

Egyptian junta raids Islamist strongholds, intensifies repression

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Egyptian police and military forces raided the Giza suburb of Kerdasa on Thursday arresting dozens of alleged Islamist militants.

In a civil war-like atmosphere, a large number of soldiers and policemen backed by armored vehicles and helicopters surrounded the town in the early morning hours, blocking its entrances. Security forces and armed Islamists reportedly exchanged gunfire. A police general named Nabil Farrag was shot when the military moved into the town.

Security forces acted with the utmost brutality. Footage showed special units armed with automatic rifles conducting door-to-door searches and firing tear gas canisters at inhabitants. During the attack, Interior Ministry spokesman Hany Abdel Latif told state media, “security forces will not retreat until Kerdasa is cleansed of all terrorists and criminal nests.”

Kerdasa is known as an Islamist stronghold near the Giza Plateau where the famous Pyramids of Giza are located. It is among the areas where hostility to the army and police has grown the most, after the July 3 military coup against Islamist President Mohamed Mursi and the Muslim Brotherhood (MB).

Tensions further escalated after the junta violently assaulted protesters and sit-ins by Mursi supporters across Egypt on August 14, killing hundreds and arresting thousands. The same day Islamists launched a retaliatory attack on Kerdasa’s police station, killing 11 police officers and driving police units out of the town.

According to the BBC, thousands of pro-Mursi protesters marched in Kerdasa the day before the military raid, calling for the downfall of coup leader General Abdel Fatah al-Sisi.

Locals speaking to BBC after the assault blamed outsiders for the August 14 attack on the police station and denounced the terror tactics of the junta. “Not

everyone in Kerdasa is a terrorist,” one youth said. There are extremist groups, but the town is full of peace-loving people. It’s the authorities who harass us, beat us and arrest us.” Even according to state TV, only three of the 65 suspects arrested were wanted for the attack on the police station.

Nonetheless, Egyptian state television sought to present the Kerdasa raid as part of the military’s so-called “fight against terrorism.” In fact, it is part of the junta’s attempt to silence all opposition to its bloody regime since the July 3 military coup.

In a similar operation on Monday, large numbers of soldiers and police forces stormed the city of Delga in the Southern governorate of Minya to break the resistance of Mursi supporters there. In the past weeks, the city has witnessed continued anti-coup demonstrations. As in Kerdasa, scores of protesters had been killed on August 14 when security forces launched a country-wide assault on pro-Mursi sit-ins.

As part of its bloody offensive, the military regime is also seeking to inflame and exploit growing sectarian divisions between Muslims and Christians.

The recent crackdowns and vicious maneuvers highlight the continuing crisis of the military dictatorship, which was established to suppress the mass working class strikes and protests against Mursi and the Islamists in the days and weeks preceding the coup. After the military takeover, the army has repeatedly moved violently against mass strikes, such as the August Suez steel workers strike, in the name of fighting Islamism.

The junta’s interim government led by military generals and free-market politicians and bankers has no program for the Egyptian masses save massive impoverishment and repression.

Only days before the assaults, the military-backed

interim government announced it would extend the state of emergency for at least two months. The overnight curfew in the capital of Cairo and most other major Egyptian cities will also remain in place.

At the same time, the junta is working on a constitution further enshrining its dominance over Egyptian society. The military-nominated Constitutional Expert Committee has decided that the selection of the defense minister should be solely the right of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. It also proposes a ban on the formation of religiously-oriented political parties, which, if implemented, threatens the existence of at least 15 Egyptian parties, including the Freedom and Justice Party, the MB's political arm.

The past-two-and-a-half months of bloody repression have highlighted again the fact that the struggle for democratic and social rights cannot be outsourced to the US-funded Egyptian army. It can be advanced only by the working class, the main force behind the Egyptian revolution. Financed by US imperialism, the military represents the same fundamental class interests as the Mursi regime, which was backed by Washington before the coup.

Moreover, the junta's alleged "fight against terror," which is supported by the entire liberal and pseudo-left milieu in Egypt, will in the long run only strengthen the reactionary Islamist forces.

According to an article in the *New York Times* a local leader of the ultra-conservative al-Gama'a al-Islamiya commented on the mass arrests and shootings of Islamists in Degla: "If the coup leaders think the anger is going to fade they are wrong, because we are gaining support every day."

A struggle against the renewed military dictatorship and the threat of ever more violent sectarian fighting must be directed not only against the junta and the MB, but also against the affluent liberal and pseudo-left milieu in Egypt which constitutes the new social basis for military rule. Most of the liberal and pseudo-left groups which first helped to channel the mass working class discontent behind the military are now the most aggressive supporters of a new police state.

According to an *Ahram Online* report most "left" and liberal parties pledged their "full support" for an extended state of emergency at a meeting with interim president Adly Mansour on September 15. The parties

in attendance included the Egyptian Social Democratic Party, the Socialist Popular Alliance Party, the Tagammu Party, the Free Egyptians Party, the Rebel Movement (Tamarod), the Constitution Party, the Democratic Front Party and the Conference Party.



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