist for the Egyptian regime and Mubarak.

As the escalating mass protests placed Mubarak's ability to survive more and more in doubt, Clinton became the administration's principal advocate of an "orderly transition" under the stern hand of Omar Suleiman, the longtime chief of military intelligence and the country's senior torturer.

At every step of the way, the US policy enunciated by Clinton was carefully calibrated according to shifting estimations of the ability of Mubarak—and finally Suleiman—to suppress the mass movement and preserve the US-backed regime intact. In the end, she and President Barack Obama issued statements supporting the removal of Mubarak only after it had already happened.

In a speech delivered at the US Embassy Tuesday, Clinton described the popular uprising in Egypt as "one of the most important historic turning points" and proclaimed, "No one is permitted to hijack this revolution, no one is permitted to turn the clock back."

Who does she think she is kidding? The entire purpose of her trip, and of US policy generally, is to strengthen the grip of the most reactionary sections of Egyptian society—the military and the wealthy elite—to ensure that any regime emerging out of the mass upheavals will uphold the interests of US imperialism and its principal ally, Israel.

Clinton announced during the trip an economic aid package directed at promoting foreign investment, further opening up Egypt to the intervention of international capital. Her most important meeting in Cairo was with Field Marshal Mohammed Tantawi, chief of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces,

which assumed power after Mubarak's ouster.

The aim of Tantawi and his fellow senior officers is to preserve the dictatorial military-dominated regime—together with the nearly \$2 billion in annual US aid—from which they have so richly profited. To that end, they are backing a referendum that would provide this regime with constitutional window-dressing. At the same time, they are ratcheting up repression.

On March 9, plainclothes secret police and soldiers were sent into Tahrir Square to clear it of protesters calling on the military regime to comply with the demands made during the mass uprising. In an attack that lasted for several hours, hundreds of protesters were beaten with clubs, metal cables and iron rods. Hundreds were detained and subjected to torture. At least 190 of them remain in custody, facing military tribunals and terrorism charges.

The Coalition of the Youth of the Revolution, representing a half dozen organizations that mobilized young Egyptians in the mass protests in Tahrir Square, correctly snubbed the State Department's invitation for a "dialogue" with Clinton.

In a statement explaining its decision, the coalition stressed that the US government only seeks a "dialogue" that is "based on their own interests in Egypt and the Middle East, even if it is contrary to the desire of the Egyptian masses."

It further noted that the US administration had been among "the most important allies and personal friends of the deposed president Mubarak and senior officials of the former regime," and remained the main ally "for many non-democratic repressive regimes in the region."

Indeed, even as Clinton was proclaiming her enthusiasm for "democracy" and "revolution" in Cairo, two of Washington's closest allies in the region—the al-Khalifa monarchy in Bahrain and the dictatorship of President Ali Abdullah Saleh in Yemen—were carrying out bloody repression against mass demonstrations in their own countries.

In Bahrain, the base of the US Fifth Fleet, security forces, backed by troops from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, drove hundreds of thousands of demonstrators from Pearl Square, using tear gas, rubber bullets and live ammunition. US-supplied Apache helicopters were deployed against the protesters, while security forces invaded hospitals, attacking doctors and

nurses treating the wounded. In a spree of sectarian violence, troops were sent into Shia villages, shooting hundreds with buckshot.

In Yemen, whose security forces are receiving \$250 million in US funding, troops and the regime's thugs have repeatedly opened fire on demonstrators demanding Saleh's ouster after 32 years in power, leaving scores dead and thousands wounded.

This is the real face of US imperialism in the Middle East, which in its war in Iraq has already demonstrated that it is prepared to kill hundreds of thousands to enforce its hegemony over the region and its energy resources.

The downfall of Mubarak represented an immense victory for the mass movement of the Egyptian workers and oppressed and a humiliating setback for the Egyptian ruling elite and US imperialism. Subsequent events in Egypt and throughout the region have made it clear, however, that Mubarak's downfall signified not the end, but only the beginning of the revolution.

Power remains in the hands of the military command and a venal ruling elite backed by Washington, which is determined to pursue a strategy of counterrevolution in Egypt and throughout the Middle East.

This strategy can be defeated and the demands that brought millions into struggle—for democratic rights, social equality, improved living standards and an end to repression and exploitation—can be won only through the independent mobilization of the working class, leading the masses of oppressed, in the struggle for power and the socialist transformation of society.

The success of this revolution depends in the final analysis on its extension beyond the borders of Egypt, uniting the struggle of Egyptian workers with those of workers throughout the Middle East and in the advanced capitalist countries. The most critical task is the building of a new revolutionary internationalist leadership in the working class by building parties of the International Committee of the Fourth International throughout the region.

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