

Egyptian dictator al-Sisi visits Berlin

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Egyptian dictator Abdel Fattah al-Sisi visited Berlin on Wednesday at the invitation of the German government. Al-Sisi was received with the highest honors by President Joachim Gauck in Bellevue Castle. Afterwards, a “discussion” took place, according to a terse statement on the president’s web site. Other events during his visit included photo-ops during “the welcome at the palace gate,” “the guest book signing in the entrance hall” and “military honors at the park.”

Later, Chancellor Angela Merkel of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) received al-Sisi at a luncheon, according to government spokesperson Steffen Seibert on Tuesday. At the center of the discussions was “the bilateral, that is, the German-Egyptian relationship, the internal political situation in Egypt and conflicts in the region.”

Additional meetings are planned between al-Sisi and the head of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), Sigmar Gabriel; Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (also SPD) and high ranking members of the business community. Both leading SPD politicians are already well acquainted with the dictator. The official invitation to al-Sisi was made by Economics Minister Gabriel at an investors’ conference in Sharm al-Sheikh at the start of May. Steinmeier visited Cairo at the beginning of May in order to meet with al-Sisi and another Egyptian official, Sameh Shoukry.

The opposition parties are also courting favor with the dictator. “Sure, when in doubt, one also has to speak with a military dictator when it concerns the extremely difficult situation in the Middle East,” the head of the Green Party fraction, Katrin Göring-Eckardt, said. The *Handelsblatt* wrote with regard to the Left Party that “the Left fraction is also anxious to meet with him. Shortly before al-Sisi’s arrival, they tried to get an appointment with the president.”

The fact that the German elite is rolling out the red carpet for the dictator from the Nile exposes the hollow

character of their references to “democracy,” “freedom” and “human rights.” More than any other head of state, al-Sisi stands for “dictatorship,” “violence” and “war.”

The former general is the gravedigger of the Egyptian Revolution that chased the longtime “partner” of the west, Hosni Mubarak, from his position in 2011. In 2013, al-Sisi led the military putsch against Muslim Brotherhood President Mohamed Mursi and since then has created a regime of terror. Since he assumed power, the Egyptian police and the army have massacred thousands of opponents of the regime, imprisoned tens of thousands and condemned over a thousand political prisoners to death, including Mursi himself.

The counterrevolutionary terror of the Egyptian regime is so obvious that even the bourgeois press in Germany cannot avoid calling some things by their names.

In a commentary titled “Dictator on the red carpet,” the *Tagesspiegel* describes how “the new rabble rousers on the Nile happily indulge in their fantasies of extermination against a good third of their own population.” Thousands have disappeared “into the torture dungeons never to return again,” while “in the meantime the country has become a global record holder for death sentences,” and the judiciary has become a “pseudo-legal backdrop for a limitless revenge campaign against all political dissidents.” Whoever protests does so at the risk of their own lives.

Under the headline, “Visit from the leader of a police state,” the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* added that the repression “indiscriminately affects everyone who voices criticism of the regime: democracy activists, human rights activists, representatives of civil society, critical journalists, and intellectuals.” The police state was restored, and in its police stations people are being tortured, “even murdered.”

But naturally, both papers then greet the visit from al-

Sisi, anyway, with the cynical remark that “talking” is still better than “silence.” The *Tagesspiegel* informs its readers, “He who cannot talk, cannot criticize.” However, the discussions with al-Sisi obviously have nothing to do with “criticism.” Rather, they are about tangible imperialist interests.

Germany is pursuing geo-strategic and economic goals in the Middle East and North Africa, above all in Egypt, one of the most influential countries in the region. Egypt is not only a close ally of the US and the oil rich gulf states, but also a traditionally important trade partner of German companies and the Arab world. According to the German Chamber of Industry and Commerce, trade between Germany and Egypt grew “dynamically” in the years before the Egyptian revolution. In 2010, German exports to Egypt (above all machines, chemical products, and motor vehicles and parts) grew by 10.8 percent, and imports from Egypt (above all oil and textiles) grew by 14.5 percent.

The German ruling class views the bloody dictatorship of al-Sisi as a foundation for further expanding this relationship. For example, at the conference in Sharm al-Sheikh that took place in March, Siemens struck a deal with the Egyptian government to build a gas and steam turbine power plant in the Upper Egyptian city of Beni Sueif. There are also plans to build a wind power plant. According to the Munich-based company, which has been active in the North African country since 1859, these two contracts have a value of four billion euros.

At the conference in Sharm al-Sheikh, Gabriel made a direct connection between German economic interests and the stability of the Egyptian military dictatorship. “The economic engagement here in Egypt is important for stabilizing the country against the backdrop of the danger of terrorism,” said the vice chancellor. He said that Europe and Germany would also profit from this.

This is also the official policy of the Foreign Ministry, and it corresponds to the sentiments of a large section of the Berlin elite. A strategy paper from the pen of the Humboldt University professor Herfried Münkler, published on the official web site of the Foreign Ministry, argues that Germany, “as a trading state, or rather an export nation,” must “orient itself less on its values and more on its interests.”

In a recent interview with the *Tagesanzeiger*, Münkler’s colleague Jörg Baberowski, historian of

Eastern Europe, justified the al-Sisi dictatorship as a supposedly popular regime: “We must acknowledge that people opt for authoritarian solutions under certain conditions. Look at Egypt: There the majority says a general like al-Sisi is better than civil war.”

Al-Sisi’s visit is a warning. A ruling class that is ready to pursue its interests by collaborating with military dictatorships will also be ready to adopt their methods at home. The plans of the German elite to once again build up the military and develop aggressive foreign and great power policies can ultimately be carried out only with those methods practiced by al-Sisi in Cairo with the full support of the West.



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