

# Egyptian junta intensifies crackdown

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The US-backed military junta in Egypt continued its violent crackdown over the weekend against any opposition to its dictatorial regime.

On Sunday evening, the military erected barricades and positioned sharpshooters on rooftops to prevent anti-coup demonstrators from marching from six locations in the Egyptian capital Cairo towards the Supreme Constitutional Court.

In a statement published Sunday night, the coup leader and de facto dictator, General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, declared: “Our self-restraint will not continue. We will not accept any more attacks. We will meet with full force. Attackers want to destroy Egypt.”

On Saturday, police and military forces stormed the al-Fateh Mosque complex in Cairo’s Ramses Square, where 1,500 supporters of the deposed Islamist president, Mohamed Mursi, were under siege since Friday.

A video streamed by the social media site Bambuser recorded the scenes of terror and panic inside the mosque. As frightened protesters, some wearing gas masks, brought chairs and furniture to barricade the entrance, stun grenades and tear gas rounds shook the building. Towards the end, the video cuts out and the constant sound of gunfire can be heard against the background of the frightened voices of the people trapped inside the mosque.

The government did not confirm the numbers killed in the operation, but announced that 79 people had been killed and 549 wounded on Saturday in an alleged “fight against terrorism.” The junta is trying to justify the killing of protesters, the reintroduction of the notorious Mubarak-era emergency laws and a military dictatorship with the false claim that all anti-military protesters are armed terrorists.

Based on this propaganda, the regime has murdered, wounded and arrested thousands of protesters since it took power in a July 3 military coup. According to the figures given by the government, violence on Friday left at least 173 people dead, including 95 Cairo and 25 in Alexandria. Since last Wednesday more than 850 have

been killed according to the regime’s count; the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) has put the deaths in the thousands.

Amongst those killed on Friday was a son of the MB’s Supreme Guide, Mohamed Badie. According to reports, over 1,000 members of the MB, including half of its top leadership, were arrested.

The Egyptian government, meanwhile, is discussing a plan put forward by the military-installed prime minister, Hazem al-Beblawi, to ban the MB altogether. Such a move would force Egypt’s largest Islamist organization back underground and turn the clock back to the days of the Mubarak dictatorship, when it was officially banned and thousands of its members arrested.

Beblawi, a founding member of the Egyptian Social Democratic Party, told reporters: “There will be no reconciliation with those whose hands have been stained with blood and who turned weapons against the state and its institutions.”

On Sunday, the MB reduced the number of marches it had initially planned to stage as part of a week of nationwide protests against the coup. The *Egyptian Independent* suggested that “the change in tactics may be an attempt to reduce human losses after hundreds died in confrontations with security forces two days ago.”

While this surely plays a role, the MB fears above all that it might lose control over the protests as broader layers of the population reject a return to the Mubarak regime and renewed dictatorship.

Gehad El-Haddad warned on 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.”

His fear that a continued crackdown might spark a renewed upsurge of mass working-class struggles is shared by the imperialist powers.

Meeting his Qatari counterpart, Mohammad Al Attiyah, Germany’s Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle warned on Saturday that the situation in Egypt could turn into a civil war and urged a political solution.

Westerwelle said: “In its way of dealing with the opposition, the Egyptian government must now be cautious and find a solution to de-escalate the situation. There is no alternative to bilateral talks.”

The EU will hold an emergency meeting today in Brussels on the situation in Egypt. Some European states are calling for cutting off aid to Egypt worth one billion euros.

The *Economist* summed up the fears and considerations of the imperialist powers: “The question is whether suppression really is now the way to deal with the Muslim Brothers, or whether it simply adds to the mayhem.” It continued: “The general’s worst mistake, however, is to ignore the chief lesson of the Arab spring. That is ordinary people yearn for dignity. They hate being bossed around by petty officials and ruled by corrupt autocrats. They reject the apparatus of a police state. Instead they want better lives, decent jobs and some basic freedoms.”

A struggle for social and democratic rights and against dictatorship would be directed not only against the junta and its international backers, but also against the affluent liberal and pseudo-left milieu in Egypt that continues to glorify the army and police crackdown.

Middle-class groups such as the Revolutionary Socialists (RS) and the National Salvation Front backed the right-wing Tamarod conspiracy to channel mass popular opposition to Mursi behind the July 3 military coup.

Tamarod leader Mohamed Badr declared over the weekend: “What Egypt is passing through now is the price, a high price, of getting rid of the Brotherhood’s fascist group before it takes over everything and ousts us all.” He then declared unconditional support for the military crackdown: “I did not see anything bad from the army. They did not interfere in politics and I am witness to that. I back its decisions on my own and without any instructions as I think they are right and getting us where we want.”

After two years of bitter revolutionary struggles, the affluent middle-class layers are demanding an end to all protests and strikes that increasingly threaten their fortunes and privileges. They have moved so sharply to the right that their counterrevolutionary politics literally bear a striking resemblance to the terror tactics of the former Mubarak regime, when it unleashed its thugs to attack protesting workers and youth in Tahrir Square in the “Battle of the Camels.”

On Thursday, Tamarod, with the backing off the NSF, called for the formation of “neighborhood watches in all

cities and villages to protect ourselves, our nation, our public and private properties, our mosques and our churches.” Armed thugs subsequently assisted the security forces in its crackdown against anti-coup protesters.

The sharp shift to the right, with calls for dictatorship from ruling elites and their pseudo-left and liberal supporters, is an international phenomenon. On Friday, the *New York Times* published a column under the title “Democracy in Egypt can wait” by Charles Kupchan, a professor at the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service and former National Security Council official in the Clinton administration.

Commenting on “the Egyptian military’s bloody crackdown,” Kupchan notes: “That reality requires a sobering course correction in American policy. Rather than viewing the end of autocracy’s monopoly as a ripe moment to spread democracy in the region, Washington should downsize its ambition and work with transitional governments to establish the foundations of responsible, even if not democratic, rule.”

Similarly, Leslie Gelb, a former assistant secretary of state in the Carter administration and onetime head of the US Council on Foreign Relations, wrote a similar August 17 column for the *Daily Beast* entitled “It’s Time to Hold Our Nose and Back Egypt’s Military.”

“[T]hough it’s not nice to say,” Gelb writes, “the [Egyptian] military is doing what a lot of governments around the world would under the same conditions.”



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