The View of a Military Soldier

Yara Zalat                                                  Karim Ismail Interview                                                 1/3

Wednesday, February 22, 2012

Persons present: Yara Zalat (me) and Karim Ismail.

Place: Narrator’s home (Maadi, Degla, rd 206 building 33, 01018707111)

The American university in Cairo

Prof. Kim Fox

Date of completion: February 22, 2012

Karim Ismail: Karim, my brother, is born in the eighteenth of August, 1987 in Egypt. He graduated from AUC [American University in Cairo] with degree of construction engineering in 2011. Currently He is a soldier in the military, but will finish his duty very soon, within a period of weeks. He is single.

I found him to be an interesting person to interview because he is currently in the military, in the walk forces. The soldiers in this section in the military are involved in the current political situation because they interact with people by providing security services. Also since Egypt is under military rule, I wanted to get a view point of a current soldier on what is occurring in the political field in Egypt and whether the soldiers support Mosheer Tantawi and the SCAF [Security Council Army forces] are taking the right decision when dealing with the problems of instability in Egypt.

The narrator explained what is happening within the military that most Egyptians do not have knowledge of. He talked about what are the roles of the soldiers and how they feel generally about the events that are happening in Egypt. I asked him about what they can and can’t express in terms of their political views. He gave me a general description on what is expected from a military soldier and the problems they face in terms of the current circumstances.

Glossary:

Muhammad Tantawy

Maadi

SCAF [Security Council of Army Forces]

AUC [American university in Cairo]

Tahrir.
Zalat: I’m about to conduct an interview with a military soldier who is an AUC graduate. Hello, How are you?

Ismail: Hi, Fine.

Zalat: Can you introduce yourself.

Ismail: My name is Karim Ismail.

Zalat: Where do you live?

Ismail: Degla/Maadi

Zalat: How old are you?

Ismail: I’m turning 25 this year inshallah

Zalat: What do you do now?

Ismail: Actually I’m finishing Inshallah my service in military forces at the end of this month

Zalat: Let me begin with asking, what type of service do the military provide in general?

Ismail: they are two divided in two sectors, first is the national service, like the soldiers who serve in gas stations, clubs, hospitals, restaurants, markets, factories and etc…

And the other sector which is the fighting forces; Such as the soldiers who practice for war and its conditions. Such as air forces, air defense, sea and water navy forces, walk forces, armed forces, peace-keeping forces, border and coastal forces, and finally military police.

Zalat: Which of the categories you have just named are the ones who went down during the revolution to protect the people and who still do until now for security and other purposes? Who interact with people in general?

Ismail: Probably most of them are from the walk forces and the armed forces and of course the military police.

Zalat: Is this where you serve specifically?

Ismail: I work in the walk forces sector in Suez in the office of the headquarters of the third army specifically in and the office of the second head officer of the third army; however, I served in the beginning of service year in a war-training area in the third army.

Zalat: Did you personally go down and interact in the revolution and in the events that happened recently?

Ismail: Unfortunately, not.
Zalat: What type of work do you do in the office?

Ismail: I am a part of a military secretariat of the high rank officer.

Zalat: What is the general opinion on Muhammad Tantawy within the military?

Ismail: Many of the soldiers do not care. On the other hand many of the officers do support the Marshal because they think in the past decade he developed the army in terms new-technology weapons, in and outside country businesses, and in huge investment-projects.

Zalat: Are the soldiers in the military allowed to discuss the political situations and share their opinions, or do they have to remain neutral?

Ismail: Soldiers and officers like any other citizens they do talk about politics and what concerns the current situation in Egypt, it’s obviously something that everyone talks about. However they still don’t have the right to talk or share any political opinions or views because they are considered as the center protector and defense for the government and society. Therefore, they can’t be on one side against the other or biased in any of the situations. However some of them they still share in the protests secretly without being known to their higher officials.

Zalat: Do the soldiers tend to speak about politics and say their opinion honestly about Tantawy and SCAF [Security Council of Forces]?

Ismail: Of course and it rises more after any event that happens, such as the tragedy that occurred in the stadium in the past month, and the violence that happened in Tahrir and in front of the head of ministry. These acts or events tend to stir opinion in the military because the soldiers are like any other citizens, so their families live in Cairo and they also live in Cairo. Many of them have friends who were involved in these acts or protests, so they of course share the same opinions of what is expressed in Tahrir.

Zalat: What is your opinion on how the peoples’ view of the military dramatically shifted from before the revolution to after they ruled?

Ismail: Well, before the revolution people thought of the military in a very negative way, that the military forces don’t have a real situation or role in the country. However after the revolution things have changed. Many thought of the military forces as the center protection of the country. After the last events that have negatively affected the society, many of the soldiers and personally I started to think of the military forces or specifically of the head council as very biased to the old system and it’s not really effective in developing a new democratic country.

Zalat: Do you think that the people who are demanding that the military leaves power have the right to do that? Or it’s a better option if they stay until there is official presidential elections, and if they stay, will this have consequences on attaining democracy?
Ismail: its better even though they may think the military forces are very negative to the change that are happening in Egypt now however its better if they leave them until the date they declared until a new democratically elected government to come because it will be more safe.

Zalat: Thank you for your time.

Ismail: Thank you.