

Significant Cases of Global Arms Trade

Egypt and Libyas internal conflict

Key Data:

Years: since 2011

Involved Countries: Egypt; Libya

Weapon Systems:

Arms Producers:

Perpetrators/Involved Parties:

Victims/Affected:

The political unrest and conflict in Libya have led to a significant influx of weapons into the country from a multitude of international actors, Egypt being one of them. As one of the largest military forces in the Middle East and North Africa, Egypt has substantial inventories of major weapons [7]. It has been alleged that Egypt, among others, has played a part in supplying weapons to Libya, despite the UN arms embargo. The implications of this action on the conflict and the region are substantial and complex.

Egypt's military strength has been well supported by international arms sales. The U.S., for example, has notably approved substantial arms sales to Egypt, with a value around \$2.5 billion in 2022 [2] and \$197 million in 2021 [1]. These deals have drawn international criticism due to Egypt's human rights record [3].

In the context of the Libyan conflict, it's essential to note that Egypt has strong geopolitical interests in the region, particularly due to its shared border with Libya. Historically, Egypt has supported the Libyan National Army (LNA) led by Khalifa Haftar, largely due to shared concerns over Islamist extremism and border security. The delivery of weapons from Egypt to the LNA has likely strengthened the LNA's position in the conflict, enabling them to maintain a strong challenge against the internationally recognised Government of National Accord (GNA).

While it's difficult to track the exact path of individual weapons from Egypt to Libya due to the opaque nature of illicit arms transfers, it's reasonable to infer that the arms supplied have likely contributed to an intensification of the conflict. They've potentially provided the means for increased violence, contributing to a higher death toll and further civilian suffering. Moreover, the breach of the UN arms embargo by supplying arms to Libya indirectly undermines international law and the credibility of multilateral institutions like the UN.

Furthermore, the flow of weapons into Libya from Egypt and other countries has destabilised the broader region. The conflict in Libya has led to security issues spilling over into neighboring countries and regions, particularly the Sahel. It has also contributed to a significant refugee crisis in the Mediterranean, affecting European countries. The inflow of weapons has potentially facilitated the activities of extremist groups, adding another layer of complexity to an already intricate conflict scenario.

In conclusion, the alleged resale of Egyptian weapons into the armed conflict in Libya is a critical element in understanding the dynamics of the conflict and the broader regional instability. The delivery of these arms has likely influenced the balance of power between the warring parties in Libya, sustained and perhaps escalated the level of violence, and had destabilising effects on the wider region. In this light, the continuation of such arms transfers underscores the need for more effective international arms control measures and a renewed commitment to peaceful conflict resolution mechanisms.

Additional Information / Sources

[1] "Feb 17, 2021 · The Biden administration on Tuesday announced it had approved a possible \$197 million sale of missiles to Egypt, just days after the Egyptian government is said to have detained family..."

URL: <https://www.cnn.com/2021/02/16/politics/egypt-missile-sale/index.html>

[2] "Jan 26, 2022 · 26 Jan 2022 United States President Joe Biden's administration has approved a massive arms sale to Egypt valued at about \$2.5bn, despite continued calls for Washington to curtail its support..."

URL: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/26/us-approves-2-5bn-arms-sale-egypt-despite-rights-concerns>

[3] "Feb 17, 2021 · News | Human Rights US sells \$200m in weapons to Egypt despite human rights abuses The \$197m sale of Raytheon-made Rolling Airframe Missiles was requested by the Egyptian navy to improve..."

URL: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/17/us-sells-200m-in-weapons-to-egypt-despite-human-rights-abuses>

[7] "Egypt has one of the largest military forces and inventories of major weapons in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). However, based on the official figures provided by the government, Egypt's military expenditure averaged a comparatively moderate, by regional standards, US\$3.8 billion annually over the past decade."

URL: <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2020/sipri-background-papers/understanding-egyptian-military-expenditure>

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