

US-backed Egyptian Regime Hands Down 683 More Death Sentences

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A drumhead court in Egypt Monday handed down death sentences to 683 defendants—alleged members and supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB)—after a five-minute trial in which the judge refused to allow a word uttered or a shred of evidence submitted in defense of the condemned men, most of whom were not even present for the proceeding.

The mass trial and its pre-ordained verdict and sentence follow a similar judicial mockery last month in which 529 people were sentenced to die by the same judge, Saed Youssef. In a separate ruling Monday, Youssef upheld 37 of those death sentences while commuting the remainder to life prison terms.

Outside the heavily guarded courthouse in Minya, about 150 miles south of Cairo, relatives of the accused wept and shouted denunciations of the ruling junta and its de facto leader, former Mubarak-era military intelligence chief, Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

The charges against over 1,200 defendants—all facing either the gallows or a life in Egypt's notoriously brutal prisons—stem from the death of a single policeman during protests organized by the Muslim Brotherhood against the military coup that ousted Egypt's elected president, MB member Mohamed Mursi. During the same period, Egyptian security forces massacred as many as 2,000 protesters, including 1,000 of them in a single day.

As the judicial travesty in Minya makes abundantly clear, that reign of terror has only continued and become more firmly institutionalized under Sisi, who stepped down recently to become a candidate in what will inevitably be rigged elections for president.

In addition to the over 2,000 killed by Sisi's junta, another 21,000 have been imprisoned. Thousands more have disappeared into a network of "black sites," secret detention and torture centers.

The target of this vast machine of repression is not only the Muslim Brotherhood, but also protesters involved in the demonstrations that led to the downfall of former dictator Hosni Mubarak in February 2011. Three of them—Ahmed Maher and Mohammed Adel, leaders of the April 6 Youth Movement, which has now been outlawed on trumped-up charges of espionage and maligning the state, and Ahmed Douma—have been sentenced to three years of hard labor and \$7,000 in fines for violating a decree outlawing all unauthorized protests. They have reported suffering continuous beatings by their jailers.

This wholesale and savage repression is aimed at the Egyptian working class, the social force that was the main actor, through its mass strikes and protests, in the toppling of the

Mubarak regime. These strikes have continued, bringing out textile, steel, public transport, postal and port workers, including on the strategic Suez Canal. Under conditions in which the ruling junta is preparing to enact drastic IMF-dictated austerity measures, including the scrapping of subsidies on bread, electricity and gas, it is desperate to intimidate Egyptian workers with state violence.

The sheer scale of Egypt's mass trials and mass death sentences is unrivaled in recent history, recalling the kind of atrocities carried out under the Nazis. With its weasel words and its concrete deeds, Washington stands exposed as the direct accomplice in this crime, with President Barack Obama all but soaping the hangman's noose.

In a statement dripping with cynicism, the White House Monday allowed that Obama was "deeply troubled" by the mass death sentences in Egypt.

"While judicial independence is a vital part of democracy, this verdict cannot be reconciled with Egypt's obligations under international human rights law," the White House statement read. It appealed to Sisi and his fellow military rulers to "take a stand against this illogical action."

Whom do they think they're kidding? The niceties of "judicial independence" are hardly an issue in Egypt. The hanging judge Youssef—popularly known as "the butcher"—was installed in a special court created by the junta to do precisely what he is doing. Moreover, the draconian sentences have a very clear logic: they are an act of state terror designed to intimidate the Egyptian masses.

The statement continued: "Since the January 25 Revolution, the Egyptian people have aspired to be represented by a government that rules justly, respects their dignity, and provides economic opportunities. The United States supports these aspirations and wants Egypt's transition to succeed."

Lies piled on top of lies. The reality is that the Obama administration did everything it could to keep its "stalwart ally" Mubarak in power and smash the January 25 Revolution, sending the Egyptian dictator the ammunition to do it.

Having failed, it sought to secure a transfer of power to Mubarak's intelligence chief and CIA "asset" Omar Suleiman. Failing that, it backed the assumption of power by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. After briefly trying to utilize the right-wing Muslim Brotherhood government of Mursi to secure its interests in Egypt and the region, it quietly backed the military coup that overthrew him last July, refusing to call the coup a coup so that it could legally continue pouring in military aid.

The talk about wanting "Egypt's transition to succeed" cannot be topped for sheer cynicism. The "transition," aided and abetted by Washington, has proven to be to a dictatorship bloodier and more repressive than even the hated US-backed Mubarak.

It is hardly a coincidence that Monday's mass death sentence comes only days after Washington approved the provision of 10 Apache attack helicopters on top of some \$650 million in military aid already approved for the Egyptian junta this fiscal year. This is half of what the administration wanted to supply to the country's repressive forces, the other half being held up by laws restricting aid to regimes brought to power through military coups.

The helicopter deal was correctly interpreted by the Egyptian junta as a green light to escalate its brutal crackdown.

Nothing could expose more nakedly the hypocritical fraud of the Obama administration's "human rights" foreign policy. For the past several months, it has postured as the champion of democracy and human rights in Ukraine. It used what was, by comparison with Egypt, a relative handful of killings—whose perpetrator remains a matter of debate—to justify a fascist-led coup and a policy of continuous anti-Russian provocation that threatens to push the world into a nuclear third world war.

Similarly in Venezuela, the death of 41 people in violent demonstrations—the cause of which are again disputed—led to Secretary of State John Kerry denouncing the government for waging a "terror campaign against its own citizens." No such terror was perceived in the massacres of thousands last August in the streets of Cairo or in the mass death sentences handed down over the past two months.

Egypt exposes the real face of US imperialist policy, which employs bloody state violence and militarism to pursue the interests of America's financial and corporate ruling strata and suppress the social struggles and democratic aspirations of working people all over the globe.

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