



US Reactions to Developments in Egypt

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Immediately after the ouster of President Morsi, President Obama in a press statement on July 3, 2013 stated that the US, "...calls on all parties to work together to address the legitimate grievances of the Egyptian people, in accordance with the democratic process..." He made it clear that the US does not support any particular individual or political party. The statement expressed concern over the Egyptian military's decision to remove President Morsi and called "...on the Egyptian military to move quickly and responsibly to return full authority back to a democratically elected civilian government as soon as possible through an inclusive and transparent process." The statement by President Obama is interesting on two counts: (a) It does not call the ouster of President Morsi's government a coup, and (b) there is also no condemnation of the role of the Egyptian military in the ouster. However, the Presidential press statement called on the Egyptian military as a decision making body "...to ensure that the rights of all Egyptian men and women are protected, including the right to peaceful assembly, due process, and free and fair trials in civilian courts." Nonetheless, reports of arrests and detention of officials and supporters of President Morsi as well as wide spread violence against them, led President Obama to announce, in August 2013, a review of US aid to Egypt.

Egypt is the second largest recipient of US foreign aid (US\$ 1.5 billion annually), after Israel, with a substantial part of it being military aid. As a result of the review report, in October 2013, the US government suspended US\$ 1.3 billion military aid by stating that, "... (it will)

continue to hold the delivery of certain large-scale military systems and cash assistance to the (interim Egyptian) government pending credible progress toward an inclusive, democratically elected civilian government through free and fair elections.” However, it made it clear that the freeze is not permanent.

The US has strong ties with the Egyptian military and in the past has supported the military governments of Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak. As in the past, it could support the military in politics and government, if it is a stabilising element not just in the country but also the region. The US has supported other military regimes in the regions such as Pakistan to achieve similar policy goals. The other reason for the US’s support to the Egyptian military could be due to a fear within the US of the military seeking assistance from other countries such as Russia and China, undermining US influence. Thus, by continuing to not call the ‘ouster’ a coup, the US has ensured that it can navigate US laws on suspending aid to ‘any nation whose elected leader is deposed in a coup.’

Meanwhile, the unrest has impacted oil prices, a situation that the US is monitoring. Oil prices have risen to US\$ 102 a barrel for the first time since May 2012. Increase in oil prices would have a negative effect on the recovery process of the US economy, which is still in the process of emerging from the recession. Egypt is not an oil-producer, but controls the Suez Canal, which is one of the world's busiest shipping passages and gives it a strategic position in maintaining global energy supply chain. For now, supplies are moving freely through the canal.

The US is observing the impact of the Egyptian crisis on the neighbourhood. The reforms in government and policies due to people’s protest was not confined to Egypt but engulfed the West Asian region. The ‘failure’ of democratic reforms in Egypt could have an effect on the other states like Tunisia, Jordan and Qatar which had announced reforms in governance.

For the US, the crisis has become a ‘diplomatic dilemma’. Egypt has been a long standing ally; the Camp David Accords (1978) set the foundation of this relationship in which the Egyptian military played an important role. Today, it is the military that has deposed the

government. Given the relationship the US has with the Egyptian armed forces, it would be difficult for the US to condemn it. However, if the US does not denounce the ouster of a democratic government, it would be counter to its commitments to promote democratic processes around the world.

The US approach has been cautious and ambivalent. On the one hand, President Obama's comments, "...democracy is more than elections." is being taken as US acceptance of the military's ultimatums to the Egyptian government; on the other, the US is also wary of being criticised for supporting a president who has lost the people's trust, very much like its support for President Mubarak.

The US finds itself in an unfriendly situation in Egypt of being accused by both, anti-government and pro- government supports of aiding the other. Within the US, the question being asked is if events in Egypt are an indication of receding US influence in the region!

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