

French President Macron hails Egypt's dictator General al-Sisi in Paris

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Egypt's dictator General Abdel al-Sisi held talks with French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris yesterday morning, as part of a three-day state visit. Al-Sisi also met Foreign Minister Yves Le Drian and the head of the National Assembly Richard Ferrand, before dining with Macron at the Élysée Palace.

In a joint press conference after their talks, Macron declared that “our regular exchanges illustrate the quality of the strategic partnership that ties our two countries, and the long period of work that we have had this morning has permitted to deepen these exchanges.”

Macron hailed al-Sisi, the head of a blood-stained military dictatorship that took power in a coup in July 2013. The coup brutally suppressed the revolution that overthrew US-backed dictator Hosni Mubarak at the beginning of 2011.

Al-Sisi thanked his “dear friend President Macron” for his “warm welcome since my arrival in Paris.” Macron bluntly brushed aside any criticism of French backing for his counterpart. In advance of the meeting, a collection of 18 human rights organizations, including Amnesty International, had signed an open letter criticizing the Macron government's support for al-Sisi.

Rejecting a reporter's question as to whether France would tie future arms sales to Egypt to empty “human rights” commitments, Macron stated, “I will not condition our cooperation in defense and economic matters” because “I believe in the sovereignty of people, and the respect of our legitimate and reciprocal interests.” A boycott would “reduce the capacities of a partner in the fight against terrorism and regional stability.”

Central to this “stability” is the bloody suppression of opposition in the Egyptian working class to the conditions of mass poverty and inequality and the

defense of Egyptian and foreign capital in the country. Al-Sisi announced that the two had “agreed upon the necessity to work together, to increase direct French investment in Egypt, above all, to profit from the opportunities of development, notably in infrastructure.”

Their discussions also centered on the war policy in Libya, where France and Egypt are allied against Turkey as part of a regional proxy war for territorial control over the oil-rich region. Macron declared that peace in Libya was “threatened by regional powers who have decided to make Libya the theater of their influence rather than the place of stability of the Libyan people.” This from the head of the government that with the UK and US led the bombing of the country in 2011, overthrowing and killing its President Muammar Gaddafi, placing in power rival Islamist militia, and plunging the country into a decadelong civil war.

Macron's declaration of support for the butcher of Cairo is a warning to the French and European working class about the advanced preparations for military-police dictatorships across the continent.

Since coming to power in 2013, al-Sisi has maintained his seven-year rule with European and US backing through police-state repression, jailing 60,000 journalists and political opponents, carrying out “disappearances,” ordering death sentences of hundreds at a time in mass show trials, and torturing prisoners in the country's notoriously overcrowded jails.

In the space of just 10 days in October, the regime carried out 49 executions, according to a report by *Human Rights Watch*. They included 15 men convicted for political offenses, two women and 32 men convicted of criminal offenses. The report noted that the government typically does not even announce executions or inform prisoners' families. The HRW

report was based off accounts in pro-government newspaper reports.

At least five of those executed had been sentenced and held for seven years after allegedly participating in acts of resistance against military forces on August 14, 2013. The military launched a crackdown on a peaceful sit-in in central Cairo by supporters of the overthrown Muslim Brotherhood President Mohamed Mursi, massacring over 1,000 people. Two are accused of participating in an attack on the Kerdasa police station and were convicted as part of a mass show trial of 188 people that sentenced 183.

Thousands of people that are being held in prison have never stood trial. Under Egyptian law, the government can detain anyone for two years prior to a trial. In May, Human Rights Watch described a typical court decision to renew the pretrial detentions of hundreds of people at a time. On May 4, 5 and 6, the Cairo and Giza terrorism courts decided to extend the detention of 485, 745 and 414 people at a time. No defendants were present; there were no hearings, and the judges left the courtrooms without informing their lawyers about the decisions.

A report on the conditions among prisoners between 2016 and 2018 noted the widespread use of torture to extract confessions. Detainees are subject to electric shocks, blindfolded, stripped, handcuffed and beaten, and placed in stress positions for hours at a time.

In one example of those the national prison network, 64-year-old Ahmed Abdelnaby Mahmoud died in the Tora Maximum-Security Prison II in Cairo on September 2. He had been arrested on December 23, 2018, at Cairo airport, along with his wife, and was held without charge for 20 months. Prosecutors reportedly accused him of participating in an unspecified “illegal group,” and he died without ever being tried.

Mahmoud’s two US-Egyptian daughters reported his treatment on Facebook, noting that he was denied visitation and medical rights “despite his chronic conditions, including diabetes, high blood pressure and a herniated disc, he also developed a skin condition due to filthy inhumane conditions in cell, he also developed PTSD after his arrest due to the physical and psychological torture he endured including beating and electrocution which resulted in difficulty moving his left side of his body.”

France has provided unstinting support to the Egyptian regime. It was the largest arms provider to Egypt from 2012 to 2017, eclipsing the United States, including with a multibillion euro contract for Rafale fighter jets, warships, and Renault Truck Defense armoured tanks. The latter were revealed to have been deployed in 2013 and after by the military to put down antigovernment protests.

French private companies have provided surveillance and crowd control tools to military and police. In 2017 alone, France provided more than 1.4 billion euros of military and security equipment.

Like its Egyptian counterpart, the Macron administration lives in mortal fear of a social explosion of workers and young people against the ever-widening levels of social inequality and poverty and enrichment of the financial elite. A central component of their discussion was no doubt Macron’s plans for suppressing opposition and building up a dictatorship, following two years of mass Yellow Vest protests and strikes against his government, and explosive anger over its negligent, politically criminal response to the coronavirus pandemic.



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