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# Repercussions of Bombing St. Peter's Church

A preliminary Reading

Unit of Policy Analysis



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## Repercussions of Bombing St. Peter's Church

### A preliminary Reading

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#### Introduction

A few days before Christmas celebrations of the Copt brothers in Egypt, Cairo woke up in the morning of Sunday, December 11, 2016 on a terrorist bombing inside St. Peter's Church, adjacent to St. Mark Cathedral in Abbassia district, killing 25 innocent people, mostly women and children.

Under a severely confused scene and intense anger of the Copts towards Al-Sisi and his regime, which was monitored by many media outlets, we will try through this paper to provide a preliminary reading to answer several pivotal questions related to the incident, through which we may be able to get to understand the circumstances of the incident and the real motives behind it, as well as its consequences.

- What are the preliminary conditions that preceded the incident?
- Who is possibly behind this incident?
- Is there a connection between al-Sisi's recent talks about "Civil War" and the bombing of St. Mark's Church?
- What are the implications of ISIS's statement, claiming responsibility for the incident?
- How are al-Sisi and his regime exploiting the crime?
- What are the external and internal messages of the regime?
- What are the potential consequences of the incident?

#### Prior to the Incident: Growing Coptic Anger at the Regime

The spontaneous way through which the Coptic protesters treated the pro-regime media people, and the direct chants against al-Sisi and the regime, do not probably refer to just a state of anger generated from the cruelty and magnitude of the attack on the church, as much as it reflects a state of latent anger from the Copts at al-Sisi



and the current regime which has entrenched during the last period as a result of several scenes.

Most notably of these scenes was the approval of the bill of construction and renovation of churches that came out in a way that raised several fears among Copts as it did not meet their basic demands, which later led to increased tension between the Copts and the regime. The state of tension and anger between the Copts and al-Sisi was referred to by [Foreign Policy](#) magazine in a report published two days before the bombing of the Petrine Church, where it pointed to the poor conditions of the Copts in Egypt and their suffering in periods prior to al-Sisi's access to power. However, the report also indicated the Copts' disappointment at Al-Sisi's inability to fulfil his promises, and the situation remains as it was and probably worse. Then the report referred to the state of apathy and tension, which accumulated during the last period between the Copts and al-Sisi.

## **Al-Sisi and the 'Civil War' Talk**

Al-Sisi's talk about the 'civil war' in Egypt and the direct messages it sends to Europe and the world, was followed after a few days by the bombing of St. Peter's Church, which could raise some questions about the relationship between al-Sisi's statements and the bombing incident.

It was noticeable during al-Sisi's recent visit to Portugal that he talked more than once about the possibility of the outbreak of a 'civil war' in Egypt:

- On November 21, 2016, al-Sisi referred, in a TV interview with the [Portuguese](#) News Agency, to the effects and results of a likely 'sectarian war' on Europe and the world and the instability it could cause, as well as the migration that would affect Europe and the world. Then, al-Sisi talked again about 'civil war' on November 22, 2016 in an interview with the Portuguese [RTB](#) TV channel, noting that Egypt was on the brink of a civil war. He also stressed that the Egyptian regime acts within the framework of the rule of law and that there is no resort to illegal means.

Al-Sisi's comments, which he repeated in more than one occasion during his visit to Portugal, send clear messages to the West about the effects and consequences of a



possible 'civil war' on Europe and the world. We can view these statements in more than one context:

\* Al-Sisi confirms to the West that his remaining in power and the recognition of his legitimacy is the safety valve for Europe and the world to avoid the instability that could take place in Egypt, leading to greater waves of migration to European countries than those experienced by Europe at the moment.

\* Exporting 'the scene' that the repressive and security measures in Egypt (under al-Sisi's military rule) are not incompatible with the values of democracy and human freedom, but it can be placed within the framework of protecting Egypt from a potential civil war and maintaining stability, which will result in the stability of Europe and the world.

What may prompt some analysts to link al-Sisi's talk about the civil war with the church bombing is the recurrence of what Sisi warns of literally, as he and his regime carry out afterwards (e.g. al-Sisi's talk before the coup that the intervention of the military in governance could drive Egypt backward, or his talk about the dangers of responding to what is happening in Sinai with violent security measures ...etc.)

## **The two incidents of the Petrine Church and the Church of Al-Qiddissin- the similarities in timing and details**

After the bombing of the Petrine Church on Sunday, December 11, 2016, people remembered once again the bombing of Al-Qiddissin Church in Alexandria in 2011, as the two incidents are greatly similar in the timing and the details of the bombing. The bombing of Alexandria's church took place on Saturday morning, January 1, 2011, on the eve of the Christmas celebrations, and resulted in killing 21 persons and injuring about 97 others. The statement of the Interior Ministry at the time said that the attack was carried out by a suicide bomber, not as a result of a car bomb. The Interior Ministry also said that the bomb was filled with small pieces of metal fragments to serve as shrapnel and that a suicide bomber supported from abroad might be responsible for



the bombing. But the most prominent scene in Al-Qiddissin Church was followed by the outbreak of January Revolution. So, [Youm7](#) newspaper published at the time documents proving that Habib al-Adli, Egypt's Interior Minister during Hosni Mubarak's era, was involved in the bombing to pressure the Copts and quell their protests, and calm the tone of Pope Shenouda towards the political leadership (Later, these documents were deleted from the newspaper's website).

Later, Al-Adli appeared before the Supreme State Security Prosecution on charges of involvement in the bombing of Al-Qiddissin Church, where he denied any relation to this incident, and then the prosecution investigations with Adli stopped at this point, and he was not included in the names of the defendants pending the case.

## **Armed Groups in Egypt and Targeting the Copts in Egypt.. Reality or Allegations?**

Pro-regime media circles accused – immediately after the incident, without any official data – the Muslim Brotherhood as well as the armed groups that emerged after the July 3 coup of being responsible for the bombing of the the Petrine Church.

Following is a quick review of the armed groups that emerged in Egypt after the July 3 coup and the dates of targeting the Copts and their churches, to show whether this allegation is true or not. Then, we will quickly review the history of what has been termed as the incidents of sectarian violence in Egypt and their reasons. Finally, we will move to reviewing the history of incidents of sectarian violence after July 3, 2013.

First, the armed organizations and movements:

1- The armed groups that have worked after the third of July 2013 are divided into groups that have organizational links or previous experience, and the newly formed groups.

Between appearance and disappearance, the newly formed groups developed as follows:

a) In 2013-2014, the names of movements such as ['Popular Resistance', 'Cocktails', and 'Spark'] emerged. The operations of those movements were restricted to burning



the vehicles used by the police forces that usually target demonstrations, or the cars of police officers. No operations targeting Christians or churches by these movements were monitored.

b) In 2015, a movement called "[Revolutionary Punishment](#)" emerged, and adopted a new escalating curve of operations targeting police forces and the collaborators with them through killing and bombing as shown on their official website. In spite of the upward development of the Revolutionary Punishment movement, but no operations were monitored targeting churches or Coptic citizens.

c) In 2016, the movements of "Revolution Brigade" and "Hasam" (decisiveness) emerged, and so far their operations have been confined to attacking police checkpoints, assassinations, or improvised explosive devices, but all operations targeted the security and judicial system, and one failed operation that targeted former Mufti Ali Gomaa. No operation was monitored targeting churches or Coptic citizens. Moreover, the Revolution Brigade movement condemned in a [statement](#) the attack on The Petrine Church, and also "Hasam" movement posted a [statement](#) in which it condemned the attack and made it clear that targeting women or children or places of worship are against its values or principles.

2- The pre-July 3, 2013 organizations whose members have experiences or previous organizational links included:

a) Ajnad Masr organization emerged in 2013 - 2015. According to its statements and videos at the time, the organization only claimed responsibility for operations against the police, as its operations only targeted police officers, and did not target any civilians, places of worship, or the Coptic citizens in general.

b) Ansar Beit al-Maqdis organization, which carried out armed operations before January Revolution, pledged in November 2014 allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), adopting the new name of "Sinai Province". Before the January



Revolution, the Ansar Beit al-Maqdis organization carried out several armed operations, notably an operation against the Israeli forces and another one against tourist places in Taba, Sinai. But from the January Revolution until the events of the third of July 2013, the organization's activities – according to their statements – targeted the Egyptian gas Pipeline extending to Israel. During this period, no signs of targeting military or police forces, or civilians, except in one case, where a group of civilians were liquidated after the organization accused them of collaborating with Israel which resulted in the assassination of one of the organization's leaders by an Israeli drone bombing at the time. But after pledging allegiance to ISIL in 2014, the Sinai Province claimed responsibility for the assassination of a priest after accusing him of fighting against Muslims.

According to the Egyptian Institute's monitoring of the Sinai affair, the assassination incidents in northern Sinai are not limited to the Copts, but the largest percentage targeted Muslims, and they all happened upon claims of cooperation with the security services. Militants usually adopt a general policy of assassinating any collaborator with the army or police forces, especially after the security forces carried out liquidation of many civilians allegedly gunmen due to malicious complaints and in exploitation of the deteriorating security situation in the Sinai Peninsula.

It is worth mentioning that the ISIL military doctrine states that there are no safety for any infidel "non-Muslims", according to the organization's ideology. Also, they see Egypt's Copts as a sect that fights against Muslims. They rely in this perception on the support provided by the Egyptian Church to the regime of Mohamed Hosni Mubarak in the past, and recently to Abdel Fattah El-Sisi's regime.

Also, there were two cases of targeting Coptic citizens by the ISIL organization outside the Egyptian territory. However, these incidents were related to Egyptian affairs, particularly after a Christian woman, Wafaa Constantine, converted to Islam and was handed over by the state security service to the Egyptian Church. This incident sparked a wave of angry demonstrations, and the organization then targeted the 'church of



deliverance' in Iraq at the end of September 2010, and captured hostages to pressure the Egyptian government. According to [Islam Memo](#) website, the situation ended with breaking into the church and killing a number of hostages and attackers. The second incident happened on Libyan territory in February 2015, where the organization slaughtered 21 Coptic citizens "in response to the crimes of the Egyptian Church" according to their statement. The incident sparked wide reactions which were monitored by the Egyptian press as stated in the [Youm7](#) newspaper.

But despite ISIL organization's existence in Sinai, no incidents were documented targeting churches or Coptic citizens in the Sinai Peninsula. Also, no incidents of mass killing were committed against Coptic citizens in Egypt, especially in the height of the crisis after the third of July 2013 events and the declared support of the Egyptian Church to the military regime.

If the ISIL's involvement in the Petrine Church bombing, according to their released statement, is proved, this means a [new strategy](#) for the action of the organization which could be maintained during the coming period.

However, monitoring all armed organizations and movements, there were no documented incidents for mass targeting of Copts or churches on the Egyptian territory since the third of July 2013 until bombing the Petrine Church.

## **Second, incidents of sectarian violence:**

The history of the sectarian incidents in Egypt started after Pope Shenouda took over the papacy in the Greater St. Mark Cathedral in Cairo on November 14, 1971. Since then, Egypt has witnessed a series of sectarian violence incidents that were rising gradually starting from the [Khanka](#) incident in 1972. Remarkably, these incidents began to escalate after Pope Shenouda's access to papacy as head of the church. In spite of the injustices that accompanied those incidents, however, the church under Shenouda used them as a pressure card only to increase its gains from the regime. At



the same time, the Egyptian Church was one of the largest supporters of the Mubarak regime, like Al-Azhar institution. The church also used to intervene in elections by directing the electoral votes in favor of the nominees of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP), and holding public meetings to support them, as it happened in the 2005 parliamentary elections.

After the third of July 2013 events and its accompanying political tension, there were a lot of incidents of sectarian violence. Some of these incidents were for political reasons, especially after the events of the Rabaa and Nahda dispersal massacres, while some were for religious reasons, and others were for tribal and social reasons.

According to a report issued by the Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms (ECRF) by the researcher [Mina Thabet](#), and despite the bias of the report and its adoption of only one view – that of the researcher’s – which appeared in confining the sit-ins in the period that followed the third of July events to the supporters of Morsi, which shows a lack of impartiality. However, the researcher monitored in the period from June 30, 2013 to September 30, 2014, a number of 16 incidents of violence against the Copts. Later, the ECRF came to the involvement of the Egyptian authorities in all the incidents, whether through inaction, or failure to protect the property of the Copts. Also, the report referred to a direct involvement of the security authorities in some of the incidents, whether by deliberately excluding the law, or by directly practicing policies of collective punishment against some Copts.

## **The Circumstances of Bombing Egypt’s Petrine Church**

Before talking about the circumstances associated with the bombing of the Petrine Church incident on Sunday, December 11, 2016, we will shed light on the [statement](#) of the Egyptian Interior Ministry concerning the church bombing as it may carry a lot of signs and signals that can contribute to drawing a picture of possible scenarios.



## Views about Egypt's Interior Ministry's statement

Here, we will try to rely on two assumptions to build a possible timeline for the incident of bombing the Petrine Church:

1. The validity of all the data contained in the statement of the Egyptian Interior Ministry on the incident of bombing the Petrine Church (apart from the participants in the plot).
2. The existence of an Egyptian security apparatus that is trendy and moves rapidly, effectively, and efficiently.

Through these two hypotheses we can imagine a hypothetical timeline a few hours after the incident as follows:

- \* 9:57: the bombing occurred inside the Petrine Church.
- \* 10:15: there was a speedy access of the Criminal Investigation and National Security services to the crime scene.
- \* 10:30, determining the centre of the bombing, its nature and finding the remains of the perpetrator.
- \* 11:00, starting assembling the face pieces of the suspect in carrying out the bombing to get a clear picture of him.
- \* 17:00: Finishing the DNA analysis for the executor of the bombing, something which requires a period of time not less than 6 hours, starting from receiving the sample until reaching the end result – according to a statement of [forensic medicine](#) director in an interview with Amr Adib, a media man and TV presenter. (We adopted this view here



in the timeline though many [sources](#) talked about the need for a period of time ranging from 4 to 7 days to get the final result of a DNA analysis).

\* 18:00 finishing assembling the face pieces of the bombing executor, comparing the final image with the Ministry of Interior's database, and uncovering the executor's identity by members of the Criminal Evidence Dept. The process of assembling the face remains and the formation of the face image supposedly took about 7 hours, according to a statement of the [specialist](#) who reportedly conducted the process of assembling the face of the suicide bomber, during an interview with Amr Adib.

\* 21:00: obtaining a DNA sample from one of the family members of the suicide bomber in Fayoum and beginning to analyze it and match it with the executor's sample – This was supposedly done in the absence of a DNA database in the security services records. This means that after 6 pm immediately following the identification of the bomber, the police headed to Fayoum governorate to arrest one of his [family](#) members, obtain a sample from him/her, and conduct a DNA analysis for that sample.

\* 3:00 am, December 12, 2016: The sample of the bomber matched the sample that was taken from one of his family members, proving the identity of the executor – considering that DNA analysis would require a period of time not less than 6 hours, as noted previously.

As is clear from the timeline in which we relied on the statements of official organs of the state – supposing the speed and accuracy of research and investigation bodies – the perpetrator would be identified at least at 3 am on Monday, December 12, 2016. According to the [testimony](#) of human rights activists on social networking sites, two of “the woman and the three men” that al-Sisi announced their arrest one day after the incident, were actually arrested on Sunday, December 11, 2016 – the same day of bombing the church – at four pm from a building in Nasr city, a district in Cairo governorate. This means that the security services had arrested in advance a group of individuals (before identifying the suicide bomber, according to the timeline we



mentioned) and linked them with the bombing executor before identifying the bomber.

This leads us to raising a central question that needs a logical answer: How could the security services link the bombing perpetrator with the persons accused of plotting the operation, such as well as the Egyptian Revolutionary Council, according to the Interior Ministry's statement, in only a few hours between 3 am on Monday, December 12, 2016 and 3 pm on the same day when al-Sisi announced the name of the bomber and the arrest of the persons who planned the bombing, and the Interior Ministry released its statement.

### **There are two factors that led us to ask this question:**

**First:** It is not normal that the president pre-empted the probes of the security services and then the public prosecution to announce the arrest of those involved in the crime. This means that the security and judicial organs would not be able to contradict the story mentioned by al-Sisi, which also means the issuance of a death penalty in advance against the suspects. (Can you imagine that al-Sisi could be judicially questioned if it was found out that there was information different from the data that he mentioned?).

**Second:** supposedly after identifying the perpetrator, investigations would begin with the circles (of friends and relatives) related to the bomber in the governorate of Fayoum, to establish a set of possibilities that would lead to investigations, resulting in the arrest of the cell that was behind the bombing. In fact, this did not happen, but particular individuals were arrested, that may be related to Al-Ansar Beit al-Maqdis organization, not necessarily the Petrine Church incident, without clear correlation with the bombing perpetrator.

In light of the Islamic State organization's claiming the responsibility for bombing the Petrine Church through a statement that was circulated by news agencies, and if this is proved true, we can consider two possibilities about the bombing of the Petrine



Church: the first, that it is a central trend on the part of the Islamic State organization; and the second, that it is an individual operation or carried out by a small group within the framework of the individual wolves strategy, followed by the ISIL in some areas that lie out of its control, as it happened in more than one incident in France and others. Here, through the supposed timeline of the bombing operation and the questions that we raised, we can suggest three main scenarios with respect to the bombing of the Petrine Church:

**First:** Egyptian and non-Egyptian security services had prior knowledge of the perpetrator or the group that planned and carried out the bombing and that the operation was implemented under the nose of these security services, and that it was done through the security services' penetration and direction of the group that planned and carried out the operation. This scenario may be supported by the first reports that the Egyptian media circulated immediately after the incident – that were later confirmed by the [testimonies](#) of some of the injured in the bombing – about the presence of a bag inside the church that was behind the bombing.

**The second:** Perhaps, the Egyptian security services – without prior knowledge of the bombing – resorted under the pressure of the extreme anger of protesters after the bombing to accelerate the announcement of the bomber without conducting a full verification of his identity, and without verification of the parties of the conspiracy that were claimed to be involved.

This suggests that the young man who was announced as the bomber might have been forcibly disappeared by the security services in the period leading up to the bombing, and the security services killed him in a manner similar to that of a suicide bomber, and arrested a group of citizens and accused them of the crime – as it previously happened in the case of the murder of the Italian researcher, Giulio Regeni, at the hands of the Egyptian security services after he was forcibly disappeared (when five young people were liquidated under the pretext that they were the cell that killed the Italian researcher, before the whole story was later proved false).



**Third:** (which branches off from the second scenario) that all the reports of the security services on the perpetrator (not necessarily the rest of the plot parties) were true. In this case, the security services are still significantly convicted of failing to provide adequate security protection to an extremely sensitive place adjacent to the Cathedral of St. Mark.

## **Linking the Muslim Brotherhood with ISIL is the Regime's Message to the Outside World:**

Despite the gravity of the incident, and whatever scenario is likely for those behind the incident, but the Egyptian regime has been consistently seeking – since their access to power after the July 3 coup – to exploit the crises and accidents in sending direct messages to the outside world in order to greatly strengthen and consolidate its presence in power.

This made the regime link the Brotherhood with the ISIL organization in carrying out the bombing of the Petrine Church, to emphasize the message that was always repeated by al-Sisi in his foreign visits, that the Muslim Brotherhood and ISIL are two sides of the same coin in order to bring international support for (al-Sisi's) remaining in power, the continuation of repression and violation of human rights, and the closure of the political sphere under the pretext of the fight against terrorism.

In fact, the [Muslim Brotherhood](#) and a number of its symbols, have directly condemned the bombing of the Petrine Church. However, the statement of the Egyptian Interior Ministry about the circumstances of the church bombing came out trying to link the Muslim Brotherhood with Ansar Beit al-Maqdis – which swore allegiance to the Islamic State in 2014 and changed its name to Sinai Province – in planning and carrying out the bombing. This carries a great deal of contradiction as there is a state of open hostility between the two organizations. The Brotherhood spokespersons always say that the ISIL organization and its affiliated armed groups do not represent true Islam and that such organizations are penetrated (by security services). On the other hand, ISIL accuses the Brotherhood of being clients to the West and also of "apostasy", which appeared in the last recording in December 2016 when



the Islamic State's media spokesman, Abu Hassan Al-Mohajer, described the Muslim Brotherhood as the "Brotherhood of apostasy".

Also, the Interior Ministry statement involved other parties such as Qatar and the Egyptian Revolutionary Council (despite the presence of declared differences between the Egyptian Revolutionary Council and many Muslim Brotherhood figures), both of which have [condemned](#) the incident.

## The Church Bombing Repercussions

It is expected that there will be a number of consequences for the incident itself, or as a result of the al-Sisi regime's exploitation of it, including:

### 1- Trump's support to al-Sisi

During a meeting between al-Sisi and the US President-elect Donald Trump in September at the start of United Nations General Assembly session, [Trump](#) promised al-Sisi that under his administration, the United States of America will be "a loyal friend, not simply an ally" to Egypt and expressed to al-Sisi his strong support for Egypt's war on terrorism, which drove al-Sisi to send Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shukri on a visit to Washington in December and meeting with the vice president-elect, Mike Pence, in an attempt to seek to achieve several quick gains soon after Trump assumes power in January 2017. Al-Sisi seeks to make mutual visits between him and Trump, increase US military support to Egypt, provide the economic aid that has not been disbursed in cash, declare the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization, and hand over the wanted Egyptians in the United States to the Egyptian government.

It seems that the church bombing incident came at an appropriate timing for Sisi at the beginning of his intersection with Trump's administration in the coming period, to confirm the existence of terrorism and request the fulfilment of Trump's promises of supporting Egypt in its war against terrorism, and overlooking criticism of the al-Sisi regime's [human rights](#) violations.



## 2. The Continuation of the Regime's Promotion of the War on Terrorism and its Potential Implications:

The al-Sisi regime's promotion of the fight on terrorism and engaging in the equations of the ongoing regional conflicts are the most prominent methods used by Sisi in order to legitimize his existence and secure his remaining in power. Al-Sisi has consistently promoted the term of the 'fight on terrorism' in most of his foreign visits and exploited the violence, which was fabricated by his security services or resulted from the environment that he created under the intense security crackdown. This makes Sisi always the first beneficiary of the terrorism incidents to make them the main justification for his continued existence in power and continuation of his repressive practices.

However, on the other side, and assuming the scenario of his inability to protect sensitive places, this may reduce the regime's credibility in its ability to fight terrorism and protect people from it. Perhaps, this is what made al-Sisi quickly announce what he called 'those involved' in the incident. However, this was accompanied by many contradictions in the official statements as was reported by social networking sites, which reduces the credibility of these stories, and can be considered a strategic error on the part of the regime, that could have been avoided if there were careful investigations on those who were behind the crime.

## 3. The Regime Exports the 'Sectarian' Discourse

Recalling the discourse of violence and sectarian crises is the most persuasive and influential tool in the West, as well as the evidence of the existence of real terrorism. It is also the means that can silence some external voices which used to condemn al-Sisi's repressive practices, while giving an acceptable justification to the West for the increased security procedures and violations of public freedoms pursued by Sisi. However, this also could be a double-edged weapon, as it would show al-Sisi as being unable to provide the necessary protection, as [Foreign Policy](#) indicated.



## 4. Expanding the Power of Military and Exceptional Judiciary

Al-Sisi called – while presenting condolences to the victims of the bombing of the Petrine Church – for “the issuance of a group of laws by which the trial of those involved in acts of violence and terrorism would be accelerated”. He called on the government and the parliament to contribute to taking steps to speed up the pace of trials. This prompted some lawmakers after al-Sisi’s talk to directly submit proposals for amending the Code of Criminal Procedures and allow the trial of civilians before military courts. The main objective of the enactment of these laws is to expand the military justice authority at the expense of the civil judiciary.

Also according to members of parliament and media men, the Code of Criminal Procedures modification could be to speed up the trial and conviction through special terrorism circles or without the availability of the defendants’ full right to resort to the court of cassation, which means a further violation of the public freedoms and the elimination of the remaining civil and judicial sovereignty. Accordingly, the coming period may see an expansion of military and exceptional trials and implementation of death sentences.

## 5. Recalling the “Conspiracy Theory” to the Minds

The means by which the regime hides its cascading failures in the management of the crises and faltering economy, is recalling the idea of conspiracy to become a priority by talking about a foreign conspiracy against the homeland with the help of terrorism. The direct objective here is to show the citizen the size of the threats and conspiracies that surround the state while the indirect objective is prevent the citizen from talking about the regime’s failure, its poor management, and the consequent economic crises and disastrous decisions.

## 6. Influencing the Course of the Egyptian Revolution

The Egyptian revolution and revolutionaries may be the most affected party by the bombing of the Petrine Church, as the emergence of bombing operations by the Islamic State in Cairo will shift the Egyptian scene from the square of the



revolutionaries' conflict with the coup regime to chaos and civil war, which the regime seems to push toward it. This would lead to several scenarios, the most dangerous of which could be that some revolutionary forces might join regime in its battle against the Islamic State, or at least that some of the revolutionary forces would change their course to cope with the situation, as well as the regional and international circumstances.

On the other hand, the Egyptian regime would tend to exploit the incident in the involvement of opposition institutions and symbols that reject the regime in violence and terrorism cases, a technique the coup regime used to tread in previous incidents. This appeared clearly in the statement of the Interior Ministry and the state-owned newspapers in an attempt to involve the Egyptian Revolutionary Council in the church bombing incident without reference to rational evidence. The regime aims through such practices to marginalize and isolate the political forces that are active in the course of the revolution; and it seems that the regime will continue in this direction.

## **7. The Continued Official Support of the Church to Al-Sisi**

Successive crises that hit the regime in the previous period made it in dire need of its supporters and key partners in the coup on July 3, 2013. Perhaps the Petrine Church bombing represents a return to an official support from the church to al-Sisi and the continuation of his support which might be stronger than it was in the previous period.

## **8. The widening gap between the Church and the Copts**

There is a growing current inside the Copts that rejects the official Church institution, as well as the practices of the regime at the same time, due to more than one reason:

- \* A growing feeling among a sector of the Copts that such bombing operations are the result of the continued support of the Church to the coup regime and its clear anti-Islamic trend in general, and showing the Copts as supporters of a repressive coup regime, which may make them later targeted directly or indirectly.



\* Al-Sisi's failure to fulfil his promises to the Copts, which turned out to be strong during the adoption of the law of restoration and construction of churches last August, and his inability to protect and secure the places of worship.

\* Copts, like the rest of the Egyptian people, are affected by the difficult economic conditions, and suffer as the rest of the Egyptians do.

This indicates the possibility of widening the gap between the church and a broad sector of the Copts in the coming period. This was expressed by the chants of the angry protesting Copts in front of the cathedral on the eve of the Petrine Church bombing.

## 9. The Circle of Violence Widened

Probably the church bombing does not only reflect an attack which the Islamic State organization has claimed responsibility for, but it may reflect a shift in the organization's strategy towards Egypt and starting acts of bombing and killing citizens in Cairo and other governorates. This would mean the widening of the circle of violence to include all segments of society, in light of the escalating repressive practices of the ruling military regime, and the closure of all outlets of the democratic political action.