

Obama and the Egyptian Massacre

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Wednesday's massacre of hundreds of unarmed protesters by the US-backed Egyptian military junta shatters Washington's hypocritical claims that its Middle East policy is based on democracy and human rights.

Obama faced a dilemma as he spoke on Egypt yesterday, from his vacation spot in the multi-million-dollar mansion of a corporate finance manager on Martha's Vineyard. Washington would have preferred to arrange a compromise between the army and the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) of deposed President Mohamed Mursi. However, amid rising mass protests in July, it ultimately gave its blessing to a military coup, removing Mursi in order to preempt renewed revolutionary struggles by the working class.

Washington apparently failed to fully foresee the implications of allowing the military and its supporters in the liberal bourgeoisie to settle accounts with the MB. It now fears that with the latest massacre, the army has overreached itself, irretrievably destabilizing Egypt and undermining US Middle East policy.

This accounts for Obama's mealy-mouthed response, attempting to distance his administration from the massacre while indicating that it will continue supporting the army. He said that his administration "strongly condemns the steps that have been taken." The centerpiece of his chastisement of the junta, however, was to postpone "our biannual joint military exercise, which was scheduled for next month."

This was simply window dressing for continuing US support for the junta, as it attempts to consolidate a dictatorship and drown the Egyptian revolution in blood. The White House still declines to recognize the July 3 toppling of Mursi as a coup, so it can continue its decades-long policy of funding the Egyptian army to the tune of billions of dollars per year.

Obama tried to cover up his administration's record in Egypt, claiming that "just over two years ago, America was inspired by the Egyptian people's desire for change, as millions of Egyptians took to the streets to defend their dignity and demand a government that was responsive to their aspirations for political freedom and economic opportunity."

While the Egyptian revolution inspired American workers, including mass protests against austerity in Wisconsin, Washington viewed it with fear and dismay. Obama backed the Mubarak regime to the bitter end, even as it murdered hundreds of protesters. His special envoy to Mubarak, Frank Wisner, stressed that Mubarak should "stay in office in order to steer those changes through."

A striking difference of tone separated Obama's speech on Martha's Vineyard from the bellicose rhetoric his administration directed against Libya or Syria. In those countries—long

targeted by Washington for regime change—the Obama administration and its accomplices in the petty-bourgeois “human rights” community declared that the risk that protesters might be killed by itself justified decisive action, including war.

In 2011 in Libya, Washington, London, Paris, and a horde of human rights activists insisted that everything had to be done to “prevent a massacre in Benghazi,” where opponents of Colonel Muammar al-Gaddafi had revolted. On this basis, they supported setting up “humanitarian corridors” and a no-fly zone in Libya. This led to a NATO war in which tens of thousands of people were killed, cities carpet-bombed, and Libya’s oil revenues seized by Western banks.

In Syria, reports that President Bashar al-Assad’s regime was “killing its own people” were used to justify a US policy of arming Islamist forces, including Al Qaeda and Syria’s MB, for a campaign to topple Assad.

The same political double-bookkeeping can be observed among the academic supporters of “humanitarian” war. Despite the Egyptian junta’s documented massacre in Cairo against its “own people,” they are not producing outraged newspaper columns, blog posts, or demands for war to oust the junta and impose a no-fly zone to ground its helicopters over Cairo.

The massacre of protesters in Cairo confirms again that US policy is not set by moral abstractions, but by a ruthless calculation of US imperialism’s geopolitical interests. Various “human rights” arguments served to manipulate public opinion and, with the assistance of a corrupt media establishment, secure the support of layers of the middle class for imperialist policies.

Masses of workers and youth must come to recognize the moral sermons of Obama for what they are: propaganda in the pursuit of imperialism’s geostrategic interests.

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