

Washington rolls out red carpet for the butcher of Cairo

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General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, the dictator of Egypt, will receive a red-carpet welcome at the White House today. His meeting with US President Donald Trump represents the highpoint of a five-day US visit aimed at solidifying Washington's support for his blood-soaked regime and securing fresh financing from the World Bank and Wall Street, along with new deals with US-based transnationals looking to profit off the exploitation of Egypt's low-paid and brutally repressed workers.

The visit is viewed by General el-Sisi as something of a triumph for his hated regime. It is the first state visit to Washington by an Egyptian head of state since the popular uprising that toppled the long-time US-backed dictator Hosni Mubarak in February 2011. That revolutionary mass movement saw not only the dramatic events in Cairo's Tahrir square, but, even more importantly, the mass strikes of the Egyptian working class.

Having propped up Mubarak for 30 years, US imperialism was loath to see him overthrown by the Egyptian masses. The Obama administration did everything it could during the dramatic days that began in January of 2011 to salvage the regime, first by trying to keep Mubarak in the presidential palace, and then by attempting to engineer an "orderly transition" under his intelligence chief and torturer Omar Suleiman.

In the end, the Obama administration was relieved when el-Sisi, a US-trained general and former head of Mubarak's military intelligence service, seized power in a bloody coup against the elected president, Mohamed Mursi, and the Muslim Brotherhood in July 2013.

El-Sisi, whom Mursi had installed as his defense minister, led a merciless crackdown against the Egyptian people and any manifestation of opposition to

the rule of the military and the Egyptian and foreign capitalists whose interests it defends.

The military regime consolidated its grip on power through the August 2013 massacre of over 1,000 Egyptians in Rabaa Al-Adawiya Square where they were protesting Mursi's overthrow.

Since then, the regime has jailed some 60,000 political prisoners, under conditions of rampant torture by the military and the police. Over 1,250 remain "missing" after falling into the clutches of the security forces, and over 1,000 have been sentenced to death in political trials.

Under conditions in which the Democratic administration was invoking "human rights" to justify wars for regime change that it launched in both Libya and Syria, Obama and the State Department found themselves compelled to formally distance themselves from the butcher of Cairo.

The public shunning of el-Sisi was never anything more than window dressing for Washington's real policy of continued support for a government that it saw as a linchpin for US interests in the region.

While the Obama administration briefly imposed a suspension of some military aid to the Egyptian regime in October 2013 in response to public revulsion over the mass killings and repression, by April 2015, it had turned on the arms spigots full blast once again, sending Cairo F16 fighter jets, Apache helicopters, missiles and tanks, and resuming the annual transfer of \$1.3 billion in military assistance, more than is provided to any other country in the world outside of Israel.

When he ordered the resumption of military aid, Obama overrode legislative provisions requiring verification of democratization in Egypt, but there was no serious opposition from either Republicans or

Democrats. Both parties were prepared to justify aid to the murderous regime in the name of the “war on terror,” even as the only war being waged by el-Sisi and his cohorts is one of terror against the Egyptian people.

While the Obama administration also suspended regular joint war games by the US and Egyptian militaries, the US Central Command indicated recently that these will now be resumed.

In dispensing with the pretense of disapproval of the Egyptian regime’s methods, Trump is implementing a policy that would just as surely have been followed had his Democratic opponent won the 2016 election. As secretary of state, Hillary Clinton had opposed Obama for what she saw as his too early abandonment of Mubarak, and she would have undoubtedly sought a similar upgrading of relations with the latest Egyptian tyrant.

The visit to Washington is by no means el-Sisi’s international debut. He has already been welcomed on state visits to Berlin, London, Paris and Rome, where European governments easily managed to put aside pretenses of support for human rights in order to pursue strategic and profit interests.

More recently, el-Sisi has also pursued closer relations with Washington’s two major geostrategic rivals, Russia and China. Russian forces have held joint military exercises with the Egyptian army, and there have been reports that Russian special forces have deployed to a base on Egypt’s border with Libya. China concluded some \$10 billion in infrastructure deals with the el-Sisi regime during a visit to Cairo by President Xi Jinping last year.

No doubt, Trump’s warm reception for General el-Sisi is bound up with Washington’s concerns over a potential loss of influence over the largest Arab country, which in an earlier period was an arena for US-Soviet rivalry during the Cold War.

Asked about whether Trump would raise issues of human rights with General el-Sisi, a senior administration official told reporters, “Our approach is to handle these types of sensitive issues in a private, more discreet way.”

This approach is part of a wider policy of dispensing with human rights rhetoric in the interests of more aggressively pursuing US strategic interests and prosecuting military operations, particularly in the

Middle East. Last week, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson announced that Washington is waiving human rights restrictions on arms sales to Bahrain, whose Sunni monarchy has ruthlessly repressed the country’s Shia majority population. The sale of F-16 fighter jets and other weaponry is bound up with an escalation of the US intervention in Yemen, where Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the other wealthy Gulf oil sheikdoms are waging a vicious war against the most impoverished population in the Arab world.

In advance of the White House visit, the Trump administration released a statement praising el-Sisi for his struggle against “terrorism” as well as for having “initiated courageous and historic economic reforms.” The latter refers to the slashing of subsidies, the floating of Egypt’s currency and other measures that have driven up unemployment, doubled the inflation rate to some 30 percent and cut bread rations, provoking demonstrations in Cairo, Alexandria and other cities of crowds chanting “we want bread” and “down with Sisi.”

Washington counts on Sisi to use an iron fist to crush such manifestations of social discontent. This is what explains Trump’s own infatuation with the Egyptian dictator.

After a meeting with el-Sisi on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly last fall, Trump described the dictator as “a fantastic guy.” He praised his repression, declaring, “He took control of Egypt, and he really took control of it.”

This is not merely a matter of foreign policy or even the personal pleasure Trump and similar parasitical billionaires take in rubbing shoulders with mass killers and war criminals. What the US president sees in the bloody events in Egypt is America’s future. Under conditions of ever widening social inequality, he and the ruling class he represents are prepared to unleash similar massacres and mass arrests to defend their wealth and power from an uprising by the working class.



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