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المعهد المصري للدراسات  
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After CBS Interview: To What  
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Bahçelievler, Yenibosna Mh 29 Ekim Cad. No: 7 A2 Blok 3. Plaza D: 64  
Tel/Fax: +90 212 227 2262 E-Mail: [info@eis-eg.org](mailto:info@eis-eg.org)

## After CBS Interview: To What Extent Was Sisi Affected?

### EIS Monitoring and Documentation Unit

General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's [interview](#) with CBS TV network, which was broadcast via the famous "60 Minutes" program on 6 January 2019, has sparked a wide-range debate, especially after the US network had aired a promo for the interview noting that the Egyptian ambassador to Washington contacted the program producers and told them the interview could not be aired. This opened the door to speculations about the issues that General Sisi raised during the interview, giving the TV network a great opportunity to promote it under the title of "[The Interview Egypt's Government Doesn't Want on TV](#)".

This report highlights the most salient comments made by Sisi, which contradict previous statements made by State agencies, Sisi himself, and international human rights organizations reports. The report also explores the interview's impact on the image of Sisi before the US decision-maker and the American citizen in general.

#### The "60 Minutes" Program:

In an article titled: "[Half a Century on CBS's '60 Minutes' Program](#)" published on Al-Shorouk Egyptian newspaper, Mohammed al-Menshawi said: "No other program can compete with "60 Minutes" that has been aired on CBS every Sunday for half a century – as it is the best and undisputed program ever on US, and perhaps global TV screens – with 14 million viewers a week". It is noteworthy that "60 Minutes has been keen on interviewing Middle East leaders, including former Egyptian presidents Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak as well as Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi," Menshawi added. "Due to the glamor of the program, it was chosen by US presidents Barack Obama and Donald

Trump for their first appearance after their historic election win in 2008 and 2016," Menshawi said.

It should be noted that *60 minutes* does not broadcast full interviews with guests, but it rather conducts something like "investigative analysis" that contains short excerpts taken out of lengthy interviews.

### Salient points of Sisi's interview with CBS

#### Cooperation with Israel

Although Al-Sisi revealed that the reasons for the strong military and intelligence cooperation with Israel are to preserve the security of Sinai, yet he refused to reply a question on why Egypt has not eliminated the militants in the Sinai Peninsula so far. "It's been estimated there are about 1,000 terrorists in Sinai. With more than a billion dollars in U.S. military aid every year, why haven't you wiped them out?" Scott Pelley asked. Instead of providing an answer to the question, Sisi hit Pelley's question with a question: "And why hasn't the US eliminated the terrorists in Afghanistan after 17 years and spending a trillion dollars?", stating that the United States has failed to eliminate terrorism in Afghanistan - but ignoring the clear difference between the two situations: the Egyptian army is supposed to be a national army whereas the US is only an occupier of Afghanistan.

Asked if cooperation with Israel was the closest ever between two enemies that once were at war, Sisi responded, "That is correct...," adding: "The Air Force sometimes needs to cross to the Israeli side. And that's why we have a wide range of coordination with the Israelis."

Sisi's remarks on military and intelligence cooperation with Israel had been previously denied by Egyptian officials. Egypt's military last year denied press reports that Egypt

and Israel were cooperating against the militants in northern Sinai, stressing that operations in the Sinai were carried out by the Egyptian army only<sup>1</sup>.

Al-Sisi did not realize that his statements on allowing the Israeli army to carry out attacks against Egyptian citizens on Egyptian territory amounted to recognition of the crime of treason, especially that most victims in Sinai are [unarmed civilians](#).

### Political detainees

“Your critics, critics in the United States Congress, critics within the United Nations, say that you are holding tens of thousands of political prisoners. That hundreds of people, unarmed people, have been killed in the streets of Cairo. They claim that you have blood on your hands. How do you explain all of this?” Scott Pelley asked Sisi. In response to the question, Al-Sisi claimed that there are no political prisoners or prisoners of opinion in Egypt, stressing that “We are dealing with fundamentalists and extremists which caused damage and killed people over these last years. I can't ask Egyptians to forget their rights or the police and civilians who died,” Sisi said, adding that “We are trying to stand against extremists who impose their ideology on the

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<sup>1</sup> In February 2018, the [New York Times](#) published a report indicating that there was secret military cooperation between Egypt and Israel, under which the latter launched raids against militants in northern Sinai; and that Israeli drones, helicopters and fighter jets carried out more than 100 air strikes inside Egyptian territory over the course of more than two years, with the consent of Egypt's Sisi. However, the official [spokesman](#) of the Egyptian armed forces denied that the New York Times report, saying it was incorrect and that the Egyptian army alone was authorized to carry out military operations in cooperation with the police, in specific areas in northern Sinai. The significance of this part of the interview where Sisi recognizes this cooperation with Israel, thinking that he will add international support to him. However, he forgot that he and his regime completely denied this a year ago when the New York Times published its report on the existence of security cooperation between Egypt and Israel in Sinai.

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people. Now they are subject to a fair trial. And it may take years, but we have to follow the law,” Sisi added.

When asked about the Human Rights Watch report which revealed that there are 60000 political prisoners in his Jails, Sisi completely denied and questioned the data of the HRW report, saying “I don't know where they got that figure. I said there are no political prisoners in Egypt. Whenever there is a minority trying to impose their extremist ideology. We have to intervene regardless of their numbers.”

Sisi also denied that the Muslim Brotherhood was outlawed because it represents the main opposition to his regime, adding that his regime only addresses extremists who carry weapons and would welcome them to live among the people. “No, no, no. We are only dealing with extreme Islamists who are carrying weapons. We would welcome them to live among the people but we don't want them to carry weapons and destroy the Egyptian economy,” Sisi replied to Pelley’s question.

In fact, Sisi’s comments imply indirect recognition of the existence of political prisoners in Egyptian prisons, although he did not mention their numbers. However, Sisi does not view them as political prisoners, but rather as extremists, and even accuses them of violence. The question here is: How could Sisi justify the detention of President Mohamed Morsi from the presidential palace, Egyptian Parliament’s elected speaker Dr. Saad Al-Katatni on the eve of the coup d'etat, and leading figures of the anti-coup alliance (known as the National Alliance Supporting Legitimacy)? Also, how can he justify the detention of former Chief of Staff of the Egyptian Armed Forces Lt. General Sami Anan, former presidential candidate Dr. Abdel Moneim Abul-Fotouh, Ambassador Masoum Marzouq, former head of the Egyptian Central Auditing

Organization Hisham Jenena and many others, including leaders and prominent figures of civil forces?

However, it seems that Sisi labels opposition to his regime as extremism, and his opponents as extremists.

### The Rab'a Sit-in

When Scott Pelley told Sisi that some Egyptian citizens do not recognize him as a president, he refused to comment. "I've spoken to a number of your countrymen who refuse to call you Mr. President because they say you're a military dictator." In response, Sisi claimed that there were "30 million Egyptians" who took to the streets to reject the ruling regime at that time, and that their will had to be met. "I don't know who you talked to. "But 30 million Egyptians took to the streets to reject the ruling regime at the time. It was a must to respond to their will," Sisi said, adding "Secondly, the maintenance of peace after this period required some measures to restore security." Commenting on Sisi's reply, Pelley wondered saying, "What Sisi calls 'measures to restore security' include the massacre of at least 800 Muslim Brotherhood supporters in Cairo's Rab'a Square!"

Sisi also refused to confess that he was the one who gave orders to disperse the Rab'a sit-in, being responsible for maintaining security (as coup leader and minister of defense) at the time. Again, he hit the question with a question: "Are you closely following the situation in Egypt? From where do you get your information?" He added that "There were thousands of armed people in the sit-in for more than 40 days. We tried every peaceful means to disperse them." This means that after 40 days, Sisi used other ways to disperse demonstrators, not including the "peaceful means" he talked about.

Sisi also denied information reported by Human Rights Watch that the Rab'a sit-in was dispersed "using armored personnel carriers, bulldozers, ground forces and snipers; police and army personnel attacked the protest encampment with hundreds killed by bullets to their heads, necks and chests." Instead, Sisi said "There were police personnel and they were trying to open peaceful corridors for the people to go safely to their homes"!

Sisi's response here is also an indirect recognition of committing mass killings in Rab'a square, which the Human Rights Watch organization described as "the largest killings of demonstrators in a single day in recent history". In fact, Sisi did not deny responsibility for what happened in Rab'a, but he only defended himself by saying that thousands of demonstrators in the Rab'a sit-in were armed. At that moment, CBS report aired an August 18 speech by the former Egyptian Interior Minister announcing that "security forces had seized 15 guns from the Rab'a sit-in", indicating clearly that Sisi was nothing but a liar.

### Exciting facts behind the scenes of '60 Minutes' program

In a [video](#) released by CBS, correspondent Scott Pelley and producer Rachael Morehouse told the *60 Minutes Overtime's* Ann Silvio the story behind their interview with Egypt's Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. In fact, they were surprised at the Egyptian ambassador's request to block the interview, the first of its kind in the show's history, referring to negotiations and pressures practiced by Egyptian officials, including the head of Egyptian General Intelligence Service, in this regard.

Pelley also referred to the horrific record of Sisi's human rights abuses. "This is a man who is accused of some of the worst human rights abuses of the last many years. In his own country, no one dares speak a word to him about any of that. And now here I was

in this amazing position to be able to ask this man questions,” Scott Pelley said. Pelley also wondered how a president could be a guest on *60 minutes* without expecting to receive such questions.

[Scott Pelley](#), the program presenter, is one of the most experienced and awarded correspondents in broadcast journalism. He has been reporting stories for 60 Minutes since 2004. The 2018-'19 season will be his 15th on the broadcast. Not many have made as wide and as deep a mark on a news organization as Pelley. In addition to his contributions as anchor of the CBS Evening News, his stories for 60 Minutes have accounted for half of all the major awards won by the broadcast since he joined it. Pelley has won a record 35 Emmys for field work, nearly all of them for 60 Minutes stories, which also have been recognized with five Edward R. Murrow awards, three George Foster Peabody awards, three Alfred I. duPont-Columbia Silver Batons, a George Polk award, as well as honors from the Society of Professional Journalists, the Overseas Press Club of America, Investigative Reporters and Editors and the Writers Guild of America.

It should also be noted that the interview with Sisi on *60 minutes* was preceded by an interview with Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the rookie congresswoman challenging the Democratic establishment (with her progressive leftist tendencies), which significantly increased the number of viewers.

### Human Rights Watch's response to Sisi's remarks

Later, [Human Rights Watch](#) published a report on its official page in response to the allegations made by Sisi during the *60 minutes* interview, titled: “Egypt: Little Truth in Al-Sisi’s ‘60 Minutes’ Responses – Government Should Reveal Numbers of Prisoners”. Following are the report’s most prominent points:

1- Since Al-Sisi effectively rose to power in July 2013 after ousting Egypt's first elected president, Mohamed Morsy, Egyptian authorities have arrested and charged tens of thousands of political opponents. A law introduced shortly after Morsy's ouster effectively banned all peaceful protests, and authorities have used it as a justification to arrest and prosecute thousands of protesters. Widespread arbitrary arrests and enforced disappearances have been a hallmark of Al-Sisi's rule.

2- Between Morsi's overthrow and May 2014, the independent Egyptian civil society initiative Wikithawra documented the arrest or prosecution of 41,000 people. In addition, 26,000 more may have been arrested in 2015 and 2016.

3- The nationwide crackdown quickly widened to include scores of writers, journalists, artists, and political and human rights defenders for their peaceful criticism. Al-Sisi himself had said in June 2015 that "there are innocents in prisons." He has issued presidential pardons for over 1,100 people, many of whom were arrested during peaceful protests.

4- The Egyptian authorities have released next to nothing on the number of prisoners in the country. But some statements to the media by officials have acknowledged at least 34,000 arrests in relation to the current crackdown. The Egyptian government should publicly provide comprehensive figures about how many prisoners it holds and create an accessible database for families so that they can locate their imprisoned relatives. The database should also be accessible to lawyers and researchers.

5- The Interior Ministry supervises and runs all prisons in Egypt. However, thousands of detainees, especially those in pretrial detention, are held in police stations and unofficial detention sites. In October 2018, the interior minister's assistant for prison supervision, General Zakaria al-Ghamry, said that over 115,000 prisoners have been

released since 2014. In May 2015, the government-sponsored National Council for Human Rights said in a report that prisons were 160 percent over capacity and police stations 300 percent over in the months following Morsi's ouster. The overcrowding and poor detention conditions led to a "rash" of deaths in custody that Human Rights Watch documented.

6- In the "60 Minutes" interview, Al-Sisi also denied any wrongdoing for the systematic and widespread killing of largely peaceful protesters in Rab'a Square in August 2013 that he personally supervised as defense minister. In one day, security forces killed at least 817 people when they violently dispersed tens of thousands of pro-Morsi demonstrators who gathered to protest his forced removal by the army. The incident was the biggest mass killing of protesters in Egypt's history and one of the largest in the world in recent decades, and the killings probably amount to crimes against humanity. Security forces also engaged in several other incidents of mass killings of protesters before and after the Rab'a sit-in dispersal.

7- Al-Sisi's said in the interview that thousands of protesters were armed during the Rab'a Square dispersal, which contradicts findings by Human Rights Watch. The claim also contradicts official statements by the Interior Ministry, which said it seized only 15 guns from the Raba'a protesters. Several years later, in an unfair mass trial of over 730 Rab'a protesters and Muslim Brotherhood leaders, authorities presented only 13 rifles and 36 birdshot guns as evidence. In addition, several official statements and reports accused the police of using excessive force. The former prime minister who supervised the dispersal, Hazem al-Beblawy, said in 2014 that "anyone who committed a mistake ... should be investigated."

8- Al-Sisi's words are contradicted by the facts, from the Rab'a Square killings, to the number of journalists in prison today for simply doing their job. Al-Sisi's blatant attempt at misinformation cannot stand up to the simplest scrutiny.

### Foreign media and Sisi's CBS interview

1- The [Daily Mail](#) published a report entitled: "Egypt tries and fails to get CBS to spike 60 Minutes interview with Sisi in which he admits former enemy Israel has been helping fight Islamic militants in his country". The report pointed to the fact that 60 minutes rejected a request by the Egyptian government not to show the interview. The report also noted that Sisi denied the existence of political prisoners in Egypt, despite documented reports by Human Rights Watch and other human rights organizations.

2- [The Financial Times](#) published a report entitled: "Egypt tries to block airing of Sisi's '60 Minutes' interview". The newspaper emphasized that Sisi's statements are contradicted by previous official statements. While Sisi recognized existence of close military cooperation between Egypt and Israel – to the extent that Israeli drones and aircraft carried out strikes against targets allegedly belonging to the Islamic State organization in Sinai with the consent of the Egyptian authorities, according to the New York Times –forgetting that "Egypt's military last year denied ... that Egypt and Israel were cooperating against the militants in northern Sinai".

3- [Voice of America](#) published a report entitled: "Egypt Tries to Block '60 Minutes' el-Sisi Interview". The report addressed the interview and referred to the Egyptian authorities' request not to broadcast it. "We understood that he wanted to be on the show. He wanted to be a figure up there with the powerful leaders in the Middle East and so we pitched this to him that those powerful leaders come on '60 Minutes'," said a "60 Minutes" producer in a video posted on the show's Twitter account.

4- The [BBC](#) published a report entitled: “Abdul Fattah al-Sisi: Why did Egypt want CBS interview pulled?” The report said “the questions about the crackdown on dissent “were not the kind of news [Mr Sisi's] government wanted broadcast”. Also, Sisi's reported confirmation of military co-operation with Israel over North Sinai might also be controversial in Egypt, taking into consideration that the two countries fought four wars before signing a peace treaty in 1979, according to BBC.

5- [The New York Times](#) published a report entitled: “Egypt's Sisi Acknowledges Close Coordination With Israel in Sinai”. The report said that “Abdel Fattah al-Sisi offered a rare acknowledgement of his close security cooperation with Israel in the Sinai Peninsula during a U.S. television interview with CBS' "60 Minutes" news program broadcast.”

6- [The Washington Post](#) published an article by the former Egyptian Minister of Investment, Yehia Hamed, entitled “Why Sisi is scared of CBS”. Mr. Hamed said, “Faced with a free media, he (Sisi) showed himself to be sensitive, fragile and fearful of being held accountable for his crimes. Emboldened by the support of people such as President Trump and encouraged by the tacit tolerance of other Western leaders, Sissi has long promoted the narrative that he is in some way ‘fighting extremism,’ believing it grants him carte blanche to do as he pleases.”

### Regime institutions and management of CBS interview crisis

It was remarkable how the Egyptian media reacted towards Sisi’s CBS interview, as the Egyptian media did not celebrate the interview as they used to do with any interview of Sisi with foreign media outlets. However, the Egyptian media deliberately refrained from commenting on the CBS interview, which confirms press reports, especially a

report by [Mada Masr](#), referring to presidential instructions to Egyptian media to refrain from addressing Sisi's interview with CBS.

"Two separate media sources within the intelligence-controlled Egyptian Media Group (EMG) say that they have received explicit orders from the presidency's media office to refrain from covering President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi interview with CBS' *60 Minutes* program on any TV channels, websites or newspapers owned by the media conglomerate. Also, a source from D Media, another media company owned by Egypt's General Intelligence Services (GIS), also confirms that similar instructions have been issued to its subsidiary network, DMC," Mada Masr reported.

On the other hand, a report on the CBS website said the Egyptian ambassador to Washington contacted the TV network after recording the interview, trying to dissuade them from broadcasting it. The Egyptian Foreign Ministry has not yet comment on this, which confirms the validity of the CBS report. This indicates that the regime understands well the magnitude of the crisis that Sisi has caused after his remarks which were contradicted by previous official statements.

## Conclusion

In the CBS interview, Sisi fell a prey to his scourge of desire to be on show, without receiving advice from his aides on how to deal with professional programs such as *60 minutes*. This reflected negatively on his appearance during the interview and mainly manifested in his body language. Sisi's CBS interview is likely to affect Sisi's relations with the US decision-making institutions in the coming period, especially amid the presence of a democratic majority in the House of Representatives, its opposition to Trump's foreign policy, and its stance against regimes that have a bad human rights record, including the Sisi regime.

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\*The report was prepared by the Monitoring and Documentation Unit at the Egyptian Institute of Studies (EIS).

