

Mounting toll of dead, injured from crackdown by Egyptian junta

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The death toll from the Egyptian army's crackdown on supporters of ousted Islamist President Mohamed Mursi mounted over the weekend, as Washington signaled its support for the junta's bloody repression.

Heavily armed security units aided by pro-junta thugs moved Saturday morning to crush sit-in protests by supporters of Mursi's Muslim Brotherhood (MB), some of which began shortly after the July 3 coup that toppled Mursi. YouTube videos of the crackdown show riot police units and snipers shooting rifles at crowds of protesters, who try to hide behind trees or concrete roadblocks.

Yesterday, Egyptian Health Ministry officials put the death toll from the crackdown at 80, with 792 wounded nationwide. However, the Health Ministry tally counts only casualties that arrive in state hospitals or morgues, while many of the wounded or slain remain in makeshift field hospitals or morgues located near the sites of the Islamist protests. MB officials estimated the death toll at up to 200, with some 5,000 protesters injured.

Surgeon Ismail Hasheesh, who volunteered at a field hospital near a protest site in Cairo, told *Al Ahram*: "Corpses were everywhere in the hospital, almost all the cases we got were in critical condition; some were already dead, while others were gasping for their last breath."

Dr. Mohamed Lofty, in charge of medical supplies at another Cairo field clinic, said: "The injuries were very precise, which suggests they were shot by snipers. There were bullet holes in the center of the forehead and right in the back of the skull. It was not just shooting to injure; it was shooting to kill."

Doctors also reported that police snipers targeted medics helping evacuate the wounded from protest sites. "Nobody should see what we had to see today. It

was like a war zone. The whole area was so full of bodies that we could not move," said Dr. Amr Gamal.

The junta indicated yesterday it was preparing to intensify the crackdown, announcing that it was giving the army the authority to arrest civilians. Anonymous state officials told *Al Ahram* that this "could be a prelude to a major crackdown on Mohamed Morsi's supporters."

The slaughter in Egypt has proceeded with the support of the Obama administration, which signaled Friday that it would support a crackdown. US State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki announced that Washington would continue to avoid using the term "coup" to describe the military's seizure of power and imposition of martial law. By means of this terminological sleight of hand, the Obama administration is evading US laws banning aid to regimes that come to power through military coups so that it can continue to deliver \$1.3 billion in annual US aid to the Egyptian army.

"Our national security interests influence our policy as it relates to aid with Egypt," Psaki stated. "The continued provision of assistance to Egypt, consistent with our law, is important to our goal of advancing a responsible transition to democratic governance and is consistent with our national security interests. Egypt serves as a stabilizing pillar of regional peace and security, and the United States has a national security interest in a stable and successful democratic transition in Egypt."

Psaki's statement—making clear that the Obama administration sees continued support to the Egyptian junta as fundamental to its geostrategic interests—was effectively a green light to the army to launch the crackdown.

The Egyptian military regime is a key prop of US

imperialism in the Middle East. It not only suppresses the working class and all expression of political opposition at home, it helps Israel and the United States isolate the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, gives the US full use of the strategic Suez Canal, and supports Washington's Middle East wars.

In releasing a statement following the crackdown expressing his "deep concern," US Secretary of State John Kerry shed a few crocodile tears over a policy of repression that Washington supports.

Kerry also called for "all of Egypt's leaders (to) take a step back from the brink"—reflecting the Obama administration's preference for bringing the protests to a close and incorporating the MB as a force supporting the new junta.

European Union foreign policy high representative Catherine Ashton landed in Cairo Sunday night for talks, reportedly to promote similar plans to force the MB to end its protests and accept positions within the military regime. She will meet with top Egyptian officials today.

US backing for the Egyptian crackdown exposes claims that it is promoting a "democratic transition" in the Middle East. It aims to consolidate a counterrevolutionary dictatorship in Egypt by incorporating the MB into the junta if possible or, if necessary, by massacring MB protesters. Such a regime would then seek to crush opposition in the working class, implementing free-market cuts to vital fuel and food subsidies and aligning itself directly with US foreign policy in the region.

US support for the Egyptian crackdown also shatters the hypocritical pretexts Washington and its European allies gave for their imperialist wars in Libya and Syria, after the working class toppled Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak in 2011. The NATO powers attacked these countries, which had long been targeted for regime-change by elements of the US foreign policy establishment, while claiming the wars were humanitarian efforts to protect protesters from harm and foster democracy.

Washington and its allies have made no proposals for "no-fly zones" or "humanitarian intervention" in Egypt in the face of massacres of unarmed demonstrators by a military regime they support.

The killings also expose the bourgeois liberal and pseudo-left parties in Egypt that supported the Tamarod

(Rebel) alliance, which helped organize the coup. These organizations include the National Salvation Front (NSF) of Mohamed ElBaradei and the Revolutionary Socialists. (See also: "Egypt's Revolutionary Socialists seek to cover up support for military coup").

Tamarod was employed to divert mass working class and popular opposition to Mursi, who carried out right-wing policies and aligned himself with US imperialism during his time in power, behind factions of the Egyptian ruling class, including the old Mubarak apparatus, that is in conflict with pro-Brotherhood and Islamist sections of the bourgeoisie.

ElBaradei, who now serves as the junta's vice-president, cynically criticized "excessive use of force" against protesters. The former head of the United Nations' nuclear arms inspection agency played a critical role in international negotiations to obtain imperialist backing for the army's July 3 coup. Now, after hundreds have been butchered by the government of which he is a part, ElBaradei declares, "I am working hard and in every direction to end the confrontation peacefully."

In a statement, the NSF expressed its "deepest sorrow" for the killings, but added it "could not help" blaming the MB for the army's killings of MB protesters, accusing the Brotherhood of seeking to "increase the conflicts and cause more innocent casualties."



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