

## Egypt's defense minister hangs defiantly on to power

Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi, 76, who called time on Hosni Mubarak, will adopt president's title of supreme commander



Field Marshal Tantawi, head of Egypt's ruling military council, is to stay on as defence minister, the council has announced. Photograph: Khalil Hamra/AFP/Getty Images

Egypt's armed forces chief will keep his post as defence minister in a new cabinet to be formed by president-elect Mohamed Morsi, a member of the military council has said. Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi, 76, who served as defence minister for two decades under Hosni Mubarak, will keep his post after Egypt's first Islamist president takes over, Major-General Mohamed Assar said in a rare appearance on a talk show on privately-owned CBC television on Wednesday night.

"The [new] government will have a defence minister who is head of the supreme council of the armed forces," he said. Asked if this meant Tantawi would keep his defence portfolio, Assar said: "Exactly. What is wrong with that? He is the head of the supreme council of the armed forces, the defence minister and the commander of the armed forces."

Tantawi pushed the 84-year-old Mubarak aside on 11 February last year when it became clear the security forces could not contain street protests against his 30-year rule. The military council took charge, managing a turbulent and sometimes violent transition period, during which Egypt's first free parliamentary and presidential elections have taken place.

Previous presidents, all drawn from the military, have held the title of supreme commander of the armed forces. Yet Assar's assertion that Tantawi would remain in place even before Morsi has been sworn in on Saturday illustrates the limits the military seeks to set on his presidential authority.

There was no official word on how the transition would unfold. Army sources said the handover would be delayed beyond Saturday, without giving a reason. They set no new date. The Muslim Brotherhood wanted the president sworn in by parliament in line with past custom, but an army-backed court dissolved the lower house earlier this month. The generals said the same court should hear Morsi take his oath of office

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