

U.S. Interests in Egypt: A Proposed Statement of U.S. Policy

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Brief Analysis

In charting policy that addresses the swiftly moving events in Egypt, it is vital for U.S. leaders to maintain a focus on core U.S. interests. In this regard, President Obama and his national security team should consider a public posture that reflects the following statement:

American interests are best served by supporting a transition to an Egyptian government that:

- *shows, through action, its commitment to the universal freedoms of speech, assembly, thought, and religion, and to a free press; that encourages religious liberty and both practices and enforces religious tolerance for all minorities; that supports the rights of people to communicate freely, including through the internet, without interference; and that combats extremism in all its forms, including those based on religion;*
- *represents, through democratic norms and practices (including free and fair elections for president and parliament), the legitimate political, economic, and social aspirations of its people and that endeavors, in all practicable ways, to meet them;*
- *respects the rule of law and the institutions of justice; recognizes the vital importance of an independent judiciary; and fights corruption at all levels of government;*
- *is committed to fulfill its international obligations, including (but not limited to) freedom of navigation through the Suez Canal; peace with Israel and the expansion of peace throughout the region; the fight against extremism and terrorism; peaceful resolution of the Sudan conflict (including recognition of partition); and all other treaty obligations and duties incumbent upon a peace-loving member of the United Nations;*
- *affirms its bilateral partnership with the United States to advance security and peace in the Middle East, Africa, and the Mediterranean.*

This is the Egypt that merits full U.S. political support and financial assistance, including both economic and military aid. Washington should send to the Egyptian leadership and people a clear message that it stands ready to provide such aid to a government that can endorse these principles and work toward their implementation in practice.

At the same time, it is important for Egyptians to know the sort of government that would not merit U.S. support: a government that suppresses popular protest or resorts to violence against its citizens; a government that rejects the

legitimate calls of its people for redress of grievances; a government whose promises of political reform consistently prove hollow; a government that flouts Egypt's international commitments.

In this context, the United States will consult with the leadership in Cairo on ways to chart a transition to a government that would meet these goals and objectives. The willingness of Egypt's current leaders to endorse these principles and to outline a timetable for their implementation should determine whether the United States is able to continue providing economic and military support to Egypt. This includes a schedule for the constitutional, legal, and administrative changes needed to ensure free and fair parliamentary and presidential elections, including a transition to new leadership. And during that process of transition, the administration will continuously monitor the Egyptian leadership's commitment to the rule of law, respect for universal freedoms, and protection of religious minorities as critical tests of its sincerity and responsibility.

These principles should serve as the foundation of Washington's policy toward the uncertain situation in Egypt. They reflect core U.S. interests in the bilateral relationship and employ "positive conditionality" by linking assistance to a timetable for political reform and leadership transition. This approach is the best way to use American assets to affect the decisionmaking of those wielding authority in Cairo and facilitate a successful and peaceful transition.

Robert Satloff is executive director of The Washington Institute. ❖

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