

Military deploys throughout Egypt ahead of mass protests

Johannes Stern
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After a defiant speech Wednesday night, Egypt's US-backed Islamist president, Mohamed Mursi, gave the Egyptian military police powers on Thursday. Gehad El-Haddad, a top advisor to the ruling Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), declared that Mursi had given the police and the armed forces "judicial arrest powers to secure major government buildings" and to ensure law and order.

On Thursday the army took up positions throughout the country, moving tanks and soldiers to strategic locations, including government ministries, the Egyptian central bank and the presidential palace in Cairo, where presidential guard forces were deployed. The army also increased its presence at the entrances of some neighborhoods in Cairo and in the three major cities at the strategic Suez Canal: Port Said, Suez and Ismailia.

The deployments come ahead of expected mass protests against Mursi and the MB scheduled for Sunday to mark Mursi's first year in office. The "Tamarod" or "rebel" campaign has called the protests. It is a new oppositional platform, supported by the National Salvation Front (NSF), an umbrella group of liberal, pseudo-left or secular-leaning opposition parties. The organizers of "Tamarod" claim they have collected 13 million signatures against Mursi in recent weeks.

The MB also announced in a press conference yesterday that its members and supporters would hold counterdemonstrations today in Cairo.

In his speech before an invited audience of top officials—including Defence Minister and Commander in Chief of the Egyptian Armed Forces General Abdul Fatah Khalil Al-Sisi—Mursi announced that the armed forces will be "deployed in several areas to

safeguard the public and defend the nation, if need be."

In the speech, Mursi threatened opponents as "enemies" and "saboteurs" trying to undermine Egypt. "The political polarization and infighting have reached a point that endangers our nascent democracy, and it threatens the whole country with a state of paralysis and chaos," he declared.

However, he also reached out to opposition groups. He declared that he "made mistakes on a number of issues" in the past year, offering talks on "national reconciliation" and changes to the controversial new constitution.

After Mursi's speech, police forces attacked protesters in the Nile Delta city of Mansoura, killing one and injuring up to 225 people. There were also reports of dozens of tents being set up again to occupy Tahrir Square in Cairo.

Al-Sisi had threatened in a speech last Sunday that if the political parties fail to reach a consensus and the situation gets out of their control, then the Egyptian army would intervene. US Ambassador Anne Patterson signaled Washington's disapproval of the protests, saying they could be counterproductive.

While Mursi and Al-Sisi's comments reflect the divisions inside the Egyptian ruling elite after the ouster of former dictator Hosni Mubarak in early 2011, their main target is the Egyptian working class.

"From day one, I have been facing conspiracies one after another to topple me as Egypt's first freely and democratically elected president," Mursi declared, adding: "How can the best of leaders make major achievements in such a poisonous atmosphere? In just one year, there have been up to 4,900 strikes and 22 calls for million-man protests. The ex-associates of the ousted regime are plotting for the collapse of the state."

Mursi's attempt to identify the mass protests and

strikes by Egyptian workers and youth with the former Mubarak regime is an absurd lie. In fact, the working class was the main social force behind the Egyptian Revolution and is waging strikes and protests against Mursi precisely because Mursi is continuing the anti-working class and pro-imperialist policies identified with the Mubarak regime.

Inside Egypt itself, Mursi is associated with massive attacks on the social and democratic rights of the working class. His regime is in continuous talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to secure a \$4.8 billion loan based on plans to cut critical price subsidies and further liberalize Egypt's economy. Like Mubarak, Mursi tries to brutally suppress any opposition against his rule. During his first years in office, dozens of workers and youth have been killed and thousands wounded in repeated crackdowns by military and police forces.

On foreign policy, Mursi functions, like his predecessor, as one of US imperialism's main stooges in the region. After supporting the Israeli onslaught against Gaza last autumn, Mursi is now emerging as one of Washington's main regional proxies in the imperialist intervention in Syria.

Speaking at a "Support for Syria" meeting called by Sunni Islamist clerics in Cairo two weeks ago, Mursi declared that he would back a no-fly zone against Syria and "materially and morally" support the Western-backed Syrian opposition.

A recent poll by the Egyptian Centre for Public Opinion Research (Baseera) testifies to the fact that Mursi is deeply unpopular amongst workers and youth in Egypt. While his approval ratings stood at 78 percent at the end of his first 100 days in power, they have fallen sharply to 32 percent.

Public anger over expanding power cuts, water cut-offs, fuel shortages and rising prices during the past weeks was further fueled by Mursi's provocative speech.

"The people are tired and they're fed up," Rifaat Hosni, a cafe owner who watched the speech was quoted in the *Washington Post*. "Everyone is even angrier now."

Khaled Abdel Nasser, a taxi driver who had waited for five hours for gas, stated angrily: "I'm going to protest on Sunday at Ittihadiya [the presidential palace]. Everyone is going to Ittihadiya."

The last two years have produced critical political lessons for workers seeking to fight the reactionary policies of the Mursi regime. The fight for democratic and social rights cannot be entrusted to any section of the Middle Eastern bourgeoisie, but falls to the working class in a revolutionary struggle for socialism against the ruling class.

Despite their sharp conflicts over power and influence inside the state machine, the army, the Islamists and secular-leaning opposition parties defend the same interests against the same enemy: they defend the power and wealth of the ruling elite against the working class and the poor. From the standpoint of the working class, the policies of the leaders of "Tamarod" and the NSF have no substantial differences with those advanced by Mursi.

In a statement, National Salvation Front leader Amr Moussa criticized Mursi for not offering a "clear" economic recovery plan and for blaming the nation's woes on street protests and strikes. He later told the Associated Press that Mursi and the Islamists "don't want to recognize there is anger. They are missing the point, a major point. They are in a state of denial."

Moussa said the opposition, like the military, wanted a genuine reconciliation, something he said was not mentioned in the president's speech.



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