



Business as Usual - U.S. Arms Sales To Egypt

Security Assistance Monitor, February 2021

What's At Issue

On February 16, 2021, the Biden Administration notified Congress of a proposed sale of 168 Rolling Airframe Missiles to Egypt worth \$197 million. The U.S. government has said the sale is a "routine replenishment" of Cairo's naval defense systems, but it comes amidst deteriorating human rights conditions in the country, including the arrest of relatives of Egyptian-American activist Mohamed Soltan, just days before the announced sale.

The sale is the first proposed for Egypt under President Biden, despite his promises to recalibrate arms transfers to authoritarian governments. And though the sale may be business as usual, the enduring security partnership with Abdel Fatah Al-Sisi's increasingly repressive government has raised serious ethical and practical concerns, in terms of human rights and broader U.S. interests.

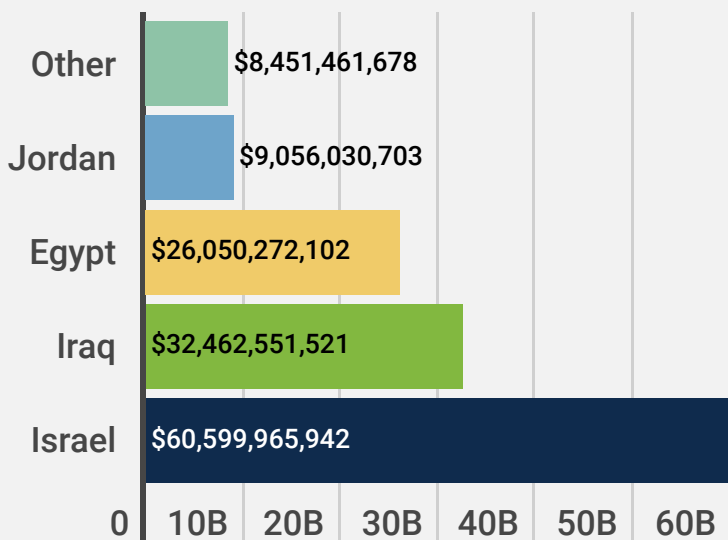
Arms and Security Aid to Egypt in Context

For more than forty years, Egypt has been among the largest recipients of U.S. military aid. It has received an annual allotment of more than \$1.3 billion in U.S. assistance since 1987, totaling more than \$41 billion, much of which is used to purchase American weaponry. Egypt's aid package reflects the longstanding alliance between Cairo and Washington, which American policymakers have insisted is essential for ensuring regional security, preserving the 1979 peace agreement between Egypt and Israel, and maintaining U.S. influence and access in the Arab world's most populous country. But Egypt's poor human rights situation, the authoritarian nature of the central government, and its brutal campaign against militants in the Sinai have raised serious questions about the U.S. security partnership with Cairo.

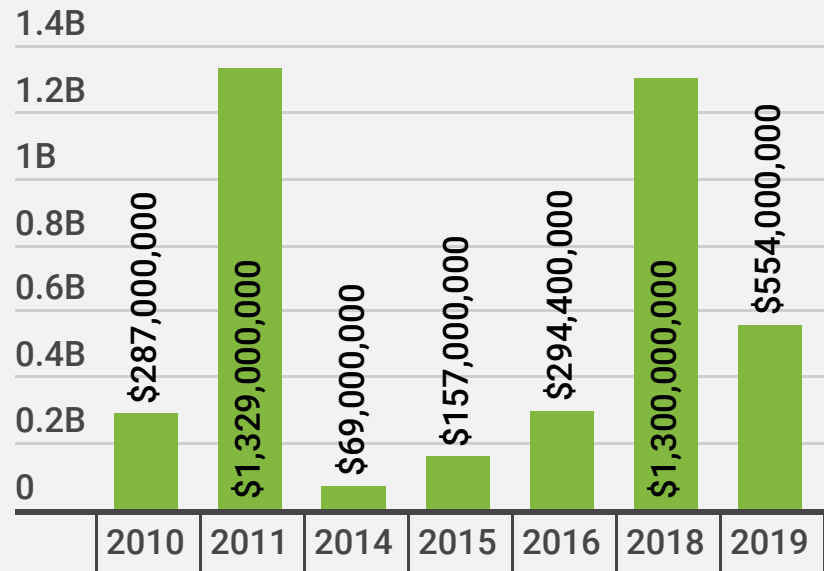
Egyptian President Abdel Fatah Al-Sisi, seized power through a military coup in 2013. Since then, his government has presided over a campaign of extrajudicial killings, unlawful detentions, a sweeping crackdown on civil society and the press, and constitutional revisionism that has expanded executive powers and secured a path for Sisi to remain in office until 2030. Although the Sisi government has justified its repressive tactics and need for American weapons by citing the need to combat terrorism, analysts have noted with concern the brutality and ineffectiveness of Egyptian counter-terror operations.

Despite this, little if anything has changed in the arms relationship between the Sisi government and Washington. The U.S. continues to provide billions in arms and assistance to Egypt, principally through U.S. Foreign Military Financing (FMF) - a program that provides foreign governments with grants to buy U.S. arms. And although lawmakers have passed legislation requiring a suspension of Egypt's FMF until the Secretary of State certifies the country is taking steps toward democracy and human rights, successive administrations have used a Presidential waiver to bypass the stipulation. Presidents Obama, Trump, and now Biden have continued to sell arms to Egypt that represent a signal of political support from Washington. In 2020, then-candidate Biden promised a change of course in relations with Egypt, saying that there would be "no more blank checks for Trump's favorite dictator." But so far at least, that promise has not been reflected in changes to arms sales.









U.S. Security Assistance to the MENA Region By Country Since FY2001



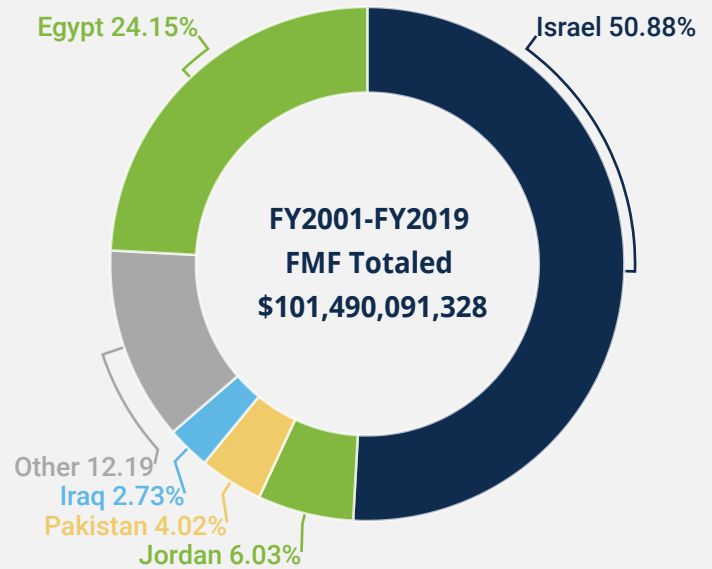
U.S. Arms Sales Notifications to Egypt Since 2008



Arms Sales to Egypt By Type Since 2008

	\$4,604,000,000
Rotary Aircraft	
	\$3,358,822,000
Fixed Wing Aircraft	
	\$2,112,012,323
Support	
	\$1,329,000,000
Tanks and Armored Vehicles	
	915,000,000
ISR, Tech, & Radar	
	\$912,000,000
Missiles	
	\$369,000,000
Munitions	
	\$240,000,000
Naval Craft	

Share of U.S. All U.S. Foreign Military Financing Assistance



Egypt's Counterterror Campaign in the Sinai

Among the most acute security threats cited by Egypt in its demands for U.S. arms is the militant insurgency in the country's Sinai desert, a vast peninsula between the Gulfs of Suez and Aqaba. In 2019 alone, the Islamic State's Sinai Province affiliate (IS-SP) conducted 282 attacks that killed 269.

But Egypt's counterterrorism efforts in the Sinai are questionable at best, and it has failed to address grievances among the people living there. Human Rights Watch (HRW) has documented a series of severe human rights abuses in connection with the Egyptian anti-terror campaign, including thousands of arbitrary arrests, and "enforced disappearances, torture, extrajudicial killings, collective punishment, and forced eviction," which has only worsened the underlying grievances.

There is also substantial evidence of numerous air and ground strikes against civilians in the Sinai, including a 2015 attack in which Egyptian forces used U.S.-provided helicopter gunships to attack a tour bus, killing dozens of tourists and wounding one American. In a 2019 Congressional briefing that discussed the incident, Congressman Tom Malinowski, formerly the Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, said "Egypt...contributes nothing to the goals of peace and security. Its military is utterly, disastrously, incompetent in addition to being cruel.... Sending a bunch of F-16 and Apaches to the middle of the western desert to simply shoot at whatever they might see with no intelligence...This is how they use the equipment that we give them."