

Headlines:

- **US Approves \$2.5bn Arms Sale to Egypt**
- **Afghanistan: West Makes Humanitarian Aid Conditional upon Human Rights Record**
- **Tensions Continue over Ukraine**

Details:

US Approves \$2.5bn Arms Sale to Egypt

United States President Joe Biden's administration has approved a massive arms sale to Egypt valued at about \$2.5bn, despite continued calls for Washington to curtail its support until Cairo improves its human rights record. The possible sale, which is not finalised, includes 12 Super Hercules C-130 transport aircraft and related equipment worth \$2.2bn, and air defence radar systems worth an estimated \$355m. The US Department of State said the Defense Security Cooperation Agency notified Congress of the possible sale on Tuesday, the 18th January. The announcement came just hours after congressional Democrats urged the administration not to release a much smaller package of military assistance withheld last year pending the Egyptian government meeting certain rights-related conditions. "The proposed sale will support the foreign policy and national security of the United States by helping to improve the security of a major non-NATO ally country that continues to be an important strategic partner in the Middle East," the State Department said. "We maintain that our bilateral relationship with Egypt will be stronger, and America's interests will be better served, through continued US engagement to advance our national security interests, including addressing our human rights concerns," it added.

The US-Egypt security relationship was the one cornerstone of US presence in the region, but economic and domestic issues has seen Egypt lose its position in the broader region and seen the US turn to other allies such as Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States. Nevertheless the relationship remains an important one as this arms deal shows, despite US concerns on the nations Human Rights record.

Afghanistan: West Makes Humanitarian Aid Conditional upon Human Rights Record

In its first visit to Europe after taking power, a Taliban delegation called on the West to unfreeze Afghanistan's assets — worth \$10 billion — to alleviate the country's deteriorating economic and humanitarian situation. The Taliban have hailed last week's talks — held in a hotel near Oslo — as a step toward international recognition. No country has yet recognised the Taliban regime, and the international community is waiting to see how the Taliban intend to govern before releasing aid.

Pakistan Today reported that on the last day of talks between Western officials and Afghanistan's Taliban delegation, European diplomats stated that humanitarian aid to Afghanistan would depend on the Taliban's human rights record, particularly women and girls' right to education. Western governments have expressed interest in working with the Taliban to mitigate Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis and offer aid to the population, which suffers from food insecurity, severe winter conditions and high inflation. The West may use conditional humanitarian aid in future deals with the Taliban as well, as Afghanistan's economic aid has remained frozen since the Taliban takeover in August 2021.

The European Union's special envoy to Afghanistan, Tomas Niklasson, wrote on Twitter that he had "underlined the need for primary and secondary schools to be accessible for boys and girls throughout the country when the school year starts in March." The Taliban is yet to announce a countrywide policy for girls' access to education among all age groups and its spokesperson has been insisting that this is a temporary issue due to resource constraints in providing separate spaces for male and female students.

Afghanistan's humanitarian situation has rapidly deteriorated since the Taliban returned to power in August 2021, when international aid came to a sudden halt, worsening the plight of millions of people already suffering from hunger after several severe droughts. Some 55% of the Afghan population is now suffering from hunger, according to the United Nations.

Tensions Continue over Ukraine

The US and Russia's UN ambassadors clashed at the UN Security Council on Monday 31 January during a meeting on Ukraine that was called by Washington. Russian Ambassador Vasily Nebenzya said the US was deliberately stoking tensions by claiming Russia is preparing to invade its neighbor. "They themselves are whipping up tensions and rhetoric and are provoking escalation," Nebenzya said. "The discussions about a threat of war is provocative in and of itself. You are almost calling for this. You want it to happen. You're waiting for it to happen." US Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield responded and said Russia was threatening Ukraine's borders. "The threats of aggression on the border of Ukraine — yes on its border — is provocative. Our recognition of the facts on the ground is not provocative," she said. Despite their differences, the US and Russia have been continuing a dialogue. The US has been stoking tensions as any Russian invasion of Ukraine will lead to Europe to turn to the US and this has been the US strategy since Donald Trump burned relations with its transatlantic partners.