

Egyptian military threatens crackdown over disputed presidential elections

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Egyptian military sources signaled plans for a crackdown against popular opposition to army rule yesterday evening, amid an escalating dispute over the outcome of this weekend's presidential elections.

The Supreme Presidential Electoral Commission (SPEC) announced they would delay the announcement of the election result, previously planned for today, until the weekend.

This came after a group of judges monitoring the elections, the Judges of Egypt, issued a statement unofficially declaring Muslim Brotherhood (MB) candidate Mohamed Mursi the winner. At a press conference held at the Egyptian Journalists Syndicate, the judges announced that Mursi won the elections with 13,238,335 votes, against 12,351,310 for Ahmed Shafiq—the last prime minister under ousted dictator Hosni Mubarak, who was the army's preferred candidate.

Yesterday night an anonymous military source told the state-owned daily *Al Ahram* that the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) junta was determined to block Mursi from taking office: "The military council is determined not to allow the Muslim Brotherhood to seize power. It will not relinquish the reins of power until a new constitution is issued and the arena is set for a balanced political process."

Given that the SCAF junta controls the drafting of a new constitution, whose release has been postponed to the indefinite future in the aftermath of last week's coup, this statement implies that the junta will not allow Mursi to be declared the winner this weekend. The junta intends to retain full control of the executive.

The military source suggested that any attempt to declare Mursi the winner threatened the stability of the state. Declaring that any further talks would be "of a confrontational, rather than friendly nature," he added: "To avoid any sudden shifts that could lead to confrontation and drive the situation to the brink, the

military council remains the only force capable of regulating the political process so as to preserve the stability of the state."

The official stated the MB was relying on support from the Egyptian bourgeoisie's main imperialist patrons, who preferred an MB victory: "The United States and the European Union have both been sending messages reflecting their preference for Mohamed Mursi as Egypt's president. In the belief that they enjoy this support, the group has adopted a policy of pressuring Egypt's interim rulers regarding upcoming political arrangements. Moreover, the Muslim Brotherhood's guidance bureau has been exchanging messages with the US—to which Israel is privy—containing reassurances about the group's stance on Hamas, Gaza, and the Camp David accords."

The army remains the basic power behind the Egyptian state and the only entity potentially capable of forcibly suppressing working class opposition to the Egyptian regime, however. As such, the official implied, the army expected the imperialist powers to support it in order to avert a possible breakdown of state authority: "It remains unclear, however, whether the US would prefer to see Mursi or Shafiq in Egypt's highest office."

While the army's comments are directed immediately at the MB campaign, the principal target of state repression would be mass working class protests, like those that led to the ouster of Mubarak in the initial weeks of the Egyptian revolution in February 2011.

In a separate declaration, army officials told *Al Ahram* that they were working on a "Plan B" to deploy army forces throughout the country: "We're bracing for a major wave of rioting and unrest for at least two days, which could be incited by the Muslim Brotherhood after Shafiq is announced president. ... We anticipate all kinds of problems and are taking steps to contain them."

These officials said they were preparing a state of emergency to cover the Egyptian capital, Cairo, and other

major urban centers—including Alexandria, Suez, and Ismailiya.

The escalating conflicts over the presidential elections reflect a bitter power struggle inside the Egyptian bourgeoisie, between the military and the MB. Initially, the ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) and the MB cooperated to suppress the revolutionary struggles of the working class, but divisions between them grew after the parliamentary elections were won by the Islamists.

With its military coup last week, the military clearly signaled that it did not intend to hand over power to the MB. It dissolved the parliament and the constituent assembly, which were both dominated by the Islamists. With a constitutional decree issued Sunday, SCAF took over all legislative and budgetary powers from the dissolved Islamist-dominated parliament.

The army's comments followed a series of attempts by the Brotherhood to pressure the army to allow Mursi to take office. On Tuesday, the Mursi campaign published a pamphlet presenting him as the winner, with 52 percent of the vote. A spokesperson of the Mursi campaign said that "the figures are based on polling station results issued on Sunday and Monday, along with the tally of expatriate votes."

The MB also called protests on Tahrir Square on Tuesday, which were attended by tens of thousands of people. Together with various liberal and pseudo-left groups—such as the April 6 movement and the Revolutionary Socialist (RS), which joined the MB's protests—the MB is concerned that a Shafiq victory would expose the empty and fraudulent character of the "democratic transition" the army has claimed it was organizing, and in which they participated.

With the "democratic transition" exposed as a lie by the army coup, the MB and its allies fear an explosive confrontation between the working class and the army.

Muslim Brotherhood spokesperson Mohamed Ghozlan warned of a "dangerous faceoff" between the people and the army if Ahmed Shafiq is declared Egypt's new president. A Shafiq victory would be "a direct military coup by the military council," Ghozlan added.

Under these conditions, the MB is signaling their concern over the army's attempts to monopolize the formal institutions of political power set up by the junta. Saad al-Katani, the speaker of the dissolved parliament, warned that the army's positions could "lead us into a vacuum and the constitution could take years, giving a

justification to the military council to stay in power for years. This is unacceptable."

Katani stressed that the MB posed no immediate threat to the junta. "What happened in Algeria cannot be repeated in Egypt," he said, referring to the 1991-2002 civil war that claimed some 150,000 lives in Algeria, as the army crushed an armed revolt by Islamist groups that had won the 1991 elections. "The Egyptian people are different and not armed. We are fighting a legal struggle via the establishment and a popular struggle in the streets."

Shafiq's campaign reacted to the MB's initiatives with a press conference, claiming that the Mursi campaign was circulating "false results," and that in fact Shafiq had won the elections. Shafiq campaign spokesperson Ahmed Sarhan accused the MB of "spreading lies about the results of the vote all along," claiming that "according to our counting our candidate is leading with 51.5 to 52 percent."

The constitutional decree allows the army to intervene "if the country faces internal unrest [...] to maintain security and defend public property."

Extra security forces are being deployed across Egypt. Three thousand police and soldiers are being sent to protect vital political and economic sites, including the Suez Canal, the head of security in Suez, Adel Refaat, said Wednesday. "We will firmly defend all public institutions and police stations," he said.

A military build-up has also been reported on the Cairo-Alexandria Road—with photographs of army checkpoints with barbed wire emplacements manned by heavily-armed troops, reminiscent of the 18-day uprising that toppled Hosni Mubarak.



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