



Macron Controversially Pledges to Continue Selling Arms to el-Sisi Despite Alarming Concerns Over Serious Human Rights Violations

This week, French President Emmanuel Macron met with authoritarian Egyptian leader Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and controversially pledged to continue selling weapons despite growing concerns over the latter's major human rights violations. Macron welcomed el-Sisi to Paris for bilateral talks that focused on counterterrorism and instability in the Sahel amid widespread condemnation of the Egyptian autocrat for his government's repression of human rights. Prior to the meeting between the two, dozens of international rights organizations condemned Macron's policy of turning a blind eye toward el-Sisi's human rights abuses. Observers have noted that Macron's dealings with el-Sisi are similar to the stance he adopted toward warlord Khalifa Haftar during his attempts to overthrow the legitimate and internationally-recognized Libyan government. In both cases, analysts rightfully point out the hypocrisy of the French president for cozying up to human rights violators abroad while at the same time lecturing citizens domestically about the importance of respecting freedoms and civil liberties.

In a joint press conference following their meeting, Macron defended el-Sisi, and played down severe human rights violations committed by his regime as "small disagreements." Macron tried to defend his actions by claiming that he had a policy of raising his concerns with foreign leaders in private, instead of airing grievances publicly. The French leader announced that he would not condition the sale of weapons and other military equipment to Egypt even in the face of grave concern regarding el-Sisi's repressive policies, and Macron also praised el-Sisi for releasing members of the human rights organization – the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights – even though they were arbitrarily and unjustly detained in the first place. Furthermore, Macron made no mention of the roughly 60,000 political prisoners who continue to languish in Egyptian prisons without just cause.

In recent years, France has overtaken the United States to become Egypt's leading arms supplier. In 2017, French weapon sales to Egypt topped the \$1.4 billion mark, and that number has continued to increase since. Additionally, private French companies have provided surveillance tools with the tacit approval from the government. However, there is very little transparency with how this equipment is used, which has culminated in human rights violations. Over a dozen organizations, including Amnesty International, have called on Emmanuel Macron to end France's unconditional support for Egypt, which includes the sale of weapons. Despite this, Macron has made his priorities clear by continuing to reap the financial rewards of selling weapons to Egypt while ignoring the blatant human rights violations frequently committed by the el-Sisi government.

This is not the only instance of Macron providing support for major human rights abusers. During the Libyan conflict, warlord Khalifa Haftar was aided by France and Egypt in his drive to overthrow the legitimate government. Haftar, similar to el-Sisi, has also been accused of widespread human rights violations, which further serves to illustrate Macron's affinity for authoritarian leaders. Haftar, who is an American citizen, is also currently being sued in the United States in several different lawsuits for abuses including torture. Emmanuel Macron has made a habit of backing strongman leaders in North Africa, oftentimes putting France in opposition to the international community. In the cases of Libya and Egypt, Macron has placed the financial reward of selling weapons to despots ahead of the respect for human rights.