

Mubarak resigns, military claims power in Egypt

By Tom Eley
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At about 6 p.m. on Friday, Egyptian Vice President Omar Suleiman went on national television and issued a brief statement saying that President Hosni Mubarak, who for 30 years ruled Egypt as a dictator, had resigned and left a group of top generals, the Armed Forces Supreme Council, in charge of the nation.

Egypt erupted in jubilation on word of Mubarak's resignation. A crowd numbering in the millions and spreading out for kilometers in all directions from Cairo's Tahrir Square broke out into singing, dancing, and tears of joy. Similar scenes took place across Egypt, including at a demonstration of hundreds of thousands in Alexandria.

Mubarak's departure came after 18 days of demonstrations and strikes that had waxed and waned, but that had generally grown in size and scope in spite of the brutal oppression of the regime. At this stage in the revolution, at least 300 have been killed—the real number is doubtless far higher—and thousands have been arrested and “disappeared”.

The decisive moment came Wednesday and Thursday, when the Egyptian working class moved to the forefront, partially or completely shutting down every sector of the economy.

The strike wave propelled the Egyptian military to finally move against Mubarak. Up until then, the Obama administration backed Mubarak, fearful that his removal would only spread the revolutionary contagion beyond Egypt and set the stage for a showdown between the Egyptian workers and the military, which will be neither willing nor able to address the social and democratic grievances of the masses.

There had been many indications that in his televised Thursday evening speech Mubarak would announce his resignation. Earlier in the day the nation's supreme military council convened before television cameras, in

the conspicuous absence of Mubarak and Suleiman, and issued a document titled “Communiqué #1” that suggested a coup d'état had taken place. The same day a general appeared in Tahrir Square and told demonstrators their demands would be met.

Meanwhile, in the US, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director Leon Panetta told Congress he expected Mubarak would step down later in the day.

When Mubarak appeared on television Thursday night and provocatively insisted he would serve out his term, while delegating additional authority to Suleiman, formerly the nation's top intelligence official and a close collaborator with the US and Israel, the stage was set for a social explosion.

Up until he made his announcement, it was unclear whether or not Mubarak would resign. In the morning, the military council issued another statement, “Communiqué #2,” supporting the dictator's speech of the night earlier. The document indicated the military would maintain its allegiance to Mubarak indefinitely. The Obama administration once again refused to publicly call for Mubarak's resignation.

But Mubarak's speech only deepened the resolve of the population. Friday's demonstration centered in Tahrir Square was the largest to date. Demonstrations erupted elsewhere in Cairo, Egypt's capital and largest city, including around Mubarak's palace and the headquarters of the hated state television network. In the afternoon it was reported that Mubarak and his family had left the city for his Red Sea palace at Sharm el-Sheikh.

Heavily armed contingents of the Egyptian military were stationed throughout the city, raising the specter of a bloody confrontation, but as the day wore on fraternization between demonstrators and rank-and-file soldiers increased.

Alexandria, Egypt's second largest city, also saw its largest protest on Friday, a demonstration that numbered in the hundreds of thousands and snaked along the Mediterranean coastline for kilometers. Mubarak's Alexandria palace also became a focal point of the demonstration.

In the industrial city of Suez, a crowd estimated in the tens of thousands massed around ten government buildings. In the Sinai, the town of El-Arish was the scene of armed clashes between demonstrators and police. Police fired guns, and demonstrators responded by throwing firebombs and setting police cars alight. The governor of a southern Egyptian province was forced to flee the region in the face of violent protests in the morning.

It is believed that Mubarak's cabinet has been or soon will be disbanded, as have both the upper and lower house of parliament. It appears that Suleiman, the favored heir of both the US and Israel, will not assume the presidency. The ruling National Democratic Party also showed signs of dissolution, with its chairman announcing his resignation minutes before Mubarak's resignation was announced.

Little is known at this point what steps the military regime will take. A "Communiqué #3" issued by the military command after Mubarak's resignation said only that it was "studying" how it could meet the demands of the population. It did not lift the state of emergency that has governed the country uninterrupted for decades, saying that it would only be lifted after the current protests had ended.

The main opposition figures and parties, including both Mohammed El Baradei and the Muslim Brotherhood—which have worked systematically to contain protests—have insisted that the military be brought into any government. As late as Thursday night, a desperate El Baradei pleaded for the military to intervene to prevent the deepening of the revolution. "The army must save the country now," he said after Mubarak's speech on Thursday night. "I call on the Egyptian army to immediately interfere to rescue Egypt. The credibility of the army is on the line."

After Mubarak departed, El Baradei declared victory. "The country has been liberated after decades of repression," he said.

There is in fact not the slightest possibility that a military-backed government will meet the demands of

the Egyptian masses—for jobs, good wages, and housing. The Egyptian military government is itself profoundly committed to the existing order. Its leading figures are deeply integrated into the business enterprises, and it has been for more than three decades the basic guarantor of the Mubarak regime.

The military's assumption of power, with the backing of the Obama administration and bourgeois political forces like El Baradei and the Muslim Brotherhood, can only set the stage for a new phase in the revolution.

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