

Kerry Boosts Egyptian Military Dictatorship

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Global Research, August 03, 2013

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US Secretary of State John Kerry claimed Thursday that the Egyptian military was “restoring democracy” when it overthrew the country’s elected president, Mohamed Mursi, in a July 3 military coup.

Speaking in Pakistan—another country where the US has backed military dictators who overthrew elected governments—Kerry told a television interview program, “The military was asked to intervene by millions and millions of people, all of whom were afraid of a descent into chaos, into violence.”

He continued, “And the military did not take over, to the best of our judgment so-so far. There’s a civilian government. In effect, they were restoring democracy.”

This claim was so brazenly false that his Pakistani television interviewer was compelled to ask whether the military had restored democracy “by killing people on the roads?”

Kerry’s comments are in line with the decision by the Obama administration not to call the overthrow of an elected president a coup, in order to avoid triggering legal requirements for a cutoff of the \$1.3 billion annual US subsidy to the Egyptian military.

The Muslim Brotherhood denounced Kerry’s statement, with spokesman Gehad el-Haddad asking if Kerry would endorse the overthrow of President Obama by Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel if large protests took place in the United States.

Kerry’s remarks appear to have taken the White House by surprise. An official told the *Wall Street Journal*, “He [Kerry] did not stick to the script.”

While in fact backing the military junta, the administration has sought to maintain an official posture of neutrality between it and the Muslim Brotherhood and Mursi, with whom it worked closely during the year that Mursi was in power. Washington fears the social consequences of an escalation of the military’s crackdown against the Brotherhood, which is continuing to carry out demonstrations despite the killing of scores of its supporters and imprisonment of hundreds more.

The US is also seeking to balance between conflicting alliances in the region. Turkey and Qatar, two of Washington’s closest allies in the war for regime-change in Syria and the campaign of sanctions and provocations against Iran, are closely aligned with the Muslim Brotherhood.

Moreover, by openly equating the military junta with democracy and ignoring its bloody repression against unarmed protesters, Kerry has further exposed the fraud of Washington’s pretenses of support for democracy and concern for the protection of civilians. He has

demonstrated the hypocrisy of the claims that the US intervened in Libya and is seeking the overthrow of Assad in Syria out of humanitarian and democratic considerations.

Meanwhile, US Deputy Secretary of State William Burns has returned to Cairo for his second visit since the coup. Egyptian officials said Burns would meet with both the military-backed government of interim President Adly Mansour and representatives of the Muslim Brotherhood. There was no confirmation of this by the Brotherhood, whose leaders refused to meet with Burns during his previous visit.

In a further show of support for the junta, the Obama administration confirmed Wednesday that it has decided to go ahead with the biennial military exercises in Egypt called Operation Bright Star. These have been conducted since 1981, except for 2011, when the mobilization was cancelled in the midst of the political turmoil that followed the ouster of the Mubarak dictatorship.

Operation Bright Star, set for mid-September, is one of the largest military exercises in the world, with as many as 90,000 troops from 11 countries participating. This year's exercise serves as both a tacit endorsement of the Egyptian military overturn and a dress rehearsal for a US military intervention in Syria.

Also on Wednesday, the Senate voted by 86 to 13 to back the Obama administration's refusal to cut off aid to Egypt, with a large majority of senators of both parties declaring that US national security interests required ignoring the legal requirement that aid be terminated to any regime resulting from a military seizure of power.

The claim that the Egyptian military did not "take over" on July 3 is cynical and absurd, given that the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), headed by General Abdul-Fattah al-Sisi, named a new interim president to replace Mursi and effectively dictates the decisions of its civilian puppet.

Al-Sisi himself holds the posts of deputy prime minister and defense minister, in addition to his role as the chief of staff and head of SCAF, demonstrating who exercises real power in the new regime.

Mursi has been held incommunicado by the military for a month. The crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood and Mursi's Freedom and Justice Party, its political arm, continues unabated. On July 31, the prime minister appointed by Mursi, Hashim Qandil, was sentenced to a year in prison on charges stemming from a lawsuit over the privatization of the Tanta Flax and Oils Company.

Whatever the merits of the suit brought by employees of the company, the conviction and sentencing had a clear political purpose.

Mursi himself faces much more serious charges that could bring the death penalty. He is being investigated on murder and conspiracy charges in connection with a raid on an Egyptian prison that freed him and other Brotherhood leaders in 2011. Essentially, he would be charged with escaping from a prison term ordered by the Mubarak dictatorship and continued under the military junta that replaced Mubarak in February 2011.

Prosecutors have brought charges against the Muslim Brotherhood's supreme guide, Mohammed Badie, and two other top officials, deputy guide Khairat al-Shater and senior leader Rashad Bayoum, for a June incident in which anti-Islamist protesters were killed

outside the group's headquarters in Cairo.

As crowds gathered Friday in pro-Mursi protests in Cairo, riot police fired tear gas and sought to disperse the gatherings, while officials threatened to break up the two major encampments of Brotherhood supporters in the capital.

Information Minister Dorreya Sharaf el-Din announced on Wednesday that the military-backed government has ordered police to set up cordons around the pro-Mursi protests, claiming they were an "unacceptable threat" to national security.

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