

# **U.S. Security Assistance to Egypt** *Examining the Return on Investment*

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May 2020



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# U.S. SECURITY ASSISTANCE TO EGYPT

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Cover Photo: An Egyptian M1A1 Abrams participates in a field training exercise during Bright Star 2017, Sept. 16, 2017, at Mohamed Naguib Military Base, Egypt.  
Credit: Staff Sgt. Michael Battles/U.S. Air Force

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## I. INTRODUCTION

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For decades, Egypt has been one of the largest recipients of U.S. security assistance, receiving \$1.3 billion per year since 1987 through the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) program—a total in that time period of more than \$41 billion before adjusting for inflation.<sup>1</sup> U.S. policymakers justify this consistent, year-in-year-out military assistance—approximately one-quarter of all U.S. annual FMF worldwide—by citing Egypt’s importance and influence in the region, the maintenance of its 1979 peace treaty with Israel, the country’s geostrategic position, and the need to solidify the overall U.S.-Egyptian relationship. In addition, the aid has been meant to promote interoperability between the two nations’ armed forces, secure privileges for the U.S. military such as fly-over rights and expedited access through the Suez Canal, and support Egypt in fighting terrorism.

The State Department describes the U.S.-Egyptian relationship as a “strong partnership based on mutual interest in Middle East peace and stability, economic opportunity, and regional security.”<sup>2</sup> Since 2013, State Department and Defense Department officials have regularly spoken of a “strategic” and “committed” relationship, with one readout describing “defense cooperation as the backbone of the U.S.-Egyptian bilateral relationship.”<sup>3</sup> On paper, the U.S. government describes as a “core objective of U.S. policy,” the promotion of “a stable, prosperous Egypt, where the government protects the basic rights of its citizens and fulfills the aspirations of the Egyptian people.”<sup>4</sup>

However, successive administrations have too often minimized Egypt’s human rights abuses and idealized the relationship, especially since the rise of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. Since overthrowing Egypt’s democratically elected president in 2013, al-Sisi has built the most repressive Egyptian state in modern history, not just limiting the space for political opposition, but seeking to eliminate it completely.<sup>5</sup> Al-Sisi’s regime has engaged in a systematic pattern of gross human rights violations, from gunning down peaceful protesters in the streets to jailing tens of thousands of political opponents, including journalists, academics, and human rights defenders. The al-Sisi government has severely restricted the ability of independent non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to operate, all but eliminated a free and independent press, and perpetuated tensions between Muslims and Christians. In April 2019, al-Sisi pushed through a new constitution that further eroded the independence of the judiciary, expanded and solidified the military’s role in society, and allowed al-Sisi to extend his presidential term. Independent analysts have described al-Sisi as “much worse than Mubarak,” and called his regime “more dictatorial, more stifling,” and “narrower in its base of support.”<sup>6</sup>

Making matters worse, President Trump—to an extent beyond previous administrations—has fully embraced Egypt’s authoritarian regime, ignoring al-Sisi’s abysmal human rights record and overstating of the country’s effectiveness in fighting terrorism. During an April 2017 meeting with al-Sisi in the White House, Trump declared, “I just want to let everybody

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1. This total is second only to Israel in FMF aid over that time period. “Egypt: Background and U.S. Relations,” Congressional Research Service, Updated November 21, 2019, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33003.pdf>

2. “U.S. Relations with Egypt: Bilateral Relations Fact Sheet,” Department of State, September 20, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-egypt/>

3. Author analysis of State Department and Defense Department press releases since 2013. “Readout of Secretary Mattis’ Meeting with President Abdul Fattah el-Sisi of Egypt,” Department of Defense, April 5, 2017, <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/1143084/readout-of-secretary-mattis-meeting-with-president-abdul-fattah-el-sisi-of-egypt/>

4. Department of State, “U.S. Relations with Egypt: Bilateral Relations Fact Sheet.”

5. “Fact Sheet – Egypt’s Totalitarian Turn: Al-Sisi’s Crackdown Deepens,” Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED), May 25, 2018, <https://pomed.org/fact-sheet-egypts-totalitarian-turn/>

6. Amy Hawthorne and Andrew Miller, “Worse Than Mubarak,” *Foreign Policy*, February 27, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/02/27/worse-than-mubarak/>





*U.S. President Donald Trump welcomes Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi to the White House, April 3, 2017. Photo: Shealah Craighead/White House Flickr*

know, in case there was any doubt, that we are very much behind President el-Sisi [sic]. . . He's done a fantastic job in a very difficult situation."<sup>7</sup> Then while waiting to meet with al-Sisi on the side of the 2019 Group of Seven Summit in France, Trump reportedly called out, "Where's my favorite dictator?"<sup>8</sup>

Decades of nearly unconditional military aid have created a sense of entitlement within the Egyptian military and among its political leaders. They expect continued high levels of U.S. assistance, despite their lack of regard for U.S. interests and concerns. Instead of using the assistance to develop the military's capabilities and advance shared national security interests, the Egyptian government has misused the aid for patronage and prestige. Meanwhile, within the United States, several of the justifications for the aid listed above are

mere myths or have been exaggerated in their importance—all helping to perpetuate an aid relationship that has gone awry. In light of the record of the al-Sisi government and what little the United States receives in return, it is long past time to reevaluate the costs and benefits of U.S. security assistance to Egypt.

The remainder of this report will address the effectiveness of U.S. arms and training in enabling Egypt to meet its most important security objectives, including whether it is receiving the appropriate equipment for its counterterror operations; the level of dependence of the Egyptian military on U.S. equipment; the recent history of Congressional action related to U.S. security assistance to Egypt; and recommendations for the U.S.-Egyptian security relationship going forward.

7. Sondos Asem, "U.S. Military Aid to Egypt a 'Greenlight for Repression,' Say Former Prisoners," *Middle East Eye*, July 27, 2018, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/us-military-aid-egypt-green-light-repression-say-former-prisoners>

8. Nancy A. Youssef, Vivian Salama, and Michael C. Bender, "Trump, Awaiting Egyptian Counterpart at Summit, Called Out for 'My Favorite Dictator,'" *Wall Street Journal*, September 13, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/trump-awaiting-egyptian-counterpart-at-summit-called-out-for-my-favorite-dictator-11568403645>

## II. THE U.S. ROLE IN BUILDING UP THE EGYPTIAN MILITARY

### EGYPT'S ARSENAL

Since 2009, the United States has offered to sell more than \$9.5 billion in weaponry to Egypt under the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program, in 18 separate deals. Over this period, the FMF program has granted Egypt's military \$13 billion, which is then used to help pay for these U.S. weapons. The bulk of these deals by value were accounted for by just three offers: a 2009 deal for 24 F-16 combat aircraft, worth \$3.2 billion; a 2011 deal for 125 kits for the coproduction of M1A1 tanks, worth \$1.3 billion; and a 2018 deal for 10 Apache attack helicopters, worth \$1 billion. Egypt's \$1.3 billion in annual U.S. military aid was used to pay for this equipment and is now consumed by maintenance of these big-ticket systems. Other recent offers include two deals in 2018 for more than \$200 million worth of 120mm tank ammunition, and a \$554 million 2019 deal for follow-on support for U.S.-supplied ships, including Oliver Hazard Perry Class Frigates (FFG-7), fast patrol boats, and minehunter

ships. For a full list of U.S. FMS offers to Egypt since 2009, see Appendix Table 1.

Egypt relies heavily on U.S.-supplied weapons systems to outfit its armed forces, especially its army and air force. Through decades of grant assistance that has accounted for approximately 20 percent of Egypt's annual defense budget, the United States has overwhelmingly influenced the country's stockpiles and capabilities. But other suppliers, especially France and Russia, are also key sources.<sup>9</sup>

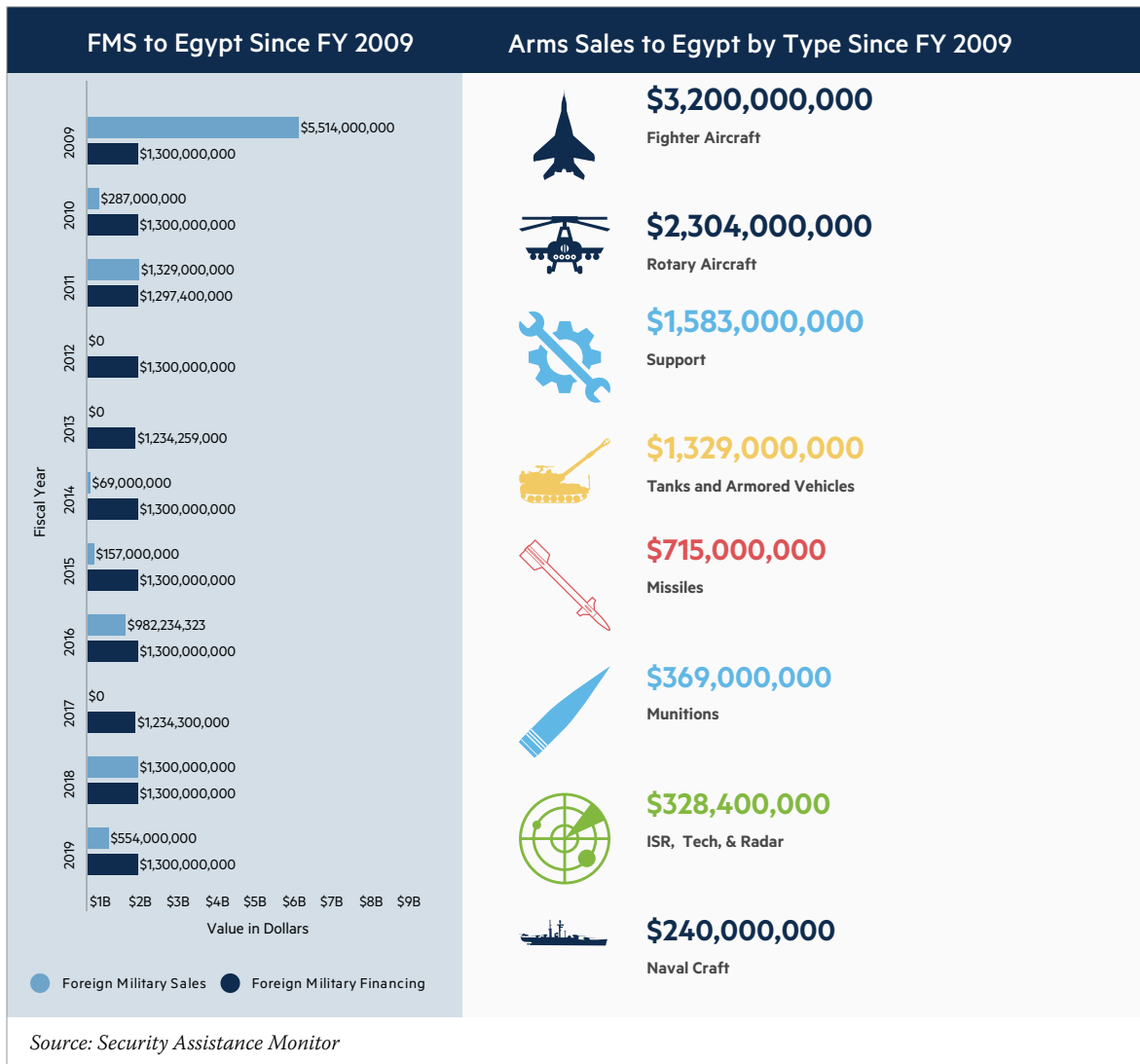
### Army

The Egyptian Army depends heavily on U.S.-supplied armored vehicles, including 2,280 of its 2,480 main battle tanks (1,130 M-1 variants and 1,150 older model M-60s). The army also has 200 Russian T-62 tanks in active service, as well as 1,140 Russian-produced tanks in storage (T-62s and earlier model T-54s). The United States has supplied Egypt with 2,000

9. All information on Egyptian military holdings in this section are from International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2019* (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 336-340.



Soldiers stabilize an M1 Abrams battle tank during an equipment offload in Alexandria, Egypt, in preparation for Exercise Bright Star 2017. Photo: Tom Gagnier/Defense Department



M-113 armored personnel carriers (APC) out of a stock of 4,700. The remainder of Egypt’s foreign-supplied APCs consist of Russian-supplied BTR-50 and BTR-60s (1,250), and Spanish BMR-600s (250). The Egyptian Army also has 300 Fahd 30 and 650 Walid APCs that it produces domestically, based on a German design with significant German components, including the engines.

### Navy

The main U.S.-supplied items in the Egyptian Navy are 4 ex-U.S. Oliver Hazard Perry-class

frigates, along with Harpoon anti-ship missiles deployed on many of Egypt’s other combat ships.

### Air Force

Well over half (238 of 375) of Egypt’s fighter and ground attack aircraft are variants of the U.S. F-16 combat plane. The remainder of the fighter and ground attack force consists of French Mirage and Russian MIG aircraft. Egypt’s medium range transport planes are all variants of the U.S. C-130. Egypt’s stockpile of attack helicopters largely consists of U.S. supplied

Apache aircraft (45 of 57). The remaining 12 are Russian-supplied KA-52 Hokum helicopters.

Egypt has traditionally secured its weapons supply and related logistics from several sources, in part to use the competition within the arms trade as leverage over global powers. However, reliance on separate streams of supply and support systems introduces inefficiencies in operability within the Egyptian military and with its partners.

Major new deals with France and Russia since al-Sisi took power could shift the balance of the Egyptian military inventory if those arms are delivered. Arms deals with France include major naval sales, including four Corvette ships; one frigate; and two Mistral Landing Helicopter Dock (LHD) vessels, each of which is capable of carrying 16 helicopters and 13 tanks.<sup>10</sup> There is also a sale of 24 Rafale combat aircraft that are in the process of being produced and delivered.<sup>11</sup> Russian deals include upgrades of Egypt's MIG-29 combat aircraft, the purchase of 46 KA-52 attack helicopters, S-300 surface-to-air missiles,<sup>12</sup> and—for \$2 billion—20 advanced Su-35 fighter jets.<sup>13</sup> While these deals may help the Egyptian government begin to reduce its reliance on U.S. weapons, it would take years to

effectively transition away from its overwhelming dependence on the United States.

Unlike the United States, France and Russia are not providing grant assistance to cover the costs of these arms agreements, which makes Egypt responsible for financing these purchases. U.S. assistance can therefore be seen as indirectly subsidizing Egyptian arms purchases from other countries, an inherent risk for any grant aid. But the preponderance of U.S. equipment within Egypt's armed forces means that Egypt would have a difficult time operating without U.S. weapons and related support, and leaves the United States with significant leverage over the Egyptians.

The Egyptian regime's decision to secure the Su-35 puts it in the crosshairs of U.S. sanctions, which restrict close engagement with the Russian military and its arms contractors through the 2017 Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA). Senator Jerry Moran (R-KS) was the first to publicly question Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, during a congressional hearing in April 2019, on whether Egyptian procurements violated CAATSA. Pompeo asserted that the administration would enforce

10. Congressional Research Service, "Egypt: Background and U.S. Relations," November 21, 2019, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33003.pdf>

11. Congressional Research Service, "Egypt: Background and U.S. Relations."

12. Congressional Research Service, "Egypt: Background and U.S. Relations."

13. Paul McCleary and Arie Egozi, "US Threatens Egypt With Sanctions For Russian Arms Deals," *Breaking Defense*, November 19, 2019, <https://breakingdefense.com/2019/11/us-threatens-egypt-with-sanctions-for-russian-arms-deals/>



*U.S. Secretary of Defense Dr. Mark T. Esper meets with Egyptian Minister of Defense Colonel Gen. Mohamed Ahmed Zaki at the Pentagon, Washington, D.C., July 29, 2019. Photo: U.S. Army Sgt. Amber I. Smith/Defense Department*



Troopers assigned to Apache Troop, 1st Squadron, 2nd Cavalry Regiment, participate in a land-to-air-to-sea casualty evacuation training exercise in the Sinai Peninsula, Egypt, January 22, 2016. Photo: Sgt. William Turner/Defense Department

CAATSA sanctions as required by law.<sup>14</sup> In November 2019, it was reported that Secretary of Defense Mark Esper and Secretary Pompeo sent a letter to Egyptian Minister of Defense Mohamed Ahmed Zaki urging the Egyptians to cancel the Su-35 deal or risk sanctions.<sup>15</sup> If the Egyptian military completes the deal, CAATSA requires economic sanctions on the individuals and agencies within the military involved in the purchase. Along with possible restrictions within the U.S. banking system, the sanctions could threaten the \$1.3 billion in military aid Egypt receives annually from the United States.

### TRAINING THE EGYPTIAN MILITARY

The United States has a longstanding military training relationship with Egypt dating back to the Bright Star exercises that began in 1980. Between 2009 and 2018, the U.S. trained 7,108 Egyptian military personnel, more than three-quarters of which were funded through the FMF and FMS programs. U.S. training programs

offer an opportunity to focus on operational and tactical support—with training on specific equipment, officer leadership, and other specialized training—but significant attention has been placed on the maintenance and repair of equipment and English language training.

Moreover, despite being the most populous Arab country with the largest military and receiving the largest U.S. military grant assistance, since 2012 Egypt has received less training from the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program—the flagship U.S. military professionalization program—than Oman.<sup>16</sup> Even within IMET, which is supposed to promote respect for democracy and human rights (a key aspect of professionalization), training courses have rarely focused on human rights and provided little to no monitoring or evaluation to determine the effectiveness of the courses.<sup>17</sup>

For a year-by-year breakdown of the number of students trained and the amounts spent, see Appendix Table 2.

14. “Sen. Moran Questions Secretary Pompeo on Human Rights Abuses, Global Conflict,” YouTube, April 9, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GkDmlQSNLS8&t=282s>

15. Vivian Salama, “U.S. Threatens Egypt With Sanctions Over Russian Arms Deal,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 14, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-threatens-egypt-with-sanctions-over-russian-arms-deal-11573769929>

16. Analysis compiled using data from Security Assistance Monitor’s database. Accessed December 12, 2019, <http://securityassistance.org/data/landing-page>

17. Analysis on courses offered to the Egyptian military conducted by authors and substantiated by a wider Government Accountability Office (GAO) study: “Security Assistance: U.S. Agencies Should Improve Oversight of Human Rights Training for Foreign Security Forces,” GAO, August 2019, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-19-554>

### III. DOES U.S. ASSISTANCE MATCH EGYPT'S SECURITY NEEDS?

The Obama administration placed a hold on and conducted a review of U.S. security assistance to Egypt after the overthrow of President Mohamed Morsi in 2013 and the security services' subsequent massacre of protesters at two sit-in locations. The administration concluded that the types of equipment the Egyptian military was requesting and receiving from the United States were inappropriate for the country's current security needs.<sup>18</sup> Systems like M-1 tanks and frigates were determined to be ill-suited to a focused approach to combating terrorism. Yet these kinds of systems have consumed the bulk of the equipment purchased or refurbished with U.S. aid over the past decade.

In 2015, President Obama told President al-Sisi that, although the United States would release the withheld assistance—which included F-16s, Harpoon missiles, and Abrams tank kits—beginning in fiscal year 2018, new U.S. military equipment to Egypt would be restricted to four pillars that the U.S. government believed were better aligned with Egypt's security needs and U.S. national

security interests: counterterrorism, border security, maritime security, and Sinai security.<sup>19</sup> This meant prohibiting continued sales of new Abrams tanks and other similar big-ticket items; Egypt, however, could still use their FMF for sustainment of weapons systems already in their arsenal.

While President Trump has maintained these four pillars of military aid to Egypt, this policy shift on the types of equipment to be provided has had a limited impact due to the sustainment carve out. In practice, Egypt has used about half of their FMF package to sustain existing systems like their Abrams tanks. For example, in a congressional notification from May 2019, the State Department declared its intent to disburse a significant portion of \$1 billion in FMF funds for sustainment of tanks, fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft, and frigates.<sup>20</sup> Egypt's use of U.S. funds to sustain the functionality and continued use of outdated, prestige equipment limits the country's ability to maximize the significant support provided by the United States in addressing security threats, and instead is used to maintain their military-run businesses.

18. "Egypt: U.S. Government Should Examine Options for Using Unobligated Funds and Evaluating Security Assistance Programs," GAO, February 11, 2015, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-15-259>

19. Office of the Press Secretary, "Readout of the President's Call with President al-Sisi of Egypt," White House, March 31, 2015, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/03/31/readout-president-s-call-president-al-sisi-egypt>

20. Congressional Notification (CN) seen by the authors, September 2019.



*The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Fitzgerald (DDG 62) fires a Harpoon missile during a live-fire drill near Guam, August 15, 2015. Photo: Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Patrick Dionne/U.S. Navy*

#### IV. HAVE U.S. ARMS AND TRAINING CONTRIBUTED TO EFFECTIVE COUNTERTERROR OPERATIONS IN EGYPT?

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The counterterror campaign undertaken by the al-Sisi regime has been waged against extremist groups operating in the northern Sinai, on Egypt's western border, and in and around major cities. The Islamic State's Sinai Province affiliate (IS-SP) has claimed responsibility for more than 1,000 attacks in the Sinai, which have killed at least 627 military personnel and 437 civilians.<sup>21</sup> According to the Egyptian government, as of mid-2018, an estimated 7,097 people have been killed in connection with counterterror operations conducted by the regime since the announcement of its war on terror in 2013. Roughly 95 percent of those deaths occurred in the northern Sinai, where Egyptian forces are fighting numerous terrorist groups, most notably IS-SP.<sup>22</sup>

Given the number of attacks and the ferocity of the Egyptian military response, the Sinai has been rightly described as the central front in Egypt's war on terror. A response is clearly merited given the threat posed, but the Egyptian campaign has been ineffective at best, and counterproductive at worst.

In the Sinai, Human Rights Watch (HRW) and other independent monitors have documented a series of severe human rights abuses in connection with the Egyptian anti-terror campaign. Documentation has occurred despite the difficulty in acquiring information due to the Egyptian government's ban on independent observers, including the U.S. government, reporting from the peninsula.<sup>23</sup> As HRW notes, thousands of people have been arrested in the Sinai over the past six years, hundreds have been

disappeared, and tens of thousands have been forcibly evicted from their homes. The Egyptian security forces have carried out "systematic and widespread arbitrary arrests—including of children—enforced disappearances, torture, extrajudicial killings, collective punishment, and forced eviction."<sup>24</sup> There is also evidence to suggest that Egyptian forces have engaged in illegal air and ground strikes that have killed substantial numbers of civilians.<sup>25</sup>

The immense human toll of the Egyptian military's approach to counterterrorism in the Sinai has alienated local communities and radicalized significant numbers of individuals who have subsequently been recruited by one of the nearly 12 terrorist groups operating there. The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy has summarized the impact as follows: "[Egyptian counter-terror efforts] may have contributed to fewer attacks in some cases, but have equally risked radicalizing a population and growing militants' recruitment pools in others."<sup>26</sup>

The security situation in the Sinai is unfolding against a backdrop of years of neglect of the area by the central government. Bedouins, who make up most of North Sinai's population, are not allowed to work in senior positions in government, or serve in the military, police, judiciary, or diplomatic corps. No development projects have been undertaken in North Sinai in four decades, and a number of villages have no schools, hospitals, or systems for supplying potable water.<sup>27</sup> The grievances stemming from this history of neglect have contributed to the current political instability in the area. Making matters worse, the government's counterterror

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21. Congressional Research Service, "Egypt: Background and U.S. Relations."

22. "Egypt Security Watch: Five Years of Egypt's War on Terror," Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, July 27, 2018, <https://timep.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/TIMEP-ESW-5yrReport-7.27.18.pdf>

23. "Egyptian Forces Commit War Crimes in Sinai - HRW," Reuters, May 28, 2019, <https://fr.reuters.com/article/africaTech/idAFL8N2332T9>

24. "If You Are Afraid for Your Lives, Leave Sinai: Egyptian Security Forces and ISIS Affiliate Abuses in North Sinai," Human Rights Watch, May 28, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/05/28/if-you-are-afraid-your-lives-leave-sinai/egyptian-security-forces-and-isis>

25. Human Rights Watch, "If You Are Afraid for Your Lives."

26. "Egypt Security Watch: Five Years of Egypt's War on Terror," Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, July 27, 2018, <https://timep.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/TIMEP-ESW-5yrReport-7.27.18.pdf>

27. Maged Atef, "Sinai's Suffering: The Peninsula Has Become a Breeding Ground for Terror," *Foreign Affairs*, March 13, 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/egypt/2017-03-13/sinai-suffering>



*Representative Tom Malinowski (D-NJ) gives remarks during the event "Al-Sisi in Washington: Egyptian President Seeks Support for Power Grab" in Washington, D.C., on April 9, 2019. Photo: April Brady/POMED*

campaign has included home demolitions and other collective punishment measures, depriving Egyptians in the Sinai of their rights and livelihood.

The government has also used the counterterrorism campaign to justify a series of repressive actions designed to destroy all political opposition. Following the coup against President Morsi in 2013, more than 1,150 civilians were killed in a two-month period—including the tragic massacre at Cairo's Raba'a al-Adaweya Square,

where protesters were shot in an attack that has been described as one of the worst mass killings of demonstrators in modern history, exceeding the death toll of the Chinese government's massacre of protesters at Tiananmen Square in 1989.<sup>28</sup> Since then, the regime has systematically arrested political activists, human rights defenders, and the secular opposition on terrorism-related charges, and has conducted extrajudicial killings following forced disappearances in disputed security raids.<sup>29</sup>

Congressman Tom Malinowski (D-NJ), a former assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights and labor, gave the following assessment of the Egyptian counterterrorism effort and the U.S.-Egyptian relationship more generally at an April 2019 forum on Egypt and the al-Sisi regime:

In exchange for the favors that Egypt gets from the White House, they don't actually do anything for us. This is not a situation where we are trading off human rights for something that advances the U.S. national interest. 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.

The only thing they know how to do well with these F-16s and Apaches is to show them off in parades and air shows that are designed to make the regime look good. They do absolutely nothing to benefit Egyptian security or ours.<sup>30</sup>

28. "All According to Plan: The Rab'a Massacre and Mass Killings of Protesters in Egypt," Human Rights Watch, August 12, 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/08/12/all-according-plan/raba-massacre-and-mass-killings-protesters-egypt>

29. "Egypt kills hundreds of suspected militants in disputed gun battles," Reuters, April 5, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/egypt-killings/>

30. Statement of Rep. Tom Malinowski (D-NJ) at a Capitol Hill forum entitled "Al-Sisi in Washington: Egyptian President Seeks Support for Power Grab," April 9, 2019. The forum was sponsored by a dozen organizations: Amnesty International, Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, Committee to Protect Journalists, Council for Global Equality, Egyptian Human Rights Forum, Freedom House, The Freedom Initiative, Human Rights Campaign, Human Rights First, Human Rights Watch, PEN America, and Project on Middle East Democracy. It is available at <https://pomed.org/event/sisiindc/> and the quoted excerpt from Malinowski's statement begins at 28:05 of the recording.



## V. U.S. (LACK OF) ACCESS AND INFLUENCE

Supporters of global U.S. security assistance often highlight that it gives the U.S. military and policymakers beneficial access and influence within the recipient country's power structure. In Egypt, however, unconditional U.S. military aid has not only failed to influence Egypt's domestic policy, it has also failed to influence Egypt's foreign policy to better align with U.S. interests. Nor has security assistance been required or helped to secure access—to the canal, our own U.S.-provided equipment,<sup>31</sup> or the upper echelons of the government—as it is often touted to provide.

Within the region, al-Sisi has continually supported actors in direct opposition to U.S. policy and interests. In Libya, Egypt has supported General Khalifa Haftar and his Libyan National Army (LNA) against the Government of National Accord (GNA), the internationally recognized Libyan government, despite U.S. support for the GNA (although President Trump has flirted with changing this policy by reaching out to Haftar at the urging of al-Sisi and Gulf rulers) and violating United Nations arms embargoes in the process. In Syria, al-Sisi has shown support for Bashar al-Assad and his regime, citing sovereignty and terrorism, despite the well-documented war crimes committed by al-Assad's regime and clear opposition by the United States.<sup>32</sup> In Sudan, the Egyptians supported the Transitional Military Council and its attempt to forcefully quell protesters' calls for a democratic transition,<sup>33</sup>

in opposition to U.S. demands for a peaceful transition to civilian rule.<sup>34</sup>

Egypt has also cozied up to Russia, helping to further its presence in the Middle East at the expense of U.S. interests in ways unseen since President Sadat kicked Soviet troops out of Egypt in 1972. The Egyptians have held joint military exercises, received military training from Russia's Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU), and purchased billions in advanced military equipment—including the Su-35 fighter jets in direct violation of U.S. sanctions on Russia. Egypt has also acted as a “conductor of Russia's interests in Libya” by facilitating Russian intelligence support to General Haftar,<sup>35</sup> and allowing Russian special forces to deploy within Egypt's borders.<sup>36</sup> In addition, the Egyptian government has continued to engage with North Korea economically, politically, and militarily, in contravention of UN and U.S. sanctions.<sup>37</sup> Ultimately, none of these policies promote “Middle East peace and stability,” the purported goal of U.S. security aid to Egypt.

Meanwhile, many have suggested that the United States is required to provide a substantial level of aid to Egypt due to the 1979 Peace Treaty or to ensure peace between Israel and Egypt. But the United States is not a party to the treaty, has no obligation to provide aid, and the Egyptian government has its own reasons for wanting to maintain good relations with Israel. Therefore, a shift in U.S. aid is

31. “U.S. Government Accountability Office: Security Assistance: U.S. Government Should Strengthen End-Use Monitoring and Human Rights Vetting for Egypt,” GAO, published April 12, 2016 and publicly released May 12, 2016, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-16-435?source=ra>

32. Oren Kessler, “Egypt Picks Sides in the Syrian War: How Sisi Learned to Love Assad,” *Foreign Affairs*, February 12, 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/syria/2017-02-12/egypt-picks-sides-syrian-war>

33. Muhammed Magdy, “Egypt's hand appears in play behind scenes in Sudan” *Al-Monitor*, June 11, 2019, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/06/egypt-sudan-military-council-protests-role.html>

34. Office of the Spokesperson, “Under Secretary Hale's Call With Saudi Deputy Defense Minister Khalid bin Salman,” Department of State, June 4, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/under-secretary-hales-call-with-saudi-deputy-defense-minister-khalid-bin-salman/>

35. Anton Mardasov, “Russia, Egypt look to boost military ties” *Al-Monitor*, November 7, 2019, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/11/russia-egypt-military-drills-arms-sales.html>

36. Phil Stewart, Idrees Ali, and Lin Noueihed, “Exclusive: Russia appears to deploy forces in Egypt, eyes on Libya role - sources,” *Reuters*, March 13, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-russia-libya-exclusive/exclusive-russia-appears-to-deploy-forces-in-egypt-eyes-on-libya-role-sources-idUSKBN16K2RY>

37. Declan Walsh, “Need a North Korean Missile? Call the Cairo Embassy,” *New York Times*, March 3, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/03/world/middleeast/egypt-north-korea-sanctions-arms-dealing.html>



Russian President Vladimir Putin had a meeting with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. Photo: President of Russia official website

unlikely to change that reality, despite threats by Egyptian officials to the contrary.<sup>38</sup>

Similarly, the U.S. Navy does not receive head-of-the-line passage through the Suez Canal or use FMF funds to cover these costs, as some have suggested.<sup>39</sup> Needing the revenue, the Egyptians would be hard pressed to deny the United States canal access if it were to adjust

the aid package. And as Michael O'Hanlon, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, has demonstrated, fly-over rights or access through the canal to carry out its strategic objectives in the region and throughout the world are helpful to the United States, but not essential.<sup>40</sup> In addition, previous holds on assistance have not resulted in Egypt prohibiting fly-over rights or canal access.

38. Andrew Miller, "Commentary: Five myths about U.S. aid to Egypt," Reuters, August 13, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-miller-egypt-commentary/commentary-five-myths-about-u-s-aid-to-egypt-idUSKBN1KY1WJ>

39. Andrew Miller, "Five Myths"

40. Michael O'Hanlon, "Access to Suez is convenient but not essential for U.S.," *Washington Post*, August 22, 2013, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/access-to-suez-is-convenient-but-not-essential-for-us/2013/08/22/224a001c-09d9-11e3-9941-6711ed662e71\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/access-to-suez-is-convenient-but-not-essential-for-us/2013/08/22/224a001c-09d9-11e3-9941-6711ed662e71_story.html)

## VI. THE ROLE OF CORRUPTION IN UNDERMINING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF U.S. MILITARY ASSISTANCE

Egypt's reliance on big-ticket weapons systems, like M-1 tanks and F-16s, has contributed to creating a military that has been unable to eliminate the Islamic State and other militant groups. But the inability of the Egyptian military to function effectively is not exclusively the result of inadequate use of U.S. funds. The government's disregard for civilians in the Sinai, torture in prisons, pervasive human rights abuses, and attempts to eliminate any form of political opposition are all potential drivers of terrorism. What is clear, though, is that decades of U.S. assistance have not yielded a military capable of addressing the country's legitimate security threats.

Instead of investing in the training and equipment the military needs to respond to the asymmetric threat posed by militants throughout the country, the military uses significant portions of its FMF to sustain outdated equipment. For example, beginning in the late 1980s, the military entered into a co-production agreement to produce Abrams tanks in Egypt and has used its FMF to support

that plant despite not using the equipment in the Sinai. As one former U.S. official told the authors, when the Obama administration restored the suspended aid in 2015, an Egyptian official expressed thankfulness for the ability to keep the factory running—and the 2,500 jobs it provides to Egyptians—not for the value of the equipment in addressing security concerns.<sup>41</sup>

Corruption and opportunities for corruption by and for the Egyptian military date back to the 1950s, when military-owned firms first became involved in weapons production. Initially created to secure support for the regime, the military's involvement in the economy increased under Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak and has sharply increased under the al-Sisi regime.

Due to a lack of transparency, there are no reliable figures on the degree to which the military dominates the Egyptian economy, with estimates ranging from an official number of 1.5 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) to independent figures of 40 percent of GDP or more.<sup>42</sup> In his new report, "Owners of the

41. U.S Embassy Cairo, "Egypt and U.S. Resume Co-Production of M1A1 Abrams Tanks," State Department, October 25, 2015, <https://eg.usembassy.gov/egypt-u-s-resume-co-production-m1a1-abrams-tanks/>

42. *The Officers' Republic: The Egyptian Military and Abuse of Power*, Transparency International Defence & Security, March 2018, [http://ti-defence.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/The\\_Officers\\_Republic\\_TIDS\\_March18.pdf](http://ti-defence.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/The_Officers_Republic_TIDS_March18.pdf)



*The military has taken a central role in multibillion dollar megaprojects such as the construction of Egypt's new administrative capital 30 miles east of Cairo. Photo: Administrative Capital for Urban Development Facebook page*

Republic: An Anatomy of Egypt’s Military Economy,” Yezid Sayigh indicates that since al-Sisi took power, the military has increased its role in the economy by “[managing] roughly one-quarter of total government spending.”<sup>43</sup> What is certain is that the military is involved in virtually all sectors of the Egyptian economy, including agriculture, real estate and construction, chemical production, mining, hotels, grocery stores, and household appliances.<sup>44</sup> Most recently, the military has taken a central role in multibillion dollar megaprojects to upgrade and expand the Suez Canal and build the new administrative capital, a future city 30 miles east of Cairo that is meant to house 6.5 million people.

The military enjoys distinct advantages over commercial enterprises, ranging from exemption from the value-added tax to the right to use conscript labor to the right of first refusal over the use of land. It guards its privileges tenaciously, as evidenced in this 2012 statement by Major General Mahmoud Nasr: “We will fight for our projects, and this is a battle we won’t withdraw from. We will not give up our 30-year-long efforts for someone else to destroy. We won’t let anyone—no matter who—to come anywhere near the armed forces’ projects.”<sup>45</sup>

In his book *Into the Hands of the Soldiers*, journalist David Kirkpatrick underscored the growth of military involvement in the economy early in the al-Sisi era, noting that “Over six months in 2014, military-owned firms received \$1.5 billion in contracts to build apartment blocks, tunnels, roads, and many other things. These were boom times for Egyptian Army Inc.”<sup>46</sup> In the process, U.S. security assistance has helped underwrite and subsidize the dominant political and economic role of the Egyptian military, which has used its businesses



Mohamed Ali accuses President al-Sisi of corruption in a series of YouTube videos such as this one from September 10, 2019. Photo: Screengrab/Mohamed Ali Secrets YouTube

not only to enhance its own wealth, but also to buy loyalty through subcontracts.

As the release of videos on social media by former military contractor Mohamed Ali in September 2019—where he describes the vast corruption by the military and the regime—have shown, Egyptians are frustrated with this situation.<sup>47</sup> While the regime responded forcefully—cutting certain websites and applications, closing off access to parts of Cairo, examining pedestrians’ phones, and arresting thousands—the willingness of Egyptians to risk their lives to take to the streets indicates the extent to which Egyptians feel crippled by the country’s endemic corruption.

43. Yezid Sayigh, *Owners of the Republic: An Anatomy of Egypt’s Military Economy*, Carnegie Middle East Center, November 2019, <https://carnegie-mec.org/2019/11/18/owners-of-republic-anatomy-of-egypt-s-military-economy-pub-80325>

44. Transparency International Defence & Security, *The Officers’ Republic*.

45. Transparency International Defence & Security, *The Officers’ Republic*.

46. David Kirkpatrick, *Into the Hands of the Soldiers: Freedom and Chaos in Egypt and the Middle East* (New York: Viking Books, 2018), p. 298.

47. Vivian Yee and Nada Rashwan, “Egypt Protests Came as a Total Shock. The Man Behind Them is Just as Surprising.” *New York Times*, September 22, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/22/world/middleeast/egypts-protests-sisi-mohamed-ali.html>

## VII. U.S. POLICY AND CONGRESSIONAL ACTION: HAS CONDITIONALITY WORKED?

Since 2012, Congress has included conditions on appropriations legislation for FMF to Egypt that requires the Secretary of State to certify that the Egyptian government is taking steps toward democracy and improving human rights. Nevertheless, except for FY2014, appropriators have provided a waiver allowing the administration to release the conditioned funds if the secretary determines it is in the national security interest of the United States. The human rights conditions send an important message to the Egyptian government that Congress is concerned with the country's democratic backsliding and pervasive human rights abuses, but the national security waiver has allowed the Egyptians to play the administration off of Congress and blunt the impact of the conditions.

In addition, Members of Congress, including longtime leader of the Senate Appropriations Committee Patrick Leahy (D-VT), have been willing to use their power to place holds on portions of the aid over egregious violations of human rights. These holds have helped influence the Egyptians to address a number of human rights concerns, including detained U.S. citizens.<sup>48</sup> But conditionality is most effective when coupled with pressure from the administration. In 2017, former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson withheld \$195 million in FMF funds on the condition that Egypt resolve the 2013 NGO "Foreign Funding" trial, repeal or revise the draconian 2017 NGO law, and discontinue diplomatic, military, and economic engagement with North Korea.<sup>49</sup> In response,

Egypt has taken cursory steps to addressing these three concerns raised by the United States, exonerating those in the case associated with the foreign and international NGOs, although not the domestic NGOs; rewriting a new NGO law, which is as draconian as the previous one;<sup>50</sup> and reducing engagement with North Korea, according to one State Department report.

These holds placed on U.S. military aid and conditioned on specific improvements have shown that using aid as leverage can work, particularly if Congress and the administration are in agreement. U.S. leverage does have its limits, however. Conditioning military aid would not be able to turn al-Sisi into a democrat, but it can have a significant impact on issues deemed important enough to put significant weight behind.



*Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) gives remarks during the event "Al-Sisi in Washington: Egyptian President Seeks Support for Power Grab" on April 9, 2019. Photo: April Brady/POMED*

48. "POMED Welcomes Acquittal of NGO Employees in Egypt's Foreign Funding Trial," POMED, December 20, 2018, <https://pomed.org/press-statement-pomed-welcomes-acquittal-of-ngo-employees-in-egypts-foreign-funding-trial/?portfolioCats=31>

49. "Human Rights Conditions on U.S. Military Aid to Egypt," POMED, August 2018, [https://pomed.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Egypt\\_FMFConditions\\_web.pdf](https://pomed.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Egypt_FMFConditions_web.pdf)

50. "Egypt's 'New' NGO Law: As Draconian as the Old One," POMED, September 23, 2019, <https://pomed.org/fact-sheet-egypts-new-ngo-law-as-draconian-as-the-old-one/>

## VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

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**E**gypt's maintenance of the peace treaty with Israel, control over the Suez Canal, and nearly 100 million citizens ensures the country's continued importance for the region and the United States. But Egypt's role in the region has greatly diminished compared to its heyday under President Gamal Abdel Nasser. It no longer commands the respect or maintains the same influence it used to have, surpassed both politically and economically by its Gulf neighbors. And militarily, Egypt has only played a nominal role in U.S. coalitions or as a part of the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen.

It is clearly time for a change in U.S. security policy toward Egypt. The regime's widespread domestic human rights abuses, coupled with a foreign policy that in many respects conflicts with U.S. interests in the region, calls for a thorough re-evaluation of the size of the annual U.S. aid package, and the conditions under which it is provided.

There are obvious limits to U.S. leverage. Changes in U.S. aid policy alone will not be enough to transform the al-Sisi regime into a fully functioning democracy. But purposeful conditionality can moderate the worst elements of the regime's behavior, setting the stage for positive changes over time.

### **CUT MILITARY AID BY \$300 MILLION PER YEAR**

The first step in a new security assistance policy should be a shift in the pattern of U.S. aid. While military assistance has held steady at \$1.3 billion per year for decades, economic aid has dropped sharply, from \$688 million in FY 2009 to just \$112 million in FY 2019.<sup>51</sup> In principle, a rebalancing of the aid that boosts appropriate economic support and reduces military assistance that could help Egypt address its greatest challenges—including corruption, inequality, population growth, and access to

adequate supplies of clean water—would be appropriate. But at the current time, the United States does not have a partner willing to address these real challenges and so a significant reduction of \$300 million in military aid is needed to show the Egyptians this assistance is not an entitlement. The \$300 million should be made available for humanitarian assistance to help the global effort to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **REMOVE NATIONAL SECURITY WAIVER THAT ALLOWS CIRCUMVENTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS CONDITIONS**

A second pillar of a new approach should be the removal of the national security waiver that allows the circumvention of human rights conditions on security aid. Targeted areas of concern should continue to include an end to torture in Egypt's prison system; easing of restrictions on journalists, human rights defenders, and other NGOs; and an end to the killing, torture, and displacement of civilians in the anti-terror campaign in the Sinai.

### **INCREASE TRANSPARENCY OVER HOW U.S. AID IS BEING USED**

A third aspect of a revised security assistance policy should be an increase in transparency over how U.S. aid is being used. This should include allowing journalists and U.S. officials into the Sinai to monitor the actions of the Egyptian military and a clear accounting of how U.S. funds are being spent as a guard against corruption.

### **RESTRICT U.S. AID SPENT ON SUSTAINMENT TO THE FOUR PILLARS**

A fourth step would be to restrict the aid that is used for sustainment and maintenance of

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51. Congressional Research Service, "Egypt Background and U.S. Relations."



*The aircraft carrier USS Dwight D. Eisenhower transits the Suez Canal on March 9, 2020. Egypt's control of the Suez Canal is one reason the country holds continued importance for the United States. Photo: Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Kody A. Phillips/U.S. Navy*

equipment to within the four pillars of fighting terrorism and bolstering border, maritime, and Sinai security. Recent FMS notifications indicate that the Egyptian government continues to prefer sustaining patronage networks rather than using U.S. largesse to enhance their capabilities to address the country's legitimate security threats.

A final question that will need to be addressed in the years to come is whether there are any red lines that should lead to a complete cutoff of U.S. security assistance. If the al-Sisi regime

continues to repress human rights, torture and kill civilians with impunity, shut down prospects for democratic reform, and allow and encourage corruption on the part of the military, there may come a point that continued U.S. military assistance is no longer tenable. But first the United States should attempt a revised approach to security aid as outlined above, in hopes of reducing human rights abuses by the regime, improving the Egyptian military's anti-terrorism performance, and creating openings, however modest, toward democratic reform.

## IX. APPENDIX: DATA TABLES

### APPENDIX 1 - ARMS SALES OFFERS TO EGYPT, 2009 TO PRESENT

**2019**

ITEM	AMOUNT	DATE NOTIFIED	LINK (starting with www.dsca.mil)
Follow-On Technical Support for ships	\$554,000,000	Jul 30, 2019	/major-arms-sales/egypt-follow-technical-support-fots-ships
<b>2019 TOTAL</b>	<b>\$554,000,000</b>		

**2018**

ITEM	AMOUNT	DATE NOTIFIED	LINK (starting with www.dsca.mil)
120mm tank rounds	\$201,000,000	Nov 27, 2018	/major-arms-sales/egypt-120mm-tank-rounds-0
AH-64E Apache Attack Helicopters	\$1,000,000,000	Nov 27, 2018	/major-arms-sales/egypt-ah-64e-apache-attack-helicopters-and-related-equipment-and-support
120mm tank rounds	\$99,000,000	Sep 17, 2018	/major-arms-sales/egypt-120mm-tank-rounds
<b>2018 TOTAL</b>	<b>\$1,300,000,000</b>		

**2016**

ITEM	AMOUNT	DATE NOTIFIED	LINK (starting with www.dsca.mil)
Common Missile Warning System	\$81,400,000	Oct 7, 2016	/major-arms-sales/government-egypt-common-missile-warning-system-cmws-ah-64e-apache-uh-60-blackhawks
Sentinel AN/MPQ-64F1 Radars	\$70,000,000	Sep 19, 2016	/major-arms-sales/government-egypt-8-sentinel-anmpq-64f1-radars-and-related-equipment-and-support
Harpoon Block II Encapsulated Missiles	\$143,000,000	May 13, 2016	/major-arms-sales/egypt-ugm-84l-harpoon-block-ii-encapsulated-missiles
<b>2016 TOTAL</b>	<b>\$294,400,000</b>		

**2015**

ITEM	AMOUNT	DATE NOTIFIED	LINK (starting with www.dsca.mil)
Border Security Mobile Surveillance	\$100,000,000	Sep 8, 2015	/major-arms-sales/egypt-border-security-mobile-surveillance-sensor-security-system-corrected
AGM-114K/R3 Hellfire II Air-to-Ground Missiles	\$57,000,000	Apr 8, 2015	/major-arms-sales/egypt-agm-114kr3-hellfire-ii-missiles
<b>2015 TOTAL</b>	<b>\$157,000,000</b>		



**2014**

ITEM	AMOUNT	DATE NOTIFIED	LINK (starting with www.dsca.mil)
Personnel Support Services	\$69,000,000	Jul 3, 2014	/major-arms-sales/egypt-personnel-support-services
Apache helicopters	–	Apr 23, 2014	/news-media/news-archive/dod-announces-military-equipment-moves-australia-egypt
<b>2014 TOTAL</b>	<b>\$69,000,000</b>		

**2011**

ITEM	AMOUNT	DATE NOTIFIED	LINK (starting with www.dsca.mil)
M1A1 Abrams tank kits	\$1,329,000,000	July 5, 2011	/major-arms-sales/egypt-co-production-m1a1-abrams-tank
<b>2011 TOTAL</b>	<b>\$1,329,000,000</b>		

**2010**

ITEM	AMOUNT	DATE NOTIFIED	LINK (starting with www.dsca.mil)
Skyguard AMOUN Solid-State Transmitters	\$77,000,000	Sep 2, 2010	/major-arms-sales/egypt-skyguard-amoun-solid-state-transmitters
Follow-On Technical Support for frigates	\$210,000,000	Sep 2, 2010	/major-arms-sales/egypt-follow-technical-support
<b>2010 TOTAL</b>	<b>\$287,000,000</b>		

**2009**

ITEM	AMOUNT	DATE NOTIFIED	LINK (starting with www.dsca.mil)
Service Life Extension Program	\$750,000,000	Dec 18, 2009	/major-arms-sales/egypt-service-life-extension-program-f-110-ge-100-engines
Harpoon Block II Anti-Ship Cruise Missiles	\$145,000,000	Dec 18, 2009	/major-arms-sales/egypt-harpoon-block-ii-anti-ship-cruise-missiles
Fast Missile Craft	\$240,000,000	Dec 18, 2009	/major-arms-sales/egypt-fast-missile-craft
Hellfire II Air-to-Surface Anti-Armor Missiles	\$51,000,000	Dec 14, 2009	/major-arms-sales/egypt-hellfire-ii-air-surface-anti-armor-missiles
F-16C/D Block 50/52 Aircraft	\$3,200,000,000	Oct 9, 2009	/major-arms-sales/egypt-f-16cd-block-5052-aircraft
AH-64D Apache Longbow Helicopters	\$820,000,000	May 26, 2009	/major-arms-sales/egypt-ah-64d-apache-longbow-helicopters
CH-47D Chinook Helicopters	\$308,000,000	Aug 6, 2009	/major-arms-sales/egypt-ch-47d-chinook-helicopters
<b>2009 TOTAL</b>	<b>\$5,514,000,000</b>		

**Total Arms Sales Offers 2009-2019: \$9,504,400,000**

## APPENDIX 2 - U.S. TRAINING FOR EGYPT'S MILITARY, 2009 TO 2018

YEAR	STUDENTS TRAINED	AMOUNT SPENT	LINK (starting with <a href="http://www.securityassistance.org/sites/default/files">www.securityassistance.org/sites/default/files</a> )
2018	434	\$9,513,999	/SAM_FMTR_V1_FY18-19.pdf
2017	432	\$10,246,737	/FMTR%202017-18%20Vol.1.pdf
2016	467	\$11,872,431	/FMTR%202016.pdf
2015	1,396	\$12,783,252	/FMTR_2015.pdf
2014	721	\$14,140,006	/243009.pdf
2013	778	\$12,198,773	/Foreign%20Military%20Training%20and%20DoD%20En- gagement%20Activities%20of%20Interest%202013.pdf
2012	791	\$15,758,774	/FMTR2012-13.pdf
2011	620	\$14,161,822	/197595.pdf
2010	811	\$12,184,494	/2010.pdf
2009	658	\$12,439,009	/2009.pdf
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7,108</b>	<b>\$57,726,859</b>	



