

# Mursi calls on military in Egypt crisis

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10 December 2012

Egyptian President Mohamed Mursi issued a decree Sunday giving army officers the authority for the next week to make arrests with a view to “maintaining public order.” Calling in the military to supplement the police is an indication of the reactionary preparations taking place behind the scenes as the political crisis deepens in Egypt.

The new Law 107 puts the military in control of security measures during the week leading up to a December 15 referendum on a new constitution for Egypt, drafted by a commission controlled by Mursi’s Freedom and Justice Party, the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood, the group that represents the Islamist faction of Egyptian big business.

The decree follows a constitutional declaration issued by Mursi a day earlier, which reaffirmed the December 15 vote on the Islamist-backed constitution. The declaration nominally rescinded Mursi’s November 22 decree, which provoked mass protests throughout the country because it claimed all legislative, judicial, constitutional and executive powers and placed the president above any judicial or legal restraint.

The new constitutional declaration effectively reasserted the absolute power claimed in the November 22 declaration, however, by reiterating that the new decree itself, and other such constitutional declarations, could not be reviewed or overturned by the judiciary.

The Mursi aide who read out the constitutional declaration Saturday night at a press conference said, “The declaration is not intended to protect the president’s decisions against legal appeals, but rather to protect the constitutional declarations. This is an act of sovereignty granted to the president.”

According to an English translation of Saturday’s decree published by *Ahram Online*, Mursi voided his November 22 declaration while insisting that “all its consequences remain in effect.” The most important such consequence is the December 15 referendum on

the new constitution.

The new constitutional declaration provides that if the Egyptian population votes down the draft constitution, the president will call an election of a new constituent assembly within three months.

Opposition groups that had organized protests against the Mursi power grab immediately rejected the new declaration, but remained silent on whether they would call for a boycott of the December 15 referendum, seek to disrupt it with protests, or call on the people to participate in the referendum and vote down the proposed constitution.

The National Salvation Front (NSF), which includes many of the bourgeois liberal opposition groups, said that Mursi’s rescinding of the November 22 decree had “fallen short of expectations.” An NSF official said, “One of our major demands is to postpone the vote on the constitution. Failing to respond to this will lead to more confrontation.”

The spokesman, Khaled Dawood, said Mursi’s action was “relatively meaningless,” explaining, “The key issue of securing the process of adopting of the constitution is done.” At the same time, Dawood said that ousting Mursi from power “is definitely not in our agenda at all.” He continued, “Our agenda is basically limited to having a new draft constitution that everybody is satisfied about before going to a referendum.”

Leaders of the NSF boycotted a meeting called by Mursi for Saturday, December 8, under the title of “National Dialogue,” to discuss the political crisis. Former presidential candidates Hamdeen Sabbahi, a Nasserist, and Amr Moussa, foreign minister under Mubarak, refused to attend the meeting, along with the former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Mohamed ElBaradei.

The National Salvation Front and the pseudo-left groups that trail behind it, such as the Revolutionary

Socialists, have called for renewed mass protests on Tuesday in Cairo and other Egyptian cities. The Muslim Brotherhood has issued its own call for pro-Mursi protests on the same day, potentially setting the stage for new confrontations and new bloodshed, which could give the military a pretext for open intervention.

The political deadlock between rival factions of the Egyptian ruling elite prompted an ominous statement from the military Saturday, warning of potential “disastrous consequences.” It was the military’s first public declaration since Mursi’s consolidation of power in August, when he sent the leading generals, including defense minister Mohammed Tantawi, into retirement.

The statement declared: “Dialogue is the best and only way to reach consensus. The opposite of that will bring us to a dark tunnel that will result in catastrophe and that is something we will not allow.” It warned that failure to reach an agreement over the constitutional referendum was “in the interest of neither side. The nation as a whole will pay the price.”

Underscoring the decisive role of the military brass in the political crisis, state radio and television interrupted programs Saturday to read the statement from the leadership of the armed forces. Muslim Brotherhood representatives welcome the “balanced” line of the statement.

Military units began to put these words into practice, as troops were mobilized to seal off the area around the presidential palace to prevent demonstrators from reaching it. Tanks, armored vehicles and barbed wire were deployed.

The *Los Angeles Times* quoted an Egyptian political analyst, Ammar Ali Hassan, to the effect that the US government was playing a key role in the political crisis behind the scenes. “There are agreements between the armed forces, the US and the Brotherhood,” he told the *Times*. “They’ve agreed to stability because the US absolutely needs stability in Egypt.”

*Washington Post* columnist David Ignatius, who is well connected to the US military-intelligence apparatus, was even more emphatic about the Obama administration’s role in backing Mursi, in a scathing column published Saturday under the headline, “Our Man in Cairo.”

He wrote: “[L]et’s be honest: The Obama administration has been Mursi’s main enabler. US

officials have worked closely with him on economic development and regional diplomacy. Visiting Washington last week, Mursi’s top aides were touting their boss’s close contacts with President Obama and describing phone calls between the two leaders that led to the Gaza cease-fire.”

Ignatius noted that since the political crisis exploded after Mursi’s November 22 decree, “the Obama administration has been oddly restrained.” He concluded that “it’s crazy for Washington to appear to take sides against those who want a liberal, tolerant Egypt and for those who favor sharia. Somehow, that’s where the administration has ended up.”

What Ignatius could not acknowledge, although it is the key to US policy in the Middle East, is that the Obama administration has formed an alliance with the Islamic fundamentalists it once shunned—or demonized as instruments of Al Qaeda—to overthrow regimes like those of Gaddafi in Libya and Assad in Syria that it regards as obstacles to US foreign policy.

Moreover, the Muslim Brotherhood represents a major faction in the Egyptian bourgeoisie, if not the dominant one, a fact emphasized by its deputy guide, Khairat el-Shater, a longtime patron of Mursi—and one of the country’s richest men.

In a press conference Saturday held by the Coalition of Islamic Forces, El-Shater expressed concern that the ongoing political unrest was undermining capital flows into Egypt. “In the past four months I have met with thousands of investors who are genuine about wanting to invest in Egypt,” he said. “However, I can not advise them to put their money in at a time of instability.”



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