

German Politicians, Media Defend the Egyptian Army

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The reaction of German politicians and the media to the massacre carried out by the Egyptian army against supporters of ousted President Mohamed Mursi ranges from subdued criticism to outright support.

All comments, including those critical of the army, refrain from calling for the resignation or overthrow of the military-controlled regime. Instead, they call on the Muslim Brotherhood to reconcile itself with the military and work with them. Their aim is to maintain the power of the military as the Egyptian bourgeoisie's main instrument of class rule.

This stance is common to all the commentaries—from the conservative to the liberal press, from the ruling coalition parties to the opposition Social Democratic Party, the Greens and the Left Party. Not a single commentary defends the democratic rights of the Egyptian masses, which are the ultimate victim of the army's brutal intervention and the government's declared state of emergency.

Instead, the media and political pundits fear that the violent repression by the military, the return of old Mubarak loyalists to leading government posts, and an open civil war between the military and the Muslim Brotherhood could reignite the revolution and undermine imperialist influence over the country.

German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle (Free Democratic Party) responded to the massacre by calling upon "all sides" to "immediately return to a political process involving all political forces." This demand is based on the recognition that the military and the Muslim Brotherhood represent different wings of the Egyptian bourgeoisie, which are both profoundly hostile to the working class.

The German Foreign Ministry summoned the Egyptian ambassador after the security forces killed hundreds of mostly unarmed protesters, with thousands injured. A spokeswoman for the ministry announced subsequently that they had put forward the attitude of the German government "in no uncertain terms" and given notice of consequences that would be coordinated with Germany's European partners. This is far from a clear condemnation of the massacre, however.

In fact, Westerwelle is poorly placed to do so, as he was one of the most consistent defenders of longtime dictator Hosni Mubarak, whose followers are now back in power. In a visit to Cairo in May 2010, nine months before Mubarak's overthrow, Westerwelle praised the incumbent president as "an anchor of stability in the region" and a "man of enormous

experience and great wisdom”, who had “the future firmly in sight”.

After Mubarak’s ouster, Westerwelle backed the military junta that replaced him, and after Mursi’s election he supported the new president. In July 2012, he was the first European politician to travel to Cairo, where he welcomed the “clear commitment by the first democratically elected president to democracy, the rule of law, pluralism and religious tolerance.”

After mass protests erupted against Mursi, and the military took power in a coup aimed at forestalling a new revolution, the new rulers treated Westerwelle with barely concealed contempt. When he visited Cairo again on August 1 this year, he had to take a bus from the plane to the airport terminal because his limousine was denied entry to the airfield. During his entire trip, he was received with marked coolness.

Westerwelle reacted by refraining from any criticism of the military coup and dropping his original call for Mursi’s release. “At the present time we are not entitled to make a legal qualification of what has taken place in Egypt,” he said of the coup.

Westerwell’s stance is shared by all parties in the Bundestag. Their priority is to preserve the stability of bourgeois rule in Egypt and maintain imperialist influence in the country. This requires, firstly, that the military remain a factor of power, secondly, that civil war between the military and the Muslim Brotherhood is avoided if possible, and, thirdly that the Egyptian working class, the driving force of the revolution, be held in check.

The foreign policy spokesman of the SPD parliamentary group, Rolf Mützenich, called for joint action by European governments. Berlin should give a mandate for intervention to EU High Representative Lady Ashton, who “still has the confidence of all the Egyptian players,” he said. Mützenich tried hard to award equal responsibility for the massacre to “representatives of the old Mubarak system” and the Muslim Brotherhood. The Muslim Brotherhood “must not further incite and exploit its followers,” he said.

Similar arguments were put forward by the foreign policy spokesperson for the Greens in the European Parliament, Franziska Brantner. Speaking to German radio, she declared that the military and the Muslim Brotherhood were equally responsible for the massacre and called for international intervention to reconcile both sides. “I think it is now really time for the various international players to bring together the various sides,” she said.

The Left Party’s Rosa Luxemburg Foundation had already presented a document calling for reconciliation with the rule of the military and to relinquish the call for early elections. “Our aim is rather to find a way to introduce social justice in a manner the military leadership can accept,” wrote Peter Schäfer and Mai Choucri, of the RL Foundation in Tunis.

Most press commentaries also call for reconciliation between the Brotherhood and the army to stabilize the Egyptian state. *Die Welt* advises the Muslim Brotherhood to comply with the military and seek a compromise: “Under military rule the struggle against current conditions can only end in defeat. It would be wise to seek talks.”

The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* complains that “the basis for a consensus has crumbled” in Egypt.

The *taz* favors public condemnation of the massacre, because otherwise “there will no

longer be an argument for Islamists in favor of engaging in democratic processes.” Then every Islamist would “feel that going underground is the only choice. It is in the interest of the whole world to prevent this.”

The *Handelsblatt* criticizes Western politicians for being too passive in Cairo. “Genuine commitment looks very different.”

For its part, the *Stuttgarter Nachrichten* dismisses talk of compromise between the warring bourgeois camps and recommends full support for the military to suppress every manifestation of social opposition.

“Instead of quoting moralistic clichés, the West needs to make a sober analysis of its own interests,” the newspaper writes. “Civil war creates poverty and a power vacuum, i.e. the best breeding ground for fundamentalists, terrorists and an expansion of the sphere of influence of the Iranian mullahs.”

“The only real concern of the West is stability in Egypt,” the paper concludes. “At the most the US and its allies have influence over the military. They are perhaps no better than the other side, but are possibly susceptible to pressure and arguments. Morality has nothing to do with this, it is rather a question of sober political interests.”

The defense of the Egyptian military by politicians and the media is a warning to the German and European population. In future social conflicts they are prepared to respond just as ruthlessly as the army in Egypt.

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