



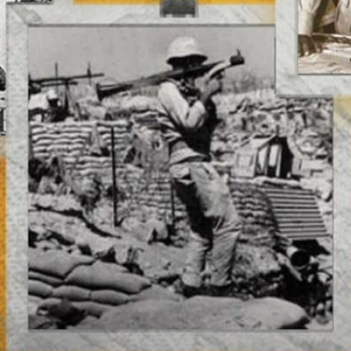
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Shift in the Mental Image of the Egyptians Army

Mahmoud Gamal

In late December 2020, I addressed followers of my [Twitter](#) account, saying: "Let me ask you some questions only for a special research purpose," adding that these questions were specifically for Egyptians.

The questions that I presented to my Twitter account followers were as follows:

- What was your view of the Egyptian army during the period starting from the October War (1973) to the January Revolution (2011)?
- What was your view of the army during the post-revolution transitional period?
- What is your view of the army from July 2013 until now?
- If there is a change in your view, what are the reasons in short?

The responses of my Twitter followers as a whole have confirmed that their view of the Egyptian army has completely transformed since July 2013 (the coup d'état against Egypt's first democratically elected government). They have also confirmed that, in their view, the Egyptian army has become the current regime's primary tool of abuse that it used against the Egyptian people. They provided as evidence the oppressive practices of the army in the Tahrir Square, the Maspero Television Building, and the Republican Guard Club, and the massacres it has committed during dispersal of the peaceful sit-ins in Raba'a al-Adawiya and al-Nahda square – where the Egyptian army, officers and soldiers, used excessive force against the Egyptian people, opened fire with live ammunition against unarmed civilians in squares and streets, targeting the killing of demonstrators from across the Egyptian spectrum, including men, women, elderly people, young people, and children, in addition to involvement in the forced displacement practiced against the people of Sinai.

Some followers of my Twitter account stated in their answers that the Egyptian army has become the main obstacle to the occurrence of any democratic transition process in Egypt, and that there is no room for discussion of a democratic transformation in Egypt in the presence of such army in light of its repressive practices. Some of them suggested that an imminent clash with the army may be the

solution for the Egyptian crisis, which is a very dangerous way of thinking, where repercussions are not in anyone's interest at all.

The comments of my Twitter followers have clearly indicated that love of the army by many Egyptians has significantly changed, and sometimes turned into "hate". Reviewing these responses showed clearly how the perception of a section of the Egyptian people about the army, which used to enjoy the respect and appreciation of everyone, has changed completely vice versa. This shift, as cited in these answers, was due to the policies adopted by commanders of the military institution during the post-July 2013 period, including abuse practices against all sects of the Egyptian people, as well as monopoly of and dominance over everything within the Egyptian state in all political, economic and security aspects.

Although the military institution used to protect the previous military regimes, of Gamal Abdel Nasser, Anwar Sadat, and Hosni Mubarak, yet it never directly practiced repression against the Egyptian people. Many of my Twitter followers believed that since the military coup led by Abdel Fattah al-Sisi on July 3, 2013, the Egyptian army has become a tool for oppressing the people, which is extremely dangerous, given that the army's mission is to protect its people, not to kill or abuse them.

The fact that some citizens currently feel that the army, which is entrusted with the task of protecting them, is the one that threatens their security and stability and stands in the face of their legitimate demands, this reflects an extremely dangerous situation, being a real threat to the Egyptian national security, where its repercussions may be catastrophic to everyone, and not in anyone's interest.

In fact, widening the gap between the people and the army is the first step to dismantling the whole state, something that the leadership of the military institution must understand well. Syria and Yemen have reached the current situation because of the wide gap between the people on the one hand, and the security and military institutions, on the other. The repressive practices that these institutions (security and military) practiced against the Syrian and Yemeni peoples were due to the directives of the heads of these states and in implementation of the orders of the political leadership. The inevitable result of this were clashes between peoples and their armies, leading to the collapse of the pillars of their countries completely. In fact, the existence of an intransigent head of regime that pursues irrational policies would inevitably lead the state to an inevitable disaster.

In some of those answers, there was an indication of an important matter, namely, differentiation between the commanders of the military institution on the one hand, and the middle and lower levels of military leadership, including officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers, on the other.

The policies followed by the military institution from January 2011 until the coup d'état staged against the first democratic experiment in July 2013, and then the policies that the army adopted after that up to this day, had basically been initiated by commanders of the military institution, not by officers and soldiers. In this regard, it noteworthy that some commanders within the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) itself did not welcome the policies and strategies of Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi after 2013. However, those leaders were all abused, most notably Lt. General Sami Anan, the former chief of staff of the Egyptian army, who was arrested, abused and placed in the military prison for nearly two years.

Some may argue that the army is not one thing, and that policies are usually set by the controlling leaders, especially those that have vast internal and external influence. Given the fact that the army is a hierarchical institution, and that the decisions descend gradually from top to bottom, where officers and soldiers can only implement, whoever adopts a different opinion and abstains to carry out orders given by the leadership, will inevitably be treated firmly, harassed and thrown in prison, something that has recurrently been taking place since the events of January 2011 and the events that followed.

Some officers actually participated in the early days of [January revolution](#), 2011. Others participated in the demonstrations that erupted on Friday, April 8, 2011, known as the "Trial and Purge" Friday, while wearing their military uniform. Realizing that the SCAF, especially Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, the acting head of the state at the time, were manipulating the demands of revolutionaries, and deliberately undermining the revolution both morally and on the ground, these officers decided to join demonstrators in Tahrir Square (on April 8, 2011), exposing themselves to referral to a military trial as a result, which actually occurred.

Immediately after July 2013 events, there were many army officers that did not welcome the coup that the army commanders led against the first democratic experiment, and attempted to correct it. Some 26 army officers were referred to a military trial, in [Case No. 03/military](#) of 2015, where they faced charges of planning for staging a military coup against Sisi and the group of leaders that run

the state with him. Some military institution personnel also tried to correct the political course by moving towards removing Sisi through elections, as did Lt. General Sami Anan, Lt. General Ahmed Shafiq, and Colonel Ahmed Konsowah, that were all abused. The abuse that Sisi and the group running the state with him affected everyone, including both the [military and civilians](#). This prompted those who had views different from those of the regime to remain silent, for fear of being exposed to retribution, or seek exiting service based on an early pension.

According to the comments of many followers of my Twitter account, the head of the regime and the military group that run the state with him were behind the shift in the perception of some Egyptians of the Egyptian army. The view of a considerable section of the people on the army has significantly shifted due to the changes that have occurred to the doctrine of the Egyptian army based on the orientations of the group of commanders that currently run the state, and are seeking to convince the Egyptian people that there has become a new enemy for Egyptians other than the traditional enemy, and are working hard to instill this ideology in the souls and hearts of Egyptians in various ways.

This shift in the military doctrine of the Egyptian army is a major strategic mistake, because the Egyptian eastern borders will remain the areas that threaten Egyptian national security, which still manifests the ideology of a large sector within the Egyptian people. It is unacceptable that a temporary threat to the Egyptian state in such an exceptional period, as seen by only the head of state and those leaders standing with him for only political reasons, would lead to a shift in the strategic doctrine of the Egyptian army at the basic, environmental and organizational levels, pushing it to abuse its own people.

The shift in the mental image of the army among masses of Egyptians leads to stating that everyone would be a loser if the approach followed by the Sisi regime continues; and that what the head of the regime reiterates that in his absence Egypt will become like Syria and Yemen, is completely inaccurate, where the opposite is true, that is continuation of this regime with its current policies will consequently push Egypt to the models of Syria, Yemen and other most affected countries.