

Egypt's crackdown on foreign media: two years of Threats and defamation Campaigns



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Methodology

The report relies on official SIS statements concerning some reports published in foreign media. The researcher monitored these Statements from June 6, 2017 to June 5, 2019. The statements of SIS were monitored since the appointment of Diaa Rashwan as Chairman of the State Information Service (SIS) for a period of two years. The report also relies on the analysis of a number of media statements issued by the SIS Chairman on foreign media during the time period covered in the report.

The report is based on 7 interviews with journalists, including 6 direct interviews, while one interview was conducted by sending questions via email. The diversity of agencies in which these journalists work has been taken into consideration, including Egyptian journalists working in foreign media. The names and places of work of the journalists were kept confidential for their safety and in accordance with their request. The report presents the content of interviews using aliases for journalists. In addition, some information was withheld to avoid identification of the journalists who responded, in order to avoid being exposed to security risks. Interviews were conducted during the period from 9 January 2018 to 11 July 2018. The report also relies on the analysis of Egyptian laws related to the work of foreign media.

Introduction

Egyptian authorities have recently clamped down on foreign media, as official Statements from the State Information Service have shown, and incidents in which foreign journalists have been deported or denied entry into the country. In addition, the Egyptian authorities have launched ongoing defamation campaigns in the local media, with the aim of portraying foreign media as part of a conspiracy against security and stability in Egypt. The Crackdown on foreign media cannot be seen in isolation from the Egyptian authorities' policy, which aims to avoid international criticism of Egypt's human rights record.

This policy is based on paralyzing the capacity of civil society organizations to work, and enacting a package of legislation restricting Media freedom and violating digital rights, so that the targeting of foreign media - the last window of access to information - is the main practice to prevent the access of information to international human rights bodies regarding the real situation in Egypt.

On the other hand, the Arabic-speaking foreign media is a source of information that can benefit the Egyptian public. Egyptian authorities do not have the ability to control and direct political messages through it, in contrast to the local media.

The State Information Service was the main driver of these practices against foreign media. SIS is directly subordinate to the Egyptian Presidency and was established in the 1960s under President Gamal Abdel Nasser in order to be a public relations agency. Hisham Kassem, a media expert, described the SIS in a press interview as “a Soviet apparatus that ended its role with the end of the Cold War”.

It is noteworthy that there have been no fundamental changes in the powers of SIS since its establishment to the present time, and the Presidency has not issued instructions to SIS to exercise control over foreign media. In the time period covered by this report, the only changing variable for SIS was probably the appointment of Diaa Rashwan as SIS Chairman.

Rashwan has experience in research and journalism. In March 2019, he was elected as chairman of the syndicate of journalists after former chairman Abdel-Mohsen Salama abstained from running for a second term. Both journalists support the current authority and support president Sisi policies. The pushing of Diaa Rashwan in the last Syndicate elections, while he was still the Chairman of the State Information Service (SIS), is likely to be paying tribute to his efforts to clamp down on foreign media working in Egypt.

It is possible to say that Rashwan has formulated a new policy for SIS, to become a source of pressure and constraint on foreign media, and some of the interviewees said that the transformation was likely done in cooperation with sovereign bodies, wishing to have a formal non-security front of pressure on foreign media.

There are many incidents and developments that have been discussed in previous reports issued by the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression (AFTE), as well as in press and media reports in foreign and local media, but this report aims to provide a broader reading of the dimensions and details of the Crackdown on foreign media. It is not enough here to point to the role of the SIS, which has the responsibility to issue work permits to foreign journalists, and has recently been following and criticizing their reports. The report deals with a series of interviews conducted by the researcher with foreign journalists and Egyptians working in foreign media investigating the aspect of direct and indirect threats received by journalists, and the extent to which the Crackdown by the Egyptian authorities affected their work. The report attempts to represent the voices of journalists, who are under constant pressure and violations by Egyptian authorities.

At another level, the report provides a legal reading of the scope of powers granted by the law to the SIS and the criteria governing its relationship with foreign journalists and foreign media in an attempt to answer multiple questions about the legality of SIS practices towards foreign media.

This report is issued two years after the appointment of Diaa Rashwan as the Chairman of the State Information Service. During this period, Egyptian authorities launched their campaign against the foreign media, the State Information Service being their main tool therefore or distorting the reputation of foreign media at the local level.

Section I: Dimensions of the Crackdown on foreign media:

The work of the press and media profession in Egypt is characterized by multiple risks between the trends imposed on the press and media institutions by the state institutions and security agencies, through the organizing frameworks for membership of the Journalists Syndicate, and ending with threats and security and judicial pursuits. Security agencies intervention in the work of journalists and media professionals is possibly the most serious threat. Over the past six years, a large number of journalists have been arrested, detained and imprisoned for their work. There are numerous examples of security threats, including Al-Jazeera journalists' case and the photographer Shawkan case, as well as dozens of cases in which journalists and photographers have been attacked during their work, especially with regard to coverage of political events and protests. Foreign journalists also face constant security threats, sometimes involving deportation to their country or denial of entry to Egypt.

In this context, the State Information Service (SIS) role has been to harass foreign media and foreign journalists. This campaign has an explicit aspect through the public statements issued by SIS and the defamation campaigns led by Diao Rashwan, SIS chairman, against foreign media, which are discussed in the report later. Another undeclared aspect is threats to foreign journalists and Egyptians working in foreign media.

AFTE began to monitor the attack led by the State Information Service on foreign media since the issuance of the SIS statement about the terrorist oasis attack in October 2017. Since the statements issued by SIS were numerous, we had to reach foreign journalists and Egyptian journalists working for foreign media, to highlight the details of the Crackdown. It is remarkable that the interviews conducted by the researcher with journalists carried many silent aspects, making them a priority in dealing with the Crackdown on foreign media.

• From security agencies to the State Information Service (SIS):

It can be said that the current attack on foreign media is not accompanied by the declared role of security, except for the arrest of journalists and their deportation from Egypt. This represents a development that needs to be understood, particularly since security services have traditionally dealt with the foreign media file. And before presenting the interviews conducted by the researcher, it should be noted that the report used aliases for journalists interviewed.

Adel said in an interview with the researcher: “Previously, sovereign bodies would contact offices of foreign media outlets as well as its journalists and question them regarding their sources in coverage of terrorist attacks and how we got certain information, for example a case that raised international questions concerning the performance of security bodies during the last two years.” “On one occasion, I was surprised by a contact of an official in a sovereign authority with some questions and threats, and then I made sure to end the call quickly,” Adel said

Caroline said in an interview with the researcher: “the situation was previously related to reports of concern to the security, such as National Security, and their intervention was through communication with the managers responsible for the foreign media, to the extent that I know” Adel and Caroline point to the period before Dია Rashwan was appointed chairman of the State Information Service, specifically before June 2017.

The interviews also reveal the nature of the role played by the SIS before Dია Rashwan assumed its chairmanship. Fawzi said: “Months would pass without journalists in foreign media receive any statements issued by the SIS. It would send us only data issued by some ministries.” “During my years in the foreign media, SIS issued permits to journalists working in foreign media, and thus had information about all these journalists, SIS also invited them to attend conferences or receive certain information. It also followed up the material published by the foreign media about Egypt and prepared reports on it to be sent to other parties in the country, according to what I know. “

According to interviews conducted by the researcher, the State Information Service was not a source of concern for foreign journalists previously. “When I started working in Egypt more than two years ago, the relationship with the press center of the SIS was easy, I got the press card of foreign correspondents, and even when there was some delay, the press center would issue a temporary press card”, says Henry. Youssef said, “The SIS was a routine body, like any media office in the government ministries, and there was no interest in responding to what the foreign press was publishing”.

Without changes in the powers granted to the SIS, It is likely to be an alternative to security in terms of pressure on foreign media. “Since Dია Rashwan assumed the chairmanship of the State Information Service in June 2017, there seemed to be a change in its role as if it were to be an executive body run by a civil official who was putting pressure on foreign media,” says Adel. “The SIS appears to be a front for security agencies that we do not know specifically,” Caroline said. “They focus on specific points in reports published by foreign media.”

She adds, “I think others have been angry at these points and they are putting pressure on us

because of that. That is what I felt during my work.” In Youssef’s opinion, the SIS “has become a regulatory body that reports on the performance of foreign media, determines what is permitted and what is prohibited, there are campaigns against certain foreign media outlets, and SIS shapes the view of local media regarding our work through the reports they issue”.

In any event, security bodies have not completely disappeared from the scene. “This does not mean, of course, that the role of sovereign bodies is over, at least in terms of covering issues related to security. We receive responses from sovereign authorities that confirm the information we have obtained, but at the same time warn us that the publication of this information will be answered by their denial and will subject us to the rule of the law.” Adel explains through an incident that happened to him during his work when journalists were forced into not publishing information. He said: “There was an undeclared terrorist attack, and despite our knowledge of the information and a sovereign authority confirming it, we did not publish the news, because the official told us that the news would be denied. We were surprised that the Ministry of Interior, a day later, announced this attack in its statement, which was issued as a commentary to a second attack, and the first attack was mentioned as one of the operations carried out by the terrorist operation without mentioning any other details.”

Many interviewees believe that there is coordination between the State Information Service and security, while it is not known exactly how. “When I asked at the press center of SIS, the officials there told me that the delay of the press cards (permits) was due to a problem with security, and they did not tell me what the problem was,” Henry said. Thus, it appears that the SIS sends foreign journalists’ Data to security and waits for Approval to grant permission, which is granted by SIS to foreign journalists and renewed annually, and SIS also requests the Egyptian journalists working in foreign media to obtain the same permission.

“After 2013, the role of the SIS increased, I cannot remember when the pressure on the foreign media began,” says Rebecca in an interview with the researcher. “The permits required for our work are issued by the press center in Maspero, while SIS monitors the information we publish and comments on our work through the issuance of statements about reports they do not like. The SIS became more aggressive and noisy, which is what I will say in general about its performance. Before that, The SIS chairman would meet with foreign correspondents and give them some advice, but now there is an attack on foreign media and this is done in a direct manner through statements demanding foreign media to apologize and delete the content. “

• **Threatening journalists and disrupting the issuance of permits:**

The current crackdown on foreign media is a constant threat to foreign journalists, as well as the suspension of issuing permits to practice journalism for foreign journalists through SIS. The interviews conducted by the researcher reveal that the attack on foreign media also includes the threat to journalists through officials of the State Information Service and its Chairman, Diaa Rashwan.

“I faced great pressure from the state Information Service, which I did not meet before Diaa Rashwan took over as chairman of the service. Security did not contact me about the reports that I published, as did the SIS. More than once I received calls from SIS officials where they asked me about the contents of reports I had published and suggested that I cover stories they considered important.”

Thus, Caroline recounted what had happened with her. Calling journalists appears to have become a common pattern for SIS officials. “There is another undeclared level where the chairman of SIS calls journalists and asks them about the content of their news and coverage, for example, in coverage related to the presidential election,” Adel said in an interview with the researcher, “he went so far as to read the whole of the report over the phone stopping at every word it contained.”

State Information Service officials also threaten journalists during their inquiries about permits related to their work, as Henry said in an interview with the researcher, he said:

“One time I was in the press center, and the director of the center spoke to me and pointed out that there were foreign journalists who “did not work professionally” as if he was a teacher directing his speech to a student. Of course I understood that he meant to intimidate and threaten me especially that he referred to BBC coverage, describing it as unprofessional.”

Youssef notes the delay in issuing permits or press cards. He says, “During 2018 there was a significant delay in the issuance of the press cards for journalists working in foreign media more than any previous year, so they issued us temporary cards,” he said. This is what Henry agrees with in the interview with the researcher in July 2018: “Since January 2018, I have been having difficulties getting my temporary card, and this was before the presidential election, so I did not have a permit to work. When I asked at the press center of the SIS, the officials there told me that the delay was due to a problem with security and did not explain what the problem was, after that I got a temporary card, and the annual card of 2018 was still not issued, although we were in July.”

Caroline believes that Egyptian journalists working in foreign media are more likely to face risks more than their foreign counterparts. “I think there is a targeting of Egyptian journalists working in foreign media institutions because they have family and a life in Egypt, and can be easily threatened with prison, as opposed to foreign journalists who face deportation as the maximum response from Egyptian authorities.” Not only that, but some officials of the SIS and other government agencies indirectly threaten Egyptian journalists working in foreign media.

“The message is to continue your work, but work to support Egypt and stand by it. Of course this means defending the policies of the current regime and overlook the transfer of the truth.” said Caroline. The same was reiterated by Fawzi, “there is new tone that we keep hearing from officials and public figures we meet to prepare our reports, which boils down to the importance of supporting the country.” Fawzi adds, “They are addressing our work on security grounds, such as saying that foreign media should consider the interest of the country and that the current situation calls for a coverage to the liking of Egyptian authorities because this will help in the combat of terrorism.”

These threats and the obstruction of granting permits to foreign journalists constitute the undeclared aspect of the attack on foreign media, which is presented in the first section of the report. The second section moves on to the analysis of the SIS policy, which represents the declared aspect of the attack on foreign media.

Section II: Policy of the State Information Service towards foreign media:

During the reporting period, the State Information Service (SIS) moved on two levels: first, by issuing official statements on specific facts to criticize foreign media; and the second level was to conduct defamation campaigns against foreign media in the local media. The report discusses the policy of the SIS on foreign media, based on the monitoring of the official statements issued by the SIS, the interviews conducted by the Chairman of the SIS, Diaa Rashwan with local media, in addition to the interviews conducted by the researcher with foreign journalists and Egyptians working in the foreign media.

• Official statements..Continuous pressure on foreign media:

Before Diaa Rashwan, the State Information Service (SIS) was not among those who issued statements to denounce foreign media reports or criticisms of the Egyptian authorities at the international level. It can be said that Diaa Rashwan devised the issuance of official statements as a tool to deal with foreign media, with the aim of putting pressure on the media in public and reflecting official positions on its coverage of the situation in Egypt.

“The foreign media does not act according to the dictates of the state institutions or to support the decisions of the authority whatsoever, but rather covers the reality of what is happening in Egypt, depending on all the tools available to it,” Adel said during the interview. This professional way of working is no longer suitable for Egyptian authorities, who want to control what is published on the reality of the situation in Egypt, and I think that is the main motive for everything that the SIS does. “

According to interviews conducted by the researcher, there were security agencies trying to intimidate foreign journalists and threaten them, and these practices were surrounded by secrecy and the foreign media did not announce them. In this case, the foreign media was trying to ignore these threats and then proceed with its work, while the Egyptian authorities did not have the courage to say that their security services threatened the work of foreign journalists in Egypt. The State Information Service (SIS) is a civilian body headed by a well-known journalist and researcher whose administrative authority is to regulate the work of foreign correspondents. Therefore, the pressures exerted against the foreign media can become overt pressures and the

foreign media must respond to them, these pressures should be known and circulated widely since they constitute a message from Egyptian authorities to all foreign media that they draw red lines to cover Egyptian affairs and that transgression of these red lines will not be tolerated.

Thus, during the period covered by the report, the State Information Service began issuing press releases, which covered specific media coverage of Egyptian affairs. The Egyptian authorities expressed dissatisfaction with them. They demanded that the foreign media amend or delete these press items, and at times apologize to Egyptian authorities.

The appropriate input of the SIS and given the potential of its president, Diah Rashwan, was the claim that the SIS was making professional observations on the performance of the foreign media, and called on it to investigate the accuracy of what it published about Egypt. Of course, this was only a curtain, through which foreign media could be pressured not to highlight issues that Egyptian authorities did not wish to address, whether terrorism or human rights issues such as enforced disappearance or some political issues related to Sisi's rivalry by former military men.

In some cases, the State Information Service went further, through what it described in its statements: "summoning the directors of the offices" of foreign media, to meet with the chairman of the SIS Diah Rashwan. "I learned that the meetings of the chairman of the SIS with the foreign media managers did not differ very much from the press releases issued by the State Information Service," said Mark in an interview with the researcher. "It is just a repetition of the talk about professional mistakes, and talking at length about the SIS comments to the work of foreign media". "We know that the chairman of the State Information Service is very interested in the foreign media, and there is a daily follow-up of foreign media, especially the world-known ones," Adel said in an interview with the researcher. I learned that when he summoned the directors of BBC and Reuters offices in Egypt it was something akin to an interrogation, posing questions such as: why did you use those terms and who are your sources. He even mentioned that later in Egyptian media outlets."

In other cases, the State Information Service sent official letters to foreign media, with the content of the SIS's published statements on specific reports, and sometimes the President of the State Information Service called the journalists themselves to criticize their reports on Egyptian affairs. It seems that the SIS wanted to transfer everything that was confidential to an official routine by a government agency that monitors the published reports about Egypt and calls on those responsible to publish them in order to modify or delete these reports. The State Information Service (SIS) did not announce any legal provisions on which such practices were based. The SIS

is mandated to clarify and explain to foreign media the policies of the Egyptian state. This means sending official data to the media and arranging its contacts with officials and official bodies.

In this section, the report provides a review of the official statements issued by the State Information Service towards the foreign media, according to the researcher. The report then proceeds from this review to an analysis of the most common features of the statements, as well as the statistics on the media addressing the SIS's statements, and the topics on which it focused ranging from democratic to foreign policy issues.

- Summary of SIS statements

Diaa Rashwan was still in his first months in office and had never before interfered in the work of foreign media. The SIS issued a statement to respond to a report published by Human Rights Watch in September 2017 in what appeared to be an attempt to present responses and opinions of the Egyptian state on the issue of torture, described in the Human Rights Watch's report.

Subsequently, SIS began to exercise control over the foreign media since the oasis attack in October 2017. This incident began after news of a terrorist attack on the police forces on the Oasis Road, on the evening of October 20, 2017. On the same day, the ministry of interior issued a statement, in which it said that "a number of policemen were killed and wounded and a number of terrorist elements were killed during an exchange of fire in an area adjacent to the 135 km point on the oasis road, deep in the desert."¹

Reuters quoted three sources as 52 police were killed, while the BBC quoted the killing of 53 policemen.² In the afternoon of the following day, the Ministry of the Interior announced detailed information about the attack, including that the death toll was only 16.³ On October 21, 2017, the State Information Service issued a statement, in which it condemned the BBC and Reuters' coverage of the Oasis attack, and that they cited unspecified security sources.⁴

Such a statement was a turning point in the SIS policy, as it began to pressure and intimidate

1. Issam Abu Sedira, the first official statement from the Ministry of Interior on the clashes of the oases, Almasry Alyoum, 20 October 2017, the date of the last visit: 15 October 2018, <https://goo.gl/JgzxLv>

2. BBC Arabic, Egyptian authorities object to reports of death toll in Oasis attack, 23 October 2017, Date of last visit: 15 October 2018, <https://goo.gl/QfwSan>

3. Alyoum Alsabe'e, Ministry of Interior announces the death of 16 of the security forces and the killing and wounding of 15 terrorists in the Oasis incident, 21 October 2017, the last visit: 15 October 2018 <https://goo.gl/ju1y8i>

4. State Information Service, Information Commission condemns BBC and Reuters coverage of Oasis crime, 21 October 2017, Date of last visit: 15 October 2018 <https://goo.gl/ZGVhh4>

foreign media, rather than providing them with the official information available. The State Information Service (SIS) continued its pressure on foreign media after that, and Diaa Rashwan began criticizing the coverage of foreign media in television interviews.⁵

On October 24, 2017, a second statement was issued about the Oasis attack, in which the State Information Service announced that it had sent two letters to Reuters and the BBC asking them to do two things: “Either deny the validity of previously published numbers of victims contrary to official figures, or if they could confirm their numbers, which we confirm to be incorrect, and publish the names of so many alleged victims.” Reuters and the BBC did not announce official responses to the letters of the SIS, which issued a third statement on the oasis attack, in which the chairman met with the directors of the offices of Reuters and the BBC in Cairo on coverage of the Oasis attack, the statement said “Reuters and the BBC network, in a hasty coverage of the incident, relied on inaccurate numbers of the martyrs of the oasis terrorist crime, that differ from the official Egyptian number.”⁶

At the beginning of 2018, SIS once again intervened in the work of foreign media. The beginning was with the New York Times, on a report published on January 7, 2018, addressing what it called leaks by an intelligence officer giving some instructions to the media about the Egyptian position of the Trump decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and criticizing the statement writing: “allegations about Egypt’s position on the issue of Jerusalem included in the call,” and asked the New York Times to prove that the officer mentioned in the report is actually working in Egyptian intelligence. On the same day, the State Information Service issued an addendum on the Jerusalem leaks that denied the existence of a person named Ashraf Al-Khouli among Egyptian general intelligence officers.⁷

By the end of the first week of January 2018, the National Election Authority announced the timetable for the presidential election, which was set in March 2018. This period witnessed many speculations about the candidates for the presidential race, especially after the decline of the former Prime Minister Ahmed Shafiq to stand for election, after he was under pressure from the current authority, according to media reports. Another former military officer, Sami Annan, was preparing to run in the presidential election. He announced this on January 2018, before

5. Here is the capital, Youtube, Diaa Rashwan reveals serious professional irregularities committed by Reuters and the BBC about the battle of the oases, 21 October 2017, the date of the last visit: 15 October 2018 <https://goo.gl/YJFHhd>

6. The State Information Service, the SIS: Reuters and the BBC rely on official Egyptian figures for the oasis crime victims, 31 October 2017, the date of the last visit: 15 October 2018 <https://goo.gl/AKVpnV>

7. The State Information Service (SIS), following the SIS statement issued on Saturday evening, January 6, 2018, January 7, 2018, last visit: 17 May 2019 <https://bit.ly/2IsIBgW>

the armed forces intervened and ousted him from the race. He was arrested on 23 January 2018. Annan was Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces until August 2012.

The SIS and the agencies responsible for the presidential election file were not satisfied with the coverage of these events by the foreign media, which showed interest in the details of the previous two candidates being excluded from the race. SIS issued a statement on 25 January 2018 on the coverage of foreign media⁸, without specifying it as it used in previous statements, and this statement focused on queries to address the candidacy of the Lieutenant General, Sami Annan mainly, while addressing the issue of candidacy of the Lieutenant General Shafiq without mentioning him, describing him as “a potential candidate who issued a statement saying that he will not run for the presidential elections and that he is not the best person to lead the country in this period”

»There is often anger when the coverage concerns issues of which the military is a party or the president,” says Mark during the interview. “It appears, for example, from the statement that was issued in response to an Egyptian journalist press interview with advisor Hisham Genina for a foreign media. The anger of the military establishment was great because it was about them”.

Subsequently, SIS returned to the subject of counter-terrorism. The armed forces announced the launch of the comprehensive operation, Sinai 2018, on 8 February 2018, with the aim of eliminating terrorist groups in Sinai. A day after the statement of the armed forces, SIS issued a statement to the foreign media asking them to “commit themselves to publishing only the official statements issued by the military spokesman, the General Command of the Armed Forces and the Ministry of Interior Information Office regarding the ongoing operations to implement the comprehensive plan of confrontation of terrorist and criminal elements and organizations, and not to publish any news quoting or publishing statements by private sources or informed sources or other ministries.”⁹

In February 2018, SIS appeared to have decided to focus on reports related to human rights issues. SIS issued six statements criticizing a BBC report on the issue of enforced disappearances¹⁰, which identified in the media as Zubida’s case. The six statements were released from February 24 to 6th of March 2018, in which SIS described the BBC report as “lies” and then announced the

8. State Information Service, in a statement by the State Information Service: Professional excesses in some foreign coverage of presidential elections, 25 January 2018, Last visit: 18 May 2019 <https://bit.ly/2K3jUtr>

9. State Information Service, State Information Service Statement for foreign media, 25 January 2018, Last visit: 18 May 2019 <https://bit.ly/2R0Y4r5>

10. See the end of the report Annex: Official data issued by the State Information Service against the foreign media..

appearance of the girl who the report alleged was subjected to enforced disappearance. SIS called on officials and elites to boycott the BBC. This call represented a new development in the SIS pressure tools against foreign media, since SIS is supposed to provide access to information and encourage officials to communicate with foreign media not to call for its boycott.

“Among the things that Egyptian authorities are doing in general is preventing us from accessing information from their sources,” Caroline said in an interview with the researcher. “Some authorities prohibit permission for foreign reporters or foreign media offices to cover their activities, something like the call by SIS to boycott BBC with the aim of preventing BBC from access to information through official authorities and this is the most serious threat to a media institution.”

The latest statement of SIS on Zubida’s case referred to the meeting of the chairman of the SIS Diaa Rashwan with the director of BBC in Cairo and handing over what the statement called “the official protest against the contents of the BBC report, which was published in English on February 24 and 25 last, including professional excesses, allegations and claims of alleged torture of opponents in Egypt and alleged enforced disappearances, among them the case of the girl Zubida Ibrahim, who later appeared in an interview with an Egyptian television channel, in which she denied all of the BBC report, as well as being subjected to torture or enforced disappearance”.¹¹

On March 25, 2018, SIS issued a statement on the deportation of The Times correspondent BelTrew from Egypt¹², in which it considered that the deportation of the correspondent from Egypt was in line with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), because the reporter did not apply for a temporary card and worked without that permit. The SIS did not focus in its statement on clarifying the Egyptian authorities’ justification for the deportation of the Times reporter, considering that it was not accurate to describe her deportation as a violation of media freedom and freedom of expression.

With the presidential elections in March 2018, SIS issued a statement on March 29, 2018, announcing that Reuters had responded to the SIS’s request to delete a report entitled Food, buses, and cash: Getting out the vote the Egyptian way.” It described the report as “false”.¹³ On its website,

 11. State Information Service, “Rashwan” officially delivers to BBC expression of protest, March 6, 2018, Last visit: 18 May 2019, <https://bit.ly/2Iy5gHh>

12. State Information Service, “SIS”: deportation of “The Times” correspondent according to the International Covenant .. And permission to the newspaper to follow up the elections, 25 March 2018, Last visit: 18 May 2019, <https://bit.ly/31itKgr>

13. State Information Service, Reuters withdraws its flawed report on the electoral process in Egypt, 29 March 2018, Last visit: 18 May 2019, <https://bit.ly/2I3s1ns>

Reuters wrote that “The item was withdrawn because it did not meet Reuter’s standards,” without elaborating whether or not the information contained in it was correct.

SIS statements again shifted to foreign policy issues, namely the dispute between Egypt and Sudan on sovereignty over Halayeb and Shalatin. On 11 and 12 May 2018, SIS issued two statements. The first statement criticized the publication of a poll to the readers of the website “Russia Today” about the affiliation of Halayeb and Shalatin to Egypt or Sudan, and SIS considered that the poll affects the sovereignty of Egypt and its territorial integrity, and that the SIS is in consultation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the necessary steps.¹⁴ In the second statement it announced that the website had deleted the poll in accordance to communications between the administration of the website and SIS.¹⁵

By the end of 2018, SIS seemed to have stopped commenting on foreign media coverage of Egyptian affairs. Seven months passed during which it did not issue statements to the foreign media. Later, on March 24, 2019, SIS came back to criticize the BBC coverage of its report on the “Be assured you’re not alone” campaign, and the authority stepped up its rhetoric towards the BBC, calling it “promoting the call for murder and the lies of the Muslim Brotherhood”. This statement addressed the communication between SIS and BBC during the previous period and urged it to adhere to what the SIS described as “professional standards”, which led the BBC’s “commitment” for only a few months to these standards in its coverage of the Egyptian situation “According to a statement by the SIS.”¹⁶

The SIS probably stopped issuing critical statements to foreign media over months, because it no longer saw anything disturbing to Egyptian authorities, which has established that they have succeeded in setting red lines for the foreign media. Of course, that belief was not true. SIS was forced to criticize the foreign media again since March 2019.

In April 2019, there was a political debate over a referendum on constitutional amendments that would allow President Sisi to remain in power until 2030. During referendum on these amendments food was distributed to voters from 20 to 22 April 2019. Meanwhile, SIS monitored foreign media reports on the referendum and issued a statement criticizing of the report of

 14. State Information Service, SIS: Rejecting and condemning the “Russia Today” violation of Egypt’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, and summoning its officials, 11 May 2018, Last visit: 18 May 2019 <https://bit.ly/2K4WEuW>

15. State Information Service, “Russia Today” to delete the offending poll of Egypt’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, 12 May 2018, Last visit: 18 May 2019 <https://bit.ly/2KEmVQn>

16. State Information Service, SIS: BBC Promotes Incitement to Murder and Lies of Muslim Brotherhood, March 24, 2019, Last Date: May 18, 2019 <https://bit.ly/2FiZs2M>

the Spanish newspaper El Mundo on 20 April 2019. The statement referred to several points, including the El Mundo report claiming that “the constitutional amendments are designed by the Presidency of the Republic and the intelligence services, for which the writer did not provide any evidence and is completely in opposition to the fact that the amendments were suggested by one fifth of parliament”, according to SIS statement.¹⁷ The next day, a new statement was issued on the referendum where SIS talked of “specific cases of providing food to some voters that were covered by media reports, although not confirmed.”¹⁸

This statement ends SIS statements to foreign media covering coverage of Egyptian affairs during the period covered by the report, two years since Diaa Rashwan assumed the post of chairman of the SIS in June 2017. In the next section, the report analyzes these statements and attempts to identify the common features among them.

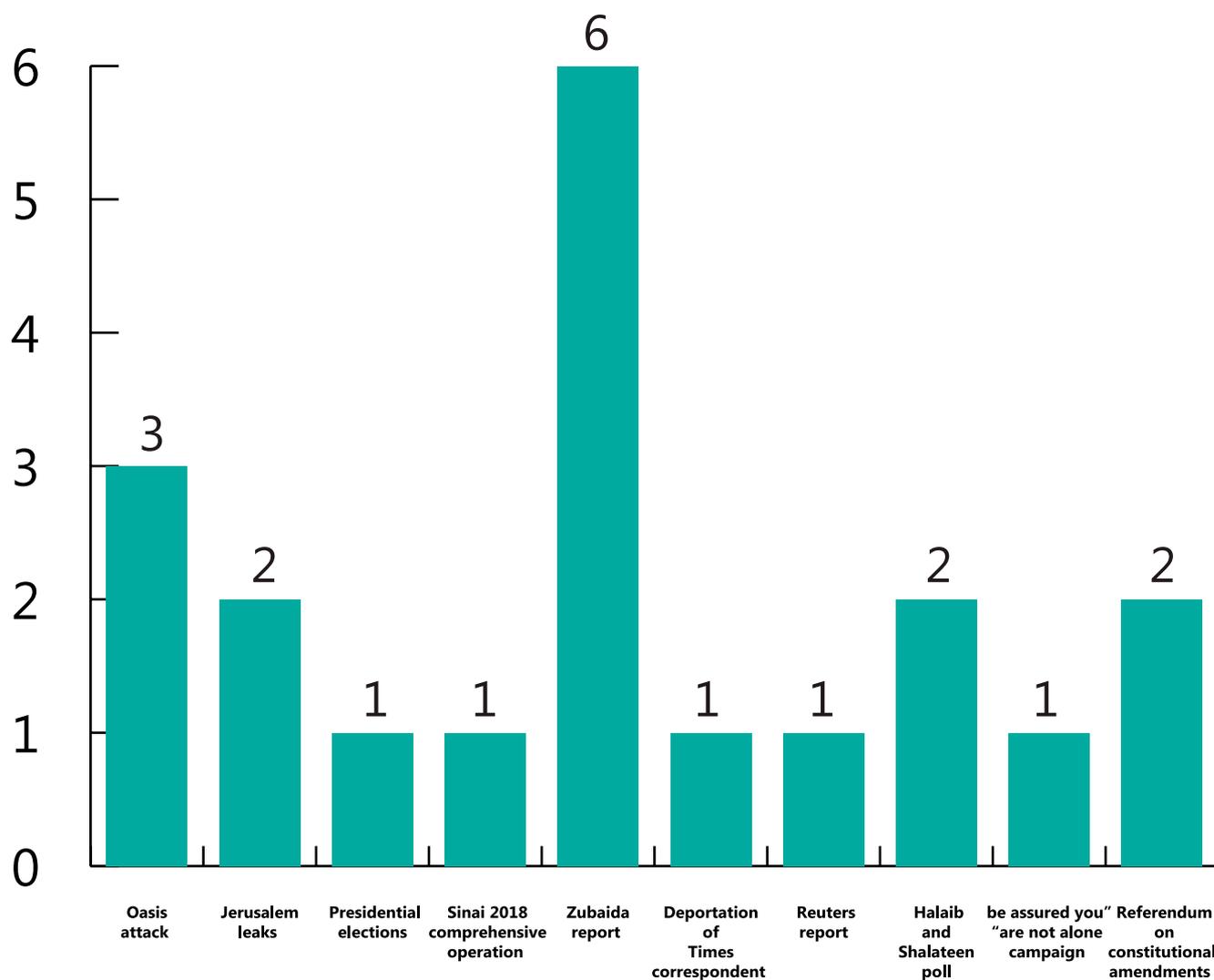
- Analysis of SIS statements against foreign media:

The researcher monitored the issuance of 20 SIS statements during the period covered by the report, which dealt with nine incidents, which are chronologically: oasis attack, Jerusalem leaks, presidential elections, Sinai Comprehensive Operation 2018, Zubaida report, Halaib and Shalatin poll, “Be assured you are not alone” campaign, and the referendum on the constitutional amendments. The *Zubida* report received the bulk of six SIS statements, followed by the Oasis attack, where the SIS singled out the incident in three statements. After that, two statements were released regarding the Jerusalem leaks, the Halaib and Shalatin poll, and the referendum. There are five cases in which the SIS has set out a statement for each: presidential elections, Sinai military operation 2018, and deportation of the Times correspondent, Reuters report, finally the campaign of “be assured you are not alone”. The distribution of SIS was as follows:

 17. State Information Service, Spanish El Mundo Report: False Information, Biased Views, False Affidavits, Major Contradictions, 20 April 2019, Last visited: 18 May 2019 <https://bit.ly/2Kz24hg>

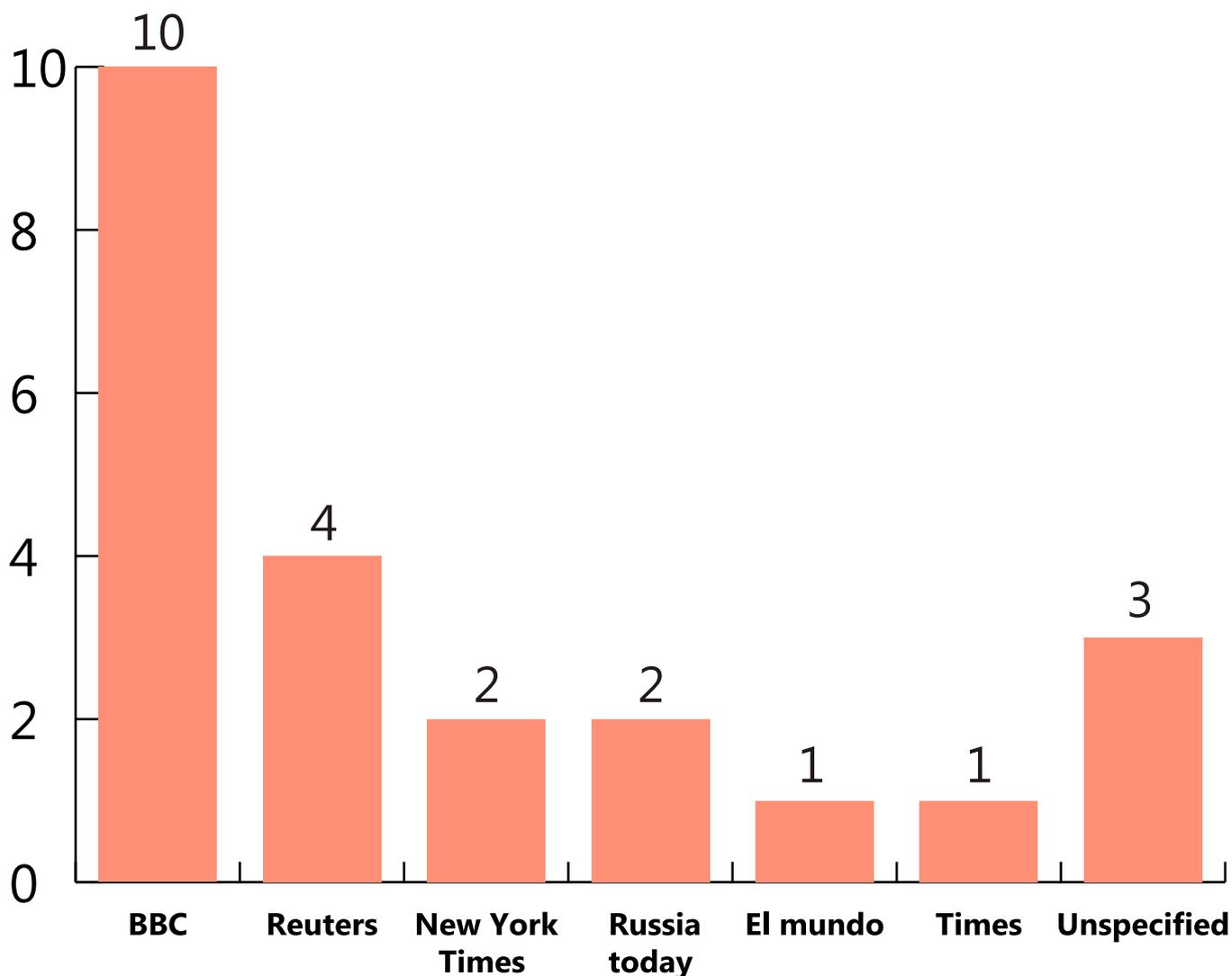
18. State Information Service, SIS statement on the global media handling of the referendum on constitutional amendments, 21 April 2019, last visit: 18 May 2019 <https://bit.ly/2UtX92K>

SIS's Statements against foreign Media Outlets according to the Incident



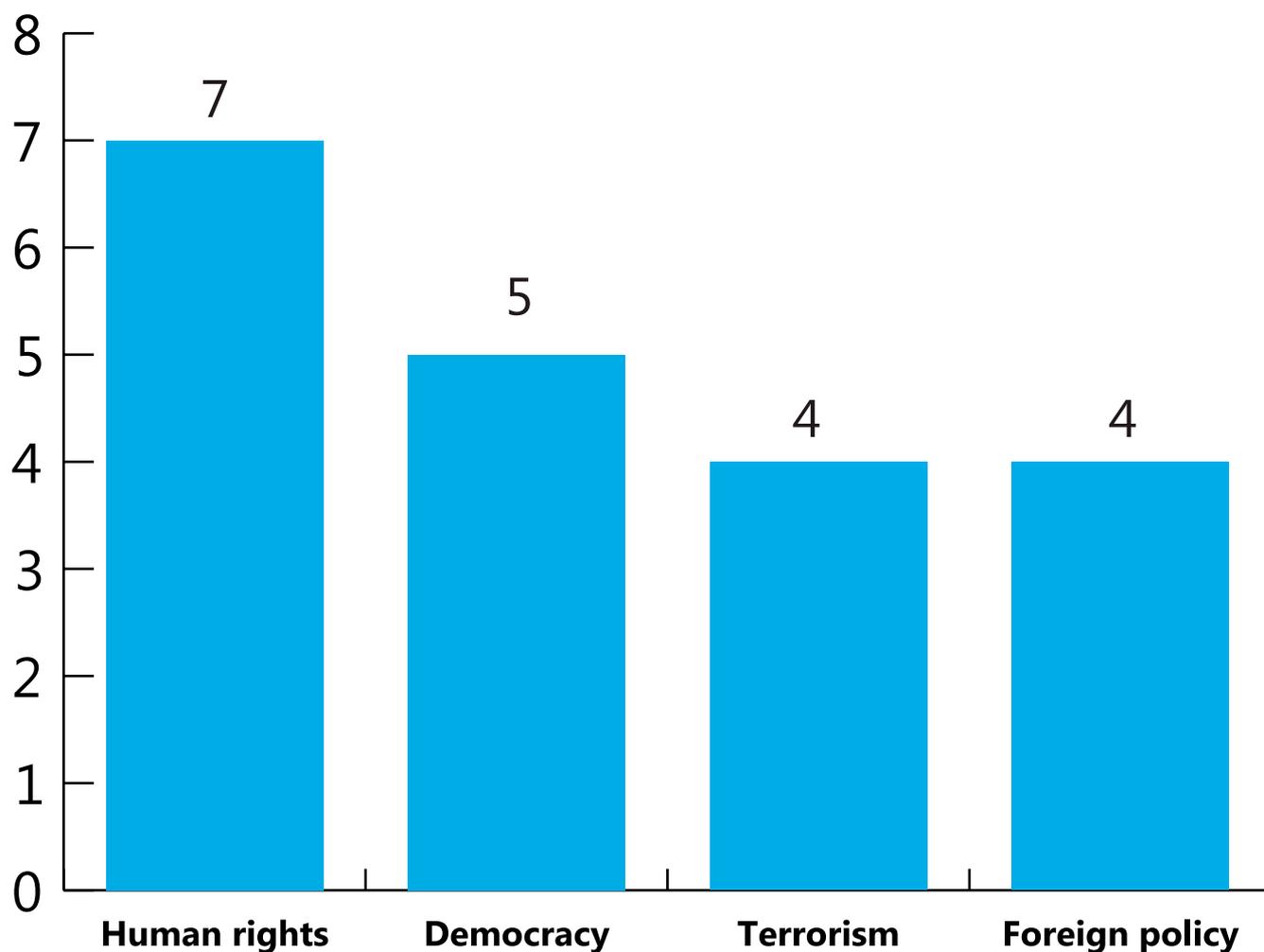
The media outlet that received the most criticism was the BBC with 10 statements, followed by Reuters (4), then the New York Times and Russia today with two statements each, while the Times and the Spanish newspaper El mundo, one each. There are three remaining statements in which SIS has not identified the media outlet. It should be noted that this statistic includes three statements sent by SIS to Reuters and the BBC together, as follows:

SIS's Statements against foreign Media Outlets according to the Media Outlet



In terms of the topics addressed by SIS during the period covered by the report, it can be divided into the following: Terrorism issues, including terrorist attacks, operations by Egyptian armed forces, foreign policy issues, human rights issues, and finally issues of democracy, election and referendum processes. Human rights issues came first with seven statements, followed by democracy issues with 5 statements, and terrorism and foreign policy with 4 statements each, as shown in the following table:

SIS's Statements against foreign Media Outlets according to the Topic



To complement these statistics, it should be noted that SIS was able in two instances to force the foreign media to delete the content, first Reuters to delete its report on the presidential election 2018, the agency said that the content was deleted because it does not fit its standards, Russia today to delete a public opinion poll on the national affiliation of Halaib and Shalatin. In one incident, the terrorist oasis attack, Reuters and the BBC published the number of victims in the attack, announced by the Egyptian authorities in their official statements, after there was reliance on other security sources' estimates.

A set of common features in the SIS statements on foreign media, based on the researcher's monitoring, is as follows:

Identification of the media to which the statement is directed: SIS has identified the media outlet in most of its statements issued to the foreign media. It can be said that the SIS focused its attack on the BBC, the only foreign media which SIS called to boycott. Most likely, the SIS specifies the media outlet to be able to send messages to its officials, and to put them under the pressure of defamation campaigns in the local media. There were only three of the 20 statements in which the SIS did not specify the media outlet.

Use of arguments related to the professionalism of the media: SIS structured most statements directed to foreign media on arguments related to the professionalism of the media. The Egyptian authorities have often relied on the accusation of deliberately damaging the country's reputation internationally, but the SIS added a new dimension to what it describes as professional standards. These arguments were developed in the Egyptian authorities discourse, regardless of their validity. SIS probably tried to use it to suggest that it was not acting on political grounds, but only to clarify "professional mistakes" committed by foreign media. Therefore, the report in its first section sought to highlight the threats received by foreign journalists and foreign media workers by SIS officials.

There are also major contradictions in the SIS's claim that it is driven by professional aspects in foreign media reports, such as that the SIS should provide information to these outlets, organize work permits for foreign journalists, and have official responses to the content of reports published in the media, but the questioning of the sources on which the journalists rely or the terms used in the reports, etc., can only be subject to the standards of editorial policy adopted by the media outlet.

Directing specific demands to the media: SIS did not stop at criticizing the reports of foreign media, but in most of the statements issued in this regard addressed specific demands such as the deletion or modification of content, or officially apologize to the Egyptian authorities for publishing certain content, or the publication of official data only and not relying on sources, as in the statement on the comprehensive military operation Sinai 2018. The demands on the media increase pressure on them, including that those responsible for the editing should exercise greater caution in dealing with the subjects, which SIS commented on it, such as military operations or interference in directing voters, according to interviews conducted by the researcher.

In total, SIS relied on issuing official statements, and then moving to communicate with foreign media by contacting its officials. In some cases, requests were made to meet with them at the SIS premises and details of their work on Egypt were discussed. This policy is based on putting pressure on the foreign media in a public manner, which is a constant threat to foreign journalists in Egypt. If prominent media outlets are under constant pressure, what can be done to reporters working for small newspapers or as freelancers?

The other side of the SIS policy is the use of defamation campaigns against foreign media through the local media, with the aim of imposing unofficial pressures, such as fear or rejection by officials, experts and commentators from communicating with foreign media attacked by the SIS, as well as obstruction of foreign media work by citizens on the streets.

• **Defamation campaigns discussing the conspiracy of Western media on Egypt!**

The current regime denounce the existence of a conspiracy against Egypt in every political discourse, they sometimes refer to regional countries, and to other Western countries, and sometimes the source of the conspiracy is as vague as saying that there are “evil people” who do not want Egypt to stabilize. This discourse is a key input to understand the Egyptian authorities’ attempt to distort foreign media, as a tool used by any of the conspirators against the interests of the country.

The chairman of the State Information Service, Diah Rashwan, began appearing in the media to talk about foreign media since October 2017. This came a day after the terrorist oases attack, when Rashwan was a guest of the program “hona al asema”, that airs on a private channel. Diah Rashwan did not conceal his convictions about the foreign media. He said:

“I do not want to give much detail, but we are about to organize something, the first of its kind, regarding foreign correspondents. We do not fear foreigners and do not discriminate between foreigners and Egyptians. But we say that the main campaign is against us, and you know, is coming from abroad, because our main enemy is outside the country, supported by states and sometimes by other agencies, and there are three parties which hit at us: the media, human rights organizations, and some research centers. I am not afraid of official states, but those three parties affect official positions and may change them at any moment.”

Thus, Rashwan announced that the Egyptian authorities are dealing with these attacks coming from the foreign media. The beginning of this was the statement issued by SIS to denounce the coverage of the BBC and Reuters of the terrorist oases attack. In the same episode, Rashwan continued to review the steps taken by the SIS.

“In fact, all the day today and yesterday, as we always do, we have been following Arab and foreign coverage of what happened. It appeared to us that some agencies were trying to draw attention to us. Like Reuters, which published on 14 martyrs in our language, victims of murder in their language; then it escalated to 30 at least yesterday evening and then to 52 according to Reuters today. It is the same number mentioned by BBC. This number has been circulated by more than one source, and maybe another agency. Before issuing this statement I made calls, which lasted at least one hour and 45 minutes with Reuters officials in Egypt, the American official of Reuters and with officials in BBC Arabic and BBC English in Egypt and abroad.”

Rashwan explains that SIS monitors the content published in foreign media and then begins to contact journalists and then issues its statements on the relevant incident. This was an official announcement of the beginning of a new phase in dealing with foreign media. Rashwan focused his criticism regarding the oasis attack on using the description of “militants” by foreign media and relying on sources to publish victims’ number. Rashwan said, “Reuters described the terrorists elements as militants and you know the English expression, which sometimes refers to positive meaning, so I said to Reuters “militants for freedom”. Mr. Rashwan here is trying to point out that foreign media sympathize with those involved in the terrorist attack, which is meaningless, but when addressing local public opinion, this contributes to the aim of SIS to demonize foreign media. Why do not they say “terrorists”, Like us, and why they say about our martyrs that they have been merely killed? There must be sympathy or complicity of these foreign journalists with the terrorists.

During the same episode, Diaa Rashwan revealed that he has asked several questions to journalists about the sources on which they rely. Rashwan said:

“What have you relied on? Both said they relied on private sources, they said that they are sources of the Ministry of Interior, the fact that is the style of the BBC, and I asked clearly what it means to rely on a source, how do you define it in your style book, which I have in front of me. He replied: t is a source that is fully aware of the information, the official source authorized to give the information, I said to him: great, informed full

knowledge if possible, I do not want to know his name, but in which department of the Ministry of Interior he works in? He mentioned a department which could not possibly be fully aware of the information, including its head.”

It is possible to say that the SIS chairman was established to monitor the foreign media. The way he deals with journalists is like an informal investigation, which is confirmed by the interview conducted by the researcher, where questions are asked to journalists about their sources and details of coverage and why they chose to publish these details. Diao Rashwan considers himself as a colleague of these foreign journalists before he became an official in the Egyptian state, while praising the coverage of the Egyptian media because most of them were cautious and did not quote sources because they felt something was wrong, according to Rashwan. Thus, the Egyptian authorities want foreign media to follow in the steps of local media, which is subject to great political control by the current regime, according to periodic reports issued by AFTE and other human rights organizations.

At the time, Lamees Elhadidi, presenter of the program asked about the role of SIS in providing information. Rashwan replied stressed the importance of the information they have and sharing it with foreign media. He even said: “I think the right way is not to take or wait for completion of the information. We provide what we have, and clarify that this is up to the moment and it gives us a chance.” Rashwan means that Egyptian authorities should have announced in successive statements the number of victims of the terrorist operation on oasis and this contradicts his attack on foreign media. If Egyptian authorities had ignored disclosing the number of victims, why blame foreign media for doing their job and trying to access information from private sources. Of course, such questions are not posed to Rashwan in other TV programs, but Elhadidi heavily criticized Egyptian authorities for lack of information concerning the oases attack, and thus had space to pose questions about the main role of SIS in providing information to foreign journalists and others.

Fawzi believes that SIS “has made changes in terms of interest to follow up what is issued by foreign media and sending emails containing official statements to us as well as statements from ministries, but it seems this is used to comment on our reports as if we are supposed to publish only what the Egyptian authorities want. “

SIS chairman has been a guest of various television programs since the oasis attack to address efforts related to Egypt’s image in foreign media. The report does not deal with monitoring all his statements and participations in the media. The report focuses on two of these, because the main

arguments used by SIS chairman are often repeated, and the TV presenter and local newspapers keep broadcasting this content to create a public opinion that is hostile and skeptical about the foreign media reports and the motives of their correspondents in Egypt.

In her interview with the researcher, Rebecca said that the SIS “is trying to impose the official version of the facts on foreign media that criticize the situation in Egypt; perhaps the aim is to control the information published in foreign media to limit criticism. I think that foreign correspondents in Egypt are reporting on the ground as much as they can and cover all the subjects, including those that the Egyptian media cannot talk about, and also the topics that the Egyptian state prefers to hide or avoid. “

Fawzi revealed in the interview conducted by the researcher that “there are several incidents in which there was harassment of correspondents on the street, and the attackers repeated accusations of espionage in the interest of foreigners. The attacks increased after SIS statements against foreign media outlets and some official sources refuse to talk to foreign media upon the recommendation of SIS. It seems that the statements are issued to move the street against the foreign media, while the communication with official authorities aims to prevent them from talking to us.” It can be said that the defamation campaign led by the SIS increased the harassment of foreign media in the street.

The second model of the TV Interviews with the SIS Chairman, which is addressed in the report, is the episode of the program “Nazra” on Sada Elbalad channel, on 12 January 2018¹⁹, presented by journalist Hamdy Rizk. This episode was entitled “Why is the Western media targeting Egypt?” and dealt with the New York Times report on the leaks of Jerusalem, which was then criticized by the SIS and denied its authenticity.

It can be said that foreign media defamation overshadowed the messages broadcasted by this episode, despite the attempts of the SIS Chairman to focus on the details of its responses to the New York Times and the denial of reliance on the conspiracy theory to deal with foreign media. The program’s host, Hamdy Rizk, chose to start questioning the information published by the New York Times in general. He used a very populist way to tell about an article he had previously seen in the newspaper about confrontations in sugar cane fields in the Sinai between the army and the terrorists. “I called my friend Abdul Moneim al-Rifai from Sinai ... Abdel Moneim, do you have sugar cane in Sinai; he said what sugar cane, we do not see it; we only see it when you invite us to Upper Egypt.”

 19.Sada Elbalad channel YouTube site, “Nazra” with Hamdy Rizk The full episode 12/1/2018, 12 January 2018, Last visit: 15 February 2019 <https://bit.ly/2wHeUBV>

Then Rizk indicates that this article, which he claimed to read in the New York Times had parts derived from the battles that took place in Malawi. Hamdy Rizk concludes this story by saying: "Sinai has olives, possibly grapes, possibly figs." Throughout the episode Hamdy Rizk refers to his story about the sugar cane report as a fact, and his guest, SIS Chairman, does not ask the about the validity of what Rizk says. The local media, which supports the current regime, would prefer to present political messages through stories that are not known to be true, but the style of the story is closer to the heart of the viewers.

The presenter then moves to talk about the conspiracy: *"Because the New York Times is not alone, we have the Guardian and we have a lot of newspapers that opened upon us like the doors of hell, and at the end, what is the link between this and that, it is a division of roles, today we are subject to a full game."* Then Hamdy Rizk continues his talk about the conspiracy, saying: *"By the way, this year is the most difficult year, unprecedented, what is happening today takes us back to what happened to the great immortal Gamal Abdel Nasser and the international siege on him; just focus on the similarities and the face of the conspiracy."*

Diaa Rashwan, began talking about preparing for the 2018 presidential election. He pointed out that there is negative coverage in the foreign media regarding the presidential election. Rashwan does not believe in the validity of the work, based on conspiracy theory even if there is a conspiracy. Rashwan discussed the details of the New York Times report on the leaks of Jerusalem, which claims to have instructed the Egyptian media to calm public opinion about the US president's decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Rashwan quickly announced his belief that the Muslim Brotherhood was the source of the New York Times, "Fabrications and nonsense". Elsewhere in the episode, the presenter reasserts the involvement of the New York Times in the Brotherhood scheme.

Despite the apparent attack on foreign media to the extent described as part of the Muslim Brotherhood's plans, Diaa Rashwan said during this episode: "I am not moving with a clear theory of targeting until it is proven that there is targeting; in the sense of legal rule: the accused is innocent until proven guilty, "But, I'm moving from another angle, non-professionalism must be faced by professionalism; if I recognize targeting, I talk about targeting."

Over the following months, the SIS Chairman participated in numerous TV interviews, in which he dealt with his role in countering foreign media's distortion of Egypt's reputation internationally, and presented his responses to what he described as professional mistakes committed by foreign media, while the local media continued the campaign of defamation launched by the SIS against foreign media.

Section III: The SIS practices towards foreign media and Egyptian laws:

The report, in its first and second sections, referred to the practices of the State Information Service towards foreign journalists and foreign media from threats, disabling work permits issuance to official statements and contact with journalists and summoning them to meet with the SIS Chairman. The report attempts to address the legality of these practices, by providing a brief reading of SIS terms of reference in its establishment law, the press and Media regulation law and the Supreme Council for Media Regulation, which is currently in force.

Decree No. 1820 of 1967 promulgated by the President of the Republic ordered the establishment of the State Information Service, which was then followed by the Ministry of National Guidance _ similar to the Ministry of Information. With regard to foreign journalists, the decree addresses that the State Information Service has to provide assistance to foreign journalists, correspondents and businessmen - Residents and Passengers - to find out the facts and trends of the State about internal and external events and issues, in accordance with item (9) of Article (2) of the aforementioned decree.

Item 10 of the same article deals with the implementation by the State Information Service of the laws and regulations relating to the press, the publication of news and statements issued by the State, as well as the dissemination of communications, statements, news, etc., as well as what is entrusted to the Ministry of National Guidance in relation to local press affairs.

This means that when the SIS was established, its legal mandate was to provide assistance to foreign journalists and to disseminate information and data representing the state's positions. Although Item 10 dealt with SIS responsibility for the implementation of laws and regulations relating to the press, it focused on aspects of the availability of information and did not contain any reference to censorship of foreign media. However, the SIS may understand that item 10 allows it to monitor the compliance of foreign journalists with Egyptian laws, but the internal regulations governing the work of the SIS are not published and therefore cannot be ascertained if this item has been interpreted as such.

If we assume that under this clause the SIS has the obligation to monitor the compliance of foreign journalists with the laws of the press, it has the sole authority not to renew the permit granted to the journalist or to withdraw the permit. In any case, the SIS should publish the determinants of refraining from issuing a permit or withdrawing it from a foreign journalist. Interviews with

foreign journalists reveal that there is considerable ambiguity about the rules governing the process of issuing permits to foreign journalists.

The State Information Service (SIS) has been under the Ministry of Information since 1972. Subsequently, it became affiliated to the Presidency of the Republic by Presidential Decree No. 170 of 2012. These amendments to SIS's mandate did not change the terms of reference established by its establishing decree.

In 2016, Law No. 92 of 2016 was issued on the institutional regulation of the press and media. The law limited the issuance of permits to foreign journalists to the Supreme Council for Media Regulation. Item (10) of Article (4) states that the Supreme Council for Media Regulation Permits the representatives of newspapers and news agencies and foreign media to work in the Arab Republic of Egypt and determine the scope of their work in accordance with the rules established by the council and determine the financial equivalent to them not exceeding one hundred thousand pounds annually or equivalent in foreign currency, in the currency determined by the Council. This text has become applicable to foreign media, especially as the Supreme Council for Media Regulation was formed in April 2017, and has been exercising its functions since then.

However, this text has not been enforced. The SIS has been working on the foreign media file without legal backing since the formation of the Supreme Council for Media Regulation in April 2017 until August 2018, when Law No. 180 of 2018 was issued on the press and media regulation and the Supreme Council for Media Regulation. Article (70) of the Law stipulates the powers of the Supreme Council of Media Regulation, including the provisions of item No. (11), whereby the Supreme Council shall receive the notifications of the SIS for the database of foreign correspondents and press and media offices operating in Egypt, coordinating with SIS regarding the rules of operation of these offices and the scope of their work within Egypt.

Most likely, the Egyptian authorities wanted to codify the SIS's interventions in the work of foreign media, by defining its role in the current law. The philosophy of the Press and Media and the Supreme Council for Media Regulation Law is to concentrate the powers of organizing the media under the authority of one independent institution. The granting of these powers to SIS contradicts the philosophy of law and the provisions of the Egyptian Constitution, which states in its article 211:

“The Supreme Council for Media Regulation is an independent entity that has a legal personality, enjoys technical, financial and administrative independence, and has an independent budget. The Council shall be competent to regulate the affairs of radio and

visual media and regulate the printed and digital press, and other media means others. The Council shall bear the responsibility for guaranteeing and protecting the freedom of press and media as stipulated in the Constitution; safeguarding its independence, neutrality, plurality and diversity, preventing monopolistic practices; monitoring the legality of the sources of funding of press and media institutions; and establishing the controls and regulations necessary to ensure the compliance by the press and media outlets with the professional and ethical standards, and national security needs as set out by law. The law shall determine the composition and regulations of the council, and the employment for its staff. The Council shall be consulted on bills and regulations related to its field of operation.”

While SIS is an executive body that follows the Presidency of the Republic, which means it's not independent. The SIS is not responsible for the media regulation. SIS is concerned with the representation of the State's positions and the availability of official information. Thus Practices of SIS against foreign media including censorship, question and call have mostly lacked legal backing.

Since the end of August 2018, there has been a legal provision on SIS responsibility to regulate the work of foreign media, but it remains in contradiction with the provisions of the Egyptian Constitution. It can be said that the Egyptian authorities did not care, if the interventions of SIS in the work of foreign media are under the laws governing the media and the provisions of the Egyptian Constitution or not. This is absent too from any SIS statements, which did not mention its legal authority, when it calls a journalist or invokes coverage and other matters.

Section IV: Effects of the Crackdown on foreign media:

The report focused in its three sections on presenting and analyzing the policy and practices of the SIS regarding foreign media and the extent of its conflict with Egyptian law. In its fourth and final section, the report examines the impact of the Crackdown on foreign media. In other words, how the foreign media has been affected by the Crackdown, based on interviews conducted by the researcher with foreign journalists and Egyptians working for foreign media outlets. This can be addressed through the following points:

- Mechanisms of work within foreign media:

The interviews conducted by the researcher indicate changes in the mechanisms of work within the foreign media outlets. One of these changes is the delay in coverage. For this, Mark says in an interview with the researcher:

“The SIS Chairman speeches and the frequent appearance in the Egyptian media and this propaganda about the work of foreign journalists in Egypt has an indirect impact on our work, there is increasing focus and review of our coverage with regard to subjects that may be sensitive to the Egyptian authorities and this means that the timing of coverage will be slower than previously.”

The Crackdown is likely to raise concerns among foreign media officials. Adel points out that Reuters is withdrawing its report on the presidential election in 2018, to avoid exposing the authors of the report to legal question. In the same period, Al Masry Al Youm faced a fierce crackdown by Egyptian authorities because of its coverage of the state’s involvement in the presidential election, which was the same topic of the withdrawn Reuters report. The Egyptian authorities’ campaign against Al Masry Al Youm then led to a sanction against the newspaper and an investigation with its editor-in-chief, Muhammad Al Sayed Salah, and 8 journalists who wrote the report before the Supreme State Security Prosecution.

Caroline says, *“Prior to these interventions, we were doing our job only without thinking about repercussions or threats, but now we have become more cautious towards the Egyptian authorities’ response to our reports. There is constant concern of the topics that may bring the anger of the Egyptian authorities, and many are reluctant to publish their names on their cover; we feel that we are in constant danger.”*

Henry agrees on avoiding publishing the names of journalists for fear of this campaign against foreign media. He says: *“I have not had internal difficulties in my work because of SIS pressure, only when there are issues that may raise the sensitivity of the Egyptian government, my employer makes the name of the report author anonymous.”*

In the interviews, the journalists reserved providing more details about the internal working mechanism, in particular the fact that some reports have been reviewed by other workers outside the editors’ authority. While Youssef believes that Egyptian authorities can “control the local media with ease, but the foreign media is difficult because there is a strict editorial policy and professional rules and no one can disturb it, so there was a need for a role that collects objections to the content of foreign media reports. The SIS is not ashamed of its ongoing crackdown on foreign media and publishes statements against it, but the SIS will not be able to control the content published by foreign media outlets.” “The maximum escalation they can do is to prevent foreign media outlets from working in Egypt, and this is very crazy and impossible to happen,” Youssef said.

- Access to information:

The Crackdown on foreign media has increased the barriers for journalists to access information. There are fears by state officials from interviewing some foreign media outlets, especially those whose boycott was called for by SIS. The interviewees refused to identify official entities that declined to cooperate with them, as this may lead to the identification of their media outlets.

“Some officials refrain from talking to us and providing us with the necessary information for our work,” Fawzi said in an interview with the researcher. *“Even some people who do not have official status seem to refuse to talk to us because of their fear of upsetting the Egyptian authorities.”*

“The SIS is talking about its assistance to the foreign press, but this is just propaganda. The press center is supposed to contact us with officials, but when we ask the center, we do not receive a response,” Henry said in the interview. “In some press conferences held by official entities, foreign journalists are required to submit their questions to be approved before presenting them at the conference. The SIS or any other official entity does not consider this to be a violation of press freedom”.

- Field reports:

The crackdown on foreign media has strongly influenced the preparation of field reports that require the work of journalists on the street and the questioning of Egyptian citizens. Youssef said *“The campaigns conducted by the SIS against the Foreign Press strongly affect the Egyptian street, Thus the probabilities of harassment and assault on correspondents are increased by citizens who affected by this propaganda against us, I think that any authority’s interest is that the foreign media outlets can work freely and the authority must help them to convey the picture of what is happening, but the Egyptian authorities believe that journalists who working for foreign media are spies and therefore must be prevented from doing their job.”*

“We have to get a permit from the press center with detailed information about the places where we will be reporting, and in practice if security authorities want to prevent us, they will do so in the street while filming, recently, citizens in the street refused to talk to us because we are working in a foreign press.” Henry says. *“For example, in terms of street filming permits, the authorities are called upon to report to other entities not only SIS, and simply to be deprived of filming on the street on the pretext of this regulations.”* Fawzi said.

On the other hand, foreign media outlets have not been able to rely on sources to cover the situation in the Sinai. Henry refers to the statement issued by the SIS in February 2018 to ask foreign media to commit to publishing official information only on the military operation in Sinai. Henry said *“Sometimes it is up to us to abide by Egyptian laws to cover events through official statements only, such as the situation in Sinai, and in practice you cannot go there, interview and visit places. Anyway, after a while we had a problem that we were relying on official information on the operation in Sinai, which does not bear evidence to enable us to verify its validity. And later, we stopped coverage of the military operation in Sinai”*.

“The hostile environment for foreign journalists in Egypt is not only the product of the SIS, but also the Egyptian media and anyone who regards foreign media outlets as “enemies”, just to dare criticize and talk about sensitive issues such as human rights,” Rebecca said in the interview.

- Departure of foreign journalists from Egypt:

The crackdown on foreign media has led to more foreign journalists feeling that conditions in Egypt are not favorable to work freely, in addition to fears of security persecution. In his interview Henry says: “The many obstacles that made by the SIS and other entities forced foreign journalists not to work in Egypt because of the current environment, so that some journalists now prefer to work in Syria or Pakistan.”

“I try to avoid thinking that SIS may comment on my reports, but I cannot ignore the scary possibilities, such as deportation to my country or not being granted my permit,” Henry said. “I also think that security agencies are monitoring us and our interviews with sources.” It seems that the tendency of some foreign journalists to leave Egypt is known among the foreign media workers, where a number of journalists agreed to the increasing number of cases of departure from Egypt, and some go so far as to predict that foreign media outlets may reduce their work in Egypt, Caroline says: “I think the current practices make many journalists planning to leave Egypt, there is concern about the increasing restrictions and also the possibility of being imprisoned, and of course the work of foreign media outlets is affected by these threats, which may lead to a reduction in their work in Egypt.”

“For the future of foreign media in Egypt, I think that all foreign journalists who work freely are no longer able to continue working in Egypt, and there are additionally restrictions on the issuance of permits for foreign correspondents, and this reduces the presence of foreign journalists in Egypt.”, Mark said.

For those who did not face direct intervention by the SIS, Rebecca said in an interview with the researcher: *“Personally, I have not been exposed to what happened to other colleagues, but these statements and warnings issued by SIS make me feel under pressure. I know that SIS has called some colleagues to complain about their work, through the Press Center which is usually the part that is in direct contact with us.”*

- The new legal status of the SIS:

As a result of the Crackdown on foreign media led by the SIS, Egyptian authorities have empowered SIS to regulate the work of the media and foreign correspondents in the Press and Media Regulation and the Supreme Council for Media Regulation Law, which was ratified by President Sisi in August 2018. Thus, SIS has become responsible for organizing the granting of work permits to foreign journalists, and then informs the Supreme Council for Media Regulation. The acquisition of this status by the State Information Service (SIS) is a strengthening of its interference in the work of foreign media.

In this section, the report summarizes the effects of the crackdown on foreign media, including aspects that have been reported about a change in their working mechanisms. The report, through its four sections, reviewed all aspects of the Egyptian authorities' crackdown on foreign media.

Conclusion and recommendations

AFTE tried to obtain as much detail as possible about the crackdown on foreign media during the period in which this report was conducted, a year and a half. Without the approval of a number of journalists for interviews, this report could not have covered the crackdown led by the State Information Service on foreign media. AFTE believes in the priority of representing the voices of the target groups and victims of violations in its reports. It is not enough to monitor or analyze policies and legal developments.

Therefore, AFTE stresses the need for the concerned parties to protect journalists and defend media freedom, to demand that the Egyptian authorities stop the crackdown on foreign media and ensure that foreign journalists and Egyptians working in foreign media are free to work in Egypt. AFTE calls for the following recommendations:

First: Egyptian authorities should stop all censorship forms on foreign media, especially the questioning and summoning of journalists and the foreign media outlets because of the content of their reports.

Secondly, SIS must comply with its legally defined role in regulating the work of foreign media, and stop all threats and interventions in the work of foreign journalists and Egyptians working in foreign media outlets.

Thirdly, Egyptian authorities must immediately stop the campaigns of defamation and incitement against foreign media outlets, led by SIS chairman in local media.

Fourthly, Human rights organizations concerned with media freedom locally and internationally should work to provide a mechanism through which to receive complaints from foreign journalists and Egyptians working for foreign media outlets to support them and strengthen solidarity with them.

Appendix: Official data issued by the State Information Service against foreign media:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1xz3-CG3RljedrSTDR6rBGbc6kqRRs105-5rP8eCaXcs/edit?usp=sharing>