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# Egypt in 2021: Politics, Human Rights and International Relations

By Ben Smith, Philip Loft

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# Summary

## Government of Sisi

In the [2018 Presidential election](#), President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi was returned to office for a second term with 97 percent of the vote. His position has been further strengthened by the dominance of the pro-Government Mostaqbal Watn (“Nation’s Future”) party in the [Egyptian parliamentary elections](#) that took place in 2020.

Whilst Sisi had been limited to two terms as president under the 2014 constitution, an amendment was made following a [2019 referendum](#) extending Sisi’s term to six years and allowing him to stand for a third term in 2024.

## Human Rights

Concerns about the treatment of journalists, opposition groups, and non-governmental organisations in Egypt continue.

This has included the [harassment](#) and [arrest of critics](#) of the Egyptian Government’s response to the Coronavirus pandemic. It is [estimated](#) that there are between 20,000 and 60,000 political prisoners in Egypt and prisons have been found by [foreign observers](#) to lack proper sanitation and medical care.

Christians continue to be [vulnerable in Egypt](#), with attacks on new Christian places of worship and discrimination in public life, though foreign governments have noted [some positive steps](#). These include Sisi’s [public backing](#) of religious inclusivity and [opening the Middle East’s largest cathedral](#) in 2019.

Organisations have also raised the “arbitrary arrests” of [LGBT persons](#) and delays in recognising [independent trade unions](#).

31 signatories, including the United States and the UK, [criticised the persecution of political opponents](#) in Egypt at the UN Human Rights Council in March 2021.

## Terrorism and the North Sinai military campaign

North Sinai has been under a state of emergency since 2014. Wilayat Sinai, a local affiliate of the self-proclaimed Islamic State/Daesh, have claimed responsibility for [multiple attacks in the region](#). 2019 and 2020 also saw [terrorist attacks in the Greater Cairo area](#), carried out by Harakat Sawa’d Misr (HASM) and al-Qaeda allied groups.

## Egypt’s international relations

Whilst US criticism of human rights violations was relatively muted under the Trump Administration, the US backing of a [joint statement](#) by members of the UN Human Rights Council expressing concern at the trajectory of human rights in Egypt suggests the Biden Administration may take a more critical position towards Egypt.

Both the [Trump](#) and [Biden](#) Administrations have criticised Egypt’s purchase of Russian fighter jets, the former stating [sanctions might be imposed](#) as a result.

Relations with Sudan and Ethiopia have been strained since Ethiopia began the construction of the [Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam](#) on the Blue Nile River in 2011. Egypt heavily relies on Nile waters. Negotiations are [currently stalled](#), and Ethiopia has said it will [continue](#) with the second stage of filling in the Dam despite the lack of agreement.

Egypt’s relationship with Libya has recently stabilised with the [formation of a unity Government](#) after a civil war in the country, where the Egyptian Government had offered [covert support](#) to one side and seen [Egyptian workers kidnapped and harassed](#).

# 1. Egyptian politics

## 1.1 Background: The Arab Spring and Presidency of Mohamed Morsi

In 2011, following popular protests, [President Hosni Mubarak](#), who had been in office since 1981, stepped down as President of Egypt.

Following a period of military rule, [Mohamed Morsi](#) of the Muslim Brotherhood was elected to the Presidency in 2012. An army-backed coup, led by Sisi, overthrew Morsi the following year.

In 2014, a new constitution was introduced, and a presidential election was held, confirming Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in power.<sup>1</sup>

The Library briefings [Arab uprisings: An update](#) (2012), [Egypt under Sisi](#) (2016) and [Egypt since the Mosque attack](#) (2017) provide information on developments in Egypt from 2011 to 2017.

## 1.2 2018 Presidential Election

President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, who has been President since 2014 and in power since 2013, [won re-election](#) with 97 percent of the vote in April 2018, on a turnout of 41 percent. This was the same proportion of the vote he won in 2014, on a higher turnout of 47 percent.<sup>2</sup>

Fines, subsidised food, and payments of US \$3-\$9 were in place to encourage turnout over the three-day election period.<sup>3</sup>

The 2018 election featured one other candidate, [Moussa Mostafa Moussa](#), who was seen by critics as a token candidate, due to his earlier backing of Sisi.<sup>4</sup>

Other potential candidates had included former military Chief of Staff Sami Anan, who was prevented from running by being arrested in 2018 and released in late 2019,<sup>5</sup> and Khaled Ali, a human rights lawyer and presidential candidate in 2012, who withdrew the day after Anan's arrest was announced.<sup>6</sup>

### Commentary on the election

The arrest of Anan in 2018 was condemned by [Amnesty](#) as "an attack on the rights to public participation and freedom of expression by eliminating any serious opposition".<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Major events in Egypt since the Arab Spring uprisings](#), Reuters, updated 18 January 2021

<sup>2</sup> [Egypt's Sisi wins 97 percent in election with no real opposition](#), Reuters, 2 April 2018

<sup>3</sup> [For as little as \\$3 a vote, Egyptians trudge to election stations](#), New York Times, 27 March 2018

<sup>4</sup> [Sisi faces supporter as sole challenger in Egypt polls](#), Al-Monitor, 23 March 2018

<sup>5</sup> [Egypt's ex-military chief of staff released after near two-year detention](#), Reuters, 22 December 2019

<sup>6</sup> [Khaled Ali withdraws from Egyptian presidential race](#), The Guardian, 24 January 2018

<sup>7</sup> Amnesty, [Egypt: Authorities must cease interference in upcoming election and set guarantees for free candidacy](#), 24 January 2018

[Fourteen Human Rights organisations](#), including Human Rights Watch and International Federation for Human Rights, said “Egypt’s government claims to be in a ‘democratic transition’ [since the 2011 uprising] but move[s] further away with every election”.<sup>8</sup>

The Foreign Office said it had “note[d] criticism of the constraints on democratic Space in Egypt” and:

Congratulated him [Sisi] on the chance he now has to take Egypt further along the path of democratic transition during his final term in office. The UK wants Egypt to succeed as a stable, prosperous and democratic country, building on the rights and freedoms set out in the 2014 Constitution.<sup>9</sup>

### 1.3 Referendum on extension of presidential term limit

Under the 2014 Egyptian constitution, presidents were subject to a two-term limit.

A [2019 referendum](#) on amendments to the constitution extended Sisi’s second term from four to six years and allows him to stand for a third term in 2024.<sup>10</sup>

[Human Rights Watch](#) said the referendum was set in a “grossly unfree, rights-abusive environment”, and the result “entrench[es] repression”.<sup>11</sup>

### 1.4 2020 Senate Election

The Senate was established as a second chamber of the Egyptian Parliament, following the 2019 constitutional referendum.<sup>12</sup>

The Mostaqbal Watn (“Nation’s Future”) party, which backs President Sisi, won 75 percent of contested seats in Egypt’s [Senate election](#) in August 2020.<sup>13</sup> Turnout was 14 percent.<sup>14</sup>

Some parties [boycotted](#) the Senate elections, arguing that the Senate lacks legislative and accountability powers.<sup>15</sup>

#### Responses

In August 2020, the Egyptian state said it would [prosecute](#) the 86 percent of voters who did not vote in the Senate election. Voting is compulsory in Egypt and citizens can face fines of up to US \$32.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Human Rights Watch, [Egypt: Planned Presidential vote neither free nor fair](#), 13 February 2018

<sup>9</sup> PQ 136283 [\[Egypt: Elections\]](#), 25 April 2018

<sup>10</sup> [Egypt president could rule until 2030 as constitutional changes backed](#), BBC News, 24 April 2019

<sup>11</sup> Human Rights Watch, [Egypt: Constitutional amendments retrench repression](#), 20 April 2019

<sup>12</sup> [Debate arises as Egypt prepares to establish new Senate](#), Al-Monitor, 8 August 2019

<sup>13</sup> [Pro-Sisi party wins majority in Egypt’s parliamentary polls](#), Reuters, 14 December 2020

<sup>14</sup> [Can Egypt prosecute 54 million voters?](#), Al-Monitor, 1 September 2020

<sup>15</sup> [Apathy dominates Senate elections in Egypt](#), Al-Monitor, 14 August 2020

<sup>16</sup> [Egypt looks to prosecute millions of non-voters](#), The Economist, 3 September 2020

## 1.5 2020 House of Representatives Election

Parliamentary elections were held for the lower House of Representatives in October and November 2020.

The pro-Government Mostaqbal Watn also [won](#) 55 percent of contested seats in the lower House of Representatives. Turnout for the second phase of voting was 29 percent,<sup>17</sup> down on the parliamentary elections in 2011-12, when turnout had been 54 percent.<sup>18</sup>

### Commentary

Both [Amnesty International](#) and [Human Rights Watch](#) reported that some opposition figures were arrested to stop them founding a coalition to contest the parliamentary elections.<sup>19</sup>

## 1.6 Opposition

In February 2021, Egyptian opposition groups, including the Muslim Brotherhood, announced the formation of the [Union of Egyptian National Forces](#) to coordinate opposition forces abroad.<sup>20</sup>

In March, opposition groups [launched a campaign](#) to urge the Biden Administration to impose a travel ban on those proved to be harassing opponents and journalist in Egypt.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> [Pro-Sisi party wins majority in Egypt's parliamentary polls](#), Reuters, 14 December 2020

<sup>18</sup> [Muslim Brotherhood tops Egyptian poll result](#), Al Jazeera, 22 January 2012

<sup>19</sup> Amnesty International, [Egypt 2019](#), accessed 1 April 2021; Human Rights Watch, [Egypt: Events of 2019](#), accessed 1 April 2021

<sup>20</sup> [Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, exiled opposition form united front](#), Al-Monitor, 19 February 2021

<sup>21</sup> [Egyptian opposition groups urge tougher US action against Sisi government](#), Al-Monitor, 18 March 2021

## 2. Human Rights: UK and international statements

### 2.1 UK Government statements

The Foreign & Commonwealth Office's (FCO) [2020 report on human rights and democracy](#) said that "the general trajectory of human rights in Egypt continued to decline in 2019", particularly in relation to media freedom and political opposition.<sup>22</sup>

Egypt was one of the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office's (FCDO) thirty Human Rights Priority Countries in 2020, being described as a country of "continued concern". The Department says it highlights these countries to "exert influence over the long term".<sup>23</sup>

Human rights in Egypt were discussed in a call between President Sisi and Prime Minister Johnson in March 2021.<sup>24</sup>

### 2.2 UN Human Rights Council Statement

At a regular session of the UN Human Rights Council in March 2021, 31 signatories, including the United States and the UK, criticised the persecution of opponents in Egypt and expressed concern over political rights.<sup>25</sup>

It is the first [joint statement](#) on Egypt by the Council since 2014. Egypt's Government expressed "disapproval" at the statement.<sup>26</sup>

The UK's Ambassador to the UN in Geneva, Julian Brathwaite, called upon the Egyptian Government to [halt the harassment of human rights activists, journalists and lawyers](#):

Restrictions on freedom of expression and civil society in Egypt are [...] concerning. We call on Egypt to end the use of terrorism charges to hold human rights activists, lawyers, and journalists in extended pre-trial detention, and to lift travel bans and assets freezes on human rights defenders, including staff of the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights.<sup>27</sup>

### 2.3 UK trade agreement with Egypt

The UK-Egypt trade agreement seeks to replicate the agreement that the UK previously had with Egypt through its membership of the European Union.

The [new agreement](#) was announced in December 2020.

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<sup>22</sup> FCO, [Human rights and democracy: The 2019 FCO report](#), July 2020, p45

<sup>23</sup> FCDO, [Human rights priority countries: Ministerial statement](#), January to June 2020, November 2020

<sup>24</sup> Prime Minister's Office, [PM call with President Sisi](#), 18 March 2021

<sup>25</sup> US Mission to International Organisations in Geneva, [Joint statement on human rights in Egypt](#), 12 March 2021

<sup>26</sup> [US joins West in rare criticism of Egypt on human rights abuses](#), Al Jazeera, 12 March 2021

<sup>27</sup> FCDO, [UN Human Rights Council 46: General Debate on item 4](#), 12 March 2021

The Shadow International Trade Secretary, Emily Thornberry, stated that the UK Government should have strengthened the human rights obligations in the agreement:

[The UK Government] had both an opportunity and a responsibility to replace the toothless platitudes on human rights in the 2001 EU-Egypt agreement and its total silence on workers' rights with meaningful, binding commitments on those issues, and serious, enforceable penalties.<sup>28</sup>

The Department for International Trade says that "respect for human rights and democratic principles constitutes an essential element of the Agreement".<sup>29</sup> The Minister, Greg Hands, said:

I do not believe that there was any diminution of human rights provisions in the agreement with Egypt, or certainly of the effect of those provisions. We have a regular dialogue with Egypt on these issues. There is an extremely difficult internal security situation in Egypt [...] It is careful to get that balance right in all our dialogues with countries such as Egypt.<sup>30</sup>

### **Amendments to the Trade Bill 2019-21**

Amendments were proposed to the [Trade Bill 2019-21](#) requiring that future UK trade agreements include an assessment of an overseas state's human rights record before and after any agreements are signed.<sup>31</sup>

In response, the UK Government said that "trade does not have to come at the expense of human rights" and would consider enhancing the FCDO's annual [Human Rights and Democracy report](#).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Labour Party, [Emily Thornberry responds to announcement of a trade agreement between the UK and Egypt](#), 5 December 2020

<sup>29</sup> Department for International Trade, [Continuing the UK's trade relationship with Egypt](#), 14 December 2020, para 100

<sup>30</sup> HC Deb, [14 January 2021](#), c 481

<sup>31</sup> House of Commons Library, [Trade Bill 2019-21: Lords amendments](#), January 2021

<sup>32</sup> HL Deb, [23 March 2021](#), c 766



## 3. Human Rights: The situation in Egypt

### Continued state of emergency in Egypt

Egypt has been under a continued [state of emergency](#) since the bombing of two Coptic churches in April 2017.

The state of emergency allows government authorities to make arrests without a warrant, impose censorship prior to publication and sequester private property.<sup>33</sup>

### 3.1 Muslim Brotherhood

The Muslim Brotherhood was designated a terrorist organisation by the Egyptian Government in 2013.

#### Trial over Rabaa square dispersal

In August 2013, Egyptian security forces [violently dispersed protests](#) in the Rabaa al-Adawiya and Al-Nahda squares in Cairo, leaving at least 817 dead.<sup>34</sup> The protests were in support of former Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi, and were constituted of many pro-Muslim Brotherhood protesters.<sup>35</sup> Morsi was President from June 2012 to July 2013, being removed from office by the Egyptian armed forces, under then-General Sisi.

A [trial of 739 defendants](#) charged with participating in unauthorised protests, murder, incitement to break the law and membership of an illegal group, concluded in 2018. Defendants included members of the Muslim Brotherhood. 75 defendants were sentenced to death, and 650 were handed down sentences of up to 25 years in prison.<sup>36</sup>

[Amnesty International](#) said the mass trial was “grotesque parody of justice” that “violates Egypt’s own constitution”.<sup>37</sup> The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelete said the judgements, if carried out, amounted to a “gross and irreversible miscarriage of justice”.<sup>38</sup>

No members of the security services have stood trial for the dispersal.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> [Egypt’s emergency laws explained](#), Al-Jazeera, 11 April 2017; Human Rights Watch, [Egypt: No end to escalating repression](#), 13 January 2021

<sup>34</sup> [Egyptian security forces “planned massacre” says HRW](#), BBC News, 12 August 2014

<sup>35</sup> Human Rights Watch, [All according to plan: The Rab’a massacre and mass killings of protesters in Egypt](#), 12 August 2014

<sup>36</sup> Amnesty International, [Five ways the legacy of the Rabaa dispersal still haunts Egyptians today](#), 14 August 2019

<sup>37</sup> Amnesty International, [Egypt: Verdicts expected for 739 defendants in grotesque mass death penalty trial](#), 29 June 2018

<sup>38</sup> United Nations, [Egyptian death sentences a “gross miscarriage of justice”: UN human rights chief](#), 9 September 2018

<sup>39</sup> Amnesty International, [Egypt: Rampant impunity for security forces illustrates dark legacy of Rabaa massacre](#), 14 August 2017

### **New leadership and arrests by Egyptian security services, 2020**

Essam el-Erian, the deputy head of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, died in prison in August 2020.<sup>40</sup> In the same month, the acting leader of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, Mahmoud Ezzat, was arrested.<sup>41</sup>

[Ibrahim Munir](#), the Secretary-General of the International Organization of the Muslim Brotherhood, was appointed the Muslim Brotherhood's Acting General Guide in September. Munir lives in the UK.<sup>42</sup>

Commentors have said that some younger members of the Brotherhood may express disappointment in the continuing role of older leadership figures, who they blame for the downfall of President Morsi, and said the appointment raised questions about the continuing strength of the Brotherhood in Egypt.<sup>43</sup>

In December 2020, security services arrested businessmen in Egypt for their alleged "involvement in supporting and financing" the Muslim Brotherhood's activities.<sup>44</sup>

### **The Muslim Brotherhood in the UK**

In November 2020, the UK Government said it has not held meetings with Munir, now the acting General Guide of the Brotherhood, since the conclusion of the [2015 Muslim Brotherhood Review](#).<sup>45</sup>

Some MPs have called upon the Government to make the Brotherhood a [Proscribed Terrorist Organisation](#) in the UK.<sup>46</sup> Being proscribed limits membership and the ability to express support, and allows the organisation's financial assets to be frozen and seized.<sup>47</sup>

The Government has stated that its assessment of the Brotherhood remains the same as that in the summary report on the [Brotherhood published in 2015](#), and that it would keep this position under review.<sup>48</sup> On the summary report's publication, then-Prime Minister, David Cameron, said it was a "complex subject" but the main finding of the report supported the conclusion that:

Membership of, association with, or influence by the Muslim Brotherhood should be considered as a possible indicator of extremism. We will therefore keep under review the views that are promoted and activities that are undertaken by Muslim Brotherhood associates in the UK [...].<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> [Senior Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood Leader dies in Cairo prison](#), Bloomberg, 13 August 2020

<sup>41</sup> [Acting leader of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood arrested in Cairo](#), Reuters, 28 August 2020

<sup>42</sup> [Muslim Brotherhood appoints acting guide after arrest of leader](#), Al-Monitor, 18 September 2020

<sup>43</sup> [Ibid](#) and [Will arrest of leader disable Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt?](#), Al-Monitor, 4 September 2020

<sup>44</sup> [Egypt targets businessmen over alleged ties to Brotherhood](#), Al-Monitor, 11 December 2020

<sup>45</sup> PQ HL 9674 [[Ibrahim Mounir](#)], 9 November 2020

<sup>46</sup> HC Deb, [Persecution of Christians](#), 6 February 2020, c 542

<sup>47</sup> Commons Library, [Proscribed Terrorist Organisations](#), December 2019

<sup>48</sup> PQ HL13600 [[Muslim Brotherhood Review](#)], 9 March 2021

<sup>49</sup> Written Statement, HCWS418, [Muslim Brotherhood Review](#), 17 December 2015

In 2020, the Home Office Minister, Victoria Atkins, described the report as showing that “the movement is a secretive organisation and that parts of it – globally – have a highly ambiguous relationship with violent extremism”.<sup>50</sup>

## 3.2 Media and journalists

The FCO’s [Human Rights and Democracy report for 2019](#) stated that “freedom of expression continued to decline in Egypt” and that:

At the end of 2019, over 500 websites remained blocked, and 26 journalists were in prison. On 24 November [2019], security forces raided one of the last independent news outlets, Mada Masr.<sup>51</sup>

Websites blocked include BBC Arabic and US-based Alhurra News.<sup>52</sup>

The [World Freedom Index](#) in 2020 ranked Egypt as 166<sup>th</sup> of 180 states in the world for press freedom. [Amnesty International](#) has commented that “the Egyptian authorities have made it very clear that anyone who challenges the official narrative will be severely punished”.<sup>53</sup>

Several Egyptian journalists have faced arrest or harassment, according to Amnesty International. These include the arrest of the:

- Editor of the independent Egyptian website, Mada Masr, in May 2020.<sup>54</sup>
- Egyptian family members of critics living abroad, including the relatives of UK-based Mona el-Shazly.<sup>55</sup>
- Brother of journalist Khaled el-Balshy, editor-in-chief of the news website Darb, in September 2020. The UK Government, together with Canada, Germany, Latvia and the Netherlands, expressed concern at the arrest.<sup>56</sup>

### Foreign Office Programme

The FCO’s “media freedom” project in Egypt seeks to train journalist on countering disinformation and fake news.<sup>57</sup>

## 3.3 NGOs and activists

In 2017, President Sisi signed into law a bill requiring non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to register and comply with a series of restrictions.

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<sup>50</sup> PQ 270 [[Muslim Brotherhood](#)], 13 January 2020

<sup>51</sup> FCO, [Human Rights and Democracy: The 2019 FCO report](#), July 2020, p4

<sup>52</sup> Human Rights Watch, [Egypt: Hundreds arrested in nationwide crackdown](#), 27 September 2019

<sup>53</sup> Amnesty International, [Egypt: End relentless attacks on journalists and other media workers](#), 3 May 2020

<sup>54</sup> [Editor-in-chief of prominent independent news site detained in Egypt](#), France 24, 17 May 2020

<sup>55</sup> Human Rights Watch, [Egypt: Escalating reprisals, arrests of critics’ families](#), 19 February 2021

<sup>56</sup> FCDO, [Statement on media freedom in Egypt](#), 13 November 2020

<sup>57</sup> FCO, [Human Rights and Democracy: The 2019 FCO report](#), July 2020, p10

This law was renewed in July 2019, with the omission of individual prison sentences for violations.<sup>58</sup>

### 2019 and 2020 protests

Rallies in several Egyptian cities in September 2019 resulted in the arrest of at least 4,000 people.<sup>59</sup> The protest resulted from allegations of corruption in Government.<sup>60</sup>

Anti-Government protests also took place in September and October 2020. 944 arrests were documented.<sup>61</sup>

### Imprisonment and Arrest of Human Rights Workers

[Bahey el-Din Hassan](#), director and co-founder of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, was sentenced in absentia to fifteen years in prison on charges of publishing “false news” and “insulting the judiciary” in 2020. He has lived in exile since 2014.<sup>62</sup>

A Cairo criminal court rejected a request to lift travel bans on human rights activists in July 2020. [Human Rights Watch](#) stated in January 2021 that there are thirty human rights defenders banned from leaving the country.<sup>63</sup>

Three human rights workers at the [Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights](#) (EIPR) were arrested in November 2020.<sup>64</sup> This followed their meeting with foreign diplomats two weeks previously.<sup>65</sup>

Together with the UN and other states, the UK Foreign Secretary directly raised concerns with his Egyptian counterpart in November regarding the arrest of members of the EIPR and welcomed their release in December 2020.<sup>66</sup>

## 3.4 Coronavirus

### Statistics

According to the Egyptian Ministry of Health and Information, Egypt recorded around 200,000 infections and nearly 12,000 Coronavirus-related deaths to 31 March 2021.<sup>67</sup> Unofficial figures suggest that the

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<sup>58</sup> Amnesty International, [Egypt: Draft new NGO law retains repressive essence of old one](#), 16 July 2019; International Centre for not-for-profit law, [Civic freedom monitor: Egypt](#), updated 16 November 2020

<sup>59</sup> Amnesty, [Egypt 2019](#), accessed 1 April 2021

<sup>60</sup> [In rare protests, Egyptians demand President el-Sisi's removal](#), Al Jazeera, 21 September 2019; [Egypt's Tahrir Square on lockdown as regime moves to stifle protests](#), The Guardian, 27 September 2019

<sup>61</sup> Human Rights Watch, [Protests still scare Egypt's Government](#), 13 October 2020

<sup>62</sup> Amnesty International, [Egypt Joint statement: Veteran human rights defender Bahey El-Din Hassan sentenced \[...\]](#), 28 August 2020

<sup>63</sup> Human Rights Watch, [Country Chapters: Egypt](#), January 2021

<sup>64</sup> [Egypt rights group says third member arrested in less than a week](#), Al-Jazeera, 20 November 2020

<sup>65</sup> [Egypt cracking down harder on human rights group, experts say](#), The Guardian, 23 November 2020

<sup>66</sup> FCDO, [UK response to arrests of human rights workers in Egypt](#), 22 November 2020; [UN urges Egypt to release human rights activists](#), Al-Jazeera, 20 November 2020; PQ 125957 [[Egypt: Detainees](#)], 10 December 2020;

<sup>67</sup> [Reuters Covid-19 Tracker: Egypt](#), accessed 31 March 2021

number of excess deaths could be higher, in the region of 60,000 for the period May-July 2020.<sup>68</sup>

The Brookings Institute states that Egypt's total confirmed cases and deaths per capita remain below those of other Middle East and North Africa countries.<sup>69</sup>

### **Vaccination programme**

By March 2021, the Egyptian Government had made available vaccines to some health workers, older people, and people with chronic illnesses.<sup>70</sup>

The Health Ministry has said it intends to provide the vaccine free to medical workers and the estimated 15 million people on the government's social support programme, "dignity and solidarity". The remainder of Egypt's 103 million population are expected to pay around US \$12 for a vaccine.<sup>71</sup>

[Human Rights Watch](#) have called upon the Egyptian Government to provide equitable access to the Covid-19 vaccine.<sup>72</sup>

### **COVAX**

The Egyptian Government is also hoping to receive around 40 million doses vaccines through the COVAX facility. This is intended to cover around 20 million people.<sup>73</sup>

### **Media coverage of the pandemic**

In 2020, the National Security Agency arrested at least ten health workers for criticising the Government's response to the pandemic.<sup>74</sup>

[Amnesty International](#) reports some medical staff were transferred to other institutions after raising safety concerns during the pandemic.<sup>75</sup>

In 2020, the [Guardian newspaper](#) said one of their journalists was forced by Egyptian authorities to leave the country for their reporting on the pandemic.<sup>76</sup>

## **3.5 Prisoners**

The FCO's [Human Rights and Democracy report for 2019](#) stated prison conditions were "an area of focus" for the UK, with "numerous reports

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<sup>68</sup> [Coronavirus: Do the death statistics in Egypt reflect the reality?](#), BBC Arabic, 26 December 2020

<sup>69</sup> Brookings Institute, [Policy and institutional responses to COVID-19 in the Middle East and North Africa: Egypt](#), 28 January 2021

<sup>70</sup> [Egypt begins vaccine rollout to wider population](#), Reuters, 4 March 2021

<sup>71</sup> Carnegie Endowment, [Playing politics with poverty: Sisi's COVID-19 vaccine strategy](#), 25 February 2021; [Egypt to charge many residents for Covid-19 vaccine](#), Wall Street Journal, 4 March 2021

<sup>72</sup> Human Rights Watch. [Egypt: Provide equitable Covid-19 vaccine access](#), 9 March 2021

<sup>73</sup> [Egypt expects COVID-19 vaccines from GAVI alliance within weeks: Minister](#), Reuters, 11 January 2021

<sup>74</sup> [Egypt: Doctors targeted for highlighting Covid-19 working conditions](#), The Guardian, 15 July 2020

<sup>75</sup> Amnesty International, [Egypt: Medics arrested for speaking out over COVID-19 failings](#), 18 June 2020

<sup>76</sup> [Egypt forces Guardian journalist to leave after coronavirus story](#), The Guardian, 26 March 2020

of family visits and medical care being denied” and “credible allegations of torture and mistreatment”.<sup>77</sup>

It is [estimated](#) that there are between 20,000 and 60,000 political prisoners in Egypt.<sup>78</sup> Human Rights Watch has published a [report on incidence of torture in Egypt](#).

The [Committee for Justice](#) estimated that from 30 June 2013 to 1 December 2019, 958 detainees had died in custody. 29 percent were defendants accused in political cases.<sup>79</sup>

In January 2021, [Amnesty International](#) reported on conditions in sixteen prisons, stating that Egyptian prisons were currently at double capacity, had a lack of oversight and healthcare, and that prisoners could experience reprisals in the form of family visits being banned and medicine denied.<sup>80</sup>

### **UK Government position and Egyptian response**

The UK Government has said it regularly raises prison conditions with the Egyptian Government, and that it submitted specific recommendations at Egypt's [Universal Periodic Review](#) at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva in 2019.

Recommendations included improved access to medical care, supporting family visits and releasing those detained for exercising freedom of expression. On prison conditions, the Egyptian Government undertook to follow up the recommendation.<sup>81</sup>

The UK expressed disappointment that the Egyptian Government did not support the recommendation to release those detained for exercising their right to freedom of expression.<sup>82</sup>

## **3.6 Christians**

The [US State Department](#) estimated in 2019 that around ten percent of the Egyptian population is Christian, ninety percent of whom belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church.<sup>83</sup>

Minority Rights Group International in a [2019 report](#) said that whilst the representation of Christians in Egyptian politics had increased in some respects since 2014, many barriers to public life remain and the

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<sup>77</sup> FCO, [Human Rights and Democracy: The 2019 FCO report](#), July 2020, p46

<sup>78</sup> [No political prisoners freed as Egypt pardons thousands on Eid](#), Al Jazeera, 24 May 2020; US State Department, [2020 country reports on human rights practices: Egypt](#), 30 March 2021, Section 1 D

<sup>79</sup> Committee for Justice, [“With no accountability”: Death incidents inside Egyptian places of detention \[...\]](#), 12 October 2019

<sup>80</sup> Amnesty International, [Egypt: Abused and denied health care, prisoners’ lives at risk](#), 25 January 2021

<sup>81</sup> PQ 54123 [\[Egypt: Human rights\]](#), 10 June 2020

<sup>82</sup> UN Mission to the WTO, UN and other International Organisations (Geneva), [UN Human Rights Council 43: Universal Periodic Review on Egypt](#), 12 March 2020

<sup>83</sup> US State Department, [Egypt 2019: International religious freedom report](#), 2019, pp2-3

construction of Christian places of worship can be met by communal violence.<sup>84</sup>

The [US Commission for Religious Freedom](#) in 2019 similarly noted some positive signs, such as Sisi's [public backing](#) of religious inclusivity and his [opening of the Middle East's largest cathedral](#) in 2019, but reported "religious discrimination remained pervasive" and harassment in rural areas was "recurring".<sup>85</sup>

The UK Government in February 2020 said that it "regularly raises" the rights of religious minorities with the Egyptian Government and provides assistance to counter terrorist groups targeting minorities.<sup>86</sup>

Ramy Kamel, an activist for Coptic rights in Egypt, was arrested in December 2019 on charges including membership of a terrorist organisation and spreading false information.<sup>87</sup> The FCDO expressed its concern to the Egyptian Government and the UK Ambassador raised the case with the President of Egypt's National Council for Human Rights in November 2020.<sup>88</sup> Kamel remains under arrest.<sup>89</sup>

### 3.7 Trade Unions

In 2018, independent trade unions in Egypt were dissolved and required to register under a new law. The [International Trade Union Confederation](#) (ITUC) said that 122 of the 1,000 independent unions were able to successfully register within the permitted timeframe.<sup>90</sup>

The [US State Department](#) reported in 2020 that "independent unions continued to face pressure to dissolve" and that the Egyptian Ministry of Manpower has delayed responding to applications for legal status.<sup>91</sup>

In 2020, the [ITUC](#) said that Egypt was one of the "ten worst countries for workers" in 2020, citing delays in the official recognition of unions and the arrest of striking workers.<sup>92</sup>

[Amnesty International](#) reported some private sector workers experienced unfair dismissals and unsafe working conditions during the Coronavirus pandemic in 2020.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Minority Rights Report, [Justice denied, promises broke: The situation of Egypt's minorities since 2014](#), 2019, pp12-14; Committee for Justice, [Legal commentary on Regulations of NGO law](#), 25 February 2021

<sup>85</sup> US Centre for Religious Freedom, [Egypt 2020](#), 2020, p1

<sup>86</sup> PQ 14982 [[Egypt: Christianity](#)], 24 February 2020

<sup>87</sup> US Commission on International Religious Freedom, [Condemns Egypt's arrest of Coptic Activist Ramy Kamel](#), 13 December 2019

<sup>88</sup> PQ 138983 [[Ramy Kamel](#)], 26 January 2021

<sup>89</sup> Human Rights Watch, [Open letter to the EU and its member states on Egypt](#), 21 January 2021

<sup>90</sup> International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), [2019 ITUC Global Rights Index](#), 2019, p12

<sup>91</sup> US State Department, [2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Egypt](#), 30 March 2021, Section 7

<sup>92</sup> ITUC, [2020 ITUC global rights index](#), 2020, pp5, 26

<sup>93</sup> Amnesty International, [Egypt: Private-sector garment workers forced to choose between health and livelihoods](#), 8 April 2020

### 3.8 Gender Equality

The [UK Government said](#) in 2019 that Egypt “made strong progress in some areas”, including girl’s education and expanding social protection.<sup>94</sup>

The [World Bank](#) reported in 2018 that most education statistics “tend to favour women”, with no gender gap among students enrolled in pre-school education and a gap in favour of females at primary, secondary and higher education levels.<sup>95</sup>

The Foreign Office’s [Human Rights and Democracy report](#) also raised the “very high” prevalence of female genital mutilation (FGM) in Egypt and the low level of prosecutions.<sup>96</sup> It was estimated by UNICEF in 2015 that 90 percent of Egyptian females aged 15 to 49 had undergone FGM.<sup>97</sup>

In 2021, the Egyptian Cabinet agreed to increase the maximum sentence for FGM and penalties for those carrying out and requesting procedures.<sup>98</sup> The UK Department for International Development has funded programmes to end the practice in Egypt.<sup>99</sup>

### 3.9 LGBT+ people

[Human Rights Watch](#) said in 2020 that Egyptian police and National Security Agency officers “arbitrarily arrest” LGBT persons, detain them and “systematically subject them to ill-treatment including torture”.<sup>100</sup>

In 2018, the FCO said it “regularly raises concerns about the treatment of the LGBT community in Egypt”<sup>101</sup> and in 2019 stated that “there was no evidence of an improvement in respect for the rights of LGBT people”.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> FCO, [Human rights and democracy report 2019](#), July 2020, section 6.10

<sup>95</sup> The World Bank, [Women economic empowerment study](#), 2018, p22

<sup>96</sup> FCO, [Human rights and democracy report 2019](#), July 2020, section 6.10

<sup>97</sup> UNICEF, [FGM in Egypt: Recent trends and projections](#), February 2020

<sup>98</sup> [Egypt’s cabinet toughens law banning FGM](#), Reuters, 21 January 2021; UN Women, [As more families report FGM incidents in Egypt, advocacy intensifies](#) [...], 5 February 2021

<sup>99</sup> PQ HL 8495 [[Human Rights: Females](#)], 9 October 2020

<sup>100</sup> Human Rights Watch, [Egypt: Security forces abuse, torture LGBT people](#), 1 October 2020

<sup>101</sup> PQ 199365 [[Egypt: LGBT people](#)], 12 December 2018

<sup>102</sup> FCO, [Human rights and democracy: The 2019 FCO report](#), July 2020, p45



## 4. Terrorism

### 4.1 Wilayat Sinai

#### Instability since 2011

Since 2011, Egyptian authorities have sought to restore their presence in the Sinai region.<sup>103</sup>

The self-proclaimed Sinai province, “Wilayat Sinai”, is a local affiliate of the self-proclaimed Islamic State/Daesh. The Sinai group was originally founded as Ansar Beit al-Maqdi, changing its name after pledging allegiance to ISIS/Daesh in 2014.

The group has claimed responsibility for multiple terrorist attacks, including the Sufi Mosque attack in 2017 and the bombing of a Russia passenger jet in 2015.<sup>104</sup> The Islamic State group also claimed responsibility for a suicide bomb attack in North Sinai in April 2019.<sup>105</sup>

#### Recent Egyptian operations

Wilayat Sinai have carried out attacks near Egypt’s border with Gaza and Israel, promoting increased security cooperation between Israel and Egypt.

The Egyptian Government’s Comprehensive Operation Sinai, launched in 2018, declared its intention to “end terrorism” in the province.<sup>106</sup>

The [US State Department](#) said that in July 2020 militants in North Sinai killed at least 12 civilians and 42 security force members, and that the Egyptian Government reported at least 178 terrorists were killed in counter terrorism operations. A further 40 terrorists were killed from September to December 2020.<sup>107</sup>

#### Population movements

[Human Rights Watch](#) has argued that the demolition of homes and forced evictions by the Egyptian military in Sinai may constitute war crimes. The Egyptian Government has said the population moves are voluntary and compensation is provided.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Carnegie Endowment, [The Egyptian military’s terrorism containment campaign in North Sinai](#), 30 June 2020

<sup>104</sup> Stanford Centre for International Security and Cooperation, [Islamic State- Sinai Province, “Major attacks”](#), accessed 31 March 2021

<sup>105</sup> [Four police, three civilians killed in bomb attack in North Sinai: Ministry](#), Reuters, 9 April 2019

<sup>106</sup> Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, [The Egyptian military’s containment campaign in North Sinai](#), 30 June 2020

<sup>107</sup> US State Department, [2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Egypt](#), 30 March 2021, Section 1 A

<sup>108</sup> Human Rights Watch, [Egypt: Massive Sinai demolitions likely war crimes](#), 17 March 2021; US State Department, [2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Egypt](#), 30 March 2021, Section 1 E “Property restitution”

## 4.2 Other terrorist actions

### Greater Cairo area

2019 saw some attacks in the Greater Cairo area, but these declined over the year, and 2020 saw further terrorist attacks closer to Cairo.

The [US State Department](#) said Harakat Sawa'd Misr (HASM) and al-Qaeda allied groups such as Ansar al-Islam were believed to be behind the attacks in mainland Egypt.<sup>109</sup>

HASM has previously claimed responsibility for an attack in 2017 on Myanmar's embassy in Cairo, killing at least twenty people,<sup>110</sup> and the Egyptian Interior Ministry linked the group to an explosion at the front of the National Cancer Institute in 2019, though the group denied responsibility.<sup>111</sup>

The Egyptian Government has linked HASM to the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>112</sup> The US State Department has described it as a "Muslim Brotherhood splinter group".<sup>113</sup>

### Western Desert

Egypt has also faced a terrorist threat from Ansar Al-Islam.<sup>114</sup> The group has claimed responsibility for attacks on police in the Western Desert in 2017.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> US Department of State, [Country reports on Terrorism 2019: Egypt](#), accessed 31 March 2021; [Are Sinai-based terrorists shifting to Cairo?](#) Al-Monitor, 5 October 2020

<sup>110</sup> US Embassy in Egypt, [State Department Terrorist designation of HASM \[...\]](#), 14 January 2021

<sup>111</sup> US Department of State, [Country reports on Terrorism 2019: Egypt](#), accessed 31 March 2021

<sup>112</sup> [Who are Egypt's militant groups?](#), BBC News, 24 November 2017

<sup>113</sup> US Department of State, [Human rights report for 2019](#), March 2020, Section 1 A

<sup>114</sup> Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, [What is Ansar al-Islam?](#), 28 November 2017

<sup>115</sup> [New al-Qaeda-linked group claims responsibility for major Egypt attack](#), Reuters, 3 November 2017

## 5. Defence and International relations

### 5.1 United States

#### Trump Administration

American criticism of human rights violations was relatively muted under the Trump Administration. The President [praised President Sisi](#) in 2017.<sup>116</sup>

In response to reports that Egypt had purchased Russian fighter jets, President Trump had initially proposed a cut in foreign aid to Egypt in December 2020, before being excluded from White House proposals.<sup>117</sup>

The then-Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, had said that if the fighter jets were purchased, US legislation would “require sanctions on the regime”.<sup>118</sup>

In January 2021, the US Congress passed the National Defence Authorisation Act stipulating that around US \$300 million of the \$1.3 billion foreign military funding to Egypt be withheld if the country does not improve its human rights record.<sup>119</sup>

#### Biden Administration

The Biden Administration in February 2021 said it had raised concerns over human rights in Egypt, which Secretary of State Blinken said would be “central to the US-Egypt bilateral relationship”. The Administration has also raised concerns about the procurement of Su-35 fighter aircraft from Russia.<sup>120</sup>

In the same month, the US approved \$197 million in arms sales to Egypt.<sup>121</sup>

As stated in section 2.2, above, the US joined other countries in expressing concern for the trajectory of human rights in Egypt in March 2021.

### 5.2 Libya

Since 2015, Libya has experienced a civil war between rival authorities based in the east and the west of the country. Following a ceasefire in October 2020, an interim Government was announced in February

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<sup>116</sup> [Trump says Egypt's Sisi “very close to me”](#), BBC News, 3 April 2017

<sup>117</sup> [Egypt dodges Trump's ire as White House orders massive last-minute aid cuts](#), Al-Monitor, 15 January 2021

<sup>118</sup> United State Senate Committee on Appropriations, [Subcommittee hearing: Review of the FY2020 Budget request for the state department](#), 9 April 2019, at 01:14:50

<sup>119</sup> D. Schenker, [Getting tough with Egypt won't work](#), The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 25 March 2021

<sup>120</sup> US Department of State, [Secretary Blinken's call with Egyptian Foreign Minister Shoukry](#), 23 February 2021

<sup>121</sup> [Biden Administration approves arms sale to Egypt despite human rights concerns](#), CNN, 17 February 2021

2021. It is intended to lead the country until elections in December 2021.<sup>122</sup>

The Egyptian Government has supported General Haftar, whose Libyan National Army has been challenging the UN-recognised Government of National Accord in Tripoli.<sup>123</sup> The past decade has seen some border clashes between Egypt and Libyan militias and jihadists.<sup>124</sup> Egypt also threatened direct military intervention in Libya in 2020.<sup>125</sup>

Following the establishment of a unified interim Government in 2021, Egypt has sought to normalise relations with the Tripoli Government. This has included negotiating access for Egyptian workers to Libya and re-establishing the Egyptian embassy.<sup>126</sup>

### 5.3 Russia

In March 2021, Egypt received the first of five Su-35 fighter jets from Russia. A total of twenty-four jets were ordered in 2018.<sup>127</sup> Egypt and Russia signed a strategic cooperation agreement in 2018.<sup>128</sup>

Russia's State Atomic Agency Corporation is also providing most of the finance for Egypt's first nuclear power plant, expected to be operational in 2026.<sup>129</sup>

Both Russia and Egypt supported General Haftar's Libyan National Army before the interim Libyan Government was agreed.

### 5.4 Turkey

Egypt and Turkey's relationship declined following the overthrow of Mohamed Morsi in 2013 and his death in a Cairo court in 2019. The Turkish Government had been supportive of Morsi's presidency.<sup>130</sup>

It was reported in March 2021 that initial diplomatic contacts have been made, and that Turkey has offered to mediate the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam dispute.<sup>131</sup> Turkey has also reportedly requested Egyptian opposition television channels in the country, such as those of the Muslim Brotherhood, reduce their criticisms of the Egyptian

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<sup>122</sup> See the Library briefing, [Libya: Towards a political settlement?](#), 24 March 2021

<sup>123</sup> [Libya's eastern leader Haftar says army to take formal control](#), Reuters, 27 April 2020

<sup>124</sup> [Libya conflict: Why Egypt might send troops to back Gen Haftar](#), BBC News, 18 August 2020

<sup>125</sup> [Egypt threatens military action in Libya if Turkish-backed forces seize Sirte](#), FT, 21 June 2020

<sup>126</sup> [Egypt seeks role in Libya's reconstruction](#), Al-Monitor, 24 March 2021

<sup>127</sup> [Egypt moves ahead with purchase of Russian arms despite US warnings](#), Al-Monitor, 3 March 2021

<sup>128</sup> M. Maher, [How Russia challenges the United States in the Middle East](#), Washington Institute, 11 December 2018

<sup>129</sup> [Pandemic won't halt construction on Egypt's first nuclear power plant](#), Al-Monitor, 12 May 2020

<sup>130</sup> [US condemnation of Muslim Brotherhood would cost Turkey dearly](#), Al-Monitor, 9 May 2019; [Erdogan lauds Muslim Brotherhood ally as Turkey mourns Morsi](#), Al-Monitor, 18 June 2019

<sup>131</sup> H. Hellyer and Z. Meral, [Will the page turn on Turkish-Egyptian relations?](#), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 19 March 2021

Government.<sup>132</sup> The Egyptian Government has denied any resumption of high-level diplomatic ties.<sup>133</sup>

Commentators have argued that improved Egypt-Turkey relations may have a positive impact on the chances for stability in Libya, in which Turkey and Egypt had [backed opposing sides](#) in the country's civil war.<sup>134</sup> However, recent Egyptian security and gas agreements made with countries including France, Greece, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have been described as attempts to "push back" against Turkish influence in the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>135</sup>

## 5.5 The Gulf states

### Qatar

Alongside the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, Egypt [severed diplomatic ties](#) with Qatar in 2017 following accusations that Qatar was "supporting terrorism", including the Muslim Brotherhood organisation.<sup>136</sup>

All three states announced a resumption of diplomatic relations with Qatar in January 2021. Egyptian officials said Qatar had agreed to not interfere in Egyptian internal affairs, though Qatar denied this.<sup>137</sup>

The first formal meeting was held between Qatar and Egypt in February 2021.<sup>138</sup>

### Impact on Muslim Brotherhood in the Middle East

Both Qatar and Turkey have been more sympathetic to the Muslim Brotherhood than other states, who see the organisation as a threat to their stability.<sup>139</sup>

Some commenters have proposed that Qatar may seek to rearticulate its relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood, ensuring that it refrains from criticism or only maintaining the asylum side of its relationship with the organisation.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> [Turkey asks Egyptian opposition to tone down criticism: TV channel owner](#), Reuters, 19 March 2021

<sup>133</sup> [Turkey renews diplomatic contacts with Egypt, says want ties with other nations](#), The Times of Israel, 13 March 2021

<sup>134</sup> [A thaw in Turkey's relations with Egypt?](#), Al-Monitor, 12 March 2021

<sup>135</sup> R. Baker, [The EastMed gas and Philia Forums: Reimagining cooperation in the Mediterranean](#), Washington Institute, 18 March 2021; A. Aydıntaşbaş and C. Bianco, [Useful enemies: How the Turkey-UAE rivalry is remaking the Middle East](#), European Council on Foreign Relations, 15 March 2021

<sup>136</sup> [Qatar row: Saudi and Egypt amongst countries to cut Doha links](#), BBC News, 5 June 2017; House of Commons Library, [The Qatar Crisis and regional ramifications](#), October 2019

<sup>137</sup> [Egypt and Qatar have "agreed to resume diplomatic relations"](#), Al Jazeera, 20 January 2021

<sup>138</sup> [Egypt, Qatar hold first meeting since ending the Gulf row](#), Al Jazeera, 23 February 2021

<sup>139</sup> [The Muslim Brotherhood is the root of the Qatar crisis](#), The Atlantic, 2 July 2017, [Turkey's AK party: US moves against Muslim Brotherhood would damage democracy in the Middle East](#), Reuters, 30 April 2019

<sup>140</sup> Washington Institute Fikra Forum, [Will Qatar's relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood change after Gulf reconciliation?](#), 3 February 2021

Combined with Turkey's decision to limit the Muslim Brotherhood's media options in the country, the re-establishment of Gulf ties may mean that Muslim Brotherhood members leave the region to continue more open criticism of the Egyptian state.<sup>141</sup>

### **Other Gulf states**

Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Kuwait provided significant financial aid to the Sisi regime from 2013 to 2016.<sup>142</sup>

Egyptian attitudes towards Saudi Arabia were impacted by the decision of Egypt to cede sovereignty over two Red Sea islands to Saudi Arabia in 2016 and the challenging of this decision in the Egyptian courts, but the decision was resolved in favour of the deal.<sup>143</sup>

Both Egypt and the UAE supported the Libyan national army, led by General Haftar, and have backed the interim government in 2021.

## **5.6 Ethiopia and the Nile Dam**

### **Proposed construction**

Since 2011, Ethiopia has been constructing the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the River Nile. Once complete, it is expected to form the largest hydroelectric power plant in Africa and to decrease Egypt's share of Nile waters.<sup>144</sup>

The first filling of the dam, expected to take between four and six years, began in July 2020 despite Egypt's insistence that no filling should occur until a legal agreement over the dam's management.<sup>145</sup>

Neighbouring Sudan has welcomed the dam but has expressed concern over safety issues and its impact on existing dams.<sup>146</sup>

### **International Mediation**

Both the World Bank and the United States have sought to mediate the dispute.<sup>147</sup> Talks supervised by the African Union reportedly reached an impasse in January 2021 due to objections from Ethiopia and its decision to continue with the second phase of filling the dam.<sup>148</sup>

Sudan and Egypt have said talks should be re-established under the supervision of the African Union, the UN, European Union and the United States.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> [Turkey asks Egyptian opposition to tone down criticism: TV channel owner](#), Reuters, 19 March 2021

<sup>142</sup> Chatham House, [Egypt and the Gulf: Allies and rivals](#), 20 April 2020

<sup>143</sup> [Egyptian President agrees to cede 2 islands to Saudi Arabia](#), New York Times, 24 June 2017

<sup>144</sup> [Egypt-Ethiopia row: The trouble over a giant Nile dam](#), BBC News, 13 January 2020

<sup>145</sup> [Nile dam row: Egypt fumes as Ethiopia celebrates](#), BBC News, 30 July 2020

<sup>146</sup> International Crisis Group, [Nile Dam Talks: A short window to embrace compromise](#), 17 June 2020

<sup>147</sup> US Department of the Treasury, [Joint statement of Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan, the United States and the World Bank](#), 31 January 2020

<sup>148</sup> [Three-way talks on Ethiopian dam reach new impasse](#), Reuters, 11 January 2021

<sup>149</sup> [Sisi says Egypt, Sudan reject Ethiopian Nile dam "fait accompli"](#), France 24, 6 March 2021

Ethiopia has refused to resume negotiations through any other mediator than the African Union.<sup>150</sup> Three-way talks in Congo in April 2021 also ended without agreement.<sup>151</sup>

A military cooperation agreement was signed between Egypt and Sudan in March 2021. Since the agreement was signed, President Sisi has emphasised that “we insist on resuming negotiations”.<sup>152</sup>

### **UK and US Position**

The Trump Administration previously paused around US \$272 million in aid to Ethiopia due to the failure of previous talks on the Dam. The Biden Administration said in February 2021 that it was [reviewing its position](#) towards the negotiations but would no longer leverage aid in the dispute.<sup>153</sup>

The UK Government has urged all parties to come to agreement and avoid unilateral action.<sup>154</sup>

## **5.7 Israel**

Israel and Egypt share joint security concerns over the Sinai Peninsula and have coordinated some military activities.<sup>155</sup> Israel has also allowed Egyptian forces to enter zones demilitarised under the 1979 Camp David Accords.<sup>156</sup>

The [New York Times](#) reported that Israel had carried out over a hundred airstrikes in Sinai between July 2015 and March 2018 in support of Egypt’s anti-insurgency campaign, though the Egyptian Government denied this.<sup>157</sup>

The Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, was due to visit Egypt in March 2021. Talks would consider security ties between the two states and the Biden administration’s approach towards the Iranian nuclear programme.<sup>158</sup> The Times of Israel newspaper reported that Sisi made the visit conditional on “making a gesture toward the two-state solution” in Israel-Palestine.<sup>159</sup> At the time of writing, the visit has not taken place.

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<sup>150</sup> [Egypt, Sudan coordinate positions in Nile dam file](#), Al-Monitor, 11 March 2021

<sup>151</sup> [Three-way talks over Ethiopian dam fail in Kinshasa-statements](#), Reuters, 7 April 2021

<sup>152</sup> [Egypt, Sudan coordinate positions in Nile dam file](#), Al-Monitor, 11 March 2021

<sup>153</sup> [US stops Trump’s aid freeze to Ethiopia over dam dispute](#), France 24, 19 February 2021

<sup>154</sup> PQ 59708 [[Ethiopia: Dams](#)], 16 June 2020

<sup>155</sup> [Egypt’s Sisi acknowledges close coordination with Israel in Sinai](#), Reuters, 7 January 2019

<sup>156</sup> [Israel giving Egyptian army free hand in Sinai, official says](#) The Times of Israel, 2 July 2015

<sup>157</sup> [Secret alliance: Israel carries out airstrikes in Egypt, with Cairo’s O.K.](#), New York Times, 3 February 2018

<sup>158</sup> [Netanyahu said set to meet Sisi in first official visit to Egypt in a decade](#), The Times of Israel, 10 December 2021

<sup>159</sup> [Egypt said conditioning a Netanyahu visit on gesture toward 2-state solution](#), The Times of Israel, 3 February 2021

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