

Egyptian military regime steps up repression

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1 November 2014

The military regime of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has issued a raft of decrees aimed at stamping out dissent and consolidating the military's power.

Al-Sisi, who holds absolute executive power pending parliamentary elections that may be held in December or January, issued a decree authorising the military to guard vital public facilities. Anyone attacking such facilities, including but not limited to power stations, the electricity distribution network, pipelines, oil and gas installations and the transport network, will be subject to a military trial.

The abolition of military trials for civilians was one of the key demands of the mass uprising that toppled the dictator Hosni Mubarak in February 2011.

Al-Sisi cited the ongoing violence in the poverty stricken north Sinai, and bombings and kidnappings in Cairo and elsewhere, as the justification for what amounts to martial law. He also declared a three-month state of emergency in north Sinai along with a 5 p.m. to 7 a.m. curfew, following an attack by militants that killed more than 30 security officials and injured another 30. While hundreds of security personnel have been killed in the past year since the ouster of Muslim Brotherhood (MB) President Mohammed Mursi, this was the deadliest single incident.

The government has deployed 7,000 military personnel and army helicopters in north Sinai, targeting the militant group Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis and killing and arresting hundreds of people whom it claims are "terrorists".

It has worked closely with both the US and Israel. Last month, Washington supplied Egypt with 10 Apache helicopters "to help the Egyptian government counter extremists who threaten US, Egyptian and Israeli security", while Tel Aviv has allowed Egypt to deploy a larger number of troops in Sinai than permitted under the 1978-79 Camp David Accords. Cairo has in turn allowed Israel to carry out a series of drone attacks and surveillance sorties on Sinai, despite having earlier insisted that it would not allow other countries to use Egyptian territory to launch attacks.

In an act of supreme cynicism and vindictiveness, the military regime closed Gaza's sole crossing point into Egypt at Rafah until "further notice"—claiming that the militants were operating out of Gaza—thereby intensifying Israel's seven-year blockade of Gaza. Cairo said it would expand the "buffer zone" between Sinai and Gaza, clear all the tunnels into Gaza and demolish 680 homes along the border in an operation named "temporary demographic redistribution."

This comes just days after a donors' conference in Cairo that pledged \$5.4 billion to Gaza, half of which is to be spent on reconstruction, much less than the \$4 billion that the Palestinian Authority (PA) had asked for.

The ostensible target of these and other new laws are the Islamists and MB, as there are new powers to control the mosques and at least 12,000 clerics have been banned from delivering sermons.

Former President Mursi has been served with another charge that carries the death sentence—passing on security information to Qatar. He already faces the death penalty in three separate trials.

Last July, a court sentenced MB leader Mohammed Badie to life imprisonment and confirmed 10 death sentences on MB members, nine of them in absentia. Hundreds of Islamists and their supporters have been sentenced to death in drumhead trials.

This follows a crackdown on the Brotherhood that resulted in the deaths of at least 3,000 people, 1,000 of whom were killed in a single day, and the imprisonment of more than 16,000, according to official figures. Activists claim that the real number of those detained is 40,000.

The real target of this repression is the working class and young people. The military junta fears another mass eruption by Egypt's restive youth and workers over increasing unemployment, poverty, power and water outages, removal of subsidies, violence, kidnappings, corruption and injustice, as well as the return to government of former Mubarak-era figures.

Such have been the tensions in the universities that the

authorities delayed the start of the new semester by one month, until October 11, to enable security and surveillance measures to be put in place. Since then, police have stormed at least five universities, killing one student at Alexandria University, and detaining hundreds on charges including destroying public property and violating a protest law even stricter than those laws in place during the Mubarak era.

On Monday, Prime Minister Ibrahim Mahlab announced that the new law applied to schools and universities, and even to school children and students, saying that they could be tried by military courts if they “sabotaged” educational facilities.

The next day, the government sent the military into Mansoura University where students were protesting, demanding the release of fellow students detained by the authorities and denouncing the deployment of troops in Sinai. Armed forces were sent in to back up police who used tear gas to disperse the students.

The government has given university presidents new powers to expel students or sack staff suspected of “crimes that disturb the academic process.” Cairo University has banned all political activity.

The police are to be expanded under new arrangements called “Community Police” to include civilians who will be allowed to make arrests, creating a vast system of neighbourhood informers and intimidation.

Restrictive laws require NGOs to register before November 10. In a vaguely worded law, any organisation or person charged with receiving money from an overseas organisation or country could end up in jail for life.

There has been a massive crackdown on the media, exemplified by the kangaroo trial of the three Al-Jazeera journalists, that has stifled any criticism of the military regime. Now the government is examining mechanisms for policing online and social media.

While the military junta has established a ruthless dictatorship, declaring it is putting an end to “terrorism” and restoring “stability”, its real aim is to impose reign of terror against the working class.

The military acceded to Mubarak’s ouster in 2011 to prevent the working class joining up with the student-led protest movement. It then worked closely with the Muslim Brotherhood after it came to power in June 2012 to contain the revolution, with al-Sisi himself heading the Ministry of Defence in Mursi’s government. In July 2013, the military launched an illegal coup to pre-empt a mass uprising by the working class and youth against Mursi and the Brotherhood.

Since then the military has used the pretext of fighting terrorism to legitimise the return of a bloody dictatorship in Egypt and carry out new attacks on the working class. It has worked closely with the most reactionary forces on the planet, including the US, the feudal House of Saud and the Gulf sheikdoms of Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). These are the same forces that funded, armed and trained Islamist terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda, Al Nusra and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to carry out wars of regime change in Libya and Syria on behalf of the imperialist powers.

More recently, al-Sisi deployed Egypt’s military forces in Libya, along with those of the UAE, on behalf of Khalifa Hifter, the renegade general close to the CIA, further destabilising the war-torn country. This is the first time in decades that Egypt has deployed the military outside its own borders.

None of this could have been carried out without the pseudo-left and liberal organisations, which consciously channelled the mass protests against Mursi and the MB behind the army.

The military coup did not constitute a “second revolution” against the MB as forces like Tamarod, the liberal and Nasserite parties of the National Salvation Front, or pseudo-left groups like the Revolutionary Socialists claimed. Instead, it paved the way for the return of a military-police state whose aim is to intensify the crackdown not only on its Islamist rivals in the Egyptian bourgeoisie, but on the working class—the main force behind the revolution.



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