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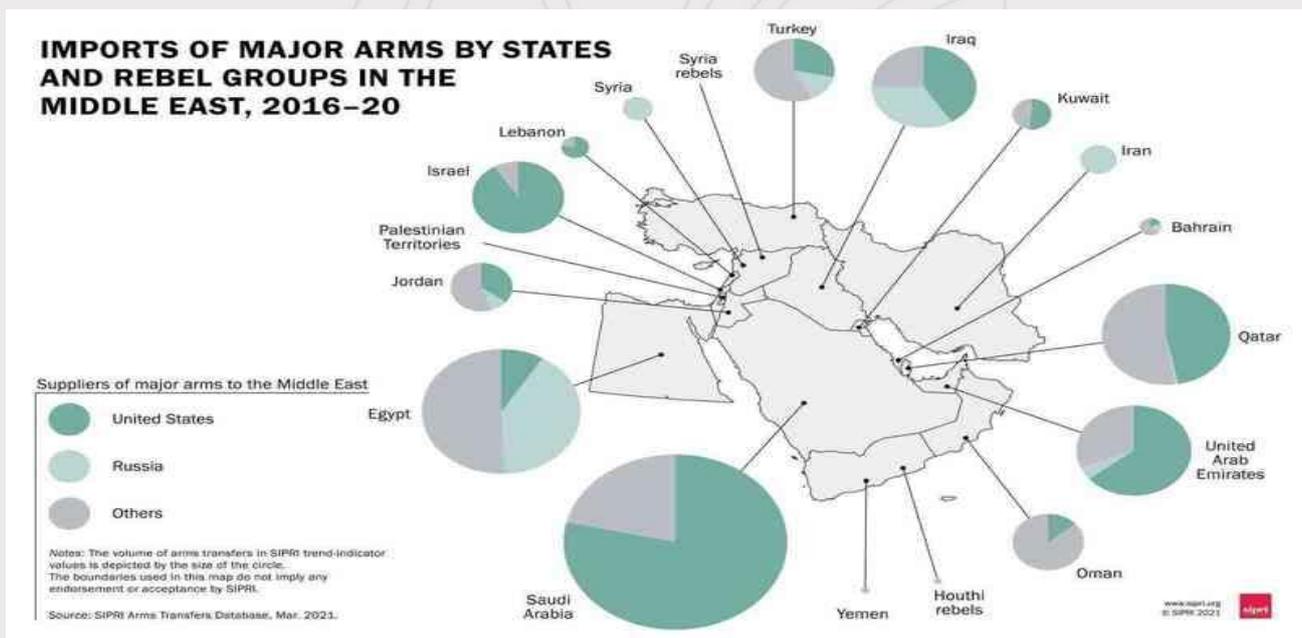
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Egypt: Motives and Orientations of Arms Deals (2016-2020)

Mahmoud Gamal

A report published by the [Stockholm International Peace Research Institute](https://www.sipri.org/) (SIPRI) on 15 March 2021 revealed that the Middle Eastern global arms imports grew by 25% during the period (2016-2020). According to the report, five Arab countries, namely, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Algeria, Qatar, and the UAE came on top of a list of key arms importers¹.

During this period, arms imports by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia - the world's largest arms importer- grew by 61%, Qatar by 361%, Egypt by 136%, and Algeria by 64%; while arms imports by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) fell by 37%, Morocco by 60%, and Turkey by 59%, compared to the period from 2011 to 2015.



Country	KSA	Qatar	UAE	Egypt	Algeria
Rate	+61	+361	-37	+136	+64

¹ Egypt's imports of arms increased by 136%, most of which from Russia at the expense of USA, Arab Defense, 16 March 2021, accessed 17 March 2021, [link](#)

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The Stockholm Institute report revealed that the military deals concluded by the Egyptian army from 2016 to 2020 were distributed among several exporters, according to the following rates:

- Russia by 41%
- France by 25%
- The U. S. by 8.7%

Through the monthly monitoring conducted by the Egyptian Institute for Studies (EIS) in the period from 2016 to 2020, the arms deals concluded by the Egyptian Armed Forces were distributed among the Air Force, the army's most important branch that was provided with several arms purchases, then the Navy, the Land Forces, and finally the Air Defense Forces.

The Egyptian army's purchases have been financed via two methods: the first through loans that are repaid according to written terms stated in the contract; and the second through direct funding by certain countries that back the Egyptian regime, mainly the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

Growth of arms deals following Sisi's access to power

There are several prospects that may explain Egypt's multiple and diverse arms deals since Sisi accessed to power, as follows:

1- The Egyptian army's growing purchase of weapons at this particular time is important in light of the troubled regional situation, to protect Egyptian national security on the one hand, and to enhance its position in the Middle East and impose itself as a major player that cannot be bypassed, on the other hand – which is a reasonable explanation.

2- The United States seeks to boost the military strength of its strategic ally in the Middle East, that is the Egyptian army, so that it can further contribute to securing the existing regional order.

This view is supported by the fact that the Egyptian army's armament remains mostly American until now, with the intense US support manifested in the US aid as well as other deals concluded between the two sides. In addition, the United States allies and NATO partners, such as France, Germany and Italy, are among the main countries that provide support to the Egyptian army. Moreover, Saudi

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Arabia and the UAE that enjoy strategic relations with the United States, provide funding for some of these arms deals.

3- The Egyptian-Russian rapprochement after July 3, 2013 has become clear to all; and accordingly, Russia's position among the key suppliers of arms to Egypt is logical. Following the 2013 coup that strained the Egyptian-American relations, the US administration under former President Barack Obama blocked some US aid, which constituted the primary impetus for the Sisi regime to seek an alternative that would provide Egypt with its military needs until the tension between the two countries fades away. At this time, Russian President Vladimir Putin's motives for expanding in the Middle East region coincided with Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's motives for seeking a "temporary" alternative for the US to spite and blackmail the United States – sending a message that Egypt resorted to the U.S.'s adversary that aspires to revive its power once again, in response to the US sanctions. However, this did not last long, as the United States later released its aid to the Egyptian regime. During the US administration under President Donald Trump, the US relations with Egypt were back to normal, and even better. Recently, after President Joe Biden's access to the White House, nothing has changed in the excellent relations between the two countries, given that the relationship of the United States with Egypt, specifically the Egyptian army, is a strategic relationship between institutions; therefore, it will remain so in the future, regardless of the identity of the ruler of any of them.

Although the US-Egyptian relations have been back to normal, the Egyptian-Russian rapprochement continued, and arms deals between the two countries even escalated over time. Furthermore, the joint exercises of the Egyptian army and the Russian army – such as 'Defenders of Friendship' and 'Bridge of Friendship' – are among the largest and most important military exercises of the Egyptian army.

There are numerous motives for maintaining and boosting rapprochement between Egypt and the Russian Federation over the past five years, including:

- Russia that is economically exhausted reaps great economic gains from the multiple aerial weapon deals with Egypt, as Moscow produces several types of aerial weapons and equipment.

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- There are common goals between Sisi and Putin, as the latter wants to boost Russia's presence and expansion in the Middle East region and its files, mainly the Libyan and Syrian files. That is why Russia has been keen on selling qualitative weapons, especially in the airspace, to the Egyptian army, so that they would be used on the Libyan territory in support of Haftar.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin's success in supporting Bashar al-Assad made Sisi view him as a reliable ally in the event of occurrence of huge events in Egypt that may lead to Sisi's departure, especially when the United States finds that Sisi's survival in power can harm its interests and the interests of the Zionist entity, and choose to support a political transition led by the army, as happened in the January 2011 revolution. For this reason, Sisi tends to strengthen relations with Putin through conclusion of several military deals with Russia.

4- The confrontation in Sinai between the Egyptian army and the IS local affiliate, Sinai Province, may be the reason for Egypt's expansion of arms deals, as the militant organization's strength has grown significantly, which led to multiple losses of the Egyptian army, both in personnel and equipment.

However, it is illogical to link these huge arms deals to a confrontation with an irregular militant insurgency, because most of these deals mostly include heavy weapons that can be used in open wars in the face of similar regular armies. In addition, some of these weapons are not commensurate with the combat environment in Sinai. This raises doubts about the role of these arms deals in enhancing the combat capabilities of the Egyptian army, due to the fact that they are concluded in coordination with the Zionist entity. Despite these huge arms deals, the Egyptian army is still suffering in the face of militants in the Sinai. The army's Comprehensive Operation-Sinai 2018 declared by Sisi in late 2017, with the hope that it would end within three months and declare Sinai a militant free area, has not succeeded to achieve this to this time, with no harbingers that such confrontation may end in the near future.

5- These arms deals may be linked with the participation of the Egyptian army, particularly air and land formations, in the military operations in Libya or in sending military reinforcements inside the Libyan territories, within the framework of the military support provided by Egypt to Haftar's militias in eastern Libya, where the latter also enjoys French, Russian and Emirati support, which may explain the existence of Russia and France on top of arms exporters to Egypt.

6- These arms deals may be aimed at enhancing the army's role in curbing illegal immigration to Europe, especially that the Sisi regime is good at political blackmail. The Egyptian regime conveyed a message to the West that Egypt is fighting for the sake of Europe that suffers from smuggling and illegal immigration, with dissemination of many statements by Egyptian officials about thwarting numerous illegal immigration attempts to Europe. In this context, it is noteworthy that Germany and France are at the forefront of countries that have concluded naval arms deals with Egypt, as both European countries see that the illegal immigration coming from the African continent in particular threatens their national security.

7- The arms deals concluded by the Egyptian army may be linked with Egypt's need to secure its natural gas wells in the eastern Mediterranean region, amid rising competition between Greece, Cyprus, Israel, Palestine, Turkey, Syria and Egypt in this regard. Accordingly, there are substantial fears that the successive discoveries of natural gas by the countries overlooking the Eastern Mediterranean, may lead to outbreak of wars between them.

Conclusion

The Egyptian army is considered one of the largest armies in the Arab region, where its strength is in the interest of the entire Arab region that has a single strategic enemy, that is the Zionist entity which harbors animosity against all Arab countries. Therefore, the keenness to strengthen the Egyptian army, as well as the rest of Arab armies, is extremely important, and must be supported by everyone that is keen to protect Arab national security, especially that the Arabs' strategic enemy, Israel, enjoys military support from various Western countries, including provision of qualitative weapons that ensure its supremacy over all its Arab neighbors.

The reliance of Arab armies, particularly the Egyptian one, on importing weapons from abroad is extremely dangerous, being in the interest of their enemies that act only according to their own strategic interests in the region, working day and night to ensure that the Middle East is at their disposal. Most of arms exporters to Arab armies take advantage of this to make the regimes of the major Arab countries, especially Egypt, dependent on them. Therefore, it is true that a nation that does not produce its own weapons, does not possess neither its decision nor its independence, and remains a puppet in the hands of major powers.