

Clashes spread in Egypt amid rising death toll from army massacre

Alex Lantier**16 August 2013**

Clashes erupted across Egypt yesterday in the wake of efforts by the Egyptian military junta to drown protests in blood. Following Wednesday's massacre, supporters of deposed Islamist President Mohamed Mursi protested and attacked government buildings throughout the country.

The army ousted Mursi in a July 3 coup aimed at preempting developing mass working class protests against Mursi's reactionary policies and moving back to the type of military-backed dictatorship that existed before the 2011 uprising against Hosni Mubarak. As casualties from Wednesday's bloodbath mount into the thousands and fighting spreads, the coup is placing Egypt on a path towards civil war and mass upheavals.

Thousands of relatives of the victims of Wednesday's massacres flocked to morgues and mosques where the bodies of victims are being held, chanting: "The army and police are one dirty hand!"

Health Ministry sources reported yesterday that the death toll from Wednesday's crackdown had risen to 638, with at least 4,200 injured—more than double the initial official figures. These figures, which do not include the bodies of protesters at facilities controlled by Mursi's Muslim Brotherhood (MB), are still substantial underestimates. Reuters reporters counted a further 228 bodies at northeast Cairo's Al-Imam mosque alone, and the MB has issued estimates that over 2,000 were killed and 10,000 wounded in Wednesday's crackdown.

As the death toll rose, Egyptian Prime Minister Hazem El-Beblawi issued a statement praising police for their "self-restraint" and justifying the massacre: "The state had to intervene to restore security and peace for Egyptians."

Groups of Mursi supporters attacked police stations in Giza, Port Said, Assuit, Helwan, Minya, and

Fayoum. They also stormed and torched the Giza governor's office yesterday afternoon and blocked Cairo's major Ring Road in both directions, bringing traffic in the capital to a halt.

Police also broke up a protest by several thousand Mursi supporters on the Corniche in Alexandria, killing three and wounding dozens.

Speaking to Reuters via Skype, MB spokesman Gehad El-Haddad said Wednesday's crackdown was a "very strong blow" to his organization, estimating the death toll at eight times the official figure. He added that several MB leaders had gone missing: "We can't confirm the whereabouts of all of them yet. Two of the top leaders have been shot but are not yet dead, as far as I know. About six of them have lost their sons and daughters."

El-Haddad made clear that the MB's central concern is that protests against the junta might escalate and escape their control. He said that the arrests and killings of MB leaders meant that the MB had lost "central coordination," adding: "After the blows and arrests and killings that we are facing, emotions are too high to be guided by anyone."

"It's beyond control now. There was always that worry. With every massacre that increases," Haddad said about anger among opponents of the junta. "The real danger comes when groups of people, angry by the loss of loved ones, start mobilizing on the ground."

The central danger feared by the MB, the junta and its imperialist backers is that rising violence and protests might trigger a movement in the working class, directed against the reactionary policies which both the MB and the junta support. All the factions of the Egyptian capitalist class and their allies in the US and Europe are determined to impose unpopular austerity measures, including cuts to vital fuel and food subsidies, to attack

the workers and crush the revolution.

Governments worldwide, fearing the explosive fallout from the massacre, are cynically trying to downplay their ties to the junta. US President Barack Obama issued a brief statement yesterday canceling joint Egyptian-US military exercises, but made no shift in US support for the junta. Washington still refuses to label the army's July 3 toppling of Mursi a "coup," so it can continue providing \$1.3 billion in yearly subsidies to the Egyptian army. (See: "Obama and the Egyptian massacre").

The office of French President François Hollande also issued a statement, declaring that "everything must be done to avoid civil war," after Hollande had summoned Egypt's ambassador in the wake of the crackdown.

Turkey's Islamist premier, Recep Tayyip Erdogan—who brutally suppressed mass protests against his own regime in June and fears a coup like the one that ousted Mursi—criticized the massacre in Egypt and US backing for the Egyptian army.

"Those who ignore the coup and don't even display the honorable behavior of calling a 'coup' a 'coup' share in the guilt of the massacre of those children," Erdogan said. "At this stage, what right do you have to speak of democracy, of universal values, of human rights and freedoms?"

Inside Egypt, however, the liberal bourgeoisie and sections of the affluent middle class closest to it are overwhelmingly supporting the coup and the massacre.

As if oblivious to the fact that supporting the junta's persecution of the MB strengthens the MB in the longer term—by allowing it to posture as the sole opponent of the junta's policies—they are backing the junta's moves to fully restore a military dictatorship in Egypt. This is because, after the emergence of mass strikes and protests earlier this year, they do not see the MB as their main enemy. Rather, they are terrified of the emergence of revolutionary struggles in the working class directed against the entire ruling elite.

This is reflected above all in the denunciations of Vice President Mohamed ElBaradei's decision to resign after Wednesday's massacre. ElBaradei withdrew in an attempt to distance himself from the crackdown he had supported.¹

This was a cynical maneuver to salvage what little remains of his political reputation: ElBaradei helped plan the July 3 coup and supported repeated bloody

crackdowns against pro-MB protesters. His maneuver was also exposed by recent revelations that, during the junta's internal discussions preparing Wednesday's bloodbath, he called for a resort to the "use of force within the limits of the law."

ElBaradei's resignation was too much, however, for the coup supporters in the Tamarod ("Rebel") alliance—a grouping through which ElBaradei's supporters, various youth groups, and the pseudo-left Revolutionary Socialists collaborated to promote the July 3 coup. They denounced him for not remaining steadfastly loyal to the coup and the crackdown.

"We were hoping that ElBaradei would do his role in explaining the situation to global public opinion and the international community, and clarify that Egypt is facing organized terrorism, which highly endangers Egyptian national security," Tamarod declared in a Facebook statement.

In a statement to ElBaradei, Tamarod spokesman Mahmoud Badr said, "Unfortunately, sir ... you have chosen to beautify your international image in front of your friends around the world at the expense of your image in front of the Egyptian people and your role [as vice-president]."

ElBaradei's maneuver was attacked even by officials of his own Constitution Party and of the National Salvation Front (NSF) umbrella group that it leads. Constitution Party leader Ahmed Darrag called ElBaradei's decision "an abandonment of his country at a time when Egypt needs him most to pass the current situation ... ElBaradei's stance does not represent me or the Constitution Party."



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