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US to unfreeze shipments of military assistance to Egypt

3/31/2015

US President Barack Obama has approved the delivery of a dozen F-16 aircraft to Egypt that had been frozen after a military-led takeover.

The White House said Obama told Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi by phone on Tuesday that a 2013 freeze would be lifted.

“The president explained that these and other steps will help refine our military assistance relationship so that it is better positioned to address the shared challenges to US and Egyptian interests in an unstable region, consistent with the longstanding strategic partnership between our two countries,” the White House statement said, according to the New York Times.

Aside from the high-tech war planes, Obama also agreed to deliver 20 Harpoon missiles and up to 125 M1A1 Abrams tank kits.

The American president also pledged to request from Congress \$1.3 billion in annual military assistance for Egypt, the Anadolu Agency reported.

The funding will allow Egypt to remain the second-largest recipient of US foreign military funding, behind Israel.

Beginning in fiscal year 2018, the US will channel security assistance for Egypt to four categories - counterterrorism, border security, Sinai security and maritime security, Obama told Sisi.

"Beginning in fiscal year 2018, we will discontinue Egypt's use of cash flow financing - the financial mechanism that enables Egypt to purchase equipment on credit," White House National Security Council spokeswoman Bernadette Meehan said.

The decision to withhold military aid to Egypt followed a 3 July 2013 military coup by Sisi against Mohamed Morsi, Egypt's first democratically elected president; and violent crackdowns on peaceful protestors in August.

Hundreds of supporters of Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood have been killed and thousands imprisoned in a government crackdown. The imprisonment of nonviolent activists and mass trials continue.

Rights groups accuse Sisi of installing a government more repressive than the one of former long-time strongman Hosni Mubarak.

Mubarak was toppled in early 2011 after an 18-day uprising, leading to years of unrest.

Washington annually offers about \$1.5 billion in aid to Egypt, including \$1.3 billion in military aid.

Around \$650 million in military aid was frozen after Morsi's overthrow.