Remarks by the President on the Situation in Egypt

Residence
Chilmark, Massachusetts

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THE PRESIDENT: Good morning, everybody. I just finished a discussion with my national security team about the situation in Egypt, and I wanted to provide an update about our response to the events of the last several days.

Let me begin by stepping back for a moment. The relationship between the United States and Egypt goes back decades. It's rooted in our respect of Egypt as a nation, an ancient center of civilization, and a cornerstone for peace in the Middle East. It's also rooted in our ties to the Egyptian people, forged through a longstanding partnership.

Just over two years ago, America was inspired by the Egyptian people's desire for change as millions of Egyptians took to the streets to defend their dignity and demand a government that was responsive to their aspirations for political freedom and economic opportunity. And we said at the time that change would not come quickly or easily, but we did align ourselves with a set of principles: nonviolence, a respect for universal rights, and a process for political and economic reform. In doing so, we were guided by values but also by interests, because we believe nations are more stable and more successful when they're guided by those principles as well.

And that's why we're so concerned by recent events. We appreciate the complexity of the situation. While Mohamed Morsi was elected President in a democratic election, his government was not inclusive and did not respect the views of all Egyptians. We know that many Egyptians, millions of Egyptians, perhaps even a majority of Egyptians were calling for a change in course. And while we do not believe that force is the way to resolve political differences, after the military's intervention several weeks ago, there remained a chance for reconciliation and an opportunity to pursue a democratic path.

Instead, we've seen a more dangerous path taken through arbitrary arrests, a broad crackdown on Mr. Morsi's associations and supporters, and now tragically the violence that's taken the lives of hundreds of people and wounded thousands more.

The United States strongly condemns the steps that have been taken by Egypt's interim government and security forces. We deplore violence against civilians. We support universal rights essential to human dignity, including the right to peaceful protest. We oppose the pursuit of martial law, which denies those rights to citizens under the principle that security trumps individual freedom, or that might makes right. And today the United States extends its condolences to the families of those who were killed and those who were wounded.

And given the depths of our partnership with Egypt, our national security interests in this pivotal part of the world and our belief that engagement can support a transition

back to a democratically elected civilian government, we've sustained our commitment to Egypt and its people. But while we want to sustain our relationship with Egypt, our traditional cooperation cannot continue as usual when civilians are being killed in the streets and rights are being rolled back.

As a result, this morning we notified the Egyptian government that we are canceling our biannual joint military exercise which was scheduled for next month. Going forward I've asked my national security team to assess the implications of the actions taken by the interim government and further steps that we may take as necessary with respect to the U.S.-Egyptian relationship.

Let me say that the Egyptian people deserve better than what we've seen over the last several days. And to the Egyptian people, let me say the cycle of violence and escalation needs to stop. We call on the Egyptian authorities to respect the universal rights of the people. We call on those who are protesting to do so peacefully and condemn the attacks that we've seen by protesters, including on churches. We believe that the state of emergency should be lifted, that a process of national reconciliation should begin, that all parties need to have a voice in Egypt's future, that the rights of women and religious minorities should be respected, and that commitments must be kept to pursue transparent reforms of the constitution and democratic elections of a parliament and a President.

Pursuing that path with help Egypt meet the democratic aspirations of its people while attracting the investment, tourism and international support that can help it deliver opportunities to its citizens. Violence, on the other hand, will only feed the cycle of polarization that isolates Egyptians from one another and from the world, and that continues to hamper the opportunity for Egypt to get back on the path of economic growth.

Let me make one final point. America cannot determine the future of Egypt. That's a task for the Egyptian people. We don't take sides with any particular party or political figure. I know it's tempting inside of Egypt to blame the United States or the West or some other outside actor for what's gone wrong. We've been blamed by supporters of Morsi. We've been blamed by the other side, as if we are supporters of Morsi. That kind of approach will do nothing to help Egyptians achieve the future that they deserve.

We want Egypt to succeed. We want a peaceful, democratic, prosperous Egypt. That's our interest. But to achieve that, the Egyptians are going to have to do the work.

We recognize that change takes time, and that a process like this is never guaranteed. There are examples in recent history of countries that are transitioned out of a military government towards a democratic government, and it did not always go in a straight line, and the process was not always smooth. There are going to be false starts. There will be difficult days. America's democratic journey took us through some mighty struggles to perfect our union.

From Asia to the Americas, we know that democratic transitions are measured not in months or even years, but sometimes in generations. So in the spirit of mutual interest and mutual respect, I want to be clear that America wants to be a partner in

the Egyptian people's pursuit of a better future, and we are guided by our national interest in this longstanding relationship. But our partnership must also advance the principles that we believe in and that so many Egyptians have sacrificed for these last several years -- no matter what party or faction they belong to.

So America will work with all those in Egypt and around the world who support a future of stability that rests on a foundation of justice and peace and dignity.

Thank you very much.

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10:37 A.M. EDT