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Egypt: Background and U.S. Relations

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Egypt: Background and U.S. Relations

Historically, Egypt has been an important country for U.S. national security interests based on its geography, demography, and diplomatic posture. Egypt controls the Suez Canal, which opened in 1869 and is one of the world's most critical maritime chokepoints, linking the Mediterranean and Red Seas.

Egypt's population of more than 107 million people makes it by far the most populous Arabic-speaking country. Although today it may play a smaller political or military role in the Arab world than it has in the past, Egypt may retain some "soft power" by virtue of its history, media, and culture. Cairo hosts both the 22-member Arab League and Al Azhar University, which claims to be the oldest continuously operating university in the world and has symbolic importance as a leading source of Islamic scholarship.

Additionally, Egypt's 1979 peace treaty with Israel stands as one of the most significant diplomatic achievements for the promotion of Arab-Israeli peace. As cease-fire negotiations over Gaza continue, Egypt has insisted that any post-conflict security arrangement that might keep Israel Defense Forces personnel in Gaza adheres to the 1979 Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty and its subsequent protocols, which limit the presence and activities of military forces and equipment. After Egypt helped broker the January 2025 cease-fire between Israel and Hamas, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio thanked Egyptian officials for their mediation efforts.

In addition to Gaza, the Egyptian government is facing other foreign policy challenges. Egypt has had to contend with a politically divided Libya on its western border and a civil war in Sudan on its southern border. In addition to insecurity on Egypt's land borders, Houthi attacks in the Red Sea and against Israel from Yemen have redirected commercial shipping away from the Suez Canal, depriving Egypt of hard currency revenues.

Since 1946, the United States has provided Egypt with nearly \$90 billion in bilateral foreign aid (calculated in historical dollars—not adjusted for inflation), with military and economic assistance increasing significantly after 1979. Annual appropriations legislation includes several conditions governing the release of these funds. Successive U.S. Administrations have justified aid to Egypt as an investment in regional stability, built primarily on long-running cooperation with the Egyptian military and on sustaining the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. All U.S. military aid to Egypt finances the procurement of weapons systems and services from U.S. defense contractors.

When President Trump ordered a 90-day pause and review of foreign aid globally, he exempted FMF to Israel and Egypt. In the President's recent Technical Supplement to the 2026 Budget, suggested legislative language includes a \$1.3 billion FMF request for Egypt.

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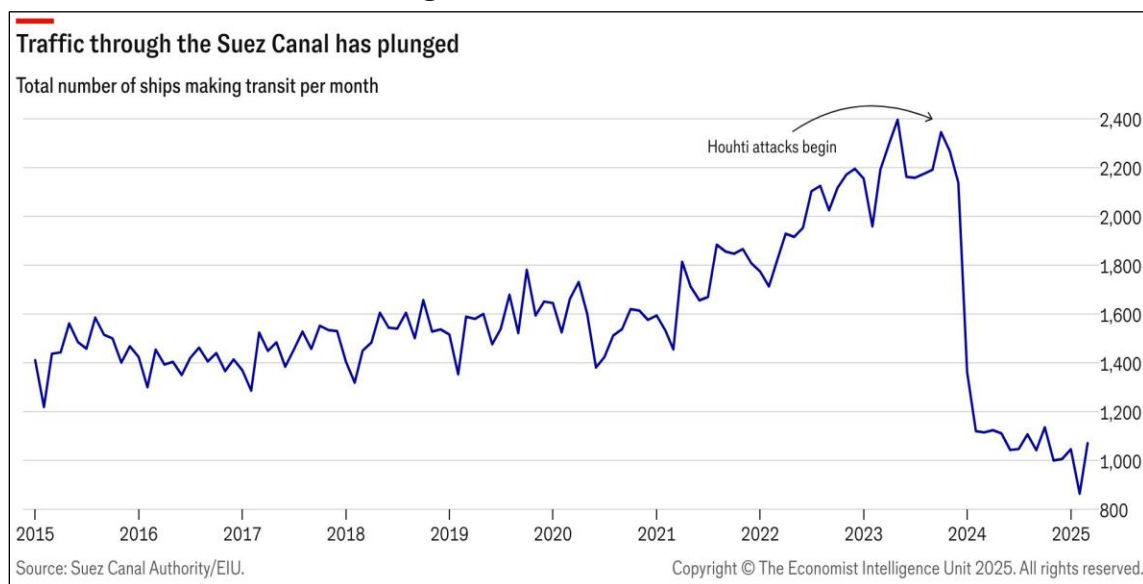
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Overview and U.S. Relations

In 2025, the Egyptian government is facing multiple foreign policy and domestic challenges. On all of Egypt's land borders, its neighbors are consumed by war, divided government, and humanitarian crises. In Gaza, though Egypt successfully helped mediate a cease-fire between Israel and Hamas in early 2025, developments there and continued policy disputes regarding Gaza's future are testing Egyptian diplomacy and longstanding agreements, including the 1979 Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty. Egypt has continued to contend with a politically divided Libya on its western border and a civil war in Sudan on its southern border. In addition to insecurity on Egypt's land borders, Houthi attacks in the Red Sea area and against Israel from Yemen since fall 2023 have redirected commercial shipping away from the Suez Canal, depriving Egypt of hard currency revenues. Shipping traffic through the Canal is down 60% since 2023; while traffic has begun to climb again in the last two months, shipping interests reportedly continue to see the passage as too high risk to resume previous transit patterns (see **Figure 1**).¹

Figure 1. Suez Canal Traffic



Source: Economist Intelligence Unit and Suez Canal Authority

The drop in Suez Canal traffic and the concomitant loss of revenue from canal tolls has compounded Egypt's economic malaise. Inflation, multiple currency depreciations, and spiraling budget deficits have all eroded the purchasing power of the average Egyptian consumer. While Egyptian government policies are partially responsible for the country's economic crisis, external shocks have exacerbated preexisting problems. In the past five years, the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and the war in Gaza all have depressed economic activity.

In order to stabilize Egypt's hard currency reserves and alleviate its national debt, Western international financial institutions (the International Monetary Fund or IMF, the World Bank, and European lenders) and individual Gulf Arab monarchies have infused Egypt with billions of dollars. Since 2024, Egypt has received over \$60 billion in external assistance partially to help it make payments on Egypt's external debt of \$152 billion (as of June 2025). In return for aid from

¹ Peter Eavis, "Red Sea Passage Remains a No-Go for Shipping Despite U.S. Action," *New York Times*, June 5, 2025.

the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Egypt sold Emirati companies valuable real estate. After Argentina and Ukraine, Egypt (\$8.2 billion) is the third largest current borrower of IMF funds.²

In Egypt, President Abdel Fattah al Sisi, who is serving his third and final term (ends in 2030) as president per the constitution, originally hails from the military, which, since 1952, has largely served as the bedrock of the country's ruling elite. Egypt's military has long taken an active role in the nation's economy, competing with private sector companies in an array of sectors, such as food production, construction, and mining and manufacturing.³ During the IMF's recent assessment of its lending program to Egypt, economists noted that "it is critical for Egypt to carry out deeper reforms to unlock the country's growth potential.... In order to deliver on these objectives, decisively reducing the role of the public sector in the economy and leveling the playing field for all economic agents should be key policy priorities."⁴ At this point, it is unclear whether the military will voluntarily reduce its economic role in the country and may continue to rely on external support to weather ongoing economic strains. According to one recent analysis, economic aid to Egypt "merely buys time until its next financial crisis."⁵

Figure 2. Map of Egypt



Source: CRS Graphics, CIA World Factbook.

² International Monetary Fund, Total IMF Credit Outstanding, Movement from June 01, 2025 to June 05, 2025.

³ Yezid Sayigh, "Owners of the Republic: An Anatomy of Egypt's Military Economy," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 18, 2019.

⁴ IMF, "IMF Staff Completes Review Mission to Egypt," May 27, 2025.

⁵ "The new losers," *The Economist*, May 31, 2025.

Historical Background

Since 1952, when a cabal of Egyptian Army officers, known as the Free Officers Movement, ousted the British-backed king, Egypt's military has produced four Presidents: Gamal Abdel Nasser (1954-1970), Anwar Sadat (1970-1981), Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011), and Abdel Fattah al Sisi (2013-present). These four men have ruled Egypt with strong backing from the country's security establishment almost continually. The one exception has been the brief period of rule by Muhammad Morsi, who was affiliated with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. That organization has opposed single party military-backed rule and advocated for a state governed by a vaguely articulated combination of civil and *sharia* (Islamic) law. In general, the Muslim Brotherhood has been the most significant and abiding opposition during the decades of military-backed rule.

The one departure from Egypt's decades of military rule, the brief period in which Morsi ruled, took place between 2011 and 2013. Popular demonstrations dubbed the "Arab Spring," which had started in neighboring Tunisia, spurred the military to force the resignation of former President Hosni Mubarak in February 2011. During this period, Egypt experienced tremendous political tumult, culminating in Morsi's one-year presidency. When Morsi took office on June 30, 2012, after winning Egypt's first truly competitive presidential election, his ascension to the presidency was expected to mark the end of a rocky 16-month transition period.⁶ Proposed timelines for elections, the constitutional drafting process, and the military's relinquishing of power to a civilian government had been repeatedly changed, contested, and sometimes even overruled by the courts. Instead of consolidating democratic or civilian rule, Morsi's rule exposed the deep divisions in Egyptian politics, pitting a broad cross-section of Egypt's public and private sectors, the Coptic Church, and the military against the Brotherhood and its Islamist supporters.

The atmosphere of mutual distrust, political gridlock, and public dissatisfaction that permeated Morsi's presidency provided Egypt's military, led by then-Defense Minister Sisi, with an opportunity to reassert political control. On July 3, 2013, following several days of mass public demonstrations against Morsi's rule, the military unilaterally dissolved Morsi's government, suspended the constitution that had been passed during his rule, and installed an interim president. The Muslim Brotherhood and its supporters declared the military's actions a coup d'état and protested in the streets. Weeks later, Egypt's military and national police launched a violent crackdown against the Muslim Brotherhood, resulting in police and army soldiers firing live ammunition against demonstrators encamped in several public squares and the killing of at least 1,150 demonstrators. The Egyptian military justified these actions by decrying the encampments as a threat to national security.⁷

Since 2013, the power of President Abdel Fattah al Sisi has gone mostly unchallenged. President Sisi assumed office formally in June 2014 after winning a May 2014 election with 96% of the vote. In 2018, he was reelected for a second term, receiving 97% of all valid votes cast. In 2023, Sisi was reelected for a third term, receiving 89.6% of the vote, though critics decried the election as a foregone conclusion.⁸

⁶ David Kirkpatrick, "Named Egypt's Winner, Islamist Makes History," *New York Times*, June 24, 2012.

⁷ "Egyptian Cabinet Vows to Disperse Pro-Morsi Protest Camps," *The Guardian* (UK), July 31, 2013.

⁸ "Egypt's Sisi sweeps to third term as president with 89.6% of vote," Reuters, December 18, 2023.

Issues for Congress

Israel and Gaza

As of June 2025, Egypt continues to work with U.S. officials to serve as a mediator between Israel and Hamas, who have been at war since Hamas led attacks on Israel in October 2023. After Egypt helped broker the January 2025 cease-fire between Israel and Hamas, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio thanked Egyptian officials for their mediation efforts “in securing the release of hostages and the ceasefire, as well as continuing humanitarian assistance deliveries throughout Gaza.”⁹

However, as the conflict resumed and has continued, Egypt has been placed in difficult diplomatic positions vis-a-vis the United States and Israel: it has protested, but also quietly accepted the presence of Israeli troops along the Gaza-Egyptian border (see **Figure 3**); it has rejected President Trump’s earlier calls to relocate Gazans;¹⁰ its multinational plan to stabilize and reconstruct Gaza has not been accepted by either the United States or Israel; and it refrained from joining the United States in taking military actions against the Houthis, which resulted in criticism from President Trump.¹¹

As of late 2024, an estimated 120,000 Palestinians or more had arrived in Egypt since the start of the war. Egypt has refused to build long term refugee camps for displaced Gazans in the Sinai, though it has accepted the temporary presence of medical evacuees, dual passport holders, and “others who managed to escape.”¹²

Figure 3. Egypt-Israel-Gaza Border



Source: CNN, December 27, 2023.

⁹ U.S. Department of State, “Secretary Rubio’s Call with Egyptian Foreign Minister Abdelatty,” January 28, 2025.

¹⁰ Sherif Tarek, “Egypt Pushes Against Gaza Displacement Call with Rebuilding Plan,” *Bloomberg*, February 5, 2025.

¹¹ Zvi Bar’el, “Egypt Is Stuck Between a Cold American Shoulder and the High Price of the War in Gaza,” *Ha’aretz*, May 24, 2025; Shahira Amin, “Choppy waters: Egypt’s waning patience with President Trump,” *Atlantic Council*, May 14, 2025; and Mohamed Nabil El Bendary, “Egypt’s Delicate Balance: Maintaining US Support While Confronting Gaza Challenges,” *Stimson Center*, April 18, 2025.

¹² “Palestinians build new lives in Cairo’s ‘Little Gaza,’” *Agence France Presse*, November 5, 2024.

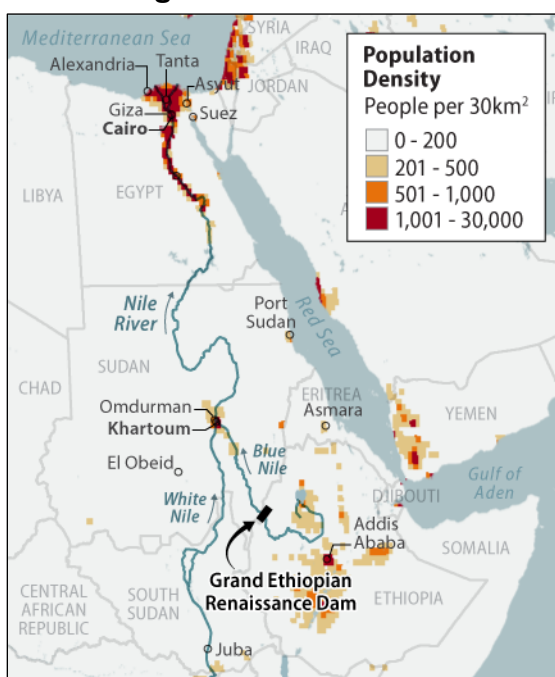
The Nile River, Ethiopia and the War in Sudan

Egypt relies on the Nile River (see **Figure 4**) for hydroelectricity, agriculture, and most of its domestic water needs, and thus treats restrictions to the flow of the Nile from upstream countries as an existential issue. The government has been at odds with Nile Basin countries to Egypt's south that seek to revisit colonial-era treaties governing the allocation of Nile waters. Tensions are particularly strong with Ethiopia (population 118 million), which operates the \$4.2 billion Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), a major hydroelectric project on the Blue Nile, which starts in Ethiopia. Egypt argues that the dam will limit the flow of the Nile below Egypt's share, as agreed upon in a 1959 Egyptian deal with Sudan (of which Ethiopia was not part). Ethiopia claims that the dam, which would double its electricity generating capacity, is critical to its efforts to eradicate poverty.

After years of failed talks, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan continue to disagree over how much water should be released from the GERD on an annual basis, particularly during prolonged droughts.

Since the conflict in Sudan began in 2023, Egypt has diplomatically supported the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF, the military) in its battle against the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), which has been backed militarily by one of Egypt's main benefactors, the UAE.¹³ As the war in Sudan has led to the world's largest humanitarian crisis, the United Nations estimates that over one million Sudanese have fled to Egypt, with over 600,000 Sudanese registering as refugees with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Sudan's influence over the Nile River's flow into Egypt makes it vital to Egyptian security.

Figure 4. The Nile River



Source: CRS Graphics.

Democracy, Human Rights, and Religious Freedom

U.S. officials and some Members of Congress have frequently criticized Egypt's record on human rights and democratization. The Egyptian government rejects foreign criticism of its human rights practices as illegitimate interference in Egypt's domestic affairs.¹⁴ It also claims that it is taking tangible steps to improve its human rights record and broaden political participation by launching a national human rights strategy,¹⁵ forming a Presidential Pardon Commission to release political prisoners,¹⁶ and launching a National Dialogue to allow some open discussion of political issues

¹³ CRS InFocus CRS In Focus IF12816, *The War and Humanitarian Crisis in Sudan*, by Lauren Ploch Blanchard.

¹⁴ "Egypt calls on US not to interfere in its affairs," *The Middle East Monitor*, March 15, 2019.

¹⁵ Government of Egypt, State Information Service, *Egypt and Human Rights*, February 3, 2022.

¹⁶ Heba Saleh, "Critics of Egypt's regime given rare platform ahead of elections," *Financial Times* (UK), June 27, 2023.

by a range of various actors¹⁷ (excluding the Muslim Brotherhood which the Egyptian government designated as a terrorist group in 2013 after the military deposed an elected Muslim Brotherhood-led government).¹⁸ Certain practices of President Sisi's government, the parliament, and the security apparatus have been the subjects of U.S. criticism, including Egypt's detention and treatment of U.S. citizens. According to the U.S. State Department's report on human rights conditions in Egypt in 2023

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: arbitrary or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings; enforced disappearance; torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by the government; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest and detention; serious problems with the independence of the judiciary; political prisoners or detainees; transnational repression against individuals in another country; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; punishment of family members for alleged offenses by a relative; serious abuses in a conflict, including enforced disappearances and torture; unlawful recruitment or use of children in armed conflict by government-supported tribal militias; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including unjustified arrests or prosecutions of journalists, censorship, and the enforcement of or threat to enforce criminal libel laws to limit expression; serious restrictions on internet freedom; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, including overly restrictive laws on the organization, funding, or operation of nongovernmental and civil society organizations; restrictions on freedom of movement and residence within the territory of a state and on the right to leave the country; serious and unreasonable restrictions on political participation; serious government corruption; serious government restrictions on and harassment of domestic and international human rights organizations; extensive gender-based violence, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, and female genital mutilation/cutting; trafficking in persons, including forced labor; de facto criminalization of same-sex sexual conduct between adults, including enforcement of other laws to punish that conduct; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex persons; and significant restrictions on workers' freedom of association.¹⁹

Select international human rights, democracy, and development monitoring organizations provide the following global rankings for Egypt (see **Table 1**).

¹⁷ Vivian Yee, "Facing Crisis, Egypt's Leader Tries New Tack: Talking to Opponents," *New York Times*, June 13, 2023.

¹⁸ "Egypt's National Political Dialogue agrees on social issues to discuss, voices appreciation for pardons," *Al Ahram*, July 30, 2022.

¹⁹ U.S. Department of State, *2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Egypt*, April 22, 2024.

Table 1. Democracy, Human Rights, and Development Indicators

Issue	Index	Ranking
Democracy	Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2025	"Not Free"
Press Freedom	Reporters Without Borders, World Press Freedom Index 2025	170/180 Countries
Corruption	Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index 2024	130/180 Countries
Human Development	United Nations Human Development Programme, Human Development Index 2023	100/193 Countries

Sources: Freedom House, Reporters Without Borders, Transparency International, and United Nations Human Development Programme.

Coptic Christians

Most Egyptians are Sunni Muslims (perhaps 90%).²⁰ A relatively small percentage are Coptic Christians, and this minority has faced discrimination and persecution, from the government as well as from other citizens and terrorist groups.

For years, the Coptic Christian community in Egypt has called for equal treatment under the law, and members of the community have won several court cases, beginning in 2019.²¹ Since taking office, President Sisi has publicly called for greater Muslim-Christian coexistence and national unity. In January 2019, he inaugurated Egypt's Coptic Cathedral of Nativity in the New Administrative Capital east of Cairo saying, "This is an important moment in our history.... We are one and we will remain one."²²

Despite these public calls for improved interfaith relations in Egypt, the minority Coptic Christian community continues to face professional and social discrimination, along with occasional sectarian attacks. According to the 2025 U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom report, "While Egyptian security services sometimes moved expeditiously to quell violent incidents against churches, observers criticized authorities' slow response in other instances, resulting in property damage;" the report also noted that "Egypt's government maintained some initiatives to recognize and encourage religious inclusivity."²³

U.S. Foreign Aid to Egypt

Since 1946, the United States has provided Egypt with nearly \$90 billion in bilateral foreign aid (calculated in historical dollars—not adjusted for inflation), with military and economic assistance increasing significantly after the U.S.-brokered 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. Annual appropriations measures have included several conditions governing the release of these funds. Successive U.S. Administrations have justified aid to Egypt as an investment in regional stability, built primarily on long-running cooperation with the Egyptian military and on sustaining

²⁰ The World Factbook, last updated August 23, 2024.

²¹ See George Sadek, "Egypt: Court Grants Christian Woman Share of Father's Estate Equal to Share of Her Two Brothers," *Global Legal Monitor*, The Law Library, Library of Congress, January 9, 2020. See also, "Egypt court gives Coptic woman inheritance equivalent to the man," *Egypt Independent*, April 11, 2023.

²² "Egypt's Sisi Opens Mega-Mosque and Middle East's Largest Cathedral in New Capital," Reuters, January 6, 2019.

²³ Annual Report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, March 2025.

the 1979 treaty. All U.S. military aid to Egypt finances the procurement of weapons systems and services from U.S. defense contractors.

Egypt and China Conduct Joint Military Exercises

In 2024 and 2025, several reports have indicated the Egyptian government's interest in purchasing Chinese J-10 or J-35 fighter jets.²⁴ Egypt's current inventory of fighter aircraft is a mix of American F-16s, Russian Mig-29s, and French Rafales. In May 2025, Egypt and China conducted "Eagles of Civilization 2025,"²⁵ an 18-day military exercise in Egypt featuring Chinese refueling tankers, radar aircraft, and fighter jets.²⁶ During the first Trump Administration, Egypt attempted to purchase Su-35 aircraft from Russia, but backed away from the deal after U.S. officials threatened to levy sanctions using authorities in the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanction Act (CAATSA).²⁷

When President Trump ordered a 90-day pause and review of foreign aid globally, he exempted FMF to Israel and Egypt.²⁸ As of June 2025, the status of U.S.-funded economic aid programs in Egypt is unclear. Reportedly, President Trump proposed to President Sisi in April 2025 that the Egyptian government provide free passage for U.S. ships transiting the Suez Canal and stated on social media that they should.²⁹ As of June 2025, it is unclear whether the Administration is considering changes to longstanding U.S. military aid to Egypt. In responding to Advance Policy Questions from the Senate Armed Services Committee, Elbridge Colby, the subsequently confirmed Under Secretary of Defense for Policy wrote that

U.S. Foreign Military Financing (FMF) plays an important role in strengthening the strategic partnership with Egypt and supporting Egypt's legitimate defense needs. That said, U.S. support to Egypt should be evaluated in the context of our overall defense priorities, especially the pressing threat posed by China and the need to secure our interests in our own hemisphere.³⁰

In the President's recent Technical Supplement to the 2026 Budget, suggested legislative language includes a \$1.3 billion FMF request for Egypt "notwithstanding any other provision of law restricting assistance for Egypt, except for this subsection and section 620M of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961." Section 620M refers to what is known colloquially as the Leahy Law, which restricts aid to specific units of a foreign country's security forces found to be committing gross violations of human rights. For over a decade, Congress has conditioned a portion of FMF to Egypt on various human rights criteria. For FY2020-FY2023, the Biden Administration and Congress reprogrammed or withheld a total of \$750 million in FMF originally designated for Egypt based on relevant provisions in appropriations law. The global democracy watchdog organization Freedom House has perennially ranked Egypt as "not free."³¹

²⁴ Amira El Fekki, "U.S. Ally Looks to Buy Chinese J-35 Stealth Jets," *Newsweek*, May 29, 2025.

²⁵ "Chinese fighter jets soar over Egypt in first joint exercises," Reuters, May 6, 2025.

²⁶ Howard Altman, "China Deploys J-10 Fighters to Egypt," *The War Zone*, April 21, 2025.

²⁷ Ali Dizboni, Karim El-Baz, "Understanding the Egyptian Military's Perspective on the Su-35 Deal," *Fikra Forum*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, July 15, 2021.

²⁸ Edward Wong, "Sweeping Halt to Foreign Aid Does Not Apply to Arms for Israel and Egypt," *New York Times*, January 25, 2025.

²⁹ Summer Said, "Trump Seeks Givebacks For Assistance to Egypt," *Wall Street Journal*, May 1, 2025; <https://x.com/TrumpDailyPosts/status/1916232692607205529>.

³⁰ Senate Armed Services Committee, Advance Policy Questions for Elbridge Colby, Nominee for Appointment to be Under Secretary of Defense for Policy.

³¹ See, Freedom House, *Freedom in the World* 2023, March 2023.

Table 2. Recent Possible Major Foreign Military Sales to Egypt Since October 7, 2023

Date Notified to Congress	Major U.S. Defense System	Amount	Principal Contractor
February 4, 2025	AN/TPS-78 Long Range Radar	\$304 million	Northrop Grumman Corporation
February 4, 2025	Fast Missile Craft Modernization	\$625 million	Lockheed Martin and L3Harris
December 20, 2024	Hellfire AGM-114R Missiles	\$630 million	Lockheed Martin
December 20, 2024	Advanced Precision Kill Weapon System (APKWS)	\$30 million	BAE Systems
December 20, 2024	Abrams Tank Refurbishment	\$4.69 billion	General Dynamics Land Systems
September 24, 2024	Stinger Missiles	\$740 million	RTX Corporation
January 10, 2024	28-Meter Patrol Craft Kits	\$129 million	Swiftships
January 10, 2024	Light Tactical Vehicle Chassis and Fleet Build	\$200 million	AM General, LLC
Totals		\$7.348 billion	

Source: Defense Security Cooperation Agency.

Since the Hamas-led attacks of October 7, 2023 and the subsequent Israel-Hamas war in Gaza, both the Biden and Trump Administrations have noticeably accelerated U.S. arms sales to Egypt. During that time, the State Department has notified Congress of a total of \$7.3 billion in Foreign Military Sales cases for Egypt (see **Table 2**), which would require over five years-worth of FMF appropriations at prevailing annual rates. It is possible that, during the Biden Administration, U.S. officials reinstated Egypt's access to cash flow financing, a special benefit for select FMF recipients, which allows countries to incrementally pay for arms sales over multiple years.

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