

Egypt's SISI: Military Cooperation with Israel at Unprecedented levels

- Egypt invites Hamas leaders for more truce talks
- Egyptian general apologizes to Israel for stray bullets hitting Nitzana



Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with the Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in New York . (photo credit: AVI OHAYON - GPO) Military cooperation between Egypt and Israel has reached an unprecedented level

in the Sinai Peninsula, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi said in an interview with CBS News which will be broadcast Sunday.

Asked if security cooperation with Israel was the closest ever between two countries which were once enemies, he answered, "That is correct... We have a wide range of cooperation with the Israelis."

Israel shares a 240-km.-long border with the restive Sinai Peninsula, and Cairo and Jerusalem have been reportedly closely cooperating in the fight against an estimated 1,000 ISIS terrorists in the region since Sisi rose to power.

Northern Sinai, a mountainous desert between the Suez Canal and Israel, has been a refuge for Islamist terrorists, with the peninsula's main jihadist group, Ansar Beit al-Maqdis, carrying out several attacks - some deadly - against IDF troops patrolling the border.

Following Sisi's rise to power, the group - which pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and the Islamic State in 2014 - began a wave of deadly attacks against Egyptian security forces in the Sinai.

Sisi began waging military operations against the jihadists, and while the terrorist group has lost much of its strength, it remains active and continues to carry out deadly attacks.

In February 2017, following a massacre of 305 worshipers at al-Rawda mosque in the northern Sinai city of Bir el-Abd, a senior Israeli defense official stated that the “relationship between Israel and Egypt is ongoing. Israel has always been ready to lend a hand and provide assistance to any country in the war against terrorism, in this case and in the future as well.”

According to foreign reports, the militaries of the two countries meet regularly to exchange intelligence in the fight against ISIS, and Cairo has given the green light to Jerusalem to strike the terrorists by air.

In February, *The New York Times* reported that for more than two years Israel had been carrying out a full-blown covert aerial campaign against ISIS terrorists in the Sinai, conducting some 100 airstrikes by unmarked drones, helicopters and jets, with Sisi’s approval.

The report also stated that it was “unclear if any Israeli troops or special forces have set inside Egyptian borders,” as it would increase the risk of exposure for the two sides which have remained, until now, mum on the cooperation.

In Israel, the military censor has restricted reports of the cooperation. Following the interview with CBS’s Scott Pelley, the Egyptian ambassador contacted the network and requested that the interview – which also touched on the jailing of Sisi’s opponents and the massacre of 800 civilians when he was defense minister – not be aired.

CBS has insisted that the interview will nonetheless be broadcast on Sunday at 7 p.m. EST/PST.

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