

of State Mike Pompeo held talks with Egyptian leaders in Cairo on Thursday as he continued a nine-nation Mideast tour aimed at reassuring America's Arab partners that the Trump administration is not walking away from the region and will maintain pressure on Iran. # Amid confusion and concern over plans to withdraw US forces from Syria, Pompeo met with Egypt's President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi and Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry to discuss security and economic cooperation. He was later to deliver a speech on the administration's broader Mideast objectives focused on combating threats from Iran. # Pompeo said on Twitter that his meeting with el-Sissi had been " productive. " He added that " the US stands firmly with Egypt in its commitments to protecting religious freedom and in the fight against terrorism that threatens all of our friends in the Middle East. " # At a brief news conference with Shoukry, Pompeo said " the United States will remain a steadfast partner in the region for Egypt and others " while also urging the countries of the region to recognize and fight back against Iranian aggression. He termed Iran the " greatest threat of all in the Middle East. " # President Donald Trump has boasted of his close relationship with el-Sissi, a former general who has been criticized for his human rights record and democratic shortcomings. The Trump administration has resumed weapons sales to Egypt that had been suspended over human rights concerns, including the jailing of several American citizens on what US officials say are false charges. # Pompeo said he raised human rights with both el-Sissi and Shoukry and reminded them that " open and honest public debates are a hallmark of a thriving society. " He said he discussed a " panoply " of rights concerns, including the detention of