

Mass protests defy curfew, army crackdown in Egypt

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Mass protests in cities across Egypt defied a curfew and crackdown by Egypt's US-backed military junta yesterday, two days after the junta killed over 600 and wounded over 4,000 in a nationwide massacre.

The junta mobilized sharpshooters in helicopters and on rooftops and tanks, and thugs armed with sticks and machetes to attack marchers protesting the July 3 army coup that toppled Islamist President Mohamed Mursi and reimposed emergency rule. Initial reports indicated that at least 120 protesters were killed throughout the country, with hundreds more wounded.

Mursi's Muslim Brotherhood (MB) called for marches as part of a "day of rage" protest after Friday prayers. MB organized marches from 28 locations in the greater Cairo area to converge on Ramses Square, which became the focus of the junta's crackdown. Army units occupied Tahrir Square and set up tanks, armored vehicles and barbed-wire emplacements to block off large parts of downtown Cairo for the protests. Dead and wounded protesters were taken to nearby Al-Fath mosque in large numbers, with 95 people killed on Ramses Square, according to reports yesterday evening.

Gunfire aimed at Ramses Square protesters rang out throughout the day, as the army blocked off the area. The large Arab Contractors building near Ramses square burned out of control, with firefighters unable to reach the blaze. Later that night, the army surrounded the square and repeatedly attempted to storm Al-Fath mosque, with hundreds of people trapped inside fearing for their lives.

Tanks lined the streets in Alexandria, Egypt's second city, as security forces repeatedly clashed with protesters. Alexandria ambulance authority chief Amr Nasr said he had counted 23 protesters killed and 101 wounded, adding that the death toll would rise, as many

bodies had not yet reached the morgues.

Army sharpshooters lined the rooftops in Ismailia, where protesters shouting "peaceful" filmed one man trying to hold off a tank shot by unidentified snipers. At least seven people were killed and 20 injured in the city. Eight protesters were killed in clashes in Damietta, and protests also took place in Tanta, Fayoum and Assiut.

The junta is trying to justify the massacre of defenseless protesters, rallying support in the liberal bourgeoisie and sections of the middle class with false claims that the victims were armed terrorists. State TV put a banner in English titled "Egypt Fighting Terrorism" on its coverage of yesterday's crackdowns.

The MB has called on its supporters to mount nationwide protests against the junta every day for the next week.

Popular anger is escalating in Egypt and internationally over the repeated mass killings of protesters by the Egyptian junta and the complicity of Washington. Protests in Egypt are mobilizing forces beyond the right-wing MB's support base, including layers of urban youth who have clashed with police and army forces since the early days of the Egyptian revolution in 2011 and oppose the army's re-imposition of emergency rule.

The MB is increasingly worried about whether it can control the protests, fearing that as broader social layers move into opposition, they could develop into a revolutionary challenge by the working class to the entire regime—as in the early days of 2011.

MB spokesman Gehad El-Haddad gave voice to these fears in comments Thursday: "It's beyond control now. There was always that worry. With every massacre, that increases. The real danger comes when groups of people, angry by the loss of loved ones, start mobilizing

on the ground.”

Protests against the mass killings in Egypt have begun to spread internationally, with marches in the Palestinian territories, Turkey, Yemen, Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia. In the Indonesian capital, Jakarta, 1,000 protesters gathered outside the US embassy, carrying signs reading “Stop Egypt Massacre,” “Jihad for Egypt,” and “Stop Killing.”

In Turkey, approximately 2,000 people marched in Istanbul and Ankara, shouting slogans against US support for the crackdowns in Egypt.

A mass revolutionary struggle of the working class against the coup and repression in Egypt would be directed not only against the junta and governments supporting it internationally, but also against the junta’s liberal and pseudo-left supporters in the bourgeoisie and the affluent middle classes.

In Egypt, these forces—such as the National Salvation Front of Mohamed ElBaradei and the pseudo-left Revolutionary Socialists—backed the Tamarod alliance, which sought to channel mass working-class protests against Mursi behind the July 3 coup. (See also: Egypt’s Revolutionary Socialists seek to cover up support for military coup)

The mass murder in Egypt is also creating a political crisis in the US political establishment. There is rising concern that US President Barack Obama’s continued support for the Egyptian junta is discrediting Washington in the eyes of the world population. In brief remarks Thursday, Obama announced the cancellation of joint US-Egyptian military exercises, but did not cancel the \$1.3 billion in yearly US aid to the Egyptian army.

Republican Senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham called on Obama to suspend this funding yesterday. They said that the army was “taking Egypt down a dark path, one that the United States cannot and should not travel with them.”

Other countries are also seeking to distance themselves from the Egyptian junta. Turkey has recalled its ambassador to Egypt, and after consultations with the French government, German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s office said that Germany would reexamine its ties to Egypt before Monday’s European Union (EU) meeting on that subject.

Washington is increasingly concerned that as the MB’s leadership collapses due to arrests and repression

and its standoff with the junta hardens, sections of the MB will go underground and organize armed resistance to the Egyptian junta. This would be all the more explosive, as the US has organized wars by Islamist forces in both Libya and Syria. A civil war in Egypt could unleash fighting that could engulf the entire Middle East.

Noting widespread fears within the US government of an “extended armed insurrection” in Egypt, the *Wall Street Journal* quoted an anonymous senior US official: “There is the real possibility of civil war. There is a dangerous possibility that Egypt goes the way of Syria.”

To halt the slide toward a regional war, the working class must intervene independently against the Egyptian junta and the imperialist powers.

The *Journal* wrote that for US officials, “The nightmare scenario would be a civil war in Egypt that creates a crescent-shaped arc of instability from Syria and Lebanon to Iraq, Egypt, and Libya... A stockpile of arms lies in neighboring Libya, a country where the security situation is spiraling downward in a similar fashion. That impedes the ability of the Libyan government to lock down the arsenal accumulated by the late Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi. US officials worry eastern Libya could serve as a springboard for insurgents moving across the border into Egypt.”



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