

Egyptian President Mursi cracks down after US embassy protests

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Egypt's US-backed Islamist president, Mohamed Mursi, is launching a crackdown against workers, students and youth after protests at the US embassy in Cairo last week.

Egypt was one of the first countries where protests erupted over an anti-Islamic video produced by right-wing circles in the United States. Since then, protests have spread throughout the Muslim world, reflecting deep anger amongst workers and youth against Western imperialism, its wars in Libya and Syria, and its backing of right-wing stooge regimes in the Middle East and Asia.

On Monday, Egyptian authorities arrested 42 new suspects for allegedly participating in the US embassy protests, which erupted last Tuesday. The South Cairo prosecutor accused them of attempting to storm the embassy, attacking police officers and disrupting traffic. The accused denied the charges and said they were street vendors selling their wares near the embassy. Over 300 people have already been detained.

On Saturday, the notorious Egyptian Central Security Forces stormed Tahrir Square and the roads leading to the US embassy, together with hundreds of plainclothes policemen, violently ending the protests.

In scenes recalling former dictator Hosni Mubarak's crackdown on protesters before his ouster by mass working class strikes and protests on February 11 of last year, security forces chased protesters with armoured vehicles, firing tear gas canisters and birdshot. Protesters defended themselves with stones and Molotov cocktails. Two protesters were reportedly killed and hundreds injured in the clashes.

The Mursi government now plans to reintroduce the currently defunct emergency law. On Tuesday, a report by the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (EOHR) revealed that a draft law to "protect society

from dangerous people" has been prepared by the Interior and Justice ministries. The law, which has yet to be approved by Mursi, would give police the right to arrest civilians without evidence and allow the Ministry of the Interior to put suspects under surveillance or house arrest.

According to the EOHR, the law could also be used to "prevent forms of protesting and striking, even the peaceful ones," as it does not provide an explicit definition of the crime it is outlawing.

Police attacks on protesters and preparations for a broader crackdown come at the behest of US imperialism. US President Barack Obama called Mursi on Wednesday evening last week to discuss the situation and put pressure on Mursi not to tolerate the protests.

According to the White House, Obama "called Egyptian President Mohammed Mursi today to review the strategic partnership between the United States and Egypt." He "underscored the importance of Egypt following through on its commitment to cooperate with the United States in securing US diplomatic facilities and personnel."

Speaking of the Egyptian regime, Obama told *Telemundo*: "I don't think we would consider them an ally, but we don't consider them an enemy." He said the Egyptian government was "trying to find its way" but that if it failed to show it was "taking responsibility," it would be a "real big problem."

Obama's statement about Egypt—over which Washington wields immense influence—was a blunt order to Mursi to protect the US embassy and end the protests. The claim that Egypt is not a US ally was not a statement of fact, but a threat that Washington could move against the current regime if it fails to meet Obama's expectations and crush popular opposition.

Washington and the Egyptian state have been close strategic allies since the 1978 Camp David accords and the signing of the Egypt-Israel peace treaty one year later. Since then, Egypt, together with Israel, have been the biggest recipients of US foreign aid, and the US and the Egyptian military have close ties and regularly hold joint exercises.

Consecutive US administrations backed Mubarak for three decades before he was toppled by the working class last February. Since the fall of Mubarak, the Obama administration has relied on the Egyptian military and the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) to suppress the working class and defend its strategic and economic interests in the region. It has established close ties to Mursi, a US-trained scientist and member of the MB, and supported his constitutional coup on August 12, in which he took over the former army junta's dictatorial powers.

American capital also supports Mursi's policies. Significantly, the US embassy protests broke out just as the largest US business delegation to travel to Egypt since the 1980s was visiting. One of the leaders of the delegation praised the Brotherhood's economic program, saying, "We got a clear message that Egypt is open for business. The delegation will leave impressed with the progress achieved so far."

The Islamists are intensifying the pro-business, anti-working class policies of Mubarak. Last month Cairo officially requested a \$4.8 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund, vowing to further liberalize the economy. On September 9, the new Egyptian prime minister announced plans to cut the budget deficit and subsidies.

Fearing he would lose popular support as a result of his anti-working class policies and his ties to US imperialism, Mursi was initially reluctant to crack down on protests at the US embassy. Protesters were able to climb the embassy's walls and bring down the American flag.

After speaking to Obama, however, Mursi followed his instructions from Washington. He unleashed his security forces against protesters and the Brotherhood called off planned mass demonstrations against the anti-Islam film. Mursi said Obama had told him that it was necessary to put in place "legal measures which will discourage those seeking to damage relations" between the US and Egypt.

Now Mursi is preparing to expand the embassy crackdown against the entire working class. In the last week, a series of strikes has erupted in Egypt. Both Mursi and the Obama administration want to prevent a renewed revolutionary upsurge of Egyptian workers and youth.

On Monday, a leading member of the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), the political arm of the Brotherhood, made clear that the Islamists regard strikes as a crime. Commenting on an on-going strike by public transport workers in Cairo, Sabry Amer told *Ahram Online* that "when workers of a vital service such as public transport decide to stop working, this is treason to the country."

On the same day, security forces disbanded a peaceful sit-in by students at the Nile University in Cairo and another sit-in by teachers.



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