

Clinton backs Egyptian military junta, Islamist president

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Over the weekend, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton held talks with the leader of Egypt's Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) junta, Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, and Islamist President Mohamed Mursi in Cairo.

While claiming to promote a "democratic transition" in Egypt, Clinton's visit deepened the counterrevolutionary alliance between US imperialism and the Egyptian bourgeoisie against the threat of renewed mass struggles of the working class. Her visit came amidst an intensifying power struggle between the two competing factions of the Egyptian ruling class, the military and the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood (MB).

Earlier this week, the Supreme Constitutional Court, an instrument of the junta, overruled a presidential decree issued by Mursi to reinstate the Egyptian parliament. By having the decree overruled, SCAF made clear that it will defend its full control of the Egyptian state machine. In a military coup shortly before the run-off in the Egyptian presidential election, the junta had dissolved the Islamist-dominated parliament and taken over all legislative and budgetary powers and the drafting of a new constitution.

Clinton tacitly backed the coup, saying that "it is very clear that Egyptians are in the midst of complex negotiations about the transition including the make-up of parliament, a new constitution and the full powers of the president."

She praised SCAF for "representing the Egyptian people in the revolution" and protecting "the Egyptian nation."

A former State Department adviser, Peter Mandaville, also stressed that the US considers the Egyptian military the main defender of its interests and a force to control the Islamists. He told the *New York Times* that

"every bone in the body of the US foreign policy establishment is going to feel more comfortable with the idea that there is still a strong military looking over these guys and looking out for US Interests in Egypt and the region."

Washington regards the Egyptian military as the main bulwark against another explosion of the masses. Last year's working class mass uprising, which led to the ouster of long-time US stooge Hosni Mubarak, shook Egyptian capitalism and imperialist rule in the Middle East to its foundations.

There are signs that the working class is again going on the offensive. The same day Clinton met Tantawi, the 25,000 textile workers at the state-owned Mahalla Misr Spinning and Weaving Company in the industrial town of Mahalla al-Kubra in the Nile Delta went on strike. The workers of Mahalla, who played a major role in last year's revolution, are demanding the removal of company management and a greater share of 2011 profits and increases in severance pay.

Fearing renewed mass struggles, Washington is trying to prevent an intensifying confrontation between the military and the Islamists, which could destabilize Egypt. During her visit Clinton assured Tantawi that the junta has the full support of Washington. However, she also put pressure on the generals to grant the Islamist president expanded powers as a cover for ongoing military rule in Egypt.

According to Egyptian diplomatic sources, Clinton told Mursi "that there are certain things that the US expects from Egypt" in exchange for its continued financial support. One US demand is that Egypt continue the Mubarak regime's pro-US foreign policy.

One of the main issues discussed, according to an official speaking to *Al-Ahram Online*, is Egypt's continuing commitment to the three-decades-old peace

deal with Israel. The diplomat said that the US expects “Egypt to use the good ties that link the Muslim Brotherhood with the Hamas movement in the Gaza Strip to curtail any plans that Hamas might have towards escalation with Israel.”

According to the official, the US also expects Mursi to continue limiting Egypt’s relations with Iran.

Mursi signaled that he and the Brotherhood are willing to cooperate closely with Washington. At their meeting at the presidential palace in Cairo’s upscale Heliopolis suburb, Mursi told Clinton that “we are very, very keen to meet you and happy you are here.”

After the meeting Clinton expressed her satisfaction: “President Mursi made clear he understands the success of his presidency and Egypt’s transition depends on building consensus across Egypt’s political spectrum; to work on a new constitution to protect civil society; to draft a new constitution that will be respected by all and to assert the full authority of the presidency.”

During and after the meeting between Clinton and Mursi, thousands of protesters gathered outside the US embassy and Clinton’s hotel to denounce US interference in Egypt and the MB’s collaboration with Washington. Placards held by protesters read “Go to hell, Hillary” and “You like the Islamists, Hillary? Take them with you.”

Having received Washington’s backing, the junta made clear that the generals do not intend to give up their powers. Speaking to troops in the city of Ismailia on Sunday, Tantawi said that the army “would not allow anyone to discourage it from its role in protecting Egypt and its people.”

However, Tantawi signaled that the military is willing to work out a compromise with the Islamists on their conditions. He claimed to respect the presidency, stating that the “the armed forces and the army council respect legislative and executive authorities.”

The main power SCAF has granted Mursi so far is to deploy the army against the population. The constitutional addendum issued by SCAF after the US-backed coup allows Mursi to “issue a decision to commission the armed forces with the approval of SCAF to maintain security and defend public property...if the country faces internal unrest requiring the intervention of the armed forces.”

Clinton’s visit shows the utter cynicism and hypocrisy of US imperialism’s claims to promote

“democracy”. As Clinton praises both the Egyptian junta and the Brotherhood, Washington is signaling the Egyptian bourgeoisie that—as was the case during last year’s uprising—it will accept the bloody repression of any renewed working class struggles which threaten capitalism in Egypt.

In return, the Egyptian junta and the Islamists pledged to back the US war drive against Syria and Iran. After her visit in Cairo, Clinton continued on to Israel, reportedly to discuss Iran’s nuclear program and the war in Syria with Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman, Defense Minister Ehud Barak and President Shimon Peres.



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