

PRESS RELEASE: ERC's letter to John Kerry re his visit to Egypt and the resumption of US-Egypt Strategic Review

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Saturday, August 01, 2015

The Honorable John F. Kerry
Secretary of State
US Department of State
Washington, DC

Re: Secretary of State John Kerry's visit to Egypt and the resumption of US-Egypt Strategic Review.

The Hon. Secretary of State,

It is with much regret that we observe the dire consequences of US foreign policy on Egypt, in what can only be described as the trampling on the innate rights of the peoples of the region to freedom and justice.

The support of the US for the coup of July 2013 was no doubt based on what was believed to be a pragmatist, Kissinger like, approach to foreign policy to ensure that Egypt remains securely a 'pro US' power. It was also assumed that it would be a way of controlling the tide of popular political sentiment calling for participation and accountability. That fear justified for the US and its democratic allies the betrayal of the core values of human rights and respect for the rule of law which was seen as a price worth paying.

Unfortunately for both the US people and for Egyptians, the consequences of this policy has only served to exacerbate all the instabilities the US State department feared in the first place.

General Sisi turned out to be not only politically incompetent, incapable of building consensus other than in a crude nihilistic sectarian discourse, but equally, economically and militarily incompetent.

The economy is in a worse shape than before, corruption is rife and the lot of ordinary Egyptians (look at unemployment for example) has deteriorated. Even his oligarch supporters are getting nervous.

Militarily he seems to have managed to lose control of large swathes of Sinai to ISIS through the pursuit of military tactics which even his Israeli allies find incompetent.

Worse still, his political incompetence married to a brutal personality and a lack of self restraint has resulted in the documented murder of thousands of dissidents, torture, rape of women, abuse of children and disappearances as a means of political control, thus promoting deep burning resentment among all sectors of Egyptian society. In sum in Sisi's two years in power according to Human Rights Watch, Egyptians have experienced the worst massacre in the modern history of their country. His promotion of unprecedented sycophancy in his circle of advisors and in the state media ensures that he continues blundering on undeterred.

So why is this detrimental to US interests? The obvious answer is that Egypt is now infinitely more unstable than in 2011. However, there is a more profound reason. In 2011 there was an opportunity with the majority Islamist trend in Egypt that was convinced that democracy was a viable political system, a position that stood contrary to that of violent extremism. The aborting of the democratic experiment in Egypt with the acquiescence of the US, not only conveys a message to all political players that western powers do not really believe in their values beyond their borders, but much more dangerously, it is slowly creating a situation where the people of the region begin to believe that democracy cannot work in their region, which in turn attracts those disillusioned and angry youth to seek violent alternatives to bring about change.

It is therefore for reasons of mutual self interest, and not only through an appeal to the values of democracy, and the standards of international law, that we believe that the US should review its policy towards Egypt and seek to do two things quickly. First, relieve and reverse the dire human rights situation by putting pressure on the Egyptian military to immediately halt political verdicts of execution, free all political prisoners, ensure that torture, rape, disappearances, arbitrary arrest and judicial as well as extra judicial killings cease immediately. Secondly, push hard for the reinstatement of democracy by asking for lifting all controls on the media and freedom of assembly.

The longer the current political order continues the greater the likelihood of a messy outcome and greater the anger at the US. The resumption of the US - Egypt Strategic Dialogue, suspended since 2006, will be clearly seen as a sign of the United States's approval of the Sisi regime and its repressive policies.

We know that in the long term democracy is the only way to achieve political stability. The failure of the US to stand up to a regime that has destroyed Egypt's democratic experiment will only serve to convince an increasing number in the region that ending repression can neither be achieved through democratic means nor in harmony with western interests. Neither the US, nor its regional allies can possibly afford such an outcome.

Yours Sincerely,

Maha Azzam
Head | Egyptian Revolutionary Council.