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Militarization of Egyptian Ministry of Health

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Ashmawi may not be the last officer to move against the regime

Mahmoud Gamal

The fate of Egyptian army officers under Sisi: Either pro-regime like Mansi or anti-regime like Ashmawi

Introduction

Hisham Ali Ashmawi Mosaad, a former Egyptian special forces (Thunderbolt) officer, has become man of the hour on Egyptian, Arab and Western press and media outlets after he was arrested on Monday, 8 October 2018, by Libya's Khalifa Haftar's militia in Derna, Eastern Libya, along with Marei Zegheibeh, a jihadist wanted in Libya, and Bahaa Ali, an Egyptian who had been a former prisoner in Egyptian prisons under the rule of former President Hosni Mubarak.

Since his arrest, Hisham Ashmawi's fate has not been known, amid intentional media blackout. However, some observers believe that Ashmawi had been extradited to several countries that wanted to conduct direct investigations with him before he was delivered to Egypt on Tuesday, 28 May 2019. Egyptian official sources said that the agreement on the extradition of Ashmawi to Egypt came during a recent visit by Major General Abbas Kamel, head of Egyptian General Intelligence Service (GIS), to Libya during which he met with Khalifa Hafater.

A video, released by an Egyptian satellite channel, showed the moment of the landing of a military plane, where Ashmawi was on board, at Cairo airport, accompanied by a number of GIS elements. Ashmawi was blindfolded and wearing a headset on his ears to prevent him from watching or hearing what was going on around him. He was immediately transferred under heavy guarding to one of the Egyptian security headquarters.

While some believe that Hisham Ashmawi went the wrong way and that a distinguished army officer like him should not have been implicated in such moves, even if he had had differences with the leadership of the military Institution, others see that he was a unique example for an army officer who sacrificed all the privileges granted by the army to achieve the change that he desired siding with an anti-regime

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militant organization – the change that was close to reach after the revolution of 2011, but was overturned by the military in July 2013.

Who is Hisham Ashmawi?



Hisham Ali Ashmawi Mosaad was born in 1979 and graduated in 2000 from the Military Academy in 1994. He is a resident of the 10th district in Nasr City, and is married to Dr. Nisreen Hassan Sayed Ali, who works as an assistant lecturer at Ain Shams University. Ashmawi joined the Egyptian Army and served in the Special Forces unit, being a distinguished officer. Ashmawi or Abu Omar Al-Muhajir had received advanced training on special operation tasks in main US training institutes. Later, he became the operations engineer of Ansar Beit al-Maqdis and in charge of the most important qualitative operations carried out in Sinai, Cairo and Al-Farafra oasis. Ashmawi served in Sinai for 10 years and witnessed the bombings of Taba, Sharm El-Sheikh and Dahab. In 2007, a military court transferred Ashmawi to an administrative post and then referred to retirement in 2009. He was completely expelled from the army in 2012.

After Ashmawi's departure from service, he immediately began his journey into the world of jihadist groups. In 2013, he moved to Sinai where he became in charge of the military wing of Ansar Beit al-Maqdis. He started to develop the performance of the group, improving their militancy skills. A year later, Ashmawi emerged as a key operative, heading a cell that taught fighters how to carry out suicide bombing missions, assemble roadside bombs and shoot soldiers. Since the failed assassination attempt of former Interior Minister Mohammed Ibrahim in May 2013, which was allegedly planned by Hisham Ashmawi and Emad Abdel Hamid and carried out by Walid Badr (all three are former army officers).

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Ashmawi was linked to a large number of attacks that were carried out by Ansar Beit al-Maqdis, whether through planning or implementation. The most prominent operations allegedly conducted by Ashmawi included the attack on the military intelligence headquarters in Ismailia in October 2013, the bombing of the Security Directorate of Al Dakahlia in December 2013, the bombing of Cairo Security Directorate in January 2014, the attack on a military unit in Farafra oasis in the Western Desert in July 2014, and the attack on armed forces in Karm Al Qawadis in Sinai in October 2014. In July 2015, Ashmawi announced in a statement that he became the emir (leader) of Al Murabitun group. Al Murabitun was another turning point in Ashmawi's life. After the Ansar Beit Al-Maqdis announced in November 2014 its allegiance to the Islamic State (ISIS), Ashmawi refused to pledge allegiance to ISIS.

Between Sisi and Ashmawi

Since he was Minister of Defense, during President Morsi's one year in office, General Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi has been keen on attending the educational seminars organized by the Department of Morale Affairs of the Egyptian armed forces for the army personnel and officers. Also, army commanders, statesmen, ministers, media, and clergy usually attend these seminars. On Thursday, 11 October, Sisi attended the 29th Educational Seminar of the Armed forces, titled "October; Continuity of Generations" together with Minister of Defense Lt. General Mohammad Zaki, Chief of Staff Lt. General Mohamed Farid Hegazi, and commanders of the main branches of the Egyptian armed forces. However, Former Defense Minister Lt. General Sedki Sobhi and Former Chief of Staff Lt. General Mahmoud Hegazi were absent from this seminar.

As this seminar which coincided with the 45th anniversary of the October 6 war victory celebrations, Sisi addressed the October war during the educational seminar, and linked the circumstances in Egypt during the time of the October war to the current situation, to convey an important message that the war which the Egyptian army fought in 1973 is still going on, but in different ways. Sisi said that in the October war the enemy was clear, but now the enemy "lives among us". "When we compare that time [1973] to now, the situation is completely different ... The battle was clear, and we knew the enemy (in 1973) ... The war has not ended, but its means and tools have changed. Now I am being very honest when I say: now, the enemy is

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not visible. He lives among us,” Sisi said, referring to political Islam, which is characterized by Sisi as extremist thought. Since the coup, Sisi has been trying to instill this idea in the Egyptian army's doctrine - that political Islam is the enemy of the Egyptian state.

Sisi did not forget to send a message to the leaders of the military institution as he used to do in educational seminars – especially that the Oct. seminar was the first seminar after the arrest of Former Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces Lt. General Sami Anan. This time, Sisi stressed that the military should be united to spare the country entering into a dark tunnel, adding that the solid mass within the army must be coherent and understood well the challenges facing Egypt.

Sisi comments on the arrest of Ashmawi

Before he ended his speech, Sisi commented on the important event of arresting Hisham Ashmawi, a former special forces (Thunderbolt) officer accused of being behind several deadly attacks in Egypt, by Libya's Khalifa Haftar militia in Derna, Eastern Libya, about 72 hours before the seminar.

“There is a big difference between the terrorist, Hisham Ashmawi, and the hero, Ahmed Mansi, an army officer who died in Sinai,” adding: “Both of them were army officers. But the difference between them is that one, Ashmawi, was confused and might have committed treason, but the other, Mansy, kept the covenant and offered his life to protect the country.” Sisi also said the Egyptian people want to retrieve Ashmawi in order to hold him accountable for the crimes he committed.

Sisi described Ashmawi as a traitor for his dissent while he described Ahmed Mansy, another special forces officer who was killed by armed groups in North Sinai, as a hero

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for his loyalty. Sisi's message to the army officers was that Mansy was the example to follow and sacrifice themselves to preserve the Egyptian state; but they must avoid the fate of Ashmawi who will be tried and punished for his treason.

Immediately after the arrival of Hisham Ashmawi to Cairo last Tuesday, Sisi on his official **Facebook** page applauded the successful extradition of Ashmawi and extended his appreciation to the 'brave men who have always acted as hawks against all those who thought they can terrorize Egyptians'. "The war on terrorism has not ended and will not end until the right of every martyr who died for the sake of the country is restored," Sisi ended. In fact, Sisi wanted to draw the Egyptian people's attention to the importance of the event which he considers a personal victory for him and for his regime.

Either Mansi or Ashmawi

Sisi knows well that Ashmawi was a distinguished army officer and was a model in the army special forces (Thunderbolt), so he did not use any bad language while talking about him although he said Ashmawi was a "traitor". Comparing Ashmawi with Ahmed Mansy, another special forces officer who was killed by militants in northern Sinai, Sisi wanted to indicate that while Mansy was considered a good example of an army officer that should be followed, Ashmawi represented a bad example that must be avoided. While Sisi described Ashmawi as a traitor that will be tried and punished - for his dissent - he described Mansy as a hero - for his loyalty.

The military institution, like all institutions and bodies, has members who differ in their nature, spirit, principles and ideologies. Since 1952, there have been voices within the military trying to correct the path that the institution deviated from. Perhaps, Lt. General Saad Eddin El-Shazli, Lt. General Abdel Ghani El-Gamasi, and Field Marshal Abu Ghazaleh (all three served during the Sadat era) were examples for this trend within the army. Also, during the outbreak of the January 25, 2011 revolution, some army officers participated in the revolution as a means of peaceful change, whether within

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the army and at the level of the Egyptian state. However, even after the Sisi coup against the Egyptian revolution and its principles on July 3, 2013, there were groups within the Egyptian army that attempted to change this situation for several reasons (most notably the troubled political situation, the wrong policies that the regime has adopted, the military situation in North Sinai, the waiver of the Egyptian islands of Tiran and Sanafir to Saudi Arabia, and the regime's move to change the military doctrine of the Egyptian army and rapprochement with Israel).

Sisi's erroneous policies after 3 July 2013 have blocked all constitutional and legal methods of change in front of those who call for change either from within and outside the armed forces, such as former Chief of Staff Lt. General Sami Anan and former Commander of Air Defense Forces Ahmed Shafiq as well as Colonel Ahmed Konsowa, and increased the numbers of those who chose to resort to armed confrontation with the regime, whether among the military or among civilians, such as the armed clashes between the army and militants in the governorate of North Sinai. Many of the dead were killed by either the militants or the army officers.

The final outcome of these wrong policies is that army officers are divided into two types that are both endangered; either they be killed at the hands of militant groups like Ahmed Mansy, Khaled Maghrabi, Rami Hassanein, Adel Ragaie and others, or they will be arrested or killed by the pro-regime forces like Hisham Ashmawi, Emad Abdel Hamid, and others. Therefore, continuation of the current regime is likely to result in more casualties among the ranks of distinguished army officers, both who support or oppose Sisi's policies.

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In the past seven decades, there have always been attempts within the Egyptian army for conducting change from within at times when some believed the institution deviated from its military doctrine due to policies adopted by heads of State, and perhaps Lt. General Saad al-Din al-Shazly and Field Marshal Abdel Ghani al-Gamasy, Field Marshal Abu Ghazaleh and Field Marshal Ahmad Badawi were an evident example for this. During the outbreak of the revolution of 25 January 2001, some officers participated in the events as a means of peaceful change both within the Egyptian army or at the level of the Egyptian State as a whole. However, after the Sisi coup against the Egyptian revolution and its principles on 3 July 2013 and blocking all ways and means of bringing about a change in a peaceful, constitutional and legal manner, this situation will force those who are seeking change within the military to resort to more brutal methods to achieve the desired change.

Therefore, Ashmawi may not be the last one to adopt such ideas for change, especially after Sisi announced that whoever wants to change must first get rid of him.

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