

## Kerry walks back coup endorsement as Egypt aid hangs in balance

By: Brendan Bordelon - August 5, 2013

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After Secretary of State John Kerry voiced unexpectedly strong support for last month's coup d'état in Egypt, he and the White House spent the weekend downplaying his apparently off-the-cuff remarks.

"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 originally said during an interview in Pakistan. "And the military did not take over, to the best of our judgement — so far."

"In effect, they were restoring democracy," he concluded.

An anonymous State Department official told the Wall Street Journal that Kerry "did not stick to the script."

Kerry changed his tone on Friday, admonishing the military government for its harsh crackdown against Muslim Brotherhood protesters.

"The last thing we want is more violence," he said. "The temporary government has a responsibility with respect to demonstrators to give them the space to be able to demonstrate in peace."

On Saturday a White House spokesperson said there was "no change in our position here" on Egypt.

The Obama administration had largely refrained from commenting on the July 3 removal of democratically-elected President Mohamed Morsi by the Egyptian armed forces, refusing to label the events a military coup.

Even if unintended, Thursdays' unequivocal encouragement of the Egyptian military is the first of its kind from a senior administration official, and may signal a willingness to continue providing aid to the troubled Middle Eastern country.

Egypt's military is currently slated to receive \$1.3 billion in American aid next year, a full 20 percent of that institution's budget. The Foreign Assistance Act forbids the appropriation of aid to "any country whose duly elected head of government is deposed by a military coup or decree."

The New York Times reports that the Obama administration recently decided that the law did not require them to determine whether the Egyptian military perpetrated a coup or not.

Halting American aid to Egypt is a divisive issue in both parties. Vermont Democratic Sen. Patrick Leahy, the head of the budget committee that oversees foreign aid, broke with the administration soon after the coup to advocate for the immediate cutoff of foreign assistance.

Tennessee Republican Sen. Bob Corker, the ranking member on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, spoke out for the continuation of aid on the Senate floor on Wednesday.

“We have a responsibility to explain why American leadership in the world in many cases helps prevent involvement in conflicts that would be far more costly,” he said.

Soon after his remarks, a proposal by Kentucky Republican Sen. Rand Paul to cut off all \$1.5 billion to Egypt failed in a 86-13 vote.

Florida Republican Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, chair of the Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East, strongly disagrees with her Senate counterparts.

“I’m in favor of cutting off U.S. funds to Egypt immediately,” she told The Daily Caller News Foundation in response to Secretary Kerry’s remarks, “but the State Department is hell-bent on giving our money away as an entitlement.”

“Foreign leaders who are on the ‘good guy list,’ even though they don’t deserve to be, know that there is almost no limit to what this Administration will put up with in order to continue the foolish spending,” she claimed.

Her comments were echoed by Dalibor Rohac, a Mideast scholar at the libertarian Cato Institute.

“Since 1949, Egypt has received around \$70 billion in foreign aid, and since the Camp David Accords there’s been a constant flow of aid,” he told TheDCNF. “For many people I think it’s embarrassing to recognize that most of the money has been wasted. It hasn’t really bought America anything in terms of leverage over the Egyptian military or Egyptian regimes.”

“To speak about the military preserving democracy when there is no clear roadguide as to when the election is going to be held, how the next constitution will be drafted, and so on and so forth, to me it sounds just preposterous,” he said.

Over the weekend the Muslim Brotherhood responded to Kerry’s comments, labeling Washington “complicit in the military coup.”

“Such rhetoric is very alarming,” a spokesman said. “The American people should stand against an administration that is corrupting their values in supporting tyranny and dictatorship.”

Over the past month Egyptian military and police forces have killed dozens of Muslim Brotherhood protesters in street clashes. Last weekend at least 72 people died when security forces opened up on largely unarmed protesters, and that number is expected to rise.

But Rohac believes that unless the situation in Egypt deteriorates into full-blown civil war, aid will continue to flow to the ruling Egyptian generals.

“I think the situation has to get even worse than that for the administration to reconsider,” he said. “But it’s really difficult to predict, to be honest.”