

## Obama axes economic aid to Egypt, keeps military money flowing

Posted By [Brendan Bordelon](#) On 6:16 PM 08/19/2013 In Daily Caller News Foundation |

The Obama administration signaled its intention to withhold \$250 million in expected economic aid to Egypt on Sunday, but refused to make a determination on \$1.3 billion in promised American military assistance.

The announcement came after a number of lawmakers expressed an unwillingness to continue American aid in light of last week's government crackdown, which left nearly 1,000 dead.

Arizona Republican Sen. John McCain, who had previously opposed a Senate amendment to cut off Egyptian aid, changed his tune after visiting Egypt with South Carolina Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham at President Barack Obama's request.

"We have no credibility [in Egypt]," McCain [said](#). "For us to sit by and watch this happen is a violation of everything that we stood for. We're not sticking with our values."

His comments were echoed by Minnesota Democratic Rep. Keith Ellison. "In my mind, there's no way to say that this was not a coup. It is," he said. "We should say so. And then follow our own law, which says we cannot fund the coup leaders."

The Foreign Assistance Act bars the United States from providing aid to "any country whose duly elected head of government is deposed by a military coup or decree."

Other lawmakers from both parties pushed back against calls to freeze all Egypt assistance. "The fact is, there's no good guys there," said New York Republican Rep. Peter King. "But of the two, I think there is more opportunity to protect American interests if we work with the military."

New York Democratic Rep. Eliot Engel said he was "very unhappy, obviously, with the crackdown," but [argued](#) that "we essentially have two choices in Egypt" and the Muslim Brotherhood is not a valid choice.

But while Congress debates whether to freeze Egyptian aid, the American public appears to have made its decision. A Rasmussen poll released Monday [shows](#) that just 18 percent of likely voters support any form of U.S. aid to Egypt.

Some experts believe that the administration's restriction on economic aid will do little to change the behavior of the generals now running Egypt.

"I think this is too little, too late to be a game-changer," said Dalibor Rohac, a foreign policy expert at the libertarian Cato Institute, during an interview with The Daily Caller News

Foundation. "I don't think it will affect in any fundamental way the decision-making problem facing the Egyptian military."

James Phillips, a Middle Eastern scholar at the conservative Heritage Foundation, agrees. "I don't think they're going to care much about economic aid," he told TheDCNF. "Military aid is much more important to them because it forms a big chunk of their capital budget, especially for big-ticket weapons systems like F-16s and tanks."

Phillips believes political pressure will ultimately push the Obama administration to halt all aid, though it could take months. "I think even the military aid will eventually be required to be cut when the administration finally admits that a coup is a coup," he said.

"They could work with Congress to authorize the renewal of aid under some kind of waiver," he explained, "but that's probably at least as far away as the decision that they're going to cut it completely."

But he cautioned that a reduction in military assistance could empower burgeoning extremist groups throughout Egypt.

"Yesterday 25 Egyptian soldiers were killed by al-Qaida-affiliated terrorists in the Sinai," he said. "If we cut off our aid, that's going to weaken the war against al-Qaida. Nobody should gloss that over."

Rohac, however, believes American aid is part of the problem. "I think that aid has misfired," he said, "in the sense that it has fueled anti-Western sentiments in the past several weeks."

"The more money we send to the generals . . . the more we validate the worldview of people like [deposed Egyptian President Mohammed] Morsi and, more importantly, of the more illegal fringe elements of the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic extremists in the country," he continued.

"This idea of buying leverage in the country, to me, seems misguided," Rohac said. "After having sent \$70 billion to Egypt since its independence, its military regime is still doing whatever they want. How much more money would it cost the United States to have any say in Egyptian affairs?"

But for all the debate on American aid, it's now dwarfed by the support the Egyptian military is receiving from neighboring Middle Eastern nations.

Phillips told TheDCNF that Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates alone recently promised at least \$8 to \$12 billion in aid to the new Egyptian government.