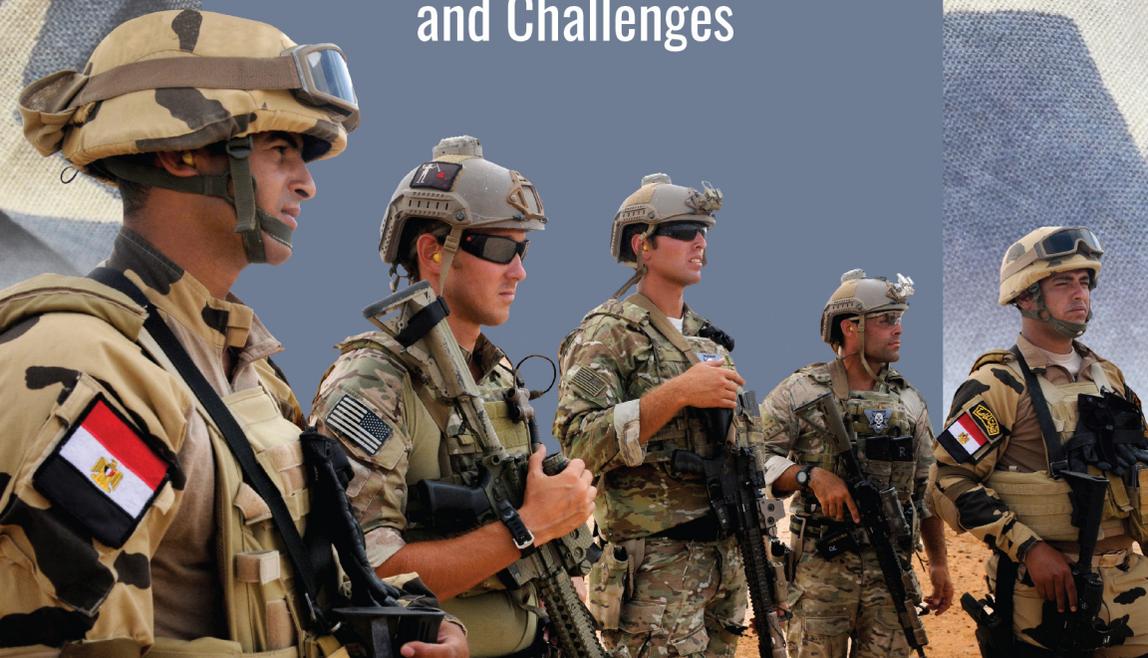


David M. Witty

# THE U.S.-EGYPT MILITARY RELATIONSHIP

Complexities, Contradictions,  
and Challenges



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Cover image: Egyptian and U.S. soldiers take part in the Bright Star military exercise.  
Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Whitney Hughes, U.S. Army Central, identified by DVIDS.

*This study is dedicated to two generations of frustrated  
U.S. security assistance officers working the Egypt desk.  
Egypt is a harsh mistress.*

# Contents

Illustrations	v
Acknowledgments	vi
Abbreviations	viii
1 Introduction	1
2 The Egyptian Armed Forces	5
3 Assessing Bilateral Military Ties	85
4 A Relationship in Transition Since the Arab Spring	115
5 A New U.S. Approach to Bilateral Military Relations	145
6 Analysis, Conclusions, and Recommendations	183

# Illustrations

2.1.	Comparison of Arab Military Strength, 2021	6
2.2.	EAF Economic, Consumer, and Manufacturing Activities	10
2.3.	Comparison of EAF and IDF, 2021	14
2.4.	Map of Northern Sinai	26
2.5.	Map of Halaib Triangle	28
2.6.	Map: Sisi's Redline for Libya	33
2.7.	EAF Main Battle Tanks	39
2.8.	Other EAF Army Equipment	39
2.9.	Map of EAF Disposition	40
2.10.	Principal EAF Air Force Combat Aircraft	42
2.11.	Map of Egypt and the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam	51
2.12.	Principal EAF Naval Vessels	54
2.13.	Map of Key EAF Bases	56
5.1.	Breakdown of \$1.3B in FMF from the 2021 U.S. Consolidated Appropriations Act	162
5.2.	Recent U.S. Congressional Notifications, Defense Security Cooperation Agency	164

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# Abbreviations

AMRAAM	advanced medium-range air-to-air missile
AU	African Union
CAATSA	Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act
CFF	cash flow financing
CISMOA	Communication Interoperability and Security Memorandum of Agreement
DSCA	Defense Security Cooperation Agency
EAF	Egyptian Armed Forces
GERD	Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam
FMF	Foreign Military Financing
FMS	Foreign Military Sales
GNA	Government of National Accord (Libya)
GNU	Government of National Unity (Libya)
IDF	Israel Defense Forces
IMET	International Military Education and Training
IS	Islamic State
JCET	Joint Combined Exchange Training
LNA	Libyan National Army
MCC	Military Cooperation Committee (U.S.-Egypt)
MFO	Multinational Force & Observers (Sinai)
OMC	Office of Military Cooperation
QME	qualitative military edge
RPG	rocket-propelled grenade
SCAF	Supreme Council of the Armed Forces
SSB	Presidency of Defense Industries (Turkey)

# 1

## Introduction

Since U.S.-Egypt ties first became close following the Camp David Accords of 1978 and the subsequent Egypt-Israel peace treaty of 1979, the bilateral military relationship has always been the strongest and most important pillar in the broader dynamic. The Egyptian Armed Forces (EAF) is the preeminent institution in Egypt and will remain central to U.S.-Egypt relations no matter what government is in power. Over the past four decades, the United States has given Egypt a little more than \$50 billion in military grant aid to procure U.S. military equipment, and between 1980 and 2014, the United States was Egypt's top source of weapons. After the Egyptian revolution of 2011 and the removal of the country's first democratically elected president in 2013, relations grew strained, and Egypt turned to other countries to obtain weapons because of U.S. restrictions on military aid, the holdup of weapon deliveries, and years of refusal to sell Egypt advanced weapons. Today, Russia and France have emerged as the top sources of Egypt's weapons, and although Egypt always bought some weapons from non-U.S. sources, they were of a lesser value than U.S. procurements. In 2008–11, for example, Egypt took delivery of \$5 billion worth of weapons, with only \$1.2 billion of those from non-U.S. sources.<sup>1</sup>

Although many of the U.S. restrictions on military aid have since been removed and relations are better since the United States restored aid closer to its original form in 2015—and then after President Donald Trump took office in 2017—other new constraints have been applied on the types of arms Egypt can procure from the United States, how the military aid is spent to focus the EAF on irregular warfare, and what the United States views as Egypt's most pressing security needs. The United States applies conditions for Egypt to receive part of its annual military aid of \$1.3 billion to promote greater democratization and respect for human rights. Although Egypt and

the United States have many shared interests, such as maintaining regional stability, the Egyptian government's repression and human rights abuses have grown worse since President Abdul Fattah al-Sisi took power in June 2014. Many U.S. voices have therefore called for even greater restrictions on or reductions of U.S. military aid.

The U.S. experience in providing military assistance to Egypt over the past four decades has raised a number of issues pertaining to the use, effectiveness, purpose, and even morality of that assistance. Among these issues are: (1) how U.S. security interests with an authoritarian government align with American values of democratization and respect for human rights; (2) U.S. success in achieving its core interests in the region, such as maintaining the Egypt-Israel peace, regional stability, and U.S. access to Egyptian territory for transit of military assets; (3) the ability to achieve EAF military reform to better address current security threats; and (4) the success of conditioned aid in achieving political reform and improved human rights. Indeed, the military relationship and the aid have been successful in supporting core U.S. interests such as maintaining peace despite popular anti-Israel sentiment in Egypt, but have largely failed in other areas when conditionality was applied and weapon transfers restricted, which ultimately made Egypt turn to other nations as its principal military patrons, even as Egypt's repression persisted.

Egypt's strategic location at the intersection of three continents and increasing role in the region make it an almost indispensable U.S. partner. Instead of using the military relationship and aid to push democracy, the United States should do the following: (1) accept the limits of its influence and recognize that Egyptian actions will never align with U.S. values; (2) understand that the relationship is transactional and view the military aid as an operating expense to help ensure core interests are met, such as reinforcing the Egypt-Israel peace and supporting improved official relations between Cairo and Jerusalem, expanding Israel's normalization of relations with other Arab nations, maintaining regional stability through preventing the spread of terrorism and future wars, and forming a method to maintain a relationship with the EAF; (3) stop using the aid to promote military reform, because the EAF will always have a conventional military focus and will

turn to others to maintain it as necessary; (4) sell Egypt at least a few of the advanced weapon systems it has been requesting for years that have been sold to other Arab nations; and (5) accept that there will always be a certain amount of anti-U.S. and anti-Israel rhetoric originating from Egypt.

Chapter 2 of this study will discuss the EAF, its role in society, and its military challenges in traditional and irregular warfare and need to project power. Chapter 3 describes the U.S.-Egypt military relationship before 2011. Chapter 4 addresses the relationship after 2011 and Egypt's turn to new military patrons. Chapter 5 will examine the relationship today and the new form of U.S. aid. The final section will determine whether the EAF is changing to better focus on irregular warfare, evaluate what worked and what did not work in the military relationship, examine what the relationship will look like in the future, and conclude with a set of policy recommendations on how best to manage the defense relationship.

## A Note on Sources

This study draws heavily on Egyptian mainstream newspapers in both Arabic and English, which are subject to censorship or self-censorship and reflect the views of the Egyptian government and not necessarily public opinion. These include publications such as *al-Ahram*, *al-Masry al-Youm*, *al-Shorouk*, and *al-Youm al-Sabaa*. Data on weapons inventories, arms sales and imports, U.S. aid, defense budgets, and international training are provided by the International Institute for Strategic Studies, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, the Security Assistance Monitor, and Global Firepower. The Defense Security Cooperation Agency provides specifics on proposed U.S. arms transactions. Jeremy M. Sharp of the Congressional Research Service in his *Egypt: Background and U.S. Relations*, updated at least annually, provides specifics on the U.S.-Egypt defense relationship. This study is also heavily based on interviews with former U.S. embassy officials in Cairo and a few others. These individuals maintain ties with the U.S. defense industry and government, as well as connections to Egypt, and chose not to have their names cited, but rather their former positions.

## Notes

- 1 Catherine A. Theohary, *Conventional Arms Transfers to Developing Nations, 2008–2015* (Congressional Research Service, 2016), 47, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/weapons/R44716.pdf>.

## 2

# The Egyptian Armed Forces

Egyptians see themselves as exceptional, the makers of civilization, and they regard their nation, in the Arabic expression, as *umm al-dunya* (“mother of the world”). Egypt has existed longer than any other nation in the Middle East, and in the reckoning of Egyptians, it was a nation-state before Europe developed the concept. Egyptians did not consider themselves Arabs until the twentieth century and have a sense of national identity lacking in other countries in the region. Given this sense of exceptionalism, Egyptians see themselves as the natural leaders of the Arab world, a role they once held and wish to repeat.

The Egyptian Armed Forces is central to Egyptians’ modern-day sense of national identity, viewed as the preeminent institution entrusted with a sacred mission. A symbol of Egypt’s independence and a source of regional prestige and credibility, the EAF is the largest military force in the region, and Egyptians take pride in its strength and ranking as one of the world’s most powerful militaries and the strongest Arab one (for a comparison of Egypt’s military with other regional militaries, see figure 2.1).<sup>1</sup> The Egyptian government likewise uses EAF capabilities to safeguard political legitimacy, founded on a covenant between the forces and the people to preserve Egyptians’ dignity and defend their homeland.

Figure 2.1. Comparison of Arab Military Strength, 2021

Country	Main Battle Tanks	Artillery (Including Mortars)	Combat Aircraft
Algeria	1,495	1,127	133
Egypt	3,620 (including 1,140 in storage)	4,468	585
Iraq	391	1,061	90
Jordan	566 (including 300 in storage)	1,393	57
Kuwait	368 (including 75 in storage)	211	66
Morocco	916 (including 260 in storage)	2,319	90
Qatar	62	89	33
Saudi Arabia	960	1,196 (including National Guard)	443
United Arab Emirates	303	613	156

**Source:** International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2021* (Oxfordshire, UK: Taylor & Francis, 2021).

The military in Egypt has played a significant role in society and economic development for seven thousand years and has been at the nation's heart for the last two hundred years as the premier modernizing force.<sup>2</sup> The EAF has run Egypt either directly or indirectly since 1952, when Gamal Abdul Nasser and the Egyptian Free Officers overthrew the British-backed monarchy. Most Egyptians support the EAF's place in society, especially during times of national crisis. During the protests aimed at overthrowing President Hosni Mubarak in 2011 and later President Mohamed Morsi in 2013, the majority of Egyptians called on the EAF to intervene, and in Egypt's state-controlled or else self-censored media, the EAF is portrayed as holding the country together in the wake of civil wars and foreign interventions. The EAF is referred to as the "spine of the nation," and two popular mottoes are "One hand builds, the other protects," in a reference to the EAF's role in civil society, and "The army and the people are one hand."

Although in recent years domestic activists have criticized the EAF, and indications suggest its popularity has fallen, public trust in the forces seems to remain high. Further, even as judging popular opinion is almost impossible because mainstream media sources are aligned closely with state messaging, and as Egyptians feel constrained in expressing their true beliefs, an Arab Barometer report cited 84 percent of Egyptians trusting the EAF in 2019, just 10 points lower than polling in 2011. In contrast, only 66 percent had trust in the government, while less than a third were satisfied with the government's performance.<sup>3</sup> The EAF's role in society is unlikely to wane; in Egypt's constitutional amendments of April 2019, the EAF is charged with protecting the people's freedom, rights, civil life, and the nation's very underpinnings.<sup>4</sup>

The EAF dominates political leadership. All of Egypt's presidents have come from the EAF with the exception of Morsi. After the removal of Morsi, many Egyptians believed a military candidate could better govern and unite the country than a civilian and chose Field Marshal Abdul Fattah al-Sisi, although his single opponent was prevented from conducting a serious election campaign, and voter apathy was widespread. Since Sisi's election, the role of the military in politics has expanded beyond its previous high historical levels. Many senior officers serve as governors and ministers, and

many lower-ranking officers are in lesser positions in the governmental administration and bureaucracy. Sisi's inner circle is dominated by military men who make all the decisions, from drafting election laws to directing the economy. Although Mubarak included civilian elites and political parties in his decisionmaking, Sisi relies almost exclusively on military men.

Although the EAF is central to Egypt and touches almost every aspect of life, there are many contradictions. Military service is an important socialization tool in providing a sense of civic duty and loyalty to the state, and it exposes recruits from rural backgrounds to modern technology. Service as an officer is one of the few paths to social mobility with good pay and access to private medical treatment and other privileges. Each year, between one hundred thousand to two hundred thousand young men apply to the army's military academy for one thousand slots. However, the EAF is a conscript force, and enlisted service is viewed as unfortunate with harsh treatment from officers and a difficult counterinsurgency campaign in Sinai. University graduates do everything possible to avoid serving, and conscription methods are corrupt, with inductees using bribes and personal connections to avoid tough duty if possible. From antiquity until the twentieth century, Egypt was conquered and ruled by outsiders who used mercenaries and foreign soldiers. Egyptians generally either did not serve in the army or resisted attempts to conscript them. Consequently, Egyptians never developed a sense of national pride in military service, although Sisi is trying to instill pride through military nationalism that emphasizes national sovereignty and military relevance regionally.<sup>5</sup>

The EAF is also among the country's least transparent institutions. Little is known of its internal workings, and it is not subject to civil oversight. Even after a relationship with the U.S. military spanning decades, the United States knows little about it. The Egyptian parliament does not have any role in how the defense budget is spent nor does it even approve it. In November 2021, the parliament amended the penal code to make even researching the EAF or collecting statistical data on it a crime punishable up to five years in prison unless such activities were first approved by the Ministry of Defense.<sup>6</sup> What is known is that the EAF's role in society goes well beyond what is associated with a Western military. In addition to protecting borders, the EAF maintains

internal security and government stability and assists in Egypt's economic and social development. Its activities range from safeguarding elections and distributing milk to children, to leading the defense of the country against the Covid-19 pandemic by disinfecting public facilities and roads and producing hygienic products. The Defense and Education Ministries are establishing popular secondary military schools to improve morale and discipline, and increase youths' loyalty to the nation, and are creating mandatory programs at universities to increase patriotism. The EAF also operates elite secondary and elementary schools.

One of the most controversial aspects of the EAF is its role in the economy and broader society, which can be described as widely intrusive. In the modern era, the EAF has been heavily involved in economic activities since the 1970s in response to pressures to reduce defense budgets and become self-sustaining, but its role has greatly expanded under Sisi, who sees these activities as a way to ensure loyalty and avoid pushes toward privatizing the economy. A network of public, private, and subcontractor companies, supervised by retired EAF general officers, controls a vast economic empire that is largely off the books and not under oversight. It employs more than five million Egyptians out of a total workforce of about twenty-nine million, and its companies have plans to compete in the Egyptian stock market. EAF conscripts provide cheap labor to public- and private-sector companies and undertake construction and agricultural activities. General officers guide the often sole-source or non-bid public contracts to their chosen subcontractors, and the EAF's economic activities are largely free from taxes, customs, government fees, and supervision in the name of national security. Recently appointed Defense Ministry military advisors to each governor oversee public services and steer development projects to EAF companies.

EAF's Engineering Authority supervises national projects such as expanding the Suez Canal and building public housing, bridges, tunnels, roads, and a new administrative capital, and it claims to create jobs through its subcontractors. It managed about a quarter of all publicly funded infrastructure projects in 2014–18.<sup>7</sup> The Ministry of Military Production, subordinate to the Defense Ministry, in addition to making equipment for the EAF, manufactures consumer items to compete in commercial markets and

has entered into partnerships with international companies to make tires, electric cars, solar light poles, and artificial grass. It supervises a smart card program that provides welfare to Egyptians and has established hundreds of desalination facilities, as well as recycling factories. (For EAF economic activities, see figure 2.2.)

Figure 2.2. EAF Economic, Consumer, and Manufacturing Activities

Activities
Iron plants
Cement factories
Bakeries
Medicine manufacturing and medical services
Import of consumer items in short supply, e.g., meat and poultry
Gas stations
Land reclamation
Smart irrigation
Food processing and canneries
Fertilizer and insecticide manufacturing
Trucks selling unprepared food, including fruits and vegetables
Macaroni factories
Farms and fish farms
Tour companies
Household appliance manufacturing
Officer club system open for civilian parties and weddings
Nile riverboats

**Note:** Material for this figure was pulled from a range of sources.

The EAF takes part in national bureaucracy reforms, and Sisi transferred the government agencies' and departments' budgetary and acquisition processes to the EAF Armament Authority to increase efficiency, reduce corruption, and synergize funding.<sup>8</sup> Sisi praises the rapid progress by the EAF in development projects, which he claims would have taken thirty years otherwise, and believes the civilian state is too inefficient to achieve his development goals. The EAF states that it combines economic and military power to make it self-sufficient and contributes to Egypt's economic development with cheap services and goods.

The EAF is largely self-sufficient except for major weaponry and produces its own supplies such as food, clothing, small arms, artillery, mortars, and armored personnel carriers, some of indigenous design. However, most production focuses on reproducing foreign equipment and licensed products rather than unique, innovative designs. Profits from EAF economic activities are used for major weapon procurements from foreign sources.<sup>9</sup>

In recent years, Egypt has been on a massive weapon-buying spree and was the world's third-largest arms importer behind Saudi Arabia and India in 2016–20, with an increase of 136 percent over the previous period of 2011–15.<sup>10</sup> It is readily apparent that weapon spending has significantly increased while Egypt suffers economically. The country's poverty rate is 29.7 percent, and its external debt requires 22 percent of government revenues to service.<sup>11</sup> However, Sisi has justified the purchases by saying that there was no other choice and that a well-equipped force with modern weapons is the only way to guarantee the nation's security.

In 2019–20, Egypt signed deals for an estimated \$16 billion in weapons from non-U.S. suppliers. Although there is little transparency, Egypt's official defense budget was \$3.35 billion in 2019 and \$4.11 billion in 2020. Reports on Egypt's official military budget vary, but defense budgets from 2010 on were similar, making it one of the smallest military spenders in the region in absolute and relative terms. Thus, the combined budgets of 2019 and 2020 were \$7.46 billion, while non-U.S. weapon buys were more than double that amount in the same period. In addition, about 60 percent of Egypt's official military budget is used to pay salaries, leaving only about 40 percent to cover arms buys and other expenses.<sup>12</sup>

Payment for Egypt's major arms acquisitions come from outside the official military budget. The reason could be to reduce the poverty-stricken population's concerns about high levels of military spending. Egypt received \$30 billion in aid from Gulf nations in 2013–16 and used at least part of it to fund weapon procurements.<sup>13</sup> French loans also financed part of the procurements, which must be repaid over a course of years. However, it is clear that the EAF uses its holdings from its off-the-books economic interests to pay for some weapon procurements, although there is much ambiguity.<sup>14</sup> Sisi has stated that the EAF has its own budget reserves to pay for weapon buys.<sup>15</sup>

The expanding role of the EAF in the economy is sometimes criticized because it competes with the private sector and has lower production costs as a result of work by conscripts and exemption from taxes and fees, and it limits the private sector's access to state contracts.<sup>16</sup> Although criticism of the EAF in the Egyptian media is considered a redline and treasonous, discussions about its role in the economy and expanding reach surface from time to time.<sup>17</sup> When the EAF opened secondary schools and began distributing baby formula, it elicited social media ridicule. The Egyptian critics who dare speak out see the EAF's activities as turning the nation into a militarized society, limiting civilian administration, and marginalizing those with real expertise in many fields. They also say these activities detract from the defense of the nation and degrade military service with soldiers serving as grocers and laborers.<sup>18</sup>

In September 2019, the issue arose again when Mohamed Ali, a former defense contractor, posted a series of YouTube videos accusing President Sisi and the EAF of corruption in the management of public-sector funds and national projects. Ali alleged that millions of dollars were spent on palaces for Sisi and hotels for the senior EAF leadership and called for a revolution. This criticism sparked small protests and was met with the deployment of security forces to cities, a wave of arrests, and assertions from Sisi that the EAF was not corrupt but rather developing the nation. These efforts were successful and produced no significant follow-on protests, but Ali's direct challenge of the EAF's economic expansion highlighted the EAF's centrality to the national leadership, striking a chord with the public. The

Cairo government's reaction showed that it viewed any criticism of the EAF as particularly dangerous.

Regardless of what happens, the EAF will protect its business interests and role in society. The EAF is the ultimate arbiter and has unprecedented power under Sisi. Although the government and the military are seen as one, there are reports that the EAF is unhappy with Sisi, ranging from his handling of the Covid pandemic, the ceding of two islands at the entrance of the Gulf of Aqaba to Saudi Arabia in 2017, the counterinsurgency campaign in Sinai, domestic policies, and the management of the Nile water crisis with Ethiopia.<sup>19</sup> To protect himself and coup-proof his government, Sisi frequently rotates, replaces, or retires the top leadership of the EAF. In summer 2021, laws were amended reducing the amount of time the EAF chief of staff and service chiefs can serve in their positions from four years to two years unless extended by Sisi.<sup>20</sup> Many of those who retire are given prominent roles in the military economy to ensure their loyalty. Nevertheless, the EAF has shown it will do whatever is necessary to protect its interests—such as overthrow Mubarak, collaborate with the Muslim Brotherhood, and then depose Morsi. If Sisi is overthrown, it will likely be by the EAF, thereby ensuring that it will have the final say in a post-Sisi Egypt.

## Security Concerns

Egypt is committed to maintaining its sovereignty and territorial integrity as a stable nation free of external influences. Because of Egypt's history of foreign occupation, there is a belief that its geostrategic location makes it vulnerable to attack.<sup>21</sup> From 332 BCE to 1952 CE, Egypt was governed by non-Egyptians. British forces did not depart from Egypt until 1956, and it later experienced Soviet neocolonialism. Egyptians are extremely leery of external influences and this outlook tints Egypt's relations with others. It is Egyptian policy that it will never host permanent foreign bases. The EAF symbolizes Egypt's sovereignty and independence; it is believed that Egypt prospers when the EAF is strong and suffers when it is weak.

Egypt's perceived security priorities can be classified as three types:

(1) conventional threats to its border from an invasion, (2) irregular threats such as terrorism and insurgency, and (3) requirements to project power in the region. Egyptian leaders believe that diplomacy cannot be successful unless it is accompanied by military force, and in turn, the EAF practices a sort of military diplomacy to achieve deterrence and contain threats.<sup>22</sup> The EAF's foreign policy role is vital because Egypt lacks the economic resources to engage in checkbook diplomacy, although it retains some other aspects of soft power through its culture, history, and media.

## Conventional Threats

Closely linked to national sovereignty is the goal to maintain at least a perceived parity with the nation that it has fought five wars against since 1948—Israel, the only true conventional threat on Egyptian borders. Traditionally, Egypt and Israel were assessed as having the two most powerful militaries in the region, although on paper the EAF is more powerful than the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) (see figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3. Comparison of EAF and IDF, 2021

	Active military force	Reserve military force	Main battle tanks	Artillery (including mortars)	Combat aircraft	Frigates	Submarines	Corvettes
Egypt	438,500	497,000	3,620	4,468	585	10	8	5
Israel	169,500	465,000	1,370	530	334	0	5	3

**Sources:** International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2021* (Oxfordshire, UK: Taylor & Francis, 2021), 334–36, 344–46; and “Egyptian Navy Receives 2nd FREMM Bergamini Frigate ‘Bernice,’” *al-Masry al-Youm*, April 15, 2021, available at <https://egyptindependent.com/egyptian-navy-receives-2nd-fremm-bergamini-frigate-bernice/>.

But these are raw numbers and do not consider intangible factors such as training, past experience, military doctrine, and nuclear capabilities; other assessments place the IDF as the most capable in the region.<sup>23</sup>

Egypt has carefully honored the 1979 Egypt-Israel peace treaty for more than four decades. It has survived many events, and maintaining it is a strategic priority for both countries and the United States. Israel supports President Sisi, who governs a relatively stable country that has avoided regional fragmentation.<sup>24</sup> Today, Sisi describes the level of security cooperation between Egypt and Israel as the best ever, with a wide range of cooperation, especially regarding Sinai. Both countries maintain a regular dialogue on defense and intelligence issues.<sup>25</sup>

Egypt and Israel cooperate in the Gaza Strip against Hamas, which Egypt sees as a branch of the now-outlawed Muslim Brotherhood and a threat to the region. Egypt, however, maintains a certain amount of leverage over Hamas because it controls Gaza's only non-Israeli border crossing at Rafah in the Sinai Peninsula, which it opens periodically, and it maintains ties with Hamas for pragmatic reasons. As one of the few states in the region with relations with both, Egypt serves as a mediator between Hamas and Israel and is pivotal in bringing about ceasefires when tensions break into open conflict. In the latest round of fighting between Hamas and Israel in May 2021, Egypt was able to broker a ceasefire after an eleven-day exchange of rockets and airstrikes. Egyptian delegations were then dispatched to Tel Aviv and the Palestinian territories to ensure the ceasefire remained in effect and negotiate prolonged stability. The efforts of Sisi and Egypt won the praise of regional and world leaders, including U.S. president Joe Biden.

Sisi supports greater Arab-Israel cooperation and peace and has welcomed the recent normalization of Israeli relations with other Arab nations, although Egypt remains committed to a two-state solution for the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, which Israel has moved away from. There is also new economic cooperation between Israel and Egypt, such as the creation of a natural gas production hub with Egypt, Israel, Cyprus, and Greece, and the import of Israeli natural gas to Egypt. Egypt wants to further increase bilateral trade with Israel, and in September 2021, Israeli prime minister Naftali Bennett met with Sisi at Sharm al-Sheikh in Sinai, the first official

visit of an Israeli prime minister to Egypt in ten years, followed by another in March 2022.<sup>26</sup> Shortly after Bennett's September 2021 visit, Egyptair, the national airline, announced the start of direct flights between Cairo and Tel Aviv, to begin the next month. Before this, Egyptian flights to Israel had been flown by an Egyptair subsidiary using unmarked aircraft.<sup>27</sup> At the upper levels of government, Egyptian officials say relations with Israel are better than with the United States.<sup>28</sup>

Security cooperation between Israel and Egypt for Sinai is critical; insurgents have launched rockets into Israel and are a common threat to both countries. Most of Sinai is demilitarized, and other than border forces and police, Egypt is allowed to deploy into Sinai only one division, which must stay within fifty-five kilometers of the Suez Canal under the 1979 treaty terms. Israel lacks strategic depth and its size, with a population much smaller than Egypt's, means that the IDF is unable to have a large active ground force. Demilitarization of Sinai enables the Israeli military doctrine of preemptive strikes before the enemy can take the initiative, fighting on enemy territory without having to overcome enemy fortifications, and time to mobilize reservists. Increases of forces in Sinai must be approved by Israel, but it has often agreed on temporary Egyptian troop increases, some of which appear to be indefinite, allowing a de facto revision of the treaty. Jerusalem has also allowed the EAF to build small posts along the border with Israel with antitank fortifications because the insurgents have these types of weapons, and Israel seeks a balance between demilitarization of Sinai and allowing Egypt enough capabilities to fight the insurgents.<sup>29</sup> The IDF carefully monitors EAF activities in Sinai, and occasionally protests Egyptian troop increases that were not previously approved. The protests are made to the Multinational Force & Observers, an international organization based in Sinai to monitor the peace. Israeli intelligence closely tracks insurgent activity in the Sinai and informs Egypt of upcoming attacks without compromising sources or disclosing the warnings publicly to avoid embarrassing Cairo. There are also reports that Israeli aircraft have conducted strikes in Sinai with Cairo's approval, which the EAF strongly denies.<sup>30</sup>

Although a peace treaty, good security cooperation, and some economic relations exist, Israelis complain that the peace with Egypt is cold and that

relations never normalized. The realities are that Cairo's relationship with Jerusalem is very complex and that Israel will not be popular in Egypt any time soon. Israel is depicted in the Egyptian media as the traditional, cultural, and eternal enemy that is expansionist, cannot be coexisted with, and eager to retake Sinai.<sup>31</sup> The peace treaty was between the Egyptian government and Israel, not the Egyptian people.<sup>32</sup> It did not address the Palestinians, and Israel continues to occupy Arab land in violation of UN Security Council resolutions. The Egyptian government has used anti-Israeli rhetoric and approves the media's fearmongering of Jews and claims that relations with Israel are treason, even by pro-Sisi television commentators.<sup>33</sup> On social media, Egyptians condemn Arab countries that have recently normalized relations with Israel, and an opinion poll conducted in the latter part of 2021 found that only 12 percent of Egyptians have positive views of the new Arab normalization agreements with Israel, down from 25 percent in 2020, possibly as a result of the latest round of fighting between Hamas and Israel in May 2021.<sup>34</sup> The media criticizes Arab nations rushing to normalize relations with Israel and doing little to defend the rights of the Palestinians.<sup>35</sup> Bizarre conspiracy theories of Israeli intent to harm Egypt routinely circulate in the press, such as that Zionism is financing Islamic extremists, or that Israel is conniving with Ethiopia to deprive Egyptians of Nile water and wants to expand its territory to stretch from the Nile to the Euphrates.<sup>36</sup> Egyptians are convinced they are the victims of Zionism, and intellectuals are the most outspoken against Israel, boycott it, and think Jews want to financially dominate Egypt.<sup>37</sup> Schools teach anti-Israel propaganda painting Jews as traitors. In 2020, an Egyptian Ramadan TV series, *The End*, depicted a dystopian future in the year 2120 in which Israel had been destroyed after a war to liberate Jerusalem. The show was made by a company with close ties to the Egyptian government.<sup>38</sup>

Israeli tourists visit Egypt, mainly Sinai, but average Egyptians are not allowed to go to Israel without a special permit from Egyptian authorities, and the recent start of direct flights between Cairo and Jerusalem by Egyptair appears to be aimed at Egyptian Christian pilgrims, who have been allowed to visit Israel since 2015.<sup>39</sup> But other than Christians, generally only diplomats and a handful of journalists are allowed to visit, reducing

the possibility of increasing cultural ties. The same opinion poll mentioned previously found that only 12 percent of Egyptians are in favor of business and sports contacts with Israel. Although Cairo wants to increase bilateral trade with Israel, in the first six months of 2021, trade between Egypt and Israel was only \$122 million, while in the same period, trade between the United Arab Emirates and Israel was \$613 million.<sup>40</sup> Egypt's professional unions, representing millions of workers, oppose increased ties with Israel, and over the years, the unions have banned members from contacts with Israelis, and as a result, economic cooperation with Israel is kept at a low profile in the media. In late 2020, Egypt's United Artists Union suspended a popular singer who appeared in a picture with an Israeli counterpart at a party in the UAE and his music was boycotted and performances canceled. The same fate has happened to other Egyptian artists. The union's position sums up the overall attitude in Egypt and the view of the government; there is a difference between official relations between governments and popular, cultural, and artistic contacts, which are forbidden.<sup>41</sup>

Egyptians are especially infuriated that they do not have unfettered sovereignty over Sinai and must seek Israel's permission to move forces there, even for training purposes, and are not allowed sufficient forces to defend it against a putative Israeli threat. In Egyptian eyes, remilitarizing Sinai is long overdue.<sup>42</sup> In *The Passage*, a 2019 Egyptian movie that begins at the start of the 1967 Six Day War and continues through the subsequent War of Attrition, Israelis are depicted as sadists who torture and kill Egyptian prisoners. It was Egypt's most expensive movie ever and did well at the box office. Sisi said Egypt needed a movie like it every six months. He also once remarked that Egypt could defeat Israel at any time in a new war.<sup>43</sup> The anniversary of Egypt's last war with Israel, the 1973 October War, is a huge annual national holiday. It is portrayed as an unmitigated Israeli defeat that, according to Sisi, pushed Israel to accept peace.<sup>44</sup> The EAF sees Israel as its main enemy and exploits public hostility to justify its role in society. Egyptian leaders are afraid to openly expand cooperation with Israel because of the likely backlash from the public, whose hostility to Israel they have encouraged.

The Sisi government, however, appears to be taking small steps to slightly

reverse some Egyptian beliefs about Israel so the government can increase official ties with Jerusalem without a backlash from the public. Sisi has firm anti-Israel views, but he is also pragmatic and wants to improve economic relations with Jerusalem, especially in energy, trade, and tourism, for the benefit of Egypt.<sup>45</sup> Cairo is also likely envious of the increased economic ties between Israel and other Arab nations that have normalized relations. Anti-Israel rhetoric from the government and the media has decreased recently, although comments by pro-Sisi TV personalities about Israel remain a problem.<sup>46</sup> Some school textbooks have been revised to better reflect Egypt's Jewish cultural heritage.<sup>47</sup> In November 2021, the EAF military spokesperson announced that the Egypt-Israel committee coordinating Sinai security agreed to increase the troop levels of Egyptian border guard forces in northern Sinai. The announcement was unusual because such discussions in the past were kept out of the public eye to avoid highlighting that Egypt does not have full sovereignty over Sinai.<sup>48</sup> Egyptair began direct flights to Tel Aviv, and some high-level meetings between Egyptian and Israeli officials have been announced, although they officially focused mainly on the Palestinians. Even with greater acceptance of official relations between Cairo and Jerusalem, cultural relations will remain taboo. Cairo will be reluctant to give up scapegoating Israel to distract from domestic problems.<sup>49</sup> Even if Cairo wanted to change relations at the people-to-people level, it would take generations.<sup>50</sup>

The Sisi government must carefully balance its relations with Jerusalem with the Egyptian street's hostility toward Israel and support for the Palestinians, which is the prism through which Egyptians view relations with Israel.<sup>51</sup> The government does not allow pro-Palestinian protests and arrests political activists who are too zealous over Palestinian issues. Instead, the Cairo leadership frames itself as the champion of the Palestinians by condemning Israeli actions against Palestinians and emphasizing Egypt's commitment to a two-state solution, efforts to negotiate ceasefires, and humanitarian assistance given to Palestinians. Pro-government media and Sisi supporters tout his dispatch of medical teams to the border with Gaza to receive wounded Palestinians, opening of Egyptian hospitals to treat them, humanitarian support shipped to Gaza, and Egyptian funding

for Gaza reconstruction. In Egypt, the media framed Sisi's September 2021 meeting with Israeli prime minister Bennett as focused primarily on reviving negotiations for a two-state solution and renewing interest in the Palestinian issue after years of neglect.<sup>52</sup> On the same day as Israeli prime minister Bennett's meeting with Sisi in March 2022, Egyptian foreign minister Sameh Shoukry was attending a session of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, where he denounced unilateral actions preventing the establishment of a Palestinian state, a message clearly directed at Jerusalem.<sup>53</sup>

But even given Egyptian attitudes toward Israel and favor for the Palestinians, a future war with Israel is not considered likely.<sup>54</sup> Egypt, however, is Israel's only remaining conventional threat. The armies of many of Israel's traditional enemies have collapsed or are greatly weakened. The Syrian army has been gutted in civil war and the Iraqi army has not been a threat since 2003. Israel faces many threats such as Hamas, possible terrorist and guerrilla activities in the West Bank, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Iran, and pro-Iran militias in Syria and Iraq. Iran, however, does not possess nuclear weapons, at least yet, and it could never confront the IDF in a conventional war along Israel's borders. These are irregular threats and not existential. Israel believes that the EAF continues to focus on the possibility of war against the IDF with training exercises geared toward war, and it worries about Egypt's new weapon acquisitions and Egyptians' hostility toward Israel. Both Israel and Egypt remain locked in a conventional arms race.<sup>55</sup> With a few possible exceptions to be discussed later, given its peace with Israel, the EAF lacks a clear strategic threat to justify the extent of its military acquisitions and large force structure. In light of attitudes toward Israel in Egypt, however, the EAF sees the IDF as its main actual threat and is worried about Israel's increasing technological abilities. Seven of the EAF's twelve armor and mechanized divisions are permanently stationed between Cairo and the Suez Canal to protect Egypt from an Israeli invasion.<sup>56</sup>

In the past, it was believed by military analysts that Israel could easily defeat Egypt, but this prospect is less clear today. Since the early 1980s, the IDF has fought only irregular wars mainly against nonstate actors without having to confront thousands of tanks and aircraft. There have been cuts to the size of the IDF with the loss of thousands of career soldiers, as well

as budget constraints and the shortening of mandatory male conscription service. Observers believe that the IDF ground and armor forces are lacking and perhaps are no longer able to conduct high-intensity maneuver warfare, as would be required in a new war with Egypt. Many Israelis share this view, and the issue was highlighted by IDF ombudsman Yitzhak Brick in 2018.<sup>57</sup> Although most IDF manpower is contained in its reserve forces, the training of regular troops has been emphasized over reservists, and the IDF has mainly employed its regular forces in recent combat operations. Fears of high casualties have caused Israel to become reluctant to use its reserve forces in large numbers and conduct high-end offensives into enemy territory as it did in the past.<sup>58</sup>

However, it is believed that manpower cuts have allowed the IDF to increase its overall quality. Although the IDF is a conscript force, it has high-quality personnel and training, and its technical abilities are unmatched. Regionally, Israel is the only country that effectively develops its military and has effective planning and strategy to give it regional superiority even with its small size. It is the only nation in the region capable of independently developing advanced approaches to joint warfare for interoperability of its services. It has one of the most advanced air and missile defense networks in the world.<sup>59</sup> The United States is Israel's principal military patron—and was the same for Egypt until recently—but has worked closely with Israel in developing advanced technology and has promised to maintain Israel's superiority, its so-called qualitative military edge, or QME, against any combination of state or nonstate actors in the region.

The IDF defense budget probably exceeds Egypt's actual defense budget, coming in at an estimated \$16.6 billion in 2020, in addition to \$3.3 billion in U.S. military assistance, as well as U.S. funding for missile defense programs. Israel has its own domestic arms industry, was the eighth-largest arms exporter in the world in 2016–20 and is the only nation in the region with a globally competitive military-industrial base.<sup>60</sup> Training of land forces is being overhauled with the creation of new concepts such as creating a networked force with units composed of all ground force elements such as infantry, special forces, tanks, and combat engineers, as well as intelligence and air force personnel. The air force is considered the leading component

of the IDF and seeks to stay ahead of other nations in the region. The IDF air force consists of modern U.S. aircraft, and older planes are continuously retired and replaced with newer ones. The pilots are considered among the best in the world with a culture of innovation and honest assessments of pilot abilities and admitting mistakes in frank debriefings. The IDF is the first foreign operator of the U.S. F-35, one of the most advanced fighters in the world.

But a new clash between the IDF and the EAF would largely be a land affair and numbers would matter. On paper, the IDF land forces, once fully mobilized, have the equivalent of about twelve divisions equipped with 1,370 modern, locally produced Merkava tanks designed to meet Israeli military doctrine. But paper aside, changes in doctrine, investments in airpower at the expense of ground units, and reduction in the use of reservists—the bulk of most divisions—mean its actual divisional strength is probably less. However, in a conventional war with Egypt, the IDF would not also face a larger coalition of other Arab nations as happened before, considering the Israeli peace with Jordan and the diminishment of the Syrian and Iraqi armies. In addition, even in a major land conflict, the IDF air force would be decisive in determining the victor in the open deserts of Sinai, and IDF ground forces could engage the EAF at long ranges. At any rate, Israel's ultimate superiority is guaranteed by its regional monopoly of nuclear weapons, with the ability to deliver them anywhere in the region. Israel could win a new war with Egypt, but the EAF could inflict significant casualties on the IDF. The main factor in a future war, however, would not be IDF deficits but those of the EAF.

In the past, both Israel and Egypt evaluated potential threats not according to their intentions but according to their capabilities, and both nations have strategically surprised each other over the years. Egypt does not want a war with Israel and would likely lose, but Israel is the only nation that can threaten it in conventional land warfare, and Egypt is the only nation that could confront Israel. Israel has planned for a war with Egypt within the past decade, and in 2020, the IDF was believed to be hedging against a possible sudden leadership succession in Cairo that could again make Egypt an enemy.<sup>61</sup> The EAF is primarily designed for conventional warfare and has

spent decades training and preparing for a war with Israel. Neither side can rule out the possibility, regardless of its unlikelihood. Egypt cannot dismiss the possibility of an event or a policy change that could again make Israel an enemy. The EAF did not change its conventional focus after peace with Israel, and those who say Egypt does not need to continue seeking conventional weapons ignore the fact that Israel continues arming itself despite its peace with Egypt and the collapse of its other conventional opponents. The IDF has reduced its ground forces, however.<sup>62</sup>

Although Egypt does not seek a war, it will always try to maintain a perceived parity with Israel for an unlikely but potentially catastrophic conflict even if it is only for domestic consumption. The EAF is the symbol of Egypt's sovereignty, and if it cannot at least claim that it could defend the homeland against the one country that could challenge it conventionally, it would lose domestic credibility. In Egyptian eyes, if Israel were allowed to maintain its superiority unchallenged, it could threaten Egypt at any time for real or perceived reasons. Egypt wants a modern force with tanks and aircraft to balance weaponry with Israel, and arguments that new weapons are unneeded ignore this fact. The EAF focuses on the IDF as its only real conventional land threat, although U.S. policymakers either do not understand this concern or do not consider it a reasonable perception. Egyptian leaders likely believe Israel is not the threat it has been made out to be to the Egyptian public but use it to justify the EAF's large force structure and to distract Egyptians from domestic concerns.

## **Irregular Threats**

Egypt's internal security is threatened by Islamist terrorism and insurgency, once described by President Sisi as the country's greatest challenge. Between the election of Sisi in 2014 and the end of 2020, there were about two thousand terrorist attacks in Egypt, the worst wave of terrorism since the 1930s.<sup>63</sup> Egypt's neighbors are unstable and, according to Egypt's leadership, Egyptians are terrified that what happened in Libya, Yemen, Iraq, and Syria will spread to Egypt and want stability above all else. Although reputable opinion polls concerning support for the Sisi government are

becoming increasingly rare in recent years, anecdotal reporting indicates that a segment of the population supports stability over democracy after two revolutions in less than three years and the violence that followed both, as well as fear that Egypt could spiral into chaos.<sup>64</sup> The government rules based on the assumption that people fear the return of instability and are willing to forgo civil liberties for a strong central leadership.<sup>65</sup> Security takes priority over the economy and political rights, and Sisi warns of conspiracies that undermine the people's confidence in the state. Because of the strong sense of belief in the EAF, the leaders of Egypt—especially Sisi—can never admit that internal security is not under full control because it would reflect negatively on them.

The government views the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood as the source of all terrorism and impossible to reconcile with. After the deaths and arrests of thousands of Muslim Brotherhood supporters after Morsi's ouster in 2013, the Brotherhood began a low-level insurgency against the government and in January 2015 declared a jihad. However, the Brotherhood has said it has no direct relationship with the so-called Sinai Province, an insurgent and terrorist group that has pledged allegiance to the Islamic State. IS, for its part, is publicly hostile to the Brotherhood, and the U.S. view is likewise that the Brotherhood and IS have no relationship. But the Sisi government claims that the Brotherhood controls IS and is directing a war against Egypt.<sup>66</sup> It also claims that this war includes not only terrorist acts but also the infiltration of society, calls for protests, and destruction of the people's confidence in the EAF and the government, aided by a media campaign based in Turkey and Qatar, as well as the undermining of Egypt's image with Western governments.<sup>67</sup> The Brotherhood is blamed by the government for any number of societal ills, ranging from the flooding of the streets during infrequent rainy periods, allegedly caused by the blocking of storm drains with cement, to a series of deadly train wrecks caused by the Brotherhood's infiltration of the railroad sector.<sup>68</sup> The Egyptian narrative—that in fighting the Brotherhood, it is fighting the source of all Islamist terrorism—has become the basis of Cairo's foreign and domestic policy. Egypt has a larger view of terrorism than the United States, which narrowly views Islamist terrorism through the prisms of al-Qaeda, the Islamic State,

and their affiliates. Egypt did not participate in military operations in Syria and Iraq, but it believes it has contributed to the overall struggle through its actions at home. Egypt maintains a constant crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood that has expanded to include any public dissent. According to the government, the role of the Egyptian media is to counter Brotherhood falsehoods.<sup>69</sup> Sisi probably realizes that the Brotherhood is not as significant a threat as he and others say it is, but he will not say this publicly so that he can continue to discredit it and conflate it with all Egypt's enemies, both domestically and externally.

The main source of terrorism and insurgency in Egypt, however, is the northern Sinai Peninsula. Egyptians view Sinai as less Egyptian than the rest of the country, and the Suez Canal created a barrier between Egypt proper and the peninsula. Wars with Israel created the impression that Sinai was a place of national honor but also a place of suffering. The Sinai's Bedouin inhabitants were regarded as dissimilar to other Egyptians in terms of tribal ties and culture and were suspected of having collaborated with the Israelis when the latter occupied the peninsula from 1967 to 1982. Sinai's population felt closer to its neighbors across the northeast border in Palestinian territory because of trade considerations and Egyptian beliefs that Egypt proper ended on the canal banks. Egyptian governments neglected Sinai and its development, looked down on its inhabitants, and denied them full citizenship, property rights, full economic participation, and access to government services. Underdevelopment was especially true for northern Sinai, which lacked the tourism possibilities of southern Sinai.

During the latter years of the Mubarak era, the Bedouin, mainly seeking a source of income, provided logistics support through tunnel smuggling to Palestinian militants in Gaza. After the 2011 revolution, this activity turned into a low-level insurgency caused by the breakdown of local security and Bedouin grievances over poverty. After the overthrow of Morsi in 2013, this movement morphed into a full insurgency by Sinai Province in northern Sinai, which repeatedly attacked security forces, Israeli border posts, and gas pipelines; fired rockets into Israel; and attempted to control terrain (see figure 2.4 for map of northern Sinai). It declared war on the Egyptian government and threatened Egypt west of the Suez Canal. The group aims

Figure 2.4. Map of Northern Sinai



to expel the EAF from northern Sinai and establish an Islamic caliphate. At its height, it had about 1,000–1,500 combatants, but as a result of the EAF counterinsurgency campaign these numbers are now estimated at about 500–1,200.<sup>70</sup> Initially, Sinai Province members were mainly from the local area, but the group later included non-Egyptian members such as Gazans, fighters from the Caucasus and Saudi Arabia, and some Iraqis. Today, mainly Egyptians and Gazans are still active in Sinai Province.<sup>71</sup> The insurgents have killed hundreds of Egyptian soldiers and police, including high-ranking officers, and captured significant military equipment. Even the Multinational Force & Observers has been attacked. In early 2014, the insurgents brought down an EAF helicopter with a surface-to-air missile. In late October 2015, a Russian passenger plane crashed in Sinai, killing all 224 on board; a bomb planted by Sinai Province is believed to have been the cause. It was a major blow to the Egyptian economy because tourism was affected. In November 2017, Sinai Province targeted a mosque in northern Sinai, killing at least 305, the deadliest terrorist attack in modern Egyptian history. At times, the insurgency had the potential to affect Suez Canal shipping, a principal

source of Egypt's income, and further threaten Israel. In 2013, insurgents fired rocket-propelled grenades at container ships in the canal but caused little damage, and in 2015, they announced they had destroyed an Egyptian navy frigate off the coast of northern Sinai with a Kornet antitank rocket and released a video supporting the claim. The EAF maintains extremely strong security along the canal's banks to prevent similar attacks on canal shipping.

In the past couple of years, insurgent activity has been greatly reduced. In 2020, Sinai Province claimed an average of sixteen attacks a month, but in 2021, the group claimed nine attacks a month as of early December. Now attacks mainly consist of snipers, improvised explosive devices, and mortar attacks, but the group is believed to retain significant capabilities and is resilient.<sup>72</sup>

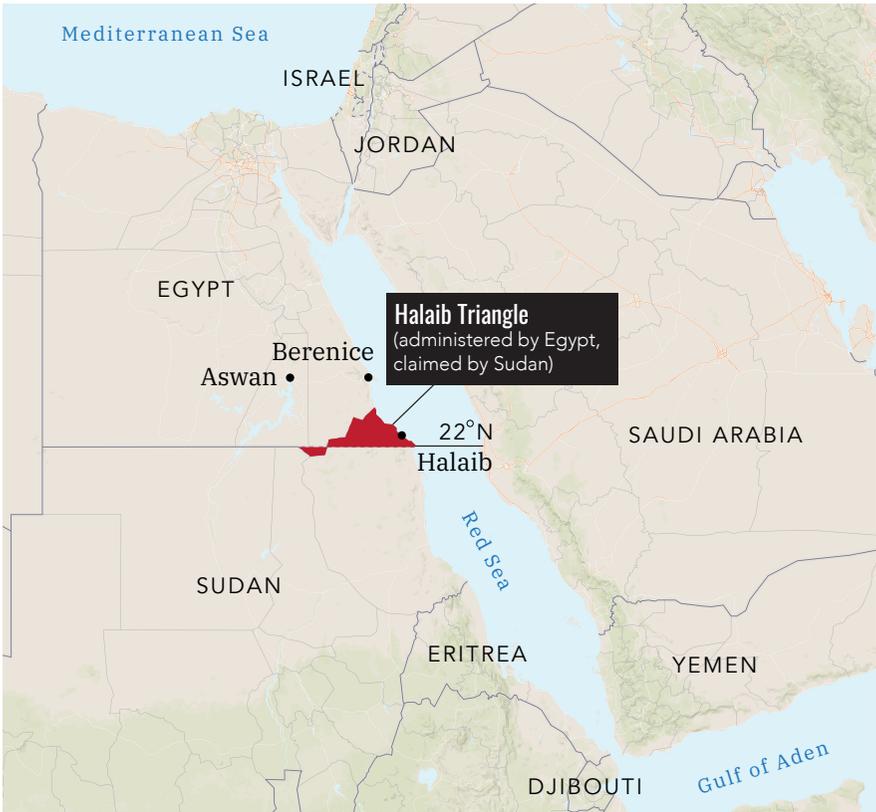
At times, violence has spread into Egypt proper—Cairo, the Nile Delta, Upper Egypt, and the Western Desert—sometimes by the Islamic State's Sinai Province or other Islamic-nationalist insurgent groups, which are mainly Muslim Brotherhood spinoffs, although IS-related attacks in the mainland were usually claimed by the main Islamic State organization and not Sinai Province. Throughout Egypt, military, police, and government sites have at times been attacked on a near-daily basis, and occasionally churches have been the targets. In recent years, attacks in mainland Egypt have greatly decreased because security forces have suppressed terrorist activities in the Nile Valley and the Delta with the elimination of most Brotherhood splinter groups. However, in August 2018, an explosive-laden car killed twenty-two and injured seventy at Cairo's National Cancer Institute, and in December 2018, a bus of Vietnamese tourists visiting the pyramids of Giza was hit by a roadside bomb, killing four and injuring others.

In the Western Desert, Bedouin people moved closer to terrorist groups, mainly IS and al-Qaeda affiliates, infiltrating from Libya, and the area is conducive to criminal activity and smuggling. In 2017, an al-Qaeda-linked group composed of former Egyptian officers and soldiers claimed an attack that killed sixteen security forces eighty kilometers southwest of Cairo. In the same year, the IS branch in Libya infiltrated Egypt and carried out terrorist attacks against Tanta and Alexandria churches, killing forty-three Christians. Sinai Province is the most dangerous of the many terrorist groups

in Egypt. The government's crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood, however, prompted many groups to respond with violence.

Egypt must also secure its borders from irregular threats originating from neighbors Sudan and Libya, which do not have full control of their borders. The border with Libya is twelve hundred kilometers long and consists of open desert. Terrorist groups have taken hold there, and weapon smuggling from Libya and the movement of militants and their associated attacks in Egypt have undermined security. Unlike Sinai, there is no barrier such as the Suez Canal to mitigate threats from Libya. Egypt's border with Sudan has also seen the spillover of turmoil from the south. Egypt and Sudan have a longstanding dispute over the ownership of the Halaib Triangle on the border, controlled by Egypt but claimed by Sudan (for a map, see figure 2.5).

Figure 2.5. Map of Halaib Triangle



Egypt has accused Sudan of harboring members of the Muslim Brotherhood and worries about IS infiltration into Sudan.

Egypt's relations and security cooperation with Sudan have improved dramatically since the overthrow of long-ruling Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir in 2019. In October 2021, the Sudanese military, led by Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, overthrew Sudan's transitional government and arrested its leaders, possibly with the Egyptian government's green light.<sup>73</sup> Sisi likely prefers military rule in Sudan as a means to ensure stability along its southern border because Cairo still fears terrorist infiltration from Sudan.<sup>74</sup> But the coup set off a political crisis in Sudan with clashes between security forces and protesters, and the situation remains unsettled. When an elected civilian government will take power is unclear.<sup>75</sup> Cairo did not condemn the military takeover in Sudan but called for calm and is trying to play a mediating role in the selection of a new transitional government.<sup>76</sup>

## **Threats Requiring Power Projection**

The EAF performed poorly in a war against Israel outside its borders in 1948. From 1962 to 1967, the EAF intervened in North Yemen to fight an insurgency seeking to overthrow an Egypt-backed government. During the conflict, the EAF suffered more than ten thousand deaths, leaving Egyptians with a dislike for counterinsurgency and foreign interventions.<sup>77</sup> Likewise, the EAF did not participate in coalition military operations outside Egypt except for Desert Storm in 1991, when it was part of a broad coalition with much international support. Instead, it focused on fighting terrorism at home, a policy it followed from the beginning of the U.S. war on terror. However, today instability in neighboring countries is a major concern and has caused Egypt to seek more power projection capabilities, and Egypt now is increasingly active in addressing threats not only on its borders but also in the larger region to deter or contain them. Egypt mainly seeks to project power through military diplomacy and posturing, rather than actual interventions.

Egypt must ensure the security of the Nile River, the source of 95 percent of its renewable water. Upstream in Ethiopia, with which Egypt has no border,

Addis Ababa is building the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the Blue Nile, the source of 85 percent of all Nile water. Construction on the \$5 billion project, designed to electrify half of Ethiopia, began in 2011 without Egypt's approval, violating colonial-era Nile water agreements that prohibit any projects in Ethiopia that could affect the flow of the Nile. These agreements divided all annual Nile water flow, less evaporation, between Egypt and Sudan, with Egypt receiving 55.5 billion cubic meters of water annually and Sudan 18.5 billion cubic meters. The Renaissance Dam reservoir can hold 74 billion cubic meters of water, the total flow of the Nile in a year excluding evaporation; the schedule to fill it could greatly affect Egypt, and Egyptians are anxious.<sup>78</sup> Ethiopia's first filling of the reservoir in summer 2020 added 4.9 billion cubic meters, and the second filling in summer 2021 appears to have added another 3 billion cubic meters. The dam's first turbine began generating power in February 2022, and Ethiopia is planning for a third filling of the reservoir in summer 2022.<sup>79</sup>

Both Egypt and Sudan want a binding agreement for the filling and operation of the GERD, but negotiations have been at an impasse for years. At times, Sudan has also been at odds with Cairo over the dam, although today Egypt and Sudan appear to be in lockstep about it. Egypt has sought international assistance in resolving the dispute and addressed its concerns with any nation willing to listen.<sup>80</sup> Internationally sponsored negotiations over the years, including by the United States, the World Bank, and more recently the African Union, have failed. Ethiopia wants to readdress Nile water shares, which Egypt and Sudan reject. Egypt and Sudan have turned to the United Nations twice for a resolution to the crisis, but these efforts failed. In July 2021, the UN called for a return to AU negotiations because it is reluctant to take part in water disputes, and in September 2021 the UN renewed the call for AU-sponsored negotiations.<sup>81</sup> Ethiopia initially financed the dam with internal bonds to keep Egypt from putting pressure on international lenders, while Chinese banks financed other portions. Ethiopia is currently consumed by a civil war between the central government and tribal forces fighting for greater independence, but even if Addis Ababa falls to the rebels, change leading to an end of the dispute is unlikely. Cairo believes that regardless of who wins the conflict, the construction and filling of the

dam reservoir will continue because it is a national project that is popular among the Ethiopian people and a way to gain support for whichever side wins the internal conflict.<sup>82</sup>

Egypt warns that the water crisis sparked by the Renaissance Dam will cause mass illegal immigration to Europe as well as regional wars. In the past, Egypt has threatened war over the Nile. In 2010, President Mubarak considered military action against Ethiopia to prevent any dam projects on the Blue Nile, and in 2013 President Morsi openly discussed bombing the dam and creating an insurgency in Ethiopia. President Sisi has been somewhat inconsistent. He ruled out a military option, even though he has called the dam an existential threat, and said all options are on the table and no one can touch a drop of Nile water. Some analysts believe that a military option is not completely off the table, and social media users in the three nations have speculated on the possibility of war.<sup>83</sup> Former U.S. president Trump said in October 2020 that Egypt would blow up the dam and had to do something, seemingly justifying a potential EAF military strike on the site.<sup>84</sup> Cairo is under internal pressure to do something since the dam situation is currently frozen, with no solution and no planned negotiations in view.<sup>85</sup>

To the west, Libya—after the Qadhafi regime’s downfall in 2011—fell into chaos and civil war, and IS and al-Qaeda affiliates established hubs there. Egypt is particularly concerned about their presence in eastern Libya and, as mentioned, they have launched attacks into Egypt. During the civil war, the country was divided into two main factions. The Government of National Accord, based in Tripoli, was supported by the UN, Turkey, and Qatar, but Egypt saw it as controlled by Islamists and the Muslim Brotherhood. The Libyan National Army, the second faction, was led by Qadhafi-era Gen. Khalifa Haftar and was based in eastern Libya and Benghazi. Haftar, whom Sisi backed, launched operations against Islamists in Libya, and Egypt gave the LNA old MiG-21 fighters, helicopters, and logistics support. Haftar was also supported by Russia and the UAE, and Egypt allowed them to use its air bases to support the LNA. Although Egypt mainly refrained from direct military action, it conducted airstrikes in Libya after the execution of twenty-one Egyptian workers there by an IS affiliate in 2015, and again in 2017 after a terrorist attack in Egypt, even though the group struck had no

relation to that attack. Egypt worked to end the conflict diplomatically and supported Libya's reunification while serving as a mediator between the LNA and GNA. Although the United States technically backed the GNA, President Trump praised Egypt's efforts to promote peace in Libya and considered supporting Haftar at the urging of Sisi and Gulf leaders.

In 2019, Haftar launched an offensive to seize Tripoli with the support of Sudanese, Syrian, and Russian mercenaries supplied by Russia and the UAE. Turkey, in turn, increased support for the GNA with direct military intervention in January 2020 with military advisors, drones, and thousands of other Syrian mercenaries; altogether, there were about twenty thousand mercenaries and foreign troops supporting both sides. Turkey aimed to establish a permanent presence in Libya and signed a maritime agreement with the GNA that supported Turkish interests in the Eastern Mediterranean and intended to establish naval bases on the Libyan coast. After Haftar's offensive was pushed back in June 2020, Sisi, fearing Turkey and the GNA would reach eastern Libya, established a redline in central Libya at Sirte and al-Jufrah, which Sisi said the GNA would not be allowed to cross. Egypt also called for a ceasefire and negotiations, and in July 2020, Egypt's parliament authorized military intervention. The situation calmed after both sides agreed to a permanent nationwide ceasefire in October 2020. Egypt sees its establishment of the redline as the deciding factor in the ceasefire (see figure 2.6).<sup>86</sup>

However, the failure of Haftar's offensive caused Cairo to readdress its strategy in Libya and follow a more pragmatic approach to avoid another outbreak of open conflict, which would again be destabilizing for Egypt. Egypt began to further increase contacts with all Libyan factions, opened up to dialogue with western moderate elements, and hosted UN-sponsored talks for reconciliation. Cairo was particularly concerned about the number of militias and foreign forces in Libya and sought a way to unify Libyan military forces purged of militias. UN dialogue ultimately resulted in a Government of National Unity in February 2021 to remain in power until elections were held in December 2021. The new government appeared free of Islamists and was supported by former GNA leaders and, at least initially, by Haftar. Egypt established diplomatic ties with the GNU, proposes to reopen its embassy

Figure 2.6. Map: Sisi's Redline for Libya



in Tripoli, and signed agreements to help rebuild Libya's infrastructure. The first official foreign visit of interim Libyan prime minister Abdulhamid Dbeibeh was to Cairo to meet with Sisi in February 2021.

As of this writing, although peace remains in place in Libya, the situation is not settled. No progress has been made to merge rival military forces, disarm militias, reconcile the various factions, or ease the hostility between the west and the east.<sup>87</sup> The country is divided between the east and the west, each with its own government, military, militias, and central bank.<sup>88</sup> Interim Prime Minister Dbeibeh cannot travel to the east because he is blocked by Haftar, who remains in control there, and the eastern Libya-based parliament withdrew confidence from the interim government in September 2021.<sup>89</sup> Although a small number of mercenaries have been withdrawn, the majority are still present, as are foreign forces. Neither the GNU and Turkey in the west, nor Haftar, Russia, and the UAE in the east, want to be the first to initiate the complete removal of intervening forces,

fearing it will lead to either Tripoli or Benghazi dominating the other and hurting the interests of the third-party intervening nations. Turkey wants to maintain its maritime agreement with the former GNA, which Egypt rejects, and still desires a permanent military presence according to an agreement signed with the GNA in 2019. The retention of official Turkish military forces appears to be supported by Prime Minister Dbeibeh, who makes a distinction between mercenaries and regular Turkish forces.<sup>90</sup> Turkey is also trying to increase its influence in the east through greater contacts with the parliament based there.<sup>91</sup> Egypt demands the disarming of militias and the end to all foreign interventions and does not want a new Libyan government that is pro-Turkish.

Haftar temporarily resigned as the commander of the LNA to run for president in the December 2021 elections, which were later delayed. But under the election law, he could return to his position if he lost, thus guaranteeing he would be a postelection player.<sup>92</sup> Haftar was a flawed candidate accused of war crimes and is facing legal charges in a U.S. court. Other candidates included the speaker of parliament, Aguila Saleh Issa, who is based in the east and subject to European Union and U.S. sanctions for obstructing democracy, and Saif al-Islam al-Qadhafi, the son of the former Libyan dictator, who is wanted for war crimes. No regional candidate or any of those associated with the former Qadhafi regime could likely gain the mass appeal needed to unite the country.<sup>93</sup> Interim Prime Minister Dbeibeh, now seen by Cairo as pro-Turkish, was also running, although he pledged not to do so as part of the agreement for him to serve as interim prime minister.<sup>94</sup> The law governing the elections was not widely accepted on a constitutional basis and lacked processes to settle election disputes or even who should be allowed to run.

The parliament announced on December 17, 2021, that the elections would not occur as initially scheduled for December 24, with the election commission proposing a one-month delay, which now appears more indefinite in the following confusion.<sup>95</sup> In February 2022, the eastern-based parliament ruled that Dbeibeh's mandate as interim prime minister had ceased after the collapse of elections and chose Fathi Bashagha as the new interim prime minister. Haftar welcomed the new government, and Cairo,

having soured on Dbeibeh, supported the move and said Libya's parliament had the authority to select a new interim prime minister.<sup>96</sup> Also in February, Bashagha proposed to have nationwide elections within fourteen months.<sup>97</sup> Meanwhile, Interim Prime Minister Dbeibeh in the west, whose government still has UN backing and international recognition, has said he would only turn over power to a government elected in a national referendum and has refused to step down, proposing that elections be held in summer 2022.<sup>98</sup> Libya now has two concurrent interim prime ministers, which could set off a new round of chaos. And if nationwide elections are ever held, it is unclear if the results will be widely accepted.<sup>99</sup> Even if they are accepted, the new government will face enormous challenges, such as unifying the army and security apparatus, overseeing the removal of foreign forces and mercenaries, and reunifying the central bank. Fear prevails of more instability and possibly renewed civil war.<sup>100</sup>

To the north, Egypt, Cyprus, and Greece demarcated the Eastern Mediterranean Sea for resource exploration, leading to the discovery of natural gas fields. Egypt is becoming a gas hub and has established an East Mediterranean Gas Forum with regional countries, to include Israel, to consolidate gas policies. Turkey is not a member of the Gas Forum, does not recognize the demarcation, and has conducted illegal gas exploration in the area and claimed unwarranted rights to the gas fields, leading to rising tensions and greater cooperation between Egypt, Cyprus, Greece, and Israel. Egypt, Cyprus, and Greece have an alliance to counter Turkish activities through a series of naval exercises, and there is broader security cooperation. The three nations have established exclusive economic zones to counter Turkey's claims. Citing a violation of international maritime accords, they have also called on Libya's new government to void the maritime boundaries agreement for the Eastern Mediterranean signed by Libya's previous GNA and Turkey.

Likewise, to the southeast, Egypt is concerned about security threats in the Gulf of Aden, the Bab al-Mandab Strait, and the Red Sea. The worry comes from Iran's involvement in Yemen and threats by its proxies, the Houthis, which have attacked shipping in the Red Sea leading to the Suez Canal. Transit fees for global shipping passing through the canal account

for about 2 percent of Egypt's GDP, earning \$14 million to \$15 million daily. Iran is trying to further penetrate the region, as is Turkey. In 2017, Turkey opened a military training facility in Mogadishu, Somalia. Also in 2017, Turkey signed an agreement with Sudan to lease the port of Suakin Island near Egypt in the Red Sea for ninety-nine years. In Egypt's view, the port deal was a move to surround Egypt, and it formed a coalition with Saudi Arabia and others to secure the Red Sea. Turkish plans for Suakin Island were voided after the overthrow of Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir in 2019 and the Sudanese military's assertion that Suakin was a part of Sudan.

Further south, in March 2015, Egypt joined the Saudi Arabian-led coalition in Yemen against the Iranian-backed Houthis. Egypt feared that Houthi control of Yemen would threaten maritime traffic, affecting Suez Canal shipping. Egyptian security is also seen as part of the wider Persian Gulf security in resisting Iranian ambitions in the region. The Egyptian navy deployed four vessels as part of a UN-approved blockade to prevent resupply of Houthi rebels and to secure the Bab al-Mandab Strait and nearby islands. Egypt also initially deployed F-16s to Saudi Arabia to support the Saudi coalition and participated in airstrikes against the Houthis, but they were withdrawn after about a year.<sup>101</sup> Egypt's participation in Yemen was also directly related to the \$30 billion in aid that it received from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf nations. Involvement in Yemen was a major departure given the EAF's performance there in 1962–67.

A recurring theme in external Egyptian security threats is Turkey, and relations have been rocky since 2013. Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan supported the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and backed Brotherhood protests after President Morsi was overthrown. Turkey became a hub of Brotherhood expatriates, and the Turkish government allowed them to operate TV stations that broadcast negative rhetoric against Cairo, and Erdogan frequently criticized Sisi. Today, the Turkish government is interested in a rapprochement with Cairo because of Egypt's regional alignments in the Eastern Mediterranean. Ankara told Brotherhood TV stations to tone down their anti-Sisi rhetoric in March 2021, which Egypt welcomed. There were initial talks between Egypt and Turkey in May 2021 to normalize relations, with a second round in September. But Egypt has been cautious,

and Egyptian foreign minister Sameh Shoukry said Turkish words must be accompanied by positive actions. Turkey must withdraw from Libya and de-escalate tensions in the Mediterranean before relations can be normalized, and the two nations must come to a mutual understanding on the Muslim Brotherhood. However, Cairo sees Turkey as wanting to maintain the status quo in Libya and even attempting to expand its influence in eastern Libya, and Ankara signed a military agreement with Cairo's regional rival, Ethiopia, as well as moving to sell it armed drones. More irritating for Cairo is that Turkey and Ethiopia signed an agreement on water resources, strengthening the legitimacy of the Renaissance Dam.<sup>102</sup> The restoration of relations with Turkey is still in the exploratory phase, and for now at least, talks are frozen.

## **Military Capabilities of the Egyptian Armed Forces**

Although Sisi highlights the threat of asymmetrical warfare and new forms of political conflict that enlist public opinion to destroy the state, the EAF's main focus has been on maintaining a large conventional military. Any suggestions to downsize the EAF to focus more on irregular threats will be resisted, especially since the IDF, the only possible conventional opponent, is more advanced in terms of technology, and Egyptian attitudes toward Israel are used to justify the weapon buys. Egypt also needs a capable military to maintain the prestige that it believes is enabling it to restore the preeminent regional role it held in the 1950s and 1960s. According to the Egyptian media, other nations are drawn to Egypt and want to cooperate with it because of the EAF's rankings as a top regional force.<sup>103</sup> This view requires a large force structure and sophisticated weapons that also give the government political legitimacy at home.<sup>104</sup> Reducing and restructuring the EAF would also limit the socialization effects of providing that segment of the population with a sense of civic duty and loyalty to the state and a role in society along with privileges. The EAF is also a jobs program, so downsizing would leave thousands of soldiers unemployed.<sup>105</sup>

## **Conventional Capabilities**

Egypt's procurements add to its inventory of newer U.S., older European, and obsolete Soviet equipment. In recent years, it has acquired fighter aircraft, attack helicopters, ships, submarines, and the S-300 air defense system, as well as thousands of armored personnel carriers and all types of missiles such as antitank, air-to-air, ground-to-air, and antiship rockets, most of which are clearly for conventional warfare.

The EAF's active force is 438,500 strong, with a reserve force of 479,000. The active force is largely conscript and is organized into an army, air force, navy, and air defense command. The active army consists of four armor and eight mechanized divisions, one light division, and various independent brigades, about half of which are armor and mechanized, giving it a total strength of about eighteen divisions. It has 3,620 main battle tanks, but only 1,130 are modern U.S. M1A1s, and the remainder are older U.S. tanks or obsolete Soviet ones, and about a third of the total inventory is in storage (see figures 2.7 and 2.8).

It is apparent that Egypt wants to maintain the ability to conduct armored warfare against a comparable conventional force.

As with all services, army units are assigned to one of four military districts—north, west, south, or central—or to the operational areas of the 2nd or 3rd Field Armies in the east (see figure 2.9). A Unified North Sinai Command was created in 2015 to better coordinate the efforts of the 2nd and 3rd Field Armies, which routinely operate there in the EAF's counterinsurgency campaign. The 3rd Field Army remains responsible for the southern Sinai area, although, as noted earlier, deployments beyond fifty-five kilometers east of the Suez Canal must be approved by Israel under the terms of the Egypt-Israel peace treaty.<sup>106</sup>

Figure 2.7. EAF Main Battle Tanks

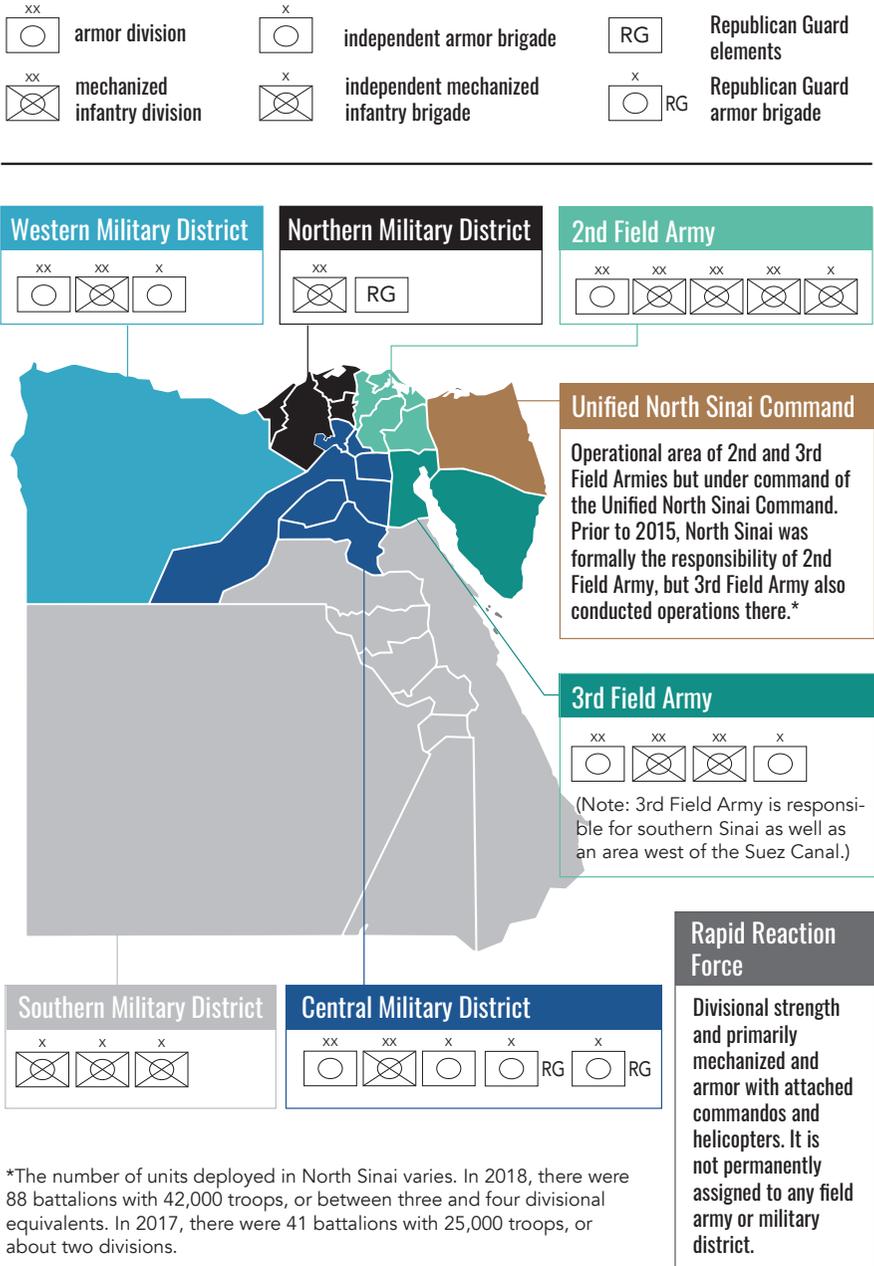
Type of Tank	Quantity	Country of Origin	Example
M1A1	1,130	U.S.	
M60A3	850	U.S.	
T-54/T-55	840 (in storage)	USSR	
T-62	500 (including 300 in storage)	USSR	
M60A1	300	U.S.	

Figure 2.8. Other EAF Army Equipment

5,700+ other armored vehicles (e.g., armored personnel carriers)	4,468 artillery pieces (including multiple rocket launchers and mortars)	42+ surface-to-surface missile launchers (e.g., FROG-7, Sakr-80, and Scud B)
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**Source:** International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2021* (Oxfordshire, UK: Taylor & Francis, 2021), 334.

Figure 2.9. Map of EAF Disposition



**Note:** This is the author's estimate of the EAF army's disposition, based primarily on the work of Mahmoud Gamal, as well as others. See Mahmoud Gamal, "Al-Jaish al-Misri al-tahwin wa kharait al-intishar" [The composition of the Egyptian Army and maps of its disposition], Egyptian Institute for Studies, May 17, 2018, 4–6, 8–11, <https://bit.ly/336Bbgt>; International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2021* (Oxfordshire, UK: Taylor & Francis, 2021), 334; Yagil Henkin, "The Egyptian Military Buildup: An Enigma," Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security, January 7, 2018, <https://jiss.org.il/en/henkin-egyptian-military-buildup-enigma/>; "Order of Battle," GlobalSecurity.org, accessed January 1, 2022, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/egypt/army-orbat.htm>; "Egyptian Army in Sinai Peninsula Doubles in a Year, with Israel's Blessing," *Times of Israel*, March 1, 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/egyptian-army-in-sinai-peninsula-doubles-in-a-year-with-israels-blessing/>; and "Egyptian Rapid Deployment Forces: Independence Essential Speed Optional," *Egypt Defence Review*, August 7, 2017, <https://egyptdefreview.wordpress.com/2017/08/07/egyptian-rapid-deployment-forces-independence-essential-speed-optional/>.

The air force consists of 585 combat aircraft. The bulk of the fleet is the U.S. F-16, of which 240 were procured since 1982, but only 207 appear to be in service today. There are other modern aircraft such as Russian MiG-29s and French Rafales, and many older ones, including Chinese Chengdu J-7s, French Mirages, and Russian MiG-21s (see figure 2.10).

Figure 2.10. Principal EAF Air Force Combat Aircraft

Type of Aircraft	Quantity	Country of Origin
<b>Combat aircraft</b>		
F-16 fighters	207	U.S.
Mirage 5 fighters	48	France
MiG-21 fighters	40	USSR/Russia
J-7 fighters	30	China
Rafale fighters	24	France
Mirage 2000 fighters	17	France
MiG-29 fighters	16	USSR/Russia
<b>Attack helicopters</b>		
AH-64D Apache attack helicopters	45	U.S.
Ka-52 attack helicopters	30	USSR/Russia
Mi-24 Hind attack helicopters	13	USSR/Russia

**Source:** International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2021* (Oxfordshire, UK: Taylor & Francis, 2021), 336.

Russia and Egypt signed a deal for the EAF to receive Su-35s, advanced fighters that are competitors to the latest fourth-generation U.S. fighters. This sale could trigger U.S. sanctions against Egypt, although a delivery date to Egypt is uncertain at best, as will be discussed in chapter 4.

Military analysts assess the EAF as inflexible and resistant to change.<sup>107</sup> Its size is irrelevant in the evaluation of its overall quality. Although in the late 1970s the EAF switched away from the Soviet Union and started acquiring U.S. equipment and using U.S. military doctrine, it is rigid in doctrinal application. The force is weak in maneuver warfare, which it approaches in

a preplanned fashion that avoids deviating from existing plans, making it unable to adjust to the rapidly changing battlefield. Training exercises are carefully staged events with known outcomes for VIP viewing, and there are no honest debriefings to point out mistakes. Graduation ceremonies from military schools often include bizarre exhibitions with men jumping through burning hoops of fire, demonstrating martial arts, and body posing.<sup>108</sup> Conscripts are poorly educated and valued, receive little training, are ill equipped, and are of marginal effectiveness.<sup>109</sup> Junior officers have little power and noncommissioned officers less.<sup>110</sup> The upper level of the chain of command is bloated and rigid, holds onto power, and does not encourage initiative.<sup>111</sup> Loyalty to Sisi and not military ability is the main consideration when officials select the top leadership.<sup>112</sup>

Although the air force is considered the most technically proficient and professional service, it is among the least capable in the region. The bulk of the fleet, the U.S. F-16, had one of the highest crash rates in the world, which was caused by consistently poor EAF pilot training, and Egyptian F-16 pilots fly less than half the hours of their U.S. counterparts.<sup>113</sup> Egyptian F-16s are near-civilian versions of the model because they are deprived of advanced avionics—a result of the U.S. commitment to maintain Israel's superiority.<sup>114</sup> The F-16s cannot use non-U.S. munitions, and the United States denied Egypt the self-guiding (“fire-and-forget”) air-to-air missiles except for short ranges. Fire-and-forget missiles enable a pilot to fire a missile at an aircraft and then evade while the missile guides itself. Egypt's fire-and-forget missile for its F-16 is the AIM-9M/P Sidewinder, but it has a range of only 18 kilometers. To fire a missile beyond that range and up to 85 kilometers, Egypt's F-16s use the U.S. AIM-7 Sparrow, a Cold War-era weapon that requires a pilot to maintain an illuminated lock on the missile's target to score a hit without giving the pilot the opportunity to evade. Many of Egypt's neighbors use the superior U.S. AIM-120 advanced medium-range air-to-air missile (AMRAAM), which is fire-and-forget with a range up to 105 kilometers. This situation renders Egypt's F-16s markedly inferior to aircraft in Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and especially Israel.<sup>115</sup> In addition, the EAF air force does not routinely train with practice munitions, meaning pilots are probably not proficient

with the missiles they have. The AIM-7 Sparrow missiles are so old that the chance of them working is reduced because rocket propellants degrade with age. Egypt's situation has the potential to change as it continues to diversify its fleet with aircraft such as MiG-29s and Rafales, which use fire-and-forget missiles with greater ranges, but it will take years to reduce the heavy dependence on U.S. equipment. The air force will also have to overcome past training deficiencies to effectively use the new equipment.

The large reserve force has been neglected since 1973 and receives little training. Even M1A1 tanks and other modern equipment are not properly maintained. With its mixed fleet of armored vehicles and aircraft, Egypt has a lack of force coherence because of so many different weapons from various sources. The EAF as a whole is said to resemble its counterpart of 1967, which Israel decisively defeated, and is in a state of decay.<sup>116</sup>

## **Irregular Capabilities**

After the mostly failed 1960s intervention in North Yemen, the EAF did not focus on irregular warfare and did little training for it. The EAF's counterinsurgency focus of the time was considered partly to blame for its poor performance in the 1967 Six Day War. In the 1990s, an Islamist insurgency seeking to overthrow the state was mostly handled by Interior Ministry forces, not the EAF. By the late 1990s, the insurgency had been defeated, but Egypt's counterinsurgency doctrine was not fully developed and was based mainly on brute force, not the nonkinetic approach favored in most counterinsurgency doctrines. Today, events in Egypt are forcing the EAF to focus on counterinsurgency and counterterrorism, and it has been fighting insurgents in Sinai.

Although the EAF has changed some of its tactics and is achieving success, with most fighting having subsided, results were achieved with widespread destruction and brutality. The force mostly applied a conventional approach to its counterinsurgency campaign in Sinai with large maneuvers of heavy, armored formations using all the weapons in its inventory, including tanks, Apache helicopters, and F-16s.<sup>117</sup> In most cases, these weapons were misused in counterinsurgency efforts, especially when the army applied

overwhelming force in fights in populated areas. Despite a series of large, forceful operations, the EAF spent eight years trying to stop insurgent attacks. It flooded northern Sinai with eighty-eight battalions comprising forty-two thousand troops in 2018, the equivalent of three or four divisions, in the largest and longest military operation since the Arab-Israel wars.<sup>118</sup> The total force level might have been as high as seventy thousand, and President Sisi gave the operation an arbitrary timeline of three months for success.<sup>119</sup>

The sporadic, large campaigns dispersed insurgents, but soldiers left to secure the areas afterward became easy targets. Rather than addressing the causes of the insurgency, the EAF emphasized the numbers of insurgents killed, with claims that six thousand militants were killed between 2013 and 2017, that terrorism had been defeated, or that it would soon be.<sup>120</sup> EAF losses remained high, although it was difficult to track total insurgent attacks and EAF casualties because reporting on them is illegal except through official channels. The EAF likely masked the real numbers of its killed soldiers. For example, in 2020, the EAF reported that only fifty-two soldiers had been killed, while an examination of media sources and numbers of funerals indicates that at least 121 were killed.<sup>121</sup> Civilian losses were not released, and reported numbers of insurgent deaths probably included civilians. Tactics have included mass artillery bombardments and airstrikes, the use of banned cluster munitions, the destruction of thousands of homes, the displacement of about one hundred thousand residents, mass arrests, forced disappearances, and the random killings of civilians. The EAF conducted cordon-and-search operations and raids, and it focused on closing smuggling tunnels and creating exclusion zones around the city of Rafah on the Gaza Strip border and nearby al-Arish. In Sheikh Zuwaid, an area of frequent fighting, the EAF is building a wall to cut off the city from the sea. The destruction of homes has not been limited to these areas but has also applied to other places as collective punishment for the families of suspected insurgents. Whole villages have sometimes been displaced. Between late 2013 and July 2020, the EAF destroyed more than twelve thousand buildings, mainly homes. The destruction of homes and forced evictions violate international humanitarian law.<sup>122</sup> The cities of Rafah and al-Arish were largely destroyed, along with more than fifty villages and at least a million acres of green spaces.<sup>123</sup>

Throughout the campaign, EAF leaders believed that stringent measures toward the population would defeat the insurgents. The population at times was not described as Egyptians but as informants, spies, terrorists, or smugglers. Locals said the conflict was a war on civilians, with the displacement of a little less than one-fourth of the population of northern Sinai, which Sisi labeled as evacuations for national security. Locals have been treated as adversaries, making normal life impossible. Curfews and checkpoints have made movement difficult.<sup>124</sup> Schools, gas stations, and traffic have been closed for large operations.

Operationally, the EAF in Sinai has had difficulty maintaining its pace for more than a few months without pauses, but more problematic were the poorly trained and disciplined soldiers who lacked fire discipline and shot haphazardly, often in urban areas.<sup>125</sup> Civilians were often misidentified as combatants, and soldiers were mainly trained on repelling insurgent attacks on checkpoints and not systemic counterinsurgency. At first, changes mainly focused on equipment and, in a minor way, training. Evacuation of EAF casualties relied on the civilian medical system for trauma cases. Even specialized commando units fared poorly and were mainly used as elite infantry. There are also documented cases of atrocities and war crimes committed by soldiers, who are not subject to EAF or Egyptian government accountability. The air force has not been effective against insurgent concentrations and has struck populated areas.

There have been positive developments, however, some of which appear to have largely reduced the insurgency. In 2015, Sisi created a unified Sinai command to better coordinate the efforts of the 2nd and 3rd Field Armies, which previously had separate commands for Sinai operations and, in 2018, he opened a permanent headquarters for the new command.<sup>126</sup> The new command, however, has not been effective, because Cairo continues to make centralized decisions, limiting flexibility, initiative, and input from lower levels.<sup>127</sup> The most significant change has been the better use of local forces. At first, the population, which understands the terrain, had no meaningful role in the campaign, but today the EAF backs tribal militias and armed civil groups of residents funded and equipped by Cairo.<sup>128</sup> They staff checkpoints, provide intelligence, hit Sinai Province targets supported by the EAF, and

provide logistical help to the EAF, although local forces began working with the EAF because of Sinai Province's brutality toward them rather than by the EAF's outreach.<sup>129</sup> Many projects to develop Sinai's civilian infrastructure have begun. They include road construction, economic development, and rebuilding Rafah, as well as creating centralized Bedouin settlements, with training and education in new skills.<sup>130</sup> Sisi has called on all Egyptians to contribute financially to the development of Sinai, but projects have been hindered by corruption, and many of the development projects further displace residents.<sup>131</sup>

Even with its shortcomings, the EAF campaign in Sinai has been largely successful in limiting the insurgency to the northeast, where, as noted, insurgent activity has been significantly reduced in the last few years. Nor have attacks spread in recent years to the south, the Suez Canal, or into Egypt proper as previously happened, and some displaced residents have been allowed to return to a handful of villages in northern Sinai, with plans to return many more in 2022.<sup>132</sup> The government is also encouraging Egyptians from the mainland to move to Sinai with incentives such as reduced housing and land prices.<sup>133</sup> Initially, it appeared that the EAF was merely following a strategy of containment, or thinking that the insurgency was temporary or actually criminal activity, not an insurgency. Even as the EAF's campaign is working in the short term, it risks further alienating the local population and ultimately creating more insurgents. Development projects have lagged, and Bedouin tribes have longstanding grievances against Cairo that have not been addressed. The EAF regularly cuts electricity and internet access to northern Sinai residents to prevent terrorist communications, and media blackouts occur. Some displaced residents have been allowed to return to their homes to inspect them but found them mainly destroyed and their farmland nonarable. They now await government compensation to rebuild.<sup>134</sup> Residents will also remember the overall brutality of the EAF's counterinsurgency campaign,<sup>135</sup> with the destruction of large parts of northeast Sinai. The EAF, for its part, continues to suffer some casualties. For example, at least five EAF soldiers were killed in January 2022 and another one in February.<sup>136</sup> Addressing the insurgency's underpinnings requires an open discussion and facing the population's grievances, which

the government cannot tolerate. Nor have structural changes been made to the EAF's conventional infrastructure to better focus on counterinsurgency, because its focus is traditional war. Making real changes would threaten the EAF's role in society and prestige.

There has been criticism of the EAF's procurement of conventional weapons in light of its counterinsurgency campaign in Sinai. Also, questions have been posed about why soldiers have been repeatedly killed in the same manner in insurgent attacks. The EAF leadership faces no accountability for poor tactical decisions, nor for the large number of civilian casualties, conservatively believed to be more than one thousand.<sup>137</sup> Sisi's management of the campaign has even caused objections from within the EAF as a result of the heavy losses, although the significance of the questioning remains unclear, and Sisi attempts to mitigate the complaints by reshuffling top EAF leaders who are critical of his policies into other positions or through retirements.<sup>138</sup>

Outside Sinai, in 2015, an EAF Apache helicopter scouting for terrorists attacked a group of Mexicans on a picnic with a police escort on a well-known tourist route in Egypt's Western Desert, killing twelve and injuring an American.<sup>139</sup> In November 2021, it was reported that from 2016 through 2018, the French government supported the EAF's military operations in the Western Desert. A French intelligence team flew surveillance aircraft along Egypt's western border to help the EAF secure the area from terrorist threats originating from Libya. The EAF air force used the intelligence provided by the French to target Bedouin people suspected of smuggling drugs, weapons, and cigarettes, killing several hundred civilians, although the French were unaware the information would be used for this purpose.<sup>140</sup>

## **Power Projection Capabilities**

As noted earlier, Egypt has refrained for more than fifty years from projecting power and instead has concentrated on threats to its borders. After the North Yemen experience in the 1960s, Egypt did not intervene in nontraditional wars abroad, and the officer corps resisted efforts by President Anwar Sadat to reorient the EAF into an expeditionary force.<sup>141</sup> Likewise, Egypt did not

become involved in military operations outside its borders with the exception of Desert Storm. Today, Egypt is developing an ability to project power, and Sisi has said that the country must be able to send forces to help another Arab nation and Gulf security is part of Egyptian security.<sup>142</sup> The EAF has created a rapid reaction force of divisional size with all-Western equipment, making logistics easier. The force is not assigned to any military district or field army, making it independent and flexible. However, the force is predominately armor, mechanized infantry, and mechanized air defense battalions, as well as some commandos and attached helicopters, and Egypt does not have the airlift to move it.<sup>143</sup> Recent developments are more for the sake of regional prestige and military diplomacy than foreign interventions.

Egypt's perceived ability for power projection is closely tied to its military diplomacy, and nowhere is this diplomacy better seen than in the Nile Basin and the Horn of Africa as Egypt attempts to counter Turkish moves and confront Ethiopia over the Renaissance Dam, the most pressing security threat for Egypt. The diplomacy has resulted in military posturing and a series of security agreements with Nile Basin countries such as Burundi, Kenya, Sudan, and Uganda for military cooperation and coordination, as well as the sharing of intelligence or guarantees of neutrality in the event of a war with Ethiopia.<sup>144</sup> Egyptian–Nile Basin relations are closer than they have been in decades. The most significant agreement is with Sudan, which resulted in a series of military exercises in Sudan between the EAF and Sudanese forces focused on bilateral air force, commando, and paratrooper operations. One in May 2021 had the provocative name of the Guardians of the Nile; it was close to the Ethiopian border and clearly intended to send a message.

If Egypt exercises a military option for the Renaissance Dam, a land incursion by a combined Egyptian-Sudanese force from Sudan would be the most feasible. The dam is located close to the Sudanese border, and the outright seizure of the dam—without damaging it—would prevent any breach of the dam's reservoir and consequent flooding of Sudan's eastern cities. But a military incursion into Ethiopia would likely lead to a prolonged regional war, and Sudan has ruled out any military option for the dam. The EAF has demonstrated an inability to sustain operations in Sinai for longer than a few months, and this operation would be even more difficult than the Sinai fighting.

Another military option is an EAF air force unilateral strike from Egypt. The air force can project power into neighboring countries and, as noted, has conducted strikes in Libya and participated for about a year in the Saudi coalition in Yemen. However, the airstrikes in Libya had only a small impact, and the aircraft participating in Yemen were withdrawn because they lacked the equipment to effectively communicate with other coalition aircraft and were more of a hazard. They also had trouble using guided munitions and working with ground-based controllers, and they were inexperienced with coalition air refueling.<sup>145</sup>

In theory at least, the EAF air force could strike the dam. Some believe that President Trump's statement about blowing up the dam was a green light, and Egyptian officials have hinted at a strike.<sup>146</sup> The distance to the dam is about 1,270 kilometers from Egypt's southern border, and Egypt could launch an airstrike from Aswan or from its new Berenice military base on the Red Sea, about 1,370 kilometers from the dam. The EAF's new French Rafale aircraft are the most likely candidates to carry out a strike because they could carry the required munitions and have a combat radius of 1,465 kilometers fully loaded, although the distance means that the aircraft would have little time to loiter around the dam while they strike it or ability to maneuver to avoid air defenses while en route.<sup>147</sup> The air force would also need to fly over Sudan. The distance to the dam and the range of the aircraft will not allow an approach from the Red Sea. Although the EAF is experimenting with aerial refueling using underwing pods, the ability to use this technique in a major air attack is questionable.<sup>148</sup> Sudan would not willingly allow EAF aircraft to overfly its airspace for a strike because the destruction of the dam would flood parts of Sudan, and the potential damage to downstream countries will increase as more water is added to the dam's reservoir. The EAF air force could potentially have to fight its way through whatever air defense Sudan could put up. The EAF air force is nearly five times larger than the Sudanese air force, so it could overcome any opposition, but Egypt would be required to commit more of its aircraft. Egypt could possibly convince Sudan that the dam could be made inoperable without destroying its reservoir (for a map, see figure 2.11).

Figure 2.11. Map of Egypt and the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam



Ethiopia has established a no-fly zone around the Renaissance Dam and equipped it with an air defense system. It is believed by some that it is an Israel-provided Spyder-MR system that can launch anti-aircraft missiles with a fifty-kilometer range. This system would pose a serious threat to the EAF, which is inexperienced in conducting long-range, coordinated strikes.<sup>149</sup> However, no Israeli air defense system is cited in the international registers for arms transfers in recent years, and the Israeli embassy in Cairo denied that Jerusalem provided a defense system for the dam, but there is still much ambiguity. Another system that could be defending the dam is a Russian Pantsir-S1 system with the shorter range of twenty kilometers. This system is listed in the international registers for having been transferred to Ethiopia in 2019 and would pose a lesser threat.<sup>150</sup> But the dam is a large concrete structure, and destroying it would be difficult. The EAF's Rafales are equipped with French Armement Air-Sol Modulaire (AASM) Highly Agile Modular Munition Extended Range (HAMMER) precision-guided bombs and Storm Shadow (SCALP, as they are known in French) long-range cruise missiles with a standoff range of more than three hundred kilometers designed to hit buried bunkers and infrastructure and evade enemy air defenses. The EAF's Rafales could target the dam without coming within range of Ethiopian air defenses. However, even if the EAF could pull off a strike, the ability to do sufficient damage to the dam is unlikely because it is a large concrete structure difficult to damage, which is incomprehensible to some Egyptians after years of large-volume weapon buys.<sup>151</sup> In the event of an attack, Egypt would also have to deal with the diplomatic and geopolitical fallout, which could be significant whether the attack was successful or not.

Although on paper the EAF has the capability to strike the dam, it would likely be unable to coordinate and conduct such a sophisticated attack. In addition, Egypt would likely never risk a strike because any military setback would be a risk to the leadership, which has largely based its domestic and regional legitimacy on its image of having a powerful military. Finally, if the EAF were planning to strike the dam, it surely would have done so while Ethiopia is embroiled in civil war and at its weakest. Egypt's constant emphasis on its military strength has placed it in a difficult situation. It is unable to use the EAF and face the risk of the government's stability,

but the lack of action makes it look weak in the eyes of the people and the region. Egypt might, however, posture as if it will attack the dam to trigger international diplomatic intervention.

Egypt has a ballistic missile force, but it largely consists of variants and updates to Soviet-era Scud systems with ranges up to five hundred kilometers with rudimentary guidance systems, and the missiles could not reach the dam or accurately strike it. North Korea is suspected of supplying missile parts to Egypt and has worked with Egypt to extend the accuracy and range of the Scuds.

In the west, the EAF could project power into Libya, and forces recently have been directed from the east toward the west, with a mechanized division and an armor division normally assigned there, although most of the army remains in the east.<sup>152</sup> An F-16 squadron has been moved from the Nile Delta to Marsa Matruh, closer to the Libyan border, and bases have been upgraded closer to the Libyan border, such as Sidi Barrani and Mohammed Naguib, formerly Mubarak Military City. Both bases now have facilities for the divisions of the 2nd and 3rd Field Armies, which were traditionally oriented to the east.<sup>153</sup> Egypt's forward desert air base at Habata near the Libyan border was upgraded, and Rafale, Mirage, and MiG-29 aircraft were deployed there in June 2020 during the buildup of the Libyan crisis.<sup>154</sup>

In summer 2020, Sisi expanded exercises and posturing on the western border, including a carefully staged amphibious assault that was clearly a signal to the Libyan Government of National Accord and Turkey. However, actually reaching Sisi's Sirte-al-Jufrah redline would have been difficult because it is more than a thousand kilometers from the border, and, as noted, the army has had trouble sustaining operations in Sinai for extended periods. Any intervention in Libya would likely be only symbolic or could just involve airstrikes. But Egypt could face challenges in sustaining a long air campaign in Libya, and the EAF air force would not want to confront a Turkish F-16.

The EAF navy can project power into the Eastern Mediterranean and the Red Sea. Naval capabilities have greatly expanded in recent years (see figure 2.12 for Egyptian navy vessels).

Figure 2.12. Principal EAF Naval Vessels

Type of Vessel	Quantity
<b>Frigates</b>	<b>10</b>
U.S.	6
French	2
Italian	2
<b>Corvettes</b>	<b>5</b>
Spanish	2
Chinese	2
South Korean	1
<b>Submarines</b>	<b>8</b>
German Type 209	4
Chinese Romeo type	4
<b>Other</b>	<b>74</b>
patrol and coastal combat craft	54
mine vessels	14
U.S. fast missile craft	4
French Mistral amphibious assault ships	2

**Sources:** International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2021* (Oxfordshire, UK: Taylor & Francis, 2021), 334–35; and “Egyptian Navy Receives 2nd FREMM Bergamini Frigate ‘Bernice,’” *al-Masry al-Youm*, April 15, 2021, available at <https://egyptindependent.com/egyptian-navy-receives-2nd-fremm-bergamini-frigate-bernice/>.

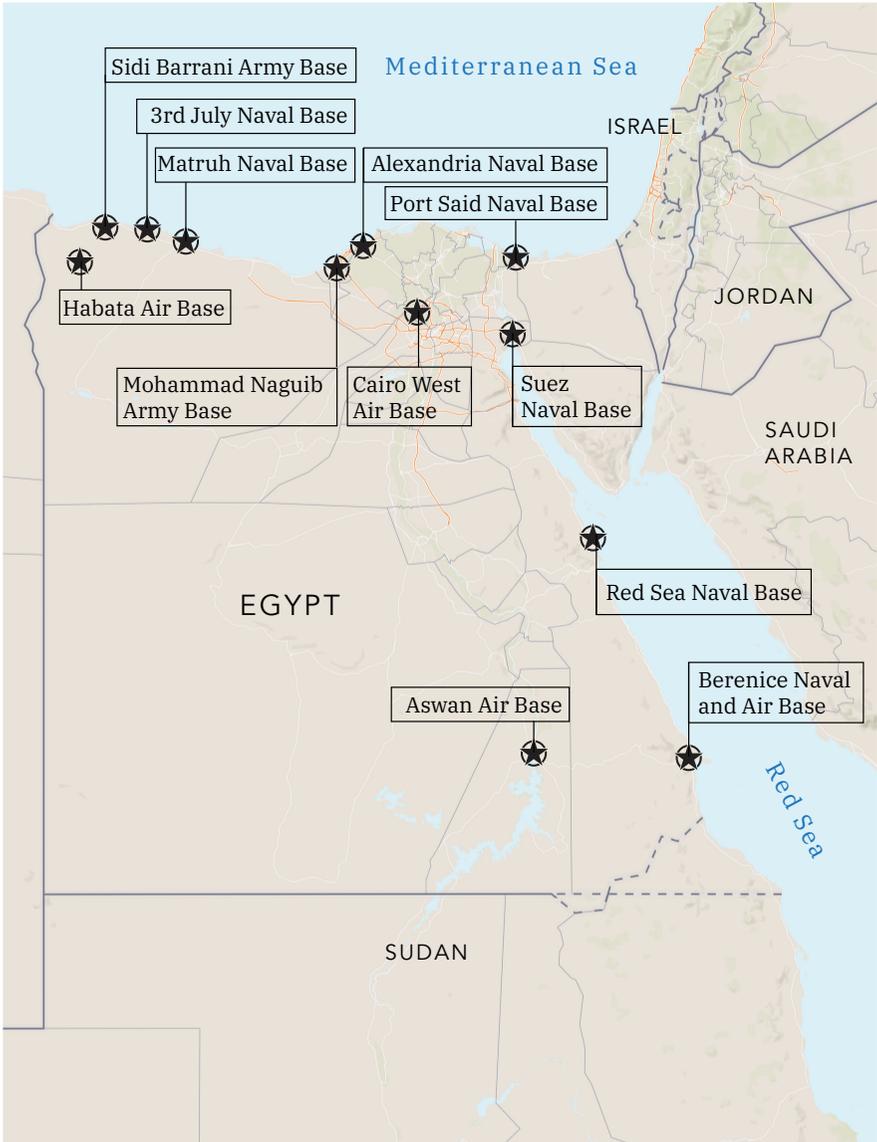
The Mistral, amphibious assault vessels from France, are each capable of carrying sixteen helicopters, thirteen tanks, and 450 soldiers, giving Egypt a small power projection capability, the first Arab nation to have this type

of amphibious ability. However, the overall fleet is of highly mixed origins, consisting of vessels from France, the United States, China, South Korea, Germany, Italy, and Spain. The German Type 209 submarines are modern, while the Chinese submarines are of questionable serviceability, and besides Egypt, only North Korea still operates this model. Integrating so many vessels of different origins makes interoperability difficult, and little attention has been given to how to sustain and maintain the fleet. Many of the vessels are fielded without full armament, with procurements more focused on numbers than capabilities, and fleet defense could be difficult given the number of vessels. For example, the Mistral initially had no air defense systems, which Egypt overcame by securing Avenger air defense Humvees to their decks.<sup>155</sup> The Mistral were unable to carry their full capacity of sixteen helicopters because the Egyptian helicopters lacked folding rotor blades, although the EAF air force appears to have modified its Russian Ka-52A attack helicopters to fold their rotor blades.<sup>156</sup>

The navy has a Mediterranean-based fleet and a newly inaugurated Red Sea fleet, which included the opening of the biggest naval base on the Red Sea, Berenice, in January 2020. In July 2021, Sisi opened the Third of July naval base on Egypt's northwest coast for its Mediterranean fleet.<sup>157</sup> The navy says its new acquisitions and bases are to prevent infiltration, smuggling, and illegal immigration, as well as to support counterterrorism efforts, secure Mediterranean gas fields, and operate beyond coastal waters.<sup>158</sup> However, the gas fields could be better secured with smaller craft and antimissile systems rather than with large vessels (see figure 2.13).

Egypt largely used its new naval capabilities for the sake of military diplomacy, which resulted in the security partnership with Greece and Cyprus in the Mediterranean, and its coalition with Saudi Arabia and other nations in the Red Sea. Egypt's partnerships in the region are mostly military illusions, however, and it is not prepared to project power other than by posturing with small, token forces.<sup>159</sup> Although Sisi says Gulf security is a fixed part of Egypt's foreign policy, the EAF would likely face serious difficulty in projecting naval power in a large, long-range, and sustained way and is not ready to deploy as far as the Persian Gulf in large numbers.

Figure 2.13. Map of Key EAF Bases



## Notes

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# 3

## Assessing Bilateral Military Ties

Egypt, in pursuit of its own interests, became a U.S. strategic partner after the 1978 Camp David Accords and the 1979 Egypt-Israel peace treaty. The United States, for its part, identified a priority in moving Egypt out of its Cold War–era alignment with the Soviet Union and ending the wars pitting Israel against Egypt and other Arab states. In the bargain, the United States has given the EAF a little more than \$50 billion in military grant aid. And America receives several benefits from this relationship, such as easy transit for U.S. military assets through Egyptian territory for projection purposes and access to Egyptian decisionmakers. While Egypt is not the regional power it was in the 1960s, it is seeking to restore its leadership role and is still important for its history, size, and location. Its population of more than 100 million makes it the largest Arab nation, and before the Covid-19 pandemic, it was expected to have the seventh-largest economy in the world by 2030. Egypt is home to the Arab League and Al-Azhar University, the world’s principal Sunni religious institution. The Egyptian media is still influential, and as noted already, Egypt’s armed forces are the largest—if not the most capable—in the region.

The foundation and most enduring result of the U.S.-Egypt relationship has been peace with Israel, following five wars. Egypt was the first Arab country to make peace with Israel, and every Egyptian government since has been committed to it. Egypt’s good relations with Israel should not be taken

for granted, however, and the U.S. Congress has worried about maintaining the peace. As noted earlier, Egypt still prepares for the possibility of war with Israel. Israel supports U.S. military assistance to Egypt and recognizes the possible consequences to the peace treaty were it to be cut.<sup>1</sup> Egypt believes the U.S. assistance is a fixed part of the treaty and that its cessation would violate it.<sup>2</sup> U.S. military assistance to Egypt is a large part of the relationship between the two countries, as this chapter will discuss.

Egypt's geostrategic position makes it the gateway to Africa, Asia, and Europe, connecting two-thirds of the world. Egypt is critical in enabling U.S. power projection, and, as noted, the Egyptian government allows U.S. military assets to traverse its territory. The Suez Canal serves 12 percent of global trade. When in March 2021 a container ship lodged in the canal blocked traffic for six days, the consequence was a \$10 billion daily holdup in global trade. The EAF helps U.S. naval vessels pass through the canal, preventing them from having to sail around Africa or across the Pacific, to reach an area from the Red Sea to the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean. U.S. naval ships transiting from the U.S. East Coast to the Persian Gulf save eight days of travel time, as well as several hundred thousand dollars in fuel costs, by not having to transit around Africa.<sup>3</sup>

The United States pays transit fees for its naval vessels to pass through the canal, as do the navies of other nations; these costs are not covered by U.S. military assistance to Egypt. The U.S. Navy is otherwise treated the same as the naval forces of other nations in that Egypt's priority is to get all naval vessels through the canal as quickly as possible, especially nuclear-powered vessels. Egypt is extremely responsive to U.S. requests and sudden changes, however, as it is to all toll-paying navies. In May 2019, the USS *Abraham Lincoln* battle group, consisting of eight ships, including a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, passed through the canal within twenty-four hours of notification to address Iranian provocations, while normally a month is required to coordinate a military vessel's Suez transit.<sup>4</sup> Egypt provides enhanced security for the passage of U.S. naval vessels through the canal and protects their secrecy up to the time of transit. U.S. access to the canal is particularly important during times of war. Between 2001 and 2005, U.S. naval vessels made 861 transits through the canal.<sup>5</sup>

Egypt's central location in the region also facilitates aerial transits. Egypt allows U.S. military aircraft to overfly its territory, often on short notice, and it has never withheld permission. No fees are paid, nor do the military aircraft of other nations pay fees.<sup>6</sup> Again, during the period between 2001 and 2005, U.S. military aircraft made more than thirty-six thousand overflights of Egypt.<sup>7</sup> If the use of the Suez Canal or overflights were denied, it would greatly increase U.S. defense expenditures, at least doubling the length of time it takes a ship to get to the Persian Gulf and increasing fuel costs, and requiring aircraft to either make fuel stops, conduct inflight refueling, or coordinate with multiple nations for overflight permissions.<sup>8</sup> The benefits of Egypt's geostrategic position and its willingness to work with the U.S. military should not be taken lightly. Saudi Arabia, another close U.S. partner, has periodically withdrawn U.S. overflight permissions of its territory, forcing U.S. planes to add thousands of miles as they navigate around it.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, Egypt is not beyond interrupting Suez transits. In the 1950s, it refused to let ships carrying Israeli-destined cargos to pass through the canal.

Egypt has supported the United States in military operations. For Desert Storm in 1990–91, Egypt provided the second-largest Arab force, around forty thousand troops and four hundred tanks. All the Egyptian units had U.S. equipment and were the best in the EAF, although sending troops to fight against another Arab state was controversial in Egypt. At the start of the U.S. global war on terror, President Mubarak stated that the war was not against Islam but against terrorism. For Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, Egypt deployed a military hospital and medical staff to Afghanistan for many years to provide medical support to Afghans. During Operation Iraqi Freedom, the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Egypt publicly opposed the war but continued to allow U.S. ships and planes to transit Egypt while moving to the war zone. Egypt is the seventh-largest contributor of troops to UN peacekeeping missions and is currently involved in six missions, all in Africa.<sup>10</sup>

Although Egypt is not as prominent as it once was, the United States still sees it as important. The U.S. partnership with Egypt is based on the shared interests of stability in Egypt and the region, maintaining peace with Israel, and countering regional extremism. Some in the U.S. government see Egypt

as a main line of defense against Islamism and “too big” to be allowed to fail.<sup>11</sup> Instability in Egypt could threaten the peace with Israel, trigger an illegal immigration wave to Europe, or threaten the lives of the eighty-two thousand U.S. citizens who live there. Egypt also works to counter Iranian penetration into the region by increasing ties with regional countries that are strongly swayed by Tehran such as Iraq and Lebanon. In 2021, President Sisi was the first Egyptian president to visit Baghdad in thirty years and, in Lebanon, Egypt is working to ease the humanitarian, energy, and economic crises with reconstruction deals, plans to ship natural gas, and established a field military hospital.<sup>12</sup> But overall, Cairo believes that regional tensions with Iran should be de-escalated. In the past, Egypt’s rulers often took positions that were unpopular domestically and regionally if they believed the positions would strengthen U.S. ties. Egyptian and U.S. interest did not always align, however. For example, Egypt’s position in Libya, where it supported military leader Khalifa Haftar, was contrary to the U.S. position. Egypt has always sought a political solution to the conflict, however, and believes the international community’s lack of action in Libya was a disaster. Today, the United States believes Egypt had a positive role in achieving a ceasefire in Libya and reconciling the warring parties.

## **Fundamentals and Background of U.S. Military Assistance to Egypt**

Military ties have always been the strongest part of the overall U.S.-Egypt relationship, and the Camp David Accords and the Egypt-Israel peace treaty initiated large-scale U.S. defense cooperation and military assistance. At the time, the other Arab states objected to the agreements by Egypt because it made a separate peace without their support. Egypt would feel the repercussions for years. It was suspended from the Arab League and most Arab countries broke off relations. It was economically isolated from other Arab nations, and Egyptians say the country lost more in foreign investment than the aid it has received from the United States, while America got the benefits of the peace with Israel and reduced Soviet influence in the Middle East. The

period up to 2011 established the fundamentals of the relationship, some of which still hold.

## **Foreign Military Financing**

Since 1978, the United States has provided military assistance to Egypt mainly using the Foreign Military Financing program, which has been set at \$1.3 billion annually since 1987. FMF gives grants to recipient countries to acquire U.S. military equipment and training. The United States has also given Israel billions of dollars in military assistance using FMF. Initially, the United States funded Israel and Egypt at a three-to-two ratio, although funding to Israel later increased and the ratio was closer to three to one. In 2020, \$3.3 billion was allotted to Israel and \$1.3 billion to Egypt. The United States also provides Israel with additional annual funding for the development of missile defense programs, with \$500 million granted in 2020. Nevertheless, Egypt is the second-largest recipient of FMF after Israel, and Egypt and Israel accounted for about 85 percent of FMF given worldwide in 2020, at 61 percent for Israel and 24 percent for Egypt.

Contrary to Egyptian beliefs, U.S. military assistance is not part of the Egypt-Israel peace treaty, which is between Israel and Egypt. FMF given to Egypt is subject to annual U.S. congressional approval, and there is no formal agreement saying the United States will supply Egypt with a certain amount of funding over a specific period, although America does have formal agreements with Israel and Jordan with stated amounts over a period of years. As noted earlier, Israel supports continued U.S. military assistance to Egypt because Egypt has kept the peace and because Cairo has traditionally depended on the assistance, which could be withheld if a new war appeared imminent.

After the overthrow of Morsi, Egypt received \$30 billion in aid from the Gulf states, some of which was used for defense spending. Before this, it was believed that the U.S. FMF annual grant of \$1.3 billion accounted for 24.5 percent of Egypt's annual defense spending, which was estimated at \$5.28 billion in 2013. However, there was a lack of precise figures on total Egyptian defense spending, and the EAF likely used income from its

economic holdings to subsidize its defense spending. Other estimates were that the annual U.S. assistance accounted for four-fifths of the annual costs of equipping the EAF. Egypt used very little of its national funds to buy U.S. equipment; it relied almost exclusively on FMF and used the funds generated from its economic activities to procure equipment from others.

All of FMF funding must be spent on U.S. defense items, training, or services such as maintenance of weapon systems and construction, provided by U.S. defense companies through lucrative contracts. Egypt, like most countries that receive FMF, procures items and services through government-to-government contracts using the Foreign Military Sales process in which the U.S. government purchases the items or services for Egypt. The funds are not transferred to Egypt. The FMS process is often criticized as being complex, lengthy, and bureaucratic; it can take years from the time an item is requested until it is delivered, but the process is designed to prevent abuse and corruption by creating a formal record of all transactions requiring various levels of U.S. approval. FMS is also a total-package approach, providing maintenance, spare parts, and training to ensure that procured items are properly maintained in the future—a practice that is not followed by many other countries.

The U.S. Department of State and Department of Defense operate the FMF program for Egypt. The State Department establishes broad goals that the Defense Department implements. The latter's Defense Security Cooperation Agency, based in Washington DC, is responsible for operating the program and pays U.S. defense companies providing equipment to Egypt. The Office of Military Cooperation, a Defense Department office in the U.S. embassy in Cairo, works with the EAF to determine specific requirements, oversees the request and delivery of items, and attempts to work with the EAF to address defense needs. Although U.S. military personnel at OMC normally rotate every two years, the Egyptian generals who oversee Egypt's requests and procurement of U.S. items have stayed in their positions for more than a decade, giving them a better understanding of the intricacies of the program than their U.S. counterparts. Egypt maintains an office in Washington DC that submits Egyptian requests for assistance to the DSCA after the OMC approves them.

The U.S. Congress is the major player in Egypt's FMF program. While the U.S. president requests the funding, it is Congress that must appropriate the annual \$1.3 billion, although it has been slightly reduced in some years because of sequestration, for example. The U.S. Arms Export Control Act requires that Congress be notified thirty calendar days before procurement starts for specific types of equipment and services, with certain values, to be given to Egypt. Congressional concerns must be resolved before the procurement process can continue.

The FMF was supposed to be used to replace Soviet-era equipment that Egypt acquired between 1955 and 1973, but due to the high costs of U.S. equipment, Soviet equipment was not eliminated but moved to second-tier units. As U.S. defense equipment was acquired, it had to be maintained and periodically upgraded, so roughly one-third of the funding was used for maintenance by U.S. defense contractors, one-third for upgrades to existing systems to keep them modern, and one-third to acquire new equipment. FMF funding was also used to upgrade a few old Soviet and Chinese items, such as the EAF's Chinese submarines. However, the United States recommended that as much as 50 percent, or \$650 million, of total annual funding be allocated to maintenance. Lack of funding to maintain equipment was a constant problem, and Egypt continually sought additional FMF funding to cover rising costs.

Egypt has used the FMF funding to acquire a vast array of items used by any modern military, including tanks and other military vehicles, artillery, all types of missiles and rockets, air defense systems, rifles, machine guns, combat and transport aircraft and helicopters, naval vessels, tools, clothing, medical supplies, and VIP aircraft and cars for generals. It was also used to construct base facilities, repair workshops, and build military factories and a military hospital.<sup>13</sup> Many of the equipment purchases were for large, expensive items. At one point, Egypt had the fifth-largest F-16 fleet in the world with 220 in service, although as mentioned, only 207 appear to be in service today. Egypt has a total of 2,280 U.S. tanks, with 1,130 M1A1s and 1,150 M60s. The EAF procures these items because it believes they are vital to security.

## **Cash Flow Financing**

Egypt had certain benefits that were available only to it and Israel. Between 2001 and 2011, Egypt enjoyed early disbursement of FMF funding. This meant that after Congress appropriated FMF funding, Egyptian funding was placed in an interest-earning account in the Federal Reserve Bank in New York within thirty days. The DSCA was able to use the interest to buy additional military hardware for the EAF. On a monthly basis, the U.S. government withdrew funding from the Federal Reserve and placed it into Egypt's FMS Trust Fund Account in the U.S. Treasury, from which the DSCA made monthly payments to U.S. defense contractors as bills became due.<sup>14</sup> Besides Israel, only Egypt enjoyed the benefit of earning interest on its FMF funding through the mechanism of early disbursement; the FMF funding of other nations was placed directly into the FMS Trust Fund Account.

Israel and Egypt also had the benefit of cash flow financing, which was halted for Egypt in 2018.<sup>15</sup> CFF allowed for the payments of contracts to U.S. defense companies over a span of years instead of upfront, a system for Egypt that assumed that Congress would continue to annually appropriate FMF funding at \$1.3 billion. Most countries receiving FMF have to pay the cost of a particular procurement at the beginning of the purchase or save FMF funding over many years to have the necessary buying power, thus deferring the purchase until they have saved enough funding. Using CFF, Egypt could negotiate monthly payments with U.S. defense contractors to stretch payments over many years into the future using FMF that was not yet appropriated by Congress. For most procurements, manufacturing requirements cause a lag of many years until the delivery of items. For example, a procurement of twenty F-16s valued at close to \$3 billion starting in late 2009 cost well over Egypt's annual \$1.3 billion in FMF, but it took many years from the time the procurement was agreed upon until the aircraft were finally delivered. During those years, Egypt made monthly payments for those F-16s instead of having to pay the total cost at the beginning. A few other countries have been able to use CFF but only for specific procurements, whereas Egypt and Israel could apply it to all purchases. Congress had to be notified of any sales for \$100 million or greater using CFF.

CFF allowed Egypt flexibility in procuring large, expensive items in a short time, enabling it to address its most current defense needs by spending well beyond its annual \$1.3 billion in FMF. Critics, however, argued it reduced flexibility because funding was committed years into the future. Payments could be stretched five years into the future, meaning future funding was already spent. From 2008 to 2012, Congress appropriated approximately \$6.5 billion for Egypt, but the United States agreed to defense contracts for Egypt valued at \$8.5 billion on the assumption that Congress would continue to appropriate the funding and that payment on contracts would stretch past 2012. Even tracking payment schedules was difficult because contracts were signed, completed, or modified daily, and defense contractors sometimes completed work early or late, causing unpredictability in monthly payments. There was always the danger that Egypt's FMS Trust Fund Account might not have enough funding to make the monthly payments. In late 2009 and 2010, the problem came to a head when the United States agreed to five big Egyptian purchases, additional F-16s, tanks, Harpoon II antiship missiles, AH-64 Apaches, and fast missile craft, requiring that payments span well into the future. It became increasingly hard to ensure that the Egyptian account had sufficient funds to pay the bills, and the amount that could be spent on the maintenance of existing equipment had to be reduced.<sup>16</sup>

The greatest danger with CFF was if the U.S. Congress failed to appropriate the assumed \$1.3 billion. Each contract had a clause that Egypt must pay the contractor company the cost of shutting off the contract even if there was no FMF. But if Egypt was unable to pay for it, then the U.S. government would be forced to pay contractors the cost of terminating the contracts, which could reach \$2 billion to \$3 billion.<sup>17</sup> To this end, the DSCA maintained a management reserve in Egypt's FMS Trust Fund Account, usually of several hundred million dollars, but it was never deemed sufficient to pay the full termination costs. The EAF constantly pressured the DSCA to reduce the management reserve so it could be used for new procurements, but between 2011 and 2015, most of Egypt's FMF was already spent on previous purchases. This situation gave Egypt a certain amount of leverage over the United States concerning any reduction of FMF funding or the sudden halt to CFF.

## **Restrictions**

In supplying equipment to Egypt, the United States is committed to maintaining Israel's qualitative military edge. The U.S. Congress defines QME as "the ability to counter and defeat any credible conventional military threat from any individual state or possible coalition of states or from nonstate actors, while sustaining minimal damage and casualties, through the use of superior military means, possessed in sufficient quantity."<sup>18</sup> In other words, the United States seeks to ensure that Israel can defeat any credible and plausible combination of Arab states, which historically would be two to three states adjacent to Israel and expeditionary forces from others. The U.S. administration is required by law to report to Congress on its policy to ensure that U.S. weapon sales to countries in the Middle East do not affect QME. The United States updates Israel on Egyptian weapons, doctrine, and military preparations, and Israeli officials have input into the QME process and list weapons they do not want their neighbors to have. The United States enforces QME by not selling those weapons to Arab states, or downgrading the weapons it does sell to them, and by upgrading Israeli versions. Although not part of QME, Israel's nuclear capability can ensure survival of the country but would be used only as a last resort.

Although Israel and Egypt have many U.S. weapons in common, Israel's are superior and of a greater quantity. For years, Egypt's F-16 fleet was kept to two-thirds of Israel's, and its version is less advanced than its Israeli counterpart. In other cases, weapons have been sold to Arab states in the region but denied to Egypt even though it had a peace treaty with Israel and others did not. Israel, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia have F-15 fighter aircraft, but Egypt does not after repeated requests. The United States sold the TOW-2B antitank missile to the Gulf states but not Egypt. The United States turned down Egypt's requests for advanced air-to-air missiles such as the AIM-120 (AMRAAM) and AIM-9X Sidewinder, a more advanced version of Egypt's AIM-9M/P, leaving it with a significant lack of capability.<sup>19</sup> Egypt requested numerous weapons that the United States, for QME, denied or sold with lesser capabilities. For five years, a sale of Harpoon missiles was delayed because of a concern that they affected QME. The missiles were eventually

given to Egypt, but their capabilities reduced.

U.S. officials did not discuss QME with the EAF but rather just stated certain items were not releasable, or not available because Egypt had not signed a Communication Interoperability and Security Memorandum of Agreement with the United States, which Egypt eventually signed in January 2018.<sup>20</sup> A CISMOA is a formal agreement between the United States and another government that ensures the security of advanced U.S. communications equipment on the country's military platforms. Agreeing to a CISMOA gives a country access to sensitive U.S. technology and increases interoperability by allowing U.S. platforms and the country's platforms to communicate, understand codes, and share data. Without a CISMOA, interoperability is extremely limited, and certain advanced weapons cannot be procured because they require CISMOA-enabled codes to operate. The United States first began offering Egypt a CISMOA in the late 1990s, but Egypt refused, citing an infringement on national sovereignty.<sup>21</sup> A CISMOA required U.S. personnel to have access to and inspect Egyptian military facilities and platforms where CISMOA items were used and stored. CISMOA-related coding devices must be stored in U.S.-approved security facilities and managed by U.S. personnel. Egypt believed the United States would have de facto control of this equipment allowing it to access sensitive Egyptian weapon platforms and information. Other countries in the region, such as Jordan, Morocco, the Gulf states, and Israel, had signed CISMOAs.

The non-CISMOA status of Egypt prevented it from having sensitive, advanced U.S. equipment. The F-16s that America sold to Egypt had limited capabilities and required costly modifications to comply with the non-CISMOA status. U.S. officials cited the lack of a CISMOA as the reason the EAF was unable to obtain the AIM-120 (AMRAAM) and the AIM-9X as its air-to-air missiles. But even if Egypt had signed a CISMOA then, America still would have denied it certain weapons under QME and, in truth, the lack of a CISMOA made it easier for U.S. officials to cite the CISMOA as a reason for denial rather than have an honest discussion on QME. The two issues became intertwined on the U.S. side, with officers at the Office of Military Cooperation unsure whether a particular system would be denied for QME or CISMOA reasons.<sup>22</sup>

A final restriction on Egypt's procurement was that Congress sometimes conditioned military aid on such Egyptian political or security reforms as improvement of human rights, democratization, and better efforts to stop smuggling. Congress withheld the obligation of \$100 million in aid for 2008 until the Bush administration certified that Egypt was taking steps to reduce police abuse, promote an independent judiciary, and address smuggling from Sinai into Gaza. Congress also gave the administration an option to waive the restriction for reasons of U.S. national security. This congressional condition on aid created tensions, and Egyptian leaders accused Israel of lobbying Congress to hurt Egypt. Ultimately, the Bush administration could not certify the reforms and exercised the national security waiver, releasing the funds. In the waiver, the administration said while there had been some progress in the three areas, more needed to be done. At about the same time, the administration also designated \$23 million in FMF to be spent on advanced tunnel detection equipment along the Sinai-Gaza border, which again angered the EAF, but it did receive the equipment and began to use it.

Other than the restrictions dictated by QME, the lack of a CISMOA, and the rare case of conditionality, the United States allowed Egypt to use its FMF grant as it saw fit. Although U.S. officials did offer strong advice on what Egypt should procure using FMF, the EAF usually went its own way, and sometimes resented any U.S. advice, viewing it as an infringement of sovereignty.

## **Other Programs**

A cornerstone of the relationship was a number of coproduction programs producing military equipment in Egypt, again supported with FMF. In the programs, some components were supplied by the United States and some made in Egypt, and then the equipment was assembled in military factories in Egypt, providing Egyptians jobs and further increasing the EAF's role in the economy. Coproduction programs included the manufacture of ammunition, vehicles, naval patrol craft, and, most importantly, tanks. The Egyptian tank plant in Cairo was the only factory in the world that produced M1A1 Abrams tanks after the United States upgraded to the M1A2. Tank production

began in 1988, and the EAF described it as the embodiment of the U.S.-Egypt relationship.<sup>23</sup> Egypt assembled well over one thousand tanks and the plant provided jobs to more than twenty-five hundred Egyptians and was cited by U.S. officials as helping Egyptian economic capabilities.<sup>24</sup> Sometimes, about a quarter of assembled tanks had not been fielded to military units and remained in storage, while the EAF continued to maintain several thousand Soviet tanks, leading some critics to question the purpose of the program.<sup>25</sup> Although the United States was eager to see the tanks fielded and used to replace Soviet tanks, the EAF, as mentioned, is geared for conventional mechanized warfare, which requires available tanks to replace combat losses, and the U.S. Army itself maintains three thousand M1A1s in storage as a strategic reserve.<sup>26</sup> In addition, the total number of tanks was more important than whether they were used because it enhanced the prestige of the EAF as having one of the world's largest tank fleets.

Besides FMF, the International Military Education and Training program is another grant fund that the United States provides to Egypt annually. This funding is used to send Egyptian officers to U.S. military courses to improve military capabilities, develop professional and personal relationships, and expose them to the roles of democratic values and human rights in military operations and governance. IMET funding to Egypt varies yearly, but its annual average between 2010 and 2019 was \$1.4 million, when 498 EAF officers attended training.<sup>27</sup> FMF funds are also used to send EAF members to U.S. training courses, which are aimed more at training EAF personnel on how to use new equipment or complex weapon systems, and dwarfed the numbers who attended IMET courses. Between 2010 and 2019, 3,440, received training using FMF funds.<sup>28</sup> Since the beginning of the U.S.-Egypt relationship, thousands of EAF personnel have trained in the United States, receiving knowledge of U.S. military doctrine and methods, and generally leaving with favorable impressions. Of note, President Sisi is a graduate of the U.S. Army War College at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, and he also attended the U.S. Army's basic and advanced infantry officers' courses at Fort Benning, Georgia.

However, the effectiveness of the IMET program in instilling democratic values and establishing social bonds is limited, and only a small portion of

Egyptian officers attended the training. Moreover, the Egyptian Ministry of Defense prohibited social contacts between U.S. and Egyptian officers after the Egyptians had returned home, fearing the U.S. officers were seeking intelligence on the EAF's inner workings or trying to indoctrinate the Egyptians to U.S. thinking. Likewise, Egyptian officers managing the U.S. defense relationship were prohibited from having social contacts with their counterparts at the OMC in Cairo outside of official business. And, in reality, EAF officers largely viewed attendance at courses in the United States as a vacation and shopping opportunity to bring back gifts for friends and family.<sup>29</sup>

Before the Egyptian revolutions in 2011 and 2013, a great number of U.S. military personnel, U.S. government civilians, and U.S. contractors, based in Egypt, provided training and maintenance support to the EAF. U.S. Army teams supported the EAF's CH-47 Chinook and AH-64 Apache helicopters and M1A1 tank units with fielding equipment, maintenance, and training. A U.S. Air Force team provided training and maintenance for the EAF's F-16s. Smaller teams supported other types of aircraft. These teams lived on Egyptian military bases, provided insight on the status of the EAF, and developed relationships with their Egyptian counterparts within the constraints of the limit on nonofficial social contacts with U.S. personnel. Many of these teams had been in place for decades, although they were originally envisioned as lasting a shorter time. Hundreds of U.S. contractors provided maintenance support to the EAF and assisted in the coproduction programs.

Egypt and the United States conducted a variety of training exercises over the years. The most famous is the biennial Bright Star exercise, which is still a central part of the relationship. The first Bright Star occurred in 1980 as a bilateral exercise between Egypt and the United States but later morphed into a multilateral exercise hosted by Egypt and the United States every two years. Bright Star played a significant role in preparing U.S. and coalition nations for their participation in Desert Storm in 1991. The largest Bright Star was in 1999 and included participants from eleven nations, for a total of seventy thousand troops, with eighteen thousand U.S. personnel. Bright Star 2001 consisted of twenty-three thousand U.S. troops. However,

U.S. combat operations in Afghanistan and Iraq reduced the scope of the exercises, and Bright Star in 2009 saw the participation of only about thirteen hundred U.S. troops. In the latter years, U.S. planners criticized the exercises because the EAF overly stressed conventional operations instead of urban and irregular warfare. The EAF complained that U.S. participation was too low and judged the quality of the exercise by its size and how large VIP demonstrations were.<sup>30</sup>

Senior U.S. and EAF officials coordinated the overall defense relationship at the Military Cooperation Committee, which met annually and alternated between Cairo and Washington. The MCC discussed the status of individual FMF procurement cases, training and education activities, and exercises. One subcommittee focused on defense industrial cooperation. U.S. officials tried to keep discussions at a strategic level, while the EAF usually stressed specifics of FMF procurement cases, the need to release advanced weapons, and wish lists of weapons.

At a higher level, the U.S.-Egypt Strategic Dialogue was established in 1998 to steer the overall relationship and met periodically throughout the years. The meetings were normally chaired by the U.S. secretary of state and the Egyptian foreign minister. Although mainly symbolic, the dialogue allowed the opportunity for high-level discussions on areas of agreement, although not much resulted from the discussions.<sup>31</sup>

## **U.S. and Egyptian Views of the Relationship**

Egypt and the United States had different views of the military relationship, especially the \$1.3 billion FMF grant, and did not always share the same vision. Egypt viewed the aid as payment for services rendered and believed it was an entitlement based on its decision to break with Arab countries and make peace with Israel. Egypt supported U.S. interests in the region and helped its military almost daily with Suez Canal transits and overflights. Egypt viewed the aid as directly connected to Camp David and the Egypt-Israel peace; it was not a gift but in service of U.S. interests. In turn, Egypt assumed that the United States would not make further demands of it, and Egyptian officers sidestepped discussions and delayed or gave vague answers

to U.S. officials on uncomfortable subjects such as military reform.<sup>32</sup>

Egypt wanted a strong military and thus required modern equipment, especially equipment for conventional warfare such as tanks and planes. The U.S. aid and what it brought—tanks, F-16s, and Apaches—were important symbols of U.S. commitment to Egypt and a sign of prestige that it was being equipped by the world's superpower. The FMF allowed Egypt to reduce procurement costs, and it strived to get the most it could out of FMF, and then it used national funds to procure equipment from other countries. The FMF indirectly helped the Egyptian economy because, otherwise, national funds would have had to go to the EAF but could instead be used for economic and social development. Although Egypt had a profound mistrust of the United States and its goals vis-à-vis Egypt, it accepted the aid since it supported the EAF.

The United States developed conflicting views of the purpose of the military aid, and some U.S. policymakers assumed that U.S. and Egyptian interests were in complete alignment regarding the EAF's need to restructure and reform, as well as the Egyptian government's plans for democratization and human rights. The United States misunderstood Egypt's attempts to maintain parity with Israel, the role of the EAF in society, and American ability to encourage Cairo to make domestic reforms.

The original purpose of the military aid was to consolidate the Egypt-Israel peace and strengthen U.S.-Egypt ties, especially military ties, and keep Egypt out of the Soviet orbit. The aid would contribute to regional stability because it essentially supported the end of the Arab-Israel conflict at large—or at least put to rest the idea of a broad Arab war coalition against Israel—and it maintained a regional balance of power. Egypt would help in enlarging the Arab-Israel peace and mediate conflicts between Israel and the Palestinians. The United States expected Egypt to support, or at least not oppose, U.S. interests. As a side benefit, the aid gave the United States access to Egyptian decisionmakers and an opportunity to offer advice, which was not always accepted. It also gave the United States a small amount of influence with Egypt's most important but least understood institution, the EAF. Originally, the aid was never intended to bring about political reform in Egypt under U.S. priorities.

The aid facilitated U.S. military movements, enabling the rapid transfer of U.S. forces between the U.S. Central and European Commands. Without such access to the Suez Canal and Egyptian airspace, the United States would either have had to reduce its presence in the region or endure greater financial costs for fuel and other needs. Longer transit times for ships sailing around Africa or coming from the Pacific to reach the Persian Gulf would have meant reduced time on station in the Gulf, because of the U.S. practice of trying to limit the time ships are at sea to six months for morale reasons. For example, for a 180-day deployment to the Gulf, which includes the transit time to get there and later return, a ship sailing from the U.S. East Coast and traveling around Africa coming and going would lose 16 days of on-station time in the Gulf. The U.S. Navy could either increase the amount of time ships stayed at sea or rotate forces more often.<sup>33</sup> Some estimated the increased costs and other hardships would exceed the value of the \$1.3 billion in annual assistance given to Egypt.<sup>34</sup> Egyptian nationalists and others believed that the United States gained more from the relationship than Egypt. Egypt had sacrificed a lot for its U.S.-sponsored peace treaty with Israel, which greatly affected relations with other Arab nations, especially with the loss of Arab investment and Egypt's isolation in the region. During this period, some Egyptians believed that Egypt had lost more in Arab investment than it had received in U.S. aid after the peace, while Israel and the United States got the benefits.<sup>35</sup>

Another purpose of the aid was to create a modern, capable, and professional EAF that could better defend its borders and have increased interoperability with the United States. U.S. officials believed that those changes would be possible by replacing Soviet equipment with U.S. items and exposing the EAF to U.S. doctrine and influence. Supplying Egypt with U.S. equipment also had the added benefit of supporting the U.S. industrial base and U.S. companies. With the increased interoperability, Egypt would be better able to participate in U.S.-led coalitions and peacekeeping missions, later support the war on terror, and defeat terrorism in Egypt so it did not spread elsewhere. The U.S. Department of Defense evaluated modernization and interoperability by the percentage of Soviet equipment that had been replaced with U.S. equipment, which the EAF said was 52 percent in 2010.

However, the degree of modernization and interoperability was never defined or measured in terms of technical readiness of troops and equipment or the actual ability to operate with U.S. forces.

Over time, other views developed as to what benefits the aid should bring for the United States. In the 1980s, maintaining a large conventional EAF was important because Egypt was out of the Soviet orbit and could be part of a U.S. coalition against the Soviets. But with the long period of peace with Israel, the end of the Cold War, and the coming of the war on terror, some U.S. policymakers began to want more from Egypt than just maintaining peace with Israel, such as reshaping the EAF into a force better able to address irregular threats—instead of preparing for conventional war—or bringing about political reform in Egypt. As a new generation of U.S. policymakers emerged, they saw the peace treaty with Israel as history and questioned what Egypt had done for U.S. interests lately.<sup>36</sup> Because Egypt did not contribute combat forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, was unable to control smuggling into Gaza, and lacked political reforms, some began to question if more was needed. Also, the thorny questions remained of how U.S. security interests with Egypt aligned with the U.S. values of spreading democracy and ensuring regional partners respected basic human rights. Several schools of thought developed about the purpose of the aid.

The first school was that the aid was to maintain the relationship and thus have access to Egyptian leaders in times of crisis and help Egypt develop a powerful conventional force. This school favored reducing QME restrictions to win Egyptian leaders' favor and letting Egypt acquire what it wanted. Another school of thought was that the aid should be used to transform the EAF into a force that could address irregular threats such as smuggling and terrorism, and better respond to humanitarian disasters. This school sought to prevent Egypt from overly focusing on Israel as its primary threat. The aid, or at least part of it, should be spent on items that promoted this agenda. The final school of thought was that the aid should be used as leverage to bring about political and security reform in Egypt, through conditionality, with regard to democratization, human rights, and basic freedoms in line with U.S. values. If Egypt did not achieve certain benchmarks pertaining to each, the aid would be withheld. The final two schools of thought saw Egypt

as a client state that would bend to the U.S. will—either through reshaping the EAF into a modern force to meet current threats as defined by the United States, or overall political reform and democratization in Egypt.

Egypt, however, aligned itself with the United States when it suited its interests, such as undermining Hamas, but resisted U.S. calls for political reform or sending troops to Iraq, given the popular disaffection with such a move that would have resulted. Achieving the U.S. goals of political and security reform by conditioning aid to Egypt faltered because it overestimated U.S. influence, especially on Egyptian domestic politics. Threatening to reduce the aid publicly reinforced the impression among Egyptians that the United States believed Egypt was a client state subservient to America. Egypt would continue to strongly resist any conditioning of aid because, as stated previously, it saw aid as payment for services rendered.

## **Egyptian Frustrations**

Before the revolution of 2011, the EAF had numerous grievances with the United States. Egypt was not getting the advanced weapons it asked for while Israel was getting more. Even when Egypt and Israel both received the same type of equipment, the Israeli version was more advanced. Other Arab states received advanced weapons and Egypt did not, and Cairo believed that the United States delayed approvals of new sales. The slow delivery of approved weapons was another point of contention, along with the complicated nature of the FMS process.

Egypt complained that the \$1.3 billion in aid had remained the same since 1987 and, in terms of buying power when adjusted for inflation, had depreciated by about half, while aid to Israel had increased and exceeded the original fixed three-to-two ratio. According to Cairo, U.S. military assistance was a part of the peace treaty, and it was set at that ratio.<sup>37</sup> Egyptian officials pointed out that costs of equipment and required maintenance had increased; these unmet needs amounted to a reduction of aid, and they repeatedly sought additional funding.<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, the Egyptians thought the United States took their

cooperation for granted. Besides facilitating U.S. military logistics with overflights and transits, Egypt maintained its peace with Israel and worked with other Arab countries to expand the range of peace. Egypt was particularly upset when Congress placed conditions on aid.<sup>39</sup> It was frustrated when the U.S. administration promised something that was ultimately up to Congress, which appropriated aid and had oversight of large procurements. Congress could tie the aid to any number of Egyptian domestic issues or its conventional buildup against Israel.<sup>40</sup>

The EAF resented U.S. recommendations and pressure to change its military doctrine, organization, and spending of aid to shift from conventional operations to irregular threats. Egypt considered this pressure to be the promotion of Israeli interests at its expense and an attempt to change the EAF into a force that could address the threats that mattered to America and Israel, not what was in Egypt's interests. Egypt strongly resisted U.S. advice on how it should address particular security matters, such as Sinai or border security, which it viewed as sovereignty issues.

Another resentment was that Egypt relied too much on U.S. aid for arms while the United States was committed to maintaining Israel's supremacy. Some felt that U.S. aid was not in Egypt's defense interests and its purpose was to control the EAF's armament, training, and doctrine.<sup>41</sup> Others thought that the weapon restrictions and the complicated nature of the relationship made aid into a chain that limited options. All these factors contributed to anti-Americanism in the EAF, which was complicated by conspiracy theories that blamed the United States and Israel for Egyptian decline.

## **U.S. Frustrations**

Leading up to 2011, the United States had many frustrations with the EAF against the backdrop of Egypt's poor performance in human rights and democracy. Those who have worked closely with the EAF have been angered at its sense of entitlement to the aid and its refusal to take U.S. advice.

The Mubarak government was authoritarian and ruled by a strongman. Its human rights record was poor, with documented cases of torture, arbitrary

arrests, and discrimination against women and minorities. Coptic Christians faced legal difficulties in repairing or building new churches and had little representation in government. Women suffered from obstacles in personal legal status regarding marriage, divorce, and custody of children. Female genital mutilation was widespread and culturally accepted. Egyptian prisons were breeding grounds of radicals because of long-term torture and other mistreatments. Although the U.S. Congress was long concerned with human rights, Egyptian and international activists considered U.S. actions hypocritical in promoting human rights and democracy while continuing to support the Egyptian government because it aligned with Washington's security interests.

As for the EAF, in the last few years before the 2011 revolution, it was viewed as in decline, unready, sclerotic, and resistant to change. U.S. officials and advisors recommended for years that the EAF shift from conventional war and transform into a smaller force able to address modern threats, but the EAF refused.<sup>42</sup> Some on the U.S. side saw no conceivable reason why Egypt needed to continue to use its U.S. aid to acquire tanks and fighter aircraft and criticized the EAF's efforts to maintain parity with Israel. Some felt that the EAF was too big and top-heavy with officers to be effective in operations and that downsizing would allow Egypt to divert national funds to the economy and civilian development. Even in terms of conventional military force, the EAF was lacking. The Egyptians refused to leverage the efficiencies of the U.S. weapons, which would allow for some downsizing, and would not adopt U.S.-style planning. The EAF only accepted U.S. conventional warfare doctrine in a rigid fashion that did not allow innovation. Exercises were heavily scripted and designed for show.

Other EAF shortcomings were maintenance, training, and interoperability with the United States, which had long advised that higher portions of the aid be applied to maintaining existing equipment. The EAF had not invested in mechanics, logistical networks, and proper sustainment programs. Much of the maintenance was left to U.S. contractors, but many of these programs were underfunded. M1A1 tanks were not properly maintained, and at one time, only 40 percent of the EAF's CH-47 Chinooks were operational.<sup>43</sup> The EAF's F-16 pilots were poorly trained, and since the beginning of the EAF's

F-16 program, at least twenty-four had been destroyed in accidents, which OMC officers considered one of the highest, if not the highest, F-16 crash rates in the world.<sup>44</sup> The EAF also continued to keep antiquated Soviet equipment that served no purpose. U.S.-Egypt interoperability was one of the purposes of the aid, but without a CISMOA, Egypt would never achieve interoperability with the United States beyond a basic level. And after years of aid, Egypt did not send combat troops to Iraq or Afghanistan.

Another U.S. displeasure was end use violations. When the United States sells defense equipment, the buyers must adhere to conditions that the items will be used only for certain purposes, or end uses. For example, buyers must agree that the items will not be exposed to third parties, because the items often contain sensitive U.S. technology and, in many cases, are the same items used by the U.S. military. The United States also seeks to prohibit the potential of reverse engineering of its military technology, as well as to ensure that FMF-funded items are used only for the reasons for which they are supplied and not for commercial profit by recipients. In 2009, the United States believed that the EAF had violated end use purposes six times within three years. There are several notable examples. FMF funding was used to equip the EAF navy with a Syncrolift, a device to lift a ship out of water onto land for repair. The EAF charged commercial ships fees for using the Syncrolift. A military hospital providing medical care to EAF officers and supported by FMF funding charged civilian patients fees for treatment. The EAF tried to reverse engineer a U.S. artillery tube.<sup>45</sup> The EAF allegedly let Chinese military officials examine U.S.-made F-16s at an EAF air base. During this period, Egypt had more end use violations than any other country in the world. End use violations required that Congress be notified.<sup>46</sup>

Finally, two other frustrations were the Egyptian government's use of its national funds for weapon procurements and the EAF's role in the economy. Cairo seldom spent national funds on U.S. equipment but instead used them to procure weapons from other sources, which made the United States question if Egypt really needed the aid. The United States believed that the EAF's role in the economy reduced Egypt's economic development and discouraged the private sector, thus harming the economy. It also detracted from the EAF's combat-readiness.

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# 4

## **A Relationship in Transition Since the Arab Spring**

Neither Egypt nor the United States expected anything to come of the anti-government demonstrations planned for January 25, 2011. That same week, an Egyptian delegation led by the armed forces chief of staff was attending the annual Military Cooperation Committee meetings in Washington DC. But the MCC was forced to end a day early so that senior Egyptian Armed Forces leaders could return home to address the protests and the rapidly deteriorating security situation.

### **The Egyptian Revolution of 2011**

During the revolution that spanned January 25 through February 11, 2011, and whose participants aimed to overthrow President Hosni Mubarak, large numbers of protesters clashed with police in major cities, eventually resulting in a police withdrawal from the streets. The EAF, deployed throughout the country to maintain order, made clear it acknowledged the people's demands and did not fire on protesters to save the government. The military's unwillingness to support the government was the main reason the revolution was successful. Most people called on the EAF to intervene on behalf of the protesters, but the EAF's actions were ultimately aimed at protecting its own role, privileges, and economic interests. With the country

descending into chaos, Egypt itself seemed imperiled, much less a place where the EAF was the preeminent institution. As the protests intensified, the EAF senior leadership convinced Mubarak to resign. The United States had encouraged the forces to press Mubarak to leave, but U.S. desires had no bearing on the EAF's actions. Under pressure, Mubarak stepped down on February 11 and turned over power to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, or SCAF, a body of senior EAF officers who would govern Egypt for the next sixteen months in a confused transitional period.

The SCAF was led by Field Marshal Muhammad Hussein Tantawi, who had served as minister of defense since 1991. Another member was Maj. Gen. Abdul Fattah al-Sisi, the director of military intelligence. The SCAF, exercising executive authority and making laws, supervised a March 2011 referendum that amended the constitution to outline a transitional period and the drafting of a new constitution. In elections for Egypt's parliament in late 2011 and early 2012, Islamic parties, including the Muslim Brotherhood, won significant majorities, and the SCAF and secular parties later challenged parliament's efforts to select members of a Constitutional Assembly to draft a new constitution. After a court ruling that the parliamentary elections were flawed, the SCAF dissolved parliament in June 2012 and assumed legislative powers.

During the transition, the EAF was at first praised for supporting the people and not siding with Mubarak, but it lost popularity after crackdowns on protesters, slowness to carry out reforms and turn over power, lack of transparency, and beliefs by some that the SCAF was betraying the revolution. The SCAF contended that it was the only force capable of saving Egypt. It disliked politics, wanted to quickly transition out of power, and ruled in the name of the EAF, not as a revolutionary force, as the Egyptian Free Officers had done in 1952. Harsh EAF suppression of protesters increased, meanwhile, and violence between the EAF, police, and protesters became monthly events.

Egypt's presidential elections occurred in May and June 2012. As the polls closed on June 17 with the election of the Muslim Brotherhood's candidate Mohamed Morsi looking certain, the SCAF issued a constitutional declaration granting extensive powers to itself, including enforcement of martial law, and

effectively allowing the EAF to operate without presidential oversight; war could be declared only if the SCAF approved. It was the military's attempt to maintain power and limit the governance of the Brotherhood.

Morsi was sworn in as president on June 30, 2012, after winning a slim majority, becoming the first civilian and democratically elected president in Egypt's history. The EAF pledged loyalty to Morsi, but when the opportunity presented itself, Morsi moved to counter the EAF's power. In August 2012, terrorists killed sixteen EAF soldiers in Sinai. The incident caused a national shock and, in its wake, Morsi removed Tantawi and the EAF service commanders. Morsi appointed Sisi as the new minister of defense. At the time, Sisi, a devout Muslim, was believed to be pro-Brotherhood. Morsi's removal of Tantawi and the most senior EAF leaders was believed to have had the support of the EAF's junior leadership, who felt it was time for a change.<sup>1</sup>

## **Post-Revolution Dynamics**

The Americans made much of the belief that the long U.S.-Egypt military relationship gave them influence in encouraging the EAF to avoid firing on protesters during the revolution. They also believed that they somewhat influenced the EAF in forcing Mubarak to step down and the EAF's subsequent actions. This is not true. Although the United States did encourage the EAF to remove Mubarak, the EAF did not listen to U.S. advice and acted according to its own interests. But there remain impressions that long exposure to U.S. doctrine, human rights values, and civilian control of the military through Egyptian officers' attendance at U.S. military schools might have played a factor in the EAF ultimately not firing on protesters and showing some constraint in the revolution's aftermath. However, no EAF leader would have agreed with that opinion because it would have undermined the EAF's relationship with the people. The EAF stated that it acknowledged the demands of the people and acted accordingly but, in reality, did what was best for preserving its position in society and preventing the country from falling into complete chaos. The EAF actions had the side benefit of reflecting the military's historical legacy of having led the Egyptian Revolution of 1952,

which overthrew the British-backed monarchy. After the 2011 revolution began, the only U.S. means of communicating with the Egyptian government was through EAF channels.<sup>2</sup>

After the revolution and Morsi's election, the United States tried to maintain military cooperation with Egypt. Diplomatically, U.S. officials worked with whoever was in power, be it the SCAF or the Muslim Brotherhood's Morsi. Before Morsi's election, U.S. diplomats did reach out to the Brotherhood, seen as a key player in post-revolution Egypt, as part of U.S. President Barack Obama's belief that democracy's regional spread after the Arab Spring meant that a U.S. dialogue was needed with Islamist groups previously kept at a distance. But in the 2012 Egyptian presidential elections, the United States did not support one candidate over another and accepted the outcome. After Morsi was elected, the United States continued to engage the EAF diplomatically because of its role in volatile Egypt and to balance the relationship with all parties. The United States did, however, shift to placing a greater emphasis on promoting democracy in Egypt, which led to renewed U.S. debate about the purpose of military aid in balancing U.S. security interests with humanitarian and democratic values.

## **Military Cooperation and Growing Tensions**

It was difficult for military cooperation to proceed as normal. Instability caused by the revolution triggered an evacuation of U.S. contractors who had provided maintenance support to the EAF. During their months-long absence, readiness dropped as complex weapon systems became nonoperational.<sup>3</sup> The United States and Egypt jointly agreed to cancel the Bright Star exercise in fall 2011 because of the transition and instability but planned to resume the exercise in 2013.

Egypt-Israel relations went through a period of tension. In August 2011, Israeli aircraft pursuing Palestinian terrorists fleeing into Sinai accidentally killed five Egyptian police officers. In response, Egyptian protesters stormed part of the Israeli embassy in Cairo in September and were close to confronting Israeli diplomats until Egyptian commandos rescued them in response to a U.S. request. Some Egyptian leaders made comments about the need

to change the peace treaty with Israel to remove restrictions on Sinai troop deployments.<sup>4</sup>

In line with the Obama administration's support of democracy in Egypt, the United States helped new political parties prepare for elections. In late December 2011, as part of a criminal investigation into the foreign funding of NGOs, Egyptian police raided the offices of unregistered U.S.-based international NGOs working on election monitoring, political party training, and government transparency. Egypt had long contended that NGOs could not work in Egypt unless they were registered, and although the NGOs had long applied for registration, they never received approval but had operated publicly for years. After the raid, Egypt barred some U.S. NGO employees from leaving Egypt, and in February 2012 nineteen Americans were charged with crimes for spending money from unlicensed NGOs. Ultimately, the Americans were allowed to leave Egypt through diplomatic channels, but their escape caused repercussions that undermined the military relationship for years, and they were formally convicted and sentenced in absentia in 2013.

Another incident followed. In September 2012, protesters scaled the walls of the U.S. embassy, wielded spray paint, and tore down the U.S. flag. The Egyptian government and EAF did not act quickly to secure the embassy. The next day, President Obama remarked that Egypt was not an ally or an enemy.

Newly elected president Morsi also faced stiff opposition and was seen as ruling for the Muslim Brotherhood and not Egyptians. In November 2012, Morsi issued a constitutional declaration that divided Egyptians, giving him exceptional powers and immunity from the judiciary. There were few checks on Morsi, and the parliament had been previously dissolved by the SCAF. Morsi's declaration sparked a series of protests throughout the country as it grew increasingly unstable, and the United States worried about the Egyptian government's ability to maintain control and preserve basic governance. Many non-Islamist Egyptians accused America of overly favoring Morsi in the coming months.

The Egyptian revolution, the actions of the SCAF and Morsi, the attack on the Israeli embassy, the talk of modifying the peace treaty with Israel, the NGO incident, and the storming of the U.S. embassy renewed debate

among U.S. military and diplomatic officials, the U.S. administration, and Congress about the purpose of the aid and how it aligned with American values. Previous cooperation had been with just two Egyptian governments for more than thirty years and was predicated on the assumption of stability in Egypt. There were widespread calls to suspend, reduce, or reform the aid program. There were new concerns that the EAF was not geared to address current threats and instability in Sinai. Even some supporters thought continuing to allow the EAF to procure jets and tanks was not in keeping with the current environment and that it enabled the EAF to dominate society. Others believed the aid should only be used for counterterrorism and border security, and some said to condition aid on cooperation with Israel and commitment to the peace treaty, economic and political reform, human rights, and democracy. A few voices advocated switching the military aid to other types of aid that would directly support democracy and the economy.

Another side argued that conditioning or changing the aid overestimated the role that America could play in Egypt, and that doing so would increase resentment. The purpose of the aid was to maintain the relationship with the EAF to buy access to Egypt decisionmakers at times of crisis. These proponents praised the EAF's role in the revolution for not supporting the government and not firing on protesters as happened in other Arab Spring nations. Although the EAF's and the SCAF's performances had not been stellar during the transition period in crackdowns on protesters or a smooth passage of the country to civilian rule, they pointed out that the EAF was not trained to deal with protesters and maintain civil order. All in all, the EAF's performance had been acceptable.<sup>5</sup>

## **Conditionality of Aid**

In any policy debate on aid, Congress was the ultimate arbiter and began to condition aid in 2012. Under the new conditions, the aid would be withheld unless the U.S. secretary of state certified that Egypt was adhering to the 1979 peace treaty, transitioning to civilian government, holding free and fair elections, and implementing policies that enabled freedom of expression, religion, association, and due process of law. The FMF funds would

no longer be automatically disbursed but held until the certifications were met and would be released in two annual tranches instead of all at once. This policy ended the early disbursement of FMF into the Federal Reserve Bank, although when a tranche was released, it could still earn interest in the Federal Reserve, which could be used for procurements.<sup>6</sup> An exemption allowed the administration to waive the certification if it was in U.S. security interests. Given the situation in Egypt at the time, the administration could not certify that the conditions were met, but neither could it exercise the waiver without risking a congressional backlash.

The conditionality aggravated an already existing cash flow financing crisis. Because payments for U.S. defense items could be stretched into the future and Egypt decided before the revolution to procure many expensive items, the country had problems making monthly payments to U.S. defense contractors. Although the Defense Security Cooperation Agency could probably make the payments, it came at the expense of fewer equipment maintenance funds.<sup>7</sup> Egypt typically had more than \$2.5 billion in outstanding payments to U.S. defense companies stretching years into the future. Without funds being released and guarantees of future funding, Egypt would default on payments and incur financial penalties. Ultimately, the United States would have to assume this liability if Egypt could not commit national funds to make the payments, which was unlikely given Egypt's poor economy. If the U.S. government did not make the payments, U.S. defense companies would be severely damaged, especially the smaller ones.<sup>8</sup> By March 2012, the FMF funding from previous years was almost exhausted and Egypt risked defaulting. It was only then that Congress began to realize that cutting off aid would obligate the United States to pay billions to defense contractors. Cutting aid would take years and place the United States in a contractual and funding quagmire. U.S. defense companies were told to slow down production of Egyptian items to buy time.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton exercised the national security waiver on March 23, 2012, releasing FMF funding just as existing funds were running out. The decision was hard for the administration because of the situation in Egypt, and Congress criticized it. Requirements for FMF funding for 2013 were the same as those in 2012, and Secretary of State John Kerry exercised

the waiver in May 2013, again as funding was running out. Even with the national security waivers, payment schedules remained tight, and there were no more new buys or releases of new equipment to Egypt; funding was used for maintenance, upgrades, items already purchased, or ammunition for existing systems.

EAF leaders were furious with conditionality, and their anger was coupled with a growing bitterness toward perceived reliance on America. Activists and EAF officers believed the aid was not in Egypt's interests. An opinion survey in Egypt found that 80 percent of Egyptians opposed U.S. military aid as leading to an assault on national sovereignty and permitting America to interfere in Egyptian affairs.<sup>9</sup> In February 2012, popular campaigns endorsed by the Egyptian government and Al-Azhar University began to raise money through charitable contributions to replace FMF funding.<sup>10</sup>

Egyptian politicians stoked anti-U.S. and anti-Israel attitudes to shift anger from the slow political transition and economic difficulties. The United States was disliked for its long relationship with Mubarak and its promotion of democracy, which Egyptians felt amounted to meddling in domestic affairs. The press accused the United States of supplying money to political parties and street protesters to cause instability. Some—longing for the stability of the Mubarak years—accused the Obama administration of inciting the 2011 revolution and then supporting the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood. In a May 2012 poll, 85 percent of Egyptians had unfavorable views of the United States.<sup>11</sup> The negative views were attributable to U.S. support for Israel and the 2003 invasion of Iraq, although previously U.S. favorability in Egypt had improved with the election of Obama, when, in 2010, only 29 percent had negative views of the United States.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the frictions in the relationship, Military Cooperation Committee meetings occurred in Cairo in November 2012 and senior delegations from both sides attended. At the MCC, U.S. officials hoped to push the EAF away from conventional war and emphasize civilian control of the military. But the primary purpose was to maintain the relationship. The MCC followed the normal patterns of past MCCs with Egypt focused on specifics of individual weapons transactions and the need to release additional equipment. U.S. talk of restructuring the EAF to meet current threats was brushed aside.

## **Morsi's Removal and Sisi's Rise**

Morsi's rule was short-lived. In the first half of 2013, popular opposition to Morsi increased because of his overreach for power, the perception that he ruled for the Muslim Brotherhood, and the continued dismal economic situation. In late June, millions of Egyptians took to the streets to demand the removal of Morsi. With Egypt descending into chaos, most Egyptians again called on the EAF to intervene. On July 3, Sisi ordered the arrest of Morsi and began a campaign against the Brotherhood. Sisi suspended the constitution and appointed the chief of Egypt's Supreme Constitutional Court, Adly Mansour, as interim president, although real power was concentrated with Sisi and the EAF. Despite previous beliefs, Sisi was no supporter of the Brotherhood. A central question was whether the EAF had conducted a military coup against Morsi or whether the action was the result of a popular revolution, similar to 2011.

Clashes between pro-Morsi and pro-Sisi supporters followed, culminating on August 14 when the EAF and police broke up two pro-Morsi sit-ins in Cairo, killing at least 1,150.<sup>13</sup> The actions were internationally condemned as the worst mass killings in modern Egyptian history. A crackdown on all Brotherhood supporters followed with mass arrests. In November, Egypt implemented a demonstration law requiring government approval before protests, which opposition groups labeled as an assault on basic rights. In December, the Egyptian government formally designated the Brotherhood as a terrorist group and outlawed it as terrorist acts spread across Egypt from Sinai-based insurgents, which the government linked to the Brotherhood and even leftist protesters.

After a national referendum on a new constitution in January 2014, Interim President Mansour promoted Sisi to field marshal. Sisi later resigned from the EAF and was elected president in May 2014. Sisi reportedly won with 97 percent of the vote in a restrictive political atmosphere, with an election turnout of between 35 and 47.5 percent.

After becoming president, Sisi continued to rule by decree in an authoritarian manner while the civil government was a facade for the power of

the EAF. The government increased investigations and prosecution of its opponents; issued mass death sentences; prohibited freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association; and weakened civil society. Egypt jailed homosexuals and atheists and was the second-highest nation in the world for jailed journalists. In August 2015, Sisi approved an antiterrorism law that established expedited trials, increased police and judicial power, and imposed fines for journalists who contradicted the official press.

Although the Sisi government was harsher than Mubarak's, many Egyptians preferred it to what was happening in other nations in the region. According to a 2015 opinion poll, the EAF was still highly regarded, at 68 percent, and confidence in Sisi was at 61 percent.<sup>14</sup> In the United States, Sisi received some positive support for his call for a reformation in Islam, emphasizing the need for greater discourse between religions, renunciations of misinterpretations of Islam, and promotion of Islam as a religion of peace and tolerance.

## **The Post-Morsi Relationship**

On July 3, 2013, following Morsi's removal, President Obama issued a statement expressing concern with the EAF's actions and suspension of the constitution. He called on the EAF to quickly return power to a democratically elected government and to refrain from arresting Morsi supporters. The United States did not make a determination of whether a coup had occurred, which by law would have prohibited military aid except for paying contract termination costs to U.S. defense contractors.<sup>15</sup> The events in Egypt intensified debate about the aid and, to buy time with Congress, the Obama administration on July 24 suspended the delivery of four F-16s. The administration also began a lengthy review of U.S. assistance to Egypt.

On August 15, the day after the violent breakup of pro-Morsi sit-ins in Cairo, Obama condemned the violence and called for the interim government to respect human rights. Obama canceled the Bright Star exercise that was scheduled for September and said it was not possible to continue traditional cooperation. The administration postponed the MCC meetings

scheduled for October. In a September 2013 address to the UN, Obama said that Morsi had been democratically elected but did not govern in an inclusive manner. The interim government that removed Morsi had answered the call of millions of Egyptians, but it also was not governing democratically. The United States would maintain a relationship with the interim government but would suspend the delivery of certain weapons.

## **U.S. Executive Actions on Arms Transfers**

On October 9, 2013, the Obama administration announced the results of its review of assistance to Egypt and said it would focus on shared interests, defined as border and maritime security, counterterrorism, and activities related to securing Sinai. The administration suspended the delivery of certain items that did not support the shared interests: twelve F-16s, 109 M1A1 tank kits to be assembled in Cairo, twenty Harpoon missiles, and ten AH-64 Apaches, as well as one Apache that was in the United States for testing. The items were placed in storage in the United States if they had already been manufactured. The administration made the items' future delivery contingent on Egypt's progress toward democracy. The administration also said it might later resume support of existing U.S. equipment procured by Egypt even if it did not support the shared interests. Before this decision, the United States had placed few restrictions on FMF but, of course, had been trying to get the EAF to refocus for years. This action was the first time the United States had ever suspended Egypt's FMF procurements. The suspension was an executive action, not congressional, so it could be adjusted in the future without being bound by law.

By spring 2014, as the situation in Sinai deteriorated, Egypt had repeatedly asked for the release of the Apaches for fighting insurgents. After lobbying from Gulf nations and Israel, the administration announced it would release the Apaches because they were required for counterterrorism. Lobbying had been particularly strong from Israel, which was exposed to insurgent rocket attacks from Sinai. The Apaches did not arrive in Egypt until November 2014. The other suspended items remained in the United States.

After the decision to hold some deliveries, the DSCA led a review of the

FMF program to align it with the identified shared interests—border and maritime security, Sinai development, and counterterrorism—to determine whether the United States should continue to use FMF to support systems not aligned with those interests. The DSCA identified numerous systems that did not align, such as M1A1 tank kits, Gulfstream VIP aircraft, and some non-U.S.-manufactured equipment, including Chinese submarines and Russian missiles with U.S.-installed components for modernization. The DSCA also identified some FMF-financed modern U.S. systems that should be supported, despite not contributing to the core shared interests. Allowing such systems to go nonoperational for lack of spare parts would have been antithetical to the total-package-approach of the Foreign Military Sales system. In the end, of the systems outside the core interests, the DSCA recommended continuing support for eighteen but stopping support for fifteen, which would then be transferred to Egyptian funding or terminated.<sup>16</sup>

As the administration considered its choices after suspending the aid, some advocated ending it. But examination revealed that stopping the FMF program would have a major impact on the U.S. defense sector with companies spread across the United States. Because of cash flow financing, it would take years and ensnare America in a contractual mess. Egypt's FMF program provided well over several thousand jobs in the United States for companies that manufactured equipment, produced spare parts, did maintenance, and gave technical assistance. For example, FMF support of Egyptian naval frigates meant that \$2.5 million in monthly salaries went to 685 employees in several U.S. companies. There were approximately five hundred U.S. employees involved in the manufacture of Egyptian fast missile craft. Boeing, which manufactured Egypt's Apache helicopters, had vendors spanning twenty-five U.S. states. It was estimated that ending Egypt's procurement of F-16s manufactured by Lockheed Martin would cause the loss of more than \$1.2 billion of direct income to the U.S. economy over the life of the program.<sup>17</sup> The U.S. defense sector, which benefited greatly from Egypt's FMF program, had powerful influence and friends in many U.S. states and the support of politicians, further complicating the situation.

Another factor was how to pay for a shutdown. In October 2013, Egypt's FMF debt was approximately \$3.2 billion, but the FMF Trust Fund had only

\$591 million from which an average monthly payment of \$150 million was to be made to U.S. defense contractors. Funding to cover the difference would be paid for with future years' FMF. If the FMF was halted, either Egypt could use its national funds to pay the remaining debt, which was unlikely, or the United States would make up the difference and take possession of the equipment or try to sell it to other countries. But the United States had no need of this equipment, and it was unlikely that other countries would purchase it because qualitative military edge restrictions meant that many of the weapons were not the latest generation. The FMF program included a plan in case the program was terminated: the United States maintained a management reserve taken from Egypt's FMF appropriations to pay defense contractors to stop production, bring their assembly lines to a close, and pay contract cancellation fees. This possibility was included in all FMF contracts. However, in October 2013, the estimated termination costs were \$2.3 billion, while there was only \$584 million in the management reserve. An abrupt halt to the program would be extremely costly to the United States.

As mentioned, the administration did not make a decision as to whether or not a coup had occurred. However, the State Department decided that assistance to Egypt should be adjusted as if one had. U.S. Consolidated Appropriations Acts prohibit foreign assistance to a government whose elected head was deposed in a coup. This policy was applied to all FMF funding obligated after the events of July 2013. Since 2012, the FMF funding had been obligated in two yearly tranches. In 2013, the first tranche had been obligated before the coup, so it could be spent as normal, as could remaining funding from previous years, while the second tranche was obligated after the coup, which meant restrictions applied to it; it could be used only to pay for terminating existing contracts with U.S. defense contractors. In practice, however, the intent was to bring contracts to an orderly end rather than terminate them suddenly, although this would be further complicated with the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014.<sup>18</sup>

These factors, coupled with Egypt's decision to acquire multiple large platforms in previous years, led to an unprecedented near-daily struggle by the DSCA to pay for Egyptian contracts. Sustainment of existing equipment suffered greatly, and the DSCA estimated it was only a matter of months

before it was unable to pay defense contractors, meaning the United States would have to provide additional funding through other congressional appropriations to pay for the Egyptian program, or even to terminate it.

## **Congressional Actions**

After the EAF's overthrow of Morsi in July 2013, U.S. lawmakers also aimed to put restrictions on military aid to Egypt until it took tangible steps toward democratic benchmarks. The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014 allowed aid to go forward but with new restraints. The act made available up to \$1.3 billion in FMF that could be spent but did not specifically direct the U.S. administration to spend that full amount for Egypt, as in past years. It contained special language exempting Egypt from clauses in other laws that required aid be cut off if a coup had occurred, since neither Congress nor the U.S. administration wanted to completely cut the aid given its role in the overall bilateral relationship. But, most significantly, there was no national security waiver that the administration could use to avoid some of the conditions Congress imposed.

The 2014 aid was condition based, and specific amounts of FMF funding would be released as certifications were met. For any 2014 FMF to be used, the secretary of state had to certify that Egypt was maintaining the peace treaty with Israel and continuing strategic cooperation with the United States. Secretary Kerry made this certification in April 2014, which was intended to release half of Egypt's 2014 FMF, or \$650 million. However, Congress held back \$87 million to cover the costs to maintain and later ship the Apaches, tank kits, F-16s, and missiles on hold in the United States and released only \$572 million. But this funding could not be used to procure new equipment or enter into new contracts, interrupting the normal flow of the program, and could only be used to pay the minimum rate necessary to maintain existing contracts. Any items from these contracts could not be delivered to Egypt and had to be in U.S. storage until other conditions were met. As well as blocking the delivery of major equipment, the rules also prevented the delivery of spare parts, which the EAF needed to maintain its equipment. The EAF and U.S. defense contractors in Egypt could perform maintenance with spare

parts they had on hand, but a modern military requires continuous delivery of new spare parts. In addition, Egypt frequently shipped equipment such as aircraft engines to the United States for overhaul, but these items could not be returned to Egypt using 2014 FMF.

For FMF to be spent in the traditional manner in implementing new contracts and delivering items, the administration had to make two further certifications: (1) Egypt had held a constitutional referendum and was taking steps to support a transition to democracy, and (2) Egypt had held parliamentary and presidential elections and the new government was taking steps to govern democratically. Each of the two certifications would release a certain amount of FMF funding, although the exact amounts were not specified. At the time, U.S. officials and international organizations had criticized the lack of progress toward democracy, so it was impossible to make those certifications.

The 2014 act, however, did contain a security exemption allowing for items related to border security, counterterrorism, and Sinai development to be funded—both in new contracts and delivery—although the law did not define what these items were or how much could be spent.<sup>19</sup> About \$80 million in FMF was spent under this security exemption, on items that included radar systems, vehicles, aircraft, and border security equipment.<sup>20</sup>

Throughout 2014, the DSCA struggled to make payments for existing contracts, and it was believed that the program was at high risk for termination, meaning the aforementioned management reserve would need to be spent on terminating the program. The management reserve was also insufficient, however, because it often had to be used to make payments on contracts. By the end of September 2014, there was still \$728 million in FMF that had not been released.<sup>21</sup> FMF funding for a specific year is normally available only for a two-year period.

## **Effects on the EAF**

The U.S. executive and legislative actions shocked the EAF and had an unprecedented negative effect on the FMF program, the readiness of the EAF, and the overall U.S.-Egypt relationship because the aid was the central

part of it. It changed the basis underlying the aid from only peace with Israel to peace with Israel and democracy. The Egyptians complained that the peace was in place but that the aid had practically stopped under so many restrictions.

U.S. officers assessed the EAF's overall readiness at an all-time low. The four principal U.S. military teams that worked and lived on EAF bases to support U.S.-provided systems were withdrawn due to a lack of funding. In the past, sometimes their work had been interrupted with temporary evacuations because of instability, but now they permanently left. The CH-47 helicopter team established in September 1988 departed in December 2014. The Apache helicopter team established in February 1993 departed in June 2015. The F-16 team and a team supporting the EAF's U.S.-made Kaman SH-2D helicopters also departed, as well as teams of U.S. contractors supporting other systems. The only notable team that remained in place was a small one of a few personnel who assisted the Ministry of Defense Language Institute with English language training.

The Egyptians were now maintaining their U.S.-supplied weapon systems and other equipment on their own but without the benefit of U.S. new spare parts, maintenance support, and funding. Office of Military Cooperation officers at the U.S. embassy tried to canvass the EAF as best they could to determine the impacts. Although their assessment likely did not reflect the true extent of the damage, they found, for example, that nine of thirty-five Apaches were grounded, and there were also reports that F-16s and C-130 cargo aircraft were in the same state. Fifty percent of Stinger missiles and 60 percent of Chaparral ground-to-air missile systems were inoperable. Seventy-five percent of SPS-48 ground radars were nonoperational. Ships and other naval craft were no longer being maintained. Dozens of weapon systems in all EAF services were becoming inoperable as well as border surveillance systems. The commander of Egyptian border guard forces refused to meet with OMC personnel and demanded that his programs be funded with Egyptian national funding because of the unreliability of FMF.<sup>22</sup>

The tank plant, which employed several thousand workers, lacked tank kits and shut down, sparking fear that job losses could lead to strikes and disruptions in other military factories. No new International Military Education

and Training funding was available to send officers to U.S. military schools, and only three attended U.S.-sponsored training in 2014, as opposed to sixty-five who attended in 2013.<sup>23</sup> Likewise, no further Military Cooperation Committee meetings had been held since 2012, with no Bright Star exercises since 2009.

EAF senior leaders were furious that the United States allowed major weapon systems to deteriorate. The hold on key weapon deliveries and aid restrictions coincided with and contributed to growing anti-U.S. rhetoric. Some Egyptians believed that the United States and the Muslim Brotherhood had shared interests, and that the Obama administration had helped Morsi reach power, collaborated with him while he was in office, and sided with him in the lead-up to and after his removal. Egyptians tied the weapons suspension and FMF restrictions to what they perceived as Obama's policy of supporting the Brotherhood.<sup>24</sup>

Regardless of the intent of suspending weapons and conditioning FMF, the U.S. actions did not lead to democracy. The situation grew worse with draconian new laws and growing repression. Security in Sinai deteriorated, which some connected to the U.S. hold on Apaches and other military aid. But to some U.S. policymakers, Sisi's Egypt was better than what was happening elsewhere in the region. The Israelis wanted a stable Egypt more than a democratic one, said that the peace with Egypt was based on U.S. military support, and expressed concern to Congress and the administration on the reduction of U.S.-Egypt military cooperation.

Egyptian leaders contended that U.S. officials and lawmakers did not understand the situation in Egypt and only had a limited understanding of terrorism, and that the U.S. fight against terrorism needed to expand to include the Muslim Brotherhood and Libya. Egyptian leaders perceived that the fight against the Brotherhood, which they considered to be the backers of all Islamist terrorism, was a fight for survival. In these circumstances, no matter what the United States did, it would not change Egyptian behavior.

In spite of the restrictions, Egypt played an important part in negotiations between Israel and Hamas in their 2014 Gaza war and joined the U.S. coalition against the Islamic State in 2015, although it did not contribute troops. Egypt's participation, while mainly symbolic, remained important

due to its potential value in uniting Arabs and the world Muslim community against the IS threat. Egypt continued to provide its traditional support to the United States with ship passages through the Suez Canal and military overflights but hinted that if the current situation continued, these benefits could be halted.<sup>25</sup>

## **Egypt Turns to New Partners**

After years of U.S. refusals to allow the procurement of advanced weapons such as F-15s and advanced air-to-air missiles, plus the U.S. stance following June 2013, Egypt concluded that it could no longer allow a single nation to have a monopoly over its national security as it rebalanced its international relations. Egypt preferred U.S. weapons but had no choice but to turn to others and diversify because the United States could no longer meet Egypt's security needs. The latest U.S. actions more than justified the rebalancing in the eyes of the EAF and senior Egyptian leadership, who felt that the United States was an unreliable partner.<sup>26</sup> Major defense items must be replaced after thirty-five years, and the EAF had been receiving U.S. weapons since the early 1980s. The EAF would seek out new partners, knowing full well that this change would lock it into a thirty-to-forty-year relationship with them. Although other nations would not give military aid like FMF, they also would not apply the same level of scrutiny to Egypt's human rights and democratization records. In addition, other suppliers would not have the overly complicated U.S. regulatory obstacles, meaning weapons could be delivered sooner. By turning to other sources, Egypt also sent a larger message that its subordination to the United States was over, and it would no longer be subject to U.S. pressure.

Between 1980 and 2014, the United States was the major supplier of arms to Egypt. In 2016–20, Russia accounted for 41 percent of Egypt's imports, France 28 percent, and the United States 8.7 percent.<sup>27</sup> Accurate details of how Egypt paid for the new weapons are unknown. Gulf states granted Egypt support with \$30 billion between 2013 and 2016. The EAF took direct control of some of this funding, but the amount used for weapons versus

other projects is unknown. The EAF's economic holdings also provided for some of the procurements, as did French loans valued at \$4 billion.

The Gulf states had opposed Morsi's rule and supported Sisi, but tensions sometimes arose with Saudi Arabia, which wanted a greater role for Egypt in Yemen and a more confrontational approach with Iran. Both Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the largest of the Gulf donors, saw the EAF as a potential security provider to support their interests and part of the Sunni axis to counter Iran. Saudi Arabia believed it had replaced Egypt as the leader in the region but valued Egypt for the size of the EAF and its potential to protect Arab states. Egypt wanted to ensure that the Saudis would continue their financial and diplomatic support. Egypt, however, did not want to commit significant land forces to Yemen, given that such a commitment would have suggested Egyptian subordination to the Saudis, rather than a relationship based on mutual benefit, as well as echo back to Egypt's disastrous intervention in North Yemen in the 1960s. But as the war in Yemen continued, Saudi Arabia needed Egyptian military and political support to counter Iran, and Sisi was able to maintain some independence from the Saudis, although the Yemen conflict did create tensions between the two nations. Sisi also supported the continuation of the rule of Bashar al-Assad in Syria, which differed from his Gulf partners, believed that tensions with Iran should be de-escalated, and came to see Gulf aid as an entitlement, adding to the differences. Regardless of the tensions and intricacies of how Egypt used Gulf funding, it further reduced U.S. influence in Egypt as Sisi took an independent approach to his foreign policy. In 2016, Egypt obtained a \$12 billion IMF loan, which allowed it to reduce its dependence on the Gulf although, of course, this funding could not be used for weapons procurements.

It was an easy decision for Egypt to turn to Russia, its weapons patron from 1955 to 1973, as a source of diversification. Russia, the previous competitor of the United States in the Middle East, did not miss the chance to advance its interests. Sisi and Russian president Vladimir Putin had mutual outlooks, and Sisi believed that Putin had a true understanding of the Middle East and terrorism. Counterterrorism needed to expand beyond the U.S.-led coalition against the Islamic State, and Russia and Egypt had a broader understanding of terrorist threats. Russia promised to quickly

address Egypt's defense needs, and Russian assistance came condition free. Russia weapons were less expensive than U.S. items and could typically be delivered in about two years from the time of purchase, much quicker than U.S. systems. Egypt and Russia established a Joint Commission on Military and Technical Cooperation, reviving the historic military relationship, and signed a strategic partnership for a decade in 2018.

From Russia, Egypt began the procurement of fifty MiG-29 fighters, forty-six Ka-52A attack helicopters, three S-300 missile systems, two thousand antitank missiles, advanced air-to-air missiles, and twenty-four Su-35 fighters in deals valued at about \$7.5 billion.<sup>28</sup> The MiG order was the largest since the fall of the Soviet Union and came with the R-77 fire-and-forget air-to-air missile, comparable to the AIM-120 (AMRAAM), although its range is only about eighty kilometers. The S-300 was believed to undermine the regional balance of power, and Israel had strongly opposed the sale of the same system to Iran because it could prevent a strike on Iranian nuclear capabilities. The Su-35 is evaluated as a competitor to the latest Western aircraft and could trigger U.S. sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), which requires the U.S. administration to impose sanctions on persons or entities that engage in significant transactions with the Russian defense and intelligence sectors.<sup>29</sup> The United States imposed sanctions on China for buying the same aircraft. Russia announced in February 2021 that Egypt had received the first five of the Su-35s, although this delivery is unconfirmed as of this writing.<sup>30</sup> The entire Su-35 transaction for Egypt is now believed to be at least temporarily suspended because of Western sanctions on Russia, which block Russia's import of certain Su-35 components that come from the United States, Europe, or Israel.<sup>31</sup>

Russia and Egypt also reached an agreement to allow each to use the other's bases and airspace, and there were reports of Russian special forces in Egypt to operate in Libya, which Egypt denied. The EAF is believed to be cooperating with Russia to upgrade its old Soviet-era MiG-21s to modern MiG-29s.<sup>32</sup> There is also discussion that Egypt will procure or coproduce four hundred to five hundred Russian T-90 tanks; however, announced Russian arms deals are not always carried through, and Russia is quick to report them in the press to annoy the United States.<sup>33</sup>

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 threw a major complication into the Egypt-Russia military relationship, with a round of new crushing Western sanctions on Moscow affecting normal military cooperation between Cairo and Moscow. As worldwide geopolitical shifts occur with unclear outcomes, Cairo is trying to walk a tightrope between Moscow and the West. Initially, Cairo signed onto an Arab League statement that did not condemn the Russian invasion and instead called for diplomacy, but facing international pressure, on March 2, 2022, Egypt voted to condemn the invasion at the UN General Assembly. Still, Sisi was quick to call Putin and explain the reasons for the vote, and he stressed both his eagerness to resume normal cooperation and the position that Egypt is not turning away from Russia.<sup>34</sup> However, Egypt is now believed to be completely reconsidering its Su-35 deal with Moscow given the Western reaction to the invasion of Ukraine.<sup>35</sup>

From France, the EAF began the procurement of five frigates, three of which were to be coproduced in Egypt, two Mistral helicopter-bearing amphibious assault vessels, twenty-four Rafale jets, and fifty Storm Shadow (SCALP) cruise missiles for the Rafales in deals estimated at more than \$8 billion.<sup>36</sup> Egypt bought the Rafale jets because the United States had delayed the delivery of new F-16s, and Egypt's existing F-16 fleet was passing its service life. Egypt was the first foreign buyer of the Rafale, one of the most advanced jets available on the international market. The Rafales came with the MICA fire-and-forget air-to-air missile, again comparable to the U.S. AIM-120 (AMRAAM) but with a range of only eighty kilometers. The naval vessels were to protect gas fields in the Eastern Mediterranean. In May 2021, Egypt signed a deal with France to purchase an additional thirty Rafales for \$4.5 billion. According to the EAF, the transaction will be financed through loans to be repaid over at least a ten-year period.<sup>37</sup> French president Emmanuel Macron said that he would not condition sales to Egypt on the basis of its human rights record because it was more important to have a dialogue on these matters and that conditions on sales would force Egypt to turn to Russia and China. Macron also stressed Egypt's role as a counterterrorism partner. As previously mentioned, a French aerial surveillance team operating along Egypt's western border with Libya provided the EAF with intelligence that was used to target suspected smugglers, killing several hundred.

Egypt developed military ties with China through weapon buys such as drones and antitank rockets. From Germany, Egypt started the procurement of four submarines for \$2 billion, a move that initially angered Israel because it could downgrade its QME.<sup>38</sup> However, Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu had secretly agreed to the sale; Germany did not need Netanyahu's approval but was committed to maintaining Israel's QME. Egypt will also coproduce four frigates in cooperation with a German company.<sup>39</sup> German arms sales to Egypt reached a new high in 2021, when the EAF received \$4.74 billion worth of equipment from Berlin, mainly air defense systems and maritime items.<sup>40</sup> Egypt procured two frigates from Italy for \$1.2 billion, with possible follow-on buys for four more frigates, twenty-four Eurofighter Typhoon jets, and twenty-four trainer aircraft that could exceed \$10 billion.<sup>41</sup> In early 2022, Egypt and South Korea signed a deal worth \$1.6 billion for K9 Thunder self-propelled howitzers, which includes their local production in Egypt.<sup>42</sup>

Although the United States has concerns about possible Russian basing in Egypt and the sale of advanced Russian weapons, it is also concerned that the new procurements affect Israel's QME because it can no longer control the quality and amounts of weapons Egypt receives. Ultimately, the Egyptian weapon buys are changing the status quo in the region and could affect the peace. Sales of French and Russian air-to-air missiles have pushed Egypt beyond the range of U.S.-provided fire-and-forget missile thresholds, which could potentially overturn Egypt's aerial inferiority.

But as Egypt acquires systems from multiple sources, further complicating training, maintenance, and operational capabilities, danger to Israel's QME, in a way, is reduced. The EAF will have equipment from the United States, Russia, France, China, Germany, Italy, South Korea, and Spain, among others. It will have to manage multiple defense relationships, obtain spare parts from multiple sources, and create complex capabilities that can repair and maintain dissimilar systems. Interoperability will be more difficult. For example, U.S. weapons are designed to interact with other U.S. or NATO systems. There is a danger that the EAF will become a hodgepodge of diverse weapon systems, each with unique capabilities that are not designed to interface with systems from other countries and will require costly upgrades,

modifications, and work-arounds. The EAF air force will have the most difficult task because the U.S. platforms Egypt uses for aerial command and control and early warning cannot communicate and share data with Russian or Chinese aircraft. Egypt has developed a work-around for this problem with an indigenously designed Radar Integration and Surveillance Command and Control system that allows data sharing between all aircraft, but its capabilities are still questionable and it has not been tested in combat.<sup>43</sup>

Many of the new systems are also fielded with only a fraction of their true capabilities, such as ships put into service without air defense and other systems. The EAF has been referred to as a *Jane's Defence Weekly* magazine army, more concerned about numbers than ensuring that the weapon systems are properly maintained, equipped, and integrated. In Egypt, however, the new procurements were described as having broken the U.S. monopoly on arming the EAF that had prevailed for more than thirty years.<sup>44</sup>

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# 5

## A New U.S. Approach to Bilateral Military Relations

In spring of 2015, the United States restored military aid to Egypt but with important new dimensions. The basis for the restoration was President Obama's reversal of his decision to withhold the delivery of items and the 2015 Consolidated Appropriations Act, which was similar to its 2014 counterpart but with several exceptions. If the secretary of state could not make democracy-related certifications, the aid would still be available at the rate necessary to maintain existing contracts and prevent their termination. The act also required the secretary of state to consult with Congress on the future restructuring of military assistance, including cash flow financing. But most significantly, it authorized the secretary of state to provide assistance to Egypt by waiving the democracy certification requirements in both the 2014 and 2015 acts if it was in U.S. national security interests.

Specifically, on March 31, 2015, Obama called Sisi to tell him the United States would resume the weapon deliveries. The U.S. administration would continue to request that Congress provide Egypt with \$1.3 billion in Foreign Military Financing annually, maintaining Egypt's position as the second-largest recipient of military aid. In the future, however, the aid would be used to support five categories only: counterterrorism, Sinai security, border

security, maritime security, and sustainment of already-procured U.S. equipment, a policy still in effect today. Most important, CFF would end in 2018, preventing Egypt from procuring large and expensive systems, another policy still in effect. In keeping with the resumption of aid, Secretary of State John Kerry exercised the national security waiver in May 2015, allowing the resumption of FMF funding in two annual tranches. The remainder of the 2014 FMF was also eventually released.

To offer some context, the United States was at this time concerned about the deteriorating situation in the region and particularly terrorism in Sinai. Washington wanted to support Cairo in its Sinai campaign and wanted Egypt to support it in the larger war against the Islamic State. The resumption of aid coincided with Egypt's announcement that it would participate in Saudi Arabia's operations in Yemen, a campaign the United States supported indirectly. The U.S. move was likewise motivated by Iranian actions in Yemen, Syria, and elsewhere, considering that the EAF was the largest Sunni army in the region. Egypt's turn to other partners such as Russia and France was a corresponding factor in the U.S. decision. In the past, the aid had kept Egypt in a nominally pro-U.S. position, but this position was now threatened. Overall, the United States had restored aid to Egypt because it was in American interests.

The end of CFF meant that the aid could no longer be used to buy large, expensive items with the payments stretched years into the future based on the assumption Congress would continue to appropriate the funding. Egypt no longer required these items, in the U.S. view, and now the aid would be used to pursue items that supported American interests. This arrangement would give Egypt more flexibility since it could procure items that were immediately required without the hindrance of the funds having been already spent on prestige equipment. The United States, meanwhile, would no longer face contractual obligations if FMF funding was reduced or eliminated in the future. By modernizing the aid to focus on five areas, the United States and Egypt could mutually support each other's shared interests by countering Cairo's most urgent threats, as identified by Washington. The United States had been trying to get the EAF to refocus for years, and now it was talking with its aid.

From the U.S. side, there was criticism of the new approach. It was unclear how the administration would determine which items were useful in confronting the new threats since some U.S. officials stated that items such as F-16s and tanks were useful for counterterrorism. With the new focus on counterterrorism and the changes, some believed the aid's connection to the peace with Israel had been downgraded. The end of CFF lessened the aid's symbolism indicating Egypt's special position and reduced chances of a closer U.S.-Egypt relationship.<sup>1</sup> Human rights critics of Egypt, for their part, felt betrayed by the U.S. administration's shift away from tying aid to democracy.

In Egypt, the media and the government spun the resumption of aid as connected to Egypt's efforts to overcome submission to America. In this framing, Egypt's situation and actions resulted in U.S. aid that could no longer be used to apply leverage. Another opinion was that the United States was forced to resume aid because of the rise of the Islamic State and the deteriorating situation in Sinai.<sup>2</sup> A stable Egypt thus was needed in the volatile region that could assist in the fight against terrorism. Government supporters believed that, at first, the United States had backed the Muslim Brotherhood and political Islam in Egypt, but it failed, and the United States was now compelled to work with Sisi despite Egypt's growing authoritarianism.<sup>3</sup> The Egyptians were shocked with the end of CFF and that the aid could only be used in the five categories and hoped that the next U.S. president would restore the aid to its previous form.<sup>4</sup> The EAF still saw U.S. aid as important because it was from the world's most powerful military and came in the form of grants not requiring the use of national funds or funding from other countries. When Egypt turned to other sources of weapons, it did not describe what it did as a break with the United States but a rebalancing.<sup>5</sup>

The United States delivered eight F-16s in July 2015 and four more in October, which the American ambassador to Egypt described as a step in U.S.-Egypt cooperation in "fighting terrorism" and "bringing stability to the region."<sup>6</sup> In October 2015, production at the Egyptian tank factory resumed with the delivery of tank kits, labeled by the senior U.S. defense representative in Cairo as providing Egypt with "a strong economic and security capability" with jobs and the means to fight extremism.<sup>7</sup> The United

States also looked to the resumption of the biennial Bright Star exercise.<sup>8</sup>

In August 2015, Secretary Kerry was in Cairo for a Strategic Dialogue session with Egypt's foreign minister, the first such meeting since 2009.<sup>9</sup> During the meetings, Kerry indicated that the relationship with Egypt was not based on perfectly agreeing but on shared interests such as "regional stability and counterterrorism."<sup>10</sup> The talks mainly focused on counterterrorism, and Kerry said that Egypt could not defeat terrorism unless it showed greater concern with human rights. The dialogue was meant to rebuild the ties with Egypt after the earlier U.S. suspension of deliveries and conditioning of aid.<sup>11</sup> However, even with the renewal of aid, but in a new form, the countries' differences over the ousting of Morsi proved to be a hurdle, and the talks failed to change Egypt's views of U.S. policy.<sup>12</sup> An Egyptian press editorial described the Strategic Dialogue as not a dialogue and not strategic.<sup>13</sup>

Relations between Sisi and Obama never recovered from the Washington stoppage of weapon deliveries and Sisi's perception that Obama wanted to court the Muslim Brotherhood. In the end, the U.S. administration's actions during the transitional period had pleased no one, not Congress, the EAF, or America's friends in the region.<sup>14</sup>

## **U.S.-Egypt Ties During the Trump Administration**

Egypt continues to view the United States as its most important bilateral partner in spite of the diversification of its sources of arms.<sup>15</sup> U.S. equipment is still procured with FMF, while systems from other countries must be financed, and U.S.-Egypt relations during the Trump era were described as the best ever. The Trump administration worked to improve ties with Egypt, and Trump praised Sisi's counterterrorism efforts while largely overlooking his human rights abuses. The two men appeared to have a chemistry between them, and Trump referred to Sisi as his "favorite dictator."<sup>16</sup> Trump called Sisi within three days of taking office and invited him to the White House twice, while Obama had never invited Sisi. In 2019, a large sign appeared on the outskirts of the U.S. embassy in Cairo in an area controlled by Egyptian security forces. The sign featured a picture of Sisi and Trump and read in

English, “A tribute to the American leader Donald Trump who supports the Egyptian people and respects their right to defend their lives, security, and stability of their country.”<sup>17</sup> U.S. popularity in Egypt increased during the Trump era, and in an opinion poll conducted in November 2020, 52 percent of Egyptians believed that good relations with the United States were important, while 55 percent had the same belief about China.<sup>18</sup>

However, Trump did not restore cash flow financing or change the requirement that FMF must be used within the five categories of counterterrorism, Sinai security, border security, and maritime security—all of which are largely related to irregular warfare—and sustainment of existing U.S. equipment. Egypt was disappointed that the relationship did not improve as much as expected under Trump.<sup>19</sup> Trump’s secretary of state Mike Pompeo and secretary of defense Mark Esper threatened to impose the Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act on Egypt if it continued with the Russian Su-35 buy and said the sanctions would complicate U.S. military assistance. But when there were tensions in the relationship, most of the blame was not directed at Trump but his larger administration and Congress, and Trump was quick to tell Sisi that holdups and cuts in aid were a mistake.<sup>20</sup>

Internationally, U.S. and Egyptian interests did not always coincide. Besides Egypt’s dealings with Russia and not aligning with the U.S. position during the Libyan civil war, Egypt supports the continuation of the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria, in contradiction of U.S. policy. In 2018, U.S. national security advisor John Bolton asked Egypt to contribute troops to replace U.S. forces in Syria, which went unanswered. Sisi also pulled out of the Trump administration’s efforts to form the Middle East Strategic Alliance, or Arab NATO, designed to counter Iran, because he did not want to increase tensions with Iran. Egypt maintained ties with North Korea and allowed North Korean diplomats to use their Cairo embassy as a front for selling weapons in the region. One of the EAF’s main military businesses was suspected of trying to buy thirty thousand North Korean rocket-propelled grenades in 2016 after an old North Korean transport ship was intercepted off Egypt’s coast, in violation of UN and U.S. sanctions. Egypt denied it tried to buy the RPGs and has said it has since reduced the size of the North Korean embassy and

monitors its remaining diplomats. While Sisi praised U.S.-backed efforts to normalize Israel's relations with its Arab neighbors, Egypt's official position is that any comprehensive peace must include a sovereign Palestinian territory, a position from which the Trump administration had moved away. Israel, for its part, encouraged Trump not to reduce military aid to Egypt since it would harm the overall Egypt-Israel relationship and the peace.<sup>21</sup>

Sisi and Trump maintained a close relationship despite their nations' conflicting positions on some international issues, and Cairo hoped Trump would win a second term of office. In a rare departure for Trump in late December 2020, he criticized a U.S. Covid pandemic relief bill that contained the annual \$1.3 billion FMF grant for Egypt and said Cairo would use the funding to procure Russian weapons. While on the surface this assertion is untrue, Trump likely meant FMF allowed Egypt to use its national funds to procure weapons from others.

It was also reported that Esper, Trump's defense secretary, had pushed to end the U.S. troop presence in the Sinai-based Multinational Force & Observers (MFO), which monitors the peace between Egypt and Israel, as part of the U.S. plan to reduce forces in the Middle East and as a cost-saving measure. U.S. troops make up 40 percent of the MFO, and both Israel and Egypt want to maintain the American role. Cairo sees the MFO in its present form as essential to the peace. The U.S. State Department opposed Esper's push, and the force remains in place today. The discussion about reducing the U.S. role in the MFO is not unique to the Trump administration and arises from time to time.<sup>22</sup>

## **Trump-Era Changes in the Military Relationship**

Some major changes in the military relationship occurred during the Trump presidency. One of the most significant involved Egypt's signing of a CISMOA in January 2018 after having rejected it for thirty years. The move was not covered in the Egyptian press for fear of a possible negative public reaction, and the Muslim Brotherhood labeled it an infringement on Egyptian sovereignty.<sup>23</sup> Many have speculated about why Sisi agreed to the CISMOA, but the truth is it resulted from Egypt's short involvement with its F-16s in

the Saudi coalition in Yemen. Egypt's F-16s were unable to operate with the coalition nations, whose aircraft communicated using U.S. CISMOA-supplied equipment, and were told to go home.<sup>24</sup> This rejection was a huge blow to the EAF's pride, forcing it and Sisi to agree to the CISMOA.

Technically, the United States can now supply Egypt with longer-range air-to-air and precision air-to-ground munitions and other systems, and Cairo is now willing to use its national funds for portions of U.S. procurements. The first possible sell of CISMOA-related items came in November 2018 when Egypt requested new AH-64E Apache helicopters with CISMOA-related equipment, but the deal was nixed by the U.S. Senate over a demand for compensation, unheeded by Egypt, for April Corley, the U.S. survivor of the 2015 Egyptian Apache airstrike that had mistakenly targeted tourists in Egypt's Western Desert. In place of that request, in May 2020, Egypt asked to refurbish its older AH-64D Apaches to the newer AH-64E model, which included CISMOA-related items, for a price tag of \$2.3 billion.<sup>25</sup> Of this amount, Cairo will pay \$1 billion using Egyptian national funds, a major departure for Cairo, which normally would use the Foreign Military Financing grant aid for most U.S. procurements.<sup>26</sup> Congress was notified of the Apache refurbishment deal, and the request had already passed Israeli QME objections, which mainly focus on fixed-wing aircraft and precision-guided munitions, not helicopters. The EAF F-16s are also being equipped with U.S. targeting pods for precision targeting for border security and counterterrorism. However, Egypt requested several other items requiring a CISMOA, even using national funds if necessary, but the requests were not acted on for QME reasons.<sup>27</sup> Requests for AIM-120 AMRAAMs and the F-15s were continuously denied, and a commitment by Trump to Sisi for the sale of F-35s was subsequently turned down at every level in follow-up requests.<sup>28</sup> Cairo was offered an alternative to the F-35 that met its military requirements in the eyes of Washington, but that was not the point of the EAF's pursuit to acquire the fighter.<sup>29</sup> Israel has the F-35, and the EAF wanted it to attempt a perceived military parity with the IDF, and for the prestige of operating the most advanced Western fighter.<sup>30</sup> The issue will only become more aggravated by the Trump administration's decision to sell F-35s to the UAE, which the Biden administration also subsequently approved. Ironically,

Sisi's request to procure Su-35s from Russia came after the United States failed to act on Egypt's request for F-35s.<sup>31</sup>

Egypt has also begun hosting Joint Combined Exchange Training exercises with U.S. Special Operations Forces.<sup>32</sup> Previously, Egypt did not allow JCET exercises because the United States required Egyptian units to be vetted for any past human rights violations, and the process involved the U.S. embassy checking unit commanders' background information. Egypt had refused to submit to the vetting process for years as an infringement on sovereignty, but the EAF is now willing to allow it. Egypt has also allowed U.S. navy ships to conduct ship visits at Egyptian ports. Previously, visits were not allowed because America requires that U.S. divers conduct searches of the piers where the vessels will dock, formerly considered an Egyptian sovereignty infringement.<sup>33</sup> OMC officers chalked up the changes in the relationship to the retirements or position shifts of the EAF officers who managed the U.S.-Egypt defense relationship.<sup>34</sup> However, changes of this magnitude likely came from the highest levels of the EAF, demonstrating a greater openness to U.S. security cooperation.

The Bright Star exercise began again in 2017, the first since 2009. The exercise in 2018, conducted for a second year in a row, had only eight hundred U.S. service members, and the EAF continues to judge the exercise's success by the size of the force levels. The exercise was next scheduled for 2020 but was postponed by Covid and was later held in 2021 with only about six hundred U.S. troops. The annual Military Cooperation Committee meetings have also resumed, and the EAF shows a new focus on carefully articulating its requests to U.S. attendees in accordance with perceived U.S. priorities.<sup>35</sup>

None of the U.S. Defense Department teams of military personnel who departed returned to Egypt to serve as trainers, advisors, and maintainers of aircraft and other equipment. The coproduction of Abrams tanks has stopped after the United States did not approve the EAF's requests to continue production. The tank plant is now used to produce non-U.S. defense items as well as products for Egyptian markets but could possibly be used in the future to refurbish older M1A1 Egyptian tanks.

## **Sisi's Egypt**

Domestically, Sisi has greatly expanded his control of Egypt and its civil society in a definite drift toward greater authoritarianism. In 2018, he was elected to a second term in office in a campaign that decidedly favored him. Sisi's only opponent in the election was a Sisi supporter, and others seeking to run against Sisi were harassed or detained. Sisi won with 97 percent of the vote with a total voter turnout of only 41 percent. In a referendum to amend the constitution in 2019 that saw the arrests of dozens in its run-up, Sisi's current term in office was extended from four years to six years, leaving him in office until 2024. The referendum also overturned a prohibition on no more than two terms in office, allowing him to run for a third term and potentially staying until 2030. Other changes to the constitution allow Sisi to appoint judges at the highest courts and the chief prosecutor, eroding the traditional independence of the judiciary that was largely left intact during the Mubarak years.

Sisi approved a new NGO law in 2019 to replace a similar law from 2017 that received widespread international criticism; however, the new law is almost as harsh as the previous one. It gives the government broad control of international and domestic NGOs in Egypt and prohibits political and religious work; NGO activities are confined to those in the interest of Egypt as defined by its government. NGOs cannot operate without licenses, but requirements for receiving them are vague and subject to the whims of officials. NGO funding is defined as public funding, and anyone can request an investigation into NGO expenditures. NGOs cannot conduct opinion surveys or research without governmental approval.

A law regulating public protests requires organizers to give authorities three days' notification before demonstrations, which the state can cancel or postpone.<sup>36</sup> Demonstrations must have specific start and end times that cannot be extended. An antiterrorism law uses a broad definition of terrorism that the state can use to target nonviolent political opponents, ordinary people, journalists, and human rights activists. Egyptians can be arrested even if not caught in the act of breaking the law. Citizens, media outlets, and businesses can be added to state terrorism lists even if not convicted by a

court. A media law allows the state to suspend the social media accounts of those who spread news that contradicts official positions and have five thousand or more followers.<sup>37</sup>

Egypt has been under a near-continuous nationwide state of emergency for decades since 1956, including in 1967–80, and 1981–2012, and most recently, April 2017 to October 2021, following terrorist attacks on two churches. A separate state of emergency was in effect in northern Sinai since 2014.<sup>38</sup> A state of emergency gives the government the power to try civilians in emergency state security courts under a separate judicial system. The Egyptian president appoints EAF officers as judges and can refer defendants in any criminal case to the security courts, whose verdicts cannot be appealed and only overturned by the president.<sup>39</sup> With a state of emergency, the president can restrict freedom of assembly, speech, public movement and meetings, demonstrations, and celebrations. The power of law enforcement is increased; Egyptians can be arrested if they are judged threats to national security. There are arbitrary arrests and searches of homes without warrants. Censorship of the media is allowed, and the government can shut down news outlets. The EAF and police are charged with protecting public and private property.

With these powers, Sisi constructed the most brutal government in modern Egyptian history, much worse than the Mubarak era, when the government had redlines it would not cross. Mubarak allowed civil institutions, independent civil society groups, and the judiciary some breathing space. Sisi does not. It is more dangerous now to criticize the government than at any time in recent history. There are forced disappearances of suspected government critics and arbitrary killings. Although impossible to confirm, there are reportedly as many as sixty thousand political detainees, a charge Sisi denies. Arrests include political opponents, activists, and lawyers, as well as doctors and journalists who contradict government statements on the Covid situation. They are charged with spreading false rumors, misusing social media, or being members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Those in prisons face inadequate medical attention and torture. Egypt currently has the world's third-highest number of detained journalists, behind China and Myanmar.<sup>40</sup> State security courts with military judges hand out harsh

sentences to civilians, and those who criticize the government on social media are arrested. Convictions for blasphemy against Islam have increased, and Coptic Christians face discrimination. Police arrest members of the LGBTI community and charge them with debauchery and violation of religious teachings, with prison sentences up to ten years. The government restricts political expression, censors the press, and blocks external internet sites critical of the government. The human rights group Amnesty International has called Egypt an “open-air prison” for government critics.<sup>41</sup>

The Sisi government has faced harsh international criticisms for its human rights abuses. For example, in March 2021, thirty-one mostly Western countries, including the United States, signed a statement calling on Egypt to end the prosecution of activists, journalists, and political opponents, and to release them unconditionally, as well as to allow freedom of expression and assembly.<sup>42</sup> In response to mounting international criticism, and possibly some later actions by the U.S. Biden administration, the Sisi government is taking steps to rectify its image abroad. In September 2021, Sisi announced a National Strategy for Human Rights that aims to instill civil and political rights. It also pledges to give government employees training to foster a culture of human rights protection within the state apparatus.<sup>43</sup> On October 25, 2021, Sisi ended the state of emergency that had been in effect since 2017, adding that “Egypt has become an oasis of security and stability in the region.”<sup>44</sup> A few political prisoners have been released.<sup>45</sup>

Critics say, however, that the national human rights strategy is “cosmetic” and a facade for the international community.<sup>46</sup> The strategy was not developed in conjunction with voices from Egyptian civil society but rather by a committee from the Foreign Ministry whose mission is to counter negative perceptions about Egypt abroad. The Egyptian embassy in Washington was the first to announce the strategy, and the first public discussions about it occurred in America, not in Egypt.<sup>47</sup> The day after the strategy was released, an Egyptian researcher was arrested for publishing an article accusing the government of discriminating against Christians.<sup>48</sup> All told, within one hundred days of the strategy’s release, there were more than one thousand arbitrary arrests, 187 cases of forced disappearances, and ten deaths of detainees in detention facilities, mainly from medical neglect.<sup>49</sup>

As for lifting the state of emergency, critics argue that, like the human rights strategy, it is a “publicity stunt.”<sup>50</sup> The Sisi-led government still has extensive repressive powers under other laws, such as those on antiterrorism, protest, and media.<sup>51</sup> The work of the state security courts continues for those already referred for trials during the state of emergency.<sup>52</sup> But to further reinforce the powers of the government, the parliament, at the urging of the Sisi government, has recently amended existing laws to make them almost the same as those in effect under a state of emergency.<sup>53</sup> Amendments to the antiterrorism law prohibit news coverage of trials for those charged with terrorism unless approved by the court. The penalty for disclosing state secrets has been toughened to a maximum of five years in prison. The president may impose curfews or order evacuation of areas to maintain security.<sup>54</sup> In amendments to the law on protecting public facilities, the EAF will permanently protect public and vital establishments, and civilians accused of attacking these facilities will face military trials. The penal law was changed to make conducting research or gathering statistics on the EAF without permission a crime.<sup>55</sup>

Real change regarding human rights is unlikely in Egypt except in a few shallow areas to appease the international community. A vast number of political prisoners remain in detention, and draconian laws remain in effect and are being strengthened. If anything, the human rights situation has grown worse since the announcement of the national human rights strategy and the lifting of the state of emergency.<sup>56</sup>

On International Human Rights Day in December 2021, Sisi spoke on the subject. He referred to social, living, and economic rights and the right of citizens to access public services—in other words, the collective rights of Egyptian society, not individual rights.<sup>57</sup> In January 2022, he added that human rights cannot be restricted to one aspect of life and highlighted the country’s dire economic situation given the addition of two and a half million citizens every year who need jobs.<sup>58</sup> Sisi thus calls for a complete understanding of human rights to account for Egypt’s unique situation, but in the process, the voice of the individual Egyptian is consumed by Sisi.

Directly affecting relations with the United States have been the arrests in Egypt of dual U.S.-Egyptian citizens or U.S. permanent residents. They are

charged with supporting terrorism or the misuse of social media. In 2017, there were eighteen of these detainees with politically dubious charges, and in 2020 there were eleven. One, Mustafa Kassem, was arrested in 2013, charged with supporting the Muslim Brotherhood, and sentenced at a mass trial to fifteen years. He died in prison in January 2020 of medical neglect. Recently, Egypt resorted to detaining family members of critics living in the United States and for years has harassed Egyptian human rights defenders who live in exile. Actions by international advocacy groups, the State Department, members of Congress, and even President Trump have resulted in the release of some detainees. After Sisi met with Trump in the White House in 2017, aid worker Aya Hijazi was released. She had been charged with child abuse and human trafficking, which human rights advocates rejected. In 2019, Vice President Mike Pence traveled to Egypt to discuss detained Americans.

## **Egypt and the Biden Administration So Far**

Cairo feared the incoming Democratic administration of President Joe Biden, who was elected at the end of 2020. Egypt had a complex relationship with U.S. lawmakers; while Republicans normally supported Egypt because of its relationship with Israel, Democrats were quick to call for cuts or conditionality on aid for human rights reasons. Biden seemed to bear out this expectation. During his presidential campaign, Biden said there would be no blank checks for Egypt. In addition, Biden had been Obama's vice president, and Egyptian leaders feared he would follow policies similar to those of Obama, who was viewed as a supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood. Cairo attempted to be preemptive with the new administration; Sisi was the first Arab leader to congratulate Biden on his election win, and Cairo hired a U.S. public relations firm to defend Egyptian interests during the Biden administration for \$56,000 a month.<sup>59</sup> Cairo realized aid might not come so easily and that human rights would be more important to the new administration.<sup>60</sup> However, Cairo put on a brave face and said there was no need for optimism or pessimism regarding the new administration, Egypt

could deal with any U.S. administration, and Biden supported a two-state solution in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, aligning with Egypt's position. It hoped for U.S. support in its dispute with Ethiopia over Nile water and in stabilizing Libya.<sup>61</sup>

During the first four months of the Biden administration, high-level relations were cold. After Biden took office, he did not call Sisi, which was seen as a snub. The first high-level discussion came in February 2021 when Secretary of State Antony Blinken called his Egyptian counterpart, Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry. Blinken made clear to Shoukry that human rights were central to the relationship, and Blinken warned against continuing the acquisition of the Russian Su-35 fighter. Blinken subsequently said that security interests must align with human rights and democracy. At the end of March, the State Department released its yearly assessment of human rights in Egypt, reporting significant problems. The one positive note was in February when the administration authorized a weapons notification to Congress of a sale of missiles worth \$197 million using FMF for the EAF's fast missile craft, the first major U.S. arms transfer to the region since Biden took office.

Much changed in May 2021 when fighting broke out between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip as Washington sought to negotiate a ceasefire. However, it learned that all roads led to Cairo as the only nation with contacts with both Hamas and Israel. At U.S. urging, Egyptian negotiators were able to implement a ceasefire that went into effect on May 21. After the ceasefire was announced, Biden publicly thanked Sisi and called him twice within less than a week. Besides a discussion on ensuring hostilities did not resume, Biden and Sisi discussed the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and Libya. They affirmed the need for a productive and strong U.S.-Egypt partnership, and Biden stressed the importance of a constructive human rights dialogue. Blinken traveled to Egypt and met with Sisi. He also praised Egypt's role in the ceasefire, as well as stressing human rights. In late May, the Biden administration's 2022 proposed budget requested the standard \$1.3 billion in FMF for Egypt, calling it steady funding. Prominent human rights organizations condemned the standard FMF allocation for Egypt, citing Biden's promise of no blank checks. U.S. lawmakers had also been

calling for cuts or greater conditionality on aid, but Cairo hoped at the time that its role in the ceasefire would change the U.S. perspective.

The Biden administration has actively engaged in several of Egypt's most pressing regional concerns. A U.S. special envoy for the Horn of Africa sought to restart negotiations over the Renaissance Dam, and the State Department announced U.S. support for Egypt's water rights. Another U.S. special envoy for Libya worked for the fulfillment of the election of a new government in Libya and praised Cairo's role in empowering the Libyan political process. The United States has also denounced provocative Turkish moves in the Eastern Mediterranean and said the issue must be settled through agreements.

However, Cairo's human rights record remains a central issue to Washington, so much so that Jerusalem repeatedly warned the Biden administration not to be overly critical of the situation in Egypt because it might push Cairo further into the arms of Moscow and Beijing, or even Tehran.<sup>62</sup> Jerusalem now also appears willing to lessen its QME concerns and supports the sale of U.S. F-15 fighters to Egypt, which Cairo has been requesting since the 1970s. In Jerusalem's eyes, it is better for Egypt to have U.S. weapons than Russian or Chinese weapons and the improvement of U.S.-Egypt relations is in Israel's interests.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, in September 2021, the Biden administration announced it would withhold \$130 million in Egypt's military aid until improvements were made in human rights, which will be further discussed later.

Against this backdrop, a U.S.-Egypt Strategic Dialogue occurred in Washington in November 2021, the first since 2015, chaired by Blinken and Egyptian foreign minister Shoukry. The United States was primarily concerned about human rights, while Egypt wanted to focus on regional issues such as its water dispute with Ethiopia, the need to restart Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, and the situation in Libya. At the dialogue, Blinken said an improvement in human rights was essential to strengthening bilateral relations. He also expressed concern about the October 2021 coup in Sudan, which Egypt might have greenlighted with Sudan's military leadership. Shoukry emphasized that the situation in Egypt was for Egyptians to decide, that political rights and civil liberties must be balanced with economic and

social rights, and that human rights were an evolutionary process specific to each nation's condition.<sup>64</sup> In the end, the United States affirmed Egypt's water rights and the need for the resumption of negotiations with Ethiopia over the Renaissance Dam. Both sides affirmed the need to hold elections in Libya and continued defense cooperation between Cairo and Washington. Reportedly, a meaningful discussion on human rights also occurred that included economic, cultural, and social rights, framing Egypt's position that human rights should not be limited to political rights, but collective rights as opposed to individual rights.<sup>65</sup> On the whole, the latest round of the Strategic Dialogue appears to be in line with the previous ones as mainly symbolic and accomplishing little.

## **Foreign Military Financing in the Trump and Biden Eras**

Although President Trump throughout his term requested the standard \$1.3 billion in FMF, as did President Biden for his 2022 budget request, FMF remains highly conditioned, delayed in obligation, and released in tranches. No funding is available until the secretary of state certifies Egypt is maintaining its strategic relations with the United States and its peace with Israel. Other reasons for holdups have included delaying release of portions of FMF until steps were taken to repeal Egypt's domestic NGO law of 2017, addressing the convictions of U.S. NGOs in 2013, Egypt's relations with North Korea, detained U.S.-Egyptian citizen Mustafa Kassem, who subsequently died in an Egyptian prison, and a demand for compensation for the Apache helicopter attack that injured American April Corley in 2015. Starting in 2018, the annual obligation of \$300 million of the \$1.3 billion in FMF was conditioned on certifications from the State Department that Egypt was taking steps toward democracy and protecting human rights. National security waivers were available for the \$300 million if it was determined that releasing the funding was in U.S. interests, but it must be accompanied by an assessment of Egypt's compliance on UN resolutions regarding North Korea. However, Egypt has ultimately gotten its annual \$1.3 billion in previous years

through national security waivers, except in 2017, when \$65.7 million in FMF was deducted for Egypt's North Korea dealings and NGO issues.

In 2021, human rights groups called on Secretary of State Blinken not to issue future waivers for conditioned aid from previous years—but Blinken found an innovative solution. The administration announced it would obligate the remaining \$300 million conditioned on human rights for 2020 FMF funding without issuing a national security waiver but instead by releasing \$170 million of it through an exception in the Consolidated Appropriations Act that allowed funding to be released without conditions if it is for counterterrorism, border security, or nonproliferation activities, although Congress has never defined these terms. The remaining \$130 million was held and conditioned on Egypt ceasing the prosecution of human rights and civil society organizations and dropping charges against or releasing sixteen individuals identified by the U.S. embassy, with an imposed U.S. deadline of end-of-January 2022.

In late January 2022, the Department of State announced that the \$130 million in 2020 FMF would be reprogrammed away from Egypt, ending the possibility of Cairo ever receiving it. This was the largest FMF amount ever rescinded from Egypt. The State Department also said that while Egypt had met some of the U.S. conditions for the funding to be released, more remained to be done.<sup>66</sup> Ironically, this U.S. decision came only a few days after it was announced that Egypt was approved for a transaction to receive \$2.55 billion of U.S. equipment for 12 C-130J-30 Super Hercules transport aircraft and three SPS-48 ground radar systems, on the assumption that the sale was not later blocked by Congress.<sup>67</sup> Human rights groups complained that while reprogramming the \$130 million in FMF was necessary, it was undermined by the Biden administration's announcement of the \$2.55 billion arms deal.<sup>68</sup>

For 2021 funding, \$225 million was conditioned on Egypt taking measures to reinforce the rule of law, democratic institutions, and human rights and allowing U.S. officials oversight of how equipment provided with U.S. aid is used in Sinai, all with a national security waiver (see figure 5.1). Another \$75 million was conditioned on the release of political prisoners and providing detainees with due process. For this \$75 million, no national security waiver is available—for the first time since 2014. The funds are available for two

Figure 5.1. Breakdown of \$1.3B in FMF from the 2021 U.S. Consolidated Appropriations Act

Funds	Conditions
A. For any funds to be available	Secretary of state must certify Egypt is: (1) Sustaining the strategic relationship with the U.S. (2) Meeting the obligations of the 1979 Egypt-Israel peace treaty
B. For \$1B	No conditions other than in A above
C. For \$225M	Secretary of state must certify Egypt is: (1) Strengthening rule of law, democratic institutions, and human rights (2) Implementing reforms that protect freedom of expression, association, and assembly (3) Holding security forces accountable (4) Investigating and prosecuting extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances (5) Allowing U.S. officials to monitor U.S. assistance where it is used (Sinai)  <i>*These certification requirements do not apply to funding provided for counterterrorism, border security, and nonproliferation</i> <i>*Secretary of state may waive these certification requirements if it is in U.S. national interests</i>
D. For \$75M	Secretary of state must certify Egypt is: (1) Making progress on the release of political prisoners (2) Providing detainees with due process of the law  <i>*No national security waiver for these conditions</i>

**Sources:** H.R.133, Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/133>; and H.R.133, 116th Congress (2019–2020), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/133/text>.

years, so the decision about whether Cairo has met this condition might not come until 2022.<sup>69</sup>

Because the FMF may be used only for irregular warfare and sustainment, Egypt's Air Defense Command has been mainly excluded from procuring new U.S. equipment except for some radar systems for the air defense network, and there is no more tank production.<sup>70</sup> However, in reality, it is often easy to fit any number of items into irregular warfare; the Apache helicopter, originally designed as a defense against tanks, plays a vital role in Sinai, and even Israel lobbied for the release of suspended Apache deliveries to Egypt in 2014. Egyptian F-16s are highly effective in securing Egypt's western border with Libya against infiltration. Even M1A1 tanks are used in Sinai for fighting insurgents; the State Department justified a sell of tank ammunition to the EAF in 2018 by stating it was needed for counterinsurgency; and the United States used tanks in Afghanistan (see figure 5.2).<sup>71</sup> Almost any type of modern equipment could potentially be used in irregular warfare, but of course how they are used varies greatly from conventional warfare.

A U.S. Senate resolution was proposed to block the \$2.2 billion sale of the 12 C-130J-30 Super Hercules aircraft due to human rights concerns, but it was rejected because the aircraft are not offensive weapons.<sup>72</sup> As noted earlier, Egypt agreed to use \$1 billion in national funds to pay for part of the \$2.3 billion deal for the refurbishment of forty-three Apaches, departing from Cairo's usual insistence that FMF be used to pay for all U.S. procurements, and it will likely do the same for the C-130J-30 transaction.<sup>73</sup> As mentioned, Egypt has many more requests for U.S. CISMOA-related equipment, such as F-35s, but these have not been acted on, largely because of QME restrictions. In March 2022, however, the head of U.S. Central Command, Gen. Kenneth McKenzie, briefed Congress that the United States was now prepared to go through with an F-15 fighter aircraft sale to Cairo, which Israel supports because, as previously stated, Jerusalem prefers that Egypt have American weapons rather than Russian or Chinese weapons.<sup>74</sup> But this sale will still require approval by Congress, where Egypt has powerful critics, will cost billions of dollars, and will take years before delivery if the procurement goes forward. While Egypt has sought the F-15 since the mid-1970s and needs the heavy air-superiority fighters, it will still be largely toothless unless it

Figure 5.2. Recent U.S. Congressional Notifications, Defense Security Cooperation Agency

Item	Value	Date	Remarks
12 C-130J-30 Super Hercules aircraft	\$2.2B	Jan 2022	For airlift support, required Communications Interoperability and Security Memorandum of Agreement (CISMOA)
3 SPS-48 ground radar systems	\$355M	Jan 2022	For air defense network
168 missiles for fast missile craft	\$197M	Feb 2021	For maritime security
Protection system for presidential Airbus	\$104M	Dec 2020	For missile defense, required CISMOA
Targeting pod for F-16	\$65.6M	Dec 2020	For border security and counterterrorism, required CISMOA
Maritime domain awareness system	\$417M	Oct 2020	For maritime surveillance capability, radars, and sensors
Refurbish 43 AH-64D Apache to AH-64E model	\$2.3B	May 2020	For Sinai counterinsurgency, required CISMOA
Technical support for naval vessels	\$554M	Jul 2019	For frigates, fast missile craft, and other vessels
10 AH-64E Apache	\$1.0B	Nov 2018	Required CISMOA, later blocked by Congress
56,000 tank rounds	\$201M	Nov 2018	For Sinai counterinsurgency
Missile warning system for helicopters	\$81.4M	Oct 2016	Protection systems against missiles
8 Sentinel AN/MPQ-64F1 radar systems	\$70M	Sep 2016	For air defense network
Harpoon missiles for submarines	\$143M	May 2016	For German Type 209 submarines

**Source:** Defense Security Cooperation Agency, accessed March 17, 2022, <https://www.dsca.mil/search/node?keys=Egypt>.

also acquires the AIM-120 (AMRAAM) missiles. Which version Egypt gets of the F-15, an aircraft first designed and developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s, will also be important as the latest models are more advanced.

A great deal of FMF funding is also used for sustainment of existing equipment such as tanks and aircraft, but the spending is normally for spare parts and technical support and funding levels often do not meet requirements for congressional notification. In 2020, about half of Egypt's FMF funds were used for this purpose.

### **Conditionality, Congress, and U.S. Views**

Some say the conditionality on specific issues has been partially successful in influencing Egyptian behavior. In December 2018, the Americans convicted in the 2013 NGO trial were acquitted of all charges in a retrial. Egypt also rewrote its 2017 NGO law, although it is as repressive as the previous one, and it has reduced relations with North Korea, as requested. U.S. pressure has also resulted in the release of wrongly detained U.S. citizens. Cairo released its National Strategy for Human Rights three days after the Biden administration announced it was withholding \$130 million in 2020 FMF, and Sisi subsequently ended the state of emergency and released some political prisoners, showing some responsiveness to international pressure.<sup>75</sup> But conditionality will likely not cause major changes, and Sisi's Egypt remains the most repressive in modern Egyptian history. U.S. conditionality on human rights has not in any fundamental way changed the nature of the government other than in a few cosmetic matters. Even with the human rights strategy, the lifting of the state of emergency, and the U.S. withholding of \$130 million in 2020 FMF, other new repressive laws have been enacted, and if anything, the human rights situation has worsened. Egypt is a military-backed dictatorship ruled by one voice, Sisi's. Making major changes regarding human rights would threaten the rule of Sisi and the role of the EAF in society. Fundamental changes would be an existential threat to the government.

Officials at the U.S. embassy believe that discussions out of the public eye focusing on how outsiders view Egypt's human rights record and its effect on

the U.S.-Egypt relationship have been more influential in changing Egyptian actions than conditionality. Foreign service and military officers serving in Cairo report that overt discussion of these topics results in a more sterile exchange, in which Egyptians cite infringements on sovereignty, argue that aid is an entitlement of the peace agreement with Israel, and highlight their services in support of the U.S. military.<sup>76</sup> Dragging differences into the public eye causes Cairo to dig in its heels even more. There are troubling trends. Congress and the State Department worry about a lack of oversight of how U.S.-supplied equipment is used in Sinai, where there have been violations of international law and arbitrary killings. Members of Congress and even some in the Trump administration pressed to reduce FMF over several issues, such as the death of U.S.-Egyptian citizen Mustafa Kassem. In October 2020, members of Congress sent Sisi a letter detailing cases of unjust imprisonments. In December 2021, the U.S. Congress's Egypt Human Rights Caucus called on the Biden administration to investigate reports that the EAF employed intelligence provided by a French surveillance team using U.S.-supplied F-16s to kill civilians suspected of smuggling in Egypt's Western Desert, violating end use agreements on how the equipment could be used.<sup>77</sup> In March 2022, congressional Democrats called for an investigation of the State Department to determine if it was enforcing a law that bars security assistance to countries that routinely harass foreign human rights critics living in the United States, with Egypt among them. As previously mentioned, Cairo has harassed the Egyptian relatives of U.S.-based human rights advocates.<sup>78</sup>

In its 2022 budget request, the Biden administration asked Congress not to condition Egypt's aid on human rights, saying it would reduce U.S. leverage with Cairo. However, in summer 2021, some Democratic members of Congress tried to increase the amount of FMF provided with no national security waiver to \$150 million for 2022 aid, conditioned on releasing political prisoners, providing detainees with due process, and compensating April Corley, the survivor of the Apache helicopter strike. In the end, the 2022 Consolidated Appropriations Act, signed into law in March 2022, was similar to the 2021 act, except a total of \$320 million was conditioned, an increase of \$20 million from 2021. Of this amount, \$235 billion was conditioned with

a national security waiver available for the secretary of state if releasing the funding was in U.S. national interests, an increase of \$10 million from the 2021 act but with the same conditions. In addition, \$85 million was conditioned with no security waiver, an increase of \$10 million from 2021. The conditions Cairo must meet to receive this amount are the same as for the 2021 act—releasing political prisoners and providing detainees with due process—but with the additional new condition of preventing the intimidation and harassment of U.S. citizens.<sup>79</sup>

Democrats in Congress have challenged the assumption that the aid is necessary to maintain the Egypt-Israel peace, because Israel has since expanded relations with the Arab world; they also say the aid is a Cold War relic. This position is opposed by the Biden administration and most Republican lawmakers, citing Egypt's role in the May 2021 Israel-Hamas ceasefire, shared goals of maritime and border security and counterterrorism, and Egypt's role in Libya and handling the Renaissance Dam dispute. But the Democratic position remains the same. In October 2021, a Democratic senator filed an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act of 2022 to prevent Egyptian FMF from earning interest in the Federal Reserve Bank, a privilege shared only by Israel.<sup>80</sup> Perhaps even more looming is the U.S. implementation of the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, which could penalize the EAF for its possible acquisition of the Russian Su-35 if the transaction ever occurs. If these sanctions are imposed on the whole structure of the EAF Armament Authority, which manages the acquisition of U.S. defense items, it will greatly change the defense relationship and potentially bring parts of it to a halt.

## **Egyptian Views**

In Egypt, Washington is still seen as unreliable because of the holdup of weapon deliveries after Morsi's removal in 2013 and conditionality. The EAF objects to conditionality in any form, and although President Trump was a friend of Egypt, EAF leaders were frustrated by his administration's continued policy of allowing FMF to be used only in irregular warfare and sustainment and the failure to reinstate cash flow financing, while Israel was

still allowed to use it. They say that the purpose of FMF funding is to address all Egypt's defense priorities, not just irregular warfare, but with the Biden administration now in office, there will be little chance of returning the aid to its previous form. Senior EAF leaders are irritated by the way the funding is delayed and disbursed in hard-to-predict tranches, causing an inability to control a significant portion of the defense budget.<sup>81</sup> They sometimes learn about new conditionality in the press rather than through prior discussions with Washington.<sup>82</sup>

The U.S. Congress is seen as not understanding the realities of human rights in Egypt, where the priority is to hold the country together and prevent its collapse after two revolutions, and Egyptian leaders point out that America itself suffers from systemic racial discrimination.<sup>83</sup> In Egypt, many of those said by U.S. groups to be political detainees are charged with terrorism, an issue on which leaders will never compromise. Leaders believe that discussions about human rights should be done in private and not through publicly shaming Cairo, which creates negative attitudes about the United States in Egypt.<sup>84</sup>

The view in Egypt is that Washington looks at bilateral relations through the narrow frames of Israel's interests and Egyptian human rights rather than with a larger focus also encompassing Cairo's interests.<sup>85</sup> Congress is also overly sympathetic to Israel, according to Egyptian thinking, and while it has outlined to Israel in memorandums of understanding how much aid it will get in ten-year periods, it has not done so for Egypt, which again affects budget planning.<sup>86</sup> Any cuts to military aid would violate and potentially damage the Egypt-Israel peace treaty. The procurement of the Su-35 is an Egyptian sovereign decision and part of its diversification of weapons sources because the United States cannot be counted on, in Egypt's view. Egypt has a plan, if necessary, to do without U.S. aid.<sup>87</sup> There were, however, hopes for the overall relationship to smooth out with Cairo's brokering of the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in May 2021 and higher U.S. appreciation of Egypt's role in the region.<sup>88</sup> Those hopes were dashed when the Biden administration announced it was withholding \$130 million in 2020 FMF as a human rights matter despite the positive steps Cairo is taking,

such as issuing a human rights strategy, lifting the state of emergency, and releasing certain detainees.<sup>89</sup>

The reprogramming of the \$130 million was strange, as noted, since it came only days after Washington announced the approval of \$2.55 billion in U.S. arms for Egypt, sending a contradictory message.<sup>90</sup> There is a belief that the U.S. government itself is divided about Egypt, with the Defense Department seen as favoring greater security cooperation, and the administration, the State Department, and some members of Congress in opposition.<sup>91</sup> The view in Cairo is that some elites in Washington are overly influenced by Muslim Brotherhood propaganda and believe that Islamists support democracy.<sup>92</sup>

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# 6

## **Analysis, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

Some speculated that President Sisi was pleased with the new form of U.S. aid and approved it because it would allow for EAF restructuring to respond to Egypt's irregular warfare threats. But such speculation turned out to be misinformed. Both Sisi and the Egyptian Armed Forces were in truth displeased with the new arrangements and want them reversed.<sup>1</sup> The effectiveness of the EAF in their perception is judged by its overall size, procurement of new weapons, and ability to carry out Cairo's military diplomacy.

### **Is the EAF Changing?**

Egypt's armed forces are undertaking a major armament program and increasing military infrastructure to address threats such as instability in Libya, Turkish provocations in the Mediterranean and in Libya, threats in the Red Sea, the insurgency in Sinai, border infiltration, and the safeguarding of Nile water. Exercises with other nations have greatly increased and include Russia, Greece, Cyprus, France, Britain, Spain, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Jordan, Bahrain, Sudan, and Pakistan. New bases have been established toward the Libyan border and the Red Sea, and many other bases have been upgraded. Some EAF units traditionally focused on the east have been redirected toward the west, and exercises have been conducted to address Libya. A rapid deployment force has been created. A dedicated command for Sinai

has been established, with an accompanying counterterrorism force, and counterterrorism exercises are happening with other nations, along with EAF counterinsurgency exercises. Although not involved in combat abroad, the EAF is one of the most active forces in the region.

However, the EAF is not making significant changes to better meet the needs of irregular warfare. Egypt's recent acquisitions of fighter aircraft, attack helicopters, ships, submarines, antitank and anti-air missiles, and the S-300 air defense system indicate that it is continuing to arm for conventional warfare and power projection. An examination of the EAF force structure of predominantly mechanized and armor divisions of eighteen division equivalents indicates a continued desire to be able to fight high-intensity battles. The entire force contains only about three divisional equivalents of what would be considered light forces, including airborne, air mobile, and commandos units. In 2016, the number of mechanized divisions increased from seven to eight.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, the Iraqi army, which is much more geared toward irregular warfare, has the equivalent of fourteen divisions, of which nine are light or motorized infantry divisions and five are heavy.

In the Sinai counterinsurgency campaign, the EAF is making better use of local tribes and armed civil groups and is achieving progress, but the EAF likely developed this approach on its own after years of security setbacks and casualties. Overall, most changes for Sinai have been modest and mainly include minor adjustments to training and equipment. No major restructuring has been carried out other than to a few small, specialized counterterrorism units.<sup>3</sup> Nor have attempts been made to address the grievances of the population in northern Sinai, a situation that could precipitate increased future instability, along with the memory of the EAF's brutal tactics. U.S. urging for overall military reform has continued to go unheeded. The EAF announced after Sisi became minister of defense that it had no intentions of downsizing. Reflecting the force structure, most EAF military maneuvers continue to focus on preparing for conventional warfare, as does its doctrine.<sup>4</sup>

The EAF keeps its conventional focus for several reasons. Egypt still believes it needs to maintain a large conventional force for an unlikely but potentially existential war with Israel. It also must be able to prevent the

spillover of regional instability into Egypt and at least have the perceived ability to confront Turkey in the Mediterranean and project power toward the Horn of Africa to ensure the security of Nile water. The Sisi government, however, has largely used the EAF expansion to obtain legitimacy at home and prestige abroad. Weapons numbers and force size are all that matter because they enhance Egypt's standing as having one of the most powerful militaries in the world. The ability to integrate, maintain, and effectively employ so many weapons from so many different sources is much less important. Because Egypt lacks other tools such as economic power, the EAF's perceived strength gives the country some regional influence and ability to conduct military diplomacy. The government is unlikely to risk this perception in an unsuccessful military confrontation outside Egypt, which in turn would greatly affect legitimacy at home. It stayed out of the Syrian conflict and its military involvement in Libya has been limited. Any power projection beyond its borders will be shows of force or symbolic. What has changed is that Egypt now appears willing to accept some new forms of U.S. security cooperation if it increases the EAF's perceived capabilities. But Egypt reached this conclusion on its own, not because of U.S. urging.

## **Analysis of the U.S.-Egypt Defense Relationship**

Military aid is the central aspect of the U.S.-Egypt relationship, but that relationship was already tense when it was aggravated by the 2011 revolution and the EAF's removal of Morsi in 2013. The Egyptians believed the aid was an entitlement for their peace with Israel and service to the U.S. military such as allowing overflights. But as decades passed, U.S. policymakers and lawmakers began to want more from Egypt, and whether it was reforming the EAF into a force more capable of addressing security threats that mattered most to America or allowing political change, the new U.S. bilateral agenda angered Egyptian leaders. Further complicating this relationship was an absence of consensus on the U.S. side on what the aid and the military relationship were meant to achieve. U.S. military officers working with the EAF believed their mission was to further develop the military relationship

and create a strong and capable EAF, while Congress and sometimes U.S. administrations wanted to use the aid to leverage positive change in Egypt. This divergence continues to this day, with some on the U.S. side saying that the United States greatly values Egypt's role in the region, and arguing there should be greater security cooperation, while others—particularly legislators—want to condition aid on human rights reform.<sup>5</sup>

## **What Worked**

The aid was successful in helping maintain the Egypt-Israel peace despite a deep, persistent popular disdain for Israel in Egypt. Egyptians believe the aid is a U.S. obligation enshrined in Camp David and that halting it would constitute a violation of the treaty. Israel supports U.S. military aid to Egypt and has lobbied for it because of this Egyptian belief and out of concern that ending the aid might threaten the peace. Likewise, the U.S. involvement in the Multinational Force & Observers, the international force that monitors the peace between Israel and Egypt in Sinai, helped anchor the peace and alleviate mistrust between Cairo and Jerusalem regarding Sinai demilitarization, especially in light of EAF deployments—higher than stipulated in the peace treaty—to fight insurgents. The U.S. presence in the MFO is symbolic of Washington's commitment to the peace and gives both Cairo and Jerusalem confidence in the MFO as a fair arbiter.

Today, some U.S. lawmakers see the aid as less important than before in maintaining the peace with Israel, because more Arab nations have normalized relations with Israel. But even today, Egypt plays a pivotal role in negotiating ceasefires between the Israelis and Palestinians when hostilities break out, and it is one of the region's few states with ties to both. While ending destabilizing Israeli-Palestinian violence along its borders is in Egypt's interest, it also allows Cairo to highlight its importance to both the United States and Israel. Also, Cairo could use its ability to negotiate future ceasefires in new conflicts as leverage if Washington wanted to reduce EAF aid. Egyptian leaders also nominally support the continued normalization of relations between Israel and its Arab neighbors but do not wish for relations between Cairo and Jerusalem to go beyond official relations between the governments.

The aid realigned Egypt during the Cold War away from the Soviet Union, and afterward it joined the U.S.-led coalition to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi occupation in 1991. Egypt also joined the U.S. coalition against the Islamic State. Although it did not send combat forces to Afghanistan or Iraq, Cairo did indirectly support these U.S. efforts.

The aid at least enhanced the U.S. military's ability to traverse the Suez Canal and Egyptian airspace, which has never stopped even at the lowest point of the relationship in 2013 and 2014. The United States pays to use the canal, as do all nations, but no other navy in the world has the same operational requirements as the U.S. Navy in addressing short-notice contingencies and quickly shifting naval assets. Egypt is accommodating to last-minute U.S. requests to use the canal, granting access within one day of requests, while normally about a month is required, saving U.S. naval vessels time and money.

The funding was used to procure U.S.-manufactured equipment through American defense contractors, thus supporting the American industrial defense base. Orders for kits for Egypt's coproduction of M1A1 tanks helped keep open the only U.S. tank plant, which employs more than nine hundred people in Lima, Ohio. The U.S. Army was planning to stop procuring new tanks, yet the plant remains open today, and the United States has since used the factory to upgrade its older tanks.<sup>6</sup> Abruptly ending Egypt's Foreign Military Financing in 2013 would have cost the U.S. economy thousands of jobs in the short term.

The aid gave U.S. officials access to key Egyptian officials, and normal diplomacy continued during the worst parts of the relationship. It also allowed the United States to maintain a relationship with the EAF, the most important institution in Egypt. During the 2011 revolution, EAF channels were the only way the United States could communicate with the Egyptian government. Today, the role of the EAF is even more prominent than it was at the beginning of the relationship in the late 1970s, and the EAF will likely have the final say in any post-Sisi Egypt, regardless of how he finally ends his term of office. The EAF will remain central to any Egyptian government no matter who leads it.

The aid nominally kept Egypt's foreign policy aligned with U.S. interests,

such as expanding the regional peace with Israel, maintaining stability in the Middle East, and defeating terrorism. U.S. aid at least entitles Washington to articulate expectations of Egypt regarding Cairo's relations with Russia, China, North Korea, and others, which Cairo will adhere to according to its own interests. Cairo has a strong military relationship with Moscow, and it supports the continuation of the rule of Bashar al-Assad in Syria, contrary to the U.S. position. Egypt supported the side Washington opposed during the Libyan civil war. However, Egypt turned to Russia after Washington refused to give it first-tier weapons, conditioned aid, and held up the delivery of weapons. Egypt is effectively neutral in the Syrian civil war, and today Washington praises Egypt's role in Libya in bringing together the warring factions.

## **What Didn't Work**

Whether because of the aid or for other reasons, the Egypt-Israel peace treaty has endured. Along the way, however, it in part fueled a massive Egyptian arms buildup against Israel. Egypt had fought five wars with Israel, and Israel was the only nation that could threaten it conventionally. The possibility of a new war with Israel justified the EAF's large force structure and privileges in society and aligned with the Egyptian street's attitude toward Israel. Although one purpose of the aid was to create a balance of power in the region, it did not have that result, but caused Egypt to try to reach at least a perceived military parity with the IDF, which it could never do. The IDF would always be mightier than the EAF because of Israel's stronger economy, indigenous technological military advancements, superior military leadership, high-quality military personnel, the IDF's culture of initiative, and the U.S. policy of favoring Israel over Egypt with qualitative military edge, which ensured Israel got more advanced models of weapons and in greater quantity. Also, U.S. military aid to Israel had increased over the years while Egyptian funding remained the same. In 2020, Jerusalem received \$3.8 billion in U.S. military aid, while Cairo only got \$1.3 billion, the same amount it has received since 1987. To Egyptians, the aid prevented the EAF from developing into a capable and modern force, an original goal of the

aid. This disparity in funding led to resentment especially because Egypt had to rely for its arms on a country that was committed to maintaining its perceived rival's superiority. Even the treaty that led to peace with Israel was resented since it forced a demilitarization of Sinai.

The aid was ineffective in achieving modern interoperability between the EAF and U.S. and coalition forces because, until 2018, Egypt would not sign a Communication Interoperability and Security Memorandum of Agreement to enable access to the most sensitive U.S. technology and advanced data sharing. Egypt resented earlier U.S. attempts to get it to sign the agreement, and it finally did so only after the Arab coalition told it to remove its F-16s from the Saudi-led Yemen campaign because the EAF's aircraft couldn't communicate with their Arab counterparts. Without a CISMOA, the EAF had been denied current equipment. With the CISMOA in place today, it will enable advanced communications and data sharing between Egyptian and U.S. weapon platforms, but the United States has not refurbished the EAF F-16 fleet to CISMOA standards other than with targeting pods for counterterrorism operations, nor has it given the F-16s advanced air-to-air missiles, although EAF Apaches are being modified with CISMOA equipment for use in Sinai because the insurgency there is a threat to Israel.

Because the EAF remains focused on maintaining a large, mechanized force, the aid, in its reshaped form with no cash flow financing and restricted to only irregular warfare-related items and sustainment of existing U.S. equipment, did not make the EAF transform into a force better able to confront irregular threats such as terrorism and insurgency. Egypt now turns to others for big-ticket, conventional arms. Today, the EAF is making some small changes and conducts small exercises with U.S. Special Operations Forces, but the ability of these changes to reshape the overall EAF are negligible.

Restructuring an armed force to emphasize irregular threats over conventional threats requires basic changes to hierarchies that most military forces resist, even the U.S. military. An overfocus on irregular threats can also reduce a force's ability to fight conventional wars, and Egypt's intervention in North Yemen in 1962–67 is often cited by Egyptians as one of the reasons for their conventional defeat in the 1967 Six Day War. Even today, the U.S.

military would not focus only on one type of warfare as it is required to be able to fight a broad spectrum of different types of wars whether they are conventional or irregular, and the EAF can use the same logic.

Cairo disliked Washington telling it what Egypt's security interests were. The EAF was much more than a military force, as defined in the United States, given its roles in the economy and the larger society. The EAF rejected U.S. advice to downsize to better fight conventional wars and counter irregular threats, because its standing in Egypt and prestige in the region would have decreased. Although the U.S. advice was sound militarily and would increase the EAF's capability, military effectiveness is not the high priority that perceived military strength and capability are. The EAF always rejected U.S. advice on specific Egyptian security matters such as its restructuring and Sinai because Egypt, with its past of exploitation by other nations, saw these suggestions as foreign interference. U.S. advice that was correct on specific issues would usually be rejected because of Egyptian pride and belief that only Egyptian leaders knew what was best for their country, and the EAF thought that the United States wanted to control it to advance U.S. interests. And, in truth, Egypt is more successful than some other nations in the region that were unable to avoid civil wars or lost significant territory to terrorists such as Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen.

The aid never created strong personal relationships between key military leaders nor strong ties between the lesser ranks because the EAF sought to limit these kinds of contacts and, to Egyptians, the overall relationship was strictly a transactional affair. The aid was ineffective in instilling democratic values and strong beliefs about the importance of human rights in the EAF, as shown by its actions after the 2011 revolution, its removal of President Morsi, and its ongoing counterinsurgency campaign in Sinai, which uses brutal methods, some of which are human rights violations. The U.S. International Military Education and Training program is aimed specifically at instilling democratic and human rights values, but the size of the program was always limited for Egypt. As mentioned, between 2010 and 2019, about five hundred EAF officers attended IMET training, but in the same period, more than three times the number of Jordanian officers attended IMET courses, from a nation with a much smaller military.

The aid was not successful in creating Egyptian political reform, and when the aid was most heavily conditioned and weapon deliveries were held up, the Egyptian government grew more authoritarian. U.S. pressure and conditionality had only modest success, such as in the release of detained U.S. citizens and a handful of Egyptian political prisoners, and Egypt's diminished relations with North Korea. Changes such as issuing a National Strategy for Human Rights and ending the state of emergency are largely cosmetic steps that have not led to anything tangible such as large releases of political detainees or reducing the power of authorities to prosecute the government's political critics.

Egypt's switch from the United States to other nations for weapons—after the denial of advanced weapons, along with conditionality on aid and the holdups on weapon deliveries—undermines U.S. influence. It also potentially decreases some aspects of Israel's superiority if the EAF can effectively absorb and employ the new systems and gets sufficient follow-on support to maintain the weapons from its new military patrons. This switch is as significant a shift as when Egypt first pivoted to the Soviet Union in the 1950s. As Egypt receives weapons from other countries, it is locked into long-term relationships with them, lasting thirty to forty years. Even more significantly, Egypt's desire to have advanced weapons even makes it risk its defense relationship with America. After the United States denied Egyptian requests for the F-15, advanced air-to-air missiles, and later the F-35, Egypt turned to Russia for the Su-35 and was willing to suffer the consequences of the U.S. Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act because its desire to have advanced weapons outweighed the risk to its defense relationship with the United States. But even if the United States did transfer to Egypt some top-tier weapons, the threat to Israel would be minimal because the EAF could likely never effectively employ them or even maintain them without significant U.S. support. Nevertheless, America has let a genie out of the bottle now that the EAF has broken free from the dependency on U.S. arms. The United States should try a more realistic approach in the future. Ironically, the U.S. denial of the F-15, and later the F-35, made Egypt turn to Russia for the Su-35, which led Israel to later support an F-15 acquisition for Egypt since it prefers that Egypt have American weapons rather than

Russian ones. Simply giving Egypt the F-15 earlier would have perhaps prevented this outcome.

## **Benefits of the Aid and U.S. Values**

Although the aid fulfilled most of its core purposes of maintaining the peace with Israel, enhancing U.S. forces' ability to easily traverse Egyptian territory, and keeping Egypt mostly aligned with U.S. security interests in the region, it clearly failed to achieve other purposes, especially the ones in the later years of the relationship. Even so, Egypt's contributions to U.S. security are unique owing to its strategic location, peace with Israel, and ability to negotiate ceasefires between Israel and the Palestinians, as well as its importance in having the largest population and military in the Arab world.

Although Egypt is an almost indispensable partner, the United States struggled with reconciling its security interest with Egypt with American democratic values and beliefs in human rights. At times, the United States was in a test of wills with Egypt over the latter's insistence on prioritizing stability over democracy and its approach to terrorism—particularly, its tendency to connect all opponents with the Muslim Brotherhood, which it views as a terrorist organization. During the period encompassing the downfall of President Morsi and the rise and rule of Sisi, Egypt grew more authoritarian, calling into question the morality of U.S. military aid and how to align U.S. security interests with American values.

However, there must be a distinction between what is essential—maintaining the Egypt-Israel peace, ending conflicts between Israel and the Palestinians, allowing U.S. military assets to traverse Egypt, and ensuring the stability of Libya—and what is nice to have: a democratic Egypt that respects human rights. Although Sisi's repression of basic freedoms and human rights cannot be defended and should continue to be called out, if the United States tries to force a change in the nature of the leadership, the Egyptian government likely would be just as repressive but less supportive of core U.S. interests. No amount of conditionality will help make fundamental changes to governance in Egypt, and this strategy has already been tried. The leadership views democratization and increased freedoms as opportunities

for critics to organize against it and call for its removal. Such changes are existential threats to Sisi's presidency. Those calling for conditionality overestimate the ability of the United States to force change in Egypt, and renewed attempts to do so will only further alienate Egyptian leaders. The value of U.S. military aid to Egypt has decreased over time because the aid has not been adjusted for inflation, buys less than it used to, and is now a much smaller portion of Egypt's defense budget. The United States has much to lose and little to gain by trying to align its security policy with its values.

## **The Future of the Relationship**

The relationship will continue to experience rough patches. The United States will not increase aid to account for inflation, and U.S. lawmakers will continue to condition aid and will try, because of human rights violations, to increase the amount of aid they approve without a national security waiver, preventing the secretary of state from giving portions of it to Cairo even if the U.S. administration judges it as vital to U.S. interests. Congress might even reduce the annual \$1.3 billion in FMF. All these steps will anger Cairo, which will not make fundamental changes to governance or human rights except in a few cosmetic cases. The United States will probably never reinstate cash flow financing and will be reluctant to greatly lessen QME restrictions or deviate from the policy of allowing aid to be used only for irregular warfare and sustainment. Cairo will continue to be annoyed by Washington's refusal to sell it first-tier weapons while selling them to others in the region.

One of the thorniest problems is Egypt's decision to acquire the Russian Su-35, which will trigger sanctions under U.S. CAATSA legislation if the aircraft are even delivered by Russia. Many nations in the region have considered buying Russian weapons, which by law require CAATSA sanctions, among them Algeria, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. The problem is that the United States does not always offer comparable weapons to what Russia is willing to sell, because of QME and an unwillingness to share sensitive military technology.

The United States imposed CAATSA sanctions on Turkey, a NATO ally, for its acquisition of the Russian S-400 missile system. The United States had

offered first-tier weapons to Turkey, which was set to procure a hundred F-35s, along with the U.S. Patriot missile system as an alternative to the S-400. Turkey was subsequently dropped from the F-35 program after it took delivery of the S-400, but the U.S. CAATSA sanctions on Turkey were on a narrow sector of its defense industrial base, the Presidency of Defense Industries (SSB), and not the whole structure. Sanctions include restrictions on U.S. loans and a freeze of new export licenses for U.S. defense items, as well as asset freezes and visa restrictions on top SSB officials. So far, the sanctions mainly appear to affect defense items procured through commercial channels and not through the Foreign Military Sales program. Therefore, some forms of defense cooperation could continue but will become more problematic, especially for new procurements and replacement parts, and it is already affecting Turkish defense readiness.

In contrast to Turkey, Egypt was not offered top-tier U.S. weapons, despite repeated requests, and it is worth noting what a greater degradation of U.S.-Egypt defense relations caused by CAATSA sanctions or reductions of aid could mean, especially regarding Israel.

Official relations at the governmental level between Cairo and Jerusalem have improved, especially after the departure of Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu. Cairo wants to expand trade ties with Israel to help the Egyptian economy. Cairo and Jerusalem have strong security cooperation concerning the Gaza Strip and Sinai with its insurgency. But Egyptian and Israeli interests are not close matches. Israel is concerned about Iran and its regional proxies. Egypt is focused on the Muslim Brotherhood, the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, the situation in Libya, and Turkey.<sup>7</sup> Cairo is concerned about Iranian penetration in the region but believes tensions need to be de-escalated. Egypt, at least publicly, tries to paint itself as the champion of the Palestinians and the need for a two-state solution, which Jerusalem is not likely to pursue. Israel is deeply unpopular in Egypt, and Egyptians believe the U.S. aid is directly tied to the Egypt-Israel peace. For now, Cairo has strengthened its official relations with Jerusalem because it is in its interests to do so. But if Washington dramatically cuts aid to Egypt, it could contribute to a future crisis in Egypt-Israel relations. For example, a crisis could result if Jerusalem took an action deeply unpopular in Egypt,

such as an expanded round of fighting between Israel and the Palestinians that also engulfed the West Bank, or if Jerusalem unilaterally annexed parts of the West Bank, as once discussed by Israel. Terrorists in Sinai could attack Israel to such an extent that the IDF would openly intervene there, which the Egyptian people would not tolerate. The Egyptian government might be forced to respond to popular criticism of Israeli actions in any number of ways, such as threatening to unilaterally amend the peace treaty, ending demilitarization of Sinai, or being less willing to negotiate ceasefires between Israel and the Palestinians in a new round of fighting to make a statement to the United States even if it prolongs instability along its Gaza Strip border.

Beyond Israel, if the United States were to dramatically cut military aid, Cairo might be less accommodating to last-minute requests for U.S. naval assets to traverse the Suez Canal or could even block transits for bureaucratic reasons. Egypt might become less flexible in accommodating U.S. military overflights or even deny them. The United States would have less leverage with Egypt in securing the release of detained U.S. citizens and less access to Egyptian decisionmakers crises. Egypt might further embrace Russia and China.

The United States still has influence because Egypt's other military patrons do not offer grant assistance; Washington is still Cairo's most important bilateral partner. Most of the EAF's equipment is made in the United States, and it will take years for the EAF to replace it. The EAF also shows more willingness to slightly change to address current threats and do what is in its perceived best interests, from accepting new forms of security cooperation such as hosting exercises with U.S. Special Operations Forces and allowing U.S. naval visits to Egyptian ports, to making better use of local forces in Sinai. Probably the most significant change in the relationship, and the most overlooked, is that Egypt has signed a Communication Interoperability and Security Memorandum of Agreement after decades of rejecting it. For the first time, Egypt can achieve true interoperability with the United States and its military partners. The Egyptians, now at least, appear to not be so touchy regarding perceived U.S. sovereignty infringements and want to buy advanced U.S. weapons, even using national funds if the United States provides it top-tier weapons. Egypt's new security cooperation with

Russia is not designed to completely replace the United States but is a move to improve U.S. ties through some leverage and to diversify its inventory. From the Egyptian perspective, the United States left Cairo no choice but to turn to others.

## Recommendations

Above all else, U.S. administrations and lawmakers should try to reach some sort of consensus on what the military relationship with Egypt and U.S. aid are meant to achieve, whether security interests alone, balancing American interests and values, or trying to force Egypt to change. Of course, full agreement will be nearly impossible given the range of views among U.S. lawmakers and sometimes even within various administrations, but at least an attempt to develop a general consensus would help those U.S. personnel managing the defense relationship with Cairo.

The recommended approach is to focus on what has at least partially worked in the past while rejecting what has clearly failed and often proved counterproductive, such as causing Egypt to turn to other nations as its primary sources of weapons while human rights abuses grew worse. A pragmatic approach that focuses on the realities in Egypt and in the region will work best, even if the approach cannot always be reconciled with U.S. values.

Washington should base its relationship with Cairo on shared security interests, such as maintaining the Egypt-Israel peace treaty, access to Egyptian territory for U.S. ship transits and aircraft overflights, and regional stability. Regional stability is a broad term, but here it refers to at least containing insurgents in Sinai, reinforcing improved Egypt-Israel official relations, preventing future rounds of fighting between Israel and the Palestinians, avoiding renewal of civil war in Libya, de-escalating tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean, and peacefully resolving the Renaissance Dam dispute without harming any of the riparian nations. Egypt is again starting to play a larger role in the region and is working on those issues. In this case, all of Egypt's interests are closely aligned with those of the United

States. America needs an Egypt aligned with it as it attempts to reduce its role in the region and increasingly relies on partners to ensure its security interests are met. America also needs Egypt's support in its competition with Russia and China.

The United States should not reduce the annual \$1.3 billion in aid, because Egypt sees the aid as directly tied to the Egypt-Israel peace treaty, and a halt or reduction of aid will affect the treaty. This recommendation is also in accordance with Israel's desires.

The United States should not end its role in the MFO in Sinai, because both Egypt and Israel want the U.S. presence to continue, which reinforces mutual trust on Sinai issues. If the United States ends its presence in the MFO, Israel might more closely enforce restrictions on EAF deployment in Sinai nearer to the limits fixed in the Egypt-Israel peace treaty, which would anger Cairo.

U.S. values require it to continue to criticize Egypt's human rights abuses, but U.S. policy and lawmakers should realize criticism will have little effect other than in a few specific cases involving U.S. citizens. Lawmakers can continue to condition portions of U.S. aid to improved human rights and democratization but should include national security waivers except for cases involving U.S. citizens. U.S. policymakers and lawmakers should acknowledge to themselves that American values will not always align with Egyptian actions, and their attempts at change will only increase tensions and highlight the limits of U.S. power and influence. The United States took this approach during the Cold War with many nations and should do the same today. Private discussions on human rights can also continue against the backdrop of the military relationship. These discussions are more likely to bear fruit when they focus on specific issues rather than on blanket public condemnations. However, it will be impossible to avoid publicly condemning some practices, such as the detention of U.S. citizens.

Cash flow financing should not be reinstated, because the United States cannot afford to allow itself into the same kind of funding and contracting quagmire that it faced when it considered halting aid to Egypt after the 2011 revolution and again in 2013.

The United States should realize that its relationship with Egypt is

transactional and will never be based on any strong personal bonds because Egypt resents some past U.S. actions and its support of Israel. The United States should accept that there will always be a certain amount of anti-U.S. and anti-Israeli rhetoric from Cairo and must be willing to ignore it. The aid should be viewed as a U.S. operating expense, which is its true nature, rather than a giveaway.

The United States should not evaluate the EAF by comparing it to the U.S. military and should forget about changing the EAF's basic nature. Egypt will break with the United States before that happens. The United States should end its efforts at reforming the EAF into a smaller force focused solely on irregular warfare and end the policy that aid should be restricted to irregular warfare and maintaining existing U.S. equipment. The EAF's role in society and its need to seek parity with Israel mean that it will always try to maintain a large conventional force. The policy of only supporting equipment for irregular warfare is open to many interpretations; any type of weapon system could be needed in counterinsurgency or counterterrorism. Allowing Cairo to procure what it wants with American aid will help reduce tensions, and it will only turn to others for the weapons if it does not get them from America. This policy will also benefit the U.S. defense industrial base because Egypt now shows a willingness to use funds other than the U.S. aid to procure U.S. advanced weapons. U.S. officials can still urge military reform but within the context of the military relationship and Egypt's willingness to accept some new forms of U.S. assistance. But the United States must realize that the EAF will have to reach its decisions on its own and for its own reasons, as eventually occurred with the CISMOA.

Washington should fully explain QME to the EAF and the reality of future restrictions on what advanced technology and weapons the United States can provide. The United States can no longer hide behind the lack of a signed CISMOA to explain why Egypt cannot get certain weapons. Although this discussion will be painful and initially increase Egyptian resentment, open acknowledgment and honesty can potentially increase long-term trust and confidence in the relationship. The United States can frame the discussion around Israel's fear of Egypt based on EAF might and the shared Egypt-Israel

border, whereas most Arab nations that receive U.S. advanced weapons do not border Israel.

In line with this view, the United States should be more flexible in the equipment provided to Egypt within the context of QME. The United States should upgrade the EAF F-16s to CISMOA standards with advanced communications equipment that can interact with the aircraft of other nations in the region. The United States should also offer a few of the weapons previously denied, such as the AIM-120 (AMRAAM) so that EAF F-16s can at least have comparable capabilities to others in the region. Egypt is already receiving similar weapons from France and Russia, so a U.S. sell would not affect the regional balance of power as drastically as it would have in the past. The United States–offered sale of the F-35 to the UAE now that it has normalized relations with Israel will only increase Egyptian resentment toward the United States because Egypt has had a formal peace with Israel longer than any other Arab nation. Offering Egypt some of the previously denied weapons will help mitigate the resentment, and although still tentative, the steps to offer Cairo the F-15 fighter are a positive sign and supported by Israel, but this must be accompanied with the AIM-120 (AMRAAM) to make the aircraft effective. Regardless, Israel will likely maintain a clear superiority into the future owing to EAF problems with training, personnel quality, and inability to rapidly learn to fully use the capabilities of modern weapons.

If Egypt finally gets the Russian Su-35, which appears uncertain today, CAATSA sanctions should be limited and mainly symbolic to do as little damage as possible to the military relationship. The entire EAF Armament Authority should not be targeted. Such an action could lead to shutdown of the entire security cooperation program, and the ramifications to America could be severe. The United States created this problem for itself because it offered weapons to others in the region that it did not offer to Egypt.

The United States should always seek to maintain a strong relationship with the EAF, Egypt's preeminent institution. Although not easy to work with, the EAF will have the final say in Egypt no matter what happens. It would be wise to maintain a seat at the EAF table, even if it is sometimes only as a frustrated observer.

## Notes

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“This is a work of profound scholarship on one of the most secretive militaries in the Middle East, the Egyptian Armed Forces. It brings to life in exquisite detail the EAF’s threat perceptions, its dominant role in Egyptian society, the enormous business enterprise it commands, and its complex relationship with the United States.”

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