

Egyptian junta imposes state of emergency after attacks on Coptic churches

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Egyptian dictator Abdel Fattah al-Sisi announced in a televised speech Sunday night the imposition of a three-month state of emergency. The immediate pretext was provided by the attacks on two Coptic churches on Palm Sunday, which killed at least 40 and injured more than 120.

The first attack took place at the St. George church on Sunday morning during the service in Tanta in the Nile delta. Reports say that the blast was caused by explosives concealed under a seat. At least 29 people died in the attack and 70 were injured.

Shortly afterwards, someone sought to gain entry to the St. Markus Cathedral in Alexandria, where the Coptic Pope Tawadros II was giving the mass. When security forces blocked the attacker, he blew himself up and killed 11 people. Many more were severely injured.

On Sunday afternoon, the Egyptian branch of Islamic State, Wilayat Sinai, claimed responsibility for the attacks. Its fighters carried out the two attacks on the churches, according to the IS platform Amak. It also threatened more attacks on Egypt's Christian minority.

There has not yet been an independent investigation into the attacks. Following past attacks on the Coptic community in Egypt, there were repeated rumours about the country's intelligence service being involved. The notorious interior minister in the Mubarak government which was overthrown shortly afterwards, Habib al-Adli, was considered to have been the mastermind behind an attack on the al-Qiddissine church in Alexandria on 1 January, 2011.

Whoever was behind the attacks, they are playing directly into the hands of the most reactionary forces. General al-Sisi literally drowned the Egyptian revolution in blood. The junta, headed by the US-trained general, has incarcerated, condemned to death or shot thousands of regime opponents since it took

power in a 2013 coup. With the imposition of the state of emergency, it is now creating conditions for an even broader crackdown against all opposition.

Al-Sisi warned in his speech, "Various steps have to be taken. The first is the declaring of a state of emergency in Egypt for three months, according to which the necessary legal and constitutional processes will be executed. We are declaring this state of emergency to protect and secure our country, and prevent potential disturbances." The general also ordered the mobilisation of the military to support the security forces. "The state of emergency allows both the armed forces and the police to execute those procedures necessary to combat the threats of terrorism and its financing, maintain security around the country and protect public and private property, as well as preserving the lives of citizens," he added.

The Egyptian parliament gave its stamp of approval to the state of emergency on Monday. "The state of emergency enables the army and police to carry out measures which for the combatting of terrorism, the maintenance of security throughout the country and the protection of private and public property [...] are necessary," it declared.

The imposition of a national state of emergency illustrates how far the counter-revolution has developed since the bloody July 2013 military coup against Islamist President Mohammed Mursi. Under Hosni Mubarak, who was brought down by the Egyptian revolution on 11 February, 2011, a state of emergency was enforced almost without interruption for three decades. This formed the basis of the Western-backed dictatorship under Mubarak. Its lifting was one of the revolution's central demands.

Now, two weeks after the former dictator was freed from prison, his notorious state of emergency is once

again in force. It permits arrests without a warrant, house searches without a judicial order and nightly curfews. Wiretapping and spying are made easier, decisions from special courts cannot be appealed and media outlets can be censored or banned.

The online magazine al-Monitor reported, citing an Egyptian parliamentary deputy, that the state of emergency enables the police to detain “suspects who are known to the security forces but against whom suspicions are insufficient for proceedings in court” for up to 45 days.

With these measures, which are being sold as part of the “fight against terrorism,” the junta is responding above all to the deepening social catastrophe, which could produce a new revolutionary explosion among the workers and impoverished masses at any moment. At the beginning of March, protests broke out over the regime’s decision to ration subsidised bread. February saw a strike of 3,000 textile workers in Mahalla al-Kubra. In January, 19 oil workers in Suez were charged because they called for a strike.

Under these conditions, the imperialist powers are demonstratively strengthening their support for their man on the Nile. US President Donald Trump, who just last week welcomed the dictator at the White House, used the attack to once again show his strong support for al-Sisi. “I have great confidence that President al-Sisi will handle situation properly,” he wrote on Twitter. The American embassy declared, “The United States stand firmly by the side of the Egyptian government and population in order to defeat terrorism.”



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