

US Cancels Hundreds of Millions in Aid to Egypt

From VOA Learning English, this is In the News.

Egypt is criticizing an American decision to cancel hundreds of millions of dollars in aid to the country. An Egyptian Foreign Ministry official says the decision is wrong. He says his country is prepared to carry out what he called a political road map, which includes plans for elections next year.

The Obama administration said this week it was suspending the delivery of major weapons to Egypt because of delays in progress toward an inclusive government.

The decision followed an investigation of events since the Egyptian military ousted President Mohamed Morsi three months ago. President Obama has also decided to suspend \$260 million in assistance to the government that followed the ouster.

Mr. Obama has said there can be no business as usual following the overthrow of Mr. Morsi. American officials say this suspension is a way of expressing that point. But it is far from a complete break in American assistance.

The United States will continue to support programs that it says directly help the Egyptian people. It will also continue financing programs that support what it calls “vital security objectives.” These include help aimed at securing Egypt’s borders.

Jonathan Broder is with Congressional Quarterly, a publication that reports on American politics. He says Mr. Obama has been under pressure for not taking stronger steps after the ouster of Egypt’s democratically-elected leader.

“There is the image that President Obama wants to present to the world as someone who stands up for human rights and for democracy. And the images of Egyptian soldiers killing protesters on the streets of Cairo is a very negative one in the United States. And there’s pressure on him from human rights organizations and from some in Congress to suspend the aid.”

American officials say Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel discussed the move in a telephone call on Wednesday with Egypt’s Defense Minister Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. During the call, the two men were said to have re-stated the importance of their countries’ relations in guaranteeing Middle East security.

Since July, the Egyptian military has led a campaign against suspected militants and supporters of Mr. Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood. At least 1,000 people have been killed. Most were Islamists.

In recent days, more violence was reported, with attacks on security forces and clashes between protesters and police. Some Egyptians predict the unrest will only lead to increased use of military force.

Emad Shahin is a public policy professor with The American University in Cairo. He thinks military leaders are preparing for a final battle with their long-time enemies.

“They think that the plan by which they managed to charge, to mobilize the anger of the people against Morsi’s rule and administration and so on, has gained a momentum and it is really time to break down the Islamists.”

For now, many Egyptians are still supporting the military against its opponents. But there are questions of how long that can last.

Mustafa Labbad is director of the Al Sharq Center for Regional and Strategic Studies.

“After a while you have to solve your social and economic problems. And it wouldn’t matter if you are wearing a uniform or casual wear. If you are in power, you have to solve these problems.”

Observers say repression against one group may be possible. But attempting to suppress a larger movement will prove difficult. And that’s In the News from VOA Learning English. I’m George Grow.