

Egyptian gunships attack tourist convoy, killing at least 12

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An Egyptian government Apache helicopter gunship targeted a convoy of vehicles carrying foreign tourists in Egypt's Western Desert on Sunday, destroying four vehicles and killing 12 people, including at least eight Mexican nationals. At least one American citizen may also have been among those killed in the incident, according to the US State Department.

The tourists were reportedly targeted in spite of prior coordination between their hotel and Egyptian security forces, and in spite of the presence of a police escort alongside the convoy. Initial statements from Egypt's interior ministry acknowledged that the convoy was "mistakenly dealt with."

The vehicles were parked at a scenic viewpoint frequented by tourist groups, according to top Egyptian tourism official Hassan al-Nahla. These statements contradict official assertions that the convoy was in a restricted military area at the time.

Sunday's incident represents potentially a major blow to the Egyptian economy, which is heavily reliant on tourism. Militarization has progressed to such a point that even tourists are not safe. Tourist traffic to the country has already fallen by more than 30 percent since 2010.

The Mexican government will press for an "exhaustive" investigation, according to statements by Mexican President Enrique Pena Nieto. Visiting Cairo on Tuesday to press the regime for further investigation, Mexican Foreign Minister Claudia Massieu denounced the incident as an "unjustified attack."

The killings of foreign tourists, while accompanied by a government security detail no less, highlights the intensifying destabilization of the country under the impact of the extreme militarization policies implemented by the military dictatorship of General

Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in response to the social unrest, including the growth of Islamist insurgencies in the Sinai peninsula and western areas, that has followed the July 2013 military takeover.

The past year has seen the regime wage an escalating aerial bombardment of Sinai along with areas of Libya, in the name of fighting Islamist insurgents centered around regional affiliates of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Hundreds have been killed as the military regime has mounted an escalating campaign against the insurgents, including hundreds of government police and military forces, according to figures advanced by the regime.

Barely one week before the slaughter of the tourists, the Egyptian military announced its "largest ever" military offensive around the North Sinai towns of Rafah, Sheikh Zuweid and El-Arish, claiming by last Friday to have killed 232 "militants" in the space of five days. Residents of the area, however, reported the deaths of a number of civilians, including women.

The attack on the tourists comes just days after the announcement by the US Department of Defense that Washington will deploy additional US forces to the area, including infantry units and "forward surgical teams." According to the Pentagon, the new deployments are made in response to intensified ISIS activity in the area, including the killing of four US personnel by a roadside bomb earlier in September.

The US military is standing by to further "adjust force protection capabilities as conditions warrant," a DOD spokesman said last Thursday. US forces are increasingly becoming implicated in the growing clashes between government troops and the ISIS Sinai affiliate, Wilayat Sinai, according to *Military Times*.

The new forces will go to bolster the already substantial US military presence in the Sinai, including

some 700 US troops stationed with the US Task Force Sinai, which has occupied the peninsula as part of a multinational force since 1979.

Egypt is a key testing ground of the Global War on Terror, where policies and tactics of counterinsurgency and martial law can be honed for eventual redeployment within the imperialist centers themselves. Since taking power, with the full backing of Washington, the Sisi junta has moved to violently suppress all manifestations of political descent.

Security forces of the Sisi regime have slaughtered and imprisoned thousands of oppositionists in the years since the July 2013 coup. During the same period, Sisi's counterrevolutionary dictatorship has overseen the imposition of historic mass death sentences by Egyptian courts, with hundreds of political prisoners being condemned to die in two mass rulings handed down in 2014 alone.

Last month, the Sisi regime decreed a bundle of new "counterterror" legislation, further enhancing the authoritarian powers already enjoyed by the blood-soaked junta.

Under the sweeping criteria advanced by the legislation, anyone accused of "undermining national unity" or "disturbing order" can be summarily detained on terrorism charges. Police and security forces are simultaneously granted sweeping immunity from prosecution for the use of force against civilians carried out "in performance of their duties." Speech acts, writings and Internet postings deemed by the authorities to "spread terrorism" are declared punishable by prison terms of up to 15 years, under the new laws.

Though narrowly framed by government propagandists in terms of the "fight against ISIS," the militarization of Egypt and Sinai and the increasingly totalitarian measures of the regime have been propelled by the counterrevolutionary response of US imperialism and the national bourgeoisie to the outbreak of the Egyptian revolution, beginning with the launch of the US-NATO war against Libya in 2011.

These efforts reached a new climax with the installation of Sisi and his cohort of professional murderers on the basis of a wave of reactionary terror, a process that was hailed at the time by pseudo-left formations including the Revolutionary Socialists (RS) and the Tamarod coalition as a "new revolution."

Despite their pretensions of intervening in the region on behalf of "democracy" and "human rights," the US and European imperialist powers have only intensified their support for Egypt's military since the 2013 coup, viewing al-Sisi and his apparatus as an essential instrument for maintaining their domination over the Egyptian and Middle Eastern working classes.

Just as during some 30 years of the Mubarak regime, since July 2013 Washington has continued its role as chief weapons supplier to the Egyptian state.

In April of this year, US President Barack Obama personally telephoned al-Sisi to inform the military ruler that Washington was prepared to sell more than \$60 million worth of Hellfire missiles to the Egyptian military as a first step in longer-term efforts by the US to help "modernize" Cairo's forces. Obama's phone call was immediately followed by new offers of M1A1 battle tank "upgrade kits" and a dozen F-16 fighter jets. The previous October saw the US provide at least 10 Apache helicopters to the Egyptian air force.

Promoting the new sales, the Pentagon Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) touted al-Sisi's government as "an important force for political stability and economic progress in the Middle East."

This massive flow of US weaponry included the helicopters and missiles used to murder at least 12 tourists on Sunday, along with the arms that have claimed the lives of countless Egyptians killed during wave after wave of mass repression by the regime.



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