

Egyptian court confirms mass death sentence against 183 political prisoners

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An Egyptian court confirmed death sentences against 183 supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) Monday, marking the culmination of yet another historic mass show trial by the US-backed military regime.

Those convicted, 34 of whom were not even present for the trial, were charged for the killing of 11 police agents in Kardasa, Giza in August 2013, during mass protests over the massacre of demonstrators in Cairo's Rabaa Square by state security forces.

The defendants were initially sentenced to death in December by Egyptian judge Mohammed Nagi Shehata, whose ruling was subsequently approved by Egypt's top Islamic legal official, the Grand Mufti, before being reaffirmed by the court.

The verdict represents the latest stage in the bloody and protracted crackdown against the population implemented by the military since the July 2013 coup.

Whether or not any of the defendants in the latest case were actually involved in the alleged incident, the real crime of those sentenced to death was their opposition to the military dictatorship. Monday's finalization of the sentences, which bring the total number of political prisoners awaiting execution to some 1,400, is intended to serve as a warning that any expression of dissent will be met with maximum brutality.

The trials have once again underscored the criminal and authoritarian character of the military regime, now led by General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who seized power in a coup backed by the US amidst an upsurge of mass opposition to the previous MB government. The military has proceeded to brutally suppress all opposition, including working-class strikes and protests against the dictatorship.

The trials themselves have been condemned

internationally as a mockery of due process. Egyptian judges have been "convicting defendants en masse without regard for fair trial standards," said Sarah Leah Whitson of Human Rights Watch.

The latest trial "flouts international law," Amnesty International's director for the Middle East said in a statement calling the verdict "outrageous." Many of those convicted did not have lawyers.

"Issuing mass death sentences whenever the case involves the killing of police officers now appears to be near-routine policy, regardless of facts and with no attempt to establish individual responsibility," an Amnesty representative wrote.

Although the defendants in this case are alleged to be associated with a bourgeois opposition party, the MB, the trials are intended as an unambiguous threat to the Egyptian working class, whose strikes were the principal factor in the fall of the dictatorship of Hosni Mubarak in February 2011.

The actions of the Egyptian regime have the full backing of Washington. Even as the government has organized mass show trials on a scale not seen in recent history, the Obama administration has insured that more than \$1 billion in annual US aid has continued to flow into the hands of the military apparatus.

Just one day after an Egyptian court handed down death sentences against hundreds of alleged members and supporters of the MB in April, US Secretary of State John Kerry oversaw a red carpet reception for Egypt's Foreign Minister. Kerry praised the Egyptian government as an "important strategic partner," commending the military government for its "positive steps," and stressing the "common interests" shared by the US and the Egyptian government.

The al-Sisi dictatorship has carried out a policy supported by the American ruling class and its allies,

both within Egypt and internationally.

Egypt has become a choice investment opportunity for international finance capital. Total Egyptian share values have doubled since the July 2013 coup, even as the regime has killed at least 3,000, including at least 1,000 MB members, imposed sweeping bans against any public demonstrations and arrested tens of thousands, sending many of them to secret prisons and torture centers. Egyptian financial markets yielded a return to investors of more than 30 percent in 2014 alone.

Al-Sisi himself has received invitations from Europe's most powerful governments. French President François Hollande publicly embraced the military leader during a recent visit to Paris, and al-Sisi has returned these affections by placing an official call to the French politician to convey "sincere condolences" on behalf of Egypt after the *Charlie Hebdo* shootings.

Al-Sisi has cemented these ties through enthusiastic support for every new war and military intervention launched by the US and European governments in the Middle East and North Africa. On Monday, a Fox News opinion piece hailed al-Sisi as "Egypt's Muslim Churchill," lavishing praise on the military despot for his promotion of the fraudulent US "war against Islamic extremism."

The mass executions of the al-Sisi regime mark the return of all the brutal methods of the old Mubarak dictatorship. Two hundred more Egyptians now face death, even while Mubarak has been cleared of all criminal charges, including those related to the hundreds of innocents executed during his decades of dictatorial rule and hundreds more killed and thousands wounded by his security forces during the January 2011 uprising.

MB leader Mohamed Mursi faces trial on espionage charges beginning on February 15, according to reports Monday.



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