

China analysis says US "caught by surprise" over Egypt presidential poll result

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Washington, 25 June: While the United States initially applauded last year's upheaval in Egypt that led to the ouster of long-time president Hosni Mubarak, it will tread uncertain waters after the Muslim Brotherhood's candidate won Sunday's election, experts said on Monday [24 June].

Indeed, Mohamed Mursi's victory leaves a number of question marks over what direction the country will take, whether it will abide by international commitments and how much power the country's first-ever Islamist leader will wield, they said.

"Mursi claims that Egypt will adhere to its international commitments, but U.S. officials may want to take his pledge with a grain of salt," said Malou Innocent, foreign policy analyst at the **Cato Institute**.

She said that aspects of the Camp David accords, such as Egypt's sale of natural gas to Israel below the global market rate, will certainly be up for review.

It also remains unclear what the United States is to expect from Egypt on the human rights front, Innocent noted.

"Although Mursi professes freedom for all Egyptians, including women and Coptic Christians, the Brotherhood has a history of going back on its promises," she said, pointing out that the party last year claimed it would not run one of its members for presidency.

The country's economic direction also seems far from certain, as the Brotherhood has argued for free market policies amid what appeared to be contradictions when Mursi invoked the need for minimum and maximum wages, Innocent said.

"Under Mursi, substantive political and economic reform do not seem to be in the cards," she contended.

US caught by surprise, but ties stay intact

In the lead-up to Mursi's electoral victory, the United States was caught by surprise on a number of fronts - Washington did not expect Egypt's military to interfere as

much as it did in the nation's first-ever democratic experiment, nor did it expect the armed forces to dismiss parliament on "questionable legal grounds," said Wayne White, a scholar at the Middle East Institute.

But despite the Brotherhood's win on Sunday, relations with the United States are unlikely to derail, said White, former deputy head of the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research's Office of Analysis for the Near East and South Asia.

"With the Muslim Brotherhood by far the most organized political party, Washington feared from the beginning that the Brotherhood would wield quite a bit of clout -- and quite possibly prevail," he said.

"However, so long as the Egyptian military functions as an effective check on the Brotherhood's power ... American relations with Cairo will not be impacted substantially.

US game plan

Washington is likely to move quickly to engage Mursi, even though much of the real power in the North African country lies with the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), White said.

Still, the United States will want to seek further assurance over the Brotherhood's moderation and encourage Mursi to do all he can to return Egypt to political and economic normalcy.

"Washington might well caution Mursi that he won by only a narrow majority," White said.

Despite satisfaction that the Brotherhood has been restrained by the military and compelled to adopt a less militant public stance, the Obama administration will continue to caution the country's military to behave with greater restraint in order to prevent the complete unravelling of Egypt's democratic experiment and a return to violence, he said.

Internally, provocative actions on the part of the Brotherhood could trigger further SCAF actions curbing Mursi's power as well as a negative popular reaction from millions of Egyptians deeply worried about the Brotherhood's ultimate intentions, White said.

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