

Kerry pushes for new IMF deal in Egypt

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US secretary of State John Kerry was in Cairo this weekend for talks with Islamist President Mohamed Mursi, Defense Minister General Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi, and members of the ruling Muslim Brotherhood (MB). He also met with leaders of the secular opposition, amongst them representatives of the National Salvation Front (NSF), the main umbrella group of Egyptian liberal and pseudo-left parties.

Kerry's trip to Egypt is part of a further intensification of the US imperialist offensive in the Middle East. On Thursday Kerry announced at a meeting of the so-called "Friends of Syria" in Rome that the US will officially provide "non-lethal" aid directly to Western-backed militias seeking the overthrow of the regime of President Bashar al-Assad.

A US State Department official, who was not authorized to discuss the private meeting between Kerry and Mursi on Sunday, anonymously reported that the discussion covered Syria and Iran, the economic and political situation in Egypt, and the peace agreement with Israel.

After the ouster of long-time, US-backed dictator Hosni Mubarak in mass revolutionary struggles two years ago, Mursi and the MB—having forged an alliance with the US-sponsored Egyptian military—have become a main pillar of US imperialism in Egypt and the Middle East.

Mursi is backing Washington's proxy war in Syria, its war drive against Iran, upholding the strategic alliance with Israel and cracking down on strikes and protests as ruthlessly as the Mubarak regime before it.

According to Egyptian state media, Kerry and el-Sissi discussed "means to support military cooperation between the two countries, in light of the depth of Egyptian-American relations."

El-Sissi reportedly announced his "aspiration for more such cooperation to build and develop the fighting capabilities of the Egyptian armed forces to

support security and peace in the region."

A central purpose of Kerry's visit was to pressure Egypt for a new loan with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). After over two years of revolutionary struggles in Egypt, international finance capital wants an end of strikes and protests and a stabilization of the economy to bring back foreign investors and increase the exploitation of the Egyptian working class.

Speaking before Egyptian and US business executives in Cairo, Kerry said: "It is paramount, essential, urgent that the Egyptian economy get stronger, that it gets back on its feet. It's clear to us that the IMF arrangement needs to be reached."

While no concrete details have been announced yet, a new deal with the IMF will be bound up with historic attacks on the working class. Plans include the cutting of subsidies for products such as fuel or bread, on which the impoverished Egyptian masses depend.

Confronted with renewed mass protests by workers and youth demanding the overthrow of Mursi, the Egyptian government had so far shied away from concluding a deal with the IMF.

Kerry stressed that the Egyptian ruling elite has to close ranks to secure the planned \$4.8 billion loan and push through the related austerity measures: "We do believe that in this moment of serious economic challenge that it's important for the Egyptian people to come together around the economic choices and to find some common ground."

While both the MB and the NSF seek to secure the loan with the IMF, there are divisions inside the Egyptian ruling elite about the "right" strategy to carry through the planned attacks against the working class.

The NSF and several other opposition parties have demanded the dissolution or reshuffling of the current cabinet of Prime Minister Hisham Qandil. They criticize the MB's "monopolization of power" and seek to convince US-imperialism that a more inclusive

government, relying more openly on the military, would be a “better” mechanism to stabilize the situation.

Last week Mohamed ElBaradei, a former UN diplomat and leader of the NSF, announced that the NSF would boycott the forthcoming parliamentary elections scheduled to start on April 22. He warned that society was “completely polarized” and elections risked setting Egypt on a “road to total chaos and instability.”

Ominously, ElBaradei added: “If Egypt is on the brink of default, if law and order is absent, [the army] have a national duty to intervene.”

While the NSF at least for the time being seems to maintain its announcement to boycott the elections, NSF leaders meeting Kerry on Saturday welcomed his visit and signaled their willingness to collaborate with the Islamists and US imperialism.

Anwar Esmat Sadat, chairman of the liberal Reform and Development Party and a nephew of former Egyptian president Anwar Sadat, declared: “There has to be sort of reconciliation. There has to be a united [Egypt], so we can go through these difficult times that we have.” He added that Kerry has been “quite helpful in listening and also giving his advice.”

Having received the Obama administration’s backing, the Egyptian ruling elite is preparing to move ahead. On Sunday Egypt’s finance minister El-Mursi El-Sayed Hegazy announced that he expects the ratification of the deal with the IMF before the parliamentary elections.

On Sunday morning, security forces attacked the sit-in on Tahrir Square, the iconic center of the revolutionary struggles of 2011. They tore down tents and arrested more than 50 protesters. Protesters have been occupying and shutting down the square for more than three months. Clashes between police forces and protesters who tried to take back the square continued throughout the day.

The day before, peaceful protesters had gathered on Tahrir Square to protest against Kerry’s visit. They carried posters portraying Kerry with an Islamic beard and reading: “Kerry, member of the Brotherhood.” Other banners stated, “Kerry, you are not welcome here.”

Outside the Foreign Ministry, protesters burned pictures of Kerry, the state MENA news agency

reported. On Sunday evening protesters blocked the road to the Cairo airport, delaying Kerry’s departure for hours.

During Kerry’s visit, protests and strikes intensified in several important industrial cities in the Nile Delta, including Mansoura, Mahalla, Tanta and Ismailiya. Protesters closed government buildings, stopped train traffic, and clashed with security forces.

In the Suez Canal city of Port Said, where a campaign of civil disobedience has been taking place since the second anniversary of the revolution on January 25, heavy clashes took place between protesters and security forces near the police directorate.

According to the ministry of health, 21-year-old protester Ibrahim Abdel Aziz was shot and killed Sunday night. At least another 39 people were injured by gunshots, and over 400 were injured throughout the day, with at least 260 suffering from heavy teargas inhalation.



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