

EGYPT'S MILITARY FORCE ROLE IN POLITICAL REFORM
AFTER 1952 COUP D'ÉTAT

Military organizations are key political and economic actors in the regimes of a variety of countries throughout the *Broader Middle East*. This study will focus on case study of civil-military relations—Egypt, in an effort to understand the likely role that military officers will play in political and economic reform and to draw lessons for the wider Islamic world. Egypt is one important country in the Middle East region, which has a long history experience for military leaders in Arab world. Investigation that related to political reform and transition to democracy in Middle East, Egypt's society is appropriate. Although, we saw the main change in current uprising in Arab countries in Egypt and Tunisia.

Nowadays, scholars of an earlier era were quite interested in the relationship between military establishments and political development in the Middle East. Their work asserted that militaries were progressive forces of modernization and democratization. This was largely the result of modernization theories, which dominated academia between the 1950s and the 1970s. Broadly, this school of thought held that industrialization was the key to the development of modern societies.⁽¹⁾ For analysts such as *Manfred Helper*, *Samuel Huntington*, *Lucien Pie*, and *Edward Shills*, the military was the ideal instrument to direct the process of industrialization because the officers were infused with a sense of mission, organizational capacity, and nationalist sentiment. Industrialization would, in turn, naturally lead to the institutionalization, order, and reform necessary for the development of a modern society. ⁽²⁾ Some writers of this generation protested. For instance, *Samuel Finer*, writing in 1962, was more cautious than his colleagues about the role the military forces could play in these critical areas. Finer cautioned that the military “lacked...title to govern.” ⁽³⁾ Despite Finer's dissent, the work on civil-military relations during this era generally proceeded from the assumption that the “new authoritarians” would relinquish their prestigious positions once national goals were met. Such theoretical questions aside, the practice quickly proved that while military officers in developing countries were often successful in generating economic performance, they often became conservative elements clinging tenaciously to regimes in which they were (and are) the primary beneficiaries. Of course, military officers and their civilian allies do not always pursue policies that result in problematic or undesirable outcomes. Militaries in the developing world have carried out successful programs of national infrastructure development, including road building, electrification, and the development of running water facilities in

rural areas. Though there is substantive importance to such national service projects, they also help to instill in the population normative sentiments concerning the leading role of the military in society. In countries of the Broader Middle East, where militaries have played key roles in political development, officers tend to be separated from society in military-only facilities such as schools, hospitals, clubs, and residential areas.

The military—the ultimate national organization—remains the guardian of Egypt's ideals. If not for the military, civilians who lacked the resources to resist foreign penetration and the will to overcome their own differences would have placed the Egyptian people in jeopardy. These themes are not unique to Egypt, but can be found in the official statements in all military governments in middle east as well. The officer corps' sense of superiority also stems from the fact that military figures not only played key roles in the founding of contemporary Egypt, but also were all "high modernists." High modernism places a premium on the scientific and technical knowledge necessary for modernization. However, it is a worldview that many view as "inherently authoritarian," in that it views only those with this type of specialized skills as having a mandate to exercise political power.(4)

Indeed, the military elite in Egypt regard themselves to be great modernizing forces. Egypt should not be confused with military dictatorship, however. They are better characterized as military-dominated states. In all of these countries, which have similar situation, the military has sought to avoid day to-day governance, believing, quite correctly, that the vicissitudes of politics are likely to undermine the officers' corporate coherence and potentially, their grip on power.

In political reform, the countries under the military government face a considerable challenge. They must either provide incentives for militaries to embrace, or at least countenance, *fundamental* change or craft policies that effectively constrain the officers' ability to oppose liberalization.

Yet, more profound and politically more significant than the actual physical separation between the military and most civilians is the distinctive worldview to which senior military personnel tend to subscribe. Commanders maintain specific ideas about the military's organizational and technological capacities as well as a particular nationalist narrative that, from the perspective of those within the ranks of the officer corps, places the military in a superior position in relation to civilians and their institutions. In fact, nationalism and the military's central place in the nationalist pantheon of Egypt, is a crucial component of the officers' worldview.

The ostensible civilianization of the presidency is a critical component of what can only be considered the democratic façades of the Egyptian state. In many countries the same Pakistan and Syria, officer corps is more politically

active and represents a more coherently defined class than its Egyptian counterpart, in Egypt military officers have overseen the development of political institutions that allow for the appearance of pluralism but also incorporate key mechanisms for their oversight and control. Yet, during periods of crisis, the military elite tend to strip away this façade, revealing themselves as the locus of power and reinforcing the authoritarian core of the political order.

On July 23, 1952 a group of predominantly midlevel ranking Egyptian army officers undertook a coup d'état ending the Monarchy government in Egypt. United in their loathing of the continued British penetration of Egypt, palace corruption and intrigue, and the incompetence and venality of Egyptian politicians, the "Free Officers" sought at first merely to reform Egyptian politics and return a reformed liberal order to civilian politicians. Yet, after only a short time in power, the Free Officers began to view their intervention in a different light.(6) Rather than reform, the commanders undertook a more thoroughgoing reconstitution of the political system, which ultimately was to have little similarity to the order that prevailed on July 22, 1952.(7) In February 1953, *Gamal Abd al-Nasir*, the dominant personality among the leading cadre of Free Officers, declared: "...this aim [changing the government] is a minor objective compared to the wider aims of our revolution. The latter, seeks to change the political system."(8)

Indeed, in their effort to alter Egypt's political system and to begin work toward achieving the six goals of their revolution—1-the eradication of all aspects of imperialism;2- the extinction of feudalism;3- the abolition of monopolies and control of capitalist influence over the system of government;4- the establishment of a strong national army;5- the establishment of social justice;6- and the establishment of a sound democratic society—the officers systematically stripped away remnants of the *ancient regime*. This process began as early as July 26, 1952, when *King Farouk* was forced to flee the country for exile in Italy, and continued with the dissolution of Egypt's parliament and the outlawing of political parties in 1953.(9) During this period, political power was concentrated within a *Revolutionary Command Council (RCC)*, composed of the leading nine to twelve Free Officers, the Egyptian presidency Nasser was the undisputed leader of this body.

It was through the RCC that the Free Officers—and the Egyptian military establishment in general—constructed their new order. For example, in addition to the political decapitation that involved dissolution parliament and political parties, as well as the termination of the Monarchy, the officers undertook a series of economic measures, including agricultural reform and sequestration of private property, which would force changes to the social structures of Egyptian society. Overall, it was from this program, which was intended to bring "greater material well-being, justice, and freedom, within a democratic polity" that the

officers derived revolutionary legitimacy.(10)This provided the justification for military officers to oversee virtually every aspect of the Egypt's political and economic development in the 15 years between the Free Officers' coup and the Six Day War (1967) . Many analysts believe that the stunning defeat of Egypt's armed forces in June 1967—known commonly in Arabic as *al-naksa* (the setback)—is the event that began the de-militarization of Egyptian politics. In the period immediately following the June war, a series of crises buffeted the military establishment that compromised the organization's significant prestige. The first blow came in August 1967, when the commander in chief of the armed forces, Field Marshal **Abdel Hakim 'Amr**, committed suicide. After 'Amr's death a number of his closest associates, including the Minister of War, Colonel **Shams Badran**, and the commander of the air force, **Lieutenant General Sidqi Mahmud**, were placed on trial over the poor performance of the armed forces. This was unprecedented for an organization that in the previous 15 years had been beyond reproach. To add insult to injury, Egypt experienced the first popular anti-government demonstrate- tins of the Free Officer era, ostensibly to protest the lenient sentences meted out to these officers. Egyptian president **Gamal Abd al-Nasir** responded to these challenges with his "March 30 Program," that committed Nasir not only to rebuild the armed forces, but also to rein in the officers. Furthermore, standard accounts of the period indicate that **Anwar as-Sadat's** "*Corrective Revolution*" of May 1971 further compromised the political role of Egypt's military establishment. The Corrective Revolution sought to resolve what **Sadat** perceived to be the shortcomings of the 19 years since the officers took power. A critical component of the new Egyptian president's agenda involved the elimination of a number of powerful and politicized senior military officers with close ties to **Nasir**. The subsequent decline in the number of Cabinet officials with military backgrounds in successive Egyptian governments suggests that, since the early 1970s, Egypt's commanders have been generally content to remain in their barracks.(11) The implications of the events of the late 1960s and early 1970s were indeed important to the future trajectory of the Egyptian political system. The officers did give up their role in the day-to-day governing of the country and as a result there was a associated reduction of officers in successive Egyptian cabinets. Perhaps the most important consequence of the immediate reduction of the prestige of the officer corps was the institutionalization of the Egyptian presidency as the undisputed principal actor in Egyptian politics. In turn, Egypt's officers, with a number of notable exceptions, have sought to maintain a low profile. Yet withdrawal from day-to-day governance and a marked decrease in the number of officers involved in politics and Administration does not necessarily mean that the political influence of the armed forces has been compromised. As Peter D. Feaver has noted, "A

military can never coup [sic] and yet still systematically undermine civilian control.”(12)

Indeed, Egypt’s senior command retains a crucial and influential position in the political system.

While the June war and events immediately thereafter roiled the Egyptian officer corps, the demilitarization of Egypt was not as thoroughgoing as some suggest. First, the exigencies of the Israeli presence on the east bank of the Suez Canal meant that the military remained in a privileged position as Egypt prepared for a decisive battle with Israel. With significant Soviet assistance the armed forces were rebuilt, retrained, and re-equipped while the group of officers that succeeded set about re-establishing the officers’ prestige within Egyptian society. Second, and more important, was that *Nasir’s* pledge for political change expressed in the March 30 Program and *Sadat’s Corrective Revolution*, both undertaken in the name of political reform, nevertheless maintained the institutional reinforcements that preserved the military’s influential position in the political system. The most important of these institutions was, and remains, the Egyptian presidency. Prior to the June war, the Egyptian presidency was already a crucial point in the political order constructed at the command of the Free Officers and the Egyptian military establishment in general. For example, both the 1956 and 1964 constitutions endowed the president with considerable powers. These consisted of the absolutely mundane, such as the ability to conclude international treaties and appoint senior members of the bureaucracy, to more significant prerogatives, such as the ability to veto legislation, dissolve the People’s Assembly, Promulgate ordinances with the force of law, and declare a state of emergency. The latter, in particular, has had a profound effect on the political arena, as Egypt’s presidents have placed the country under a state of emergency almost continuously since the 1960s, granting key powers to target any domestic opposition. Ultimately, the combination of the full weight of presidential powers, interlocking with the two-thirds parliamentary majority that Egypt’s ruling party invariably enjoys, permanently places the balance of power decidedly in favor of the president—who for all of modern Egypt’s history has been a military officer whose position ultimately depends upon the military establishment.

During the early years of the *Sadat* period, when the prestige and influence of the military establishment was at its lowest ebb, the president still found it necessary to cultivate officers in order to oust his rivals both within and outside the armed forces.(13) Moreover, in time, the officers regained an ability to act separately. During the January 1977 *Bread Riots*, for example, Egypt’s commanders agreed to intervene and restore order throughout the country, thereby rescuing *Sadat* from a potentially fatal political crisis. Yet, the officers refused to act until their demand that the president withdraw economic austerity

measures was met. This episode, no doubt, reinforced the populist image of the military establishment, but there was also a measure of self-interest involved as the riots, which swept Egypt's major cities, posed a significant threat to a regime whose primary beneficiaries were military officers. Analysts have often described civil-military relations in Egypt during the Mubarak era as a continual bargain, yet it is something more profound. Mubarak was president of Egypt because he was a military officer. As a result, the military establishment trusts the president as the steward of the state and political development.(14)

Socialized in the same manner as the officers through military education, training, and experiences, Egypt's current head of state maintains a worldview that tracks closely with that of his colleagues both in and out of uniform and he can be expected to pursue policies and initiatives that do not contradict the interests of the senior command.(15)This does not mean, however, that the officers have relinquished their considerable ability to shape policy, as the uneasy relationship throughout the 1980s between Mubarak and then Minister of Defense *Field Marshal Abu Ghazala* attests. Equally important as the formal rules, regulations, and decrees that shape Egypt's political system are informal institutions based on unmodified norms and expectations. In Egypt, the origins of these institutions lie in the precedents set at the time of the Free Officers coup, which placed the military establishment in an exalted political and social position. Despite the attenuation of the military's prestige after June 1967 and the alteration of the overt role of the officer corps, the nexus between the presidency and Egypt's commanders indicates that the informal institutions, which support the power of the military establishment, endure.

Consider, for example, the much-discussed issue of presidential succession. Egypt's constitutions all specify in detail the procedures for the selection of a new president in the event of retirement, resignation, incapacity, or death of the incumbent.(16) In practice, Egypt's heads of state—thus far, all military officers— have either been selected through, or relied upon the decisive influence of, the officer corps .When Anwar *Sadat* chose Air Force *General Mohamed Hosni Mubarak* to be his vice president in 1976, this was widely regarded as both Sadat's effort to further undermine his opponents among the cadre of officers who took part in the 1952 coup and an acknowledgement that the "October Generation" would become politically influential. Sadat's assassination in October 1981 brought this influence into sharp relief. Although constitutionally the speaker of the people's assembly, rather than the vice president, is the next in line to the presidency, there was never any question that Mubarak would succeed Sadat. This is not to suggest that a civilian could not become the Egyptian head of state, but that support within the military high command is an essential requirement for the position. The informal institutional power of Egypt's military establishment is also reflected in the pattern of

relations between the presidency, its military-affiliated personnel, and the parliament. For example, the staff of the presidency has been composed almost exclusively of currently serving or retired military officers, who have a significant role in the administration of the Egyptian state. Accordingly, these officers are routinely deployed throughout the ministries and agencies to impress upon the enormous Egyptian bureaucracy the priorities of the leadership.⁽¹⁷⁾ Furthermore, while the executive's power in areas related to armament allocation and procurement—particularly from foreign suppliers—is legally subject to parliamentary review, this has never occurred. Indeed, despite the wide ranging powers of oversight with which the People's Assembly is formally vested, there is no actual oversight. Egypt's minister of defense is formally required to make an annual presentation to the Assembly's standing committee on defense, national security, and mobilization and is obliged to answer parliamentarians' questions, but these queries are, in general, not forthcoming. As one military officer explains, "The minister of defense may brief the parliament, but there is no real dialogue, the members are not culturally inclined to question the military."⁽¹⁸⁾

As this officer suggests, the historically high regard with which the military has been held in Egyptian society has placed the military above criticism. The differences between what Egypt's formal institutions require and actual practice is not limited to defense-related or even broader political issues. The significant economic activities of the Egyptian armed forces have also been made possible through informal institutions. Egypt features a thoroughly institutionalized system that ensures both the privileges of Egypt's "military political complex" and political continuity. This is based on an institutional framework that places the officers in a highly influential position through the military's crucial and intimate association with the presidency. This link, at the fulcrum of Egypt's political order, is the primary means through which the Egyptian officer corps can, if necessary, influence political events. It is this mutually reinforcing relationship with the president, combined with the array of formal and informal institutions that ensures stability, and has allowed the officers to remove themselves from the day-to-day governance of Egypt. In the end, this arrangement does not promise well for meaningful political change. It is unlikely that in the current political environment, in which the language of reform has popular local support as well as American and European encouragement, that Egypt's military political leadership will openly oppose reform. Yet, the officers and their civilian allies have an surviving interest in maintaining the prevailing political order. As a result, while Egyptian authorities may pay lip service to political change, the type of institutional alterations that would usher in a more liberal—and possibly democratic—political order are unlikely.

Given the important changes in Egypt over the last 50 years it may seem somewhat radical to suggest that the forms of the Free Officers regime remain largely in place. Since the late 1960s, Egypt has, indeed, undergone a series of political reforms. For example, after the June war, *Nasir* outlined a ten-point program for a new constitution that underscored the importance of such basic individual rights as freedom of expression, thought, and opinion, as well as freedom of the press. At the same time, the Egyptian leader proposed the establishment of a High Constitutional Court vested with the power of judicial review. Since this court's establishment, its justices have fiercely protected its constitutionally-mandated independence. Indeed, these jurists have never shied away from striking down laws—even those emerging from the presidency—that they deemed to be unconstitutional. In the mid-1970s, Sadat effectively brought an end to the era of the single, mass-based vanguard party when he first called for the establishment of *manabir*, or platforms—representing the left, right, and center—within the Arab Socialist Union and shortly thereafter abolished the Union in favor of multi-party politics. This was followed by a series of constitutional amendments in May of 1980 that ostensibly deepened Egypt's democratic practices. The amendments stressed the importance of democracy and social justice, including constitutional recognition of the multi-partyism that Egypt had embarked upon in 1976. The amended constitution also established a new parliamentary chamber—the *Majlis ash-Shura* (Consultative Council). Consisting of 264 members, two-thirds of whom are elected by direct and secret elections, with the remaining third subject to presidential appointment, the *Shura* Council was established to provide greater consultation on state policy. Another reform struck "*hard labor*" from the penal code. Finally, the members of the People's Assembly voted to abolish the *State Security Courts* established under law 105 of 1980.

By 2004, Egyptian officials could boast that Egyptians now vote in regularly scheduled elections in which a number of parties compete, the press is relatively freer, and there is a general relaxation of police powers. Yet, beneath the surface, the initiatives that the Egyptian government has undertaken ostensibly to promote liberalization are not what they appear.

The reforms of July 2003 should give policymakers, analysts, and other observers pause about the future of political liberalization in Egypt.

"*Reform*" does not always signify meaningful political change—i.e. changes to the institutions that maintain prevailing power relations. In Egypt, the political-military leadership has overseen mere institutional revisions rather than what reform is often conceptualized to signify. These changes are intended to confer a certain amount of legitimacy on the regime while simultaneously maintaining the largely authoritarian status quo. This is nothing new, as the

regime has multiple times before sought to satisfy demands for political change from below, but has never before and is not likely inclined to permit change that would alter the non-democratic nature of the Egyptian regime. Simply, Egypt's senior military and political leaders have an interest in both a facade of democracy and in the maintenance of key institutions of political control. The pretenses of democracy serve to insulate officers from politics, while ensuring that political development remains within a relatively narrow band. This system, in their worldview, preserves both stability and the primacy of Egypt's current elite.

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- 10 -See for example Mark N. Cooper, *The Transformation of Egypt* (London: Crook Helm, 1982); "The Demilitarization of the Egyptian Cabinet," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 14 (1982): 203-225; Raymond A. Hinnebusch, Jr., *Egyptian Politics Under Sadat: The Post-populist*
- 11- Peter D. Feaver, "The Civil-Military Problematic: Huntington, Janowitz, and the Question of Civil Control," *Armed Forces and Society* 23, no. 2 (Winter 1996): 154.
- 12 -Sadat was more a professional revolutionary than a career military man, but his status as a Free Officer earned him a certain amount of respect given Egypt's national myths surrounding the role of the military.
- 13- Steven A. Cook, *The Unspoken Power: Civil-Military Relations And The Prospects For Reform*, Brookings center, p9.
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- 15- Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt, Part 5, Chapter 1, Articles 76, 78, 82-84.
- 16- Steven A. Cook, Interview with a retired Egyptian military officer 8 October 1999 (Cairo): p10.

- 17- Mona Macramé – Ebhed, "Egypt's 1995 Elections: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back?" *Middle East Policy* 4, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam Middle East Papers, 1995); no. 3 (March 1996): 119–136
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Եգիպտոսի զինված ուժերի դերը 1952թ. պետական եղաշրջումից հետո

Թեև քաղաքական փոփոխությունը ընդհանրապես ներքին քաղաքական գործընթաց է, այնուամենայնիվ, կան մի շարք միջոցառումներ, որոնցով ազատ աշխարհը կարող է օգնել ավելի նպաստալի պայմաններ ստեղծել զարգացող քաղաքական առաջընթացի համար Եգիպտոսում և այլ ռազմական կառավարությունում, հատկապես Մերձավոր Արևելքի տարածաշրջանում, ինչպես նաև իսլամական աշխարհի այլ երկրներում, որտեղ միլիտարիզմը խաղացել է քաղաքական առանցքային դերեր:

Դեպքերի ուսումնասիրությունները Եգիպտոսում ցույց է տալիս, թե ինչպես են ռազմական ղեկավարները շահույթ ստանում և փորձում պահպանել մեծապես ավտորիտար քաղաքական ոեժիմը իրենց համապատասխան երկրում: Քանի դեռ քաղաքական բարեփոխումը հնարավոր է, Եգիպտոսի սպաները հավանաբար կդիմակայեն ցանկացած էական բարեփոխում ձեռնարկելու ջանքերին, որոնք կարող են փոխել գերակա ուժերի հարաբերությունները և քաղաքական կառույցները: Հրամանատարները, ինչպես արել են և անցյալում, ձգտում են ծայրահեղ քաղաքական փոփոխության, որը ավելի մեծ լեգիտիմություն է փստահելության կհաղորդի իրենց ոեժիմներին: