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A military doctrine could be defined as: the traditions, values, and experiences that govern the behavior and attitudes of the military institution in public life; or as: the identification of enemies and the threats and how to get prepared for confronting them. Throughout Egypt's modern history, the army has not identified any enemy other than Israel; and the army's identification of the enemy has never separated from the masses' doctrine.

Egypt has engaged in four wars against Israel; but it finally signed a US-sponsored peace treaty with Tel Aviv. In fact, this was the first step that paved the way for transforming the doctrine of the Egyptian army. Former President Anwar Sadat (from October 1970 to October 1981) had declared that the October War (1973) was the last war with Israel, and that peace is Egypt's "strategic choice". However, this has remained the "official" discourse up to now.

Some observers believe that Sadat's statement was a kind of a "strategic deception" plan, and that the army leadership was convinced that Egypt's enemy has been "Israel":

1- Field Marshal Gamasy, head of the Operations Department during October War and Egypt's Minister of War during the Sadat era, believes that Israel is "an enemy", that "the conflict between major powers will not calm down in this region", and that "the Israeli conflict will not stop".

2- Field Marshal Abu-Ghazala, commander of the Second Army's artillery during October War and Minister of Defense during the Mubarak era, showed clear hostility toward Israel as an occupying enemy, in his book: "Gunfire Broke out at Noon".

3- Twenty years after the Peace Treaty between Egypt and Israel, Field Marshal Saad al-Din al-Shazli, Egypt's chief of staff during October War, said: Certainly, there will be more wars between the Arabs and Israel – as the (religious) faith vision supported by the strategic vision say that sooner or later the Arabs will win over Israel. In his book "The Arab Military Option" (written in 1983), he stated that the option of war, not peace, is the only solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The main idea of the book is: non-recognition of Israel and the need to work for the liberation of Palestine.

4- After Field Marshal Abu-Ghazala was sacked from the Ministry of Defense, Mubarak made radical changes within the Egyptian army. Yusuf Sabri Abu Talib took over for a year and a half and then took over the ministry, Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, who was the commander of a battalion in the October War.

In a televised interview after October War, Tantawi described Israel as an “enemy”, saying that he had given orders to open fire on enemy forces during the October War, 1973. In February 2011, the Debka website, which is close to Israeli military intelligence, said that Tantawi's view of Israel was “very cold”, and that his relationship with Israel was “very frosty”. Also, US diplomatic documents published by the WikiLeaks website in December 2010 showed that the United States is upset that the Egyptian army still considers Israel its “main enemy” despite signing a peace treaty with it more than three decades ago.

Post-2013 military coup

Abdel-Fattah Al-Sisi did not participate in any war against Israel. He graduated from the Military Academy in 1977. Some believe that he was keen on removing all military commanders that participated in the October War from the Military Council. Also, the word “enemy” - in reference to Israel - has never been mentioned by al-Sisi in any of his speeches since he was ministry of defense until now. Even the military statements



from July 3, 2013, up to now have never described Israel as “enemy”. During the Israeli war on Gaza in 2014 - one month after Al-Sisi took office - he made no comments on the aggression. Moreover, Israel announced at the time that the head of Egyptian intelligence service had been to Tel Aviv one day before the attack; and Al-Sisi maintained the closure of the Rafah crossing, except for a few hours when it was opened for special cases.

Israeli leaders repeatedly praised Al-Sisi, expressed their admiration of the policy that he follows - particularly against Hamas - and described him as an important ally of Israel. [Israeli Army Gaza Division Commander said that “What Egypt is doing is impressive to everyone,” commenting on the Egyptian army attack on Gaza-Sinai tunnels.]

In October 2017, the Greek Defense Minister announced that the Greek Air Force had conducted a joint military exercise with Cyprus, Israel and Egypt. This exercise was the first of its kind that to be “declared” about joint military exercises including units of the Egyptian army with units of the Israeli army. According to the common training doctrine within armies, joint military exercises are joined by friendly and allied armies, to unify their military concepts and plans, and reinforce coordination between them.

In early February 2018, The New York Times reported that “For more than two years, unmarked Israeli drones, helicopters and jets have carried out a covert air campaign conducting more than 100 airstrikes inside Egypt – frequently more than one a week – and all with the approval of Abdel-Fattah Al-Sisi.” This is a clear evidence on the transformation of the army’s doctrine.

Through the memoirs of the commanders of the Egyptian army, it seems that the peace treaty with Israel did not change the military doctrine toward Israel. Instead, they considered that Egypt is in a stage of temporary and unstable peace which will,

sooner or later, be followed by other wars. Undoubtedly, the most prominent shift in the doctrine of the Egyptian army started with the access of Al-Sisi to power – to the extent that both countries conducted joint military operations in Sinai!

On the other hand, the military exercises and parades showed another serious shift in the Egyptian army, i.e. training on how to engage in guerrilla warfare – which had been previously rejected by Field Marshal Tantawi when he was defense minister. This came during the “Defenders of friendship” exercises that brought together Egyptian forces with Russian troops (2016-2017). Also, the Bright Star military exercises with the US – to counter the insurgency in northern Sinai – were resumed in 2017, after being suspended by the US for eight years.

It is inconceivable that these great and dangerous shifts in the army's doctrine – from hostility towards Israel to considering “terrorism” and “political Islam” its new enemy. Moreover, the war against the new enemy is undertaken in partnership and alliance with the old enemy – which can never be viewed within the framework of mere response to the internal challenges facing the Al-Sisi regime.

Since July 2013, Al-Sisi has presented himself to the international community as the only one that can make major shifts in the military and political relations with Israel in return for remaining in office.

However, there have been no voices so far within the Egyptian army that expressed opposition to this dangerous shift. We do not know if this is the final position of the Egyptian army, or that there are still some military commanders who are more loyal to the old doctrine – that was expressed by Al-Gamasy, Abu-Ghazala and Al-Shazli. Is it likely to find someone from within the army that could seek to reform what Al-Sisi has already destroyed, particularly the Egyptian army's doctrine?!

[N.B.: The full text of this study is available in Arabic on the Egyptian Institute for Studies ([EIS](#)).]