

Amid protests, Egyptian court suspends trial of ousted President Mursi

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5 November 2013

An Egyptian court was forced Monday to adjourn the trial of ousted Muslim Brotherhood President Mohamed Mursi, after he and his co-defendants repeatedly interrupted the proceedings by denouncing the trial as the illegitimate expression of a criminal military coup.

The opening of the trial marked the first public appearance of Mursi since he was overthrown by the military on July 3. Since then, he has been held incommunicado at a military base.

Outside the Police Academy complex, where the trial is being held, hundreds of Muslim Brotherhood supporters faced off with heavily armed riot police backed by armored vehicles deployed by the army. In a bid to limit the size of protests, the site of the trial had been switched only at midnight the night before from the Tora prison, on the outskirts of Cairo, to the sprawling police training facility about an hour and a half from the center of the Egyptian capital.

Some 20,000 military and police personnel were deployed to suppress any challenges to the trial. Protests also took place outside the High Court and the Supreme Constitutional Court in Cairo, and it was reported that employees at some government office buildings and students at private schools were told to stay home for fear of unrest.

Military roadblocks and barbed-wire barriers were thrown up around Cairo's Tahrir Square to prevent crowds from gathering in the square, the symbolic center of protests since the popular upheavals that toppled the US-backed dictatorship of President Hosni Mubarak in February 2011.

In Alexandria, Egypt's second city, there were clashes reported between Mursi supporters and opponents that left several people injured.

Mursi is being tried for incitement to murder in

connection with killings outside the Ittihadiya presidential palace on December 12, 2012 during mass protests against his issuing of a decree immunizing himself against any appeals to the Egyptian courts—which were still dominated by holdovers from the Mubarak regime—and asserting quasi-dictatorial powers.

Significantly, Mursi and his co-defendants are being tried for incitement to murder, which carries a possible death penalty, while Mubarak, whose regime killed nearly 1,000 and wounded thousands more during the 2011 uprising, was prosecuted merely for failing to protect the victims. His conviction on this charge was thrown out last August, and he is now facing a re-trial that is to run concurrently with the prosecution of Mursi in the same Police Academy.

The military regime headed by Army chief Abdel Fattah al-Sisi that is trying Mursi and his 14 co-defendants for incitement to murder is itself responsible for massacres that claimed the lives of at least 1,300 opponents of the military coup, while leaving thousands more wounded.

In the wake of the July 3 coup, dozens of top leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood and thousands of its members have also been rounded up, and the organization, Egypt's largest political party, has been outlawed.

The military intervened with its coup last July to preempt the mass upheavals that had brought millions into the streets against Mursi last summer.

This movement had been rekindled by the right-wing and authoritarian policies adopted by Mursi's government, including its close alignment with US imperialist policy in the Middle East and its turn toward the International Monetary Fund and the implementation of free-market austerity policies. While

overthrowing the Islamist ruling party was the coup's immediate objective, its underlying aim was to intimidate and suppress the movement of the Egyptian working class. Militant opposition has continued to grow in the aftermath of Mubarak's 2011 downfall.

Ferried to the police court in a helicopter, Mursi showed up at the trial in a dark suit, having refused to wear the white garb reserved for prisoners in the dock.

Asked to give his name at the start of the proceedings, Mursi, who was held with his co-defendants in a barred cage, replied: "I am Dr. Mohamed Mursi, the president of the republic. I am Egypt's legitimate president. You have no right to conduct a trial into presidential matters."

He continued interrupting the judge, declaring, "This is not a legitimate trial, this trial is part of the coup; the coup itself is a crime."

His co-defendants chanted "Down with military rule," while his supporters in the court room denounced the court and participated in scuffles with opponents of the Muslim Brotherhood.

As the courtroom descended into chaos, the judge ordered the trial adjourned until January. Mursi was removed to Burj al-Arab prison outside Alexandria, while his co-defendants were taken to Cairo's Tora Prison.

This judicial farce underscored the politically sordid character of the official visit to Cairo staged just the day before by US Secretary of State John Kerry, who met with the chief of the ruling military junta, Gen. al-Sisi and other officials to assure them of Washington's continued backing.

Officials of the Cairo junta told *Al Ahram* that they saw Kerry's stance as a signal of Washington's backing for the "irreversible end" of the Muslim Brotherhood—that is, for the campaign of bloody police-state repression that has followed the July 3 coup.

While assuring the junta leaders that Washington's temporary suspension of the delivery of a few weapons systems in the wake of the coup was merely a formality required by Congress and not a "punishment" for overthrowing the elected president, Kerry mouthed a few platitudes about the need for the junta to avoid politically motivated arrests and provide fair trials for detainees.

But he made no mention whatsoever of the political trial of the ousted Egyptian president, set to begin only

hours after his plane left Cairo. This silence was the clearest signal of continuing US support for the military crackdown.



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