



U.S. Aid Does a Disservice to the Egyptian People

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Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., is entirely justified in his call for a suspension of military aid to Egypt. The only problem is that the call comes a wee bit late. Since 1948, the aid provided by the United States to Egypt – which was overwhelmingly military in nature – totaled some \$70 billion. Only a few weeks prior to the coup, in a remarkable display of lack of prescience, the Obama administration approved \$1.3 billion in military aid, waiving the democracy- and human rights-related conditions earlier imposed on the aid package by Congress.

The effects of propping up Egypt's military are immediately visible. The military is the largest on the African continent and controls a large fraction of the economy, between 15 and 40 percent of GDP, according to some estimates. The military runs hotels and resorts, as well as manufacturing businesses producing anything from kitchen appliances to olive oil and bottled water.

Current events in the country make it very difficult to argue that military aid to Egypt has advanced American interests in any measurable way. If anything, aid has contributed to the creation of a bloated, opaque and extremely powerful organization, which now seems to be the single biggest obstacle in Egypt's transition to a representative government that could be a reliable partner for the United States.

As the future of Egypt hinges on the wisdom and benevolence of the country's generals, one needs to stress that U.S. military aid has also done a great disservice to the Egyptian people. Even if one chooses to ignore the excesses of the past week – such as the carnage which occurred on Monday and in which 51 supporters of Muslim Brotherhood died – the coup has set a terrible precedent for the country's transition, as it suggests that a future elected government might be ultimately accountable to Egyptian generals and not the electorate. While much of the damage that has occurred in the past days is irreparable, it should be exceedingly clear that a continuation of military aid to Egypt is nothing short of foolishness.