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Two years since Abdel Fattah al- Sisi toppled former President Mohamed Morsi in 2013, there are two main dangers that threaten the stability of the Egyptian regime: economy and security.

Egypt, a state of 90 million people has deteriorating economic and living conditions. Al-Sisi's regime is challenged by serious economic problems that threaten the stability of the regime. The most prominent problems include the lack of foreign currencies, the devaluation of the Egyptian pound value against the US dollar, the increase of prices on the majority of the basic goods, high unemployment and bureaucracy and corruption.

Although the Egyptian security forces produced an atmosphere of security and stability, the war against the radical Islamic groups and the Muslim Brotherhood is far from being over.

Cairo's prosecutor general said in a statement on November 20, 2016, that the country's President Abd al Fatah al-Sisi had faced two previous assassination attempts: one in Saudi Arabia and the second in Egypt. The assassination attempt on Sisi was part of a larger plan to overthrow the current regime that would also involve the assassination of former interior minister Mohamed Ibrahim over the 2013 dispersal of Cairo sit-ins supporting ousted president Mohamed Morsi, according to the prosecution.¹ This is the first time that Egypt officially acknowledged assassination attempts against Sisi.

Egypt will try 292 militant suspects over plots to assassinate President Sisi and attacks in the Sinai Peninsula. The suspects were also responsible for carrying out a number of high-profile attacks in North and South Sinai, including the bombing of a tourist bus in the resort town of Taba in February 2014 that killed two South Koreans and an Egyptian driver. The suspects, including 151 currently in custody, were referred to a military court for alleged membership of the "Sinai State", the local affiliate of the ISIS group, which is leading an insurrection in the Sinai. The suspects were questioned about the accusations against them and 66 confessed during an investigation that lasted more than a year.² Investigators say all the members of the terrorist cells advocated the Jihadist ideology and believe that state officials and members of the army, police and the judiciary are "infidels."³

The assassination plot in Saudi Arabia

The prosecutor said the terror plot involved members from terrorist cells in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. They were coordinating to target Sisi during his trip to perform the minor pilgrimage known as Umrah in the holy city of Mecca.⁴ The alleged attempt, also targeted Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef.⁵

It involved employees at the Swissotel near the Royal Clock Tower complex in Mecca. The conspirators monitored the movements of the Egyptian president and kept watch on the Saudi royal family's helipad in the Clock Tower complex. They also purchased materials from the Kaaki Bazaar in Mecca that could be used to manufacture explosives, hiding these on the 34th floor of the hotel where they believed Al-Sisi would stay. One of the accused told investigators his wife had offered to wear a suicide belt and blow herself up in order to distract security forces while the other members of the cell carried out the assassination.⁶

The assassination plot in Egypt

The assassination attempt was allegedly orchestrated by a terrorist cell consisting of seven members – six former police officers and a dentist known as the “bearded officers,” who planned to attack the president's convoy using explosive charges as it travelled in Cairo.⁷ The policemen, all of whom enlisted in the Central Security Forces in 2007, had received intensive training in the use of firearms.⁸ The officers were arrested last year.⁹ The leader of the terrorist cell, former police officer Mohammed al-Bakoutchi, reportedly confessed that he had provided information to Sinai Province, ISIS's Egyptian affiliate, over the dispersal of the Muslim Brotherhood's Rabaa sit-in. He also leaked information regarding Sisi's itinerary as part of a plot to kill the president by targeting his motorcades.¹⁰

In last 2 years there were several reports about plots to assassinate President Sisi:

- Before taking office as President, al-Sisi admitted to surviving several assassination attempts during his service as Egypt's Defense Minister.
- **The ' Arab Sharkas' terrorist cell** - a security source said ' Arab Sharkas' terrorist cell admitted plotting the assassination of Field Marshal Abdel-Fatah al-Sisi. The cell members were tracking Sisi, who they planned to assassinate on March 19, 2014, a few hours before they were arrested, according MBC channel. An arrested terrorist led security authorities to the location of a terrorist cell in Sharks village in Qalyubia. The informer was earlier arrested during an armed attack that targeted two buses affiliated to the army in Al-Amiria, Cairo.¹¹ The assassination plot was foiled before Sisi 's announcement on state television on March 26, 2014 that he would run for president after first resigning from his post as Minister of Defense.¹²
- **During his presidential campaign of May 2014**, Sisi claimed that he was the target of two assassination attempts “I believe in destiny. No one will take my life earlier than is destined. I fear nothing. I have already survived two assassination attempts.”
- **In August 2015**, the Egyptian Intelligence Services succeeded in foiling the attempt to assassinate the President in advance during the days preceding the opening of the new Suez Canal.
- **In December 2015**, a military court sentenced three army officers to death in a secret hearing on charges of plotting to assassinate President Sisi. The three faced several other charges, including the preparation of a military coup, reported *Al-Araby Al-Jadeed*.¹³ The sources within the Egyptian judiciary told the newspaper that the men were also accused of trying to create a state of chaos in

society and pave the way for popular protests to be led by members of the armed forces. They confirmed that “detailed plans have been seized in addition to explosives.” It is alleged that the assassination plot involved blowing up the presidential aircraft during an overseas trip.¹⁴

- **The Nouakchott plot - in June 2016**, Egyptian President Abdel Fatah al-Sisi canceled his tour to Mauritania and sent Prime Minister Sherif Ismail to represent him at the Arab Summit. Government sources have been quoted as saying that Sisi canceled his visit based on intelligence that suggested there were plans to attempt to assassinate al-Sisi in the Mauritanian. The Egyptian presidency stated that after discovering the alleged attempted plot on Sunday, al-Sisi reportedly mandated Prime Minister Ismail Sherif to chair Egypt’s delegation in Mauritania. Maximum security measures were put in place to protect the Egyptian delegation in Mauritania. At the summit, Prime Minister Ismail delivered al-Sisi’s speech on his behalf.¹⁵

Summary

On July 3, 2013, Sisi, who was an army general, replaced the elected Islamist President Mohamed Morsi through a popularly-backed coup and in 2014 has been elected the country’s president. However, Islamists began protests which were put down by the security forces.

Two years later, Egypt is relatively stable, the institutions of state are collaborating with one another, the opposition is weak, and Egypt has received political and financial support from its neighbors other countries and the IMF. But the confrontations with the radical Islamic movements including the Muslim Brotherhood are far from being over and they endanger the country's stability.

The Sinai Province (the Egyptian branch of ISIS) has claimed responsibility of many attacks on Egyptian security forces in the Sinai and extended its terror attacks to other districts of Egypt including Cairo. The Egyptian security forces are conducting operations against the violent Islamic groups in Sinai and in other parts of the country with limited success.

This is the first time that Egypt officially acknowledged assassination attempts against President Sisi but he is not the first Egyptian president challenged by assassination plots:

- Anwar Sadat, the President of Egypt, was assassinated on 6 October 1981, during the annual victory parade held in Cairo to celebrate the 1973 war. A fatwa approving the assassination had been obtained from Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman, the spiritual leader of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad and the assassination was undertaken by members of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad.
- Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak survived an assassination attempt on June 27, 1995, when gunmen ambushed his motorcade as he arrived in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, for a summit of African leaders. Although his car was pocked with gunshots, Mubarak, 67, was unhurt and he immediately returned to Cairo.

Egypt has critical role in dealing with regional challenges including counterterrorism. El-Sisi's moderate and pragmatic policies make him the right man at the right time to lead Egypt in the current turbulent period. The stability of Egypt and the success of Sisi's regime are fundamental for the stability of the region and the world.

It is the common strategic interest of the U.S. the E.U, Israel and the moderate Arab Sunni countries to support president Sisi to fight the radical Islamic movements in Egypt and to remain in power in order to maintain the stability of Egypt as a pillar of the moderate Arab countries.

Notes

¹ Plot to assassinate Egypt President Sisi uncovered: MENA, Ahran Online, November 20, 2016.

² Egypt foils plots to assassinate Sisi, suspects held, Al Arabiya, November 21, 2016.

³ Plot to assassinate Egypt President Sisi uncovered: MENA, Ahran Online, November 20, 2016.

⁴ The prosecutor did not disclose when the two cells were arrested, but Sisi had already performed umrah in August 2014.

⁵ Plot to assassinate Egypt President Sisi uncovered: MENA, Ahran Online, November 20, 2016.

⁶ Amany Maged, Terror plots: Joining the dots, The assassination plot in Saudi Arabiya, Al Ahran Weekly, Issue No.1321, 24 November, 2016.

⁷ Plot to assassinate Egypt President Sisi uncovered: MENA, Ahran Online, November 20, 2016.

⁸ Amany Maged, Terror plots: Joining the dots, The assassination plot in Saudi Arabiya, Al Ahran Weekly, Issue No.1321, 24 November, 2016.

⁹ Plot to assassinate Egypt President Sisi uncovered: MENA, Ahran Online, November 20, 2016.

¹⁰ Egyptian officers behind Sisi plot revealed, Al Arabiya, November 21, 2016.

¹¹ Aya Ibrahim, Arab Sharkas admitted plotting Sisi's assassination, The Cairo Post, May 7, 2014.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Army officers sentenced to death for Sisi assassination plot, Middle East Monitor, December 22, 2015.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ After Intel About Assassination Plot, Egypt's Al-Sisi Sends PM Sherif Ismail to Mauritania to Attend Arab Summit, nsnbc, July 25, 2016.