

## Thousands join Egypt rally called by Muslim Brotherhood



Many of the Tahrir Square protesters are Muslim Brotherhood supporters

Thousands of people are gathering in Cairo's Tahrir Square to protest against a decision by the ruling military council to assume new powers.

The protests have been called by the Muslim Brotherhood, as it claims its candidate Mohammed Mursi won last weekend's presidential election.

His rival, former PM Ahmed Shafiq, also says he has won.

As Egyptians voted, the generals dissolved parliament and claimed all legislative power for themselves.

Correspondents say the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (Scaf) appears to be working on the assumption that Mr Mursi will win, and making moves designed to reduce or constrain the power of the president and entrench its own.

Activists have described the moves as a "military coup".

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## At the scene



Jon Leyne BBC News, Cairo

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By early evening, the crowds of protesters were beginning to edge out the traffic from Tahrir Square.

Organisers drew barricades across the entrances. Egyptian flag sellers took up position, and the chants began.

"Down with the military," went one. "Wake up field marshal, this is the last day," went another - a reference to the promise by the military ruler Field Marshal Tantawi to hand over power to civilians by the end of June. Then the most familiar cry of all: "Erhal" (meaning simply "leave!").

As the sun began to set, a series of marches converged on the square. One man rallied protesters with a drum adorned with a picture of the Muslim Brotherhood leader, Mohammed Mursi.

Any demonstration organised by the Muslim Brotherhood is almost guaranteed a strong turnout. The question now is how determined they are to challenge the latest moves by the military to take back sweeping powers, or would victory in the presidential elections be enough to satisfy them.

Complex message

Demonstrators have been chanting slogans against the military council, in the same square where huge protests last year led to the fall of President Hosni Mubarak.

Youth activists and liberals, many of whom refused to take part in the election run-off, are also involved in the protests.

But the BBC's Kevin Connolly in Cairo says that this year the message is more complex.

"[The election is] not totally stolen, but they have put some obstacles to fully transfer the power of the revolution and the voice of the street, and the voice of the critical mass to rule the country," one protester told the BBC.

But our correspondent says there are plenty of Egyptians who seem to be reconciled to the prospect of the military continuing to exercise power because they fear that otherwise the Muslim Brotherhood might turn their secular society into something resembling the theocracy of Iran.

Earlier the Muslim Brotherhood claimed victory in the election.

A spokesman for its Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) announced its chairman, Mohammed Mursi, had received 51.74%, compared with former Prime Minister Ahmed Shafiq, who he said had 48.26%.

### Election candidates



#### **Ahmed Shafiq (L)**

- Aged 70
- Veteran fighter pilot and former air force commander
- Appointed Egypt's first aviation minister, earning reputation for competence and efficiency
- Promoted to PM during February 2011 protests
- Associated with former regime, though denies being backed by ruling military council
- Campaigned on a promise to restore security

#### **Mohammed Mursi**

- Aged 60
- US-educated engineering professor
- Head of Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (FJP)
- Served as independent MP 2000-05
- Quietly spoken, viewed by some as lacking charisma
- Has promised "stability, security, justice and prosperity" under an Islamic banner

The Higher Presidential Election Commission (HPEC) is scheduled to announce the official results on Thursday, but it usually shares them with the candidates beforehand to give them a chance to make objections.

The results tally with what Egyptian media and independent observers have been reporting, and the FJP's own calculations, which it released on Monday.

However, Mr Shafiq's campaign vigorously denied its candidate had lost.

In a news conference shown on Egyptian television, representatives of Mr Shafiq's campaign said the papers that Mr Mursi's campaign referred to did not come officially from the HPEC, and insisted that Mr Shafiq was ahead in the tally.

"We are willing to do whatever necessary at a legal level to prove he's the next president," Shafiq campaign spokesman Karim Salem said.

Troops outside parliament

Voting over the weekend to choose a successor to Hosni Mubarak, who was forced to step down by last year's uprising, was overshadowed by two Scaf decrees.

The first ordered the immediate dissolution of parliament following Thursday's Supreme Constitutional Court ruling that the law governing the recent elections for the lower house was unconstitutional because party members had been allowed to contest seats in the lower house reserved for independents.

Troops were deployed outside the parliament building before the decree was issued on Saturday to prevent MPs gaining access. The FJP and the ultraconservative Salafist Nour party dominate both chambers.

## **Interim Constitutional Declaration**

- Issued by ruling Supreme Council of Armed Forces (Scaf)
- Amends Constitutional Declaration of March 2011
- Grants Scaf powers to initiate legislation, control budget, appoint panel to draft new constitution
- Postpones new parliamentary elections until new constitution is approved

The second decree, which was published after the polls closed on Sunday, amended the March 2011 constitutional declaration and gave the generals complete control over legislation and military affairs until fresh parliamentary elections are held.

The Scaf will also play a significant role in running the 100-member assembly that will draft the country's new constitution.

The new president - who will take office without the oversight of a parliament and without a permanent constitution to define his powers or duties - will be able to form and dismiss a government, ratify and reject laws, and declare war, but only with Scaf's approval.