

Thousands of women march in Cairo against military junta

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Thousands of women marched in downtown Cairo Tuesday to protest against the deadly crackdown on demonstrators being carried out by the army and demand the resignation of the military junta that has ruled Egypt since the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak last February.

As many as 10,000 demonstrators, mostly women, guarded by a cordon of male protesters, marched from Tahrir Square to the Press Syndicate, chanting, “Egyptian women are a red line” and “Down with military rule.” Many carried pictures of soldiers attacking women, particularly one of a veiled woman being dragged by soldiers who had half-pulled off her clothes and were about to stomp on her.

That image, along with others showing soldiers beating demonstrators and firing live ammunition at them, had been widely disseminated via the Internet and some Egyptian newspapers over the weekend, sparking popular outrage. At least 14 people have been killed by the military and the police and more than 850 injured in a series of attacks carried out since Friday against anti-regime protesters.

Four of the deaths occurred Tuesday when, for the second day in a row, troops and police carried out a pre-dawn attack on protesters occupying Tahrir Square. All of the deceased had been shot. A 15-year-old remained in critical condition as a result of a gunshot wound in his chest.

The claims of the ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) that its troops were not using live ammunition and the violence was being provoked by demonstrators were shattered Tuesday by a report issued by Egypt’s chief forensic doctor. According to the official MENA news agency, Dr. Ehsan Kamil Georgi, having conducted autopsies on 10 of 13 people killed since Friday, concluded that 9 “were wounded by

gunshots.”

Another “breathed his last breath in detention in the south Cairo court, before he was presented to the prosecution,” the report said. “The cause of death,” it continued, “was traumatic injury to the head that caused internal bleeding.”

The murderous violence of the junta, using arms and ammunition supplied by its backers in Washington as part of \$1.3 billion in annual military aid, is its response to the new wave of mass protest that erupted on the eve of the currently unfolding parliamentary elections. Its ultimate target is a series of strikes involving up to 750,000 workers that began after the end of Ramadan.

The military crackdown has underscored the fraudulent character of the elections and the supposed transition to democracy being carried out under the control of SCAF. It is undermining remaining illusions among broad sections of the population in the military, which was presented by liberal as well as pseudo-left opponents of Mubarak as the protector of the revolution.

The ongoing military violence has evoked official criticism from United Nations officials and the Obama administration over the past several days. Ban Ki-moon, the UN secretary-general, condemned what he called “excessive force” by the army. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on Sunday issued a pro-forma statement saying she was “deeply concerned” by the violence and urging the security forces to “respect and protect the universal rights of all Egyptians.”

By Monday, however, responding to signs of mounting outrage in Egypt following the circulation of video clips on the Internet, Clinton felt obliged to issue a more pointed statement, calling the military’s treatment of women protesters “shocking” and a

“disgrace.” All such rebukes are utterly hypocritical, as Washington fully supports the Egyptian military, which it considers to be the backbone of the capitalist state and chief protector of US imperialist interests in the region.

The double-standard between Washington’s support for the Egyptian junta and its war for regime-change in Libya and efforts to topple Assad in Syria, supposedly on humanitarian and democratic grounds, grows ever more obvious. Since taking over from Mubarak, SCAF has killed over 80 protesters and wounded several thousand, while arresting and putting on trial 12,000 civilians, many of whom were tortured. On the same day that Clinton issued her wrist-slap to the Egyptian junta, the US State Department reiterated its demand that the regime in Damascus step down.

The Obama administration has ignored a call by Amnesty International for foreign governments to halt supplies to Egypt of small arms and ammunition that are being used to gun down civilians.

Bolstered by Washington’s support, the Egyptian junta appears to believe it can murder and maim with impunity. On Monday, Gen. Adel Emara, a member of SCAF, held a televised press conference in which he placed the entire blame for violence on the protesters, denouncing them for “seeking to destroy the country.” He also attacked the media, at one point demanding, “Why don’t you talk about the excessive use of violence by the other side?”

The general attitude of the military chiefs—and their ultimate intention—was summed up in a public remark by Abdul Moneim Kato, a retired general who continues to serve as a military adviser. He declared that the protesters deserve to be thrown into “Hitler’s ovens.”

Alarmed by the women’s march and fearful that its provocative statements were inciting a mass revolt—and very likely after consultation with Washington—the military council late Tuesday issued an apology for “violations,” expressed “deep regret to the great women of Egypt,” and promised to take measures against those responsible for attacking women.

The signs of mounting crisis for the junta prompted representatives of the liberal opposition to join with the Muslim Brotherhood in demanding that the military speed up its timetable for transferring power to a civilian government. Liberal figure Amr Hamzawy and

other newly elected members of Parliament were joined Monday by Mohamed Beltagy of the Muslim Brotherhood and other political leaders at a demonstration on the steps of the high court. They called for SCAF to turn over power to the lower house of Parliament soon after the completion of elections to the body, which will be dominated by the right-wing bourgeois Brotherhood and other Islamist forces. The group proposed a deadline of January 25.

These forces, which have sought to legitimize the military junta and endow it with democratic credentials, are now seeking to prepare an alternative, should that become necessary, to defend the capitalist state and crush the resistance of the working class. They have the backing of the various middle-class pseudo-left organizations. Last Sunday, Revolutionary Socialists leader Kamal Khalil signed a statement along with over 170 politicians and intellectuals calling for such a “national salvation” government.



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