

Egyptian coup leader al-Sisi threatens mass repression

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Three weeks after the military coup that removed Islamist President Mohamed Mursi and the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) from power, the Egyptian army is preparing mass repression to solidify its grip over the country and re-establish a military dictatorship. Egypt's coup leader and de facto ruler, General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, has called upon all "honest and trustworthy Egyptians" to support the military's campaign of repression.

Anti-Mursi demonstrators began gathering in Cairo's Tahrir Square on Thursday night, as well as in Alexandria and Port Said. The Muslim Brotherhood (MB), meanwhile, has called its own rallies demanding the reinstatement of Mursi, who remains in military custody. The country of 84 million faces the prospect of escalating bloodshed in a simmering conflict that has claimed at least 200 lives since the July 3 coup, most of them Mursi supporters.

The MB-led Anti-Coup Pro-Democracy Alliance accused the military of issuing an "explicit call for civil war."

The army has given Mursi's backers a deadline of Saturday to "join the nation in preparation to launch into the future," threatening to "turn its guns" against those who perpetuate "violence" and "terrorism."

In a Wednesday speech at a military graduation ceremony broadcast on state TV, General Sisi said: "I request that all Egyptians next Friday ... go down [into the street] to give me a mandate and an order to confront possible violence and terrorism."

Al-Sisi's speech must be understood as a threat. He aims to mobilize pro-army thugs in the streets to provide a cover for more violent repression by the military. His remarks recall former dictator Hosni Mubarak's infamous speech on February 1, 2011, ten days before his ouster, when he vowed to stay in power

to defend the Egyptian nation and to "continue pursuing outlaws." The following day, he unleashed his thugs to attack protesting workers and youth in Tahrir Square in the "Battle of the Camels."

Over the past weeks, the military has launched a brutal crackdown. On July 8, the army killed at least 51 pro-Mursi protesters and wounded hundreds in a massacre in front of the headquarters of the Republican Guard compound in Cairo, where Mursi was believed to be held. Thousands of MB members have been detained, including MB Supreme Guide Mohamed al-Badie.

While the immediate target of the repression is the MB, the army's ultimate goal is to suppress the working class, the driving force behind the Egyptian revolution. It is widely expected that al-Sisi will announce a state of emergency on Friday and reintroduce the notorious Mubarak-era emergency laws. Like Mubarak before him, al-Sisi is referring to an alleged threat of "terrorism" to provide cover for a crackdown and establish a military dictatorship.

Sisi's dictatorial plans are supported by the Tamarod ("Rebel") alliance, which declared on its Facebook page: "We call all the great Egyptian people to gather in the squares of Egypt this Friday and to call officially for the prosecution of Mohamed Mursi and to support the Egyptian armed forces in its coming war on terrorism."

On the eve of Friday's demonstrations, Mohammed Abdul Aziz, a spokesman for the Tamarod coalition, declared, "Tomorrow we will cleanse Egypt," adding in relation to the Muslim Brotherhood, "We will not let extremists ruin our revolution." Tamarod, a political alliance backed by some of Egypt's richest oligarchs and remnants of the former dictatorship of Hosni Mubarak, while including elements of the country's

pseudo-left like the Revolutionary Socialists, worked to steer mass protests against the right-wing policies of Mursi behind a seizure of power by the military.

Tamarod has been a right-wing conspiracy from the start. It functions as a front group for the reestablishment of a military dictatorship in Egypt, speaking for the interests of powerful sections of the Egyptian bourgeoisie.

On July 20, the *Washington Post* published an article, titled “After Morsi’s ouster, Egypt’s old guard is back— and Muslim Brotherhood is out,” detailing how the coup restored former Mubarak regime officials and army generals to power. The *Post* writes, “Egypt’s new power dynamic, following the July 3 coup that ousted Morsi, is eerily familiar. Gone are the Islamist rulers from the once-banned Muslim Brotherhood. Back are the faces of the old guard, many closely linked to Mubarak’s reign or to the all-powerful generals.”

The article quotes Amr Ali al-Din, a lawyer representing MB detainees: “We have gone back to before the 25th of January. It’s the same treatment in the prisons, and on the street.”

In its counterrevolutionary offensive, the Egyptian ruling elite is relying on the affluent liberal and pseudo-left milieu in Egypt, which is shifting sharply to the right. Threatened by the mass movement of the working class, political forces that formerly criticized the Mubarak regime are caught in a wave of right-wing chauvinism.

An article, titled “Egypt’s ‘democrats’ abandon democracy” published in the *Post* on July 22, cites Esraa Abd, one of the co-founders of the April 6 Youth Movement, who is backing the coup. The *Post* writes that “she justified the military intervention with a burst of xenophobic hyperbole: ‘When terrorism is trying to take hold of Egypt and foreign interference is trying to dig into our domestic affairs, then it’s inevitable for the great Egyptian people to support its armed forces against the foreign danger.’”

In Washington, meanwhile, the Obama administration made it clear that it will not oppose the military’s consolidation of power. US Deputy Secretary of State William Burns briefed senior members of the US Senate and House of Representatives Thursday, explaining that the administration has no intention of issuing a ruling acknowledging that a coup took place in Egypt.

Under US law, such a ruling would require a cut off of the \$1.55 billion in annual US aid to Egypt, \$1.3 billion of it going directly to the country’s military. “It is not in our national interest to make such a determination,” an administration official told Reuters news agency.

On Wednesday the administration announced that it was delaying the scheduled shipment of four F-16 fighter jets to Cairo in an apparent effort to pressure the ruling military-controlled regime to reach some kind of accommodation with the Muslim Brotherhood, without restoring Mursi to power.

Washington fears the eruption of civil war in the Arab world’s most populous country and also is concerned that an all-out crackdown on the MB would cut across its policy in the wider region, particularly in Syria, where it is backing that country’s Muslim Brotherhood as well as Al Qaeda-linked elements in a civil war aimed at bringing down the regime of President Bashar al-Assad.



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