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To: NEWS-Mahogany
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Subject: Egyptian Leader Assures McCain and Kerry on Transition (NYT)

CAIRO — After talks with the leader of Egypt's ruling military council, Senator John McCain on Sunday expressed confidence that the caretaker military rulers wanted to transfer powers to an elected government "as soon as possible."

Senator McCain, an Arizona Republican, and Senator John Kerry, Democrat of Massachusetts, who were visiting Egypt with an American business delegation, said it was in the interest of the United States' national security to see Egypt become a free and democratic country.

Mr. McCain said that the leader of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, had "again indicated his absolute commitment to a transition to a civilian government at the earliest possible time after the elections have taken place."

Mr. Kerry said that he thought the military was "very anxious to get out of the business of governing, and they want to go back to doing what they were doing."

This month, Prime Minister Essam Sharaf raised the possibility of delaying parliamentary elections, saying that "postponing the elections would give the chance for a larger number of new political parties to develop." Increasingly, some secular groups and political parties are calling for the elections to be delayed until a new constitution can be drafted, partly because they fear that early elections will give an unfair advantage to Islamists.

The senators proposed that Field Marshal Tantawi allow international monitors to observe Egypt's parliamentary and presidential elections, which are scheduled for this fall.

"Our recommendations included the idea of having third-party organizers with Egypt's upcoming campaigns and elections," Mr. McCain said. "We also suggested ways to have more economic cooperation, further assistance to Egypt's military and hastening the legislation of proposed aid to Congress."

The senators' Cairo visit was part of a broader trip to advance American economic ties in the region. On Sunday, they rang the opening bell at the Egyptian Stock Exchange.

Mr. McCain affirmed his belief that "the success and failure of the revolution in this part of the Arab world will be directly related to the ability of providing investments and jobs for the Egyptian people."

Mr. Kerry also offered words of encouragement. "What Egypt does can change the region and will help in the quest for a better future," he said.

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