

Egyptian junta defends massacre, launches fresh attacks on strikers

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At a press conference Wednesday, generals of Egypt's Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) junta defended their latest crackdown on peaceful protesters. Last Sunday the military brutally attacked 10,000 mostly Coptic demonstrators in front of the state television building in Maspiro, in downtown Cairo. At least 26 peaceful protesters were killed and over 300 wounded.

The protesters were demanding the overthrow of Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, the leader of the SCAF, and religious equality for the Coptic Christian minority in Egypt.

The generals claimed in the press conference that protesters were responsible for the violence and maintained that "some individuals in the protest attacked army soldiers and tanks with sticks, Molotov cocktails and swords without any provocation." They went on to claim that "the armed forces never opened fire on the people. There has not been a case of rolling over people with vehicles."

In fact, dozens of eyewitness reports and video footage on YouTube prove that the junta unleashed a massacre, using live ammunition and armoured vehicles to kill and crush protesters.

One demonstrator injured during the crackdown told *Al Ahram Online*: "We had a peaceful march, as soon as we blocked the road the army attacked us with batons. After a while the army carriers were running us over. I was one of those people running away from the army and they kept attacking us. One carrier crushed a man's head and his blood sprayed over his T-shirt. Afterwards the police and the army closed ranks and used teargas and bullets against us. I started running and as I ran away, someone from the army threw a rock which hit me on the head. None of us had weapons, it was a peaceful march."

Another protester spoke to *Al Jazeera*: "Security forces attacked us as if we were stray dogs. We were like cats fleeing, we were crushed. We were jumping into the Nile, this is real, a massacre. Why? Because we were demanding our rights."

Human rights lawyer Khaled Ali said there is also proof

that the army is "entirely responsible" for the massacre. "Forensic reports show that seven people were killed by live ammunition, while ten others were killed by being crushed under army vehicles", he told Egypt's independent daily *Al Masry Al Youm*.

The SCAF generals Mahmoud Hegazy and Adel Emara also used the press conference to incite sectarian strife between Muslims and Copts. They claimed that "radical Christian priests" had incited the Coptic community and planned violent protests against the state.

Already during the clashes, Egyptian state television started a smear campaign against the Christian minority, claiming that Copts had started the attack and tried to attack and kill soldiers. The broadcasts encouraged Muslims to take to the streets to protect the Egyptian army.

Before the press conference started, General Ismail Etman praised the state television for its coverage of the events on Sunday, stating: "I salute state television for showing the truth on-air, as I do all channels that transmitted live coverage. The media should tell the entire truth, be unbiased and keep the public interest in mind." Then he claimed that SCAF "does not censor opinions, even if they are oppositional."

Etman's statement could hardly be more false and cynical. During the attack the Egyptian army also raided the offices of two news channels, *Al-Hurra TV* and *Channel 25* in Cairo, which broadcast live coverage of the crackdown. The military forced the channels to stop their broadcasts, checked journalists' ID cards to identify Christians, and beat some of them up.

The junta's recent actions—violence, attempts to incite sectarian strife and the outright lying—recall for many Egyptians the worst days of Hosni Mubarak's dictatorship. A female protester told *Al Ahram Online* that the "army is treating us the same way Mubarak treated protesters during the revolution." Even bourgeois media outlets declared that the military had lost all credibility amongst Egyptians, with Tantawi "vilified as a new autocrat, wielding military might against the people just like Mubarak himself."

The funerals of the Coptic martyrs on Monday turned into mass protests against the SCAF and Tantawi (See YouTube video), with people shouting: “Revolution in all the streets of Egypt” and “Down with the Field Marshal.” Many Muslims also attended the funerals in solidarity with the Copts.

Confronted with ongoing popular resistance, the military junta is preparing even greater repression to crush the Egyptian revolution. On Tuesday, *Al Masry Al Youm* revealed that the Egyptian military has “a training program called ‘Victory-5’ to prepare low-ranked officers for Egypt’s new security challenges.”

That same day, a unit of Egyptian military police working with thugs attacked hundreds of textile workers from Mega Textiles Company in Shebin al-Kom. The workers were protesting outside state buildings in Menoufiya for better wages and working conditions. According to media reports, they were attacked with batons, electrical prods and whips. At least 30 were injured and 12 arrested; one female worker died after being hit by a car.

On Thursday, military police attacked over 1,000 workers from Telecom Egypt, who had besieged the office of the company’s executive director, Mohamed Abdel-Rahim. At dawn the military broke the workers’ siege and arrested 12 of them. The workers accuse Rahim of being affiliated to the former ruling party and of squandering funds and refusing to raise salaries.

These attacks show that the violence unleashed by the junta is directed against the working class as a whole, as the SCAF’s answer to the wave of mass strikes sweeping Egypt in recent weeks. Since the end of Ramadan, hundreds of thousands of workers have gone on strike to demand higher wages, better working conditions and social equality. Workers also demand the fall of the SCAF junta.

The Egyptian bourgeoisie is increasingly concerned and divided over how to bring the situation under control. On October 2, 13 political parties—including the Freedom and Justice Party (the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood), the Salafist Nour Party, the liberal Al-Wafd and the Nasserite Karama Party—signed a deal with the SCAF stating that parliamentary elections will be held at the end of November this year, while the military will retain power at least until the end of 2012. According to *Al Ahram Online*, the signatories of the document “also declared their full support for the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces and their appreciation of its role in protecting the revolution and its process of transferring power to the people.”

This open, uncritical acceptance of the SCAF dictatorship has been criticised by youth groups like the April 6 Youth Movement and pseudo-left political groups, such as the Workers Democratic Party (WDP), the Revolutionary

Socialists (RS) and the Socialist Popular Alliance Party (SPAP). These groups fear that workers’ and youths’ hatred of the SCAF could lead to another revolution, threatening the bourgeois state and capitalist rule in Egypt.

In response to the massacre on Sunday, these organisations held a press conference Thursday and issued a press release stating that the “SCAF has failed to administer the transitional period and has made the situation from bad to worse.” The junta should therefore “relinquish executive power to a civilian government.”

The statement can only be described as an affront to the martyrs and the revolutionary proletariat. Its signatories have consistently claimed that the SCAF could be pressured into organising a “democratic transition” in Egypt. Everybody knows now that this is a lie. Mubarak’s generals have not the slightest intention of leaving power to a democratic state, but from the start have led the counterrevolution, continuing all Mubarak’s anti-social and anti-democratic policies.

Why should the generals—who are now guilty of killing peaceful protesters—step down and hand over power to civilian authorities? To propagate such hopes is not only wishful thinking, but a conscious attempt to disarm the working class and tie it to the junta.

A conscious revolutionary struggle against the US-backed military junta based on an international socialist program is the only means to fight the counterrevolution and take the revolution forward. (See “Political tasks of the Egyptian Revolution”)

A comment in *Al Masry Al Youm* shortly before the massacre described the situation as follows: “On the streets, the revolution is intensifying, with strikes and sit-ins spreading to factories and schools. Egypt’s social contradictions are boiling over, and institutional corruption, poor living standards and the collapse of social services are all being exposed and challenged.” The author warned that if the state does not address “the demands of tens of thousands of protesters and strikers who continue to fight for a decent living and a better future ... Egyptians may find themselves facing one of two scenarios: a restoration of the police state or a revolutionary escalation.”



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