

COMMENT

Egypt: The counterrevolution cries conspiracy

Saturday 7 September 2013, by [NAGUIB Sameh](#) (Date first published: 28 August 2013).

Egypt's military, led by Gen. Abdul-Fattah el-Sisi, is justifying its murderous crackdown on opponents by claiming that the Muslim Brotherhood is working in collaboration with the Israeli and U.S. governments to destroy Egypt. The state's repression has become increasingly savage since the military removed President Mohamed Morsi on July 3, in the wake of massive protests on June 30 initiated by the Tamarod (Rebellion) campaign that showed how little public support the Brotherhood had after one year in the presidency. Now, the military is clearly engaged in re-establishing the old dictatorial regime that existed under Hosni Mubarak, before he was overthrown at the start of the Egyptian Revolution in February 2011.

Sameh Naguib, a leading member of the Revolutionary Socialists in Egypt, wrote this article in late August analyzing the attempts of the generals to smear and demonize their opponents, while attempting to reoccupy their position as partners with Egyptian capitalism and U.S. imperialism in imposing exploitation and oppression on the mass of the Egyptian people.

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Contents

- [From Mubarak to El-Sisi](#)
- [The Brotherhood, the Military](#)
- [Saudi Arabia, El-Sisi and the](#)
- [Israel and el-Sisi](#)
- [The Qatari and Turkish Excepti](#)

COUNTERREVOLUTIONS AND military coups always use the idea of "foreign conspiracies" to paint all those who oppose them as traitors and to justify their brutal oppression. They do this to create a situation of national hysteria to cover up their crimes.

So it is not at all strange that we find the same mouthpieces of the Mubarak regime, both private and state, who appear to collectively work now under the direct administration of the secret police and security apparatus, speaking night and day about "Brotherhood terrorism" and American and Zionist plots in support of this terrorism. They portray American and European pronouncements about the coup and the massacres and the threats to stop foreign aid a part of these same devilish plots, not only to return the Muslim Brotherhood to power, but to break Egypt apart and sabotage its

national security.

It follows that everyone who opposes military rule is not only accused of being in the service of the Muslim Brotherhood and of terrorism, but of betraying the nation and participating in foreign conspiracies to destroy Egypt. All those who demonstrate for democracy, all those who protest the policies of the government, all who strike or occupy become enemies of the state and agents of the American-Zionist plot. All those who criticize el-Sisi—who consider what has happened in Egypt today a bloody military coup and counterrevolution to reproduce the Mubarak regime—are not only Muslim Brotherhood terrorists, but deserve to be prosecuted on charges of treason!

From Mubarak to El-Sisi

But let us take a step back in an attempt to understand what is happening. The Mubarak regime, against which the Egyptian people revolted in January 2011, based its undertakings on three interconnected strategic principles.

The first principle was neoliberal capitalist policy, impoverishing the great majority of Egyptians for the benefit of a handful of big businessmen, international corporations and the heads of state institutions. At the pinnacle of this are the institutions of the military and security services. The second principle was dictatorship and oppression, which enabled the state to implement the policies of the first principle. The third principle was the political, military and security alliance with American imperialism, in the service of its interests and those of its principal partners—the Zionist entity on the one hand and the oil-rich countries of the Gulf on the other, foremost the kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Throughout 30 years of Mubarak's government, the regime remained one of the most important regional allies of the United States and the Zionist entity. The government participated in the strangulation of the Palestinian revolution and in the American war against Iraq. The regime provided every possible service toward American and Zionist colonization.

Since this alliance was the essence of strategic foreign policy for Mubarak's state, the military institution at its head became integrally connected with the American military in terms of training, armaments and funding. This was the case as well for the Egyptian security and secret police apparatus, which played a prominent role in the service of the American "war on terror," against all those who oppose American interests in the region.

This principle is the foundation of the state against which the January revolution rose up. The American administration attempted to rescue Mubarak up to the final moment, until it became aware, along with the Egyptian military, that sacrificing Mubarak and some of the figureheads of his government was the only means for the regime to continue. So the Supreme Council of Armed Forces arrived to protect those same principles of Mubarak's state—the same dictatorship, the same capitalism and the same strategic alliance with Washington, Tel Aviv and Riyadh. But the blows of the revolution had created deep cracks in that state, and the military institution had no choice but to find a political partner capable of co-opting and aborting the revolution, which has not subsided to this day.

Along came the Muslim Brotherhood to play out its role, the largest political organization in Egypt, with the greatest popular influence.

The Brotherhood, the Military and America

The American and European position in opposing the coup and the massacres does not arise, of course, from any humanitarian or democratic dimension. Imperial powers do not shift their positions except in their own interests. This opposition also does not arise from any preference for the Brotherhood over the military, security apparatus and Mubarak's state, for these have been imperialism's historic allies.

So what is the imperial strategy of America and her European allies toward our region generally, and toward Egypt specifically?

This strategy is based upon two fundamental principles. The first principle, of course, is American political and military hegemony over the Arab oil states, most prominently Saudi Arabia. The second principle is a guarantee of security for the Zionist entity, which represents the fundamental military anchor for American control in the region.

The importance of Arab oil for Washington has increased in the last three decades for a number of reasons, the first being that Arab oil is still the principal source of energy for many large capitalist countries, particularly China, Japan and the European Union. American control over this precious treasure is a key component in Washington's ability to remain at the pinnacle of the capitalist hierarchy, considering the rapid ascent of large capitalist centers such as China. Secondly, and particularly in the past decade, Saudi Arabia and the statelets of the Gulf have become an important financial center in the international capitalist system. And the influence of these sources of wealth has increased since the outbreak of the global economic crisis in 2008.

So we see the continuation of the "Carter principle," put forth in the wake of the Iranian revolution, which asserts that any threat to the Arab oil states is considered to be a direct threat to the vital interests of the United States, to be responded to with armed force if necessary. This is also what we have seen in practical terms with the war on Iraq in 1991 and the invasion in 2003.

Into this situation come the Arab revolutions, foremost the Egyptian revolution, like a nightmare for Washington, surpassing the dangers of the Iranian revolution in 1979. The possibility that these revolutions could extend to include the Gulf states and negatively impact the stability of these dictatorial regimes represented, and continues to represent, a dangerous threat to the strategic interests of America and its European allies.

The second danger was certainly that the coming of independent revolutionary forces to power would mean the toppling of the peace agreements with the Zionist entity, directly detracting from the power and influence of this colonial entity and threatening its existence in the longer term.

This is the logic of the U.S. wagering on the Muslim Brotherhood. When it became clear during the rule of the military council that it could not control the revolutionary situation through repression alone, it gambled on the Brotherhood as a political force with national influence that would at the same time want to preserve the same strategic alliances of the old regime.

And so we arrive at the deal between the military and the Brotherhood with the blessings of America. The military accepted the coming to power of the Brotherhood in 2012 in return for the commitment of the Brotherhood to the same policies and alliances of the Mubarak regime, and the avoidance of any encroachment on the fundamental interests of that regime, as well as working toward co-opting the anger of the populace and aborting the revolution.

In truth, the Brotherhood demonstrated that they were prepared to play this sordid role. They

instantly confirmed their loyalty to Washington, to Camp David, to the King of Saudi Arabia, whom they were quick to visit and to shake hands with. They stonewalled the demands of the revolution, especially retribution for the martyrs, and allowed a safe exit for the leaders of the military and police. They implemented the same economic policies as the Mubarak regime with its generals and businessmen.

What the Brotherhood was unable to achieve was the co-optation and abortion of the Egyptian revolution, for on the contrary those same policies led to a deepening of the revolutionary crisis and the igniting of successive waves of millions-strong revolutionary demonstrations, and the outbreak of the largest wave of labor strikes and social protests since the breakout of the revolution.

At their peak in the five months leading up to June 30, the demonstrations reached the highest rate of strikes and protests in the world, surpassing during those months the total number of strikes and demonstrations in the year 2012. And we know that the number of strikes in 2012 alone exceeded the number of all those that had happened in the 10 years before (Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights and the Democracy Index Report—Center for International Development, May 2013)

It became clear that the continuation of Morsi's government and the escalating revolutionary anger threatened not only Morsi and the Brotherhood, but Mubarak's state, the generals and his big businessmen. Panic began to spread in the heart of the American administration regarding the escalation in the wave of popular demonstration leading up to June 30. The military and *feloul* planned to derail this wave with the coup of July 3 and what immediately followed—the smashing of the Brotherhood, the massacres, the rapid return of the *feloul* and the old security apparatus—paving the way for the counterrevolution. And we are still now in its first days.

The American problem with these developments has no relationship to a conspiracy about returning the Brotherhood to power. The American fear is that the gamble on crushing the Brotherhood made by el-Sisi and the generals will be devastating for all sides. It threatens to transform Egypt in one of two directions: The first is the Algerian scenario, with the spread of terrorism and a long civil war threatening American and European strategic interests in the Suez Canal and the security of Israel, and possibly unleashing waves of illegal migration across the Mediterranean toward the coasts of Europe. The second is that el-Sisi's moves will lead to a new revolutionary wave, as happened previously under the military council and with Morsi. This time, such an outcome would truly threaten the interests of the Egyptian ruling class, the deep state and all of the American and colonial interests in the region.

The disagreement between Washington and el-Sisi is a tactical disagreement around the methods of returning stability for the interests of historical partners. Ultimately, the issue will not end in hostility, a break or any real sanctions or consequences. For what Washington gains politically and economically from its partnership with the Egyptian state and the military institution will not be wasted on a further gamble on the Brotherhood, which was proven in the end to be a failure.

Perhaps what has aided el-Sisi's bloody project the most has been that the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamist movement in general have included in their response an armed terrorist campaign, directed not only at the army and the police, but toward the persecution and massacres carried out at dozens of churches and Christian foundations. This is a vile example of sectarian incitement—as if those who overthrew the rule of Morsi and committed the massacres against the Brotherhood were Egypt's Copts, and not the generals of the army and the police!

The regime's goal of linking the Islamist movement and its resistance, both peaceful and armed, with foreign conspiracies is not only to turn the Islamists and any other opponents of counterrevolution into devils and traitors, but also to encourage a wave of lying propaganda about the patriotism and

nationalism of the military and its leaders—making a symbolic link between the army and Gamal Abdel Nasser and the era of national liberation.

Unfortunately, many liberals and former leftists are participating in this propaganda campaign. We have found, for example, the statement of the Egyptian Communist Party talking about “Islamist terror and its link with the American-Zionist alliance, which aims to shatter and destroy our nation and the entire region, to redraw the maps of the greater Middle East, making the United States the mistress of the world and the state of Israel the most powerful in the region. They aim to make Egypt a weak country, and the rest of the Arab nations only parties subservient to the American-Israeli-Turkish alliance.” The statement speaks about the necessity of “standing with the army and police in the war against religious terrorist fascism,” and so on. As if the battle was for national independence, and as if el-Sisi had only just nationalized the Suez Canal.

The Socialist Alliance Party has put forth the same talk about “the conspiracy,” ending one of its recent statements with the necessity of “working toward confronting and aborting the American-Zionist plot.”

All of this is in stark contradiction to what is actually happening on the ground. For the most important supporters of el-Sisi and his bloody campaign are the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Emirates on the one hand and Israel on the other hand—the fundamental pillars of counterrevolution in the Arab world over the past six decades and the largest supporters of the regime of Mubarak’s rule.

Saudi Arabia, El-Sisi and the Opposition

The economic clout and capability of the oil-rich countries of the Gulf has increased qualitatively over the past two decades. The fundamental power is concentrated in the Saudi-Emirati axis, which has become one of the principal pivots of the global capitalist system on the level of finance.

According to statistics published in the U.S. magazine *Fortune*, the value of oil exports from the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council had reached \$500 billion by 2008. As for the capital invested abroad by these same countries, it had reached \$530 billion in the period between 2002 and 2006, including \$300 billion in the United States and \$60 billion in the Arab and Middle Eastern region. Plus, the value of these foreign investments tripled between 2002 and 2009, reaching a total that could be more than \$1.4 trillion. The oil countries of the Gulf, led by the Saudi-Emirati axis, include the three largest owners of U.S. Treasury bonds after China and Japan.

This economic clout is reflected not only in the centrality of these countries to American foreign policy but also in their increasing influence in the Arab region generally and in Egypt specifically. The relationship of the Egyptian economy to the Gulf economy has changed from the mere export of Egyptian workers to the intervention of these countries as fundamental partners with the Egyptian ruling class and the institution of the military in every area of the Egyptian economy, from agriculture and industry to real estate and financial investments.

There is not space here to go into the details and amounts of these partnerships, but suffice it to say that it exceeds American and European investments in many areas, especially in the banks and the real estate and construction market. (For details, see Gilbert Achcar *The People Want* and Adam Hanieh *Gulf Capital*)

It is not surprising, then, that these countries should be at the forefront among the supporters of Mubarak’s state, with its generals and businessmen. Nor is it strange that they are among the most

important supporters of el-Sisi and his counterrevolution. It is not surprising that el-Sisi should bet on the capability and desire of the Saudi king and his partners to finance his plan to crush the Egyptian revolution and restore the old regime.

The king of Saudi Arabia, which is the center of regression and despotism in the region and oasis of Wahhabism and Islamist extremism, was the first well-wisher for the coup, and devoted a speech to praising el-Sisi, supporting him in his war against terror and promising him innumerable billions.

What is strange is not the position of the king, nor his praise for el-Sisi in his position. What was strange was the response of the political forces that were counted among the opposition, if not part of the revolution. The Tamarod movement commended funding from the Gulf and the speech which respected "the legitimacy of Egypt and the will of her people." Hamdeen Sabahi, the Nasserist politician and leader of the Popular Current, also commended the position of the Saudi monarch, who confirmed his support for the measures taken by the Egyptian state against demonstrators. Sabahi said in a tweet from his personal Twitter account, "I welcome the position of the Saudi monarch and the position of the Emirates in supporting Egypt."

The king who is the archenemy of the Egyptian revolution, servant of the Two Holy Mosques, along with Washington and Tel Aviv, has become a hero to these people!

Israel and el-Sisi

And for those who do not have experience with the current secret police media, this is the position of the leadership of the Zionist enemy. If el-Sisi was truly a national hero, he would return independence to Egypt, and we would expect a state of terror for the Zionists and clear support for the Muslim Brotherhood. But reality could not be farther from these fabricated illusions.

A former Israeli defense minister and close friend of Mubarak, Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, announced, "In my opinion, if General el-Sisi had not taken these sweeping steps, within a short time, the Egyptian government would have become a regime resembling Iran, and along our southern borders. We would have seen the Revolutionary Guards in an Egyptian form." He declared also that the peace treaty would be secure in el-Sisi's hands, and that there is ongoing cooperation between the Egyptian army and the Israeli army. (*Maariv*, 8/20/2013)

Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak announced that the entire world aids and supports el-Sisi (interview with CNN, 8/16/2013).

An Israeli official stated to the *New York Times* that the el-Sisi regime must be supported because it is now preferable to the alternatives. And Mordechai Kedar, researcher at the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, expressed the same position in a statement to the Israeli newspaper the *Jerusalem Post*.

On a practical level, the Zionist lobby, exemplified by the organization AIPAC, is conducting a heavy campaign in Washington to continue American aid to the Egyptian army and to support el-Sisi. (*New York Times*, 8/18/2013)

The enemy in the eyes of the Egyptian public, which the media of the counterrevolution claims is a supporter of the Islamists and terrorists in Egypt in their battle against the state and the army, is, in fact, a greater supporter of el-Sisi and the Egyptian state, of the institutions of the coup and counterrevolution, and of course, in the crushing of all who oppose them, first and foremost the Brotherhood. What misdirection—what capability for deceit and creation of an alternate "truth" that

bears no relation to reality.

The Qatari and Turkish Exception

Qatar constitutes the exception among the remaining oil countries of the Gulf, for while those countries revolve around the Saudi-Emirati axis and do not deviate from the political line put out by them, Qatar alone has attempted to create for itself a space of independence from the parent kingdom. So it is in perpetual tension, with efforts to compete with Saudi Arabia and its foreign policy, despite its tiny size and lack of population, and even the absence of any prospect of success in its ambitions.

What makes Qatar capable of these adventures to begin with is, of course, the enormous amount of revenues it gets from the export of oil and natural gas, which exceeded \$43 billion in 2010-11, along with the absolute control of its emir over this tremendous wealth.

The emir of Qatar dedicates a significant part of this continual flow of wealth to purchasing regional political weight outside of the direct control of Saudi Arabia. And the adventures don't end there: establishing relations with Iran and rapprochement with it; at the same time, opening the door to relations with Israel; plus hosting the largest command center of the American military forces in the region. There is also support for Hamas and orchestrating negotiations between Hamas and Fatah—plus support for the Saad Hariri Current in Lebanon, while funding the rebuilding of South after the war on Hezbollah in 2006.

But perhaps the two greatest weapons that Qatar has used to create an international voice have been their adoption of the Muslim Brotherhood, after tensions arose between the group and Saudi Arabia, with its perpetual hosting of Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the main theorist of the Brotherhood since the 1980s—and the Al Jazeera television channel, which Qatar permitted, especially since the outbreak of the Egyptian revolution, to become the media mouthpiece of the Muslim Brotherhood. This is, of course, within the framework of longstanding tensions between the Brotherhood and Saudi Arabia, dating back to the 1990s, due to the position of the Brotherhood at that time in opposing the U.S. war on Iraq.

This is the context in which we can understand the support of this small statelet and its adventurist emir for the Muslim Brotherhood, both before Morsi came to power and during his presidency, as well as its antagonistic position to the government of el-Sisi and the overthrow of the Brotherhood.

As for Turkey, its position is simpler and more rational than its Qatari counterpart. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan—with a popular base of an Islamic orientation, with the rapid growth of the Turkish economy, and with the closing of the door on membership in the European Union—is in desperate need to create a regional influence across the geographic scope of the old Ottoman Empire. The arrival of Islamists to power in Egypt and Tunisia enabled him to begin implementing this vision.

For this reason, it is completely clear why Erdogan would violently oppose el-Sisi's coup and the savage smashing of the Brotherhood—not because Erdogan is a humanitarian or a revolutionary, of course, but because that change represents a negative influence on the interests and influence of the Turkish government in the region.

The Brotherhood, of course, accepted aid from Washington itself. But reality shows us that el-Sisi and his coup were strongly supported by forces in Israel and Saudi Arabia, and, though less directly, their anxious masters in Washington.

The revolution will not succeed except within the framework of a true independence of the Egyptian people from American and Zionist imperialism and their regional partners, whether Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, Qatar or Turkey. Morsi was unable to achieve any real autonomy, so the same old constraints of dependency remain. And el-Sisi will assuredly not achieve any independence by falling into the arms of the kings and emirs of Gulf oil.

But unfortunately, facts and truth mean nothing before the storm of lies with which the counterrevolution justifies its crimes. The regime's targeting of traitors will not stop at the Islamists, but will extend, as we said in the beginning of this article, to every revolutionary, every opposition member and every one who demands their rights—to the cheers not only of the thugs of the regime, but of the liberals, leftists and intellectuals who have sold their souls and consciences as foot soldiers in the service of the general.

This does not mean defeat or hopelessness for the Egyptian revolution. For this is not the first time that the old regime has tried to deceive the public. The Egyptian people have proven time and again that they will quickly outstrip this false consciousness and expose their enemies through their revolutionary experience. We still have before us many battles, some of which we will lose and some of which we will win. We learn from our experiences and our sacrifices until we win our revolution.

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P.S.

* September 4, 2013: <http://socialistworker.org/2013/09/04/the-counterrevolution-cries-conspiracy>

* Translation by Jess Martin.