

Egypt's military junta condemns 75 coup protesters to death

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A Cairo court referred 75 defendants to Egypt's grand mufti to approve death by hanging sentences on Saturday. The 75 are all part of a mass trial of 739 defendants, who all face the same maximum penalty.

Only two defendants, both US citizens, were excluded from the first group to be condemned for participating in an August 2013 protest against the coup staged by Egypt's ruling military junta in July 2013 under Gen. Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, which deposed the government of President Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Several of those referred for a death sentence are leading figures in the now-banned Muslim Brotherhood, but charges also include illegal assembly, possession of a weapon and murder.

This turns reality on its head. The brutal military assault on the sit-in at Cairo's Rabaa al Adawiya square in support of Morsi led to the deaths of over 1,000 people.

The mass trial in Cairo is only the latest outrage in a campaign of repression that has been ongoing ever since and has seen over 60,000 imprisoned for political crimes, thousands executed and thousands more "disappeared" by the security services.

Torture and mass murder are accompanied by systematic censorship targeting journalists, newspapers, TV stations and over 500 websites, in the name of combating "fake news" that "spreads instability," damages "public order" or harms the "national interest."

The blood on Sisi's hands also drenches the palms of political leaders of all the major parties in the United States, Europe and the other imperialist powers.

The Trump administration paved the way for Saturday's death sentences by announcing on July 25 that it was unfreezing \$195 million in military aid to

Egypt while a senior Egyptian military delegation was visiting Washington and a congressional hearing was underway to supposedly consider extending an aid freeze. At least 17 Americans are still incarcerated in Egyptian jails.

Trump is only continuing the policy of his predecessor, Barack Obama.

The same day as the death sentences were delivered, David D. Kirkpatrick of that most fervently pro-Obama newspaper, the *New York Times*, published an extended preview of his upcoming book on Egypt, acknowledging that Obama's administration had "paved the way for Trump's embrace of dictators."

Kirkpatrick notes the open endorsement of Sisi's coup and repression of the Muslim Brotherhood by leading figures in the then-Democratic administration, including Secretary of State John Kerry and Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel.

"Kerry told me he had argued at the White House that Mr. Morsi's removal was not, in fact, a coup. General Sisi had merely bowed to the public will in order to save Egypt," he writes. Obama "yielded to those views" when he "decided not to make any determination about whether Mr. Morsi's ouster was or was not a coup, effectively accepting it."

This is a flimsy apologia for Obama, who first lifted the 2013 military aid ban on Egypt in 2015.

Aside from a subsequent and brief period of denial provoked by Sisi's clampdown on NGOs that was ended by Trump this month, Washington has continued to provide an average of \$1.3 billion a year to Egypt—more than to any other country besides Israel.

The same holds true of all the major powers, with the butcher Sisi making diplomatic visits to Berlin, London, Paris and Rome to rake in arms deals and aid packages. Earlier this month, France was accused by

human rights organizations of aiding Sisi's repression through arms sales involving at least eight companies worth €1.3 billion and including "powerful digital tools" that "have helped establish an Orwellian surveillance and control architecture that is being used to eradicate all forms of dissent and citizen action."

Two overarching considerations inform the attitude of the imperialist powers to Egypt's dictatorship.

First is the escalating contest for domination of the oil-rich Middle East, including plans for military conflict with Iran.

Trump's announcement of a Middle East Strategic Alliance, modelled on NATO, seeks to bring together Israel, Saudi Arabia and the UAE in alliance with Egypt—regimes that have carried out repression just as brutal as Sisi against the Palestinians and in Yemen. Savage repression to crush social and political dissent must accompany such a turn to war, and not only in the Middle East.

More fundamental still is the threat posed by the working class.

The Egyptian Revolution was the key event in the "Arab Spring" of 2011, which witnessed the eruption of mass strikes and protests that led to the downfall of first Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia and then the February ouster of Hosni Mubarak.

But without establishing its political independence and without a revolutionary party to lead it, the Egyptian working class was politically disarmed by the bourgeois forces, liberal and Islamist, it looked to for leadership. A vital role in this betrayal was played by pseudo-left groups such as the Revolutionary Socialists, who insisted throughout that the working class confine itself to a struggle for "democracy" in alliance with one or another faction of the bourgeoisie.

This has allowed the Egyptian military to restore its rule and its imperialist sponsors to resume their policies of war, repression and exploitation of the region, including Libya, Syria and Iraq. But the fear remains that Egypt was only a prelude to a far broader revolutionary offensive by the working class that this time will also sweep through Europe, America and across the world.

Sisi is not only given carte blanche by the major powers to carry out his clampdown, but is provided with unlimited financial and technical support because they are preparing or actively employing similar

measures against the working class at home.

In a recent interview, Sisi declared of his government's overarching mission, "Everything is linked to stability and security. I want us to develop an acute fear of instability."

This statement could just as easily have come from the mouth of Trump, Hillary Clinton, Emmanuel Macron, Theresa May or Angela Merkel.

Everywhere, the gap between the super-rich financial oligarchy and the mass of workers and young people struggling to get by has achieved morbid dimensions. Social anger is palpable. For the first time since 2011, industrial struggles and other forms of mass protest are re-emerging.

Everywhere, the response of the ruling elites is the same—a turn to police-military measures against the population, mass surveillance, censorship, attacks on democratic freedoms, the deliberate cultivation of far-right forces, cuts to social programs and stepped-up military spending.

The central lesson that must be drawn from the earth shaking events of 2011 and the tragedy that has followed is the necessity to consciously prepare an international revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of capitalism and imperialism.

The goal must be the taking of state power by the working class and the building of a socialist economic system to end the scourge of austerity, dictatorship and war and provide for the essential needs of all the world's people.

The sole basis for doing so is through the construction of sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International, in Egypt and throughout the world.



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