

US backs Egyptian president as he claims dictatorial powers

By Johannes Stern
21 August 2012

Media reports have made clear that last week's move by Egyptian President Mohamed Mursi to take over the dictatorial powers of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) junta was closely monitored and approved by Washington.

On August 12 Mursi sent into retirement the two leading generals of the hitherto ruling SCAF junta, Defence Minister Mohamed Hussein Tantawi and Chief of Staff Sami Annan. Mursi also issued a new Constitutional Declaration, abrogating the junta's June 17 "addendum" and transferring all legislative and executive powers held by SCAF to Mursi. It also puts the drafting of a new constitution under the control of the Islamist president.

Mursi's operation was reportedly organized in cooperation with sections of the army dissatisfied with Tantawi and Anan. Military sources state that resentment against the two grew after the Sinai border incident last week, when 16 Egyptian soldiers were killed by allegedly Islamist militants.

Retired general Qadri Saeed stated that "Mursi must have seen this as a good chance to sideline the top-ranking military leadership. The lower ranks were not happy with their superiors' recent performance and their excessive involvement in politics at the expense of the army. And they were especially demoralized following last week's Sinai border attack."

Statements by the White House and the Pentagon suggest that the US was closely involved in Mursi's decisions.

One day after Mursi's coup White House spokesmen Jay Carney told reporters: "We had expected President Mursi to cooperate with the military to name a new defence team. And we will continue to work with Egypt's civilian and military leaders to advance our many shared interests. In particular, we are ready to

help President Mursi and the military as they continue to work to prevent extremists from operating in the Sinai."

The two generals replacing Tantawi and Annan are close allies of the US. The new General of Staff, Sedky Sobhi, studied at the United States Army War College in Pennsylvania. The new defence minister and strongman of the Egyptian military is General Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi, the former head of the military intelligence, who has close ties to both Mursi and the US.

Media reports indicate that that El-Sisi collaborated with Mursi. They reportedly established ties one year ago, and their contacts drew closer after Mursi became head of the Freedom and Justice Party, the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood. Mursi even met El-Sisi in his office.

According to *Al Ahram Weekly*, "El-Sisi communicated directly with the president, giving him information concerning what was being planned among the military chiefs who Mursi knew were loyal to former president Hosni Mubarak and then, after Mubarak, to themselves. This information, especially coming from El-Sisi in whom Mursi has full confidence, was crucial to galvanizing the president into taking the recent decisions."

El-Sisi has close ties to the US and its international and regional allies. El-Sisi received his military training in Britain and the US and received two masters' degrees from a British military college and an American academy. Before heading military intelligence, he was the Egyptian military attaché in Saudi Arabia.

The Pentagon was delighted with El-Sisi's nomination. US Secretary of Defence Leon Panetta said, "General al-Sissi expressed his unwavering

commitment to the US-Egypt military-to-military relationship, which has been really an anchor of stability in the Middle East for more than 30 years.”

Panetta said that, in a phone call, he had told El-Sisi “that I look forward to working with him, to continue the relationship that we have had with Egypt over those years and to advance our shared goals in the region.”

The apparent transfer of power from SCAF to Mursi comes as US imperialism relies ever more directly on Islamist forces to pursue its political and economic interests in the Middle East. It reacted to the mass working class struggles in Tunisia and Egypt with a turn to Sunni Islamist forces, either in the form of Islamist free-market parties in Tunisia and Egypt, or extremist terrorist groups in Libya and Syria to bring down regimes Washington sought to overthrow.

After gaining dictatorial powers, Mursi declared, “it is time for the Syrian regime to leave.” In Syria the US are launching a terrorist proxy war to bring down the Syrian regime of President Bashar Al Assad, an Alawite Shiite and close ally of Shiite Iran.

The former Egyptian military leadership, with its secular past and its close ties to Mubarak, did not enjoy such close relations to the Brotherhood as more junior officers, and it had also become politically inconvenient. Tantawi is hated amongst the Egyptian masses as a *feloul* (remnant) of the Mubarak regime and for his violent suppression of protests after Mubarak’s ouster. Protesters repeatedly called for his execution during mass protests against military rule.

However, the US officials and its new allies in the Egyptian ruling elite did not forget the counter-revolutionary services rendered by Tantawi and Anan.

Carney praised Tantawi “for his service, especially during the extremely difficult transition from President Mubarak’s leadership through the elections.” Mursi gave Tantawi and Anan the highest state honours in a celebration at the presidential palace on Tuesday and appointed them as his advisors.

Tantawi and Anan accepted their removal and at least for now it appears that the Muslim Brotherhood and the Egyptian military worked out a compromise.

Significantly, the petty-bourgeois Revolutionary Socialists (RS) declared their support for President Mohammed Mursi’s assumption of the junta’s dictatorial powers. In an August 14 statement, they

declared: “Today Mohammed Mursi issued a number of decisions, including the cancellation of the Supplementary Constitutional Declaration and the removal of some members of the military council headed by Tantawi and Anan. We see these decisions as gains for the revolution.”

This argument is reactionary and absurd. Mursi has seized all the powers claimed by the junta and concentrated them in the office of the presidency, which has—at least on paper—more power than it ever did under the Mubarak dictatorship. This does not strengthen the revolution, but constitutes an attempt by the ruling classes, working with US imperialism, to strengthen the power of the Egyptian state.

Mursi is using his dictatorial powers to pursue the same repressive policies as his predecessor, Mubarak. Salah Abdul Maqsd, the Brotherhood’s new minister of information reportedly plans to remove 50 leading editors and journalists. The editor of the independent newspaper *Al Dustur* now faces charges for insulting the president.

On the Sinai Peninsula, the army is launching a brutal crackdown against alleged “terrorists,” working closely with the US and Israel. It is moving against the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, closing the border crossing at Rafah and sealing tunnels connecting the Gaza Strip to Egypt.

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