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## 'Ikhtiar' 1&2, bet. regime's messages and failure of tool

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Autocratic regimes usually use the media machine to promote their messages to citizens, through which they attempt to draw a certain image in the minds of their people that could convince them of official policies and practices. Therefore, mass media is considered one of the most powerful weapons in our modern era, where it works to form ideas and formulate beliefs that are essential for mobilization of peoples.

Malcolm X, the well-known American rights activist, says: "The media's the most powerful entity on earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent, and that's power. Because they control the minds of the masses ."The victors and those who hold the reins are the ones who write history; even, they may falsify it as well; as throughout history many events have been falsified because it was the victor that wrote them.

The Egyptian regime tightened its control over the joints of the state immediately after the military coup against the first democratic experience in Egypt on July 3, 2013. After controlling all security, military and economic areas, the new military regime worked to tighten its control over media and art production companies, and even draw up their plans and direct their work, using drama to instill pro-regime ideas and transmit directed messages to all sectors of society, including both civilians and the military.

In assessing the reign of Sisi over a period of nearly eight years until now, it can be said that Sisi has brought the early beginnings of the military regime (1954) back to the fore. However, he learned the lesson from the past and sought to avoid the pitfalls of the military regime in all three successive stages under: Gamal Abdel Nasser, Anwar Sadat, and Hosni Mubarak.

Al-Sisi worked to subject the military, security, and mass media to his direct power, so that none of them would act or move against him in case of disagreement with his policies. Al-Sisi decided not to allow presence of any competitors to him; unlike Nasser who allowed that, with respect to the influence of his close friend Abdel Hakim Amer; or Sadat, with respect to the influence of Lt. General Mohamed Fawzi; or Mubarak, with respect to the influence of Field Marshal Mohamed Abu Ghazaleh.

Although Sisi has disposed of almost all members of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) that were involved with him in the coup against the first democratic experience in Egypt on 3 July 2013, yet, he granted them unprecedented privileges at the same time, so that he could feel secure from their likely schemes against him – through issuance of [Law No. 161 of 2018](#), known as Law on Treatment of Some Senior Armed Forces Commanders, which was approved by Parliament on 3 July 2018, then ratified and issued by Sisi on 26 July 2018. Nevertheless, Al-Sisi set restrictive controls for all current and excluded SCAF members when they intend to run for any electoral entitlements, whether presidential or parliamentary; then he applied these restrictions to all officers, especially after Colonel Ahmed Konsowa had announced his intention to run for the 2018 presidential election against Sisi.

In the aftermath of July 3, 2013, Sisi developed a plan for himself based on the philosophy of “survival” in power for the longest possible time. With the aim of protecting his regime and thwarting any attempt to revolt against him, Sisi worked to impose his control over all “sovereign institutions”, dismissed all leaders that might be adopting approaches contrary to his policies, and implicated all state agencies in the bloodshed of Egyptians, to establish a principle to the effect that ‘his survival in power is the only means to secure safety for all of them’.

### Army Morale Affairs and drama

In the two Ramadan drama seasons (2020,2021), with their heavy schedule of drama works, the Department of Morale Affairs of the Egyptian Armed Forces, under the leadership of Major General Ahmed Fathy Khalifa, worked through its production arm, [Synergy Art Production](#), headed by Tamer Morsi, to produce and air two versions of the ‘Ikhtiar’ (Arabic for ‘Choice’) serial [Ikhtiar 1 & Ikhtiar 2], to consolidate some of the regime's convictions and achieve its objectives, which will be addressed hereunder as follows:

#### Ikhtiar 1:

The first version of the ‘Ikhtiar’ serial was broadcast in Ramadan 2020; where the regime addressed the Sinai events and the ongoing confrontations between the forces of the Egyptian army and militants in North Sinai over years.

It is to be mentioned that the Egyptian army has carried out [seven military operations](#) against militants in North Sinai until the present time, namely: Operation Eagle 1 in 2011, Operation Eagle 2 in 2012, and Operation Martyr's Right 1, 2, 3, and 4 from 2015 to 2017, and finally the Comprehensive Operation Sinai 2018 which Sisi assigned to Lt. General Mohamed Farid Hegazi, the Chief of Staff of the Egyptian Army in early 2018 and has continued until now. It is also noteworthy that Lt. General Mohamed Farid Hegazi was given three months to get rid of insurgencies in North Sinai and clear all the hotbeds of armed operations both in North Sinai and across the country, but the operation did not succeed like its predecessors, and where the confrontations between the Egyptian army and militants in the Sinai are going on until now, with the army losing many of its competent personnel at the hands of a few hundred militants.

The Department of Morale Affairs of the Egyptian Army focused in the 'Ikhtiar 1' serial on the subtle attack carried out by members of the Islamic State's local affiliate "Sinai Province" on a military checkpoint in the southern Rafah village of Al-Barth, which was led by the competent Colonel Ahmed Mansi. Although the structure of the checkpoint was completely blown up, and most officers and soldiers, headed by Colonel Ahmed Mansi, were killed, unfortunately the Department of Morale Affairs worked to portray the incident as a heroic operation by the forces of the checkpoint!

**From a pure military perspective, some points can be referred to in this regard as follows:**

1- No military assessment would describe an attack that annihilated most of the checkpoint's forces, and completely destroyed its structure -as happened in the case of the attack on the Al-Barth Checkpoint- as a heroic military operation by the targeted forces that were liquidated.

2- Al-Barth area was an active outpost for the militant groups, and therefore the army set up a checkpoint there in order to be close to that outpost. However, it is assumed that before making that decision, the military intelligence service should have gathered all required information about the capabilities of militants, to help establish a strong checkpoint capable of confronting the militant groups stationed in that area.

3- The attack launched by elements of the "Sinai Province" organization on the Al-Barth Checkpoint in July 2017 indicates that the checkpoint did not have the adequate capability to confront militants, whether in terms of the number of officers and soldiers or the level of their arming, which is considered an "intelligence failure" par excellence.

4- Those who handled the preparations of the Al-Barth Checkpoint before the transfer of part of the forces of the 103rd Thunderbolt Brigade there, must be held accountable; and the incident should not be portrayed as an act of heroism, while it is assessed militarily as a real disaster.

5- The support forces were too late to reach the Al-Barth Checkpoint and help thwart the attack targeting it, which led to the entire annihilation of the military checkpoint and the killing of most of its personnel. This indicates the weak vision of the Egyptian military in setting up checkpoints and the methods of linking and supporting them, which is militarily described as "indiscriminate planning".

## **Ikhtiar 2:**

Taking advantage of the relative "success" achieved by the first part of the Ikhtiar serial, the Department of Morale Affairs of the Egyptian Army produced a second part of the serial as "Ikhtiar 2", that was broadcast in the Ramadan drama season (2021). This part of the serial basically worked on improving the image of the Egyptian police, whose bad practices were behind the outbreak of the 25 January revolution (2011) and became further worse in the aftermath of July 2013. Ikhtiar 2 worked to enhance the image of the officers National Security Sector in particular, who have carried out the most heinous repressive practices against citizens of various orientations since July 2013. Observers of the human rights situation in Egypt are aware of the extent to which the human rights situation has reached at the hands of these officers who owe allegiance to the Sisi regime.

The key objective of "Ikhtiar 2" was to acquit Al-Sisi from the massacres of the dispersal of the peaceful civilian sit-ins in Rab'a Al-Adawiya and Nahda, branding them as armed sit-ins without providing any evidence for that. Through Ikhtiar 2, Sisi is trying to completely erase the memory of those massacres in the minds of Egyptians. In the aftermath of the coup that he led against the elected president on 3 July 2013, Sisi ordered changing the name of 'Rab'a Al-Adawiya Square' to 'Hisham Barakat Square', in order to erase any traces of the crime that would continue to haunt him and his regime, no matter how long.

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The participation of the army in the dispersal of the peaceful sit-ins in Rab'a and Nahda will remain a black spot in the history of the Egyptian military, where the army fired live ammunition at its people due to political differences, which it had to stay away from. The Ikhtiar 2 serial claimed that only the police forces dispersed the sit-ins, and deliberately obscured the fact that the army forces participated in those operations. It should be noted that Major General Ihab Salloum, commander of the 9<sup>th</sup>. Armored Division – Scope of the Central Military Zone – at that time, was responsible for the forces that dispersed the Nahda sit-in in Giza. Later on, he was held accountable because of his early action before the specified time, as the Nahda sit-in dispersal was carried out before the dispersal of the Rab'a sit-in, in contravention of the plan that was in place at the time. The serial tried to blur those facts to bleach the face of the army and its supreme commander, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, but both history and minds of people have recorded that tragedy, where its scenes that were aired live will continue to remind Egyptians of this painful memory.

In general, the dispersal of the peaceful sit-ins carried out by both the army and police forces left many women and elderly people dead along with other protesters, which refutes the regime's fake narrative of the protesters carrying weapons, as the Ikhtiar 2 serial wanted to portray it. The shooting of the peaceful protesters was indiscriminate, based on the instructions of officials to use excessive force.

In continuation of the state of societal dissent that Sisi and his regime have always been keen on, being the guarantor of the survival of the military regime, the Egyptian authorities exploited the situation created by the directed drama in order to carry out several death sentences related to the events that occurred in the Kerdasa Police Station -that some described as "ambiguous"- shortly after the Rab'a dispersal, which further widened this gap, in pursuit of the regime's interest only, without considering the public interest.

An important message that the Ikhtiar 2 series worked to disseminate was shedding light on the officers that rejected the July 2013 coup against legitimacy and adopted harsh methods to confront the regime – with the aim of distorting them and sending warning messages to other officers.

The repressive practices of the military leadership after the 3 July coup (2013) contributed to convincing some personnel of both the military and police institutions that the jihadist action may be a means of change, where some army and police officers adopted jihadist ideas and engaged in

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jihadist action as a means to bring about that desired change. Some of them joined militant groups, while others founded armed entities to confront the regime, such as Officer Hisham Ali Ashmawi, founder of a jihadist group called "Al-Mourabitoun", and Officer Imad Abdel Hamid, who carried out the Al-Wahat Operation in October 2017 that resulted in the dismissal of the Chief of Staff Lt. General Mahmoud Hegazi, the father in law of Sisi's son, National Security Sector's head Maj. General Mahmoud Sha'rawi, and others.

However, in the second part of the Ikhtiar series, there was focus mainly on a group of Interior Ministry officers, particularly graduates of the Police Academy – batch of 2012, who joined militant groups in Sinai to confront the regime, including: Officer Hanafi Mohamed Gamal, Officer Mohamed Gamal Abdel Aziz, Officer Khairat Sami Abdel Hamid Mahmoud al-Sobki, and Officer Islam Weam Ahmed Hassan.

هشام جيسمدا

يتم تشديد الخدمة والحراسة على جميع البوابات و المنافذ الخاصة بمجموعة تأمين المعمر والإتحادية وبقلا السلام والمقر الجوي وعدم السماح لأي فرد أو مركبة بالإقتراب من البوابات والأسوار إلا بعد التعرف عليها وتفتيشها تفتيش دقيق ويتم الإبلاغ الفوري عند الإشتباه أو التعرف على أحد الأشخاص الأتية :-

| م | رتبة    | إسم                               | تاريخ التخرج | تاريخ الميلاد | ملاحظات   |
|---|---------|-----------------------------------|--------------|---------------|---|
| ١ | ملازم أ | خيرت سامي عبد الحميد محمود السبكي | ٢٠١٢         | ١٩٩١/٥/٨      |  |
| ٢ | ملازم أ | إسلام ونام أحمد حسن               | ٢٠١٢         | ١٩٩٠/١١/١٩    |  |
| ٣ | ملازم أ | حنلى جمال محمد سالماني            | ٢٠١٢         | ١٩٩٠/١٢/١٥    |  |
| ٤ | ملازم أ | محمد جمال عبد العزيز              | ٢٠١٢         | ١٩٩١/٤/٩      |   |

The final say here is that the closure of all constitutional and legal means to achieve change would lead some to pursue other methods for making the required change.

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## Finally,

Armies have never been established in order to rule countries or to confront politically-motivated demonstrations and fire live ammunition at their own people only for political differences, away from the scope of their role and function. Likewise, armies have never been established to set up summer resorts and recreational clubs, or to seize civilian economic spheres. The role of armies is basically to protect the homeland from external threats, which is the reason behind spending lavishly on arming and qualifying them.

The attempt to erase a recent memory related to a person (Sisi) whose hands are tainted with the blood of innocents, a person that: waived the land that our grandfathers and fathers had fought for its liberation, displaced Egyptian people, arrested thousands of innocents, and abused all his opponents – any attempt to cover and obliterate the atrocities of such a person won't work on Egyptians, as Egypt of 2021 is completely different from Egypt of 1954.