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Following Sisi's ratification of the [draft law](#) that the government presented to parliament in June 2021, regarding the amendment of three laws related to the Egyptian armed forces – namely the laws on conditions of service and promotion for officers of the armed forces, the service of honorary and non-commissioned officers and soldiers in the armed forces and the Law of Command and Control of State Defense Affairs and the Armed Forces – there had been expectations that the next step resulting from this ratification would be the removal of Lt. General Mohammed Farid Hegazy from his position as Chief of Staff.

Indeed, this is what really happened on 27 October 2021, when Sisi appointed Lt. General [Osama Askar](#), head of the Egyptian armed forces' operations authority, as chief of staff of the Egyptian armed forces, replacing Lt. General Mohammed Farid Hegazy, who was appointed as advisor to Sisi for [Karama](#) (Decent Life) Initiative.

The most prominent articles that were amended in the law were specifying the stay of the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, leaders of the main branches (air - air defense forces - the navy) and the assistants of the Minister of Defense in their positions for only two years instead of four years, unless Sisi decides to extend their service period. In its explanatory memorandum to the MPs, the government had justified this amendment as based on a desire to inject new blood into the major positions in the armed forces.

Lt. General Mohammed Farid Hegazy had participated in the coup against the first democratic experiment in Egypt in July 2013, as he at the time was Secretary-General of the Ministry of Defense in 2013. Lt. General Mohammed Hegazy, Ma. General Mamdouh Shahin, the assistant to the Minister of Defense for constitutional and legal affairs, and Lt. General Osama Askar, who was reinstated according to the December 2019 top officers reshuffle, were the only remaining members of the July 2013 junta; after Sisi removed all other leaders who had made up the Supreme Council for the Armed Forces (SCAF) in July 2013.

A previous paper titled "[Al-Sisi and Policies of Domination of Army Leaders](#)", explained in detail the Al-Sisi policies that he has pursued with the army leaders since the first moments of his rule.

Reviewing the changes of positions of top officers since July 2013 until now, we find that there have been fundamental changes in the ranks of senior officers, particularly in the ranks of SCAF members, at frequent intervals. Al-Sisi's strategy from the very beginning was to transform the system of government in Egypt from the rule of the military institution to the rule of the military individual (the dictator ruler, with a very narrow circle around him), who dominates all state institutions and agencies. Meanwhile, Sisi was keen on granting unprecedented privileges to all army leaders without exception, after they leave their positions, so that Al-Sisi could avoid any harm that might come from them.

Al-Sisi is keen that these continuous changes in the ranks of the military leadership, since 2013, specifically affect those who criticize his policies on some issues. An example of this is what happened with Lt. General Mahmoud Farid Hegazy, the father-in-law of Sisi's son, whom he removed from his position as chief of staff in October 2017, due to differences on some security issues; Maj. General Ahmed Wasfi, who was excluded from the leadership of the Second Field Army in February 2014, and then was excluded from heading the army's training authority in December 2016, and others, so that they would not pose a likely threat to Sisi one day.

Connotations of Hegazy's dismissal

It is worth noting that Lt. General Mohammed Farid Hegazy was appointed as Chief of Staff in October 2017, and at that time was assigned to lead the comprehensive military operation and was given a three-month deadline to rid Sinai of militants, which has not yet happened; as four years have passed since the start of the comprehensive operation and Sinai continues to witness armed attacks against the army and police forces. This security failure led to a strained relationship between Sisi and Hegazy in the past year, which eventually prompted Sisi to remove Mohamed Farid Hegazy from his position. But, because Sisi wanted to do this at a time that would seem natural, according to military laws, the dismissal of Hegazy came immediately before the announcement of the periodic changes of senior army officers, and also in line with military laws.

Therefore, some see that the departure of Lt. General Mohammed Farid Hegazy from his position as Chief of Staff at this particular time is not surprising, but it is rather a natural move, in terms of timing, as it came in line with the laws related to service and promotion of officers of the armed forces that Sisi has recently ratified, given that Hegazy actually spent his term (whether four years,

before the amendment, or two years, based on the new amendment). But the truth is that Sisi has had the right to extend the service of Hegazy, but he did not want to, because he was upset with him, as mentioned above, due to the poor security conditions in North Sinai, where Sisi sought to hold him responsible for the security and military failure in the face of the rebels there.

Behind appointment of Askar

Loyalty and interest to the regime, not competence, are the primary criteria that Sisi focuses on when he appoints leaders. Therefore, the recent reinstatement of Askar and his appointment as chief of staff of the Egyptian army can be interpreted via the fact that Sisi is currently adopting new policies to deal with the army commanders, but with a well-thought-out plan in order to secure his rule, as he has realized that causing the enmities of the army leaders or members of the General Intelligence Service would not be in his interest.

Therefore, Sisi worked to appease them, by returning some to service, and granting unprecedented privileges to all army leaders, whether those who were removed or those who are currently in service, and started to listen to the voices of critics within the sovereign institutions, as he realized that they would constitute a real threat to him and his regime in case they were not contained; and this is the new form of his regime that aims to continue for many coming years.

Lt. General Askar had served as the commander of the Third Field Army that is responsible for the operational scope in North Sinai Governorate, until early 2015, when he was assigned to head the [Unified Command](#) for the East Canal Zone in February 2015, which was created specifically to combat militants in Sinai, and to unify command and coordination between the Second and Third Field Armies. However, there was no qualitative development to eliminate the militant groups there throughout the period of the Lt. General Osama Askar's leadership of the Third Army or the Unified Command, where the Egyptian army continued to suffer in the face of militants, with a continued loss of elements, equipment and logistics of the Egyptian army, the main reason Lt. General Askar was dismissed from his newly created position as commander of the Unified Command in December 2016.

The truth is that Lt. General Osama Askar was one of the leaders who used to be angry at Sisi's policies in some files, especially the nature of the military ruler. However, during the last two years (2020-2021), Askar completely complied with Sisi's policies and became a strong supporter of him.

Askar realized that Sisi had appeased the angry leaders and released Anan from prison, as was agreed upon in September 2019; thus, he has finally sided with him, at least during this period.

On the other hand, Lt. General Osama Askar has got popularity and credit within the ranks of the army, and standing behind Sisi and his policies is a great gain for Sisi. Likewise, Askar's foreign relations with the American side are good, and Sisi is trying to have military figures who have distinguished communication with the Americans at the moment to restore the somewhat tense relations between the Biden administration and the Sisi regime. The bottom line is that Osama Askar is considered an acceptable figure externally and internally, and he is the most appropriate person to stand with Sisi at this particular stage. He may stay for two years, according to the amended law, and then Sisi extends his service for two more years, and thus he will have gained him on his side to avoid any competitors among heavy weight military leaders in the upcoming presidential elections.

Sisi carrot and stick

Al-Sisi is good at running the carrot and stick policy, as over the past two years, he has reinstated some dismissed army commanders and thus gained them on his side. He also ratified the law on the treatment of senior military leaders that was approved by his parliament on 3 July 2018, granting unprecedented privileges to all senior Egyptian army leaders and immunizing them against any court action, whether they are on or off duty.

In return for these privileges, the most recent amendments in some military laws, approved by parliament on 6 July 2020, have actually handcuffed all commanders of the Egyptian army, and even all officers; as they would not be able to take unilateral decisions as Lt. General Sami Anan, Lt. General Ahmed Shafiq, or Colonel Ahmed Konsowa had done. These amendments stipulate that all army commanders and officers, whether in service or pension, may not run for presidential, parliamentary, or local elections...etc. except after the approval of the Supreme Council of the Egyptian Armed Forces and its Supreme Commander, which ensures that Sisi holds all the cards of the game in his hand, both inside and outside the military institution.