

Egypt's Military Consolidates Dictatorship as Washington Reviews Aid

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Egypt's military junta continued its crackdown Tuesday with large numbers of new arrests, including that of the Mohamed Badie, the so-called supreme guide, or spiritual leader, of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB).

The move comes in the wake of the July 3 coup that ousted Egypt's elected president, Mohamed Mursi, a longtime member of the Islamist group, and a series of mass killings that the government says has claimed nearly 850 lives, while MB supporters placed the death toll at over 2,000.

The arrest of Badie, 70, followed that of two of his top aides and has been accompanied by a nationwide roundup of MB leaders that is forcing the movement underground. This generalized repression strongly suggests that the military-controlled regime is preparing to outlaw the Brotherhood. Even previous dictatorships, such as those of Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak, had not gone this far, but to some extent tolerated and even encouraged the MB as a counterweight to the emergence of working class and left-wing opposition.

The systematic repression of the Brotherhood, which is estimated to have a million members and the support of close to a third of the Egyptian electorate, is conceivable only by means of a sustained and brutal dictatorship.

While Badie is to be put on trial August 25 on charges of incitement to murder stemming from clashes that took place before Mursi's ouster between Muslim Brotherhood supporters and opponents, Hosni Mubarak—the former dictator whose regime murdered hundreds in its attempt to suppress the 2011 revolution that overthrew him—may be freed from prison by the end of this week.

Judicial officials in Cairo reported that an Egyptian court will convene Wednesday inside the Tora prison, where Mubarak is being held—and where MB leaders are being jailed—to rule on a petition to free the former dictator on bail, following the dismissal of corruption charges against him. While he still faces trial on charges related to the massacre of demonstrators in 2011, there is growing suspicion that the military-controlled regime will ensure that he enjoys impunity.

Mubarak's release would sum up the significance of the July 3 coup and the subsequent wave of carnage, which increasingly has emerged as the restoration of the regime overthrown by the January 25, 2011 revolution, albeit on an even more repressive basis. His release as thousands are being thrown into prison would provoke mass opposition.

Most of the thousands who have been killed and wounded over the past week are drawn

from Egypt's masses of poor and working class, as well as layers of the lower middle class. Those being shot by the security forces do not include the more privileged and often NGO-connected elements that are the core constituency of the pseudo-left organizations like the Revolutionary Socialists.

These elements backed the right-wing conspiracy of the Tamarod Coalition to divert mass hostility to the Muslim Brotherhood government behind the July military coup and have since provided political justifications for the junta's crimes.

Driving home the criminal nature of the regime was the revelation Monday that 37 MB supporters, rounded up during the suppression of demonstrators at Cairo's al-Fath mosque, had died the day before while in police custody. Officials gave several conflicting accounts of the mass killing, first suggesting that they had died while trying to escape from prison. Then the report was given that they were killed when assailants tried to take over a prison van in which they were being transported. Finally, it was put out that they suffocated to death after tear gas was fired into the crowded van.

A reporter for the London *Telegraph* who was able to get into the Cairo morgue, however, cited accounts by family members and morgue workers that several of the bodies had gunshot wounds to the head or chest and signs of torture. Others said that morgue officials were refusing to release the bodies, unless relatives signed forms agreeing that the cause of death was asphyxiation.

Meanwhile, the junta has seized upon the deaths Monday of 25 policemen in the Sinai desert near the Rafah border crossing with Gaza to bolster its pretense that the bloody state violence in Cairo and elsewhere is a "struggle against terrorism."

State media reports equated the killers of the police with the Muslim Brotherhood, and Egyptian television carried extensive coverage of their flag-draped coffins being returned to Cairo.

In fact, much as in the massacre of prisoners the day before, there was more than one contradictory report given as to how the policemen were killed. Initially, it was put out that the vehicles in which they were riding had been attacked with rocket-propelled grenades. Then it was reported that militants forced the vehicles to stop and ordered the police to lie on the ground before shooting them execution-style.

And, as the *Telegraph* reported, the grisly photographs of the slain police "raised doubts: the bodies appeared to have been lined up after death. The hands of one were behind his back, as if tied, yet there was no binding."

The Muslim Brotherhood, while condemning the killing of the police, charged that the regime's security forces had carried out the killings themselves to distract attention from the massacre of prisoners the day before and provide a pretext for intensified repression.

Faced with a steady stream of reports of bloody crimes by the Egyptian junta, President Barack Obama met with his national security advisers on Tuesday to review the \$1.3 billion in annual military aid that Washington gives Cairo. A White House spokesman denied reports Tuesday that the administration had already cut off aid to the Egyptian regime, insisting that the matter remained under review.

The US administration has not declared the overthrow of Mursi a coup, a finding that under US law would require suspending all aid until an elected government was restored to power. It may seek to delay aid, as it did with the delivery of F-16 fighter planes last month, to pressure the regime. However, it faces pressure from arms manufactures such as Lockheed, for which Egypt is a lucrative market. With Saudi Arabia and other reactionary Gulf state monarchies pledging to make up any aid that the US cuts, moreover, the Cairo junta has insisted it will not bow to US pressure.

At a press conference in China Monday, US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel appeared to wash his hands of the bloodbath being carried out by the US-funded and trained military. "Our ability to influence the outcome in Egypt is limited," Hagel said. "It's up to the Egyptian people. They are a large, great, sovereign nation and it will be their responsibility to sort this out."

In a bid to head off a civil war in Egypt and the destabilization of a regime that has served as a lynchpin of imperialist rule for decades, the United Nations Tuesday sent its under-secretary general for political affairs, Jeffrey Feltman, to Cairo. Until last year, Feltman was US assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern Affairs.

In January 2011, before Mubarak's fall, Feltman said that Mubarak would not suffer the same fate as deposed Tunisian dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, insisting: "What happened in Tunisia strikes me as uniquely Tunisian."

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