

Egyptian junta condemns Muslim Brotherhood chief Mohamed Badie to death

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In yet another transparently political verdict, the Egyptian military regime on Saturday condemned to death Mohamed Badie and other leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), the Islamist organization toppled from power by an army coup in July 2013. Those convicted are expected to appeal the verdicts.

Badie and other MB members were accused of running an “Operations Room” at a sit-in in Rabaa Square in Cairo opposing the July 2013 coup. The army attacked the sit-in and drowned it in blood, killing approximately 1,000 people and wounding 4,500.

Also condemned to death were Omar Malek, the son of leading MB businessman Hassan Malek; former MB spokesman Mahmoud Ghozlan (in absentia); and MB officials Saad El-Hoseiny and Saad Emara.

In a statement, the MB attacked the ruling as “issued vengefully by the junta’s judiciary, who act only on instructions from the Generals, to abuse, oppress, and deal out injustice. We are therefore confident that the junta’s judiciary will fall, just as those unjust sentences will be annulled.”

In the same case, 37 defendants were sentenced to life in prison, including Saad El-Shater, the son of MB business tycoon Khairat al-Shater, and American-Egyptian dual-national Mohamed Soltan, whose father Salah Soltan was condemned to death in the same case. Mohamed Soltan was declared guilty of supporting the MB and spreading lies about the political situation in Egypt in the media.

Mohamed Soltan has mounted a hunger strike to protest his detention, and US authorities felt compelled to denounce the verdict against him.

“The United States condemns the life sentence issued today in Egypt against American citizen Mohamed Soltan,” White House spokesman Josh Earnest said. “We call for Mr. Soltan’s immediate release from

prison.... We remain deeply concerned about Mr. Soltan’s health, which has suffered during his 20-month-long incarceration.”

Human Rights Watch (HRW) executive director for Middle East and North Africa Sarah Whitson denounced the trial as a “sham proceeding.” She added, “The fact that those who publicized the mass killings of 2013 could go to prison for life while those who did the killings receive official accolades perfectly symbolizes the abject failure of transitional justice in Egypt.”

Nonetheless, Washington and its European allies are supporting the Egyptian junta’s mass death sentences and show trials. The Obama administration continues to arm the junta to the hilt, using it as a military proxy for its Middle East wars and guard against the danger of a resurgence of the revolutionary struggles in the Egyptian working class that toppled US-backed dictator Hosni Mubarak in 2011.

The Egyptian junta’s street massacres, show trials, and mass death sentences promote an atmosphere of political terror in Egypt and thus help block renewed working class struggles. They are therefore welcomed in Western capitals. Amid a surge of strikes in early 2014, the junta launched the first mass death sentences condemning 529 MB supporters last March, a further 683 last April, and 185 more in December. Yet the junta has consistently remained a close ally of the United States, as Washington seeks to mobilize it for wars in Libya, Yemen, and beyond.

On March 31, Obama personally telephoned Egyptian military dictator General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, informing him that the White House was eliminating the partial “executive hold” it had imposed on military aid to Egypt shortly after the 2013 coup. Obama assured Sisi that he would seek to keep providing the Egyptian army with \$1.3 billion in annual military aid.

He added that the two would “stay in touch in the weeks and months ahead.”

On Sunday, the day after the mass death sentence involving Badie was announced, US secretary of state John Kerry telephoned Egyptian foreign minister Sameh Shoukri to discuss bilateral US-Egypt relations. According to an Egyptian foreign ministry statement, they discussed the wars in Libya, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, as well as collaboration between Washington and Cairo at the UN and on Palestine.

The show trials against the MB have also become closely tied up with reactionary attempts by the junta to broaden its base inside the Egyptian ruling class, so it can join in US-led wars in the Middle East in the face of broad popular opposition. The most pressing conflict appears to be the US-backed Saudi intervention in Yemen. Egypt, which depends financially on Saudi Arabia to fill its budget deficits, is preparing to contribute ground troops to the Yemen war despite misgivings in Egyptian ruling circles.

There is broad concern in Cairo that such an adventure, after Egypt’s disastrous intervention in the 1962-1967 civil war in Yemen, will be a bloody failure, triggering a broader war and inflaming already explosive class tensions in Egypt. “There is no Egyptian answer that respects the general anxiety and can build wide national consensus before deploying troops abroad,” warned Abdallah El-Sinnawi in *El Shorouk*.

“We shouldn’t jump to war.... We need to know if Saudi Arabia is ready for the costs. Yemen is a sleeping volcano south of the Arabian Peninsula. If it erupts, it will sweep the entire region,” said Sisi supporter Mohamed Heikal in a television interview.

As it prepares to plunge into broader and bloodier conflicts, the Egyptian junta is opening back-channel talks with various forces inside and on the periphery of the MB, seeking some sort of possibly Saudi-backed accommodation. Islamic scholar Tarek al-Bishri is reportedly seeking Saudi support to broker talks between the MB and the Sisi junta.

Last month, Sisi met personally with three leading members of the Dissident Muslim Brotherhood organization, an ostensibly pro-Sisi breakaway from the MB.

The multiple death sentences on various trumped-up charges against Badie and other MB defendants—which

trigger a long process of going to Egypt’s Grand Mufti for religious sanction, then facing appeals and finally further trials—are a sinister bargaining chip in these negotiations.

Badie was reportedly among both the 529 condemned to death in March 2014 and the 683 condemned to death in April 2014. While he appeals his latest death sentence, Badie still faces further charges of espionage and of breaking out of jail.

“In the confrontation between the state and political Islam, pressure is being sustained, on the one side, by long prison terms for Muslim Brotherhood leaders.... It is a game of nerves, in which each side is seeking to strengthen its hand for whatever negotiations eventually ensue,” wrote Egypt’s state-run *Ahram Weekly*.



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