

RELEASE IN PART
B5,B6

From: Sullivan, Jacob J <SullivanJJ@state.gov>
Sent: Saturday, February 5, 2011 11:51 AM
To: H
Subject: Fw: NYT (Landler): Obama Backs Suleiman-Led Transition

Fyi

From: Burns, William J
To: Sullivan, Jacob J
Sent: Sat Feb 05 11:27:19 2011
Subject: RE: NYT (Landler): Obama Backs Suleiman-Led Transition



B5

From: Sullivan, Jacob J
Sent: Saturday, February 05, 2011 11:20 AM
To: Burns, William J
Subject: Fw: NYT (Landler): Obama Backs Suleiman-Led Transition

Your thoughts?

From: Adler, Caroline E
To: Sullivan, Jacob J
Sent: Sat Feb 05 11:15:49 2011
Subject: Fw: NYT (Landler): Obama Backs Suleiman-Led Transition

Fyi

From: Ellen Connell [redacted]
Sent: Saturday, February 05, 2011 11:12 AM
To: stratcomm
Subject: NYT (Landler): Obama Backs Suleiman-Led Transition

B6

Obama Backs Suleiman-Led Transition

By MARK LANDLER and STEVEN ERLANGER

MUNICH — The Obama administration on Saturday formally threw its weight behind a gradual transition in Egypt, backing attempts by the country's vice president, Gen. Omar Suleiman, to broker a compromise with opposition groups and prepare for new elections in September.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, speaking to a conference here, said it was important to support Mr. Suleiman as he seeks to defuse street protests and promises to reach out to opposition groups, including the Muslim Brotherhood. Administration officials said earlier that Mr. Suleiman and other military-backed leaders in Egypt are also considering ways to provide President Hosni Mubarak with a graceful exit from power.

“That takes some time,” Mrs. Clinton said. “There are certain things that have to be done in order to prepare.”

Her message, echoed by Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany and Prime Minister David Cameron of Britain, was a notable shift in tone from the past week, when President Obama, faced with violent clashes in Cairo, demanded that Mr. Mubarak make swift, dramatic changes.

Now, the United States and other Western powers appear to have concluded that the best path for Egypt — and certainly the safest one, to avoid further chaos — is a gradual transition, managed by Mr. Suleiman, a pillar of Egypt’s existing establishment, and backed by the military.

Whether such a process is acceptable to the crowds on the streets of Cairo is far from clear: there is little evidence that Mr. Suleiman, a former head of Egyptian intelligence and trusted confidant of Mr. Mubarak, would be seen as an acceptable choice, even temporarily. Opposition groups have refused to speak to him, saying that Mr. Mubarak must leave first.

But Mrs. Clinton suggested that the United States was not insisting on the immediate departure of Mr. Mubarak, and that such an abrupt shift of power may not be necessary or prudent. She said Mr. Mubarak, having taken himself and his son, Gamal, out of the September elections, was already effectively sidelined. She emphasized the need for Egypt to begin building peaceful political parties and to reform its constitution to make a vote credible.

“That is what the government has said it is trying to do,” she said. “That is what we are supporting, and hope to see it move as orderly but as expeditiously, as possible, under the circumstances.”

Mrs. Clinton expressed fears about deteriorating security inside Egypt, noting the explosion at a gas pipeline in the Sinai Peninsula, and uncorroborated media reports of an earlier assassination attempt on Mr. Suleiman.

The report was mentioned at the conference by Wolfgang Ischinger, a retired German diplomat who is the conference chairman, just as Mrs. Clinton began taking questions at the gathering of heads of state, foreign ministers, and legislators from the United States, Europe, and other countries.

American officials said they have no evidence that the report is accurate. But Mrs. Clinton picked up on it and said it “certainly brings into sharp relief the challenges we are facing as we navigate through this period.”

A senior Republican senator at the meeting, Lindsay Graham of South Carolina, voiced support for the administration's backing for a gradual transition in Egypt, saying that a Suleiman-led transitional government, backed by the military, was probably the only way for Egypt to negotiate its way to elections in the fall.

"What would be the alternative?" he asked.

Mrs. Clinton emphasized that American support for Mr. Suleiman's plan should not be construed as an effort to dictate events. "Those of us who are trying to make helpful offers of assistance and suggestions for how to proceed are still at the end on the outside looking in," she said.

But in a hectic morning of diplomacy, Mrs. Clinton was clearly eager to build support for this position. She met with Mr. Cameron, Mrs. Merkel, and Turkey's foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, who said the views of Turkey and the United States were "100 percent identical." Mr. Obama spoke by phone Friday with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Mrs. Clinton's emphasis on a deliberate process was repeated by Mrs. Merkel and Mr. Cameron. Mrs. Merkel harkened to her past as a democracy activist in East Germany, recalling the impatience of protestors, after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, to immediately join democratic West Germany. But the process took a year, and it was time well spent, she said.

"There will be a change in Egypt," she said, "but clearly, the change has to be shaped in a way that it is peaceful, a sensible way forward."

Mr. Cameron said introducing democracy in Egypt "overnight" would fuel further instability, saying the West needed to encourage the development of civil society and political parties before holding a vote.

"Yes, the transition absolutely has to start now," Mr. Cameron said. "But if we think it is all about the act of holding an election, we are wrong. It is about a set of actions."

Mrs. Clinton highlighted the dangers of holding elections without adequate preparation. To take part in Egypt's new order, she said, political parties should renounce violence as a tool of coercion, pledge to respect the rights of minorities, and show tolerance. The White House has signaled that it is open to a dialogue with the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamist group that Israeli officials and others warn could put Egypt on a path to extremism.

"The transition to democracy will only happen if it is deliberate, inclusive, and transparent," she said. "The challenge is to help our partners take systematic steps to usher in a better future, where people's voices are heard, their rights respected, and their aspirations met."

"Revolutions have overthrown dictators in the name of democracy, only to see the process hijacked by new autocrats who use violence, deception, and rigged elections to stay in power," Mrs. Clinton said.

She also underlined the need to support Egypt's state institutions, including the army and financial institutions, which she said were functioning and respected. Economic pressures are building in Egypt, she said, which has been paralyzed by days of street demonstrations.

While this meeting was dominated by the political change sweeping through the Middle East, the United States and Russia also formally put into force New Start, a strategic arms control treaty passed by the Senate in December after a long political battle by President Obama.

Mrs. Clinton and Russia's foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, exchanged legal documents ratifying the treaty, which puts new limits on strategic nuclear warheads, heavy bombers, and launch vehicles. The United States and Russia have 45 days to trade details on the number, location, and technical specifications of their arsenals. Inspection can begin in 60 days.

Relations between the United States and Russia began to thaw at this meeting in 2009, when Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. called for the countries to "reset" their relationship after the chilly Bush years.

In addition to the ratification of New Start, the day saw a meeting of the Quartet, a group that deals with the Middle East and comprises the United States, Russia, the European Union and the United Nations. This meeting was intended to reaffirm support for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, even amid the turmoil in Egypt and the Arab world.

The United States was reluctant to hold the meeting, a senior Western diplomat said, but the Europeans in particular wanted to make the point that change in the Middle East was a new opportunity for peace, and that stagnation between Israel and Palestine was a bad signal.

"Our analysis is because of the events in Egypt we must react and send a signal the peace process is alive," the European diplomat said. Another quartet meeting will follow in the next month, he said.

Mrs. Clinton deflected a question about how the turmoil would affect Israel or the peace process. In its eagerness to avoid the issue, the administration lined up with Turkey. Mr. Davutoglu said, "It is better not to talk about Israel-Palestine now. It is better to separate these issues."