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## Foreign Influence in S. Sinai: The Greatest Transfiguration Project

### Islam Zaabal

The Sinai Peninsula has been subjected to the largest global theft ever in the peninsula over decades, but the Western strategies that had been kept secret are now getting clear after approaching the last step, namely, expulsion of the population under the pretext of fighting terrorism, to hand it over to the new Zionist owners in the north, the Greeks and the Russians in the south.

This report will handle the Great Transfiguration Project, St. Catherine's Monastery, and the foreign influence there.

In the aftermath of the Israeli forces' withdrawal from Sinai On 25 April 1982, there were only two areas in South Sinai under the auspices of foreign countries: namely, the city of Taba that was still occupied by Israel and the Saint Catherine Monastery left under the auspices of a group of Greek monks. The [St. Catherine Monastery](#) is located down Mount Catherine near Mount Moses in southern Sinai. It is administered by the Bishop of Sinai who serves as the head of the Monastery, where he is not subject to any authority from a patriarch or a holy council, while keeping a strong relationship with the Patriarch of Jerusalem.

The custodianship of the monastery has been for the Russian Orthodox Church, and the priests of the monastery are Greeks, not Arabs - exactly like the bishops of the Greek Orthodox Church in Jerusalem - where it was controlled by the Greeks a long time ago. The target has been to prevent the Egyptian state and Egyptians from carrying out any work in South Sinai, whether construction or any other work on the ground in the entire region.

Therefore, after careful planning, an [Egyptian ministerial decree](#) was issued in 1988, considering most of the southern triangle, not just the monastery area, a natural reserve zone, over an area of about 4350 km<sup>2</sup>. Due to the fact that some Bedouins used to dig wells for drinking and grazing there, Prime Minister Dr. Kamal Al-Ganzouri renewed issuance of the decree again in 1996, activating the work under the terms of the natural reserve. Accordingly, all wells were filled in and lawsuits were filed against violators, where the highest mountainous area in South Sinai and all over Egypt was included in the decree. It is worth noting that about 15% of the protected area in in 2002 was declared as a

World Cultural Heritage area, as the sixth area in Egypt, including the highest mountainous areas and the entire city of Saint Catherine.

### St. Catherine's Monastery.. a mini-state in Sinai with international protection and Egyptian guarding:

The St. Catherine Monastery and the area around it, known as the Southern Triangle, have been transformed into a mini-state within the Sinai Peninsula, with a special flag raised next to the Greek and Egyptian flags. All monks at the monastery come from Greece, and the head of the Monastery holds Egyptian citizenship in addition to his original Greek nationality. The monastery started to expand and dominate the surrounding mountains and valleys between them, and it is the only area in Sinai that contains several high mountains, such as Mount St. Catherine, the highest peak in Egypt with about 2641 meters above sea level; Jabal Musa (Mount Sinai) with a peak height of about 2285 meters, the Red Mountain, about 2,681 meters high with a peak of about 2036 meters, and Qasr Abbas Mount, with a peak of about 2341 meters.

For more international protection, UNESCO decided to consider most of the Southern Triangle a world cultural heritage area, imposing an international umbrella to prevent any party from entering, paving the way for the head of the monastery and his Greek monks to expand and devour more lands, being not content with the boundaries of the reserve, where their influence extended to the entire Southern Triangle.

The European Union also contributed to the establishment of this new mini-state similarly to the Vatican State, on the Egyptian land of Sinai, where the monastery has become a destination of European leaders with periodical visits. The [European Union](#) also financed the construction of a 220 km pipeline to deliver the Nile water to St. Catherine area at a cost of 18 million euros, equivalent to about [EGP 208 million](#), to transfer 4000 cubic meters of water per day, including 2000 cubic meters to the city of Saint Catherine from Ras Sidr to the Sahel Al Raha area.

### The Greek ambassador to Egypt is the one who appoints the abbot of St. Catherine's Monastery:

Although St. Catherine Monastery is located on the land of Sinai, it is subject to Greek monastic sovereignty, where it belongs to the Greek Orthodox sect in South Sinai. A protocol signed between

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Egypt and Greece gives [the Greek ambassador](#) the right to choose head of the monastery from the Greek monks, to immediately be granted Egyptian citizenship by the President of the Republic. The current abbot of St. Catherine Monastery is [Dimitry Dinatos](#), a Greek with Egyptian citizenship. St. Catherine Monastery annually receives [half a billion dollars](#) in fees for access to the place without the Egyptian state taking a single penny.

### Lawsuits and statements from former army generals against the administration of St. Catherine Monastery:

The crisis of St. Catherine Monastery issue continues to cast its shadow in Sinai, amid [several lawsuits](#) filed demanding its demolition, for its encroachment on some of the archaeological areas surrounding it. Also, monks are accused of working for the Israeli Mossad and the European Union, with warnings of their continued presence in the monastery and turning it into a Greek colony, threatening Egyptian national security.

Major General [Ahmed Ragaei Attia](#), military expert who filed a lawsuit against the monastery, and founder of the Front for the Defense of South Sinai, accused the monastery monks of manipulating names of mountains and valleys there over about [20% of the area of South Sinai](#), in addition to obliteration of the original Ain Moussa (Springs Of Moses) and groundwater sources, under the pretext of being part of the monastery, stressing that "the present Springs Of Moses are fake".

Ragaei also said that the monastery's protocol states that whoever resides in the monastery's sphere of influence must be having Greek nationality, adding that the monastery administration established seven new monasteries and seeks to establish a special holy complex for the Greek Orthodox community similar to the Vatican State, stressing that it has also changed established names in the area, such as changing the Sacred Valley of Towa into Wadi Al-Arba'een.

In a TV interview, Maj. Gen. Ragaei said: This monastery includes a group of Greek monks that seize it and raise the Greek flag over making it seem like an occupied area of foreigners, which is a violation of national security and Egyptian sovereignty, and therefore the Egyptian government must deport everyone who does not hold Egyptian citizenship from the area.

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Major General [Abdel-Aal Abdel-Rahman Saqr](#), head of the Saint Catherine city council, also testified against the monastery and demanded expropriation of the lands from the monastery, and imposition of state sovereignty on its lands. However, he was dismissed from his post, where the dismissal decision came after his attendance in court as a witness to the Greek occupation of central Sinai.

### Fortification of St. Catherine Monastery Reserve

The occupation of South Sinai was not carried out with military forces, not even with a population density, but rather by building high walls and raising the Greek flag over each annexed area. The monks of St. Catherine Monastery. Maj. Gen. Abdel-Aal Saqr confirmed that he had monitored 71 assaults by the monks of Saint Catherine Monastery on the archaeological sites in the area, and that he had issued several reports about these infringements, fearing that some might infiltrate among the monks and take control of the heights, posing threats to the national security. Saqr also stated that the monastery [nuns](#) occupied vast areas and had huge walls built around them in places where entry of building materials by virtue of registration of this area in UNESCO as an archaeological reserve, such as the area of Wadi Al-Arba'een, where they built a wall with a length of 15 km, as well as the Wadi Tarfa area over 35 feddans (acres), the Al-Wattia area over 15 acres, and the Al-Bustan and Al- Rusairis areas and others, all outside the monastery, in addition to the [encroachment on over 3 thousand acres](#).

Most of the sites seized by the monastery are strategic places that control entrances, areas and valleys of Sinai, such as the encroachment on the Tarfa area, which controls the entrance to the Ferran area leading to the monastery and the road leading to Sharm El Sheikh in an area of no less than 3000 acres, in front of the entrance to Sahel Al Raha at Jabal Al-Nabi Saleh; and also Al-Bustan and Al-Rusairis areas that control the entire area of St. Catherine, next to Wadi Al-Arba'een, which is the main side entrance to St. Catherine.

The high walls around the lands encroached on not only block what is going on inside them, but also prevent entry to the valleys, as these walls are high and overlapping, and sometimes even repetitive, and in ways similar to [military barracks](#).

Maj. Gen. Abdel-Aal Saqr pointed out that these encroachments have been ongoing since 2004, and that they have even been legalized, as Dmitriy Dinatos, the head of the monastery, was able to own

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22 pieces and legalize them, during the tenure of Youssef Afifi, the governor of South Sinai. The crisis is that those 22 areas are owned by the abbot of the monastery as a personal property, that is, he can bequeath them to his brothers and relatives, and of course they are foreigners, while many Sinai Bedouins cannot own property within these areas.

### Mount St. Catherine, a spot for electronic espionage in central Sinai:

Mount Abu Ramil, which the monks of the monastery turned into Mount Catherine, is the highest peak in Sinai, rather the highest peak in the southern and eastern Mediterranean basin, with a unique site in terms of communications and uses of audio and video broadcasts and electronic guidance, as Mount Abu Ramil can be considered a space station on the surface of the Earth or a fixed satellite with no cost at all, in terms of site, where the California Institute monitoring center is unfortunately located, since receiving the site from an Israeli call center that was operating it during Israeli occupation of Sinai from 1967 until the late 1970s.

### Role of the Greater Transfiguration Project in Consolidating Foreign Influence in Central Sinai:

In January 2022, Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi was briefed on the executive position of the [Great Transfiguration Project](#) in the vicinity of the Jabal Musa (Mount Sinai) and Saint Catherine mountain in the Sinai Peninsula. According to a statement by Bassam Radi, the Egyptian presidential spokesman, Al-Sisi made directives to pay attention to all operational details of the project in line with the status of that sacred spot in the land of Egypt, which God honored it with His transfiguration, and to appropriately present it to humanity and peoples all around the world, in appreciation of its unique spiritual value that stems from being an incubator of the three heavenly religions.

The Sisi regime intends to establish a new governorate in Central Sinai, so that there will be 3 governorates in Sinai, namely North Sinai, South Sinai and Central Sinai. Governor of South Sinai Major General Khaled Fouda, father of Sisi's son-in-law, during a meeting with a parliamentary delegation on 19 January 2020 confirmed that the state would soon issue a decision to establish a new governorate under the name of Central Sinai Governorate to link the two governorates of North Sinai and South Sinai.

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The governorates' re-division plan started since Sisi announced candidacy for first-term presidential elections in May 2014, when his platform included a proposal to re-divide the governorates and establish new cities.

In July 2014, the Official Gazette announced formation of a committee to demarcate borders of new governorates, where the committee agreed to establish a new governorate in Central Sinai in August 2014; and in December 2014, the government revealed its intention to establish a governorate in Central Sinai and establish a new airport there. However, the proposal to establish the Central Sinai governorate raised the fears of the Sinai tribes at the time, which prompted Governor of South Sinai Major General Khaled Fouda to hold a meeting with the South Sinai tribes in 2014, and he then emphasized that the third governorate in Sinai was a necessary measure to achieve security and development in Sinai. In 2014, the government announced the cities that would be included in the Central Sinai Governorate, which are to the south of Ras Sidr (as the governorate's capital), Abu Zenima, Abu Dis, Nuweiba and Taba; and Nakhal to the north. But so far, the establishment of the new governorate has not been implemented because of tribes' fears of the effects of the redivision on Sinai families and tribes, against the nature of the interconnected Sinai tribal society.

The redivision of Sinai into three governorates instead of two leads to creation of an administrative line that coincides with the line of influence of the Greek settlement located in St. Catherine Monastery, which expanded and controlled the region, under leadership of European monks, during the last thirty years, where they now control the entire southern triangle that controls the two entrances to the Gulf of Aqaba. and the Gulf of Suez and thus control the entrance to the Red Sea.

According to Sisi's project, the South Sinai governorate will be torn into two parts: the southern part that is under the influence of the monks will be separated as a governorate in the name of South Sinai, and the northern the desert hinterland was joined with part of the North Sinai governorate the desert hinterland to create a governorate in the name of Central Sinai. The new administrative redivision presents the Greek Church and the Europeans with a principality and even a mini-state in Sinai, similar to the Vatican State.

The late Major General Ahmed Ragaei Attia had filed a lawsuit against: the President of the Republic, the President of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Defense, the Minister of Tourism, the Minister of Environment, the President of the Supreme Council of

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Antiquities, the Head of Security Nationalist, Governor of South Sinai, Metropolitan of Saint Catherine's Monastery in South Sinai Governorate, Minister of the Interior in his capacity, Minister of Culture in his capacity - regarding the Greek and European influence over the Saint Catherine Monastery.

Also, a group of army generals, along with Major General Ragaei Attia, gave their testimonies in this regard, including the former governor of South Sinai and the current governor of North Sinai, Major General Mohamed Abdel-Fadil Mohamed Shousha, in the case against the monastery. But the state has unfortunately been unable to confront the Greek and European influence on St. Catherine Monastery, nor the ongoing settlement process there, which confirms that there are hidden hands within the current Egyptian regime that prevent addressing the foreign influence in the Sinai Peninsula, and even legalize foreign control over it, whether in the north, the center, or the south, in addition to Sisi's waiver of the Red Sea Tiran and Sanafir islands to Saudi Arabia and allocating one thousand square kilometers of land in southern Sinai to Riyadh to be annexed to [the NEOM project](#)<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The views expressed in this article are entirely those of the author's and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Egyptian Institute for Studies