

Islamist President Mursi takes office in Egypt

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In his initial days in office, Mohamed Mursi, the first Egyptian president after the revolutionary ouster of long-time dictator Hosni Mubarak, reassured the US-backed military junta that he will not threaten its control over the state, but act as a compliant figurehead of the counterrevolution.

On Saturday Mursi gave his inauguration speech at the University of Cairo, praising the Egyptian military and vowing to increase its influence. He stated that “the armed forces are the shield and sword of the nation. I pledge before God that I will safeguard that institution, soldiers and commanders, raise its prestige and support it with all the powers available to me so it can be stronger.”

Mursi also assured the junta’s imperialist allies in the US and Europe that he will defend their strategic and economic interests in Egypt and throughout the region. He affirmed his “respect for the Egyptian state’s commitments in accords and international agreements.”

In another show of subservience to the military dictatorship, Mursi had been sworn in at the Supreme Constitutional Court (SCC) earlier.

The SCC, a body staffed with judges appointed by Mubarak, played a major role in the military coup staged by the ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) only two days before the presidential election run-offs. It declared the Islamist-dominated parliament unconstitutional, whereupon SCAF dissolved both the parliament and the constituent assembly.

Based on the SCC ruling, the generals then issued a constitutional decree granting themselves sweeping powers, including control over the legislature, the budget, and the drafting of the new constitution.

With the junta asserting full control of the state, the official “handover of power ceremony” on Saturday afternoon at the Hykestep military base on the outskirts of Cairo was an empty show.

Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, Egypt’s de facto dictator, claimed to “have fulfilled our promise which we made before God and the people. We now have an elected president, who assumed Egypt’s rule through a free and direct vote reflecting the will of Egyptians.”

Tantawi and the chief of staff of the Egyptian armed forces, Sami Annan, saluted Mursi several times when he arrived. Tantawi then decorated the Islamist president with the “Shield of the Armed Forces”, the Egyptian military’s highest honor.

In return Mursi vowed to “accept the transfer of power” and praised the role of the army during the transition. “You were up to the expectations of the people of Egypt,” he claimed, stressing that Egypt needs the armed forces to regain security.

The renewed alliance between the military and Mursi and his Islamist Muslim Brotherhood (MB), after weeks of conflicts and backroom talks during the presidential elections, is a stark warning to the working class. Fearing another social explosion of the masses, the ruling class has concluded that a closer collaboration is necessary to prepare new attacks on the workers.

Mursi’s speech at the Cairo University was attended by various influential figures of the Egyptian ruling elite. SCAF generals sat next to leading MB members and other political and religious leaders, including interim Prime Minister Kamal al-Ganzouri, former UN nuclear watchdog Mohamed ElBaradei, former head of the Arab league Amr Moussa, the Grand Mufti of Egypt Ali Gomaa, and Saint Pachomius, the Pope of the Coptic Church.

Speaking to *Al Arabiya* on Sunday, Judge Tahani al-Gebaly, deputy head of the SCC, said: “The coming phase is very critical and that is why all the next steps have to be very carefully calculated.” He stressed that the most pressing issue the new president has to address

is re-establishing security. He suggested that Mursi should rely on “the armed forces at this point to maintain law and order and they have so far been doing a good job at that since the eruption of the revolution until the present moment.”

Preparations are being made for the direct use of the military against the population. Article 53b of the constitutional decree issued by the SCAF allows the president to “issue a decision to commission the armed forces—with the approval of SCAF—to maintain security and defend public properties ... if the country faces internal unrest which requires the intervention of the armed forces.”

Last Thursday the chief of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Christine Lagarde, reportedly called Mursi to praise his election as “an important step forward in Egypt’s transition.” According to an IMF source, they discussed Egypt’s economic situation; Lagarde stressed “that the IMF stands ready to support Egypt and looks forward to working closely with the authorities.”

The Brotherhood has been trying to reach a deal with the IMF for some time. Ahmed El-Naggar, a member of the MB’s Freedom Justice Party (FJP), told Reuters: “position has been clear all along. We have no to an agreement with the IMF, but only after looking at all the alternatives.”

The development finance adviser to the FJP, Amr Abu-Zeid, also confirmed that the Islamists “intend to approach the IMF again.” Abu-Zeid helped to draw up the MB’s free-market Nahda (Renaissance) economic programme which seeks to further liberalize the Egyptian economy, cut subsidies, and attract more foreign investment.

The Brotherhood and SCAF aim to suppress working class opposition to the planned social counterrevolution. On Monday Mursi met with Interior Minister Major General Mohamed Ibrahim and heads of the security and police forces at his presidential palace to discuss security issues.

The palace is guarded against workers’ protests to rising social inequality by heavily armed police forces in Egypt. On Tuesday hundreds of workers of the Alexandria branch of the Italian tire manufacturer Pirelli protested in front of the palace, demanding unpaid salaries and benefits.

On Monday, dozens of workers, taxi drivers and relatives of protesters detained by the military junta

attempted to storm the presidential palace but were stopped by security forces.



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