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The Egyptian military institution witnessed several developments during February 2019, including:

Differences between Sisi and chief of staff after El Arish attack:

Abdel-Fattah Al-Sisi left Cairo on Thursday, 14 February 2019, heading to Munich, Germany, to participate in the Munich Security Conference 2019. During the conference, Sisi gave a speech focusing on counterterrorism strategies and referring to the challenges facing Egypt as well as the “successes”, using his own words, that the Egyptian army has achieved in the fight against terrorism.

However, while Sisi was in Germany, the Islamic State’s local affiliate in Sinai (known as Sinai Province) on 16 February 2019 surprised the army forces with an attack, the first of its kind to target army forces in the vicinity of the city of Arish about a year since the military Operation Sinai-2018 started in February 2018. The attack that targeted Gouda 3 checkpoint near the Arish airport led to complete destruction of the base, according to a statement released by the militant group’s media arm, the Amaq News Agency.

According to the [communique](#) issued by Army Spokesman Colonel Tamer Al-Rifaai, the attack took place at 6am and the casualties among the army forces were 15 military personnel, including an officer (The deceased soldiers were from Rapid Deployment Force, Battalion-408). “Seven perpetrators were killed and an officer and 14 other soldiers killed or wounded during the exchange of fire,” the military communique said. However, a leaked military [document](#) as well as medical sources in the Arish Military Hospital confirmed that one army officer and at least 14 other military personnel were

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killed in the attack. Subsequent pictures published by the IS-affiliated media showed a new crisis for the Egyptian military institution, which has been shaken so much since it became one of the regime's repression tools against citizens since Mubarak stepped down in 2011.

Immediately after Sisi returned to Cairo on Sunday, 17 February 2019, he met with the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) to discuss the repercussions of the Sinai attack that caused him great embarrassment during his participation in the Munich Security Conference, especially as he was attempting to propagandize the alleged Egyptian army "successes" in the field of combating terrorism during the past years. During this meeting, Al-Sisi strongly blamed Chief of Staff Lt. General Mohamed Farid Hegazi, who was appointed in October 2017 and mandated by Sisi on 29 November 2017 to clear Sinai from the armed groups and "use all brute force" to restore security in North Sinai governorate within three months, which was not achieved. Sisi noted that since Hegazi was given a 3-month deadline until February 2019, a period of more than a year, the Egyptian armed forces has not succeed in the mission assigned to them.

Accordingly, some observers believe that Sisi may soon get rid of the chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Mohamed Farid Hegazi, one of only three commanders remaining from the military junta which carried out the military coup against President Mohamed Morsi in early July 2013. It is noteworthy that Sisi had done the same thing in 2015, when gave Lt. General Osama Askar, the former Third Army commander, a 3-month deadline to rid Sinai of armed groups; but when Askar failed in achieving any successes in this regard, he was dismissed.

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The military institution and constitutional amendments:

The [New York Times](#) on 14 February published a report by its Cairo bureau chief, Declan Walsh, titled: “El-Sisi May Rule Egypt Until 2034 Under Parliamentary Plan”, saying that “the Egyptian Parliament approved sweeping measures on Thursday that would allow General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to extend his rule until 2034, further entrenching his authoritarian rule and enshrining in law the military’s dominance over the country.”

Walsh revealed that " In recent months, the General Intelligence Service, one of Egypt’s three major security services, has convened near-daily meetings to coordinate plans for extending Mr. el-Sisi’s term, citing [Mada Masr](#), one of the few independent news media outlets in Egypt.

The proposed amendments declare the country’s military “guardian and protector” of the Egyptian state, democracy, the constitution and the civil nature of the state, while also granting military courts wider jurisdiction in trying civilians. They also enshrine veto power for Egypt’s Supreme Council of the Armed Forces over choice of defense minister and guarantee a lasting political role for the military in state policies.

Crash of a Rafale aircraft during Macron’s visit to Cairo

Under the title “The discreet crash of the Rafale aircraft in Egypt embarrasses Paris and Cairo” the [Medea Bart](#), a French news website, revealed that a Rafale aircraft crashed in Egypt during the visit of French President Emmanuel Macron to Cairo late January. Media Bart said it confirmed the crash of a Rafale aircraft during Macron’s visit to Cairo, pointing out that the incident - which has been concealed - has become a scandal embarrassing the two parties to coincide with a deal to buy Egypt 12 aircraft of the same model. In his article on the site, Arthur Herbert said Maron's official visit to Egypt

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this time was complicated, especially since the contracts announced by the Elysee about one billion euros did not sign many of them, and some turned into mere memorandums of understanding.

Macron, who released the Egyptian president on his first visit a year and a half ago from any criticism, said, "I do not want to give lessons", this time publicly referred to violations of fundamental rights in Egypt. In this heavy atmosphere - according to the writer - a piece of bad news was moving to Macron, that a Rafale plane crashed just at the Egyptian air base at Jabal Al-Bassour under the eyes of a team of trainers and experts from the French company Dassault Air, which handed the plane in 2017 to Egypt. The writer said that the French president tried not to show him influenced by the news, but the attendees noticed that his speech seemed disturbed or inaccurate, adding that the news was not communicated to observers except the narrow circle, and also could not contact the officials of the Dassault, despite attempts.

But Media Bart was able to communicate with the relatives of Major Muhtadi al-Shazli, the young pilot, who assured the French website of his death in the Rafale crash at first but returned to say that they were not aware of the exact circumstances of the incident and could no longer confirm the type of aircraft in which the incident occurred. You can talk about them only with the permission of the armed forces. " The incident comes at a sensitive time for the French and Egyptian authorities, as negotiations continue on a deal involving 12 additional Rafale aircraft, especially as the French side sees Egyptians as "good customers who are hard to abandon."

Medea Bart asked about the cause of the crash: Is it a human error or a technical problem? The site said the first information they gathered indicated that the timing of the incident was a misfortune, since the flight was planned for a long time and had

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nothing to do with Macron's visit. The question asked: Could this impact on the ongoing negotiations on the request for the purchase of 12 additional aircraft? "This question should be addressed to the Egyptians," says Jean-Pierre Moulne, deputy director of the Institute of International and Strategic Relations. "States can exploit such incidents to gain concessions in negotiating contracts."

Military Exercises:

1- Egyptian-Kuwaiti joint military drills "Sabah-1/Yarmouk-4"

Early February 2019, the Egyptian and Kuwaiti forces started two simultaneous joint military drills in Kuwait code-named "[Al-Yarmouk-4](#)" and "[Sabah-1](#)" that lasted for several days in Kuwait, the Egyptian military spokesman said in a statement on Thursday. Being held for the first time between Egypt and Kuwait, "Sabah-1" started with theoretical and practical courses ahead of sailing as well as coordination of efforts to carry out a mock operation to restore and secure an island of strategic importance, according to Egypt's army spokesman Tamer al-Refaie.

As for "Al-Yarmouk-4" military drill, it includes performing a number of offensive and defensive air operations targeting vital sites to enhance the combat capabilities of the two countries. "The drills contribute to supporting the ties of military cooperation between the armed forces of both countries to confront all joint challenges that may face the region," Refaie said. Meanwhile, the Kuwaiti military said in a statement that the mock battles involve elite personnel, F-18 warplanes from the Kuwaiti air forces and F-16 jet fighters from the Egyptian counterparts. While the Sabah-1 exercise is carried out for the first time between Egypt and Kuwait, the Egyptian-Kuwaiti joint air training (Yarmouk-4) is part of the annual agenda of the Egyptian army training.

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2- Fateh-26 exercise:

On 13 February 2019, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and Minister of Defense and Military Production Lt. General Mohamed Zaki attended the main stage of [Fateh-26](#) military drills with live ammunition that are carried out by units of the central military zone and major branches of the Armed Forces. The exercises continued for several days within the framework of the army's annual plan of combat training. Units of the mechanical infantry, armored corps and artillery along with elements from the air, air defense and elite forces participated in the drill. Attending the main stage of the drills were Army Chief of Staff Lt. General Mohamed Farid and senior commanders.

3- Egyptian-US joint training:

Members of the Egyptian Special Forces “Thunderbolts” personnel on 12 February 2019 were in a military training [mission](#) in the U.S. Army Fort Campbell Kentucky Training center.