

Protests continue in Cairo amid threats of crackdown by military junta

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As tens of thousands rallied Friday in Cairo's Tahrir Square against the assumption by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) of dictatorial powers, the standoff between SCAF and the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) over the disputed presidential election grew more tense, and the junta threatened to unleash repression against the protesters.

Friday saw the biggest of the daily demonstrations called by the Islamist Brotherhood since Tuesday to protest a series of moves by SCAF dissolving the MB-dominated parliament and constituent assembly and effectively placing all legislative and executive power in the hands of the generals.

Tensions have increased since the Supreme Presidential Electoral Commission, appointed under the deposed dictator Hosni Mubarak, delayed its announcement of the winner of last weekend's presidential runoff from Thursday to this weekend. The commission claimed it was putting off the announcement to consider charges of election fraud.

Both the MB candidate, Mohamed Mursi, and his runoff opponent, Ahmed Shafiq, a former air force commander and Mubarak's last prime minister, have claimed victory. It is widely suspected that SCAF ordered the delay in order to prepare the army and police for an anticipated eruption of popular protest over an announcement handing the presidency to the generals' candidate, Shafiq.

The state-owned *Al Ahram* newspaper on Friday cited unnamed government figures and Western diplomats as saying the Supreme Presidential Electoral Commission was set to announce the victory of Shafiq on Sunday evening. The article reported a source as saying the SCAF-backed candidate would be credited with having

received 50.7 percent of the vote.

Sources at the Supreme Presidential Electoral Commission, the newspaper reported, would not confirm the reports of its intention to declare Shafiq the winner.

Earlier in the week a group of judges monitoring the elections, the Judges of Egypt, issued a statement unofficially declaring Mursi the winner. The judges said Mursi had won the election with about 900,000 more votes than Ahmed Shafiq.

According to *ahramonline*, intense negotiations between the Brotherhood leadership and the military command continued into the night Thursday toward a "a political deal" that would allow Mursi to assume the presidency, while keeping real power in the hands of the generals. The SCAF is demanding that the Brotherhood pull its supporters out of Tahrir Square and accept the military's constitutional decree arrogating to itself dictatorial powers.

The report quoted a Brotherhood source as saying that a deal could be reached by Saturday or Sunday to allow Mursi to assume the presidency. "But if no deal is reached, and if the SCAF insists on taking everything and giving nothing, then we would not be surprised if they announce Shafiq as president," the source said.

The US is giving its tacit support to the junta, neither denouncing its power grab nor demanding that it rescind its dictatorial measures. Washington continues to maintain the absurd pretense that the junta is presiding over a transition to democracy. In line with this façade, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in a television interview urged SCAF to hand over power to the "legitimate winner."

The conflict between SCAF and the Muslim Brotherhood is a power struggle within the Egyptian bourgeoisie. The MB is itself a right-wing party hostile

to the working class and committed to defending both capitalism and the existing imperialist set-up in the Middle East. It reflects the interests of sections of the corporate-financial elite and privileged middle class layers that have been excluded during the decades of military rule from political power and what they consider their rightful share of the economic spoils from the exploitation of the workers.

The Brotherhood collaborated with SCAF in suppressing the revolutionary upsurge centered in the working class that brought down Mubarak in February of 2011, but came increasingly into conflict with the generals after winning a majority in the parliamentary elections.

It wants to secure a share of state power by winning the post of president, reduced by SCAF's decrees to a mere figure-head, and is eager to work out a deal with the junta. At the same time, it, along with the military, fears a new eruption of mass protests and strikes by the working class and is seeking to head off a revolutionary movement to overthrow the capitalist state and establish socialism.

The MB also fears that the installation of Shafiq, following the military coup carried out last week, will discredit it by exposing its role in promoting the fiction of a "transition to democracy" under the junta.

Friday afternoon, SCAF flatly rejected calls by the MB, other Islamists, liberals and pseudo-left groups such as the Revolutionary Socialists that have now lined up completely behind the Brotherhood that it rescind its measures dissolving the institutions put in place to provide the illusion of a democratic transition.

In a four-minute statement read on state television, SCAF warned that the army and police would be mobilized in response to any attacks on Egypt's "public or private institutions." Defending its issuance of an amendment to the constitutional declaration of 2011 giving itself immunity and complete control over the country's security forces, granting the army the right to arrest civilians, and assuming control over legislative and budgetary issues, SCAF declared: "The issuance of the supplementary constitutional decree was necessitated by the needs of administering the affairs of the state during this critical period in the history of our nation."

It said ominously that it would allow peaceful protests so long as they did not conflict with the

"interests of the country."

The statement denounced MB presidential candidate Mursi for declaring victory prior to an announcement by the election commission and blamed him for growing political unrest.

Mursi responded by reiterating his demand that the junta reverse its dissolution of the parliament and constituent assembly and its assumption of dictatorial powers. However, he refrained from repeating his previous claims to have won the election, and made clear the Muslim Brotherhood's desire to collaborate with SCAF, calling its members "honest men working for the betterment of Egypt." He added, "They are working to safeguard our land."

The Egyptian army is the backbone of the Egyptian capitalist state and the main bulwark against working class revolution. Should the Muslim Brotherhood—or, for that matter, its pseudo-left supporters such as the Revolutionary Socialists—manage to carve out a share of state power, they would deploy the military and police to put down a challenge to capitalist rule by the working class.



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