

# Pressure mounts on Egypt's Mubarak

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Protesters in Cairo's Tahrir Square chant "Irhal" ("go") and wave shoes as they watch Mubarak speak on a big screen

Pressure remains on Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak to quit immediately after a speech in which he said he would not stand for re-election in September.

US President Barack Obama said an orderly transition "must begin now", while Turkey's PM Erdogan said Mr Mubarak should take a "different step".

In Tuesday night's speech, Mr Mubarak promised to leave at the next polls, and pledged constitutional reform.

Thousands took to the streets to voice their support for him on Wednesday.

They insisted they spoke for the real Egypt and were not being paid to demonstrate, says the BBC's Jon Leyne in Cairo.

Others, though, remained camped out on the nearby Tahrir Square saying Mr Mubarak's promise was not enough, and chanting: "We will not leave! He will leave!"

Egypt's army - widely seen as an arbiter in the crisis - issued a statement on Wednesday calling for demonstrators to return to their homes, and allow life in the country to return to normal.



President Obama: "An orderly transition must be meaningful, it must be peaceful and it must begin now"

"Your message has arrived, your demands became known... you are capable of bringing normal life to Egypt," said a spokesman in a message broadcast on state television.

Meanwhile, internet service was reportedly returning to the country, having been cut off for days by the government. State television also reported an easing of a nationwide curfew - with restricted hours from 1700-0700 (1500-0500GMT) rather than 1500-0800.

## Demonstrations to continue

Hundreds of thousands had gathered across the country on Tuesday in the biggest rally since more than a week of protests had left about 300 dead, according to UN estimates.

Up to 2,000 demonstrators saw out a cold night in Cairo's Tahrir Square, the epicentre of the protests, saying the president's pledge was insufficient: They want to see him deposed and punished.

It seems pretty clear Mr Mubarak's offer to stand down simply won't be enough to satisfy large sections of the opposition: Leaders are saying they will refuse to negotiate a political solution with him.

If the president had made this offer just a few days ago, the reaction might have been rather different, but after the shootings last Friday the mood is much fiercer.

People are saying that if a week of demonstrations has pushed the president this far then there's every incentive to keep up the pressure on him.

President Mubarak's offer to stand down will cause shock waves right across the Middle East. Until recently the regime in Egypt seemed pretty much rock solid.

Now autocratic governments in North Africa right through to Yemen, Syria and maybe even Saudi Arabia will be looking for ways to buy off discontent at home.

In a statement after Mr Mubarak's address, Mr Obama said the US would be happy to offer assistance to Egypt during the transition process.

Opposition leader Mohamed ElBaradei dismissed Mr Mubarak's move as "a trick" to stay in power, and protesters in Cairo's Tahrir Square have vowed to continue their demonstrations until Mr Mubarak quit.

Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, meanwhile, said Mr Mubarak should take a "different step", Reuters news agency reported.

On Tuesday, Mr Erdogan had advised the Egyptian leader to listen to his people's desire for change.

### **'Inflames anger'**

Abdelhalim Kandil, leader of Egypt's Kifaya (Enough) opposition movement, said Mr Mubarak's offer not to serve a sixth term was not enough.

"I will tell you very simply that there is an unprecedented popular movement that rejects the presence of the president on a scope that has not been seen before, that is calling for the will of the people to be imposed," he said.

If Mr Mubarak does not step down, demonstrators are planning to march on the presidential palace.

Some demonstrators said they did not trust their 82-year-old leader to enact the necessary constitutional changes.

"The speech is useless and only inflames our anger," one protester, Shadi Morkos, told Reuters. "We will continue to protest."

However, other Egyptians said they believed that Mr Mubarak's offer could be a suitable compromise.

Omneya Okasha, a resident from Alexandria, told the BBC she believed that sudden change could lead to "more drastic consequences".

"I find this a stable solution something that suits both sides - a win-win situation. But a lot of people will still protest and they will still want him to leave," she said.

## **'Restore peace'**

In his address on Tuesday, Mr Mubarak said he would devote his remaining time in power to ensuring a peaceful transition of power to his successor.



He criticised the protests and said his priority was to "restore peace and stability".

"This is my country. This is where I lived, I fought and defended its land, sovereignty and interests, and I will die on its soil," he said.

In a short statement, Mr Obama said that it was not his country's right to dictate the path for Egypt, but that any transition must include opposition voices and lead to free and fair elections.

"It is my belief that an orderly transition must be meaningful, it must be peaceful and it must begin now," Mr Obama said he had told Mr Mubarak during a 30-minute phone call between the leaders.

SOURCE: BBC News Middle East