

Egypt: Italian student tortured to death

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Italian student and journalist Giulio Regeni, who was found dead in Egypt, was buried in his hometown of Viumicello on Friday at a funeral attended by a large turnout of mourners. Since then, evidence is mounting that the Egyptian military used bestial methods to torture Regeni to death.

Reuters reported on Saturday that Regeni's body had "seven broken ribs, signs of electrocution on his penis, traumatic injuries all over his body, and a brain hemorrhage." This was according to an employee of the forensics authority who examined Regeni's body.

According to a "senior source," "His body also bore signs of cuts from a sharp instrument suspected to be a razor, abrasions, and bruises. He was likely assaulted using a stick as well as being punched and kicked."

Spiegel Online had previously reported on autopsy results that had "brought to light grisly results". "Regeni was apparently systematically tortured before his death. Regeni's tormenters cut off ears and tore out finger- and toenails. His body was covered in burns and cuts, upper arm bones and shoulder blades were among those broken", the news site wrote.

Italian interior minister Angelino Alfano referred to a second autopsy in Italy and "inhumane, animalistic and unacceptable violence" to which the victim was subjected.

What is known about the background to Regeni's horrific torture death?

According to reports, Regeni left his apartment in the Cairo district of Dokki on January 25 at around 20:00. His planned destination was a birthday celebration near Tahrir Square in downtown Cairo. But the 28-year-old Italian never arrived. Instead, a taxi driver found Regeni's body at the side of the highway between Cairo and Alexandria on February 3. He allegedly came across the half-naked body because the taxi happened to break down at that particular spot. However, the discovery took place shortly after the Italian

government, confronted with significant pressure, had publicly urged the Egyptian military dictatorship led by Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi to support the search for Regeni.

Eventually, the Egyptian regime, at the urging of its ambassador in Rome, agreed to undertake an autopsy on the body. However, it has since denied having anything to do with Regeni's death. On Monday, a media official at the Egyptian Interior Ministry dismissed "reports in the Western media" that Regeni "was arrested by Egyptian security forces before his death." Prior to this, Interior Minister Magdi Abdel Ghaffar disputed the claim that Regeni was ever in the hands of the authorities, asserting, "Such crimes have never been associated with the security apparatus."

In fact, there is considerable circumstantial evidence to suggest that the junta's security forces attacked and tortured Regeni to death for political reasons.

Regeni disappeared on the fifth anniversary of the beginning of the Egyptian revolution against long-standing dictator Hosni Mubarak. On that day, thousands of heavily armed security personnel, in uniform and plainclothes, were posted in the city centre to ensure that the Egyptian masses did not take to the streets once again to protest against the counterrevolutionary junta. This massive security build-up by itself makes it appear highly improbable that Regeni fell victim to criminals.

Based on the testimony of eyewitnesses, the *New York Times* reported on Friday that Regeni was "led away by two men believed to be Egyptian security agents" and that "three security officials said Mr. Regeni had indeed been taken into custody."

According to Italian daily *Il Corriere Della Sera*, a street trader told Italian investigators that plainclothes security agents had "taken [Regeni] with" them at the exit of a subway station on the day he disappeared. Regeni had been concerned about his security after he was photographed by an unknown observer on

December 11 at a joint meeting with academics.

As a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Cambridge, Regeni was researching the role of the independent trade unions in Egypt, and also wrote articles under a pseudonym for the Italian newspaper *Il Manifesto*, which is aligned with Rifondazione Comunista (Communist Refoundation). *Spiegel Online* speculated that the “trainee academic due to his work [maintained] contact with people who were being spied upon by the security services.”

The independent trade unions and pseudo-left organisations supported the July 2013 military coup against President Mohammed Mursi and the Muslim Brotherhood. The president of the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU), Kamal Abu Aita, even joined the junta government as labour minister and backed the suppression of protests and strikes. Under conditions where rising social inequality and repression by the junta threaten to provoke another revolutionary uprising, there have been criticisms by sections of the “independent” unions of the terror methods employed by Al-Sisi.

The message being sent out by Regeni’s murder is clear: anyone in Egypt who dares to criticise the regime, even if they are foreign, must expect to be abducted and tortured to death.

Regeni’s fate is only the tip of the iceberg. According to Amnesty International, 41,000 political prisoners had disappeared into the country’s jails in the middle of 2014. Since then, there have been no more reliable figures. In the same way as before, Egyptians are disappearing on a daily basis without charges, or are condemned in show trials by a military tribunal. The numbers have increased in recent weeks. According to human rights activists, 163 people were forcibly abducted between April and June, 340 from August to November, and in January of this year alone, 66. Forty-two of these cases led to torture.

Although the counterrevolutionary Al-Sisi regime has far surpassed the Mubarak dictatorship, the same Western governments currently decrying “human rights” abuses in Syria to justify their intervention against Bashar al-Assad and Vladimir Putin have largely remained silent on Regeni’s death. There are two main reasons for this. They see the Egyptian junta as a bulwark against another potential uprising by the Egyptian working class and also cooperate closely with

Al-Sisi to impose their economic and geostrategic interests in the region. Last year, Berlin, Paris and London rolled out the red carpet for the Egyptian dictator.

In addition, Western “democracies” are increasingly resorting to Al-Sisi’s methods to suppress growing popular resistance to despised policies of austerity and war. This was clearly visible last June when the German police worked closely with the Egyptian security authorities in the arrest of the Egyptian journalist Ahmed Mansour at Berlin-Tegel airport.

Currently, the Hollande government in France is using a state of emergency to establish a police state along the Egyptian model. According to a report by Human Rights Watch researchers, special police conducted at least 3,289 raids in recent weeks. They forced their way into homes and buildings, attacked residents, handcuffed them and beat them. Just a few hours after the attacks of November 13, Al-Sisi and Hollande discussed via telephone how to “fight terrorism”.



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