

US moves to cut some of its military aid to Egypt

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On Wednesday the Obama administration announced that it would cut some of its military aid to Egypt. Senior US officials revealed that besides F-16 warplanes whose delivery was halted in July, the Obama administration will not send 10 Apache helicopters, M1-A1 battle tanks and Harpoon anti-ship missiles despite existing contracts.

Washington will also continue to suspend \$260 million in cash support promised to Egypt's previous government under Islamist president Mohamed Mursi, before he was ousted in a July 3 coup. The funds had already been held up over Mursi's failure to reach a new deal with the International Monetary Fund and push through subsidy cuts.

The partial suspension of military aid to Egypt is an admission that the Obama administration's policies are essentially illegal. The US government may not legally provide aid to a country whose government has been overthrown by a military coup. Washington has avoided defining the military takeover in Egypt as a "coup," however, as it doesn't want to break up its relations to a country that is one of its closest allies in the Middle East since the 1979 peace treaty with Israel.

US Secretary of Defence Chuck Hagel informed Egypt's coup leader and *de facto* dictator General Abdel Fatah al-Sisi about the decision during a call Wednesday afternoon. American officials described the conversation as friendly and stressed that they valued "continuing a strong relationship with Egypt."

State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki declared that the US has "decided to maintain our relationship with the Egyptian government, while recalibrating our assistance to Egypt to best advance our interests." She added, "The United States wants to see Egypt succeed, and we believe the US-Egypt partnership will be strongest when Egypt is represented by an inclusive,

democratically elected civilian government based on the rule of law, fundamental freedoms and an open and competitive economy."

Speaking to reporters shortly after arriving in Malaysia, Secretary of State John Kerry sought to reassure the Egyptian regime: "The interim government understands very well our commitment to the success of this government, which we want to see achieve, and by no means is this a withdrawal from our relationship or a severing of our serious commitment to helping the government."

Egypt's Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman Badr Abdel Atty nevertheless criticized the move, declaring: "The decision was wrong in terms of content and time. It raises serious questions about US readiness to provide stable strategic support to Egyptian security programs amid threats and terrorism challenges it has been facing."

The US move comes amidst an intensifying crackdown against the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood (MB), which Washington supported prior to the coup. Only last weekend, Egyptian military and security forces killed over 50 protesters, attacking protests called by the MB-led Anti-Coup Alliance on the 40th anniversary of the beginning of the 1973 October War with Israel.

The same day that the US announced that it would suspend some of its military aid, Social Solidarity Minister Ahmed al-Boraie officially dissolved the MB's NGO, based on a court ruling which had banned the Muslim Brotherhood and confiscated its properties on September 23. Also on Wednesday, an Egyptian court said Mursi and other leading MB figures will be tried on November 4, on charges of "inciting the killing and torture" of protesters.

Since the military junta took power, it has been

organizing a brutal crackdown under the cover of an alleged “fight against terrorism” to crush all resistance to its dictatorial rule. It has killed and arrested thousands of MB supporters and put down two strikes by thousands of workers at Suez Steel and the Scimitar Petroleum Company.

The cut in US military aid—however temporary and limited it may prove to be—reflects concerns inside the Obama administration and among its European allies over the danger of a renewed social explosion in Egypt.

This fear was expressed in a Thursday editorial by the British Guardian titled “Egypt: from bad to worse,” describing Washington’s decision as “welcome and long overdue.” It warned: “Try as he might, General Sisi cannot contain the continued protest against his takeover. Egypt is locked down and its economy is hemorrhaging. The US, and the EU, must speak out, because the situation is untenable.”

In a statement published Wednesday, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, expressed her concern over “last weekend’s violent clashes in Egypt and yesterday’s terror attacks in Sinai and Ismailiya.” She declared, “The clashes show there is clearly a great deal of polarization and mistrust. This can only be overcome if all sides commit to a political process, defined and agreed by Egyptians themselves, that leads to deep and sustainable democracy.”

Behind all the hypocritical phrases about “democracy” and “civilian freedoms” stands the goal of American and European imperialism to install a broader national unity government in Egypt which would be better suited to suppress the working class and push through further social attacks. A European diplomat, commenting on Ashton’s visit to Egypt, said that she “came to see what the officials want to offer for the inclusion of Islamists, because this is the only way forward for sustainable stability.”

However, Ashton—who last week met with al-Sisi, Interim President Adly Mansour, Prime Minister Hazem al-Beblawi, Amr Moussa (the president of the committee of 50 people tasked with amending the constitution), Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmad al-Tayeb, Coptic Pope Tawadros II and members from the MB-led Anti-Coup Alliance—could not reach any agreement.

Highlighting the crisis of imperialism in the Middle

East after two years of mass working class struggles in Egypt and Tunisia and imperialist interventions in Libya and Syria, the US and European diplomatic efforts are inflaming regional tensions rather than stabilizing conditions.

Washington’s other main ally in the region, Israel, criticized the US decision to cut military aid to Egypt. Israel’s Minister of International and Strategic Affairs Yuval Steinitz, demanded that Egypt be “strengthened and supported ... It’s very important that Egypt stabilize [itself], economically and politically. It’s very important for the world, for the Middle East, and for us, and first and foremost for the Egyptians.”

Currently the Egyptian military is closely coordinating its operations on the Sinai where it is sealing off tunnels to the Gaza strip and killing and arresting alleged Islamist militants.

Eli Shaked, a former Israeli ambassador to Egypt warned that the Egyptian military might now limit its cooperation with the Israel. “There is much anger. Therefore it may affect badly on the direct ties” between Israel and Egypt, Shaked said. “They [the Egyptians] are likely to punish Israel along with the US.” According to the *Washington Post*, he added that Israel largely sees the “punitive” aid cutoff as a mistake that will weaken US influence in the Middle East and harm the US-Egypt-Israel alliance.

Some Egyptian officials went so far as to declare that Egypt was better off without US financing and could look for other countries for military aid—including China, Russia or the Persian Gulf oil sheikhdoms.

“This is actually a chance for Egypt to be free of this burden,” said Tahani Al Gabali, the current Vice President of the Supreme Constitutional Court in Egypt. “The US is pressuring Egypt to allow the Brotherhood back into politics and it won’t work. Unfortunately, the current American administration has a failed foreign policy.”



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