

Egyptian Military Leader Travels to Meet With Putin in Moscow

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Egypt's top military commander and expected presidential candidate Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi is on his way to Moscow, marking the first time senior Egyptian officials have visited Russia since the overthrow of the country's president, Mohamed Morsi, in June.

El-Sissi is scheduled to meet with President Vladimir Putin and speak at a joint press conference, The Associated Press reported, citing Egyptian media.

State-owned Egyptian news outlets have also reported that the purpose of the visit was the conclusion of a \$2 billion arms deal funded largely by the Gulf States Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

An Egyptian Army statement characterizes the visit as a "response to the historic visit of the Russian defense and foreign ministers to Cairo" last year, Al-Jazeera reported.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu made a two day trip to Cairo in November, where they discussed arms deals, political and economic ties. The visit took place during a period of pronounced tension in the traditional alliance between Egypt and the U.S. following the military-led popular coup resulting in Morsi's overthrow in July.

In Moscow, el-Sissi and Egyptian Foreign Minister Nabil Fahmy will participate in bilateral talks with Kremlin officials, a rare event given that Egypt has been much closer to the U.S. since Egyptian leader Anwar Sadat moved away from the Soviet Union in the 1970s.

In October the U.S. froze a large portion of the \$1.5 billion in aid that it gives to Egypt annually, including a substantial amount of military aid, presumably in response to political turmoil and violence in the country.

El-Sissi has been rising in popularity as a public figure in Egypt after he led the overthrow of Morsi, Egypt's first democratically elected leader, amid a wave of mass street protests. He is also rumored to be a candidate for the country's presidential election, expected in April.

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