Hundreds of thousands join Islamist rallies to protest military coup in Egypt

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Hundreds of thousands of Egyptians participated in demonstrations Friday called by the Muslim Brotherhood to protest the July 3 military coup and demand the reinstatement of the deposed Islamist president, Mohamed Mursi.

The biggest rally was held near the Rabaa El Adawiya Mosque in the Nasr City district of Cairo. The mosque has served as the base for Muslim Brotherhood supporters, who have camped out on its grounds since the Egyptian army, acting with the support of Washington, arrested Mursi, suspended the constitution and dissolved the legislature. Anti-coup rallies were also held in Alexandria and other cities on Friday.

Supporters of the coup and the interim government being set up by the army command to provide a civilian fig leaf for military rule held a much smaller event in Cairo's Tahrir Square to celebrate Mursi's ouster. Maintaining the grotesque fiction that the imposition of military rule marked an advance for the revolution that began with the February 2011 toppling of long-time dictator Hosni Mubarak, a coalition of bourgeois secular and pseudo-left groups held a communal Ramadan meal at sundown under the banner "Protecting the Gains of the Revolution."

Those participating in the pro-coup assembly included the Tamarod (rebel) coalition, which had channeled demonstrations against Mursi involving millions of workers and youth driven by opposition to Mursi's right-wing, pro-corporate and pro-imperialist policies, behind an appeal for the military to intervene against the Muslim Brotherhood regime.

Among the enthusiastic supporters of Tamarod is the misnamed Revolutionary Socialists, who continue to support the junta despite its massacre of 53 unarmed Islamist protesters last Monday, its arrest of hundreds of Brotherhood leaders and members, its closure of Islamist television channels, and its appointment as prime minister of Hazem al-Beblawi, a free market economist who has called for sweeping cuts in state subsidies for grain and fuel on which millions of Egyptian workers rely.

Others participating in the pro-coup event were the June 30 Front, the April 6 Youth Movement and the Egyptian Popular Alliance. They are allied with the National Salvation Front of Mohamed ElBaradei, whom army chief Abdul Fatah al-Sisi has named vice president for foreign affairs.

The April 6 Youth Movement released a statement saying its members would be participating to celebrate the "revolution's third wave." A joint statement issued by the groups backing the Tahrir Square event did not attack the junta for murdering and imprisoning opponents of the coup. Instead, it echoed the cynical claims of the military that the Muslim Brotherhood was responsible for the July 8 massacre of its own members. The communique demanded that the Brotherhood end its protests, calling on it to "immediately stop inciting violence and terrorism against Egyptians."

Far from a revolutionary development, the coup was a counterrevolutionary, preemptive move taken to block the emergence of a mass working class movement directed against the entire Egyptian ruling class—both its secularist and Islamist factions—and US imperialism. Washington and the Egyptian army relied on Tamarod and its pseudo-left allies to sideline the working class opposition long enough for the military and its allies in the internal struggle within the Egyptian ruling elite to deal with the Brotherhood, while preparing a massive assault on the working class.

On Friday, the army maintained a large and highly visible presence, fearing the potential for a violent clash

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between pro- and anti-Muslim Brotherhood demonstrators and the outbreak of civil war. Security personnel and armored vehicles were deployed near the presidential palace, the Defense Ministry and key bridges and thoroughfares. They were also out in force around the Republican guard barracks, where it is believed Mursi is being held incommunicado. That compound was the scene of the July 8 massacre that killed dozens of demonstrators and wounded hundreds more.

The military blocked roads linking the presidential palace and Tahrir Square with the Rabaa El Adawiya Mosque, the site of the mass pro-Mursi demonstration. The Brotherhood had announced it would march from the mosque to the presidential palace, but the military intervened to turn the demonstration back to Rabaa.

The United States played a direct role in preparing the July 3 coup and has given the military junta de facto support. The Obama administration has refused to call the overthrow of the elected government a coup, because doing so would trigger a law requiring it to cut off Washington's annual $1.5 billion in aid to Egypt, $1.3 billion of which goes directly to the military.

Earlier this week, the administration announced it would go ahead with the shipment of four F-16 fighter jets to Egypt, underscoring its backing for the junta.

At the same time, the opposition mobilized by the Muslim Brotherhood and the bloody actions of the junta have raised fears in Washington as to the viability of the interim government being cobbled together by General al-Sisi. In an effort to contain the highly explosive situation in Egypt, US State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said Friday that Washington agreed with an appeal made earlier by Germany for the military to release Mursi.

However, Psaki declined to say whether the US still recognized Mursi as president of Egypt.

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