

Washington presses for talks between Egyptian army junta, Islamists

Johannes Stern
9 August 2013

Washington and its European allies are increasing pressure on the Egyptian military to end its bloody stand-off with the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and former Islamist president Mohamed Mursi, who was ousted in a July 3 coup following mass working class protests against his rule.

On Wednesday, US Secretary of State John Kerry and the European Union (EU) foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton issued a joint statement stating: “Deeply concerned about Egypt’s future and what is at stake at this critical time, we have suggested a number of practical ideas to calm current tensions and help Egyptians build a bridge toward real political dialogue. These ideas remain available for the parties even now, and our engagement at all levels continues on a daily basis.”

The statement is part of continuing efforts by the imperialist powers to arrange a political truce between the MB and the junta, after initial attempts failed earlier on Wednesday. Last Friday US Deputy Secretary of State William Burns traveled to Egypt for talks with Egypt’s interim president Adly Mansour and his deputy Mohamed ElBaradei. Burns also met Kheirat al-Shater, a leading member of the Muslim Brotherhood, who is currently detained in a Cairo prison.

On Tuesday, Republican Senators John McCain and Lindsay Graham met top military and civilian leaders in Cairo to press for an end the standoff between the military regime and the MB. Graham said, “in democracy, you sit down and talk to each other.” Referring to the MB’s jailed leadership, he added that “it is impossible to talk to somebody who is in jail.”

Graham warned that US-Egyptian relations, and particularly the \$1.3 billion in yearly US aid to the Egyptian military, might be harmed if there is no reconciliation. “Some in Congress want to sever the

relationship. Some want to suspend the aid,” he explained, adding: “We have to be honest to where the relationship stands... We can’t support Egypt that is not moving to democracy.”

Graham’s invocation of Washington’s alleged concern for democracy is a cynical fraud. The US and the European powers supported the coup against Mursi, whom they had previously supported, as a pre-emptive strike to block the emergence of a revolutionary movement in the working class. They are, however, concerned that the army’s bloody crackdown against the MB will further destabilize Egypt and the entire Middle East, ultimately provoking renewed mass struggles.

In their statement, Kerry and Ashton warn: “This remains a very fragile situation, which holds not only the risk of more bloodshed and polarization in Egypt, but also impedes the economic recovery, which is so essential for Egypt’s successful transition.”

The US-sponsored Egyptian junta is threatening to intensify its repression against the MB, however.

On Wednesday, Egypt’s interim president Adly Mansour announced in a statement that “the phase of diplomatic efforts has ended.” He declared that “the state gave room for all necessary efforts to be exhausted in order to urge the Muslim Brotherhood and its supporters to reject violence, prevent bloodshed and cease the disruption of Egyptian society by holding its future hostage.” He added that the MB and its allies bear “full responsibility for the failure and the subsequent events that may result from this failure regarding breaking the law and endangering the social peace.”

Prime Minister Hazem El-Beblawi made clear in another statement that the threat of a violent crackdown on the ongoing sit-ins of MB supporters—who protest

the coup and demand the reinstatement of Mursi—is imminent. He said that the government’s decision to dissolve sit-ins was final, and its “patience” is about to expire. He accused protesters of inciting violence, blocking roads and arresting citizens, warning that such actions would be met “with utmost force and decisiveness.”

On Thursday, Beblawi reiterated his threats while meeting with Interior Minister Mohamed Ibrahim and the security leaders and forces on a visit to Cairo’s Central Security headquarters in El-Darassa. He stressed that “security” was his government’s main priority, praising the “great” and “continuing” role of the security forces in “maintaining security, and protecting the nation and people.”

In the aftermath of the coup, hundreds of people have been killed and thousands wounded and arrested by the military and security forces. On July 8, the security forces killed at least 51 pro-Mursi protesters and then at least 80 more in another massacre on July 27. On Wednesday, army spokesman Ahmed Ali released a statement stating that the military has killed 60 and arrested 103 “terrorists” in the course of its crackdown on the Sinai since July 5.

The MB is warning about further bloodshed, while signaling that it is willing to enter talks with the military. MB spokesperson Gehad El-Haddad told Reuters: “This means they are preparing for an even bigger massacre. They should be sending us positive signals, not live bullets.”

On Thursday, the first day of Eid, the festival of breaking the fast after Muslim’s holy month of Ramadan, the MB-led National Alliance to Support Legitimacy, called upon its supporters to take to the streets for an “Eid of Victory.”

Dutch Foreign Minister Frans Timmermans, who was involved in reconciliation talks in Cairo, expressed the concerns over the likelihood of renewed slaughter in coming days. “More people will turn to the streets to protest, and the tendency in the armed forces to repress that will mount,” he told Reuters.

While the immediate target of the army crackdown is the MB and its Islamist sympathizers, the regime’s ultimate goal is to suppress any resistance in the working class and restore the political setup that existed before mass revolutionary struggles led to the ouster of longtime US-backed dictator Hosni Mubarak on

February 11, 2011.

The counterrevolutionary offensive of the Egyptian ruling elite exposes the reactionary role of liberal, Nasserite and pseudo-left organizations that helped to channel mass discontent against Mursi and the MB behind the military and former elements of the Mubarak regime. While the Revolutionary Socialists (RS), the most rotten of the middle class groups in Egypt, launch a desperate campaign to distance themselves from the coup, their former allies continue openly to mobilize support for the military.

The Tamarod (“Rebel”) campaign, which the RS supported previously, called for pro-military Eid prayers on Tahrir Square. The prayers were also supported by Socialist Popular Alliance Party and Nasserite politician and leader of the National Salvation Front (NSF), Hamdeen Sabahi, who cynically declared in a radio interview that the “Muslim Brotherhood must accept the will of the people. I can’t imagine any political solution.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact