

US Sends Apache Attack Helicopters to Egyptian Junta

By [Patrick Martin](#)

Global Research, April 25, 2014

[World Socialist Web Site](#)

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Militarization and WMD](#)

The Obama administration has approved the shipment of Apache attack helicopters to the military junta that rules Egypt. The decision was communicated to the military regime April 22 by defense secretary Chuck Hagel in a phone call to the Egyptian minister of defense, General Sedki Sobhy.

Hagel also told his Egyptian counterpart that US Secretary of State John Kerry will soon certify to Congress that “Egypt is sustaining the strategic relationship and is meeting its obligations under the 1979 Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty.” These certifications are required under US law to permit the continuation of US military aid.

The ten Apache helicopters are “in support of Egypt’s counterterrorism operations in the Sinai,” according to a Pentagon press release, but there is no restriction on their use once the weapons are in Egyptian hands. The murderous gunships can be redeployed from strafing restive Bedouin tribesmen along the border with Israel to massacring demonstrators in cities like Cairo, Alexandria and Suez.

The US will continue to withhold certain weapons, including F-16 fighter jets, M-1 tanks and Harpoon missiles, whose shipment has been suspended since the July 2013 coup that overthrew the elected president of Egypt, Mohammed Mursi of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Colonel Steve Warren, a Pentagon spokesman, confirmed that the US government had certified Egypt was cooperating with the US military and with the Israelis.

“Now that we’ve completed this look and we know that Egypt has been continuing the fight against terrorism in the Sinai, we believe that they need this additional equipment to continue that fight,” he said. “We continue to have very close dialogue with Egypt focused on counterterrorism.”

Other US government spokesmen discussed the political whitewash of the military regime made by the Pentagon and State Department, as part of the formal certification process required each year.

“We are not yet able to certify that Egypt is taking steps to support a democratic transition,” said Admiral John Kirby in a statement that urged “the Egyptian government to demonstrate progress on a more inclusive transition that respects the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all Egyptians.”

US State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki called for a transition to democracy “as Egypt will be more secure and prosperous if it respects the universal rights of its citizens.”

These anodyne statements cover up the brutal reality of mass murder and repression in Egypt. The military slaughtered more than 2,000 people, most of them supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood, in the first weeks after the coup. An estimated 21,000 people have been jailed, including many students and youth active in the revolutionary movement that brought down longtime military dictator Hosni Mubarak.

Three of the most prominent leaders of the 2011 protests in Tahrir Square, Ahmed Maher, Mohammed Adel and Ahmed Douma, have been convicted of violating a decree issued by the junta that bans all political gatherings and protests held without prior permission from the police. Earlier this month an appeals court upheld penalties of three years of hard labor and fines of \$7,000 on each man.

The military is now imposing a far bloodier version of the Mubarak regime under the auspices of its current strongman, Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, who stepped down as chief of staff and defense minister last month in order to become the military's favored candidate in presidential elections set for May 26-27.

The dictatorship has outlawed strikes, which continue to erupt nonetheless, particularly among textile and other industrial workers and among public employees. These include those who work on the Suez Canal, Egypt's key strategic asset from the standpoint both of world trade and imperialist military operations in the region.

Even more savage repressive measures are likely once the presidential election is completed. Last month a court in the Nile delta city of Minya sentenced 529 Muslim Brotherhood supporters to death for the killing of a single policeman, after a hurried two-day proceeding in which most of the defendants were tried in absentia.

By comparison, during 30 years of the Mubarak dictatorship, a total of 90 Islamist militants were sentenced to death—mainly those involved in the assassination of Anwar Sadat and other attempted assassinations—of whom 68 were executed.

A separate trial of 683 Muslim Brotherhood supporters, including the group's top leader, Supreme Guide Mohammed Badie, began last month as well. The ousted president, Mohammed Mursi, is on trial on multiple trumped-up charges that could bring a death sentence.

The regime has proposed two new anti-terrorism laws that would expand on the existing ban on the Muslim Brotherhood, which was outlawed late last year. Under these laws, holding a leadership position in the Muslim Brotherhood or other "terrorist" group would become punishable by death.

Terrorism would be defined so broadly that, according to Amnesty International, the law "criminalizes strikes and peaceful demonstrations in schools, universities and those emanating from mosques." Joining any group so defined would become punishable by ten years in prison.

The shipment of the Apaches is in addition to \$650 million in direct US aid to the Egyptian military set for the current fiscal year. That amount represents half the usual US subsidy, with the balance on hold while the Obama administration labors to find a legal way around the clear congressional ban on aiding a regime originating in a military coup.

The green light for sending Apaches to Egypt underscores the cynicism of the US government and media propaganda about US concern for democracy and human rights in countries ranging from Ukraine to Venezuela. A relative handful of people have been killed in the course of civil strife in those countries, but the US media presents the crisis in Ukraine as the justification for a US-NATO intervention that could provoke war between nuclear-armed powers.

But in Egypt, where the military has carried out a series of massacres, suppresses democratic rights, and is entrenching a ferocious dictatorship, the Obama administration is tacitly endorsing the repression and openly aiding the bloodstained rulers.

In this context, it is worth noting the speech this week by former British prime minister Tony Blair, which gave full-throated support to the Egyptian military's suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood. Blair remains an unapologetic defender of the crimes committed by US president George W. Bush with his assistance, including the invasion and occupation of Iraq.

Blair called for Western leaders to embrace a religious conception of the conflicts in the Middle East, in which radical Islam was understood as the main enemy. He argued that no significant distinction could be made between political movements like the Muslim Brotherhood and terrorist organizations like al Qaeda.

He said that the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood was "dangerous and corrosive; and cannot and should not be treated as a conventional political debate between two opposing views of how society should be governed."

While noting the death sentences to more than 500 people as one of the "things we strongly disagree with," Blair concluded with an outright endorsement of al-Sisi, declaring, "The next president will face extraordinary challenges. It is massively in our interests that he succeeds. We should mobilise the international community in giving Egypt and its new president as much assistance as we can."

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