

Egypt boasts of imprisoning 10,000 in 2014

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The Egyptian military dictatorship of Field Marshal-President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi boasted last weekend that it had detained nearly 10,000 people over the past 12 months. This grim estimate came as Washington moved to further normalize its relationship with the regime, and as the US Congress effectively waived human rights conditions for the provision of military aid to the Cairo regime.

Maj. Gen. Abdel-Fattah Osman, a senior official in Egypt's interior ministry, provided the figure of 9,983 individuals detained over the course of the year, classifying them as "saboteurs, rioters and terrorists." Included in the figure, he said, were 6,400 people classified as "rioters," 2,600 accused of attacking police stations, 460 declared suspected terrorists, 50 "wanted militants," 119 administrators of social media pages, charged by the regime with incitement against state institutions, and four people accused of producing "hostile videos."

Earlier, security officials had estimated that more than 20,000 people had been arrested since the July 2013 military coup that ousted the country's elected president, Mohammed Mursi of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB). The Islamist organization, Egypt's largest political party, has since been outlawed as a terrorist organization.

Opponents of the regime believe that the real number of those arrested has reached over 40,000, many of them held without charges in clandestine torture centers run by the security forces.

Among these prisoners are at least 1,000 minors, some as young as 11 years old, according to the human rights group "Free the Children." A report issued earlier this week found that at least 600 are being held in the town of Banha, north of Cairo, in a secret detention camp whose very existence the regime denies. Lawyers for the youths' families report them being held for eight months or more without trial or

access to either family members or attorneys.

Last November, when 78 children were tried in Alexandria's juvenile misdemeanor court and sentenced to between two and five years in prison for unauthorized protests, they managed to release a statement revealing that they had been beaten and tortured.

In the vicious crackdown on protests against the coup, the regime has killed at least 3,000 people, including the bloody massacre of over 1,000 people who had occupied Cairo's Rabaa al-Adawiya Square in August of last year.

Since then, the regime's courts have held three mass trials in which a total of 1,397 political detainees have been sentenced to death.

The regime has sought to suppress any future protests by imposing a law outlawing any demonstration that is not authorized by the security forces.

None of this, however, has stood in the way of a steady march toward full normalization between Washington and the Egyptian junta. Full diplomatic relations are being restored and steps taken to assure the uninterrupted flow of military hardware to the dictatorship. In the face of the junta's monstrous crimes, the Obama administration has proven unable to summon up any of the phony "human rights" outrage it reserves for countries like Venezuela, where its aim is regime change.

Obama and al-Sisi spoke by telephone last Thursday. The White House readout of the conversation states that Obama "affirmed the United States' continuing commitment to the strategic partnership with Egypt and emphasized the importance of bilateral cooperation to promote shared interests in counterterrorism and regional security," and that "The two leaders agreed on the importance of continuing their countries' close military and intelligence relationships."

As an apparent afterthought, the readout states that

the US president “also expressed concern about mass trials, the status of NGOs, and the continued imprisonment of journalists and peaceful activists in Egypt.”

Al-Sisi’s spokesman said of the same conversation: “Both sides agreed on the importance of strategic ties between the two countries and expressed keenness to develop them. They also discussed Egypt’s efforts in combating terrorism. President Obama lauded Egypt’s pivotal role in this regard, pledging to continue to support the Egyptian efforts.”

He made no mention of Obama’s fleeting reference to human rights. If it was actually made by the US president, the Egyptian junta justifiably dismissed it as empty rhetoric.

Actions speak louder than words. The US has shipped Egypt 10 new Apache attack helicopters, advanced weapons that are supposedly to be used in counterterrorism operations—a category in which the Egyptian regime includes the mass killings of unarmed civilians and the mass imprisonment of its opponents. While the Reuters news agency and a number of other outlets reported over the weekend that the gunships had arrived only on Saturday, a State Department spokesperson said that they had actually been shipped last month.

A hold on supplying armaments to the regime, imposed in the aftermath of the 2013 coup, was lifted by Washington last April, on the grounds that Egypt was meeting its obligations under its 1979 peace treaty with Israel and “sustaining the strategic relationship” with the US.

Included in the \$1.1 trillion budget resolution passed by Congress earlier this month was a provision empowering the Obama administration to waive conditions that Egypt supposedly must meet to receive some \$1.3 billion in new US military aid along with hundreds of millions of dollars more in economic assistance. These include the regime taking measures to uphold freedom of expression and the rights of civil organizations.

The congressional provision effectively turns these “human rights” requirements into meaningless window-dressing that can be ignored with a “national security waiver” which Secretary of State John Kerry can invoke merely by providing classified justification to Congress.

Meanwhile, after 16 months with the top post at the US embassy in Cairo vacant, a new ambassador, Robert Stephen Beecroft, arrived in the Egyptian capital last week to present his credentials to the country’s military rulers.

From the outset of the mass upheavals that brought down the US-backed dictator Hosni Mubarak in February 2011, the Obama administration has pursued a policy aimed at maintaining power in the hands of the military. The aim of this policy has not been merely the suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood, but more fundamentally the containment of the powerful movement of the Egyptian working class, the driving force of the revolution.



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