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Exit the bloody mess in Egypt

By: Doug Bandow

Dead protesters litter the streets of Cairo. So much for Secretary of State John Kerry's theory that Egypt's military rulers "were restoring democracy." Unfortunately, the dead will have trouble voting in the new and improved Egypt. The Obama administration should cut off all aid.

The \$75 billion provided in "aid" over the years was mostly a payoff to successive dictators and their military praetorian guards. All that Washington worried about was "stability."

Hosni Mubarak was overthrown in 2011 and last year the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi was elected president.

The Brotherhood is no friend of liberty but it chose to enter the political process rather than remain underground, when it was persecuted by successive dictators.

Unfortunately, Morsi failed to establish his organization's democratic bona fides and governed badly.

Yet Morsi's opponents were no better. In particular, the authoritarian Mubarak state remained largely intact and obstructed Morsi at every turn. Army commander Gen. Abdul-Fattah al-Sisi worked with the Tamarod movement, which organized the massive demonstrations used to justify military rule.

Had the opposition simply waited Morsi would have discredited political Islam.

In this way, argued Reuel Marc Gerech of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies: "The Egyptian military may have snatched defeat from the jaws of victory."

Instead, Morsi's disparate opponents backed SCAF in staging the July 3 coup. Unfortunately, the al-Sisi government restored not democracy but the old Mubarak structure. Overall, reported the Washington Post: "Back are the faces of the old guard, many closely linked to Mubarak's reign or to the all-powerful generals."

The Brotherhood resisted the military's demand for abject surrender. However, the military regime seemed determined to destroy the Brotherhood.

So Gen. al-Sisi and his fellow generals chose violence over conciliation. Reported the Washington Post, "Two weeks before the bloody crackdown in Cairo, the Obama administration, working with European and Persian Gulf allies, believed it was close to a deal to have Islamist supporters of ousted President Mohamed Morsi disband street encampments in return for a pledge of nonviolence from Egypt's interim authorities. But the military-backed government rejected the deal and ordered its security forces to break up the protests."

The military government acknowledged over 600 dead, and the toll almost certainly was much higher.

Many of the killings appeared to be deliberate, the result of army sniper fire which journalists called "indiscriminate."

Sheriff Mansour of the Committee to Protect Journalists decried the “systematic” targeting of the press.

The slaughter in Cairo sparked more violence nationwide, including Brotherhood attacks on government buildings and Coptic churches.

Moreover, the movement survived prior attempts at suppression. The Brotherhood is closer to the average Egyptian than the liberals, secularists, and Christians backing the coup.

By killing demonstrators and closing political space to Islamists the government is encouraging the rise of a more radical and violent leadership.

Continuing civil disorder and violence are almost certain. Terrorism may follow. Iraq recently and Algeria in the 1990s offer frightening, if thankfully less likely, specters for the future.

In any conflict there will be little room for liberal and democratic values. Nor does Gen. al-Sisi seem to hold these values, having previously criticized Western pressure for democracy.

The Obama administration ignored U.S. law requiring an aid cut-off after a coup because it wanted to preserve its “leverage.”

Unfortunately, Washington has been consistently impotent in Cairo. The administration has been reduced to begging the military to promote reconciliation. One unnamed official admitted to the New York Times: “what we say might not be part of their calculus.”

The carnage in Cairo mimics that in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square. Washington’s best policy is to support neither side.

The U.S. should end all financial and military aid and get out. America should leave this tragic conflict to the Egyptian people.

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