

Massacre in Egypt: US-backed junta kills scores, wounds thousands of people

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Deadly clashes have erupted across Egypt, as tens of thousands protested in dozens of marches supporting either deposed Islamist President Mohamed Mursi or the military junta that ousted him in a July 3 coup.

Security forces attacked pro-Mursi rallies early this morning, firing live ammunition, rubber bullets and tear gas. The move came after Interior Minister Mohamed Ibrahim—installed by the army—vowed that the coup regime would disperse the protests organized by Mursi’s Muslim Brotherhood (MB) “soon and in a legal manner.”

Al Jazeera reported today that 120 people had been killed and some 4,500 injured when the army attacked a round-the-clock pro-Mursi vigil at Cairo’s Rabaa al-Adawia Mosque. Seventeen were killed and over 500 wounded in clashes with police near the October 6 Bridge in Cairo’s Nasr City, the site of another of the largest ongoing pro-Mursi protests.

At least seven people were killed and 80 or more wounded when pro-army and pro-Mursi demonstrators clashed in Alexandria. MB officials claimed the security forces opened fire with birdshot on pro-Mursi demonstrators in Alexandria. Among the dead was a 14-year-old boy who was stabbed to death.

Egyptian health officials reported that most of the dead or wounded had suffered shots to the head or torso, suggesting that security forces attacking the protests are shooting to kill.

Hundreds of others were wounded in clashes in the port city of Damietta, the Shubra neighborhood of Cairo and other areas across Egypt.

There are widespread fears of an even bloodier crackdown to come, after the army issued the MB an ultimatum to join negotiations with the new military junta by today. On Thursday, July 3 coup leader General Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi told the MB that the next

48 hours were a “final chance” to “join the nation in preparation to launch the future.”

The army had also posted a statement on its Facebook page threatening to fire on anyone it deemed violent. It said that it would not “turn its guns against the people, but it will turn them against black violence and terrorism which has no religion or nation.” Hundreds of protesters, mostly MB supporters, have been killed on demonstrations since the coup.

Tanks and armored personnel carriers ringed Cairo’s Tahrir Square Friday. Top police and security officials appeared on the square during the day to chants of “The army, the police, and people are one hand.” At night, hundreds of thousands of people massed on Tahrir Square and surrounding streets, supporting Mursi’s overthrow.

There were large pro-Mursi rallies in the Sinai and in Matrouh. It appears that pro-Mursi rallies are still heavily outnumbered by anti-Mursi protests.

Tensions were further heightened by the announcement that the army was bringing charges against Mursi, whom the army has imprisoned in an undisclosed location since the July 3 coup. The charges stem from a prison escape by Mursi and other MB detainees during the 2011 uprising that toppled Hosni Mubarak. Mursi had said in a TV interview that “unknown men” freed him and other MB members from Wadi Natroun prison.

The Egyptian courts, a bastion of support for Mubarak, allege that Mursi conspired with the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas to attack Egyptian police stations and jails. This allegedly involved “setting fire to one prison and enabling inmates to flee, including himself, as well as premeditated killing of officers, soldiers, and prisoners.”

MB spokesman Gehad El-Haddad dismissed the

charges, saying that with them the Mubarak regime was “signaling ‘we’re back in full force.’”

The increasingly pro-authoritarian tone of the anti-Mursi protests reflects the crisis of leadership in the working class and the counterrevolutionary role of the bourgeois and middle-class forces that make up Egypt’s liberal and pseudo-left parties.

Terrified by the mass strikes and working class mobilizations of the spring and after the June 30 appeal for protests, fearing a revolution against the entire political establishment, they shifted sharply to the right. Tamarod—a coalition involving liberal forces such as the National Salvation Front (NSF), the Free Egyptians party, and the April 6 Youth Movement, and supported by the pseudo-left Revolutionary Socialists (RS)—backed the military coup. This paved the way for the formation of a military junta to try to wind down mass opposition.

While the initial target of army repression is the MB, ultimately the army and its supporters will turn on opposition in the working class to their reactionary social agenda—which includes deep cuts in critical subsidies for food and energy upon which Egyptian workers depend.

Tamarod and its allies hailed the army’s call for protests and have sought to shift the political atmosphere in Egypt as far to the right as possible. Tamarod and the NSF issued statements endorsing al-Sisi’s call for pro-army protests and giving the army its full backing in a “war on terrorism.”

The April 6 Youth Movement did not endorse the army’s call for protests, but signaled its support for military repression. It issued a statement saying that the armed forces “do not need popular delegation to perform its patriotic duties of preserving security and resisting violence.”

In a cynical maneuver, the pseudo-left Revolutionary Socialists (RS), which hailed the coup as a “second revolution,” declined to endorse the army protests. They wrote, “Whatever crimes the Brotherhood has committed against the people and against the Copts in defense of its power in the name of religion, we do not give army chief El-Sisi our authority. We will not go into the streets on Friday offering a blank check to commit massacres.”

This statement reflects the RS’ concerns that their support for the coup leaves them politically exposed,

not their opposition to massacres by the military. (See also: Egypt’s Revolutionary Socialists seek to cover up support for military coup) In fact, leading RS members openly said yesterday that they would support a military intervention.

On her Twitter feed, RS member Gigi Ibrahim, the partner of RS blogger Hossam el-Hamalawy, angrily demanded that the army intervene in the protests. “Five were killed in Alex[andria] and [neither] the army nor the police intervened, while the squares around Egypt are calling for Sisi’s mandate to end violence,” she wrote. “Why are the army and police that everyone is cheering now not stopping or intervening in the bloodshed?”

More fundamentally, the RS’ position reflects that organization’s long-standing alignment with US foreign policy. Like Washington, they are signaling their essential support for the coup, while trying to prevent the outbreak of too much bloodshed between the army and the MB. Such bloodshed would make it difficult for Washington to effect a reconciliation between the military and the MB and stabilize the Egyptian state, one of its key props in the Middle East.

Anonymous US diplomatic officials told *Al Ahram*, “the main US aim is for the Brotherhood to be reintegrated into the political life of Egypt and that there must be no persecution of the group.”

Yesterday, US Secretary of State John Kerry reportedly spoke at length with Egyptian Foreign Minister Nabil Fahmi, endorsing the coup. While stating that Washington wanted Egypt to resume a “democratic path,” Kerry assured Fahmi that any delay in US economic or military aid to the Egyptian regime due to the coup would be “temporary.”

The administration has made clear that it will not declare the military’s overthrow of Mursi a coup, which would require by law a cutoff of aid. And, while Washington has temporarily held up the shipment of four new F-16 fighter jets to Cairo, the Pentagon is going ahead as planned with joint exercises with the Egyptian military.



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