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## Sinai Under Israeli Bombardment with Sisi's Consent

Haitham Ghoneim

*Violation of Egypt's Sovereignty – Sinai Under Israeli Bombardment with Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi's Consent*

The Egyptian regime under Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has allowed the Israeli air force to carry out aerial survey, reconnaissance, and bombardments in the Sinai Peninsula. In August 2013, the [Associated Press](#) reported that the Israeli drones fired missiles that killed five militants in Sinai, citing two senior Egyptian security officials, but the military spokesman at the time, Col. Ahmed Ali, denied the report. "There is no truth in form or in substance to the existence of any Israeli attacks inside Egyptian territory," he said in a statement, adding, "The claims of coordination between the Egyptian and Israeli sides in this matter are totally lacking in truth and go against sense and logic."

In July 2016, only one day after Egypt's Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry had visited Tel Aviv for the first time in a decade, a former [senior Israeli official](#) told Bloomberg that Israel had carried out several drone strikes in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula aimed at suspected militants with the Egyptian authorities' blessing. However, the report was also [denied](#) by Cairo.

In February 2018, the [New York Times](#) reported that for more than two years Israel had been carrying out a full-blown covert aerial campaign against militants in the Sinai, conducting some 100 airstrikes by unmarked drones, helicopters and jets, with Sisi's approval. However, one day after that, [Military Spokesman](#) Tamer al-Refaei denied the

June 17, 2019

report confirming that there is no such “secret alliance” between Egypt and Israel in fighting terrorism in North Sinai.

However, in an interview with American [CBS News](#) channel in January 2018, General Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi said that the military cooperation between Egypt and Israel has reached an unprecedented level in the Sinai Peninsula. Asked if security cooperation with Israel was the closest ever between two countries, which were once enemies, he answered, “That is correct”. To send a message to the Egyptian people, Sisi said, “The Air Force sometimes needs to cross to the Israeli side. And that's why we have a wide range of coordination with the Israelis.” Although Israeli officials did not deny reports about the Israeli military cooperation with Egypt in Sinai, Egyptian officials used to deny them altogether, until Sisi confirmed this in his interview with CBS News. However, Sisi wanted to employ this in his favor through claiming that the Egyptian air force sometimes cross the border to chase militants in occupied territories.

In their populist media discourse, the Egyptian officials are keen on presenting Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi as a hero who, since his access to power, has been able to regain the status of the Egyptian army – by imposing his will on the Israeli side in deploying large numbers of Egyptian troops in Area C in Sinai.

In this report, we will discuss the reality of this claim in attempt to reveal what Sisi and his media outlets are keen to hide and what Egyptian army officers know but remain silent to avoid affecting the mental image of the army before the Egyptian people who still see “Israel” as Egypt’s first enemy and consider any kind of cooperation with Tel Aviv as “high treason”.



June 17, 2019

## With Sisi's Consent

Immediately after the January 25 revolution (2011) when Abdul Fattah al-Sisi was head of the military intelligence, the Israeli drone intervention was significantly observed by residents of eastern areas of North Sinai, according to testimonies of some civilians. But following the events of 3 July 2013 and the start of armed operations in Sinai, the defense minister at the time who led the military coup against Morsi's elected government, Abdul Fattah al-Sisi, gave the green light to the Israeli army for monitoring and bombing Egyptian targets by drones in order to eliminate the militants opposed to the regime. It is noteworthy that the Egyptian drones obtained from China entered into service intensively only in 2017.

In fact, the Israeli press revealed these operations more than once. In July 2016, [Yedioth Ahronoth](#) (and [Haaretz](#)) quoted a report published by [Bloomberg](#) that Israeli drones have struck suspected militant targets in the Sinai Peninsula several times over the past few years, with Egypt's consent, according to a former Israeli official. This led Alon Ben David, an Israeli military analyst, to ask in an article he published in [Maariv](#) for disclosure of what he described as Israeli-Egyptian cooperation.

Therefore, the report of [New York Times](#) in 2018 on Sisi's approval of the Israeli drone attacks against suspected militant targets in Sinai was not shocking to us, as it is consistent with the data we have documented in the EIS Monitoring and Documentation Unit. In spite of the angry reactions from the Egyptian side towards the NYT report, Jonathan Marcus, the [BBC](#) diplomatic affairs correspondent, handled the report, noting that the Israeli air raids in the Sinai Peninsula is an indication of development of its relations with the Arab world. However, the Egyptian regime,

June 17, 2019

through its [military spokesman](#) at the time, Tamer al-Refaei, denied the report saying that there is no such “secret alliance” between Egypt and Israel in fighting terrorism in North Sinai. “The Egyptian Armed Forces, as part of law enforcement forces, is entrusted with all military operations in cooperation with the civilian police, as stipulated by the law and constitution in the designated areas,” Refaei said, calling on media outlets to refer to the official and competent authorities to fact check information.

In fact, the NYT report angered the current Egyptian regime who cannot tell the Egyptian people that Sisi agreed to allow the Israeli drones to carry out reconnaissance and bombardment in Sinai, targeting Egyptian citizens and targets, because this is likely to destroy the mental image of the Egyptian military institution.

Sisi’s security cooperation with Israel is completely different from what was happening under the rule of former President Mubarak. Despite Mubarak used to turn a blind eye to the Israeli violation of Egyptian sovereignty, but he never allowed such Israeli intensive interventions as it is happening now. Therefore, Sisi and his media machinery spread a populist discourse that glorifies the military institution during his reign. Also, the regime is keen on producing cinema movies, such as “The Corridor”, to consolidate the mental image of the army.

However, despite this unprecedented level of cooperation between the Egyptian regime and Israel, which was emphasized by Sisi during his interview with the US [60 Minutes](#) program in January 2019, the Israeli ambition is even higher; as the Israeli officials deliberately emphasize existence of this cooperation in attempt to enhance it and achieve normalization at the level of peoples.

June 17, 2019

## “Our Sisi”

“Our Sisi” is a phrase that was used in an Israeli newspaper, [Haaretz](#), which stated in a report that “In private, senior Israeli officers call him “our Sisi,” and in public, no other Egyptian president has ever been so open about enjoying a good relationship with Israel’s leaders”. This shows how the Israeli government is delighted with the advanced level of its relations with the current Egyptian regime. [Avichai Adarai](#), spokesman of the Israeli army, on 31 October 2015 tweeted after the downing of the Russian plane in the Sinai Peninsula, saying, “Since the morning, the IDF has helped the Egyptian regime through reconnaissance aircraft in searching for the Russian jet in Sinai,” adding that Israel offered additional assistance to Russia and Egypt if required. However, neither the Egyptian government nor the military spokesman commented on this tweet at the time.

As a result of considering Sisi as part and parcel of the Israeli security system, the Egyptian army acquired significant reinforcements in the Sinai Peninsula with Israel’s consent, against the terms of the Camp David Accord’s military annex, only to preserve the security of Israel. In July 2018, the [Times of Israel](#) referred to the significant reinforcements that the Egyptian army acquired in Sinai with Israel’s approval. On the other hand, the Israeli side provides the Egyptian army with valuable security information it needs in fighting militants due to the effective cooperation between the two parties.

On 17 December 2018, [Israel Defense](#) reported that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke at a conference of Israeli ambassadors to the countries of Latin America, Asia and Africa, at the Israeli Foreign Ministry, revealing that Tel Aviv exerts

June 17, 2019

great efforts to prevent the presence and survival of armed organizations in the Sinai, including launching air strikes against targets in the depth of Egyptian territory in the Sinai Peninsula with full Egyptian coordination and cooperation.

## Why?

The reasons for the strong cooperation between the current Egyptian regime and Israel can be summarized as follows:

### 1- Politically:

The Egyptian regime wants to obtain external political support, especially from the Jewish lobbying groups, with the consent of the Israeli government. In addition, Tel Aviv believes that the current situation in the region is in its favor for reaping the greatest gains, which motivates it to move forward for achieving normalization with the Arab countries and reaching a solution to the Palestinian issue based on the Israeli terms.

### 2- At the security level:

The Egyptian regime is not able to confront the militant organizations in Sinai alone. At the same time, the Israeli government wants to end the security threats coming from the Sinai Peninsula and tighten the siege imposed on Hamas through coordination with the Egyptian side in destroying tunnels between Gaza and Sinai.

### 3- Militarily:

Egypt is in need for the Israeli military intervention, where the Israeli F-16 and Apache helicopters are much superior to their Egyptian counterparts, with respect to many technical advantages granted by the United States to Israel. In addition, the experience

June 17, 2019

of the Israeli pilots outweighs that of the Egyptian pilots. Moreover, Israel needs the Egyptian military forces to stand as a barrier and protector for separating them from the militant groups in the Sinai Peninsula.

#### 4- Economically:

There is a need to eliminate any armed activity in the Sinai Peninsula and evict its population in order to be able to restructure it according to the economic requirements of the “deal of the century”, and secure the gas pipelines which will transport gas from Israel to Egypt.

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#### Appendix

Here, at the Egyptian Institute for Studies (EIS), we have documented several attacks by Israeli drones during 2018 and 2019. These attacks focused on areas in south of Sheikh Zuweid, southern Rafah and central Sinai. Aerial penetration operation ranged between monitoring and aerial survey and shelling with swift withdrawal. We have noticed that the Israeli air force covered the withdrawal of Israeli aircrafts in some cases and re-bombed the same targets.

**We have also monitored the following:**

#### In 2018

1- On 27 April, an Israeli drone entered the airspace of the Egyptian city of Rafah and overflew the village of Al-Hilweh, Al-Shalalafa area and Al-Masoura village in Rafah.



June 17, 2019

- 2- On 3 May, an Israeli drone penetrated the border and then returned to the occupied Palestinian territories.
- 3- On 16 May, more than 4 drones crossed the border from the occupied Palestinian territories and flew over the cities of Sheikh Zuwaid and Rafah.
- 4- On 26 and 27 June, Israeli aerial reconnaissance operations were monitored, followed by bombing a car in southern Rafah.
- 5- On 2 July, Israeli drones were observed flying and surveying areas in south and west of Rafah and Sheikh Zuweid.
- 6- On 5 July, an Israeli drone fired a missile at an unknown target in the area west of Rafah.
- 7- On 10 July, Israeli drones were observed flying and surveying "Israeli" drones for "Al-Rufayaa, Al-Hilweh ash-Shalafah" villages in southern Rafah.
- 8- On 11 July, Israeli drones carried out a flight and aerial survey of the coastal areas of Rafah.
- 9- On 13 July, Israeli drones carried out a flight and aerial survey of areas in southern Rafah.
- 10- On 14 July, an Israeli drone carried out an aerial reconnaissance of the villages of Al Masura, Al-Saha, Al-Tayra, Al-Hilweh, Al-Rufayaa and Rafah, and then fired a missile at an unknown target in that area.

June 17, 2019

- 11- On 31 July, Israeli drones conducted aerial reconnaissance flight in the area of the village of Abu al-Helu in southern Rafah.
- 12- On 1 August, Israeli drones conducted an aerial survey of the areas south and west of Rafah and Sheikh Zuweid and shot four aerial missiles at targets in Al-Tuma village, south of Sheikh Zuweid, Shabana village south of Rafah and Balaa village west of Rafah.
- 13- On 5 August Israeli drones fired three missiles at targets west of the Egyptian city of Rafah.
- 14- On 12 August, Hermes 450 Israeli drones conducted reconnaissance operations in the villages of Balaa and Yamit in the Egyptian Rafah area.
- 15- On 21 August, Israeli drones conducted aerial reconnaissance and targeted areas in south of Sheikh Zuweid and Rafah.
- 16- On 22 August, an Israeli drone aimed at a target missile in the east of the village of Al-Masura in Rafah, in conjunction with the flight of Israeli reconnaissance planes in areas south of Rafah.
- 17- On 25 August, Israeli drones carried out a flight and aerial survey of the villages of Al-Tayra, Al-Masurah, Abu al-Helu, and Rafah.
- 18- On 27 August, two Israeli drones and an aerial reconnaissance aircraft flew over the Egyptian port of Rafah and the village of Yamit while the second over some villages south of Rafah.

June 17, 2019

- 19- On 6 September, two Israeli drones overflowed the airspace of the village of Kharafin south of Sheikh Zuweid, and carried out aerial reconnaissance there.
- 20- On 9 September, an Israeli drone overflowed the village of El-Sayala in Central Sinai, and another drone flew over the Nqizat and Al Barth villages south of Rafah.
- 21- On 25 September, two Israeli drones bombed several targets south of the city of Rafah and east and south of Sheikh Zuweid.
- 22- On 28 September, an Israeli drone carried out an aerial survey above the area of Qoz Abo Raad south of Rafah, and another flew over the area west of Rafah.
- 23- On 29 September, two Israeli drones carried out aerial surveys and fired several missiles at targets in the village of Balaa west of Rafah, and the village of El-Moqataa in Sheikh Zuweid.
- 24- On 3 October, an Israeli drone carried out aerial survey over Al-Barth village, south of Rafah.
- 25- On 4 and 5 October, more than an Israeli drone carried out reconnaissance activity and then launched several air raids inside Egyptian territory over two days targeting the villages of Balaa, Masawrah, Al-Hilweh, Shalalfeh, Tayrah, Shabana, Al-Muqata'a, and Dahir, south of Sheikh Zuweid.
- 26- On 7 October, an Israeli drone carried out reconnaissance over the villages of Al-Masura, Al-Hilweh, Rafiah, Al-Tayera and Mahdia in Rafah.

June 17, 2019

- 27- On 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18 October, Israeli drones conducted an aerial survey of the coast of Rafah sea, the Balaa area west of Rafah, and the Shalala area south of Rafah.
- 28- On 29 October, two Israeli drones carried out aerial reconnaissance over the areas of southern Rafah and Sheikh Zuwaid.
- 29- On 12 November, there were flights and aerial survey of several Israeli drones over the villages of Rafah and south of Sheikh Zwaid.
- 30- On 20 November, Israeli drones carried out several attacks inside Egyptian territory in areas south of Sheikh Zwaid, Rafah and central Sinai.
- 31- On 25 November, there were flights of Israeli drones over the area of Shalalfa in south of Rafah and the border strip.
- 32- On 27 November, Israeli drones penetrated the Egyptian airspace and overflew the villages of Shabana, Mahdiya, Sadut, Qawz Abu Urd, Masura and Taira in the Egyptian Rafah area.
- 33- On 3 December, several Israeli drones targeted houses in and around Bila'a village, west of Rafah.
- 34- On 9 December, a group of Israeli drones carried out reconnaissance activity over the villages of al-Maqataa and Rafi'a, south of Rafah, and then targeted an unknown ground target. Meanwhile, another group of drones carried out reconnaissance activity over the villages of Masura, Halwa, Taerah and Mahdia.



June 17, 2019

35- On 16 December, there was an Israeli raid where a missile was fired through a drone targeting the Midan area, west of the city of Arish.

36- On 24 December, 3 Israeli drones conducted reconnaissance and aerial survey over the villages of Tayrah, Neqizat, Barth and Shabana, south of the Egyptian city of Rafah.

37- On 26 December, at 12:30 pm, four Israeli drones penetrated the Egyptian airspace, south of Rafah, specifically from the direction of the village of Tayrah. The drones carried out aerial bombardments against targets in Shabana village south of Rafah, and al-Moqataa and Lefitat, south of Sheikh Zuwaid.

### In 2019

1- On 2 January, there were more than 15 drone attacks by the Israeli air force that targeted areas in Rafah, Sheikh Zuwaid, and El-Arish between 5:00 and 7:00 p.m.

2- On 3 January, there were more than 25 Israeli drone attacks targeting areas in Rafah, around the Al-Jura airport, south of Sheikh Zuwaid, and areas south and east of El Arish. Social networking sites circulated images of the effects of shelling.

3- On 10 January, there were two Israeli drone attacks in Al-Masoura village, Rafah.

4- On 14 January, there were three Israeli drone attacks targeting areas south of Rafah and south of Sheikh Zuwaid.

5- On 21 January, there were activities of aerial reconnaissance by two drones belonging to the "Israeli" Air force, over the villages of Masura, Tayra, Rafiah, and Shalalfa, south of Rafah City.

June 17, 2019

- 6- On 3 February, an Israeli drone carried out aerial reconnaissance over the villages of Balaa and Yamit, west of Rafah.
- 7- On 1 March, Israeli drones launched two air raids, targeting the area south of the city of Sheikh Zuwaid.
- 8- On 4 March, Israeli drones launched 6 raids, targeting the Egyptian Rafah area.
- 9- On April 15, drones launched nearly four joint air raids by Israeli and Egyptian air forces on the villages of al-Muqata'a and al-Tumah, south of Sheikh Zuwaid.
- 10- On April 16, two Israeli drones were spotted in the Egyptian Rafah area. Two drones were seen flying over the villages of Al-Dhahir, Al-Hakur and Al-Kharafin south of Sheikh Zuwaid and two were flying over the villages of Balata and Rafah. More than 30 joint air raids by the "Israeli" and Egyptian air forces were monitored on areas to the west and south of Rafah and south of Sheikh Zuwaid.
- 11- On 18 April, two Israeli drones were monitored over the villages west of the city of Arish.