

Hundreds wounded in crackdown against antigovernment protests in Egypt

Our reporter
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Thousands of protesters opposed to the US-backed military regime of General Mohammed Hussein Tantawi in Egypt clashed with pro-government thugs during demonstrations on Saturday, leaving more than 300 injured.

The demonstrations were called to mark the anniversary of the 1952 revolution that ousted King Farouk. As the protesters attempted to march toward the headquarters of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, they were attacked by thugs wielding knives, rocks and Molotov cocktails. Military and police fired in the air and used tear gas as protesters sought to continue the march.

The violence bears all the hallmarks of a deliberate provocation of the sort often used by Mubarak, including during the mass demonstrations that led up to his resignation. It was some of the worst violence in the country since the ouster of the former dictator in February.

According to a report in *Al-Ahram Online*, protesters were blocked by army and military police barricades outside of the Al-Nour Mosque in the Abbassiya district of Cairo. There they were trapped and set upon by pro-government groups as the military stood by. The protesters had been chanting for the end of military rule and the ouster of Tantawi.

“Whether there was a trigger, I do not know, but there was a sense of mock disbelief as the first rocks came down on us,” the *Al-Ahram* correspondent reported. “As we ran back, more rocks came from behind the mosque’s gates to the right... The army had picked the perfect spot to make us stop. They could have let us walk some more” but “they had us in the tight space of someone else’s backyard.”

Several protesters are still hospitalized, including at least one in critical conditions. There were earlier

reports that one protester may have died from his wounds.

Opposition groups have called for mass demonstrations on Friday to protest the violence. Several organizations have called for the SCAF to carry out an investigation into the violence. Such an investigation, however, would be nothing more than a whitewash.

The military has over the past several months taken an increasingly aggressive attitude toward protesters, deliberately whipping up right-wing forces and deploying military personnel throughout the city.

There is growing discontent over the fact that the military has continued all the essential policies of the Mubarak regime and has delayed moves to prosecute those responsible for the bloody crackdown in February, which killed hundreds of protesters.

Hundreds of protesters have occupied Cairo’s central Tahrir Square for weeks to demand the prosecution of Mubarak-era police and officials.

The escalation of violence is aimed not only at protesters but also at workers involved in strikes. None of the social and economic demands of workers have been met, and mass unemployment remains at record highs. The government has instituted a new law banning actions by workers.

Last week, the government also announced that it was postponing elections previously scheduled for September.

Elsewhere in Egypt, protesters in Alexandria reported being beaten by military forces Friday. The military prosecution has announced that it is investigating 12 demonstrators who were arrested during the incident.

There are also indications of a growing crackdown on any media outlets that dispute the official government line. On Sunday, a private satellite channel fired a talk

show host after she reported on a newspaper article critical of the government and questioned statements made by the military aimed at discrediting the protesters.

SCAF member Major General Hassan al-Ruwainy had called a show hosted by Dina Abdel Rahman to allege that members of the youth organizations were on the payroll of foreign powers. “Asserting freedom of the press, Abdel Rahman asked the military council to provide evidence for the allegations,” *al-Masry al-Youm* reported. On the same show, she interviewed a reporter who accused the military of instigating the violence on Saturday.

The owner of the channel fired Abdel Rahman after the episode aired.



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