

Violent clashes spread in Egypt as US backs army coup

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Clashes spread throughout Egypt yesterday as security forces cracked down on protests by supporters of Muslim Brotherhood (MB) President Mohamed Mursi, who was ousted in a coup Wednesday. The coup—launched with US support to end mass protests against Mursi and pre-empt the development of a political movement in the working class—now threatens to plunge Egypt into civil war.

Initial reports indicated that dozens were killed and at least 400 injured in protests in Cairo, Alexandria, and the Sinai Peninsula yesterday.

The Egyptian generals are coordinating their crackdown closely with Washington. The chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, spoke with Egyptian chief of staff, Lieutenant General Sedki Sobhi, Thursday, also contacting Israeli army officials. These ties show that, while the initial target of repression is the MB, the ultimate target of the military regime is working class opposition to the free-market and pro-imperialist policies that Washington demands.

To block the growth of opposition to the coup from the working class, the army is relying on liberal and pseudo-left forces that back the Tamarod (“rebel”) coalition, such as the National Salvation Front (NSF) of Mohamed ElBaradei and the Revolutionary Socialists (RS). Tamarod officials supported the coup, appearing on Wednesday next to military strongman General Abdul Fatah Khalil al-Sisi as he announced the installation of the new military regime. Yesterday, the NSF called on Egyptians to “protect” the regime in street protests.

In Cairo, the army fired on a pro-Mursi protest at the Republican Guard barracks, where Mursi is being held, killing three and wounding at least 65. Deadly fighting continued yesterday evening on the October 6 Bridge near Tahrir Square, as security forces intervened in clashes between pro- and anti-Mursi protesters.

At least 12 were confirmed dead yesterday in Alexandria, after gun battles erupted between pro- and anti-Mursi demonstrators, with police joining the anti-Mursi side.

In the Sinai, where Islamist forces have substantial support, the army declared a state of emergency after a wave of attacks on army installations in Al-Arish, Sheikh Zuweid, and Rafah, and on the Al-Arish airport. Reports indicated that 20 Islamist fighters as well as several soldiers and policemen have died in clashes since Mursi’s ouster.

Sheikh Ibrahim El-Manei, the head of the Union of Sinai Tribes, said that the region resembles a “battlefield.” Alluding to the risk of civil war, he added that he was wary of “the

Algerian and Syrian scenarios.” He was referring to the bloody Algerian civil war of 1991-2002 and to the ongoing US-led proxy war in Syria, both of which featured armed Islamist insurgencies fighting the national army.

General Ala Ezzedine told Egypt’s state-run daily *Al Ahrām* that the army will soon start a “mass operation” to crush opposition in the Sinai.

The army is moving to destroy the MB’s positions in the state. Newly-installed President Adly Mansour dissolved the Shura Council, the Islamist-dominated upper house of parliament, by decree yesterday.

The army also reportedly has arrested up to 300 leading MB officials, including MB Supreme Leader Mohamed Badie and billionaire Deputy Leader Khairat al-Shater.

The coup is proceeding with Washington’s full support. The Obama administration has even cynically sought to avoid admitting that what is taking place in Egypt is a coup, as this would legally bar Washington from paying its yearly \$1.3 billion subsidy to the Egyptian army.

US congressmen have also indicated that they favor ignoring the law to continue backing the coup. “The law by its terms dictates one thing, and sensible policy dictates that we don’t do that,” Democratic Representative Howard Berman told the *New York Times*. “That’s why the executive branch gets to decide whether it’s a coup or not. Under the plain meaning rule, there was a coup.” However, Berman added that he opposed cutting off aid to the Egyptian army.

The Egyptian military junta that Washington is supporting is a deeply reactionary regime, dedicated above all to crushing opposition in the working class.

Perhaps the clearest indication of the reactionary policies US imperialism intends for the Egyptian army to carry out came in a column from the *Wall Street Journal*, calling for the new junta to model itself on Chilean dictator and mass murderer General Augusto Pinochet.

The *Journal* called for Washington to “help Egypt gain access to markets, international loans, and investment capital. The US now has a second chance to use its leverage to shape a better outcome. Egyptians would be lucky if their new ruling generals turn out to be in the mold of Chile’s Augusto Pinochet, who took power amid chaos but hired free-market reformers and midwived a transition to democracy.”

Pinochet came to power in a US-backed coup on September 11, 1973 that overthrew the Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende. His regime murdered, tortured, or exiled hundreds of thousands of Chileans.

Pinochet’s reactionary free-market policies, which devastated working class living standards in Chile, are considered a model for Egypt by US financiers as they push for deeply unpopular cuts to state subsidies to grain and fuel prices. These are critical to keeping bread and transportation affordable for working class families in Egypt.

Former World Bank chief economist for the Middle East Caroline Freund wrote: “The right approach to Egypt’s economic problems would be to force it to bite the bullet now by ending wasteful expenditures, especially fuel subsidies. These cost almost half of government revenue, at a time when Egypt’s budget deficit is more than 10 percent of gross domestic

product and growing.”

The Egyptian military regime is aggressively signaling to international finance capital that it will carry out the policies demanded of it. Farouq El-Oqda, a former head of Egypt’s central bank, is now being offered the prime ministership. Adel El-Labban, a former Morgan Stanley banker who is now a leading executive at Bahrain-based Ahli United Bank, is reportedly another candidate for the post. *Voice of America* noted that businessmen are enthusiastic about the army regime, as “a more technocratic administration” anxious to lure “back some of the investors and money which have fled the country.” It cited Karim Helal, the chairman of investment bank ADI Capital: “I believe that anybody who is asked to join the cabinet won’t hesitate.”

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