

Top US official meets with Egyptian junta as crackdown continues

Chris Marsden
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The two-day visit to Cairo by Deputy Secretary of State William Burns saw violent repression of Muslim Brotherhood (MB) members in Cairo.

The second-highest diplomat in the US State Department met with interim President Adly Mansour, interim Prime Minister Hazem al-Beblawi and coup leader General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, even as demonstrators demanding the release of deposed President Mohamed Mursi were beaten, arrested and killed.

At least seven people were killed in overnight clashes after Mursi supporters left the sit-in at north Cairo's Rabaa Al-Adawiya Mosque and massed in Ramses Square, blocking the Sixth of October Bridge over the Nile that is a main route into the capital.

Police fired tear gas at demonstrators, as tires were set on fire and rocks were hurled. By 1:00 a.m. the police began firing birdshot.

Two people were killed at the bridge, and five more died in the capital's Giza district. Security officials said four of the five deaths came after Mursi supporters staging a sit-in near the main Cairo university campus clashed with residents.

State media quoted health ministry official Khaled al-Khatib that 261 people were injured and that 124 people were still in hospital. More than 400 people were arrested, according to the state news agency.

The protesters had wanted to stage a sit-in near Tahrir Square.

MB members said police used live ammunition against peaceful protesters.

“We were praying. Suddenly there was shouting. We looked up and the police were on the bridge firing tear gas down on us,” protester Adel Asman told Reuters.

The latest clashes are the worst since more than 50 Mursi supporters were killed last week in fighting outside the Republican Guard compound where Mursi is

suspected of being detained.

Burns had earlier made clear that the United States has no intention of doing anything to interfere with the efforts of the army to impose order on a restive and divided population.

“I did not come with American solutions, nor did I come to lecture anyone,” he declared. “We will not try to impose our model on Egypt.”

He made a wholly cynical statement to journalists that “If representatives of some of the largest parties in Egypt are detained or excluded, how are dialogue and participation possible?”

But he added that “The government itself has said it wants inclusion of all political streams” and singularly failed to so much as name Mursi or the Muslim Brotherhood.

“We have called on the military to avoid any politically-motivated arrests,” he said, even as hundreds more were about to take place.

When an Egyptian journalist asked how the new government responded to American calls for Mursi to be released, Burns fended the question, saying, “We have made our views clear on that issue.”

Washington hoped that Egypt’s new transition would “hasten Egypt’s return to a democratically elected civilian government as soon as possible. ... My sense is that people realize that what is most important is that the process be transparent and inclusive.”

Afterwards, a satisfied Egyptian military said on its Facebook page that Burns and Sisi had discussed “ways to reinforce co-operation” between Washington and Cairo.

There is still widespread opposition to the Obama administration, however, making it difficult for the coup leaders to acknowledge its support. Millions of Egyptians have not forgotten Washington’s previously warm relations with the Muslim Brotherhood.

For this reason, the Tamarod movement and others did not meet with Burns. Islam Hammam, a Tamarod organiser, said they had turned down the invitation to talks “because the United States did not stand with the Egyptian people from the beginning.”

A spokesman for the Salafist Al Nour party said it had turned down an invitation to meet Burns due to “unjustified interference in Egyptian internal affairs and politics” by the US.

An MB spokesman from the Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party told the BBC, “Such kind of visit doesn’t mean anything for us because we believe that America supported this military coup.”

Despite such posturing, the US will be in secret discussions with all interested parties in Egypt to ensure that the new military-backed regime defends its interests.

In the weeks before Mursi’s July 3 ouster, US Secretary of Defence Chuck Hagel and others were in regular contact with Al-Sisi and with the Mursi camp. These discussions continue in the hope of securing a modus vivendi between the rival representatives of Egyptian capitalism—the army, the nominal liberals and the Islamists.

Further evidence of the venal nature of the liberal leaders who backed the coup is provided by the revelations of Israeli military analyst Roni Daniel that al-Sisi informed Israel of his efforts to remove Mursi three days before the coup took place. He was accompanied by Mohamed El-Baradei of the National Salvation Front and now interim vice president for foreign relations in the military regime.

Speaking to the Israeli TV Channel 2, Daniel said that Al-Sisi had asked Israel to monitor the Palestinian Islamic movement Hamas and that Israel had advised him to destroy tunnels connecting Egypt to the Gaza strip.

Military analysts then admitted that ElBaradei met with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu once before and again after the coup. Israel had promised ElBaradei to help lobby for Western recognition of the post-Mursi government. The Egyptian army had started damaging tunnels to Gaza several days before the coup took place.

On the other side of the divide, *The Guardian* has already reported that the MB is still in secret negotiations with the military, while a split has emerged in the Brotherhood calling for a retreat from open conflict. With 1,400 supporters, Brotherhood Without Violence has launched a no confidence petition against the Supreme Leader Mohamed Badie. A spokesman, attorney Ahmed Yehia, told the press: “After (Mursi’s government) came

to power, they changed and forgot about Islam and tolerance and the call to Islam...”

Above all the US wants to ensure that the military is in a position to stabilise the present situation and then press ahead with massive austerity measures targeting the working class.

Yesterday, Egypt’s new transitional government was sworn in. It is dominated by pro-Western figures who sit alongside representatives of the military and the police.

The most significant development yesterday was the nomination of al-Sisi as first deputy prime minister. Al-Sisi also keeps his position as defence minister, making clear just who represents the real power in the land.

This means that the government consists of Al-Sisi and the US stooge ElBaradei, sitting alongside:

- Prime Minister Hazem el-Beblawi, who ran Egypt’s Export Development Bank for 12 years and went on to work at regional economic agencies in the Middle East.
- Finance Minister, Ahmed Galal, a managing director of the Cairo-based Economic Research Forum since 2007 and a researcher at the World Bank.
- Deputy Prime Minister Ziad Bahaa El-Din, who has a doctorate in banking law from the London School of Economics and ran Egypt’s investment authority in 2004-2007.

Police Force General Mohamed Abu Shadi has accepted a post to head Egypt’s supply ministry. He will be tasked with slashing subsidies on which millions depend. Egypt spends up to \$15 billion per year on providing gasoline at well below international prices. Bread, the basic staple, is presently subsidised by more than \$3 billion a year. This is all targeted for removal in a country where living standards are already in free-fall.



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