

In Cairo, French President Hollande defends the bloodstained Sisi junta

Alex Lantier, Kumaran Ira
20 April 2016

French President François Hollande's visit to Cairo Sunday and Monday, offering support to Egyptian dictator Abdel Fattah el Sisi, exemplified the criminalization of European politics.

Even before Hollande left Paris, he faced rising criticism over his ties to the general who set out to crush the Egyptian revolution that began when the working class overthrew Hosni Mubarak in 2011. The methods Sisi has employed since his coup toppled Islamist president Mohamed Mursi are infamous. He massacred thousands of peaceful protesters in the streets in July and August 2013, jailed tens of thousands of political prisoners, and imposed mass death sentences against associates of Mursi in staged show trials.

Human Rights Watch criticized France's "deafening silence" on Sisi's crimes, noting the "gravity of the repression of civil society, with a drastic increase in torture, abusive incarceration, forced disappearances and violence...without precedent in recent Egyptian history."

Hollande's Socialist Party (PS), itself engaged in the brutal police repression of mass protests by high school and university students against its reactionary labor law reform, treated these criticisms with visible contempt. PS officials made clear that the issue of democratic rights would not interfere with the political and financial ties Hollande is developing with the Sisi junta. Sources at the Elysée presidential palace declared that human rights issues would be raised only in "a discreet and efficient way."

As Hollande arrived in Cairo, however, a scandal was escalating over the grisly murder of Italian student Giulio Regeni. Rome has been compelled to withdraw its ambassador to Egypt, as it is increasingly clear that Regeni was brutally tortured and then murdered by the

Egyptian security authorities, who confiscated his papers.

The issue of the junta's human rights violations came to dominate the sinister press conference held by Hollande and Sisi, leaving Sisi increasingly shaken and irritated. At one point, Sisi felt he had no option besides lying through his teeth, declaring, "We respect the rule of law. We respect human rights, I want to stress this point."

At that point, the French president intervened to defend Sisi, taking the next question on democratic rights, which he insisted were not a barrier to aggressive police work.

"The Rights of Man are not a constraint. They are also a way of fighting terrorism," Hollande said. As if informing the Egyptian dictator about how he would build a flourishing democracy, Hollande blandly added that democracy requires "freedom of the press and freedom of expression" and "a judiciary that answers all questions that must be asked."

Hollande insisted that questions to Sisi on human rights should not be taken as a criticism of his bloody record. "One should not see in the question of human rights an attack, but an expectation. It is because we are very attached to what Egypt represents that this question is legitimate," he said.

Throughout, Sisi defended his murderous policies without any meaningful protest from Hollande. "The criteria in Europe, which are the height of progress and civilization, cannot be applied in the situation that our region is undergoing, and particularly in Egypt. We are facing diabolical forces that are trying to undermine Egypt," Sisi said, denouncing "accusations aiming to weaken the police and the courts."

Afterwards, despite Egypt's huge foreign currency shortage and budget deficit, Sisi signed billions of

euros' worth of contracts with dozens of French businessmen, who have become key suppliers particularly of weaponry—including Rafale fighters, missiles, and warships—for the junta. At the same time, German economy minister Sigmar Gabriel was also visiting Cairo with an even larger delegation of German businessmen.

Hollande's provocative defense of Egypt's Pinochet in the face of rising public horror at the crimes of the Cairo junta reflects the deepening crisis of bourgeois rule on both sides of the Mediterranean. The European bourgeoisie sees Sisi's nationalist appeals and brutal police-state methods as critical to blocking a renewed eruption of the class struggle, and ensuring that Egypt remains a reliable base for reactionary NATO operations in the region, such as a new war in Libya.

At the same time, European and Egyptian capitalism are bound together by their fear of the working class. Far more than at the beginning of the Egyptian revolution in January 2011, the European bourgeoisie fears that social struggle in Egypt could trigger a revolutionary explosion at home. With the European Union (EU) discredited by five years of economically suicidal social austerity policies, most brutally in southern and eastern Europe, regimes across the continent are tottering.

In France, Hollande has become France's most unpopular president since World War II. In the face of explosive social discontent, he has imposed a reactionary state of emergency after the November 13 terror attacks in Paris to stabilize his rule. He is relying entirely on the passive complicity of the union bureaucracy and pseudo-left parties like the Left Front and the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) to prevent a mobilization of workers to defend students protesting the PS's reactionary labor law against bloody police assaults.

Under these conditions, Hollande and the entire European bourgeoisie view the stabilization of the Sisi junta and the blocking of renewed revolutionary struggle by the working class in Egypt—and anywhere else, for that matter—as a life-and-death question.

There is a very direct and concrete link between the suppression of revolutionary struggles in Egypt and the French state of emergency. Hollande discussed his response to the November 13 attacks in Paris with the Egyptian dictator, whom Hollande has reportedly

counted as a personal friend since 2014, before deciding to impose the state of emergency across France.

The day after the November 13 terror attack in Paris, RFI reported that Sisi had called Hollande “to present his condolences and those of Egypt. ... Relations between Presidents Sisi and Hollande go well beyond simple protocol. French sources said there is ‘friendship’ between the two men. Official sources in Cairo said that the two presidents discussed reinforced cooperation in the anti-terror struggle, especially against the Islamic State.”

The fact that Hollande apparently feels a deeper connection with Egypt's blood-soaked strongman is, however, only the personal reflection of the crisis facing both their regimes. Definite parallels exist, despite the vast differences between Egypt and France, in the counterrevolutionary strategies the two men apparently discussed after the November 13 attacks.

Inciting hysteria over the threat posed by Islamism—the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, or in France by terrorists trained in the NATO proxy war in Syria—they both incite nationalism to try to suppress the class struggle.

To the cult of the army and the leader in Sisi's Egypt corresponds to Hollande's appeals to the far right: the imposition of a state of emergency first imposed during France's war against Algerian war, and his proposal to resurrect the deprivation of nationality policy, used to launch the mass deportation of Jews from France to death camps across Europe during World War II. It is in this degraded political atmosphere that the French president could effortlessly associate himself with the Sisi junta on the issue of democratic rights.



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