

Obama green lights weapons sales to Egypt, Pakistan

Thomas Gaist
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The US government will sell advanced weapons systems to Egypt and Pakistan this week, according to statements issued from the White House and the Pentagon.

An initial transfer of some \$60 million worth of Hellfire II missiles to Egypt will mark the beginning of new US efforts to “modernize” Egypt’s military arsenal, aimed at insuring a “secure and stable Egypt,” according to the White House.

On March 31, Obama telephoned Egyptian military ruler Abdel Fattah al Sisi to inform the general that he was ending the “executive hold” imposed by the US administration on a limited number of weapons systems in October 2013.

Obama personally assured General al Sisi that he would seek to continue providing \$1.3 billion annual military aid packages to the Egyptian regime, which is the number two recipient of US military aid worldwide. The US president vowed that the two would “stay in touch in the weeks and months ahead,” according to a White House press release.

Immediately following Obama’s announcement, the US moved ahead with a pending sale of 20 Harpoon missiles, 125 M1A1 Abrams main battle tank “upgrade kits,” and 12 F-16 fighter jets. Another weapons deal approved Wednesday will send more than 350 US-made Hellfire missiles to Egypt.

With the lifting of the ban, the US will resume unrestricted transfers of “high-grade, sophisticated, big ticket items” to the military dictatorship, according to Tamara Cofman Wittes, director of Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, a Washington think tank with close ties to the White House.

The weapons sales are being coordinated by the US State Department and US Defense Department, and tailored to meet the “operational needs” of the latest

war against Yemen, a US official told *Defense News*. “Operation Decisive Storm” was launched against Yemen on March 25 by forces from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the Gulf monarchies, backed by the US.

“Given the current operational needs, we are making every effort to expedite security assistance to coalition forces,” the official said.

“The State Department is acting promptly on requests for military capabilities from our Gulf partners, in partnership with the Department of Defense,” he added.

Egypt, which previously conducted military operations in Yemen during the 1960s, has deployed at least four warships to the Yemeni coast.

The latest weapons sales to Egypt are an extension of the “robust, long-standing security relationship with Saudi Arabia and other partners in the gulf region,” according to a US State Department statement. The transfer of heavy weapons to Egypt “will contribute to the foreign policy and national security of the United States by helping to improve the security of a friendly country that has been and continues to be an important force for political stability and economic progress in the Middle East,” according to a statement from the Pentagon’s Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA).

Obama’s October 2013 “executive hold” on weapons sales came nearly six months after the military coup led by al-Sisis, and only applied to a handful of weapons systems, with significant military aid continuing to flow. In the immediate wake of the July 2013 coup, the Obama administration refused to impose any restrictions, with White House spokesman Jay Carney announcing at the time of the takeover that “it would not be in the best interests of the United States to immediately change our assistance programs to Egypt.”

Even during the “arms freeze,” the US continued to send various forms of aid to the military junta. During 2014, the US provided some \$35 million worth of equipment to Egypt’s armored units, and some \$45 million worth of equipment to the Egyptian air force, as well as nearly \$70 million worth of guided missiles, according to US government data.

In October 2014, the US furnished a set of 10 Apache helicopter gunships worth more than \$170 million.

During this period, al Sisi’s government has orchestrated historic massacres, mass trials and roundups, handing down death sentences against hundreds of political opponents at a time and detained tens of thousands of political prisoners in a system of military prisons and torture camps. Al Sisi’s military junta has banned political opposition, shuttered independent media, and harassed and terrorized journalists, carrying out what Human Rights Watch described as “mass arrests and torture that harken back to the darkest days of former President Hosni Mubarak’s rule.”

In August 2013, Egyptian security forces massacred some 1,000 people at a protest camp near Rabaa, and wounded some 4,000 more. Forces under the command of the Sisi government carried out “indiscriminate and deliberate use of lethal force,” leading to “one of the world’s largest killings of demonstrators in a single day in recent history,” Human Rights Watch noted.

The weapons ban, which the White House insisted would be ended only after a return to civilian rule, has now been lifted with an open military dictatorship still firmly in place, a discrepancy that US officials have not even bothered to address.

The Obama White House is cooperating with al Sisi and his officers to expand Egypt’s capacities to intervene militarily throughout North Africa and the Middle East, in the name of the fraudulent “global war on terrorism” and to enforce the shared interests of US imperialism and the Egyptian national bourgeois elite.

Freshly armed with American weapons, the Egyptian military is preparing to expand its interventions across the Middle East as part of the “unified Arab military force,” which was proposed by General al Sisi himself and officially approved at the March 26 Arab League summit, one day after Arab coalition warplanes began bombing Yemen.

Also this week, the US announced more than \$950

million in military aid to Pakistan, including 15 Viper attack helicopters and 1,000 state of the art Hellfire II missiles and more than five years of maintenance, support and training from US government employees and contractors.

A Pentagon statement specifically noted that the attack helicopters will enhance Pakistan’s efforts to target militant groups in North Waziristan and other tribal areas.

Large-scale US weapons exports grew by nearly 25 percent between 2005 and 2014, according to a March report from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

In 2011, the US sold almost \$67 billion worth of arms, according to a Congressional report. During the first five years of the Obama administration, the Pentagon approved foreign weapons sales of some \$170 billion, a total that is \$30 billion greater than the amount sold during the entire eight years of the Bush administration.



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