

# EGYPT CRISIS Obama to meet top aides on aid

President Barack Obama will meet with national security aides Tuesday to discuss the future of US aid to Egypt in the wake of its military-backed government's fierce crackdown on Islamists.

But the White House insisted that reports it had already cut assistance were wrong, insisting that military and economic grants were merely under review.

The meeting at the White House between Obama and top members of his National Security Council was due to begin shortly, said Josh Earnest, a White House spokesman.

Earnest denied reports that Washington has already made a decision to secretly freeze aid to Egypt's military rulers.

The comments came after the Daily Beast website said US assistance had been "secretly pulled" by the Obama administration.

Earnest said there had been no final decision on a review of US aid to Egypt launched after the ouster of president Mohamed Morsi, the country's first democratically elected leader.

In an increasingly complex game of semantics on \$1.3 billion of annual US military aid to Egypt, Earnest insisted that the flow of aid was not a "faucet" that could be turned off and on.

"This is not a faucet in which you just turn the spigot and assistance continues to flow," Earnest said.

"Assistance is provided episodically, assistance is provided in tranches... This is not a matter of turning the dial one way or the other."

Earlier, an aide to Senator Patrick Leahy, a Democrat who heads the subcommittee on foreign operations, said the flow of aid had been "stopped."

"This is current practice, not necessarily official policy, and there is no indication of how long it will last," the aide said.

# Mubarak casts shadow over Washington's policy

AP, Washington

For the Obama administration, there's a new wrinkle that could further complicate ties with post-coup Egypt: The possible release of the country's jailed former leader, Hosni Mubarak.

For nearly three decades, the US propped up Mubarak and the Egyptian military with financial and military support. In exchange, Egypt helped protect US interests in the region, including a peace treaty with Israel.

But that long and tangled relationship is now casting a shadow over the Obama administration as it grapples for a coherent Egypt policy following the ouster of Mubarak's democratically elected successor, Mohamed Morsi.

Amid the tumult of Morsi's ouster, Egyptian judicial officials announced Monday that Mubarak could be released from jail later this week. The White House refused to take a position on the status of its former partner, saying it would be inappropriate to comment on a legal matter.

"President Mubarak is part of an ongoing Egyptian legal process right now," White House spokesman Josh Earnest said. "And because that is a process that is internal to Egypt, it's not something that I'm in a position to comment on from here."

The US has frequently taken positions on legal matters in other countries, including the jailing of Ukraine's former Prime Minister

Yulia Tymoshenko, the sentencing in Russia of the band Pussy Riot and the arrest of American aid workers in Egypt last year.

Mubarak's release likely would deepen the anger among Morsi's supporters in the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamist political movement that was illegal under Mubarak.

Mubarak's sentence was overturned on appeal and he is now being retried. Two judicial officials, however, said there no longer will be any grounds to hold the former president if a court accepts a petition by his lawyer requesting his release in a corruption case later this week.

Morsi's ouster has put the Obama administration in the awkward diplomatic position of choosing between US national security interests and its democratic values, particularly given the military's deadly crackdown against Morsi supporters.

Congressional lawmakers are split over whether to cut off aid. Democrats were generally supportive of the president's approach, though Minnesota Rep. Keith Ellison, the first Muslim elected to Congress, joined a growing number of Republicans calling for the elimination of military aid.

Just over half of Americans say it is better for the United States to cut off military aid to Egypt in order to put pressure on the government, according to a new Pew Research Center poll. That's nearly double the percentage who prefer the US continue sending military aid to Egypt in order to maintain influence there.

# UN rights office pushes for monitors

AFP, Geneva

The UN rights office yesterday said that it was pressing Egyptian authorities to let it deploy monitors in the crisis-wracked country.

Spokeswoman Liz Throssell told reporters that the office was seeking a green light to send "several" human rights observers to assess the situation.

"We're calling to have human rights officers allowed on the ground in Egypt so they can gather information, they can talk to NGOs, national human rights institutions, draw up reports," she added.

Last Thursday, UN rights chief Navi Pillay demanded an "independent, impartial and credible" probe into the bloody crackdown by Egypt's security forces, saying anyone found guilty of wrongdoing should be held to account.

According to Egyptian authorities, hundreds of people were killed in last Wednesday's assaults on two Cairo protest camps of supporters of ousted Islamist president Mohamed Morsi in the country's worst violence in decades. The Muslim Brotherhood has put the death toll at over 2,000.

# BENAZIR MURDER Musharraf indicted



AFP, Rawalpindi

A Pakistani court yesterday charged former military ruler Pervez Musharraf with the 2007 murder of opposition leader Benazir Bhutto, an unprecedented move against an ex-army chief.

It is the first time a head of Pakistan's army has been charged with a crime, challenging beliefs that the military is immune from prosecution and threatening to fan tensions with civilian institutions.

While murder will be difficult to prove, it may embolden efforts to try Musharraf for treason for seizing power in 1999 and for violating the constitution by sacking judges and imposing emergency rule in 2007. Treason can carry the death penalty.

Musharraf, once the most powerful man in the nuclear-armed state, appeared in court yesterday to deny the charges against him.

The case was adjourned until August 27 although no date has been set for any trial.

Musharraf's legal team dismissed the charges as "baseless". Bhutto, twice elected prime minister of Pakistan and the first woman premier of a Muslim country, was killed in a gun and suicide attack in Rawalpindi on December 27, 2007.

Musharraf's government blamed the assassination on Pakistani Taliban chief Baitullah Mehsud, who denied any involvement. He was killed in a US drone attack in 2009.

In 2010, a UN report accused Musharraf's government of failing to give Bhutto adequate protection and said her death could have been prevented.

"There is a long way to go and it will be very, very difficult to prove that he engineered the murder conspiracy or that he was the mastermind," political analyst Imtiaz Gul told AFP.

"All we have seen is a politically motivated indictment, which may be of no real significance in the long run."

Nor has the indictment silenced speculation about the possibility of a behind-the-scenes deal that could allow Musharraf to leave Pakistan without going to jail.

# NEWS IN brief

## Floods kill 8 in Philippines

AFP, Manila

More than 200,000 flood-battered residents of the Philippine capital fled their homes yesterday as relentless monsoon rains, which have killed eight people, submerged more than half of Manila.

Streets turned into rivers with water rising above two-metres in some parts of the megacity of 12 million people, while vast areas of neighbouring farming regions on the main island of Luzon were also inundated.

## US boy, 3, kills himself with gun

CNN ONLINE

A 3-year-old boy in a small Michigan town was killed over the weekend when he accidentally shot himself in the head with a gun he found on the closet floor of his home.

Police said Damon Holbrook discovered the gun, which belonged to a family friend who was living in the house. He was charged with careless discharge of a firearm -- a misdemeanor which carries a sentence of up to 2 years in prison or a fine of \$2,000.

## India's food scheme launched in Delhi

IANS, New Delhi

The food security scheme in India is "unparalleled" in the world, Congress president Sonia Gandhi said while launching the ambitious food scheme in Delhi.

Delhi was the first state to clear the scheme. Under the scheme, a total of 73.5 lakh people will get foodgrain at highly subsidised rates.

## Iraq violence kills 35

AFP, Baghdad

Iraq violence killed 35 people including 15 civilians, officials said yesterday. Violence has claimed more than 3,500 lives already this year.

On Tuesday, six car bombs south of the capital killed six civilians and a policeman and wounded 98 people. Another bomb struck a cafe in a village north of Baghdad, killing five people. And two separate bombings at a livestock market and a police station north of Baghdad killed three people, including a cop. Gunmen also killed two senior police officers and a civilian in the coun-

# Russia, US to discuss Syria next week

AFP, Moscow

Top Russian and US officials will meet in The Hague next week to discuss preparations for a long-delayed international peace conference on Syria, Russian and US officials said Monday.

"This meeting will take place in the middle of next week in The Hague," Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Gennady Gatilov told the Interfax news agency.

The US State Department said the meeting follows an accord reached at August 9 talks in Washington between the foreign and defence ministers of the two countries.

However, UN-Arab League's Syria envoy Lakhdar Brahimi yesterday said he would not take part in crunch talks.

In a statement, the UN said that Brahimi welcomed the bilateral talks between Moscow and Washington in The Hague, but would not be participating himself.

Neither Gatilov nor the diplomat disclosed which Russian officials would be attending. Washington said it will be represented by Wendy Sherman, the US under-secretary of state for political affairs, and the US ambassador to Syria, Robert Ford.

Moscow and Washington agreed in May to conduct the so-called Geneva 2 talks, which aim to bring together President Bashar al-Assad's allies and the opposition for the first time after two-and-a-half years of conflict.

Gatilov said last week that the Geneva 2 meeting itself would probably not happen until October at the earliest because of a busy diplomatic schedule in September that includes UN meetings in New York.



The photo shows vehicles submerged by water in the flood-hit Chaonan district of Shantou, in southern China's Guangdong province on Monday. Devastating floods in China have left more than 130 people dead and another 115 missing in recent days, state media said.

# Britain forced to destroy Snowden files: Guardian

AFP, London

The Guardian newspaper says the British government forced it to destroy files or face a court battle over its publication of US security secrets leaked by Edward Snowden, as the fallout over the arrest of a man linked to the fugitive intensifies.

The claim by the paper's editor Alan Rusbridger came as Britain faced a second day of questions over why the partner of US journalist Glenn Greenwald had been detained and questioned at a London airport for nine hours.

The partner of the US journalist, Glenn Greenwald, behind the Edward Snowden leaks launched legal action against Britain yesterday for holding him under anti-terror laws.

David Miranda was held for almost nine hours on Sunday as he passed through Heathrow Airport.

Writing in yesterday's edition of The Guardian, Rusbridger said that two months ago

he had been contacted by "a very senior government official claiming to represent the views of the prime minister".

The call led to two meetings in which "he demanded the return or destruction of all the material we were working on".

At the time, the paper was in the middle of publishing candid revelations about mass surveillance programmes conducted by the NSA and its British counterpart, GCHQ, after Snowden handed them thousands of documents.

Rusbridger claimed that in a call "from the centre of government", someone he does not identify told him: "You've had your fun. Now we want the stuff back."

"There followed further meetings with shadowy Whitehall figures," he continued. "The demand was the same: 'hand the Snowden material back or destroy it... You've had your debate. There's no need to write any more.'"

# Israel, Palestine negotiators hold Jerusalem talks

AFP, Ramallah

Israeli and Palestinian officials held talks in Jerusalem yesterday and were to meet again later the same day, Palestinian sources said, just six days after they resumed direct negotiations.

An initial two-hour meeting took place in secret in the morning, with negotiators set to return to Jerusalem's King David Hotel for a "second round of talks" at around 7:30pm, a senior official said on condition of anonymity.

"A meeting was held today between the Palestinian delegation, headed by Saeb Erakat and Mohammad Shtayyeh, and the Israeli delegation of (Justice Minister) Tzipi Livni and Yitzhak Molcho," the official told AFP, saying the talks had started at 11:00am.

The meetings were taking place just six days after Israeli and Palestinian

negotiators formally resumed direct peace talks after a hiatus of nearly three years, thanks to an intense bout of shuttle diplomacy by US Secretary of State John Kerry.

Details of the morning discussions were not revealed, following a request from Washington last week for a strict news blackout.

In the evening, the negotiators were to focus on "how to begin discussing borders and security," one source said, indicating that the talks on borders would touch on the issue of Jerusalem, settlements and the Jordan River.

Each team was expected to hand over a list of names of the negotiators who would chair committees on key issues such as Jerusalem, borders, security, prisoners, water, settlements and the economy.

# Pak PM calls on extremists for talks

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif Monday called for dialogue with extremists to end bloodshed that has left thousands dead in the country in more than a decade of violence.

He made the offer in his first televised address to the nation since taking office after winning elections in May, a sweeping, hour-long speech that focused on Pakistan's myriad problems.

He campaigned for an historic third term as premier by offering peace talks to the Pakistani Taliban, the leaders of a devastating domestic insurgency that has links to al-Qaeda.

# US military judge weighs sentence for Manning

AFP, Fort Meade

A US military judge yesterday began deliberating on a sentence for Bradley Manning, the soldier convicted of espionage for giving classified government documents to WikiLeaks.

The judge, Colonel Denise Lind, opened the proceedings at 9:30am and adjourned within five minutes to begin her deliberations on Manning's punishment over the massive leak.

"I will announce the sentence tomorrow morning at the earliest," Lind said.

The slightly built, bespectacled Manning, 25, clad in his customary dress blue Army uniform, sat silently next to his military and civilian lawyers, listening to the proceedings in a courtroom at Fort Meade, northeast of Washington.

Military prosecutors on Monday demanded a 60-year prison sentence for Manning, saying the penalty would send a



message to any soldier contemplating stealing classified information.

Lead defense attorney David Coombs, however, appealed for leniency for his client, saying Manning had expressed remorse, cooperated with the court and deserved a chance to have a family and one day walk free.

Coombs said Manning was young and "naive", but had good intentions when he leaked classified files in hopes of shedding light on US foreign policy.

The judge said Manning would have 1,293 days removed from his sentence, getting credit for his pre-trial confinement after May 2010, which included a nine-month period in harsh conditions at a military jail in Virginia.

The former junior intelligence analyst admitted to handing over about 700,000 classified battlefield reports and diplomatic cables to the anti-secrecy website WikiLeaks.



The photo shows Prince William his wife Catherine with their newborn baby boy, Prince George of Cambridge at the Middleton family home in Bucklebury, Berkshire, in early August. The couple released two family photographs with their son, Prince George, taken by Michael Middleton, Catherine's father, in early August in the garden of the Middleton family home.

# ODDLY enough

## New dog in White House

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama and his family welcomed a playful new addition to the White House on Monday -- a dog called Sunny.

The black Portuguese Water Dog joins the first family's other four-legged friend of the same breed, Bo.

## Bolivian claims he's 123

AFP, Fragua

Could this be the world's oldest person? Carmelo Flores Laura lives high in the Bolivian mountains, chews coca leaves, cooks on open fires and says he's 123 years old.

Flores Laura was born on July 16, 1890, according to his government identification card. Bolivia's Electoral Tribunal confirmed his identity and his age.

According to the Guinness World Records, the world's oldest person whose age could be verified was a French woman, Jeanne Calment, who died in 1997 at the age of 122. The official world's oldest man is a 112 year-old Spaniard