

U.S. AID FOR TUNISIA SINCE KAÏS SAÏED'S JULY 2021 COUP



October 2023 // Sheridan Cole and Seth Binder

Since July 25, 2021, the U.S. government has cut portions of foreign assistance for Tunisia in order to demonstrate concern about the country's authoritarian turn under President Kaïs Saïed. Those cuts have disproportionately targeted economic assistance, including support for Tunisia's severely threatened civil society, compared to security assistance. President Joe Biden's **budget request** for Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 follows that pattern, significantly cutting economic aid to Tunisia while keeping security assistance at nearly the same level.

Foreign Assistance Accounts	Administration Allocation		Administration Request	
	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24
ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE				
Economic Support Fund (ESF)	\$40 million	\$12 million	\$45 million	\$14.5 million
Democracy Assistance (DA)	\$45 million	\$10.5 million		
SECURITY ASSISTANCE				
Foreign Military Financing (FMF)	\$85 million	\$60 million	\$45 million	\$45 million
International Narcotics Control & Law Enforcement (INCLE)	\$13 million	\$6 million	\$12 million	\$4 million
Nonproliferation, Anti-terrorism, Demining, & Related Programs (NADR)	\$6.1 million	\$6.1 million	\$2 million	\$2.5 million
International Military Education & Training (IMET)	\$2.3 million	\$1.5 million	\$2 million	\$2.3 million
TOTAL BILATERAL AID	\$191.4 million	\$96.1 million	\$106 million	\$68.3 million

Amid Saïed's autocratic consolidation, the administration's FY22 allocation cut democracy and governance assistance by 76% compared to FY21.

The administration reprogrammed unspent prior-year economic support, \$60 million for direct **socio-economic aid** for vulnerable Tunisians and \$25 million for a 5-year **civil society program**.

The Biden administration reduced INCLE funding overall, but maintained training, technical assistance, and other support for the Ministries of Interior and Justice, despite the outsized role these bodies play in Saïed's repression.

In the FY24 **request**, the administration proposed further cuts to economic aid while maintaining security aid at the same level it requested for FY23.

For FY22, the administration reduced overall assistance by nearly 50% compared to FY21, \$62.5 million of which was cut from economic assistance—nearly double the amount cut from security assistance.

In the FY24 request, the administration proposes potentially providing Tunisia additional assistance from a new region-wide economic "Opportunity Fund" and a new FMF "Emerging Global Priorities" fund if Saïed's government "shows signs of a return to democratic governance."

For FY24, the administration again requested funding for the Tunisian National Police and the National Guard counterterrorism unit, the very body that reportedly interrogated Tunisian opposition leader Rached Ghannouchi.

CONGRESSIONAL ACTIONS FOLLOWING PRESIDENT BIDEN'S FY24 BUDGET REQUEST

In FY22 and FY23, Congress removed the earmark that, since FY19, required that Tunisia receive at least \$191.4 million in bilateral aid annually. This shift allowed the Biden administration greater flexibility to reduce the aid provided to the country. Since the administration's FY24 budget request was released, however, members of Congress have been concerned with the administration's policy direction and have taken steps to demonstrate that Tunisia's democracy is a U.S. national security interest that needs to be prioritized by the administration.



U.S. SENATE

The Senate Foreign Relations MENA Subcommittee, led by Senators Chris Murphy (D-CT) and Todd Young (R-IN), held a **hearing** on U.S. policy on Tunisia.

Chair Bob Menendez (D-NJ) and Ranking Member Jim Risch (R-ID) of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee introduced and passed out of committee the "**Safeguarding Tunisian Democracy Act**."

Democratic Senators introduced a **resolution** expressing support for Tunisian democracy and calling on the Tunisia government to release all political prisoners, protect human rights, and hold a free and fair 2024 presidential election.

The Senate Appropriations Committee passed their **FY2024 State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs bill** out of committee, which includes earmarks for economic assistance and civil society, a reporting requirement on the country's democratic backsliding, and urges assistance for the Tunisian government, such as military aid, "to be contingent on measurable progress" on human rights.

2023

MAR 28

20 House Democrats sent a **letter to Secretary Blinken** expressing concern over President Saïed's intensified crackdown against his perceived political opponents and his racially motivated remarks against sub-Saharan Africans.

APR 20

Democratic leaders of the House Foreign Affairs Committee issued a **statement** condemning the arrest of Tunisia's opposition leader and democratic backsliding.

APR 26

MAY 31

Chair Joe Wilson (R-SC) and Ranking Member Dean Phillips (D-MN) of the House Foreign Affairs MENA subcommittee led 10 representatives **calling for an earmark** for economic assistance for Tunisia's "pro-democracy" civil society and Tunisians in economic need.

JUN 16

The House Appropriations Committee passed their **FY2024 State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs bill** out of committee, which urged the administration to prioritize funding for promoting democracy and not to provide assistance to the government or government-sponsored programs until "after the Tunisian government demonstrates a commitment to political and social tolerance, respect for democratic institutions and rule of law, responsible treatment of migrants, and respect for independent media and human rights."

JUN 21

JUL 12

Chair Joe Wilson (R-SC) and Ranking Member Dean Phillips (D-MN) of the House Foreign Affairs MENA subcommittee introduced a **companion resolution** to the Senate condemning the collapse of Tunisia's democracy under President Saïed.

JUL 20

JUL 25

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES