

# The Egyptian Military Massacre. The Role of the U.S. Government in the Egyptian Crisis

The Political crisis deepens

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At least 54 people have been reported killed outside the Republican Guard headquarters in Cairo on the morning of July 8. Witnesses from the ongoing sit-in organized by the Muslim Brotherhood demanding the return of President Mohamed Morsi to office say that the shooting was unprovoked and resulted in the deaths of innocent men, women and children.

The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) which seized power on July 3 immediately denied responsibility for the massacre and claimed that their soldiers were attacked by armed people within the crowd. Military spokespersons say that their forces were merely acting in self-defense against purported “terrorists.”

Medical witnesses on the scene of the shooting said that a field hospital had been established prior to the massacre. During the early morning hours, tear gas had been fired in an effort to prevent additional people from joining the sit-in.

President Morsi is rumored to be held in the Republican Guard building and the protesters are demanding his immediate release and restoration to office. Participants were conducting morning prayers when the tear gas and firing of live ammunition began.

According to a report published by the state-run Ahram Online, “At first, around dawn, we had live ammunition wounds coming in; one guy was shot in the neck. We had over 40 dead, including a ten-month-old child and a 65-year-old woman,” said Dr Hassan Ahmed, an emergency medic at Cairo’s Qasr Al-Aini hospital, who had been manning the field hospital at the sit-in. (July 8)

“We had many birdshot wounds to the face, seven to the eyes. Ambulances were getting in but only a handful, we had hundreds who needed proper medical assistance, so we had to deal with the patients here and make priorities.”

Developments on July 8 have taken the political and class conflicts in Egypt to new levels. With the military removing the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) government of President Mohamed Morsi from office on July 3, the polarization between the political forces opposed to the ousted administration and its supporters has risen substantially.

Not only is the struggle being waged between the supporters and opponents of the FJP government but Islamist parties outside the Muslim Brotherhood have also broken with Morsi. The Al Nour Party, a Salafist group, appeared at the press conference where Gen. Abdul Fatah al-Sisi announced the formation of an interim governing council on July 3.

The military had given the FJP government a 48-hour ultimatum on July 1 to either form a broader government moving towards new elections within six months or face removal. The Tamarod or Rebel movement has been credited with launching a petition campaign and mass demonstrations which demanded the resignation of the president.

Although millions were reported to have demonstrated in support of the demand that Morsi be forced to call early elections, it was the SCAF that acted decisively in taking control of the presidential office, refusing to take orders from the president, closing down media outlets that support the Muslim Brotherhood, arresting key political leaders including the president and announcing to the people of Egypt and the international community that the government of the FJP was no longer in charge of the state.

Since the developments of July 3 various parties and coalitions in opposition to President Morsi have supported the military actions and characterized these developments as part of the ongoing revolutionary process in Egypt which began on January 25, 2011. On February 11, 2011, after weeks of strikes, rebellions and mass demonstrations, the SCAF took control and forced the regime of former President Hosni Mubarak out of office, jailing the former leader, members of his family and other key figures in the government.

Although on both occasions the military and other political forces inside the country have said that the army was acting on behalf of the people in an effort to preserve the Egyptian state, these scenarios reveal a key weakness in the democratic movement and that is the question of the seizure of power. One element missing from the uprisings of 2011 and 2013 is the inability of the workers, youth, farmers, intellectuals and other democratic forces to seize power in their own names.

#### Impact of the July 8 Incident on the Current Crisis

Since the July 3 coup by the military, new problems have surfaced in the attempt to form the proposed interim governing council. Later in the aftermath of the installation of interim President Adly Mansour, chief of the Constitutional Court, another announcement was made on July 6 by the SCAF that former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Mohamed ElBaradei, had been appointed as prime minister of the purported transitional body.

Yet there were problems associated with this appointment of ElBaradei when leaders from the Al Nour Party objected. Later it was reported that Ziad Bahaa of the Social Democratic Party had agreed to take the position of premier.

Nonetheless, after the massacre on July 8, the Al Nour Party withdrew from talks on the formation of the interim government and national reconciliation. Two other Islamist parties, the Strong Egypt and Al Wasat have also condemned the killings.

ElBaradei condemned the shooting at the Republican Guard headquarters ahead of the announcement by the SCAF of a military-appointed commission to investigate the killings. However, the military continued to justify its actions by releasing a video that claimed to show a gunman outside the building attacking the military.

Internationally throughout the region there have been statements of condemnation against the massacre. The governments of Turkey, Gaza, Qatar, the European Union and Iran deplored the killings and called for restraint by all political forces inside the country

including the military.

Although there have been differences of opinion over whether to characterize the military actions of July 3 as a “coup”, the massacre on July 8 will inevitably change the course of the debate. In whose interests would the military be acting by unleashing such violence on the people when in fact the FJP government had already been overthrown?

### The Role of the U.S. Government in the Egyptian Crisis

Since the late 1970s, successive U.S. administrations have poured tens of billions of dollars into the Egyptian military and economy. The defense forces have played a dominant role within the Egyptian state since the seizure of power by the Free Officers Movement headed by Gamel Abdel Nasser and Mohamed Naguib in 1952.

Later a split between the nationalist forces headed by Nasser and the Muslim Brotherhood which supported Naguib resulted in the banning of the Islamist group by the Revolutionary Command Council then headed by Nasser. The Muslim Brotherhood was accused of attempting to assassinate Nasser on more than one occasion.

The struggle between the Soviet Union and the U.S. was also played out within the framework of developments in Egypt after 1954. Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal which was built and owned by Britain and France in 1956 prompting an invasion by London, Paris and Tel Aviv.

The war ended soon when the U.S. demanded the withdrawal of British troops. The U.S. viewed the French and British actions against Egypt as an effort to reclaim Europe's supremacy within world imperialism after being supplanted by Washington in the aftermath of World War II.

Nonetheless, under Anwar Sadat, who took over after the death of President Nasser in 1970, Egypt moved further towards the U.S. position. By 1977-78, Egypt had negotiated a separate peace treaty with the State of Israel becoming isolated for years within Africa, the Arab world and the Islamic community in general.

In exchange for this separate peace treaty, known as the Camp David Accords, Egypt became the second largest recipient of U.S. foreign assistance only second to Tel Aviv. The Pentagon and the CIA still wields tremendous influence within the Egyptian military which maintains business interests that converge with capitalist corporations based in North America.

Consequently, the U.S. does not want a genuine revolution in Egypt. The implications of the seizure of power by workers, youth, revolutionary intellectuals and farmers would reverberate throughout the continent and the entire region.

In response to the coup, the Obama administration has refused to characterize the military overthrow of the elected government of the FJP as a putsch. Nonetheless, various media reports indicated that there were close consultations between the Pentagon and the Egyptian top military brass in the days leading up to their taking control of the government.

On July 8, the White House through its spokesman, refused to make a political assessment of the situation in Egypt. It had already been stated by a leading member of the U.S. Congress that Washington would not suspend aid to the government in Egypt despite the

overthrow of an elected government.

Contrasting this approach was that of the African Union (AU), the continental organization that represents 54 states. The AU took immediate action to suspend Egypt from this regional body pending the holding of elections and the return to civilian government.

In all probability, as within the tradition of the U.S. and other imperialist-allied states, Washington and its partners in North Africa and the Middle East will not follow the political direction of the AU. Although some political forces opposed to the administration of Morsi have welcomed the coup by the SCAF, it remains to be seen how long this alliance will continue.

During 2011 and 2012, most of the principled forces within the democratic movement worked to expedite the rule of the military. The problems associated with the candidacy of former Air Force Commander Ahmed Shafik during the June 2012 run-off elections was that Shafik had been a leading official in the Egyptian military under the National Democratic Party government of the deposed leader Hosni Mubarak.

Military rule during such a profound economic and political crisis may not be capable of maintaining the confidence and support of the Egyptian people. New alliances may soon emerge in efforts to foster national reconciliation and the realization of genuine democracy.

#### The Class Character of the Military in Africa

As mentioned above, the leadership of the Egyptian military has been closely allied with the Pentagon, the CIA and the State of Israel for three decades. The top echelons of the army constitute a major and dominate element within the national bourgeoisie of the country.

Perhaps the most accurate and profound analysis of the class position and role of the military in Africa was advanced by the former President of the First Republic of Ghana, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah. In his book entitled "Class Struggle in Africa", published in 1970, a chapter in this work, "Reactionary Cliques Among Armed Forces and Police," Nkrumah draws a direct link between the military leadership and the imperialist bourgeoisie.

According to Nkrumah, "The majority of Africa's armed forces and police came into existence as part of the colonial coercive apparatus. Few of their members joined national liberation struggles. For the most part, they were employed to perform police operations against it." (p. 41)

This same chapter continues pointing out that "A large number were men who had held educational positions in the army, and were drawn from among the educated petty bourgeoisie. These and other older officials at present serving in Africa's armies were trained by colonialists or in military colleges of the West, and are therefore oriented towards Western norms and ideals. They may be said to form, because of their rank, part of the bureaucratic bourgeoisie, with a stake in the capitalist path of development."

Nkrumah goes on to observe also "When neocolonialist coups take place, members of the armed forces, the police and the bureaucracy work together....Bureaucrats alone cannot overthrow a government; and the military and police have not the expertise to administer a country. Therefore they combine, and bring about a state of affairs strikingly similar to that which operated in colonial times, when the colonial government depended on the civil service, on the army and police, and on the support of traditional rulers." (p. 42)

Therefore under capitalism and imperialism the military works against the interests of the people. When the capitalist state is overthrown and the people under the leadership of the workers and farmers take political control of the revolution, the military leadership must either act against its own class interests or be swept aside. Elements within the lower ranks of the army may join the revolution but they must be aligned with the interests of the workers and other democratic forces inside the country.

Nkrumah stresses that “The solution to the problem lies in the politicizing of the army and police. Both must be firmly under the control of the socialist revolutionary party, and commissions entrusted only to those who are fully committed to revolutionary socialist principles. ..When the army intervenes in politics it does so as part of the class forces and the struggle between imperialism and socialist revolution.” (p. 43)

Moreover, Nkrumah points out “The army, after it seizes power, gives its weight to one or the other side. In this respect, the army is not merely an instrument in the struggle, but becomes itself part of the class struggle, thus tearing down the artificial wall separating it from the socio-economic and political transformations in society. The theory of the ‘neutrality’ of the armed forces, consistently propagated by the exploiting classes, is thereby proved to be false. (pp. 43-44)

If Egypt is to overcome its political crisis the national democratic forces must forge alliances that place the interests of the workers and farmers at the center of the revolutionary movement. As the military was eventually opposed by the democratic forces in 2011 and 2012, this same set of circumstances in 2013 has illustrated even clearer the need for independent revolutionary political organizing and mass mobilization.

The military leadership realizes that the question of legitimacy, as has been raised by the FJP and its allies in reference to the SCAF, will be a major source of debate and struggle in the aftermath of the events of both July 3 and July 8. Revolutionary legitimacy can only be guaranteed by the leadership of the workers and the national patriotic forces organized into a political party or alliance that is principled in its objectives and organizational practice.

Of course the Egyptian people have the right to reach their own solutions based upon the concrete conditions inside the country. Anti-imperialists and anti-war forces must insist upon the non-interference in the internal affairs of the country and the region.

A rapid diminishing of imperialist influence in Egypt will provide the political space for the masses to reach their own solutions to the problems of the state and society. The character of these solutions will have a profound impact on the people’s struggles throughout the region and indeed within the imperialist states themselves.

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