



المعهد المصري للدراسات  
EGYPTIAN INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES

STRATEGIC  
REPORTS

24 SEPTEMBER  
2019

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**Mahmoud Gamal**



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TURKEY- ISTANBUL

Bahçelievler, Yenibosna Mh 29 Ekim Cad. No: 7 A2 Blok 3. Plaza D: 64  
Tel/Fax: +90 212 227 2262 E-Mail: [info@eis-eg.org](mailto:info@eis-eg.org)

## Mohamed Ali: Will Conflict of Wings Lead to Fall of Sisi?

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Since the events of July 03, 2013, individuals and groups within the army have been trying to change the approach adopted by the leadership of the institution that aroused a state of dissatisfaction among officers of different ranks within the army structure for several reasons, including:

- The turbulent political situation witnessed by the Egyptian state,
- The wrong policies adopted by the regime, which implicated the army in governance and administration,
- The regime's handling of the situation in the Sinai Peninsula,
- The successive losses and casualties among the Egyptian army ranks during these confrontations, and
- The waiver of the two islands of Tiran and Sanafir to Saudi Arabia.

Over the past six years since the July 2013 coup d'état, there have been different attempts seeking change within the military by both groups and individuals who reject the practices of the current army commanders, including:

1- Attempts for carrying out change through constitutional and legal means; as owners of this trend have believed that the legal and constitutional procedures could bring about the change they want, and could help them get rid of the current army commanders, whom they believe have abducted the military institution).

2- Attempts for carrying out change through the use violence as a means of change; as owners of this trend were aroused by acts of killing, forced disappearances, and assassinations as well as the deteriorating economic conditions.

Al-Sisi has raised many hostilities within the military institution, including the feud with the General Intelligence Service (GIS) (of which he has taken full control since 2018 after the dismissal of GIS

director General Khaled Fawzi and hundreds of GIS agents and the appointment of Abbas Kamel and Mahmoud El-Sisi took over as CIS director and deputy respectively.

These hostilities led to creation of interest groups that have arranged their ranks and determined their priorities, pending an opportunity to get rid of the Sisi regime. In this context, come the videos of the Egyptian actor and businessman Mohamed Ali:

### First: Sisi and his regional and international supporters

It seems that there is a state of tension currently existing between the Sisi regime and a number of regional and international parties that used to support him, including:

#### 1- The United States:

Perhaps this tension was behind the dismissal of Major General [Mohamed al-Keshki](#), the assistant minister of defense, against the backdrop of the Egyptian-Russian rapprochement which has been growing gradually since the coup of 3 July 2013. If that tension was justified during the former US administration under President Barack Obama due to measures taken against Egypt after Sisi's military coup in 2013, including suspension of some US military aid to Egypt; however, it cannot be justified after Trump came to power in January 2017.

Most recently, Egypt has reportedly signed an agreement with Russia for the purchase of 20 to 24 Sukhoi Su-35 multi-role fighter jets worth about \$2 billion, according to a report by the Kommersant news daily; but deal was not then confirmed by official sources. On April 9, 2019, during a Senate budget hearing, U.S. Secretary of State [Mike Pompeo](#) announced that the United States would penalize Egypt under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) should Egypt buy Russian Su-35 fighter jets.

#### 2- Saudi Arabia:

Since March 25, 2015, after the Saudi-led Alliance (including ten countries, namely, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Sudan and Pakistan) launched the then called 'Operation Decisive Storm' against the Houthis and the forces of Ali Abdullah Saleh in Yemen, there has been some tension between Saudi Arabia and the regime of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi due to the lack of effective participation of the Egyptian army in the operation. Saudi Arabia was



counting on the Egyptian army in leading a ground intervention which the Sisi regime did not do, restricting the Egyptian role to only occasional air strikes. This led Saudi Arabia to resort to the Sudan to take over the ground intervention in [Yemen](#).

However, the Egyptian army's abstention from sending infant troops to Yemen at that time strained the relations between Egypt and Saudi Arabia, prompting Saudi Arabia to punish the Egyptian regime economically by stopping the oil supplies to Egypt in 2016. This had a negative impact on the performance of the coalition in achieving its desired goals. In order for Saudi Arabia to tackle the situation, it resorted to the Pakistani army which later limited its participation in the alliance to only air and sea operations only, prompting Saudi Arabia to resort to Sudan, which sent its troops to the Yemeni interior to participate in the battles between the coalition forces and the Houthis.

The tension between Riyadh and Cairo led Riyadh to bring a Pakistani commander to be at the head of the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition (that was formed on 15 December 2015 including 41 countries: Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Egypt, Jordan, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Somalia, the Sudan, Niger, Nigeria and Yemen. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said the alliance's goal was to coordinate efforts against extremists in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Egypt and Afghanistan)

In the fight against terrorism, Egypt was keen on winning leadership of that coalition at the time, believing that it would provide a positive image of the Sisi regime internationally. Sisi has always sought to portray his regime as leading the region in attempt to deny circulated reports by his critics about his government's dependency both regionally and internationally.

Some observers say this was behind reducing Cairo's representation in the alliance's annual meetings in Riyadh. While the Egyptian delegation that participated in the first meeting in March 2016 was headed by former Chief of Staff Lt. General Mahmoud Hegazi, the Egyptian delegation that participated in the November 2017 meeting was headed by the former Chief of Operations and Assistant Minister of Defense Tawheed Tawfiq – following the appointment of Sharif as commander of the alliance forces.

Currently, there is a clear conflict between Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in the management of the Saudi file, and perhaps Sisi aligns with Mohammad bin Zayed, which escalates

tension between Saudi Arabia and Egypt, especially with the crises experienced by Saudi Arabia after targeting its eastern oil fields.

## Second: Mohamed Ali videos

The videos posted by the Egyptian actor and businessman Mohamed Ali on the internet highlight some important points, including:

- 1- Mohamed Ali is considered a regime insider who was one of the military institution's working group and executed many of its construction works over about 15 years.
- 2- Taking into account that Mohamed Ali worked with the military under Mubarak from 2004 to 2010, the philosophy of Mubarak's regime was keen to leave a good part of economic gains to other security institutions and civilian businessmen, which explains why the majority of businessmen were against the January 25 revolution to preserve those gains.
- 3- Mohamed Ali knew very well that Mubarak's regime provided a lot of privileges to him and other businessmen, but he expected along with many other businessmen that the Sisi regime would follow the same path of Mubarak and allow them the same gains; so they supported the new regime (of Sisi). However, they soon realized that the strategy followed by that regime has been imposition of military control and domination over all aspects of the Egyptian economy, restricting benefits only to a limited team close to the regime; and perhaps this is why Mohamed Ali decided to quit the Sisi regime.
- 4- A short time after Mohamed Ali left Egypt, he started to expose the corruption of the ruling regime through the accurate information that he has already known; he has also worked to humiliate the character of the head of the regime. The content of Ali's discourse indicates there is relation and coordination between him and groups within the regime that are seeking change.
- 5- Mohamed Ali no longer demands restoration of his due money from the military; however, he is only focusing on two very important things:

First, that there are individuals within the military who are not content with the acts of the current regime, to emphasize that not the entire military institution is corrupt, reiterating that those who

receive economic privileges are only a handful of leaders, and that there are officers in senior positions who are suffering from their difficult economic situation.

Second, that he has been calling on people to take to streets and squares, realizing that mobilization of people is a key factor for any group that wants to undertake change or even to practice pressure on the current regime to win some gains.

### Third: absence of the legitimacy scarecrow

Sisi used to use legitimacy (of the ousted president Mohamed Morsi) as a scarecrow for suppressing any dissenting voices within the military institution, threatening that with the absence of his regime, the alternative would be Morsi. But after the death of Mohamed Morsi, the use of that scarecrow has expired.

Perhaps this was the main reason behind the abuse of military leaders who were adopting the idea of changing Sisi's strategy of management and announced this during a [junta meeting](#) in October 2016.

### Conclusion

The current conflict is a struggle within the corridors of the Egyptian army, between two parties from within the military institution. The party opposed to the administration of Sisi and his regime have accumulated pressure cards since July 2013 that had not been available for them before, especially in light of the current regime's international and regional failures and the existence of the popular revolutionary factor based on what Mohamed Ali is doing and keen on.

The anti-Sisi party seeks to return the rules of government to the pre-July 2013 era, in the sense that the military institution is a complete partner in governance, and not only one person who controls power and dominates the whole country, as Sisi has been keen on since the first moment of his coup on Morsi.

The two parties are now betting on the ability to mobilize people in streets and squares and each party has its own pressure cards against the other<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 EIPSS