



## US sending 20 more F-16s to Egypt, despite turmoil in Cairo

By Maxim Lott - December 10, 2012

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Turmoil in Egypt isn't stopping a shipment of 20 F-16 fighter jets, including this one - already emblazoned with Egypt's flag.

Instability in Egypt, where a newly-elected Islamic government teeters over an angry population, isn't enough to stop the U.S. from sending more than 20 F-16 fighter jets, as part of a \$1 billion foreign aid package.

The first four jets are to be delivered to Egypt beginning Jan. 22, a source at the naval air base in Fort Worth, where the planes have been undergoing testing, told FoxNews.com. The North African nation already has a fleet of more than 200 of the planes and the latest shipment merely fulfills an order placed two years ago. But given the uncertainty in Cairo, some critics wonder if it is wise to be sending more top gun planes.

"Should an overreaction [by Egypt] spiral into a broader conflict between Egypt and Israel, such a scenario would put U.S. officials in an embarrassing position of having supplied massive amounts of military hardware ... to both belligerents," said Malou Innocent, a foreign policy analyst at the Cato Institute. "Given Washington's fiscal woes, American taxpayers should no longer be Egypt's major arms supplier."

The U.S. government ordered and paid for the fighter jets for Egypt's military as part of foreign aid for Egypt back in 2010, when Hosni Mubarak ruled. The fighter jets were supposed to be delivered in 2013, and delivery will go ahead as scheduled even though Hosni Mubarak has been removed from power and replaced by Mohamed Morsi, who led the Muslim Brotherhood before becoming Egypt's president.

Morsi was democratically elected, but last month attempted to seize dictatorial powers for himself. After widespread protests and violence in Egypt's capital of Cairo, Morsi backed off from his power grab. But he is pushing through a controversial new constitution for Egypt that would more strictly enforce Islamic Shariah law, and only recently said he reserves the right to have the military arrest protesters without charges. "The Morsi-led Muslim Brotherhood government has not proven to be a partner for democracy as they had promised, given the recent attempted power grab," a senior Republican congressional aide told FoxNews.com.

Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, (R-Fla.), who chairs the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, recently criticized U.S. military aid to Egypt:

“The Obama administration wants to simply throw money at an Egyptian government that the president cannot even clearly state is an ally of the United States,” Rep. Ros-Lehtinen said.

The \$213 million order, which is paid for by U.S. taxpayers and is part of Egypt's foreign aid package from America, had to be approved by lawmakers in Washington. While the basic F-16 has been a military workhorse for top air forces for more than 25 years, the cockpit electronics are constantly updated and the models Egypt is getting are the best defense contractor Lockheed Martin makes.

"This is a great day for Lockheed Martin and a testament to the enduring partnership and commitment we have made to the government of Egypt," said John Larson, vice president, Lockheed Martin F-16 programs. "We remain committed to providing our customer with a proven, advanced 4th Generation multirole fighter."

"In an air combat role, the F-16's maneuverability and combat radius exceed that of all potential threat fighter aircraft," the U.S. Air Force description of the plane reads.

"The F-16 can fly more than 500 miles, deliver its weapons with superior accuracy, defend itself against enemy aircraft, and return to its starting point. An all-weather capability allows it to accurately deliver ordnance during non-visual bombing conditions."

A Pentagon spokesman said the U.S. and Egypt have an important alliance that is furthered by the transfer.

"The U.S.-Egypt defense relationship has served as the cornerstone of our broader strategic partnership for over thirty years," said Lt. Col. Wesley Miller. "The delivery of the first set of F-16s in January 2013 reflects the U.S. commitment to supporting the Egyptian military's modernization efforts. Egyptian acquisition of F-16s will increase our militaries' interoperability, and enhance Egypt's capacity to contribute to regional mission sets."

Last month, State Department official Andrew J. Shapiro explained why the administration plans to continue military aid to Egypt:

“I know that the uncertainty over the Egyptian transition has prompted some in Congress to propose conditioning our security assistance to Egypt. The administration believes that putting conditions on our assistance to Egypt is the wrong approach, and Secretary Clinton has made this point strongly. Egypt is a pivotal country in the Middle East and a long-time partner of the United States. We have continued to rely on Egypt to support and advance U.S. interests in the region, including peace with Israel, confronting Iranian ambitions, interdicting smugglers, and supporting Iraq,” he said.