

The US-Egypt Weapons to Ukraine Dispute. Menendez Indictment

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US Senator Robert Menendez, (D. NJ.) temporarily stepped down from his powerful role as chairman of the Senate Relations Committee, according to Senate Minority Leader Senator Chuck Schumer, following accusations of political corruption and breach of US national security.

On September 22, Menendez was indicted by federal prosecutors in New York, along with four others, including his wife Nadine Arslanian Menendez, on one count of conspiracy to commit bribery, one count of conspiracy to commit honest services fraud and one count of conspiracy to commit extortion.

New Jersey businessmen Wael Hana, Jose Uribe, and Fred Daibes were each charged with one count of conspiracy to commit bribery and one count of conspiracy to commit honest services fraud, also included in the indictment are unnamed Egyptian government officials Menendez dealt with between 2018 and 2022, from which he received bribes.

Menendez opened the US Senate for business with Egypt, and is facing serious corruption charges, which have US national security implications, as he passing along confidential US government information to Egyptian officials.

Instead of fighting for the safety and prosperity of his New Jersey constituents, Menendez was working for the benefit of the Egyptian government, which represses their own people, including foreign journalists in jail without charges or trial, as is the case of journalists from Al Jazeera media.

Fellow Senators, and New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy, called on Menendez to resign, and Murphy said the allegations "implicate national security". Menendez held a seat in the House of Representatives from 1993 to 2006 and has been in the Senate since 2006.

Menendez was working on behalf of the Egyptian government to release pending US military aid to Egypt, that the State Department had held up due to Egyptian human rights violations. The indictment says Menendez, and his wife, met with Egyptian officials in July 2018 and promised to lobby for “Egyptian foreign policy goals and positions and setting forth Egypt’s requests for the approval of foreign military financing and foreign military sales to Egypt.”

At first glance, the Menendez story looks like a classic case of US political corruption, but it coincides with a US pressure campaign on Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi because he refused to cave-in to pressure from US President Joe Biden to send weapons to Ukraine. Is the exposure of Menendez corruption with Sisi, a pay-back from Biden?

Egypt had tried to remain neutral in the Ukraine conflict, while maintaining good relations with both Russia and the US. Egypt relies on Russian wheat imports, and increased sales are in Russia’s interest.

In March, US Secretary of Defense, Lloyd Austin, asked Sisi to send artillery shells, anti-tank missiles, air defense systems and small arms to Ukraine, but Washington did not receive the answer they expected.

In subsequent talks between the US and members of the Sisi administration, it was confirmed that there were no plans to supply weapons to Kiev.

The Egyptian request came after US President Joe Biden admitted previously that the stocks of weapons that the US could send to Ukraine, especially artillery shells, were depleting.

In early April, US intel leaks indicated that Cairo sought to export 40,000 missiles, and other equipment to Russia, after Sisi instructed a minister to provide the arms. Under pressure, Egypt agreed it wouldn’t send weapons to Russia.

In early August, the US asked Egypt to supply artillery, antitank missiles, air defense systems and small arms for Ukraine, but Egypt refused to back down to pressure from Washington according to Egyptian media.

Egypt’s failure to deliver requested weapons has concerned members of the US Congress. Pressure is mounting on the Biden administration not to release \$320 million in military aid to Egypt over human rights violations. The US currently provides Egypt with \$1.3 billion in annual military aid, with a portion depending on Egypt’s human rights improvement.

The new indictment features photographs of the \$480,000 in cash, close-ups of the two one-kilogram gold bars worth over \$100,000 and a photo of the brand new Mercedes Benz C-300 found in the garage of the Menendez home. Further bribes included payments on a home mortgage, home furnishings, and exercise equipment. Equally surprising, was compensation for the senator’s wife, Nadine Arslanian Menendez, for a job dubbed as ‘low-or-no-show’.

US Attorney Damian Williams said a grand jury charged Menendez for using his power and influence to protect and enrich those businessmen and to benefit the government of Egypt.

In 2015, Menendez was indicted on bribery and fraud charges involving requests that the State Department pressure a foreign government which would benefit a Florida businessman, who gave Menendez money, and paid for his lavish vacation trips on a private

jet.

In 2017, Menendez escaped conviction when a judge in New Jersey declared a mistrial, and by January 2018, the Department of Justice announced that it was dropping all charges.

On January 25, Biden approved a whopping \$2.5bn in arms sales to Egypt. Typically, the State Department will honor requests to delay grants and weapons sales from the chair or the ranking member of the Senate committee. Menendez, who has served as the top Democrat on the Foreign Relations Committee since 2018, has publicly criticized Sisi over human rights violations, while privately acting as his 'man on Capitol Hill'.

Rep. Don Beyer (D-VA), co-founder of the Egypt Human Rights Caucus, urged Menendez to resign. The indictment alleges that a person who acted between Sisi and Menendez bribed the Senator to use his position as a leader of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to weaken America's response to human rights violations in Egypt.

The Justice Department accuses Egypt's intelligence and military of a scheme that saw payments of bribes to ensure US military assistance and arms sales continued despite congressional objections to Egypt's abysmal record of repression.

Beyer recently urged the Biden administration to significantly withhold military assistance to Egypt in response to ongoing human rights violations by the Sisi government.

For years, Egypt was the second-largest recipient of US aid, behind Israel. During the three-decade rule of Hosni Mubarak, the US-Egypt relationship was stable with Egypt stepping up to provide valuable security in conflicts in the region.

In 2011, the US-NATO project called Arab Spring, engineered by President Obama and VP Biden, forced Mubarak from power, and through a rigged election executed by Hillary Clinton operatives, the Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mohamed Mursi was put in power. But, in less than a year, after killing thousands of protesters, Mursi was overthrown and Sisi came to power in 2013.

If Sisi continues to refuse Biden's request for weapons to Ukraine, we may see further attacks on his government.

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