

Egyptian dictator al-Sisi signs military, economic deals in Paris

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In his first trip to Europe, beginning last week in Rome, Egyptian dictator General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi stopped in Paris on November 26-27, holding talks with Socialist Party (PS) President François Hollande, Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius, Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, top officials including the speakers of both houses of parliament, and French business leaders.

The French and Italian governments hailed Sisi, who slaughtered thousands of protesters on the streets of Cairo during his July 2013 coup against Muslim Brotherhood (MB) President Mohamed Mursi, as a strategic partner. It was an explicit green light from European imperialist powers for Sisi to continue using mass killings to terrorize political opposition in Egypt and delay a renewed revolutionary upsurge in the working class.

Sisi's trip to Paris came as tens of thousands of political prisoners and their families mounted a hunger strike against the Egyptian junta, and steel workers struck for back pay. The Sisi junta has killed over 1,400 people and jailed over 15,000. Sisi has banned the MB and sentenced over 500 of its members to death in mass show trials, while imposing austerity measures on the working class including massive fuel price increases.

The Hollande administration made clear that it supported the policies of Egypt's Pinochet. Before Sisi's visit, an anonymous source close to Hollande told the press: "Yes, we consider Sisi to be legitimate. But there's a lot to talk about."

Initial reports claimed that Hollande would address issues of democratic rights while meeting Sisi on November 26. The Reporters Without Borders NGO sent a letter to Hollande, asking him to raise the "crackdown in a shocking manner on journalists in the name of combating terrorism."

None of these issues were discussed, however, when Hollande warmly received Sisi at the Elysée Presidential palace, focusing on economic and military cooperation. After talks with Sisi, Hollande praised Egypt as a "great country and a big partner for France."

"We hope that this process, this process of democratic transition will continue, respecting the road map that will fully allow for the success of Egypt," Hollande said at a joint news conference.

Hollande's cynical remarks came as Alexandria courts handed jail sentences of two to five years to a group of juveniles, aged 13 to 17, for belonging to "an outlawed group," after they participated in protests called by the Muslim Brotherhood calling for the fall of the Sisi junta.

The talks also dealt with economy, military and security cooperation. Al-Sisi said his talks with Hollande were "fruitful" and reflected a common consensus between Paris and Cairo on bilateral, regional and international relations.

Hollande revealed that he had signed economic agreements worth hundreds of millions in Egypt, including a €700 million Suez Canal deal and the refurbishing of Cairo's subway system. On the second day of his trip, the Egyptian delegation met top French business officials.

Despite its cynical efforts to somewhat distance itself from the crimes of the Sisi junta, Paris is continuing to arm the bloodstained Egyptian military to the teeth. French shipbuilder DCNS has signed a €1 billion contract to furnish four corvettes to the Egyptian Navy. The two countries are also discussing the renewal of Egypt's stock of French-built Mirage 2000 fighter jets.

"This deal opens doors because it is prompting enormous interest in the Gulf countries," a French government source added.

Sisi and Hollande also discussed cooperating in the “war on terror,” with Hollande insisting, “We have to act together to fight terrorism.”

“Egypt is a country affected by terrorism, both in the past and in the present, and particularly in the Sinai Peninsula,” Hollande said. “In southern Libya terrorists are taking root, which would threaten and already threatens the entire region. We have all the proof.”

Hollande's bogus claims to be waging a “war on terror” are a fraudulent pretext for aggressively advancing French imperialist interests in the Middle East and Africa, where it is fighting a war in Mali and threatening to mount a renewed invasion of Libya.

The bloody chaos and the growth of Islamist terrorism in Libya is a direct product of NATO's bloody military intervention in 2011, after mass working class uprisings toppled pro-imperialist regimes in Tunisia and Egypt. The NATO powers, prominently including France, bombed Libya and recklessly armed Islamist opposition militias in order to oust Gaddafi and pillage Libya's oil and financial wealth.

The goal of these wars, like that of Sisi's coup itself, is to terrorize and intimidate the working class, in a region where workers have already toppled two bloody dictators. Hollande's reference to the terrorist threat in the poverty-stricken Sinai Peninsula—which has seen a reign of terror unleashed by the Sisi regime junta, imposing martial law, arbitrary arrests, forced eviction of thousands of people after demolishing their homes

Hollande and al-Sisi claimed that they agreed on the need to establish a peace process between Palestine and Israel, after both governments backed the Israeli assault on Gaza that took the lives of thousands of Palestinians during the summer. The PS took the unusual move of banning outright protests against the Gaza war.

Hollande cynically declared, “We must set out again to demonstrate the necessity of negotiations to seek peace between Israelis and Palestinians.” In fact, this fraudulent “peace plan” aims to maintain the subjugation of Palestinian territory to the dictates of Israel and its imperialist allies, while dividing the Arab and Jewish working class along ethnic lines.

On November 27, al-Sisi visited the French National Assembly, surrounded by an honor guard, where he met with PS legislators including its majority leader Claude Bartolone, who hailed Sisi's pro-business reforms against the Egyptian working class.

The National Assembly voted 339 to 151 to approve a resolution recognising the Palestinian state yesterday. The Senate is due to vote on the resolution on December 11.



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