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## Sisi's Reshuffle of Top Army Officers (June 2020)

### Causes and Implications

Mahmoud Gamal

In two previous papers, "[Anti-Sisi powers within regime and opp. management policies](#)" and "[Egypt Release of Anan & Reshuffle of Top Officers.. Causes and Implications](#)", we discussed the measures that Sisi took in December 2019 after the state of mobilization and popular protests that the Egyptian street witnessed in September 2019, were the anti-Sisi powers within sovereign institutions helped to create and then exploit for achievement of some of their own goals. However, Sisi adopted a policy of "equivocation" to foil the protests, but soon after that, he returned once again to the same philosophy and strategy of governance that he has been following since the first moment of assuming power in May 2014, by getting rid of both present and potential opponents.

### Sisi's philosophy

From the first moment of assuming power, Al-Sisi has sought to completely dominate power and turn the governance system in Egypt from the rule of the military institution as a whole – as established by Gamal Abdel Nasser and followed by Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak – to the rule of the dominant military dictator. Therefore, Sisi dismissed all members of the military junta that participated in his removal of the democratic experiment on July 3, 2013, except for only two members, Lt. Mohamed Farid Hegazi, the current chief of staff of the armed forces, and Maj General Mamdouh Shahin, the assistant Minister of Defense for constitutional and legal affairs, so that Sisi could control and redraw the path of the military institution unilaterally.

In addition, Al-Sisi abused many leaders within the military institution even those that are more senior and more popular than him and had shared his vision of the need to end the first democratic experiment and restore the military rule once again. But those leaders, most notably Lt. General Sami Anan and Lt. General Ahmed Shafiq, did not want Sisi to be the military ruler that should succeed Hosni Mubarak, and tried to compete with him in the 2014 and 2018 elections.

In order to achieve the goal of seizing power alone without sharing the military institution, Al-Sisi restructured the influential General Intelligence Service, whose capabilities and potentials were well

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known to him, so that it could become fully loyal to his regime and would not pose threats to him at any time.

Sisi dismissed Major General Mohamed Raafat Shehata, director of the General Intelligence Service during the era of late President Mohamed Morsi, immediately after the July 3 coup, and appointed Major General Mohamed Farid Tohami in his place. At the time, he also dismissed dozens of GIS agents who were affiliated with Maj. General Omar Suleiman (the GIS director under Mubarak) who was at odds with Sisi when he was director of the military intelligence at that time.

Sisi then sacked Major General Mohamed Farid Al-Tohamy in December 2014, and appointed General Khaled Fawzi to replace him, where the former was in a "personal" row with Maj. General Abbas Kamel, then-director of Sisi's office and his confidante.

Al-Sisi also transferred his loyalists from the military intelligence to the General Intelligence Service to replace dozens of the GIS agents that were dismissed when Maj. General Khaled Fawzi was the service's director before Fawzi himself was sacked in January 2018, due to differences between the GIS leaders under Maj. General Khaled Fawzi and Al-Sisi in managing some files, most notably the waiver of the two Egyptian islands of Tiran and Sanafir to Saudi Arabia. Some sources say that prior to the 2018 presidential elections, GIS leaders did not welcome the idea of electing Sisi for a second term, and worked in coordination with Lt. General Sami Anan and Lt. General Ahmed Shafiq, to compete with Sisi for the presidency. Therefore, in January 2018, Sisi appointed his confidante, Major General Abbas Kamel, as the new GIS director and appointed Maj. General Nasser Fahmy as his deputy, who had virtually no actual powers, as the GIS was actually run by Major General Abbas Kamel and Brigadier General Mahmoud Sisi, the eldest son of Abdel Fattah Sisi<sup>1</sup>.

## Second: Attempts, but:

The leaders from within the sovereign bodies that Sisi had abused were monitoring the situation after July 3, 2013, in general and tried to engage in any popular mobilization in the street and support it

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<sup>1</sup> Egypt: Behind Dismissal of Spy Chief, Mahmoud Gamal, Egyptian Institute for Studies, ([URL](#)).

to effect change, or at least achieve some of their goals in participating in the governance system again, as follows:

1- Attempt to compete with Sisi in the 2014 elections through candidacy of Lt. General Sami Anan, the former chief of staff. However, after pressuring General Anan to back down from his position, Sisi obtained the approval of SCAF to run for the presidency.

2- Leaking recordings to Sisi and some military leaders loyal to him within the framework of what was known as the "strategy to expose corruption", with the aim of creating a state of popular discontent against Sisi and his supporters. However, these leaks were not exploited properly by the civilian opposition.

3- Opposition to Sisi's waiver of the Egyptian islands of Tiran and Sanafir to Saudi Arabia, and engagement in the state of popular protests on the street. Lt. General Sami Anan, Lt. General Ahmed Shafiq, and Lt. General Magdy Hatatah expressed their rejection on their own Facebook pages, stressing that the islands are Egyptian. However, Sisi succeeded in controlling street mobility, and expressing refusal to give up the Tiran and Sanafir islands became limited to social networking sites only.

4- Attempt to exploit the 'revolution of the poor' in November 2016, but Sisi also succeeded in controlling the street; and in the December 2016 reshuffle of senior army officers, Sisi sacked 12 SCAF members, notably Lt. General Osama Askar "who was reappointed again in the December 2019 officer reshuffle", Major General Ahmed Wasfi, the former commander of the Second Field Army, Lt. General Osama Mounir Rabei, the former Commander of the Navy, and Lt. General Abdel Moneim El Tarras, the former Air Force Commander<sup>2</sup>.

5- Attempt to compete with Sisi in the 2018 presidential election, but Sisi abused all the leaders who had intended to run for election, most prominently Lt. General Sami Anan and Lt. General Ahmed Shafiq, in addition to Major General Khaled Fawzi, who was sacked for coordination with them.

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<sup>2</sup> Dismissal of Hegazi: Dimensions and Interpretations, Mahmoud Gamal, Egyptian Institute for Studies, ([URL](#)).

6- Exploitation or rather creation of September 20, 2019 protests, the most dangerous attempt of them all, but the anti-Sisi leaders entered into negotiation with him under mediation of Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi and an agreement was reached to start a new stage for Sisi's rule. Perhaps that was the reason for the failure of the mobilization for the 25 January 2020 protests. (For more details about the change attempts of the anti-Sisi military leaders, read this study: "[Egypt's Military and Jan. Revolution: Policies and Transformations](#)".<sup>3</sup>)

### Third: After 20 September (2019)

After the 20 September 2019 protests, Sisi realized that the real danger to him came from within the sovereign bodies. Therefore, he pursued a new policy to calm things down; So some of the leaders of the old ranks returned again in the December 2019 military reshuffle, and Lt. General Anan, who is considered the godfather of the anti-Sisi military leaders, was released. Sisi also removed his son Mahmoud "temporarily" from the General Intelligence Service, but Sisi later recoiled from his pledges.

We expected in a previous study, "[Anti-Sisi powers within regime and opp. management policies](#)", continuation of these confrontations, especially in light of the current and expected crises facing Egypt, especially the coronavirus crisis, the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) crisis, and the economic crisis. We also expected that Sisi would continue his policy to exclude his opponents and get rid of these "threats" to his regime.

*Do recent developments confirm this?*

The extensive leakage of military documents from within the military institution during February and March 2020 was a new indicator of this conflict. These leaks revealed manifestations of the Sisi regime's lack of transparency in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, and its inability to confront it, which may have future repercussions on the Egyptian political, economic, social, and health situation.

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<sup>3</sup> Egypt's Military and Jan. Revolution – Policies and Transformations, Mahmoud Gamal, Egyptian Institute for Studies, ([URL](#)).

#### Fourth: The recent developments:

Over the past few days, there have been indications that Sisi is maintaining the same approach of the “military dictator” and that he will continue to drive away all circles and parties that conflict with his administration and strategy. The latest measures also confirm that what Sisi did in December 2019 was merely a “deception” attempt, but he quickly retracted all agreements with his opponents within sovereign bodies, as follows:

##### 1 )The June 2020 reshuffle of top army officers

During June 2020, Al-Sisi approved a periodic reshuffle of senior army officers that take place every six months, proving that what Sisi did in the December 2019 reshuffle of top army officers was a “circumventive process” to surpass the wave of popular anger against him on September 20; but he later resumed his old policy. According to special sources, the military reshuffle came as follows:

- 1- Maj. General Staff Emad Al-Ghazali was removed from his post as Secretary-General of the Ministry of Defense and SCAF Secretary and appointed as assistant to the Minister of Defense, while Major General Staff Ashraf Fares in hi position.
- 2- Major General Staff Ashraf Zahir was appointed as director of the Military Academy to succeed Major General Staff Ashraf Fares, who was appointed Secretary-General of the Ministry of Defense.
- 3- Major General Staff Nabil Hasaballah was appointed as commander of the Second Field Army succeeding Major General Staff Rafik Raafat Arafat.
- 4- Maj. Gen. Yehya Taha El Hemeili was removed from the position as chairman of the Training Authority and Major General Staff Rafik Raafat Arafat (who was commander of the Second Field Army) in his place.
- 5- Major General Staff Khaled Shawky was appointed commander of the Central Military Zone to succeed Major General Staff Nabil Hasaballah, who was appointed commander of the Second Field Army.
- 6- Major General Staff Ehab Fikry was appointed chief of staff of the Central Military Zone succeeding Major General Staff Ahmed Wasfi.

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7- Major General Staff Khaled Labib was appointed commander of the Southern Military Zone to succeed Major General Staff Ashraf El-Hosary.

8- Major General Staff Salah Saraya, commander of the Western Military Zone, was appointed as deputy head of the National Service Dept., and Major General Staff Sherif Moawad was appointed in his place as commander of the Western Military Zone.

9 - Major General Staff Fahmy Heikal was removed from his position as commander of the Northern Military Zone and Major General Staff Yasser El-Sereigi was appointed in his place.

10 - Major General Staff Tariq El-Zahir replaced Major General Staff Khaled Bayoumi as director of the Infantry Department

11- Major General Staff Khaled Tawfiq was removed from his position as head of the Military Research Authority for his health conditions and Major General Staff Ayman Naeem was appointed in his place.

12- Major General Staff Ashraf Farid was appointed as Assistant of Defense Minister.

Reviewing the names of commanders included in the June 2020 military reshuffle, we find that the most prominent thing in this reshuffle was the exit of Major General Staff Emad Al-Ghazali from his "important" position as secretary general of the ministry of defense and secretary of the military junta, where Major General Staff Ashraf Faris, the director of the Military Academy who is known to be close to Sisi, was appointed instead of him.

### What about Major General Emad Al-Ghazali?

Major General Staff Emad Al-Ghazali, very popular within the Egyptian army, was in charge of the Central Military Zone during the popular demonstrations that erupted on September 20, 2019, and he rejected deployment of the army forces in the streets and squares during protests, as he believed that the army should not take to the streets and face the demonstrators again. This position negatively affected the police forces in confronting demonstrators violently, and accordingly, the demonstrators were encouraged and their numbers increased and reached up to Tahrir Square.

Through his "circumventive process" in the December 2019 military reshuffle, Al-Sisi transferred Major General Emad Al-Ghazali from his vital position as commander of the Central Military Zone to become

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the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Defense and Secretary of military junta. Although this step was considered a kind of promotion for Major General Al-Ghazali, as the post of Secretary-General of the Ministry of Defense is a higher position than commander of the Central Military Zone, but by reviewing and analyzing the June 2020 military reshuffle, it is clear that what Sisi did with General Al-Ghazali in December 2019 was a tactical step to remove him from the command of the Central Military Zone, whose scope and work is located in Greater Cairo (Cairo, Giza, Qaliubiya), where most of the regime institutions and presidential palaces are located, is based on the position of Major General Al-Ghazali against "suppression" of the popular protests of September 20. Indeed, Sisi got rid of Major General Ghazali in the June military reshuffle, just six months after he was appointed as Secretary-General of the Ministry of Defense.

Also, Maj. Gen. Yehya Taha El Hemeili was removed from his position of head of the Training Authority, and Major General Rafik Raafat replaced him, given that Maj. General El Hemeili, according to private sources, was in permanent conflict with Al-Sisi in several files, most notably the file of "counterinsurgency" in North Sinai, and was among the commanders that al-Sisi dismissed in December 2016, after the events of the so-called "revolution of the poor" in November 2016, but was later re-appointed in December 2019.

Prior to the events of the so-called "revolution of the poor" on November 11, 2016, specifically on October 05 2016<sup>4</sup>, Sisi held an open meeting with SCAF, then composed of 26 members<sup>5</sup>, to discuss the situation in general, including calls for the November 11 2016 demonstrations. This meeting witnessed disagreement between Sisi and a group of leaders within the military council, where those leaders held Sisi responsible for those calls that had come from a broad sector of the people, not only from the movements of "political Islam" as such calls used to come before. During the meeting, they criticized the way of managing the State, especially in economic terms, and they also held Sisi responsible for the failure of management of the military operations in Sinai, and demanded that the

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<sup>4</sup> Egyptian President meets SCAF and reviews anti-terror efforts, Asharq Al- Awsat, on 5 October 2016, accessed 17 June 2020, ([URL](#)).

<sup>5</sup> Egypt's Military Council of March 2020, Mahmoud Gamal, Egyptian Institute for Studies, ([URL](#)).

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policies of State administration must be modified. After the events of the so-called “revolution of the poor”, Sisi sacked 12 leaders from within the Military Council, including Major General Taha El-Hemeili, as well as General Osama Askar, who was reinstated by Sisi again as chief of operations within the “deception” move that he did in December 2019.

In 2019, Al-Sisi also re-instated Maj. General El-Hemeili again, appointing him as commander of the forces of the east of the canal area<sup>6</sup>, to contain the 20 September (2019) protests, but Sisi soon transferred him to become head the Training Authority, and later in the June 2020 military reshuffle, Major General Staff Yehia Taha El-Hemeili was dismissed once again. This is also one of the clear indications that Sisi has resumed his old policy that he had adopted before September 20, and got rid of all the measures he had been prompted to take then to surpass the protest wave of the September 20 mobilization.

## 2) Anan under house arrest:

Among the hasty steps that Sisi took soon after the September 20 protests to ensure calm was the release of Lt. General Sami Anan who had been held in a military prison for nearly two years only because of announcing his intention to run for the presidential election (March 2018) in defiance of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

Lt. General Anan, as described by some of the military, is the godfather of the anti-Sisi party inside the army, and therefore Sisi was keen on releasing him immediately after the events of September 20, with pledges not to constrict Anan after his release. However, sources close to the family of Anan reported that the former chief of staff of the Egyptian army is under strict house arrest, cannot move freely, and exposed to continued warnings to completely stay away from political life.

## Finally:

The June (2020) reshuffle of top military officers adopted by Sisi confirms what we had mentioned before that Sisi has eluded his opponents within the sovereign institutions through the few measures

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<sup>6</sup> Interview: Commander of the Eastern Canal forces to combat terrorism: the comprehensive operation imposed sovereignty of the state on every inch in Sinai, Al-Akhbar Gate, ([URL](#)).

that he took in December 2019 with the aim of overcoming the protest wave of 20 September (2019). The recent officer reshuffle indicates that Sisi is maintaining his old policy of imposing hegemony on the state as a military dictator. Based on this, a new confrontation is likely between Sisi and his opponents in the coming periods. But the upcoming confrontations will be completely different from those that had taken place before, as they will engage in any upcoming popular mobilization, whatever its form may be, and will not stop in the middle of the road as they did in January 2020 when they entered into negotiations with Sisi, as they have already learned the lesson.

The goal of Sisi's departure was not the primary goal of the anti-Sisi officers in the 20 September (2019) confrontations, but that equation has now changed and the need to remove Sisi will be on top of their goals in the upcoming confrontations, as they believe that the dispute with Sisi has become a "zero battle" and that surrender means exposition to more abuse.

It is noteworthy that the anti-Sisi parties agree that the optimal rule of Egypt from their point of view is the military rule, but they disagree with Sisi only about the nature of the current military ruler and Sisi's mismanagement of some files.

During the next stage, it is likely that the Sisi regime will face two crises, which is likely to greatly increase public anger that may be exploited by the anti-Sisi powers:

1- The likely worsening of the Egyptian economic situation during the coming periods, especially after the coronavirus crisis, will increase the state of public boredom over Sisi and his regime, especially in light of the poor management in addressing the epidemic and the failure to contain it, which may be exploited by the anti-Sisi military leaders.

2- The crisis of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, especially when Ethiopia begins filling the dam's reservoir, may cause a great public anger as a result of the failure of the Sisi regime to properly manage that file and preserve Egypt's historical water rights, which may cause a great deal of popular discontent, and the anti-Sisi parties may try to exploit in the coming periods.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that the ongoing conflict within the sovereign institutions is between two parties, each of which has powers and capabilities, and that the Egyptian popular revolution, or the state of popular mobilization, has no powers or capabilities that may enable it to

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be a third party to enter into this conflict. But the real revolutionary forces which want a real democratic transformation in Egypt, must engage in any popular protests that may erupt in the coming periods, similar to what happened on September 20, 2019, in order to achieve interim tactical goals, in the hope that the Anti-Sisi leaders within the sovereign institutions will succeed in winning the conflict. The key interim goals include the release of the detainees and departure of Sisi from the scene, as a first step in the targeted change and democratic transformation in Egypt, hoping to achieve the goals of the January revolution and re-aligning again, as the current circumstances necessitate implementation of the strategy of "setting goals based on potentials and capabilities".

