

# **American Aid to Egypt and its Impact on Egypt-Iran Relations**

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## **Abstract**

Egypt is a strategic country for the United States. On the one hand maintaining Egypt friendly to the West due to its geopolitical location and influence in Arab League, keeping Suez Canal open for economic and military interests, following market development opportunities and securing a settlement with Israel are among the reasons which make Egypt vital for U.S. policy makers on the other the Egyptian foreign policy pattern is based on geography, national interests, cold War setting and leaders of Egypt is mainly affected by U.S. policies. This study uses foreign aid political theory to discuss how the United States uses foreign aid to maintain its interests in Egypt despite the political instability caused by the Arab Spring. The archival research on the USAID and U.S. foreign policy towards Egypt demonstrates that after Nasser presidency and since the late 1970s, the United States has provided significant military and economic assistance to Egypt to pursue its interests in the Middle East. Although Arab Spring and Egyptian uprisings in 2011 and Egyptian military's coup in 2013 made Obama administration to suspend temporarily some U.S. assistance to Egypt, but after re-establishment of aids, the steady rate of U.S. military assistance to Egypt hasn't been changed. This issue shows that U.S. unceasing influence in

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Egyptian circles of power was saved by foreign aid and proves the permanence of U.S. strategic interests in the region. As a result, U.S. utilizes these aids as an influential tool to control Egypt and to pursue its goals in the Middle Eastern countries, including Iran. Due to the close partnership with the United State and Israel, Egypt doesn't have a stable relationship with Islamic Republic of Iran.

**Keywords:** United States, Egypt, Political Economy, USAID, Arab Spring

Received: 2020-12-03

Review: 2021-01-21

Accepted: 2021-03-19

**Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs, Vol. 11, No. 2, Summer- Fall 2020, pp. 407-438**

## **Introduction**

U.S.-Egypt relations have a complex and multi-faceted nature. Egypt has been an essential political force for guaranteeing U.S. influence in the Middle East and a crucial U.S. ally allowing Western powers to fly over Egyptian territory to the Persian Gulf and transiting through the Suez Canal. Since the late 1970s, the United States has provided significant military and economic assistance to Egypt and U.S. policy makers have regularly justified the aid to Egypt as an investment in regional stability. Nevertheless, this aid has been primarily based on preserving long-running cooperation with the Egyptian military and sustaining the March 1979 so-called Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. In view of that, successive U.S. presidents have overtly regarded Egypt's government as a significant country in the Middle East in line with U.S. policies and interests (Sharp, 2014: 2). Accordingly, Egypt has always been considered a key partner in pursuing US interests in the region and in preserving the Arab-Israeli peace process on behalf of the United States and Israel.

The Arab Spring was provoked by the dissatisfaction of the Egyptian people especially the youth and the unions, because the Mubarak government was an important point in the history of this long-term partnership. Before Arab Spring, Egypt's foreign policy under Mubarak was characterized by a trilateral relationship with the United States and Israel; the main reason of these close relations was the Camp David agreement because of which Egypt received a large amount of aid, both civilian (from US\$800 million in the 1980s to \$250 million in 2011) and military (a steady flow of \$1.3 billion per annum) (Droz-Vincent, 2012: 1).

However, with the onset of the Arab Spring in 2011 and shortly prior to Mubarak's overthrow, the U.S. support for Egypt was initially sustained and then reestablished. Indeed, the January 2011 Egypt uprisings and the protracted transition that followed created a milestone in Egypt's political history that shaped a new balance of power in the country. So, the U.S. policy makers started debating about the future of U.S.-Egypt relations and the then U.S. president Barack Obama felt the necessity of revising U.S. policies towards the country in order to maintain U.S. leverage not only over the Egypt, but also over Southwest Asia and North Africa. As a result, US foreign aid resumed a few months later.

One of the main instruments adopted by U.S. policy makers to manage the critical situations is foreign aid. This was also the case of Egypt involved in the political turmoil of Arab Spring. The U.S. government generally classifies foreign assistance into one of two categories: military aid and economic aid. Marvin G. Weinbaum in *Egypt and the Politics of U.S. Economic Aid* argues that the massive U.S. economic aid program for Egypt initiated in 1970s is mainly shaped by the interaction of political and development goals. He believes that the U.S. assistance has enabled the country to achieve a certain level of consumption and development planning but with no other alternative. Weinbaum shows that the U.S. profits is dependent on the Egyptian leaders' foreign policy approaches and the strategic threats to the Middle East and emphasizes that if U.S.-Egypt strategic partnership is to survive, the United States must display greater sensitivity to Egypt's political and economic problems (Weinbaum, 2019). Moreover, Matthew Craig Axelrod in a thesis titled *Aid as Leverage? Understanding the U.S.-Egypt Military Relationship* shows that the Egyptian military is no dissociated from politics and continuous U.S. military assistance to Egypt seems to have been confirmed by the long-lasting partnership between both countries and it is to say that at the moment of truth the Egyptian military supported a repressive regime rather than the people

(Axelrod, 2011). In this regard, Arab Spring was a critical point which placed U.S. economic and military aid to Egypt into the crucial testing.

It is noteworthy that, Iran's relationship with Egypt is deeply involved with tensions that in turn derive from the Arab states' foreign policy calculations mainly affected by U.S. approaches towards the Middle East. Hence, this investigation aims to compare and contrast U.S. foreign aid toward Egypt before and after Arab Spring to indicate how U.S. adopted foreign aid as an instrument to preserve its influence in the country and to pursue its goals in the Middle East without being so much affected by the political instabilities caused by Arab Spring. It is hypothesized that U.S. aid, especially military aid, was an efficient instrument in leading the uprisings towards U.S. objectives. So, the archival research methodology is used for "the locating, evaluating, and systematic interpretation and analysis of sources found in archives" (Corti & Thompson, 2004; Berg, 2001; Denzin, 1989) and consequently for extracting required evidence from original archival records. Through referring to the collected data, first Egypt foreign policy pattern and its inclination towards U.S. interests are explained and secondly, the critical points of U.S.-Egypt relations are introduced. Then the available data including official reports, statistics and statements about USAID to Egypt is examined to offer an interpretation on the role of USAID in preserving U.S. interests in Egypt before and after 2011 uprisings.

## **I- Egypt Foreign Policy and U.S. Interests**

Over the centuries, Egypt's foreign policy has been associated with various factors that were mainly dictated by geographical situation and historical realities of the country. In other words, despite recent political transformations of the country, the Egyptian foreign policy pattern is always characterized by four essential factors, namely, geography, national interests, Cold War setting and leaders of Egypt (Tianshe, 2011) which are explained in the following paragraphs.

In terms of geography, geopolitics has inevitably shaped the nature of Egypt's foreign policy because the country occupies a strategic position as a land bridge between Asia and Africa forming a link between two principal waterways, the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean. Therefore, this factor provides Egypt with a politically strategic position, as truly argued by Gamal Abdel-Nasser, constituting the center of three "circles," the African, the Arab, and the Islamic. This factor gives Egypt an important position in the Islamic world which is closely linked with its national interests.

In terms of interests, it is to mention that although protection of national interests is underpinning of Egypt's foreign relations like any other country, the national interests of Egypt have been relied on different points of emphasis at different times. However, since the beginning, the constant element of Egypt's national interest has been its Arab-Islamic character. Egypt is considered as the main part of the Arab world. It is the largest Arabic-speaking country with modern intellectual and political centers. For instance, Al Azhar University is one of the major Islamic religious institutions and its profoundly Islamic culture explains why Egypt is known as the center of Islamic civilization (Tianshe, 2011: 88; Aly, 2014). Therefore, the country's Arab-Islamic identity is also one of the main pillars of its foreign-policy decision making.

For Cold War, Egypt's foreign relations during that period of time were mainly determined by the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union and these two countries were regarded as top priority in the country's foreign relations before the 1990s (Tianshe, 2011: 92). In other words, U.S. foreign policy toward Egypt during the 1950s was based on the following goals: 1) Supporting American and western Europe access to oil in the Middle East, 2) Promoting the ideal of self-determination expressed in the Atlantic Charter by ending British colonial rule throughout the region, 3) Supporting the independence of Israel without alienating the Arab states, and 4) Containing the

expansion of communism, specially the influence of the Soviet Union in the region (Holland, 1996). Hence, the United States considered Egypt as a natural leader among the Arab countries and encouraged pro-Western elements in Egyptian society to make the country an ally of the United States. . Since those times, Egypt mainly Islamic approaches have been influenced by Western powers' interests, especially the United States. Indeed, during decades, different types of U.S. foreign aid to Egypt have been used to realize U.S. objectives in the country. The following figure shows the amount of USAID provided to Egypt from 1951 to 1990. Before 1979, the U.S. foreign assistance to Egypt was based on economic developments. However, in 1979, following the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, the U.S. foreign assistance to Egypt amounted to more than 7 billion dollars which means that after that treaty, the US foreign assistance to Egypt was mainly based on military equipments. So during the Cold War, Egypt foreign policy pattern gradually took Western characteristics. These characteristics have shaped Egypt foreign policy during many decades up until Al-Sisi ascension to power which is experiencing some shifts in its priorities (El Hadidi, 2018).

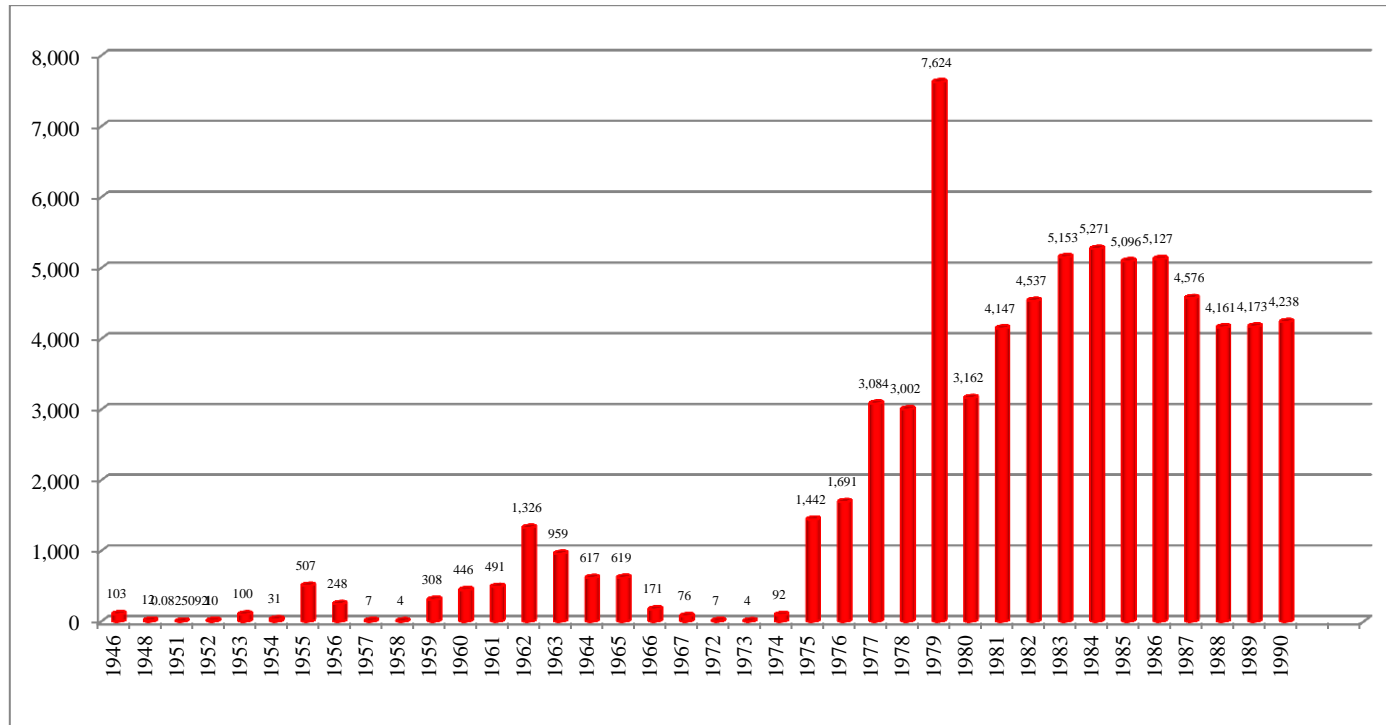


Figure 1. U.S. Foreign Assistance to Egypt During Cold War (Current Year US\$ in Millions)

Source: U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Retrieved from <https://explorer.usaid.gov/data>.



On the other hand, Egypt's foreign policy was favoring the contrary directions such as the ideals of anti-imperialist non-alignment and the webs of dependency in which the country was increasingly involved. So the basic dilemma of Egypt's foreign policy during Cold War was its dependence on foreign assistance which was in conflict with its aspiration for national independence and its Arab-Islamic and traditionally non-aligned entity. This Arabic-Western dilemma is still present in the foreign policy decision-making process of the country.

Finally, Egypt foreign policy decision making functions under a particular political mechanism which assigns a supreme power to the leaders and players of foreign policy. Indeed, personal characteristics of Egyptian leaders feature in Egypt's relations with other countries of the world. Furthermore, Egypt is a presidential republic and according to 1956, 1958, 1964 and the permanent 1971 constitutions, president is the dominant authority in the political affairs of the country. So, Egypt president and his staff constitute a circle of power which has the absolute power in terms of foreign relations and orientations (Tianshe, 2011: 95). It is to say that in spite of modifications in the new constitutional amendment, the conditions of the president's campaign and terms of office didn't impose many restrictions on his power and the President of Egypt is still a dominant authority in terms of foreign policy.

The absolute power assigned to the president was displayed by signing the Camp David I agreement after which Egypt foreign policy under Mubarak entered to a triangular relationship with the United States and Israel. Because of this agreement, Egypt received a large amount of aid, both civilian (from US\$800 million annually in the 1980s to \$250 million in 2011) and military (a steady flow of \$1.3 billion annually) from United States. Therefore, USAID made Egypt a critical partner in the Arab-Israeli Peace Process, an essential political force for guaranteeing U.S. influence in the Middle East and a crucial U.S. ally allowing the Western power to fly over Egyptian territory to

the Persian Gulf and transiting through the Suez Canal (Droz-Vincent, 2012: 2). In short, USAID amplified the Western nature of Egypt foreign policy and made it more dependent on the U.S. interests. Some Egyptian political experts argued that because of Mubarak's regime foreign policy approach, Egypt suffered a significant decline in its traditional role in Arab, regional, and international affairs (Darrag, 2012: 2; Aran & Ginat, 2014). However, the history shows that the Mubarak's foreign policy approach is still continuing. In other words, in spite of January 2011 uprisings, the United States has maintained Egypt as its ally in the Arab world and the leader's Arabic-Western approach is up until now an outstanding element in Egypt foreign policy decision-making.

Another important factor in the Egypt foreign policy orientations are military leaders. In other words, the distribution of power in Egypt and its foreign policy could be better understood by considering the military as the second influential factor in Egypt foreign policy. Egyptian military is an indispensable part of the ancient government. It serves as the ultimate coercive backbone to political leaders in the case of immediate threats and maintains significant influence on the core issues in foreign policy, such as U.S.-Egypt relations and the Palestinian question; and it is a reference for the employment in political positions and the bureaucratic apparatus. It is worth mentioning that the Egyptian military has established its own vast economic complex, which comprises industrial enterprises in military production and civilian goods, major infrastructure projects, land projects and agriculture, and tourism business (Albrecht & Bishara, 2011: 15). As truly argued by Sallam, military is one of the main and wealthiest economic corporation and the owner of profitable and heavily subsidized revenue-generating enterprises in Egypt. The military's budget is not meaningfully overseen by elected civilian officials, and consequently little transparency regarding the production and allocation of military revenues and resistance against democratic standards such as transparency and

accountability are main characteristics of military leaders. In addition, military leaders control different entities such as the ministries of defense, interior, finance, and foreign affairs to impede any challenges against their interests. Strategically and politically speaking, Egypt's military leaders not only try to secure the continuous flow of military aid from the United States to Egypt through maintaining friendly ties with the United States, but also aim to keep their country out of costly wars with neighbors, mainly Israel, through protecting their defense establishment from any foreign policy initiatives that elected politicians may choose to advance (Sallam, 2012). So military leaders are keen to preserve their relationship with the United States and Israel and accordingly, enhance that Arabic-Western approach is underscored in the Egypt's foreign-policy.

Therefore, the four factors of Egypt's foreign policy namely geography, national Islamic character, the enduring dilemma between reliance on foreign assistance and traditionally non-aligned entity and dependence on the will of presidents and military leaders demonstrate that the Egypt's foreign policy pattern has gradually taken an Arabic-Western nature. The factors confirm that Egypt foreign policy pattern has gradually inclined to the U.S. interests and has become increasingly affected by U.S. policies in Southwest Asia and North Africa. Egypt's tense relationship with Iran is one example of the U.S. impact on the country's foreign policy affairs. It is clear that the geographical and strategic importance of Egypt and its predominantly Islamic nature are unchangeable factors in this pattern and any dramatic change in the Egypt's foreign policy could be realized through modification in other factors such as reliance on foreign assistance and dependence on the will of presidents and military leaders. The following parts show how the United States historically has tried to focus on these elements in order to establish its interests in the country. These interests were not even challenged in the context of Arab Spring evolutions.

## II- Establishment of USAID to Egypt

Before discussing US foreign aid to Egypt before prior to the Arab Spring, it is important to look at the relationship between the United States and Egypt to see how Egypt's dependence on USAID has developed. Historically, Egypt has been considered a strategic country for the U.S. national security interests due to its geography, demography, and diplomatic posture. During the presidency of Gamal Abdel-Nasser (1952–70) who alienated the U.S. by his pro-Soviet policies and anti-Israeli approaches, the United States didn't have so much dealing with Egypt, but tried to keep the minimal ties with the country by forcing Britain and France to end their invasion in 1956 and keep anti-imperialist Abdel-Nasser in power. After the presidency of Abdel-Nasser, U.S. gradual rapprochement with the Egyptian leaders began so following the 1973 Yom Kippur, changes in Egypt's leadership from the Abdel-Nasser to moderate Anwar Sadat resulted in U.S. strong support to presidents who supported peace with Israel. In other words, figures such as Anwar Sadat (1970–81) and Hosni Mubarak (1981–2011) helped U.S.-Egypt relations became more serious and U.S. and Israel came to be the main Egypt allies.

Strictly speaking, after the 1973 Arab-Israeli War and start of the Anwar Sadat presidency, the peace process between Egypt and Israel became more important. Sadat believed that the main prerequisite for Egyptian development was the settlement of Arab-Israeli conflict. So he focused on the enhancement of U.S.-Egypt relations to advance a peace process with Israel. Finally, after seven years, normal diplomatic relations between the two countries were established on February 28, 1974 and the negotiations with Israel resulted in the historic Camp David Accord in 1979. Sadat plans such as the 1974 Open Door Policy (known as *infitah*) and the 1979 Camp David Accord reestablished Egypt-U.S. diplomatic relations and initiated what has become a substantial amount of foreign assistance. Indeed, with the Camp David Agreement, Egypt began to receive approximately \$2 billion annually in USAID which was the

second largest allocation after Israel (Momani, 2003: 88; Sharp, 2020). Since that time, Egypt economic dependency on the US has been gradually established and successive U.S. administrations have regularly justified aid to Egypt as an investment in regional stability (Sharp, 2018: 19). However, this assistance was primarily based on maintaining long-term cooperation with the Egyptian army, and has since been based on maintaining the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty concluded in March 1979. In the following parts, the U.S. foreign aid to Egypt before and after Arab Spring will be explained to demonstrate how foreign aid helped the U.S. to keep its alliance with Egypt, one of the main regional powers in North Africa, Southwest Asia and the Muslim world.

**Before Arab Spring:** As mentioned in earlier parts, Egypt has a profound impact on the North Africa and Southwest Asia political and religious ideologies, as well as their popular culture. During and after the Cold War, pursuing an Arab-Israeli peace, fighting the so-called terrorism, and promoting economic and political reforms paved the way for good U.S.-Egypt relations and Egypt became a critical force in advancing U.S. interests in the Middle East. Consequently, large amount of U.S. military and economic aid, greater than other amounts given to any other Arab state in the Southwest Asia or North Africa were sent to Egypt (Momani, 2003). From 1979, Egypt became the second-largest recipient of U.S. foreign aids after Israel (see Table 2.) (Sharp, 2012: 6). Therefore, according to Morgenthau's political theory of foreign aids, this assistance was in the service of political goals and before Arab Spring Egypt was definitely playing an important role in advancing the United States' strategic objectives in the Middle East.

Table 1. Top Recipients of US. Foreign Aid, 2009\* (Current Year US\$ in Millions)

1	Israel	1,992
2	<b>Egypt</b>	<b>1,734</b>
3	Mexico	1,284
4	Pakistan	1,249
5	Columbia	1,229
6	Peru	534
7	Sudan	514
8	Ethiopia	441
9	Kenya	391
10	South Africa	361
11	Russia	332
12	Haiti	232

\* Does not include military assistance.

Source: Statistical Abstract of the United States (2011).

<https://www.census.gov>.

According to the 1964 National Policy Paper on Egypt, there are many reasons that describe the position and importance of Egypt for U.S. foreign policy. For instance, maintaining Egypt friendly to the West due to its geopolitical location and influence in Arab League, keeping Suez Canal open for economic and military interests, following market development opportunities and securing a settlement with Israel (Tauber, 2013; Taghdar et. al. 2020: 2478) are among the reasons that confirm the significance of Egypt for U.S. policy makers.

In view of that, benefits driven from United States foreign aid to Egypt are more strategic, diplomatic, and political than economic. Development experts believe that if Egypt's economic assistance had been centered on economic necessities rather than on political objectives, Egypt would have expected \$100-\$200 million in U.S. assistance and there is a great difference from the \$100-\$200 million to approximately \$1 billion devoted solely to economic aid (Momani, 2003: 88).

Moreover, U.S.-Egyptian military ties are crucial in understanding the U.S. foreign policy toward Egypt. According to the Congressional Research Service, U.S. Navy access to the Suez Canal on an expedited basis allows the Navy to “deploy carrier groups swiftly to the Persian Gulf region. Without passage through the Canal, the Navy would have to deploy ships around the Cape of Good Hope-adding significant time to deployment from Norfolk, Va., to the Persian Gulf or Indian Ocean” (Sharp, 2013: 6). U.S.-Egyptian military cooperation is not limited to the U.S. Navy access to the Suez Canal. Secure transit of oil tankers through the Canal; over-flight rights; Operation Bright Star as the largest military exercise conducted by U.S. in the world; sharing intelligence information in the region, military supply, etc., demonstrate the important nature of the U.S.-Egypt military relationship (Momani, 2003: 89). The military cooperation is a strong signal of the U.S. ability to conduct military operation in the region, especially during times of war and crisis. Actually, the strategic, political and military cooperation between U.S. and Egypt confirms that U.S. Foreign policy towards Egypt before Arab Spring was based on the USAID to ensure the survival of those moderate Arab regimes that are capable of playing a mediator role for legitimizing and advancing U.S. interests in Middle Eastern affairs. Following tables show the details of USAID to Egypt before Arab Spring.

Table 2. U.S. Foreign Assistance to Egypt (Current Year US\$ in Millions)

Fiscal Year	Total	Economic	Military	IMET	Total
1998		815.0	1,300.0	1.0	2,116.0
1999		775.0	1,300.0	1.0	2,076.0
2000		727.3	1,300.0	1.0	2,028.3
2001		695.0	1,300.0	1.0	1,996.0
2002		655.0	1,300.0	1.0	1,956.0
2003		911.0	1,300.0	1.2	2,212.2
2004		571.6	1,292.3	1.4	1,865.3
2005		530.7	1,289.6	1.2	1,821.5

2006	490.0	1,287.0	1.2	1,778.2
2007	450.0	1,300.0	1.3	1,751.3
2008	411.6	1,289.4	1.2	1,702.2
2009	250.0	1,300.0	1.3	1,551.3
2010	250.0	1,300.0	1.9	1,551.9
2011	249.5	1,297.4	1.4	1,548.3
Total	31,320.3	41,809.2	44.54	73,174.0

Source: Sharp, 2012 CRS Report.

Table 3. U.S. Assistance to Egypt, FY2010-FY2013 Request  
(Regular and Supplemental Appropriations; Current Year US\$ in Millions)

Account	FY2010	FY2011	FY2012	FY2013 Request
ESF	250.0	249.5	250.0	250.0
FMF	1,300.0	1,297.4	1,300.0	1,300.0
IMET	1.900	1.400	1.400	1.800
INCLE	1.000	1.000	0.250	7.900
NADR	2.800	4.600	5.600	—
Total	1,555.7	1,553.9	1,557.25	1,559.7

SOURCE: Sharp, 2012 CRS Report.

As shown in the Table 3. USAID to Egypt include funds from three primary accounts: Foreign Military Financing (FMF), Economic Support Funds (ESF), and International Military Education and Training (IMET). Additionally, Egypt occasionally receives relatively small sums from the Nonproliferation, Antiterrorism, Demining, and Related Programs (NADR) account and the International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE) account (Sharp, 2012: 6). Generally, there are two channels for giving aid: a) bilateral aid agency that answers directly to the country's government, and b) multilateral agencies such as the World Bank. Multilateral aid allocation is less controllable by countries (Boone, 1996). From the 1970s to 2004, all U.S. economic assistance to Egypt was subject to a bilateral agreement, which means that each aid project was dependent on the approval by the Egyptian government. Given the lack of



transparency and equitable allocation of aid to many NGOs and CSOs by Egyptian government, in 2004 U.S. started to pay directly to these organizations, but then when Obama took office in 2009, he repaired bilateral relations with Egypt focusing on Egypt's role in renewing the Israel-Palestine peace process, and avoiding criticism of Egypt's human rights record (Tauber, 2013: 17).

In terms of economic aid, annual bilateral assistance to Egypt is usually provided in three different ways: (1) direct cash transfer to the Egyptian government; (2) part of the Commodity Import Program, through providing hard currency to the Egyptian private sector in order to purchase U.S. agricultural goods; and (3) funds for USAID programming in Egypt (Sharp, 2006: 27-28). To explain more details of economic aid, it is to say that a 10-year agreement reached in the late 1990s known as the "Glide Path Agreement" that made U.S. Congress decide to reduce economic aid both to Egypt and Israel and as a result, ESF aid to Egypt was decreased from \$815 million in FY1998 to \$411 million in FY2008. Later, because of Mubarak's reaction to the Bush Administration's democracy agenda, Congress cut ESF aid by half in FY2009 to \$200 million. However, in 2009, President Obama increased a \$50 million in economic aid to Egypt for FY2010, which was passed by Congress (Sharp, 2009: 29). Moreover, after Mubarak's resignation in February 2011, Obama Administration reprogrammed \$165 million in already appropriated ESF for support to Egypt's economy (\$100 million) and political transition (\$65 million) (Sharp, 2012: 9). In brief, economic aid acted as the main pillar of the U.S. foreign policy to intervene in the Egyptian executive system.

In terms of military assistance, FMF aid for Egypt military is divided into three mechanisms: (1) acquisitions, (2) upgrading existing equipments, and (3) follow-on support/ maintenance contracts. Both U.S. and Egyptian defense officials acknowledge that approximately 30% of annual FMF aid to Egypt is spent on new weapons systems, because of the aim of Egypt's defense

modernization plan to gradually replace most of Egypt's older Soviet weaponry with U.S. equipment (Sharp, 2009: 5). To sum up, between 1948 and 2011, the United States provided Egypt with \$73.2 billion in bilateral foreign aid, including \$1.3 billion a year in military aid from 1987 to date (Sharp, 2012: 6). As it is shown in Table 2, the main proportion of USAID to Egypt is allocated to military assistance (see Table 2) which proves the pivotal role of this aid in controlling Egyptian military.

Tauber (2013) argues that many experts consider the U.S. investment in Egypt as a force over the Egyptian government to accommodate American interests in the Southwest Asia and North Africa, especially those related to Israel. Additionally, lagging political and economic reforms and poor human rights record make some experts to undermine the benefits of aid to Egypt (Tauber, 2013: 35-37). In brief, before Arab Spring U.S. foreign assistance to Egypt was served as an influential instrument in hand of U.S. foreign policy to address specific U.S. political goals and purposes in Egypt and realize its strategic and diplomatic objectives in the country.

### **III- US Foreign Aid to Egypt: Its Impact on Egypt-Iran Relations**

The 2010-2012 Arab protests, known as the Arab Spring, refers to a series of anti-government protests, uprisings, armed rebellions and popular demonstrations calling for democracy and social rights organized by the Arab population in countries such as Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, Bahrain, Morocco, Iraq, Algeria, Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Sudan, Djibouti, Mauritania, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, etc. In Egypt, millions of people came to the streets to demonstrate against Hosni Mubarak who had been in power for 30 years (Aljazeera, 2021).

The protests in Egypt began on January 25, 2011 and as a result of violent manifestations on February 10, Mubarak ceded all presidential power to his Vice President Omar Suleiman and then to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. Immediately

afterwards, the military junta dissolved Parliament, suspended the Egyptian Constitution and declared that there would be free elections in Egypt. In the first elections in 2012, Mohamed Morsi, from the Freedom and Justice Party affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood organization, was the winner with 51.9% of the votes. Morsi announced that he would enact constitutional changes which created the hope for justice and economic prosperity in the country. In fact, these changes gradually gave unlimited powers to the military forces, including the possibility of arresting civilians by force among other authorities and consequently new popular protests and chaos started in the streets. Furthermore, Morsi represented an evident setback in matters such as secularism and religion-state separation, which increased dissatisfaction of the followers of Islamic religion and Islamic law or Sharia in public life (Korany, 2012). As a consequence of the growing government repression of the protests and a series of regressive economic policies, the president of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, Abdul Fatah al-Sisi, with the help of the Army, led a coup that overthrew Mohamed Morsi on July 3, 2013.

These instabilities show that during Arab Spring the Egyptian political situation was in ups and downs. The January 2011 uprisings and the long transition that followed marked a turning point in Egypt's political history, creating a new balance of power in the country. At the beginning, these revolts were not related to foreign policy and were unlikely to have much effect on foreign relations. But in the following months they had undeniable effect on Egyptian foreign policy. Indeed, these evolutions inevitably led to the adjustment of domestic and foreign policies in Egypt and created a context for changing Egypt's foreign policy pattern. In other words, the last two factors of Egypt foreign policy i.e., Cold War setting and leaders became prone to drastic changes.

The Arab Spring in Egypt took the form of a revolution which forced the rulers from power and provided an opportunity for fundamental reforms in the circles of power in Egypt. This

situation caused debates among U.S. policy makers. Initially, the U.S. decided to protect its ally and, in a speech, delivered at the State Department on May 19, 2011, Obama outlined a new plan for U.S. engagement with Egypt and other Arab countries undergoing political transitions. “Major components of that plan included providing up to \$1 billion in bilateral debt relief to Egypt and \$1 billion in U.S.-backed loan guarantees to finance Egyptian infrastructure and job creation, and creating an enterprise fund to invest in small- and medium-sized Egyptian businesses (SME)” (Sharp, 2014: 30-31).

However, after the collapse of Morsi’ government by Egyptian military on July 3, 2013, the United States announced that it would suspend some U.S. assistance to Egypt. In this regard, following statements could show how foreign aid to Egypt was employed to exert U.S. control over the Egyptian evolutions.

On August 15, 2013 and a day after the brutal attack of Egyptian military against the Muslim Brotherhood, the Obama administration suspended U.S. participation in Operation Bright Star referring to the human rights violations of this coup. This operation was the largest military exercise conducted by U.S. in the world and a biannual military exercise with the Egyptian armed forces. In other words, in his remarks, Obama emphasized the deep and strategic partnership between the United States and Egypt and the United States’ security interests in this country, which is located at the core of the world. Obama believed that engagement could support Egypt’s transition back to a democratically elected civilian government and by referring to the massacre of civilians in the streets, stated: “this morning we notified the Egyptian government that we are canceling our biannual joint military exercise which was scheduled for the next month. Going forward I’ve asked my national security team to assess the implications of the actions taken by the interim government and further steps that we may take as necessary with respect to the U.S.-Egyptian relationship” (Obama, 2013a: 8).

Similarly, in his address to the United Nations General

Assembly on September 24, 2013, Obama repeated his minimalist approach to Egypt with regard to the traditional security goals and affirmed U.S. constructive relationship with the interim government would be maintained due to the core interests like the Camp David Accords and counterterrorism. However, he declared that: “But we have not proceeded with the delivery of certain military systems, and our support will depend upon Egypt’s progress in pursuing a more democratic path. ... Nevertheless, we will not stop asserting principles that are consistent with our ideals, whether that means opposing the use of violence as a means of suppressing dissent, or supporting the principles embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights” (Obama, 2013b: 47). This statement clearly shows how Obama was using foreign aid to force military leaders act in a way consistent with the U.S. interests.

In line with the policies adopted by the Obama Administration, on October 9, 2013, Jen Psaki, State Department Spokesperson explained details of U.S. assistance to Egypt. Psaki remarked that U.S. would assist to secure Egypt’s borders, counter terrorism and proliferation, and ensure security in the Sinai, through providing U.S.-origin military equipment, military training and education, certain large-scale military systems [F-16s, Apache helicopters, Harpoon missiles, and M1A1 tanks] and cash assistance. But this assistance was conditioned on Egypt’s “credible progress toward an inclusive, democratically elected civilian government through free and fair elections” (Psaki, 2013: 2). These details revealed the systematic approach taken by U.S. policy makers to manage the Egyptian instable situation in line with their interests. Accordingly, Secretary of State John Kerry, emphasized the need for the Egyptian interim government to enact constitutional protections and during his November 2013 visit to Cairo, remarked: “this aid is a very small issue between us, and the Government of Egypt... has handled it very thoughtfully and sensitively” (Kerry, 2013: 31). Kerry’s speech confirms the importance of foreign assistance in U.S. foreign policy towards Egypt.

In brief it could be said that from the resignation of Mubarak in 2011 until 2013, U.S. economic aid to Egypt was gradually decreased because of various reasons, for instance, U.S. budgetary limitations, increasing anti-Americanism seen in Egyptian circles of power at the time, rising polarization, lack of national consensus on a constitution and finally Egypt's lack of commitment to regional peace and securing the Sinai.

In the case of the ultimate reason, it is worth mentioning that after U.S. announcements on suspension and limitation of foreign assistance to Egypt, Israeli officials expressed both publicly and privately their concern over Obama's decision. Their main concern was reduction in U.S.-Egyptian military cooperation, particularly with regard to U.S. aid to Egypt.

A review on the history of military leaders in power could provide a better understanding of the importance of this issue for U.S. and Israel. As mentioned in previous sections, the Egyptian army is the second factor in guiding Egypt's foreign policy and plays an important role in its foreign policy decisions. Since the military coup in Egypt in 1952, all Egyptian presidents, except for Mohamed Morsi, came from the army. During the presidency of Gamal Abdel-Nasser, the military's involvement in politics was evident. However, due to some reforms on Egypt's foreign and defense policies in the 1970s, and increasing partisan competition during Sadat and Mubarak, the military became an invisible and secret power operating behind the scenes in cooperation with the president (Sallam, 2012; Albrecht & Bishara, 2011; Sharp, 2018: 2). Morsi's administration created a gap between presidential power and military forces. Therefore, when Morsi was ousted from power in a military coup on July 3, 2013, Al-Sisi regained the lost power of the Egyptian army under Morsi and resumed hopes of reviving the triangular relationship between Egypt, the United States and Israel.

In this context, after Obama's decision on revision and suspension of U.S. aid to Egypt, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said: "Our interests are basically in making peace with

Egypt ... This peace was based on American aid to Egypt, and I think this is the most important thing for us, and I am sure that it was done in consultation with Washington” (Kershner, 2013: 8). So United States re-established its foreign assistance mechanism to preserve its interests in Egypt (see Figure 2).

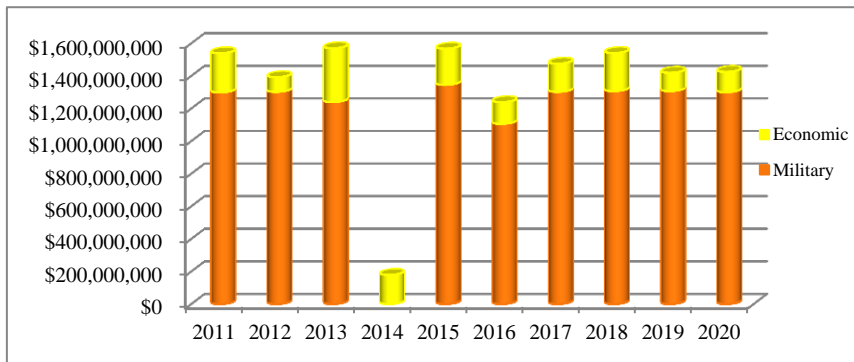


Figure 2. U.S. Foreign Assistance to Egypt (2000-2020) (Constant Amount US\$)

Source: U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants, Obligations and Loan Authorizations, July 1, 1945-September 30, 2018, and Congressional Budget Justifications (FY2019-FY2020).

Currently, U.S. economic aid to Egypt is provided in two mechanisms: (1) USAID-managed programs which include public health, education, economic development, democracy and governance; and (2) the U.S.-Egyptian Enterprise Fund. These mechanisms are mostly financed through the Economic Support Fund (ESF) appropriations account. As shown in Figure 2, the main proportion of U.S. Foreign Assistance to Egypt is dedicated to the military aid. According to the Congressional Research service (CRS), for FY2021, President Biden requested a total amount of \$1.4 billion in bilateral assistance for Egypt. Accordingly, the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) account is the main source of the U.S. funds for Egypt and provides Egypt with grants in order to purchase and maintain U.S.-origin military equipment (Sharp, 2020: 24).

All these data prove that the most influential instrument for the United States to gain a favorable view of the Egyptian leaders after Arab Spring has been foreign aid, especially military one. The following table shows the USAID to Egypt after Arab Spring which proves that Egypt is still among the first fourth recipients of U.S. foreign aids (see Table 4).

Table 4. Top 10 Recipients of US. Foreign Aid, 2019 (Current Year US\$ in Millions)

1	Afghanistan	4,893.2
2	Israel	3,308.5
3	Jordan	1,723.1
<b>4</b>	<b>Egypt</b>	<b>1,248.0</b>
5	Iraq	960.2
6	Ethiopia	922.8
7	Yemen	809.8
8	Colombia	800.8
9	Nigeria	793.4
10	Democratic Republic of the Congo	781.1

Source: U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Retrieved from <https://explorer.usaid.gov/data>

In short, under the Obama administration, US-Egyptian relations soured, especially when al-Sisi came to power in 2013 with a military coup and Obama supported foreign aid to the Egyptian military. Under the Trump Administration, the President and other U.S. policy makers and officials ignored Egypt's poor human rights record. In fact, weakening the goals of the revolution, dissolving the Muslim Brotherhood movement, the inexperience of Egyptian politicians, and the influence of Western culture on Egyptians (Taqdar et al. 2020: 2483) provided an opportunity for Trump to rebuild relations. So, the Trump Administration like its predecessors focused on military aids and ties to foster friendly relations with the Egyptian government. In view of these



developments, the gradual defeat of the goals of the Egyptian revolution helped the United States to take over this new opportunity using an effective tool called USAID. The USAID to Egypt and its Impact on the Egypt-Iran relations

Foreign aid has always been a tool in the service of political goals, and political and strategic considerations are the most important factor in providing foreign aid. So, USAID to Egypt is not limited only to the close relationship between Egypt and the United States. As it is seen in the case of the Camp David agreement and its significance for Israel's interests in the Middle East, it also affects Egypt relations with other countries and political actors located in the Southwest Asia and North Africa. Accordingly, U.S. aids to Egypt have impact on the Egypt's interactions with its neighboring countries particularly those with anti-U.S. orientations.

The Islamic Republic of Iran, as an important power in Southwest Asia, is no exception. Iran's anti-U.S. approach and policies have always been considered a challenge for U.S allies in the Middle East. Egypt's close relationship with the United States and its allies, highlighted by various instruments, including economic and military aid, is the main reason for the fluctuation in Iran-Egypt relations.

Egypt-Iran relations have wavered during centuries due to the historical, political, social and cultural evolutions of the Middle East and still remain fluctuating. After the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi fled to Egypt and was granted asylum by then-Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. As explained earlier, Sadat normalized Egypt-U.S. relations and signed the historic Camp David Accord which became a substantial source of U.S. foreign assistance to Egypt and resulted in the Egypt's economic dependency on the U.S. Since then, diplomatic ties between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Egypt severed. Although 11 years later under Hosni Mubarak, these ties were resumed at the *chargé d'affaires* level, tense relations between both countries continued until the so-called Arab

uprisings.

The Arab uprisings provided an opportunity for various political forces to participate in gaining power in Egypt. In addition, US policymakers sought to manage the situation by suspending economic aid and providing some form of political support for the new situation. In continuation of these developments, When Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood won the 2012 Egyptian elections, some hopes for fundamental changes in Egyptian political behavior at home and abroad emerged. Accordingly, Iran-Egypt relations were improved during the first months of Morsi's presidency, therefore mutual visits at the presidential level were resumed. Some political experts believed that Morsi's decision to travel to Tehran for a summit of the Non-Aligned Movement "reflects a major foreign policy shift for the Arab world's most populous nation, after decades of subservience to Washington" (Londoño, 2012). In fact, this was the first visit by an Egyptian leader since the severance of diplomatic relations between the two countries and Egypt's recognition of Israel in the 1980s. Furthermore, Iran's ambassador to Egypt for the first time in decades was appointed during Morsi's administration.

Later, Morsi's retreat on issues such as secularism and the separation of religion and state not only increased the dissatisfaction of followers of Islam and Islamic law in countries of the region, including Iran, but also helped the United States and Israel return to the Egypt's political scene, especially through USAID as shown earlier. Hence, relations between Egypt and Iran were neutralized because of the political chaos in the country.

With al-Sisi's presidency and Trump's interest in rebuilding Egypt-US relations, small hopes for a change in Egypt's foreign policy were dashed.

In this regard, Monshipouri and Zamyar believe that Egypt under al-Sisi avoids being involved in the Sunni-Shia divide by reforming its security considerations through prioritizing stability above sectarian and ethnic identity concerns. However, the

fundamental alteration in Egypt foreign policy is unlikely in the near future mainly because of Egypt economic dependency on rich Arab countries of the Persian Gulf (Monshipouri & Zamar, 2017). This investigation showed that Egypt's economic dependency is not limited to the Arab countries which are U.S. allies, but also includes the United States itself. Therefore, Egypt is economically dependent on the US and its allies and its regional activities are highly influenced by US alliances and rivalries with the countries located in Southwest Asia and North Africa. Overall, USAID, in turn, has influenced the normalization of Egypt's relations with Iran.

### **Conclusion**

The U.S. foreign aid to the Middle East has historically been a function of U.S. national security interests in the region. Since the late 1970s and after the March 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, the United States has provided significant military and economic assistance to Egypt. Indeed, U.S. policy makers have regularly justified the aid to Egypt as an investment in regional stability. However, this assistance was primarily based on maintaining long-term cooperation with the Egyptian army and maintaining the so-called Egypt-Israel peace treaty in March 1979. In view of that, successive U.S. administrations have overtly characterized Egypt's government as an increasingly influential element in the Middle East in line with U.S. interests. Actually, Egypt's strategic location and its history of close collaboration with the United States make it a matter of significant importance for U.S. national security interests. In this regard, US aids to Egypt has always pursued specific goals, such as keeping the Suez Canal open for economic and military interests, following market development opportunities and securing a settlement with Israel. So U.S. military aid to Egypt has historically shaped a pro-U.S. military establishment, which aims to ensure that Egypt remains associated with the United States and Israel.

The January 2011 Egyptian uprisings and the protracted

transition that followed created a milestone in Egypt's political history in the sense that shaped a new balance of power in the country and challenged forty-year military cooperation between U.S. and Egypt. So U.S. policy makers started debating about the future of U.S.-Egypt relations and the U.S. president of the time Barack Obama felt the necessity of revising U.S. policies towards the country in order to maintain U.S. leverage not only over Egypt, but also over Southwest Asia and North Africa. Obama's most effective tool was USAID, and the Arab Spring placed the U.S. economic and military aid to Egypt into crucial testing. Initially Obama continued U.S. Assistance to Egypt, but after 2013 al-Sisi coup against Morsi, he decided to suspend military aid to the country due to the human rights violations. Then the necessity of guaranteeing the security of Israel convinced Obama to re-establish military aid to the country. This issue shows that unceasing intervention and influence of the U.S. In general, the grand strategy shows that not only does Egypt need US political and economic assistance, but the United States needs Egypt to implement its Middle East strategy. So the development of Egypt-U.S. relations is a mutual. Furthermore, this relationship makes Egypt comply with international and regional treaties resulting to maintain peaceful relations with Israel.

It is clear that these relations affect Egypt's interactions with countries in Southwest Asia and North Africa. As an example, although Iran is an important actor in the political evolutions of the region, Egypt doesn't have a stable relation with the country. The fluctuating relations between both countries has its roots in Egypt's close partnership with the United State and Israel. Clearly, Egypt's military cooperation with the U.S. and its dependency on the U.S. economic and military aids constitute the foundation of this partnership that has always been used to further U.S. interests in Southwest Asia and Northern Africa.

In sum, given the continuation of U.S. presence in the military spheres of Egyptian circles of power, USAID still serves as an effective tool to safeguard U.S. interest in the country.

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