

Egypt's President Mursi claims vast new executive powers

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23 November 2012

On Thursday evening Egypt's Islamist president, Mohamed Mursi, issued a new constitutional declaration claiming vast new executive powers. This comes amid a broader political crisis in Egypt, after Israel's brutal attack on Gaza and amid the ongoing US proxy war for regime change in Syria.

The main target of the declaration is working class opposition to Mursi and the ruling Muslim Brotherhood (MB). In Article VI Mursi claims extraordinary powers, declaring that, "the president is authorized to take any measures he sees fit in order to preserve and safeguard the revolution, national unity or national security."

Mursi also re-asserts the powers he took from the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) junta in a political coup in August, also granting himself further powers over the ongoing formulation of Egypt's constitution.

Article II of his declaration states that all "previous constitutional declarations, laws, and decrees made by the president since he took office on 30 June 2012, until the constitution is approved and a new People's Assembly [lower house of parliament] is elected are final and binding and cannot be appealed by any way or to any entity."

Mursi's declaration explicitly targets rival sections of the Egyptian state. Those are more secular-oriented bureaucrats tied to the army and the old Mubarak regime. The declaration states that the January 25 Revolution had tasked the president to "root out the remnants of the old regime from Egypt's state institution."

Mursi thus cynically evokes the mass uprising against former dictator Hosni Mubarak, which the MB initially opposed, to replace the Mubarak-era figures with right-wing MB cadres.

Since Mursi's political coup in August, a war has raged between the Islamists and Mubarak-era judges. The latter filed lawsuits against the Islamist-dominated constituent assembly, tasked with drafting a new constitution. They regularly acquitted Mubarak-era officials charged with killing protesters during last year's revolutionary struggles.

The declaration deprives the judiciary of oversight powers against Mursi. Article II annuls all lawsuits "brought before any judicial body against these (the president's) decisions".

Article III dismisses Egypt's prosecutor-general Abdel Maguid Mahmoud, a long-standing rival of Mursi. Meguid's successor will be directly appointed "by the President of the Republic for a period of four years."

As of this writing, Washington has not commented on Mursi's declaration. However, top US officials' remarks about Mursi's role in the US-Israeli onslaught against Gaza suggest that Mursi is working out his policies in close consultation with US officials.

The *New York Times* quoted a senior US official expressing President Barack Obama's positive impressions of phone talks with his Egyptian counterpart during the Gaza fighting. "The thing that appealed to the president was how practical the conversations were—here's the state of play, here are

the issues we are concerned about. This was someone focused on solving problems,” the official said.

The *Times* wrote that Obama felt he had a “connection” with Mursi after six phone calls over the last few days, and that Obama had decided to “invest heavily” in Mursi.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton thanked Mursi at a press conference in Cairo Wednesday, stating, “Egypt’s new government is assuming the responsibility and leadership that has long made this country a cornerstone of regional stability and peace.”

Mursi is cynically cloaking his new power grab behind claims he is “safeguarding the revolution,” while continuing to crack down on the force that led the revolution: the Egyptian working class.

Since Monday there have been ongoing clashes between Mursi’s security forces and thousands of angry youth in downtown Cairo, who compare Mursi to Egypt’s former dictator Hosni Mubarak and demand his ouster. Policemen are firing rubber bullets and tear gas canisters at protesters who are fighting back with stones and Molotov cocktails. Over one hundred protesters have been wounded, and at least one protester was killed.

The protests began as peaceful marches to commemorate the anniversary of the so-called Mohammad Mahmoud uprising—street protests that began near Tahrir Square in Cairo, shortly before the parliamentary elections one year ago. In these mass protests against the SCAF junta, more than fifty protesters were killed and thousands injured.

The current protests reflect rising discontent amongst the Egyptian masses against the ruling MB, which is continuing Mubarak’s anti-working class and pro-imperialist policies.

The Islamists’ cynical statements of solidarity with the Palestinians could not conceal that Egypt worked closely with the United States and Israel and is deeply complicit in the war in Gaza.

As Israel fired rounds of missiles on Gaza, killing more than 150 Palestinians and destroying much of Gaza’s infrastructure, Mursi started a diplomatic offensive in Cairo to enforce a truce on Hamas, the Palestinian offshoot of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. This aimed to block the development of broader popular opposition to war in Egypt, Israel, and throughout the region.

Israel demands that Egypt increase security at its border with Gaza and ensures that no weapons reach Gaza. Egypt plans to increase its collaboration with Israel on the Sinai Peninsula, arresting alleged militants and sealing tunnels to the Gaza Strip. Egypt has reportedly already begun to enforce the ceasefire; yesterday three rockets were seized by Egyptian security forces in Sheikh Zawayed, near Gaza.

Washington and Tel Aviv view the suppression of Hamas and of the Palestinian people as a precondition for their plans to oust the Syrian regime of Bashar Al-Assad and prepare war with Iran. As the Mubarak regime before it, Mursi and the MB are aligned with Washington and aim to back imperialist policies hated by the Egyptian masses.

On economic issues Mursi is preparing further attacks on the working class. Earlier this week, Egypt secured a \$ 4.8 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), based on plans to cut Egypt’s budget deficit. On Wednesday Ashraf Al-Arabi, Egypt’s minister of planning and international cooperation, approved gasoline subsidy cuts.

As the MB enforces its reactionary program on the Egyptian masses, there is growing concern in the ruling elite about a renewed explosion of mass discontent. “Mursi’s popularity can’t go on eroding like this forever,” rights activist Mohsen Kamal told Reuters. “He is vulnerable to dramatic, and maybe even violent, changes if he ignores what is happening.”



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