

Egyptian junta proclaims a military dictatorship

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With the issuance of a constitutional decree Sunday night, the Egyptian Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) finalized the coup it staged last Thursday and proclaimed a military dictatorship.

Only two days before the run-off of the Egyptian presidential election, the US-backed junta had dissolved the Islamist-dominated parliament and the constituent assembly, which had been tasked with the drafting of a new constitution.

With the constitutional decree, an amendment to the military-authored constitutional declaration issued March 30, 2011, SCAF is asserting full control over political life in Egypt.

Article 56 of the decree hands over all budgetary and legislative powers to the junta until a new parliament is elected. Article 60 B allows the generals to decide the composition of the constituent assembly and control the drafting of a new constitution.

Article 53 further expands the economic and political influence of the military. It codifies that SCAF stands above the law and enshrines the military's control over any future government, including the president.

It specifies that "the incumbent SCAF members are responsible for deciding on all issues related to the armed forces, including appointing its leaders and extending the terms in office of the aforesaid leaders. The current head of the SCAF is to act as commander-in-chief of the armed forces and minister of defense until a new constitution is drafted."

Article 53/1 states that "the president can declare war only after the approval of SCAF."

Under these conditions, the results of the run-off of the presidential election between Ahmed Shafiq, the last prime minister under ousted President Hosni Mubarak, and Mohamed Mursi, the Islamist candidate of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), have little significance. The future president will be nothing more than a figurehead of SCAF.

The decree was announced only 20 minutes after the polling stations closed on Sunday. The elections—held at gunpoint, with military helicopters circling over the polling stations—were marked by fraud and numerous violations. On Monday, both campaigns declared their candidate the winner with 52 percent of the vote.

Al-Ahram Online and most other Egyptian media outlets reported that Mursi was in the lead. Official results are to be announced on Thursday.

Workers and youth reacted with a mass abstention to the first presidential election since the revolutionary ouster of longtime dictator Mubarak. Both candidates are right-wing representatives of the Egyptian ruling elite, deeply hostile to the revolution and widely despised in the working class.

The orchestrated election, the military coup and the constitutional amendments have exposed the “democratic transition” promoted by the Egyptian ruling elite and its imperialist allies in the US and Europe as a cynical fraud. These developments have also exposed the political bankruptcy of all the official political forces in Egypt—Islamist, liberal, and petty-bourgeois “left”—who declared that democracy could be established under the junta’s heel.

It was never the junta’s aim to organize a “democratic transition,” but rather to protect the power and wealth of the Egyptian ruling elite, beginning with the social privileges of the generals. From the day of the revolutionary ouster of US-stooge Mubarak, it was the single-minded goal of SCAF to defend the Egyptian bourgeois state and imperialist domination of Egypt and the entire region against the threat posed by the mass strikes and protests of the working class.

With the coup and the constitutional amendments, the generals are seeking to intimidate and suppress any renewed struggle of the working class, the main force behind the Egyptian revolution.

Article 53b of the decree allows the army to intervene to crush any mass protests that challenge the authority of the generals: “If the country faces internal unrest which requires the intervention of the armed forces, the president can issue a decision to commission the armed forces—with the approval of SCAF—to maintain security and defend public properties.”

One day before the coup, SCAF issued a decree allowing military and police forces to arrest anyone who is “harmful to the government” or who “destroys property,” “resists orders” or “obstructs traffic.”

US imperialism, the main backer and sponsor of the military junta, is clearly behind the establishment of open military rule in Egypt. AFP reported that US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta called Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, the leader of SCAF, one day after the coup.

According to a Pentagon statement, Panetta called “to discuss current events in Egypt” and emphasized the need to “move forward expeditiously with Egypt’s political transition, including conducting new legislative elections as soon as possible.”

Tantawi in turn “reiterated” the commitment of the junta “to hold free and fair presidential elections as scheduled and to transfer power to a democratically elected government by July 1.” According to the statement, both “agreed on the importance of the US-Egyptian strategic relationship,” and Panetta stated that “he looks forward to working with Egypt’s newly elected government to advance our mutual interests.”

On Monday, Pentagon spokesmen George Little told reporters the US was “deeply concerned about new amendments to the constitutional declaration, including the timing of their announcement as polls were closing for the presidential election.”

Little’s comments are a cynical evasion. Panetta’s talk with Tantawi one day after the coup makes clear that the US is backing SCAF’s counterrevolutionary offensive as firmly as it

backed the Mubarak regime in the initial days of the revolution, when it cracked down on mass working class protests with deadly violence.

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