

Egypt's Leader in Russia for Talks on Arms, Trade

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Putin and el-Sissi taking a stroll Tuesday through Olympic host city Sochi.

Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi focused on boosting trade and military cooperation on his first presidential visit to Russia, where he was greeted with a display of weapons right upon arrival.

Russia has signaled its desire to expand ties with Egypt, an important U.S. ally in the Middle East.

When el-Sissi visited Moscow in February, Russian President Vladimir Putin wished him success in the presidential election, though el-Sissi hadn't yet announced his candidacy.

Egypt was Moscow's closest Arab ally in the 1950s and '60s, when nationalist leader Gamal Abdel-Nasser turned from U.S. support to win Soviet backing for his drive to modernize the country and the military. The Egyptians partnered with the Soviets to build the High Dam, a mega-project to control floods and provide electricity and water for irrigation.

Nasser's successor, Anwar Sadat, broke with Moscow and evicted Soviet military advisers.

Under el-Sissi, Egypt has shown a renewed interest in Russian arms. An array of weapons, including new armored vehicles and missile systems, was displayed at the airport in Sochi, the site of the 2014 Winter Games, and el-Sissi listened attentively to his guides as he toured the exhibition.

Following talks with el-Sissi, Putin said they agreed to expand military cooperation. Putin said Russia started supplying weapons to Egypt after signing a memorandum in March, but gave no details.

The Russian president said Moscow would welcome more imports of Egyptian oranges, potatoes and other agricultural products, while Russia plans to sharply expand grain exports to Egypt this year.

Putin said following the meeting that Egypt would soon be ready to increase its supply of agricultural products to Russia by 30 percent to compensate for the ban on Western food products, Interfax reported.

Russia last week banned most food imports from the West, retaliating for Western sanctions over the Ukrainian crisis.

El-Sissi, who was elected president in May, ousted Egypt's democratically elected Islamist president a year ago and then led a violent crackdown.

New York-based Human Rights Watch on Tuesday called for an international inquiry into the mass killings during the crackdown and urged Egypt's allies to suspend military aid and cooperation until the government adopts measures to end human rights violations. Egypt's government rejected the report.

The United States partially suspended military aid to Egypt following last year's coup. Within weeks, Russia's foreign minister and defense minister each paid a visit to Cairo.

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