

Egypt: US-Backed Repression is Insight for American Public

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Global Research, January 28, 2011

28 January 2011

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

As thousands more Egyptian citizens take to the streets in anti-government protests, the country is in danger of witnessing a bloodbath – at the behest of Washington.

Defying a ban on public demonstrations by the government of President Hosni Mubarak, tens of thousands of Egyptians have for the fourth consecutive day rallied on the streets of the capital Cairo and other major cities calling for his abdication. Inspired by the mass uprising in neighbouring Tunisia earlier this month, which forced its president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali into exile, the protesters in Egypt are likewise demanding Mubarak and his government to quit.

Mubarak's military apparatus has so far shown brutal determination to suppress the uprising. As many as seven civilians have been killed by heavily armed riot police, hundreds are reported injured and more than 1,000 arrests have been made by secret security agents who were videoed bundling protesters into unmarked vehicles. Now the country's formidable military forces are reported to have taken up positions in public places in Cairo and elsewhere.

But it is Washington's latest intervention that could trigger an escalation of Egyptian state violence against its people. Speaking to media, White House spokesman Robert Gibbs described the Mubarak government as an "important ally" and that the US "expects" the 30-year-old regime to remain intact. Forget the hollow and cynical plea by Gibbs to the Egyptian government and protesters to refrain from violence, the key message is continuing US support for the regime. In other words, the US is assuring Mubarak that it stands full-square behind his bid to stay in power. Given that the already-lethal response of the Egyptian state did not draw a word of condemnation from the White House nor that the population's demands for democracy and social justice were unequivocally endorsed can only send the following code to Mubarak: do whatever you must to get these people off the streets.

Meanwhile, an Israeli cabinet minister probably voiced the unvarnished essence of the US position when he was quoted in Israeli media as urging the Mubarak to use lethal force to quell the protests. "They will have to use force, power in the streets..." the unnamed minister said.

Make no mistake. The Mubarak government – which can only be described as a repressive military dictatorship – is well-placed and willing to do its worse, no matter the cost to civilian life. The country's army and police forces are geared to the teeth thanks to more than \$1 billion in military aid a year from Washington. The North African country and the Arab

region's most populous is the second highest recipient of US military equipment after Israel. It has also one of the worst human rights records, routinely detaining and torturing thousands of its citizens, earning itself the reputation as a "torture chamber". When the US officially describes Egypt as "an important ally" it is inadvertently referring to Mubarak's role as a garrison outpost for US military operations and dirty war tactics in the Middle East and beyond. There is clear evidence from international human rights groups that countless "suspects" rendered by US forces in their various territories of (criminal) operations are secretly dumped in Egypt for "deep interrogation". The country serves as a giant "Guantanamo" of the Middle East, conveniently obscured from US public interest and relieved of legal niceties over human rights.

In collaboration with Israel, and openly described as an "ally" by Tel Aviv, Egypt has shown itself to be the anvil to Israel's hammer against the Palestinian people. In keeping the Raffah Crossing between Egypt and the Gaza Strip closed, thus denying badly needed humanitarian aid to Palestinians in the aftermath of Israel's murderous 2009 assault, Mubarak has shown unspeakable callousness and willingness to collaborate with the criminal US/Israeli policy of "collective punishment" of this civilian population.

The importance of Mubarak's Egypt to the US government can be illustrated in another way. Imagine the repercussions for Washington if the Egyptian people were to succeed in overthrowing this military state and establishing genuine democracy, one where the abundant resources of that country are used to lift the mass of the population out of grinding poverty instead of serving to enrich a corrupt elite and its masters in Washington. Imagine a country that refuses to continue to be a US garrison and staging post for criminal wars in the region. Imagine the catalytic effect for democracy across the region and likewise the demise of other US puppet regimes.

When it gets down to the nitty-gritty, this is the "vital interest" of the US executive - as opposed to the US public interest. Indeed, the stance by Washington over events in Egypt and elsewhere across North Africa and the Middle East should serve as a salutary insight for the US public of where their own pressing interests really lie and how they are best served. Their government is for dictatorship and repression and steadfastly against democracy, economic justice and human rights - at any human cost. All of which is beginning to sound uncomfortably familiar - and closer to home.

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Finian Cunningham has written extensively on international affairs, with articles published in several languages. Many of his recent articles appear on the renowned Canadian-based news website Globalresearch.ca. He is a Master's graduate in Agricultural Chemistry and worked as a scientific editor for the Royal Society of Chemistry, Cambridge, England, before pursuing a career in journalism. He specialises in Middle East and East Africa issues and has also given several American radio interviews as well as TV interviews on Press TV and Russia Today. Previously, he was based in Bahrain and witnessed the political upheavals in the Persian Gulf kingdom during 2011 as well as the subsequent Saudi-led brutal crackdown against pro-democracy protests.

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