

Egypt's US-backed president Mursi deploys army, prepares massive repression

By Johannes Stern
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Egypt's US-backed president Mohamed Mursi and the ruling Muslim Brotherhood (MB) are preparing mass repression against protests and strikes, which have been intensifying throughout Egypt in the past two weeks.

Anticipating mass protests today, the Mursi regime deployed the army around the Ittihadeya Presidential Palace in Cairo's Heliopolis neighborhood, declaring a curfew and protest ban in the area. On Thursday afternoon the Presidential Guard moved into Heliopolis with several tanks and smaller armored vehicles and took positions in front of the palace. Soldiers set up barbed wire around the building and built barricades in the surrounding streets. Hundreds of riot police were also deployed in the area.

The deployment of the army comes one day after the MB mobilized its membership for a bloody crackdown on a peaceful sit-in in front of the presidential palace, brutally attacking workers and youth protesting against Mursi. Islamist militias worked closely with the Central Security Forces (CSF) in clashes throughout Wednesday night, killing at least five protesters and injuring hundreds more.

Defying the curfew and the violence unleashed by Mursi's Islamist followers, thousands of workers and youth continued mass protests last night against Mursi and the MB. In the evening hours three peaceful marches started off from Abbaseya Cathedral and Al-Nour Mosque in Abbaseya and Raba Al-Adawia Mosque in Nasr City.

"Down, down Mohamed Mursi", "Down with the rule of the Supreme Guide", "The people want the downfall of the regime" and other chants against Mursi and the MB rang through the air as protesters marched on the Ittihadeya Palace.

According to an *Ahram Online* reporter, there was an

air of "sadness and anger." Some youth carried symbolic coffins commemorating the martyrs of Mursi's ongoing crackdown. Chants were "Justice, justice, they killed our brothers with bullets" and "No dialogue with the one killing revolutionaries."

As protesters faced the army, CSF units and tanks in a standoff before the palace, anger exploded after Mursi addressed the nation in a speech on state TV. Recalling the reactions after speeches of former dictator Hosni Mubarak before he was ousted in mass revolutionary struggles last February, thousands of protesters waved their shoes. They shouted, "Killer, killer" and "We won't go, he will go", another famous slogan of the initial days of the revolution.

In his speech Mursi cynically portrayed protesters as "armed assailants" funded by remnants of the "former regime." He described the protests as a "foreign conspiracy and threatened that the "assailants...will not escape punishment."

He also declared that he "will never allow murder, sabotage or coups against legitimacy."

While threatening workers and youth demonstrating against him, Mursi appealed to the official liberal and pseudo-left groups taking part in the protests. He promised to "differentiate between all stripes of political opposition and those who spend their corrupt money to destroy the nation," proposing a meeting on Saturday with the political opposition and legal figures to discuss a "road map" out of the crisis.

Mursi made clear, however, that he does not intend to make any concessions and will stick to the "road map" he has already laid out. He vowed to keep his November 22 presidential decree in place, by which he claimed all executive, legislative, constitutional and legislative powers. He also declared that the referendum on the new authoritarian constitution

drafted under the MB's control will be held on December 15, as scheduled.

Mursi's attempt to strike a conciliatory pose was empty and cynical. In fact, his lone talking point for discussion made clear that he is still seeking to reestablish dictatorial rule in Egypt, calculating that he can get the support of all the Egyptian bourgeois parties for such an outcome.

Mursi declared that he does "not insist on keeping Article 6 of the declaration if dialogue with political partners leads to that," adding that "what is included in the article is already mandated, as some have pointed out."

Mursi offered to delete Article 6 of his decree, which declares that "the president is authorized to take any measures he sees fit in order to preserve and safeguard the revolution, national unity or national security." Dropping Article 6 would not in fact eliminate the dictatorial powers Mursi grants himself in the first five articles, however—which include full control of the legislature, judiciary, and the drafting of the Egyptian constitution.

This makes clear that, having received the backing of the United States and the European powers after he showed his reliability—isolating the Gaza Strip during the Israeli assault on Gaza—Mursi is seeking to reestablish dictatorial rule in Egypt.

The anti-worker and pro-imperialist policies Mursi and the MB aspire to carry out necessitate a brutal dictatorship. They support Washington's war drive against Syria and Iran and work closely with international finance capital to prepare massive attacks on wages and working-class living standards. Mursi secured a \$4.8 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), based on plans to cut Egypt's budget deficit, slash vital subsidies, and further liberalize its economy.

All these policies are deeply unpopular amongst the impoverished Egyptian masses.

In their plans to establish a military-backed Islamist dictatorship in Egypt, Mursi and the MB rely on the fact that the official liberal and pseudo-left opposition groups agree with the basic policies. These groups are also deeply hostile to the independent mobilization of the working class to bring down Mursi, and are more than willing to impose deep social cuts to stabilize Egyptian capitalism.

Despite the deepening conflicts with the Islamists over the distribution of power and wealth inside the Egyptian state machine, the National Salvation Front (NSF) is mainly concerned about the threat from below. The NSF consists of liberal leader Mohamed ElBaradei, the Nasserite Hamdeen Sabahi, former Mubarak regime official Amr Moussa and Sayed Al-Badawi, the head of the liberal Wafd party, and various pseudo-left groups, such as the Socialist Alliance Party.

They are signaling that they are willing to find a compromise, which would ultimately be dictated by Mursi and the MB.

Before Mursi's speech, ElBaradei urged the president "to see what is happening in the Egyptian street, the division, the polarization. This is something that leads us to violence and worse." Inviting Mursi to negotiate, he declared: "The ball is in your court... Bullying will not yield any results for this country."

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