

Statement by the Working Group on Egypt

July 8, 2013

After the Egyptian military's July 3 removal of Mohamed Morsi from the presidency and suspension of the constitution, and amid mounting civil strife, Egypt's democratic future hangs in the balance. U.S. policy toward post-Mubarak Egypt also faces a critical test.

The United States should acknowledge that Morsi failed utterly as Egypt's first freely elected president, and that many Egyptians strongly support the army's action. But the reliance on military intervention rather than a political process to resolve crises severely threatens Egypt's progression to a stable democracy. The United States has drawn intense criticism from many Egyptians either for failing to criticize Morsi's governance when he was in office, or for not clearly condemning the military's moves. Now is the time to convey U.S. policy publicly and consistently in order to remove confusion over whether this administration supports Egypt's democratic aspirations.

In his statement soon after the military's actions, President Obama asserted that the United States is "committed to the democratic process" and that "the best foundation for lasting stability in Egypt is a democratic political order." Obama's words are correct. It should be obvious by now that Egypt can only be a truly effective long-term U.S. partner and a moderating force in a volatile region if it stays on the path to becoming a stable and prosperous democracy. The high level of popular mobilization that now characterizes Egyptian politics makes long-term military rule, or any rule that excludes participation of all non-violent segments of society, impossible to sustain without vast repression. It is in the U.S. national interest to help Egyptians achieve a democratic political system. Yet, since the transition began in 2011, the administration has failed to follow through on its own declared policy. The United States should now change course and take four steps to support a democratic transition.

First: The Obama administration should apply the law that requires suspending \$1.5 billion in military and economic aid to Egypt following the removal of a democratically-elected leader by coup or military decree. Not only is this clearly required under U.S. law, but is the best way to make clear immediately to Egypt's military that an expedient return to a legitimate, elected civilian government—avoiding the repression, widespread rights abuses, and political exclusion that characterized the 18 months of military rule after Mubarak's fall—is Egypt's only hope. It is the only way to achieve the stability and economic progress that Egyptians desperately want. Performing semantic or bureaucratic tricks to avoid applying the law would harm U. S. credibility to promote peaceful democratic change not only in Egypt but around the world, and would give a green light to other U.S.-backed militaries contemplating such interventions.

The Egyptian military has already shown its eagerness to secure U.S. and international acceptance of its action; Washington should not provide this cost-free. The military helped sow

the seeds of the current crisis by failing to foster consensus on the political transition, and its promise to midwife a democratic transition now is just as uncertain. Suspending aid offers an incentive for the army to return to democratic governance as soon as possible, and a means to hold it accountable. Cajoling on democracy while keeping aid flowing did not work when the military ruled Egypt in the 18 months after Mubarak's fall, and it did not work to move President Morsi either.

Abiding by the aid legislation will be unpopular with many Egyptians, and will cause tension in the bilateral relationship. But it need not rupture relations with Egypt's military or harm security cooperation, as long as the army fulfills its duty to shepherd a democratic transition. On the contrary, the administration should make clear to Egypt's generals and in its public statements the desire to maintain a close working relationship and to resume aid promptly once a democratically-elected government has taken office.

Second: The United States must finally abandon its long practice of building up relations with what it believes to be the strongest actor—most recently Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood—while largely ignoring other groups. Egypt's political scene is far too diverse and volatile, and the U.S.-Egyptian relationship far too important, for such a narrow approach. The United States should engage quickly and visibly with Egypt's new transitional leadership, but must also undertake outreach to repair relations with the many segments of Egyptian society who are deeply suspicious of the United States for its perceived unquestioned backing of first Mubarak, then the SCAF, and then Morsi.

Third: The United States must urge Egypt's authorities not to engage in repression or political exclusion of non-violent Islamists and to restore media and civil society freedoms, including resolving the recent case in which 43 Americans, Egyptians, and others were given harsh sentences for democracy promotion work. Islamists are a significant part of the Egyptian polity that cannot be ignored; all parties that subscribe to core democratic norms – including equality under the law and the protection of basic political rights – should have a place. As the past year's failed experiment shows, majority rule without enshrining basic rights is no recipe for sustainable democracy.

Fourth: The United States should make clear that it is prepared to lead in galvanizing large-scale international economic support for Egypt's government and citizens, including but not limited to an IMF program, conditioned on clear progress toward democracy, human rights, a sound economic program, and continuation of a responsible foreign policy. Doing so will align aid more closely with stated U.S. policy and with the demands of millions of Egyptians for inclusive, accountable governance.

Robert Kagan (co-chair)
Brookings Institution

Elliott Abrams
Council on Foreign Relations

Daniel Calingaert
Freedom House

Amy Hawthorne
Atlantic Council

Peter Mandaville
Ali Vural Ak Center for Islamic Studies

Tamara Wittes
Brookings Institution

Michele Dunne (co-chair)
Atlantic Council

Ellen Bork
Foreign Policy Initiative

Reuel Gerecht
Foundation for Defense of Democracies

Neil Hicks
Human Rights First

Stephen McInerney
Project on Middle East Democracy