

## U.S.: Egypt Violence 'Serious Blow' To Peace Efforts

BY MATTHEW LEE AND  
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Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In a stern warning to Egypt's leaders, Secretary of State John Kerry said the escalating violence throughout the country Wednesday had dealt a "serious blow" to political reconciliation efforts between the military-backed interim government and supporters of ousted President Mohammed Morsi.

Still, Obama administration officials signaled no change in U.S. policy toward Egypt or clear consequences for the mounting violence. The U.S. has avoided declaring Morsi's ouster a coup, a move that would force the administration to suspend \$1.3 billion in annual military aid to the strategically important nation, and officials said they continued to believe that step is not in America's national security interests. They said they were engaged in a continual review of policy toward Egypt but stressed that there were no changes to announce.

Kerry, during a surprise appearance at the State Department, condemned the violence that killed at least 149 people nationwide and the reinstatement of emergency rule. He called it "deplorable" and urged Egypt's interim leaders to take a step back and calm the situation.

"It's a serious blow to reconciliation and the Egyptian people's hopes for a transition towards democracy and inclusion," he told reporters.

Kerry added that he and other administration officials had for the past week been



AHMED ASADI/APA IMAGES/ZUMA PRESS/MCT  
**Supporters of ousted Egyptian president Morsi clash with security forces in Cairo, Egypt, Wednesday. Egypt security forces launched an early morning attack Wednesday on two sit-ins by supporters of ousted President Mohammed Morsi, firing ammunition and razing the sites with bulldozers in an attack that may have killed hundreds.**

urging the military and interim government to respect freedom of speech and assembly. But neither he nor other officials could or would outline or even hint at any consequences the failure to heed those calls would bring.

Instead, Kerry and other officials repeated their appeals for a return to dialogue.

"This is a pivotal moment for all Egyptians," Kerry said. "The path toward violence leads only to greater instability, economic disaster and suffering."

Wednesday's assault came after days of warnings by the interim administration that replaced Morsi after he was ousted on July 3. The two sit-in camps at two major intersections on opposite sides of the Egyptian capital began in late June to show support for Morsi. Protesters — many from Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood — have demanded his reinstatement.

Vice President Mohamed ElBaradei, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate and pro-reform leader in the interim government, resigned in protest over the assaults as the military-backed leadership imposed a month-long state of emergency and nighttime curfew.

Kerry spoke Wednesday with ElBaradei and Egypt's foreign minister, as well as other top officials in the Middle East. He insisted that a political solution remains a viable option in Egypt, though he conceded that path was made "much, much harder" by the recent events.

Kerry did not elaborate on his call with ElBaradei, which took place after the latter had resigned. State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said that ElBaradei's resignation was "a concerning development" but added that Kerry had not urged ElBaradei to reconsider his decision.

President Barack Obama,

on a weeklong vacation in Martha's Vineyard, Mass., was briefed on the deteriorating situation by national security adviser Susan Rice.

White House and State Department officials said the U.S. role was largely to encourage the interim government to fulfill its promises to enact political reform. The military-backed government has pledged to amend the Islamist-backed constitution adopted last year and holding parliamentary and presidential elections early next year.

"Figuring out how to encourage the interim government to make good on their promise to transition to a democratically elected government there is something that we're working on," White House spokesman Josh Earnest said. "Hopefully it's something they're working on."

The turmoil was the latest chapter in a bitter standoff between Morsi's supporters and the interim leadership that took over the Arab world's most populous country. The military ousted Morsi after millions of Egyptians massed in the streets at the end of June to call for him to step down, accusing him of giving the Brotherhood undue influence and failing to implement vital reforms or bolster the ailing economy.

Morsi has been held at an undisclosed location. Other Brotherhood leaders have been charged with inciting violence or conspiring in the killing of protesters.

At least 250 people have died in previous clashes since the Morsi's overthrow.

## Israelis, Palestinians Hold Peace Talks

JERUSALEM (AP) — With tensions high and expectations low, Israeli and Palestinian negotiators kicked off their first substantive round of peace talks in nearly five years, huddling together at an undisclosed location Wednesday in search of an end to decades of conflict.

The meeting was cloaked in secrecy, an attempt by both sides to prevent leaks to the media and maintain trust. Officials would say only that the talks took place in Jerusalem, and there was no immediate comment from either side. The Israeli government released a brief video showing the chief negotiators shaking hands as the talks continued into the evening.

Ahead of the meeting, there already were signs of trouble. A new Israeli push to build hundreds of new homes in Jewish settlements and fresh fighting in the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip underscored the tough road ahead.

"We are committed to making the effort, for the sake of Israel and for Israel's values," Israel's chief negotiator, Tzipi Livni, told Channel 10 TV before the talks began. "It will be complicated and complex, but I am not giving up."

Late Wednesday, both sides confirmed the meeting had ended after several hours. A Palestinian official said they had agreed to meet weekly, alternating between Jerusalem and the West Bank town of Jericho. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sides' commitment to maintain secrecy. No further details were immediately available.

## Pfc. Bradley Manning Takes The Stand

FORT MEADE, Md. (AP) — Pfc. Bradley Manning took the stand Wednesday at his sentencing hearing in the WikiLeaks case and apologized for hurting his country, pleading with a military judge for a chance to go to college and become a productive citizen.

He addressed the court after a day of testimony about his troubled childhood in Oklahoma and the extreme psychological pressure that experts said he felt in the "hyper-masculine" military because of his gender-identity disorder — his feeling that he was a woman trapped in a man's body.

"I am sorry that my actions hurt people. I'm sorry that they hurt the United States," he said as he began.

The soldier said that he understood what he was doing but that he did not believe at the time that leaking a mountain of classified information to the anti-secrecy website would cause harm to the U.S.

Manning, 25, could be sentenced to 90 years in prison for the leaks, which occurred while he was working as an Army intelligence analyst in Iraq in 2010. The judge will impose the sentence, though exactly when is unclear.

## UPS Jet Crashes Near Birmingham

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) — A UPS cargo plane crashed into a field near the Birmingham airport Wednesday, killing two pilots and scattering wreckage over a rural area moments after witnesses heard the massive A300 jet coming in at treetop level.

People living near the airfield reported seeing flames coming from the aircraft and hearing its engines struggle in the final moments before impact.

"It was on fire before it hit," said Jerome Sanders, who lives directly across from the runway.

The plane, which had departed from Louisville, Ky., went down about a half-mile from Birmingham-Shuttlesworth Airport. It broke into several pieces and caught fire. The pilot and co-pilot were the only people aboard.

Weather conditions at the time were rainy with low clouds.

## Terrorists Turn To Online Chat Rooms To Evade U.S.

BY LARA JAKES AND  
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Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Al-Qaida fighters have been using secretive chat rooms and encrypted Internet message boards for planning and coordinating attacks — including the threatened if vague plot that U.S. officials say closed 19 diplomatic posts across Africa and the Middle East for more than a week.

It's highly unlikely that al-Qaida's top leader, Ayman al-Zawahri, or his chief lieutenant in Yemen, Nasser al-Wahishi, were personally part of the Internet chatter or, given the intense manhunt for both by U.S. spy agencies, that they ever go online or pick up the phone to discuss terror plots, experts say.

But the unspecified call to arms by the al-Qaida leaders, using a multi-layered subterfuge to pass messages from

couriers to tech-savvy underlings to attackers, provoked a quick reaction by the U.S. to protect Americans in far-flung corners of the world where the terror network is evolving into regional hubs.

For years, extremists have used online forums to share information and drum up support, and over the past decade they have developed systems that blend encryption programs with anonymity

software to hide their tracks. Jihadist technology may now be so sophisticated and secretive, experts say, that many communications avoid detection by National Security Agency programs that were specifically designed to uncover terror plots.

A U.S. intelligence official said the unspecified threat was discussed in an online forum joined by so many jihadist groups that it

included a representative from Boko Haram, the Nigerian insurgency that has loose and informal ties to al-Qaida. Two other intelligence officials characterized the threat as more of an alert to get ready to launch potential attacks than a discussion of specific targets.

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