



[A U.S. Senator Blocks \\$75 Million in Military Aid to Egypt over Concerns Regarding Its Poor Human Rights Record](#)

This week, United States Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) blocked an additional \$75 million in American military aid to Egypt over concerns regarding egregious human rights violations under the El-Sisi government. In doing so, Senator Leahy expressed that it is important that U.S. administrations not allow other policy interests to take attention away from Egypt's poor human rights record. He called authorities' treatment of political prisoners in particular "deplorable," and stated that releasing millions of dollars' worth of aid is unconscionable in light of recent events that saw a wave of death sentences handed down by Egyptian courts after hasty mass trials. U.S. Congress has devoted more attention to grave concerns about the state of human rights in Egypt recently, passing a law last year which subjects some of the military aid to conditions. Back in September, the U.S. State Department had withheld a portion of military aid, but said that it would allow for another \$75 million to be given because of supposed progress by the Egyptian government in improving human rights. However, Senator Leahy, who serves as Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, has stated that he rejects the State Department's assessment justifying the aid.

Unease over the state of human rights in Egypt has grown in the preceding years since El-Sisi's overthrow of the country's prior democratically-elected president. The current government has instituted a brutal crackdown on any groups or individuals that they deem to be political opponents and dissidents. Since the takeover, rights groups have documented how Egyptian security forces have acted with impunity, routinely conducting arbitrary arrests, forced disappearances, and torture against real or suspected political activists, as well as ordinary citizens. In September, El-Sisi tried to appease concerns by introducing a supposed national strategy for human rights, but many domestic and international rights groups have criticized it as failing to adequately address the government's manifold of human rights abuses. In fact, in that same month, a Human Rights Watch report documented more than a dozen extrajudicial killings of alleged "terrorists" despite evidence that those killed posed no danger to security forces or anyone else, and in many cases were already in long-term custody. Furthermore, authorities have imposed severe restrictions on freedom of movement in North Sinai and demolished hundreds of homes. At the 46th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, 32 countries stated that they were "deeply concerned with the trajectory of human rights in Egypt."

Last year's Congressional law regarding military aid to Egypt placed conditions on \$300 million worth of this. The Biden administration recently pledged to block \$130 million of that, but to release some of the remaining due to Egypt's release of 500 political prisoners. Senator Leahy, however, objected this decision and urged Congress to specify its standards on the matter, and even suggested sending the money as scholarships to Egyptian students or for other means. Leahy argued that the circumstances facing political prisoners and dissidents in Egypt is still of serious concern and should not be brushed aside. Congressman Gerry Connolly (D-VA) also criticized the administration's decision to provide multiple attack helicopters to Egypt, highlighting as Leahy did that the Egyptian government is infringing on the rights of its citizenry.

Rights activists have praised Senator Leahy's actions this week, with the hope being that blocks like this and restrictions will force the Egyptian government to increasingly address their human rights issues. They have also pointed out that it appears to represent a notable uptick in skepticism among elected officials towards the abusive actions of Egyptian authorities.