

Coup-proofing strategies in counter-revolutionary regimes:

Egypt since 2013^{*}

By

Abdel-Fattah Mady, Ph.D.

Professor of Political Science

Chair of Unit of State & Political Systems Studies & Editor-in-Chief, *Hikama*

Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies

Office: +974 40354148, Cell: +974 33682720, US: +1 7202094188

Emails: abdefattah.mady@dohainstitute.org

Abdefattah.mady@gmail.com

[Academia](#)

Website: www.dohainstitute.org

Webpage: www.abdefattahmady.net

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Abstract

Most of the existing literature on coup-proofing in Arab countries focused on the measures implemented during periods of stability, overlooking external issues like foreign aid and military-to-military relationships. This paper examines the strategies used by the Egyptian counter-revolutionary regime to maintain control over the armed forces and analyzes their impact on power dynamics and decision-making. The president employs a three-track strategy, with the military playing a pivotal role. He aims to retain power and establish absolute personalist rule by preventing military coups, avoiding popular uprisings, and obstructing external support for regime change.

Three major conclusions: (1) While coup-proofing measures offer benefits in terms of ensuring the military's allegiance, the concessions granted to the military in return reinforced its autonomy. This autonomy may lead to military defection if circumstances change, such as if the privileges granted to the army are reduced or if public outrage against the regime's economic policies escalates and the regime fails to respond. In addition, the regime has no alternative but to continue to rely on the military and retired officers because it lacks a robust and cohesive party organization. (2) The regime believes effective opposition mobilization will lead to street protests, causing the military to become the primary threat as it will not defend the regime against the people. Thus, the regime's iron fist remains strong and will endure as long as the opposition remains divided. (3) Egypt's foreign policy aims to align its survival with regional and global powers' interests, with the military playing a crucial role. Tactics include compromising on economic reforms, offering lucrative military contracts to foreign corporations, and connecting the debt to other foreign and regional policies that affect Egypt.

1. Introduction

Contemporary states establish armies primarily for protection against external threats, but these armies also carry out political tasks beyond their primary role, leading to the issue of "the very institution created to protect the polity is given sufficient power to become a threat to the polity,"¹ or "protection by the military and protection from the military." In democracies, civilian control over the armed forces has been established,² but in authoritarian regimes, this issue is more complex, involving many dimensions.³ To protect themselves against challenge and forestall rebellions and revolutions, ruling elites (whether civilian or military) need strong military and security institutions. They also want to ensure that these institutions cannot overthrow them while maintaining the effectiveness of their armies against external threats. Additionally, they aim to have control over the armed forces without harming their budgets and privileges. There is also an international dimension that guarantees regime support, driven by the interests of major powers in authoritarian states whose armies depend on foreign aid and have close ties with the armies of donor states.⁴

Most of the existing scholarship on coup-proofing in Arab countries has primarily examined the measures implemented during periods of stability, as these countries had not seen widespread uprisings prior to 2011. Furthermore, external issues such as foreign aid and military-to-military relationships were to some extent overlooked. This paper examines the strategies implemented by the counter-revolutionary regime in Egypt since the 2013 coup. It discusses how the regime maintains control over the armed forces to ensure its survival, tactics to prevent military coups, and how these measures impact power dynamics and decision-making processes within the regime. It also briefly points out the similarities and differences between the current regime and prior Egyptian presidents' approaches to regulating their relationship with the military.

The paper argues that the president employs a three-track strategy to uphold and reinforce his regime's survival, with the military playing a pivotal role in almost every aspect of this strategy. Following Bueno de Mesquita et al., political survival is the ability of the regime to remain in office without being removed through electoral defeats, impeachment, or coups.⁵ As will be seen, the regime is constantly threatened with removal, so the core of its survival strategy is to ensure that the regime's survival aligns with the interests of critical stakeholders both within and outside Egypt and to make the necessary concessions and exchanges to achieve this alignment. There exists a form of reciprocal exchange wherein the regime offers policy content in return for political support from specific stakeholders, who comprise a relatively narrow portion of the population and international donors and lenders. The regime encountered a challenging economic situation that was aggravated by its economic policies. To keep its economy afloat and prevent external

¹ Peter D Feaver, "Civil-military relations," *Annual Review of Political Science* 2, no. 1 (1999): 211-241.

² Richard H. Kohn, "How democracies control the military," *Journal of Democracy* 8, no. 4 (1997): 140-153.

³ See: Lisa A. Brooks, "Integrating the civil-military relations subfield," *Annual Review of Political Science* 22 (2019): 379-398.

⁴ See: Abel Escribà-Folch and Joseph George Wright, *Foreign pressure and the politics of autocratic survival* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁵ Bruce Bueno De Mesquita, Alastair Smith, Randolph M. Siverson, and James D. Morrow, *The logic of political survival* (MIT press, 2005).

support for regime change, the regime was compelled to promote its borrowing policy and make numerous concessions to international sponsors. The army is also involved in this.

The current regime, which incorporates features from earlier Egyptian regimes, is in a state of transition due to uncertain local and international circumstances. The regime's approach is defined by an opportunistic strategy aiming at the survival and consolidation of its pillars, relying on both internal and external allies. During its early years, the regime's actions were reminiscent of a police state, as it relied on methods such as brutality, surveillance, censorship, arbitrary detention, torture, or other forms of abuse to maintain control. Later, it appears that the president and the military engage in a power struggle, and they eventually reach a mutually beneficial deal based on a win-win solution. In his pursuit to establish a personalist regime, the president is attempting to please and subjugate the military in every way possible, while the army continues to support the president as long as he maintains military privileges. The president, who came to power via a bloody military coup, is aware that the military poses the greatest threat to his rule. In response, he resorted to a carrot-and-stick policy to strip the military of its ability to carry out a coup against him and secure his grip on power.⁶

This paper begins by examining how literature has addressed the central issues posed earlier. It proceeds to discuss the method used before delving into a comprehensive analysis of the Egyptian case. The paper concludes by summarizing the findings and drawing conclusions.

2. Coup-proofing literature

Authoritarian regimes have utilized a variety of strategies to suppress political mobilization that poses a threat to their authority.⁷ However, the primary threat to these regimes comes from within, particularly through coups.⁸ Between 1945 and 2002, 205 dictators were ousted through coups.⁹ The early coup-proofing studies focused on civilian control over the military by maximizing military professionalism (Huntington¹⁰ and Janowitz¹¹). Later, studies focused on internal and external measures to secure military support and prevent coups.

The internal measures include monopolizing information, disrupting communication channels between army units, using intelligence agencies to sow distrust among officers and units,¹² implementing co-optation policies, and securing loyalty through appointing officials based on ethnic, religious, or familial ties. This last approach is often more effective than the policy of

⁶ Many Arab rulers who came to power through military coups have succeeded in establishing an absolute personal regime. Examples include Jamal Abdul Nasser, Anwar al-Sadat, Hosni Mubarak, Houari Boumediene, Hafez al-Assad, Muammar Gaddafi, Omar al-Bashir, and Ali Abdullah Saleh.

⁷ Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁸ Henk E. Goemans, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and Giacomo Chiozza, "Introducing Archigos: A Dataset of Political Leaders," *Journal of Peace Research* 46.2 (2009): 269-283, and Milan W. Svolik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 10.

⁹ Svolik, 4.

¹⁰ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Harvard University Press, 1957).

¹¹ Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (Simon and Schuster, 1960).

¹² Jesse D. Savage and Jonathan Caverley, "When Human Capital Threatens the Capitol: Foreign Aid in the Form of Military Training and Coups," *Journal of Peace Research* 54 (4) 2017: 542-57.

purging disloyal military officers, which can lead to instability and increased coup risk.¹³ Military indoctrination such as that using military academies and other educational resources, can also prevent coups without harming military unity or efficiency, as seen in Germany during Hitler's regime.¹⁴ In China and North Vietnam, such a policy increased civilian control by the ruling party.¹⁵

One of the most common strategies is to create divisions within the military or establish parallel armed forces (counterbalancing) that prioritize loyalty to the president and compete against each other for resources and influence.¹⁶ This strategy is more common in centralized regimes with weak institutions, weak elite interactions, and weak popular support.¹⁷ Yet, it can have unintended consequences that may undermine political stability. Mubarak's defense-interior rivalry¹⁸ and reliance on the Ministry of Interior¹⁹ irritated the army, leading to its abandonment during the January revolution.²⁰

Arab presidents utilize many tactics to avert coups: appointing leaders based on family; ethnic, or religious loyalty; establishing alternative armed forces; creating multiple internal security structures; and enhancing military expertise.²¹ Others added providing adequate funding for security systems.²² The efficacy of these measures has varied. Quinlivan argued that rulers were more likely to use these strategies as the risk of a coup increased.²³ Sudduth criticized this hypothesis, arguing that rulers were less inclined to use them as the danger of a coup rose. This is because such measures could provoke the military to stage a coup, as seen in Pakistan in 1999, Algeria in 1963, and Niger in 1974.²⁴ Others suggest that measures can be effective as long as there are no structural factors that enhance the military's power and autonomy, which could be internal, such as popular uprisings, increasing internal oppression, or civil wars, or external, such as regional competition over disputed territories, the absence of conflicts with an external adversary,²⁵ or strong external pressure from countries or influential international organizations.

¹³ Adrian Florea, "Spatial Rivalry and Coups Against Dictators," *Security Studies*, 27:1, 2018, 1-26.

¹⁴ Dan Reiter, "Avoiding the Coup-Proofing Dilemma: Consolidating Political Control While Maximizing Military Power," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 16.3 (2020): 312-331

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Abel Escribà-Folch, Tobias Böhmelt, and Ulrich Pilster, "Authoritarian Regimes and Civil-Military Relations: Explaining Counterbalancing in Autocracies," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 37, no. 5 (2020): 559-579.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Joshua Stacher, "Egypt Without Mubarak," *Middle East Report* 7 (2011).

¹⁹ Hazem Kandil, *Soldiers, Spies, and Statesmen: Egypt's Road to Revolt* (Verso Books, 2014).

²⁰ Non-state, military actors pose a significant threat. In June 2023, Yevgeny Prigozhin, the commander of the Wagner Group, led an insurrection. Putin, with the assistance of the Belarusian president, was able to thwart the plot.

²¹ James T. Quinlivan, "Coup-Proofing: Its Practice and Consequences in the Middle East," *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (Fall, 1999), p. 133.

²² Michael Makara, "Coup-Proofing, Military Defection, and the Arab Spring," *Democracy and Security*, 9:4, (2013) 334-3593

²³ Quinlivan, p.

²⁴ Jun Koga Sudduth, "Coup Risk, Coup-Proofing and Leader Survival," *Journal of Peace Research* 54, no. 1 (2017): 3-15.

²⁵ One of the main reasons for the 1952 coup in Egypt was the defeat in Palestine in 1948. In Algeria, the Sand War with Morocco and the emergence of Moroccan military superiority was one of the reasons for Houari Boumediene's coup against Ahmed Ben Bella in 1965, just a few years after independence in 1962. See: Adrian Florea, "Spatial Rivalry and Coups Against Dictators," *Security Studies* 27, no. 1 (2018): 1-26.

Albrecht's analysis of coups in the Middle East and North Africa from 1950 to 2013 found that anti-coup measures partially succeeded in reducing coups and attempts. However, the risk of a coup persists as long as authoritarian rule endures, and incentives and motives remain.²⁶ The results depend on factors such as accessible resources, centralized military leadership, and appropriate timing.

In the context of the Middle East, the concept of professionalism within the armed services does not typically encompass civilian supervision. Kamrava argued that modernizing equipment and reforming recruitment, promotion, and training systems did not lead to depoliticization or increased obedience to civilian rule.²⁷ Instead, it strengthened the military's internal cohesion, consolidated its identity, and made political intervention more feasible. Middle Eastern armies have become less ideological and more conservative, prioritizing the preservation of the existing political order.²⁸ Most of such research focused on coup-proofing under stable conditions, as Arab regimes had no widespread uprisings before 2011. It also disregarded external factors like foreign aid and military-to-military relations.

Regarding external measures, there are several elements in the coup-proofing literature. Studies show that American training programs, such as the U.S. International Military Education and Training Program (IMET), can lead to coups due to the quality of instruction provided to officers.²⁹ The likelihood of a coup increases with training, as it increases officers' independence from the regime and reduces their motivation to use repression.³⁰ This partially explains the events surrounding Mubarak in 2011, when the military disassociated from him and abandoned him. Another study found that the likelihood of military coup increases with the increasing number of officers trained by IMET and the U.S. Counterterrorism Fellowship Program, and if the regime does not satisfy the expanding demands of the military.³¹ This scenario, however, did not occur in Egypt prior to or after 2013 because the regime met the military's demands with perks and salaries. Nevertheless, American training programs are significant in the case of Egypt, as we will explain later.

International peacekeeping operations can have divergent effects on civil-military relations too. Some argue it strengthens military organizations and promotes a professional ethos,³² while others suggest it leads to military reforms by improving training and focusing on external threats.³³ Peacekeeping forces can improve civil-military relations by influencing soldiers' socialization,

²⁶ Holger Albrecht, "The Myth of Coup-Proofing: Risk and Instances of Military Coups D'état in The Middle East and North Africa, 1950–2013," *Armed Forces & Society* 41, no. 4 (2015): 659–687.

²⁷ Mehran Kamrava, "Military Professionalization and Civil-Military Relations in The Middle East," *Political Science Quarterly* 115, no. 1 (2000): 67–92.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Savage and Caverley.

Since 2008, American mentees have staged at least ten coups in West Africa, including those in Burkina Faso (2014, 2015, 2022), Gambia (2014), Guinea (2021), Mali (2012, 2020, 2021), and Mauritania (2008). See: Nick Turse, "Soldiers mutiny in U.S.-allied Niger," *The Intercept*, July 26, 2023. Available at: <https://theintercept.com/2023/07/26/niger-coup-us-military/> (Accessed: 27 July 2023).

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Holger Albrecht, "Diversionary Peace: International Peacekeeping and Domestic Civil-Military Relations," *International Peacekeeping* 27, no. 4 (2020): 586–616.

³³ Arturo C. Sotomayor, *The Myth of The Democratic Peacekeeper: Civil-Military Relations and The United Nations* (JHU Press, 2014).

leading to long-term professionalism and defense tasks. However, if tasks involve state-building, participation may have negative consequences, as forces may focus on internal threats.³⁴ This is particularly relevant in Egypt, where African countries are the primary destination for peacekeeping forces due to weak state institutions and multiple internal threats. Despite being the seventh-largest global contributor, Egypt has not altered its military doctrine to prioritize external threats.³⁵

External support is an additional factor that involves various dimensions. Considering the rationale of political survival, it is reasonable to anticipate that recipient regimes will employ aid, whether directly or indirectly, to ensure their own political survival, with a focus on appeasing their alienated groups.³⁶ The effectiveness of foreign aid in challenging the dynamics of political survival in autocratic regimes and promoting democratization is a subject of debate, primarily due to the fungibility of aid resources. In the Middle East, external geopolitical interference made post-colonial political regimes more susceptible to authoritarianism.³⁷ This is because receiving aid from outside encourages reliance on repressive institutions and allows regimes to reward their patrons rather than forge coalitions or achieve agreements with internal social forces. The possibility of a coup rises as a result of this. Rulers who lack external support are compelled to negotiate with their rivals.³⁸

In addition, foreign aid might exacerbate terrorism in authoritarian and personalist regimes. According to a recent UN study, “it should also be self-evident that effective counter-terrorism is not being realized by the widespread, systemic targeting of civil society. Precisely the opposite is true. The kinds of violations revealed by this Study demonstrate that security is not the goal of abusive State practice but rather its opposite, namely the continuance of instability, insecurity, and cultures of impunity and violence.”³⁹ Boutton found in “personalist regimes, US aid significantly increases levels of terrorist activity,” as “rents from foreign aid encourage these regimes to become counterterrorism ‘racketeers,’ offering their services in exchange for a fee. But rather than fixing the problem, they perpetuate it, as their survival is conditional upon a perpetual security threat.”⁴⁰ Others refer to democracy aid as a counterterrorism instrument, arguing that governance and civil society aid are more effective than economic aid in reducing domestic terrorism, “but this effect is only present if the recipient country is not experiencing a civil conflict.”⁴¹

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Cairo peacekeeping, “Fact Sheet: Peacekeeping,” the Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding, Cairo, <https://shorturl.at/buvAV>

³⁶ Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair Smith, “Foreign Aid and Policy Concessions,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 51, no. 2 (2007): 251–84.

³⁷ Sean L. Yom, *From Resilience to Revolution: How Foreign Interventions Destabilize the Middle East* (Columbia University Press, 2015), pp. 2–3.

³⁸ Daniel Byman and Jennifer Lind, “Pyongyang’s survival strategy: tools of authoritarian control in North Korea,” *International Security* 35, no. 1 (2010): 44–74.

³⁹ *Global Study on The Impact of Counter-Terrorism on Civil Society & Civic Space* (United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, 2023). <https://shorturl.at/BDNTW>

⁴⁰ Andrew Boutton, “Of terrorism and revenue: Why foreign aid exacerbates terrorism in personalist regimes,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 36, no. 4 (2019): 359–384.

⁴¹ Burcu Savun and Daniel C. Tirone, “Foreign aid as a counterterrorism tool: more liberty, less terror?” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 62, no. 8 (2018): 1607–1635.

U.S. law grants a legal character to the allocation of foreign aid for security purposes, including "helping friendly countries maintain internal security" and "enhancing the independence of recipient countries from international communism."⁴² This often incentivizes countries to align with American interests. Since 1946, the U.S. has supplied approximately \$87 billion in bilateral foreign aid to Egypt, with military and economic assistance increasing substantially after 1979.⁴³ Jason Brownlee studied U.S. Egyptian relations since the 1970s, concluding that these relations have hampered or hindered Egypt's move to democracy.⁴⁴

The literature just reviewed leads to three basic findings. First, regimes do not have unrestricted flexibility in choosing the tools they use to maintain power. Privileges and bribes, for instance, require financial resources, and indoctrination may be unfeasible in certain countries. Therefore, regimes typically use the tools that are available to them based on the necessities of their society.⁴⁵ Second, the efficacy of coup-proofing measures varies depending on the specific context in which they are implemented. Poorly designed or implemented coup-proofing measures can cause political instability. For example, favoring specific ethnic groups may potentially result in civil conflict. Finally, insufficient attention is given to the relationship between internal and external factors in civil-military relations in authoritarian regimes. Armed forces in such regimes preserve the status quo in collaboration with ruling elites and allied foreign countries.⁴⁶

However, it is imperative to examine the strategies employed to prevent coups in nations facing internal turmoil and depending on support from external powers. Egypt is an exemplary case study because it faces challenges from two directions: another coup and a popular uprising.

3. How does this paper address the case of Egypt?

This paper employs a theoretical approach that integrates the analysis of actors' discourse, positions, choices, and actions, along with studying the impact of structural determinants and factors on these positions and decisions. Civil-military relations are conceptualized as power dynamics between two components: the first is the political regime, represented by Egypt's head of state, who comes from the military establishment but in practice represents a civilian institution and wields control over other civilian institutions, reinforced through multiple alliances. The second is the military in a broader sense, encompassing not only that institution, but also security and intelligence agencies. The analysis considers the military's level of autonomy or subservience to the president and various internal and external contexts such as economic orientation, interests defended by each component and its alliances, institutional legacies, personal factors, regional and international influence, among other factors.

⁴² The Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, <https://bit.ly/3YbgSFI>

⁴³ Federation of American Scientists, *Egypt: Background and U.S. Relations*, Updated May 2, 2023 (Congressional Research Service, 2023), p. 2. Available at: bit.ly/3rIZ8Gw (Accessed: 25 July 2023).

⁴⁴ Jason Brownlee, *Democracy Prevention: The Politics of the US-Egyptian Alliance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁴⁵ Jesse Dillon Savage and Jonathan D. Caverley, "When Human Capital Threatens the Capitol: Foreign Aid in The Form of Military Training and Coups," *Journal of Peace Research* 54, no. 4 (2017): 542-557.

⁴⁶ Danish Khan and Aasim Sajjad Akhtar, "Transforming a Praetorian Polity: The Political Economy of Democratization in Pakistan," *Canadian Journal of Development Studies*, 43, no. 3 (2022): 320-338.

The initial premise of this paper is that the current regime in Egypt is transitioning towards a personalist regime, akin to other Arab countries that gained power through military coups. As the current regime gains power through a military coup and has a military that ruled the country after a democratic popular uprising, it cannot ignore the military as a crucial actor, the use of coups to gain power, or the revolution as a means to reject the regime's policies. Additionally, the regime encountered a difficult economic situation, which was exacerbated by the unfavorable effects of its economic policies, which prioritized the construction of bridges, presidential palaces, and arms agreements.⁴⁷

To maintain and strengthen its power, the regime utilizes a complex strategy, with the military playing a critical role in nearly all aspects of this strategy. The core of the strategy is to ensure that the survival of the regime aligns with the interests of key actors within and outside the country and to offer the necessary concessions and exchanges to achieve this alignment. This strategy is based on the current regime's conception that Mubarak's policies resulted in a popular revolution, leading to the military abandoning the regime and its allies being inclined to support a change in the regime, even if only temporarily. Thus, the regime's strategy seeks to prevent (1) coups, (2) popular uprisings, and (3) external support for regime change.⁴⁸

4. Regime's survival strategy

The regime's complex strategy consists of three components, each with several dimensions related to the armed forces: coup-proofing measures; proactive measures to prevent revolution and the diffusion effect; and foreign policy to ensure the regime's continued external support (Table 1). Before delving into these measures, I will briefly discuss the legacy of the Egyptian military intervention in politics.⁴⁹

4.1. The military legacy

The army was Egypt's most powerful institution from 1952, when it toppled the royal family, until its defeat in 1967. Sadat continued Nasser's policy of shrinking the number of military personnel in civilian administrations after the defeat, frequently changing the top military leadership to counter any threat from the army. He focused on making the army more professional and achieved strong military performance in the 1973 war. In contrast, Mubarak relied on expanding the army's privileges and benefits, allowing it to manage its economic and military affairs independently. The army's economic activities maintained the living standards of its members and prevented any

⁴⁷ See

⁴⁸ This strategy appears to concentrate on the short and medium term, while for the long term, it seeks to build a support base among the youth and the bureaucracy in state-run enterprises. These individuals are likely to be the main source of recruitment for backing the regime over the long term, and they may eventually be organized as a dominant ruling party that enables complete control over the military, society, and state, similar to other autocratic regimes. See

⁴⁹ There are extensive details on this subject. See: Ahmed Abdallah (Editor), *Army and Democracy of Egypt* (Cairo: Sinai Publishing, 1990); Robert Springborg, *Mubarak's Egypt: Fragmentation of The Political Order* (Routledge, 1988 & 2019) chapter 4 Robert Springborg, *Egypt* (John Wiley & Sons, 2017), and Robert Springborg, "the President and the Field Marshal: Civil-Military Relations in Egypt Today," *MERIP Middle East Report*, No. 147, Egypt's Critical Moment (Jul. - Aug., 1987), Azmi Bishara, *Army and Politics, Problems of Arab Theory and Models* (Doha/Beirut: Arab Center for Research and Policy Study, 2017), chapter III; Anwar Abdel-Malik, *Egyptian Society and Army: 1952-1967* (Cairo: Al-Mahrassah Centre, 1998).

opposition within its ranks. U.S. military aid provided resources to meet the army's needs despite the decline in military spending during Sadat's era.⁵⁰

Since the peace treaty with Israel in the late Sadat era, the regime's biggest threat has been internal opposition, particularly from Islamic groups. To combat this, Mubarak relied on the Central Security Forces (CSF), which Sadat established after the 1977 uprising, and strengthened intelligence and security agencies like the State Security Investigations Service (SSI) and General Intelligence Service (GIS). He employed tens of thousands of security personnel and informants, resulting in the Ministry of Interior employing around 1.4 million people by early 2011.⁵¹ Indeed, Mubarak bolstered the security agencies so that he would not have to rely solely on the military.⁵² This led to a power struggle between security and military forces competing for the regime's favor.⁵³ Despite being called upon twice during the Sadat and Mubarak eras to address local threats (in 1986 and the 1990s), the army returned to its barracks after fulfilling its duty of protecting the regime.

During the Mubarak era, the army was not the only dominant force, as other actors like the bureaucracy, small groups of businessmen and wealthy individuals, urban commercial businessmen, labor unions, professional associations, and intellectuals from various trends emerged. Additionally, a group of civilian and professional experts worked alongside the president in the Council of Ministers on foreign policy, the economy, and finance.⁵⁴ Even before the January revolution, there were no indications that Mubarak's successor would be a military leader, and the country was focused on the issue of his son's succession.

However, during the January 2011 revolution, the situation changed. When the internal security forces were unable to contain the protesters, the army intervened for the third time to confront an existential threat to the regime.⁵⁵ This time, the army did not return to its barracks but took over the authority of the country during the transitional phase, which led to a military coup in 2013, a year after the first democratically elected president was elected.

Table 1: The regime's Survival Strategy

President's Powers ➡	Military Prerogatives ←
1- Coups-proofing	
• The periodic replacement of military officials	<i>Organization:</i>

⁵⁰ Yezid Sayigh, *Owners of the Republic: An Anatomy of Egypt's Military Economy* (Carnegie Middle East Center, 2019), p. 20.

⁵¹ Michael Makara, "Coups-Proofing, Military Defection, and The Arab Spring," *Democracy and Security* 9, no. 4 (2013): 334-359.

⁵² Stephen H. Gotowicki and H. Stephen, "The role of the Egyptian military in domestic society," *National Defense University* (1997). Available at: (<https://rb.gv/44uvi>), Lisa Anderson, "Bread, Dignity and Social Justice: Populism in The Arab World," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 44, no. 4 (2018): 478-490.

⁵³ Muhammad Abdul Aziz and Youssef Hussein, "The President, the Son, and the Military: The Question of Succession in Egypt," *The Arab Studies Journal* 9.2/1 (2001): 73-88.

⁵⁴ Nathan J. Brown, Shima Hatab and Amr Adly, *Lumbering State, Restless Society: Egypt in The Modern Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021).

⁵⁵ Stephen H. Gotowicki, and H. Stephen.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harsh measures against significant military adversaries • Prohibiting former service members from standing for office without SCAF approval • Counterbalance: the establishment of "the Rapid Intervention Forces" • The authority to create new military forces or modify existing ones • Taking control of intelligence agencies and using them to monitor other security and military agencies • The establishment of the Egyptian Military Academy to serve as the umbrella organization for all of Egypt's military academies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safeguarding the constitution, democracy, the state's civil character, and individuals' rights • The financial independence of the military • No mechanisms for overseeing military performance • Safeguarding leaders from any legal action taken against them • Military responsibilities have been expanded to include non-military, internal security issues <p><i>Privileges:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Periodic pay raises • Expanding the economic privileges of the military • Monthly rewards and numerous commemorative medals across the various branches of the army <p><i>Politicization:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thousands of retired personnel occupy Key administrative, executive and local positions • Bachelor's degrees in political, economic, administrative, and engineering sciences to be awarded to all graduates of military colleges
2- Preventing popular uprising	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The use of the military to crush opposition • The politicization and use of intelligence agencies to suppress opposition • The use of military tribunals for the trial of civilians • The head of the military judiciary was appointed as the deputy head of the Constitutional Court • The narrative of the regime, in which the military and security agencies play major roles
3- Impeding external support for regime change	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large-scale arms transactions benefit military suppliers and nations that support the regime in addition to satisfying the military. • Egypt has benefited from the U.S. training program as well as int'l peacekeeping programs, but there has been no significant pressure to promote human rights or establish civilian control over the military • The regime uses the war on terror to achieve numerous aims, including strengthening its ties with the West and justifying its suppression policies.

4.2. Coup-proofing measures

The regime adopts the same anti-coup measures as its predecessors while also introducing new ones. These measurements pertain to three dimensions: the organization, privileges, and politicization of the military.

Sisi is aware of the long-term dangers of comprehensive purging, which causes animosity and potential opposition bloc formation due to fear of purging targets. Therefore, a variety of changes have been made to the **military structure** in order to gradually strengthen Sisi's hold on power

and eliminate the possibility of a defection. To begin with, Sisi maintained the financial independence of the military institution. The 2014 Constitution prohibits transparent discussion of the military budget, and there are no mechanisms for overseeing military performance.

Sisi also replaces military officials on a periodic basis by reassigning some to civilian positions and installing others as military advisors. Under the guise of injecting new blood into the armed forces, a law amendment cut military leaders' terms from four to two years, unless the president decides to make them stay longer.⁵⁶ Except for Ahmed Zaki, who became Minister of Defense in 2018, all members of the military council were excluded. Furthermore, Sisi's policy involves placing family members in key posts, with a son in the General Intelligence Service and another in the Administrative Control Authority. In 2016, Sisi appointed his eldest brother as the director of the Egyptian Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing Combatting Unit with broad authority to investigate terrorists, including the bank accounts of individuals suspected of money laundering or supporting terrorism. In 2022, he ratified a legislative amendment, weeks before the end of his brother's term, that would enable him to remain indefinitely in charge of the Unit.⁵⁷

In several situations, Sisi took harsh actions against his military opponents, including imprisoning Sami Anan, Ahmed Qonsowa, and numerous other officers, and placing Ahmed Shafiq under home arrest. Anan, Qonsowa and Shafiq were on the verge of announcing their plans to run for president in 2018. To avoid such problems in the future, a law amendment was made in 2021 that prohibits former military personnel from running for office without the consent of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), which is headed by Sisi himself. In addition, there have been claims that scores of officers who attempted a coup in 2015 were arrested, with some of them killed in December of the same year⁵⁸.

Sisi appears to be cautiously contemplating the measure of Counterbalancing as well. He established "the Rapid Intervention Forces" in March 2014, an airborne force consisting of military police, mechanized infantry, defense, armor, and artillery. The forces are used to defend the regime, secure elections, protect important facilities, and fight terrorism. They are outfitted with cutting-edge weapons and equipment, including fighter planes and special troops.⁵⁹ In a law amendment in 2021, the president was granted the authority to create new military forces or modify existing ones, subject to the endorsement of SCAF.⁶⁰

It may take some time to fully grasp the motivations behind some of the other steps currently underway. For instance, Sisi established the Egyptian Military Academy to serve as the umbrella organization for all of Egypt's military academies. In addition, a new Ministry of Defense headquarters referred to as the "Strategic State Command Center" or "The Octagon" is being

⁵⁶ Rana Mamdouh and Sarah Saifuddin, "Sisi ratifies amendments that reduce the length of the Chief of Staff and branch leaders in their positions to two years instead of four..," *Mada Masr*, (In Arabic) July 17, 2021. <https://shorturl.at/ktHKN>

⁵⁷ See: <https://shorturl.at/kmFHM> & <https://shorturl.at/amK08>

⁵⁸ "Egypt's SCAF and the Curious Case Against Qonsowa," *Carnegie Endowment*, Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/75353> (Accessed: 30 May 2023).

⁵⁹ There is hardly much information available regarding Egypt's Rapid Support Forces. All sources are newspapers. See: <https://shorturl.at/IRX26> , <https://shorturl.at/tKZ14> & <https://shorturl.at/muCFI>

⁶⁰ Rana Mamdouh and Sarah Saifuddin.

constructed in the New Administrative Capital. The military ministry's stance in the Octagon remains unknown, yet Sisi noted that the inauguration of a “New Administrative Capital” would represent the “birth of a new republic”⁶¹. The Octagon will serve as the national government's nerve center, and it will include a number of institutions designed to increase the president's authority over the country.⁶²

In terms of military privileges, Sisi continued and even reinforced the policy of awarding concessions to the military, which had been in place since the 1980s. The regime provides a significant number of benefits and privileges to a group of high-ranking officers. Members of the armed forces have been eligible for periodic pay raises as well as improvements to retirement, insurance, and pension regulations.⁶³ Sisi was also granted the authority to determine a monthly reward for those who hold specified ranks and medals in the law or to increase their monthly reward (law amendments 2021). However, given the deterioration of the economy, it is unclear how content and loyal middle-ranking officers are with the regime.

Expanding the privileges and economic interests of the military enterprises is a key component of the policy of appeasement. After 2013, the government entrusted significant projects to the Engineering Authority of the Armed Forces and other military-affiliated entities, including the new capital, the construction of hospitals, roads, housing, schools, the improvement of service complexes, wheat silos, traffic signaling systems, and the national circus.⁶⁴ The restoration of the Jewish temple and the construction of mosques have also been included in these projects. According to the spokesperson for the Armed Forces, these initiatives involve 2,300 projects and the employment of 5 million civilians.⁶⁵ The military enterprises oversee these projects rather than managing them directly. Sisi justifies this expansion by arguing that the armed forces can deliver fast and effective results, are not motivated by self-interest, and have access to substantial physical and human resources.⁶⁶ These companies operate outside of state regulations and are granted exemptions from taxes and fees. They operate without financial or parliamentary oversight, creating an environment that is susceptible to profiteering and corruption.

The expansion of the army's role in the state and economy is displacing the private sector and frightening away foreign investors. Even people who have always supported Sisi have their doubts now that companies must deal with or even compete with the military, which controls much of Egypt's land, can use conscript labor, doesn't have to pay income or real estate taxes, and only has to answer to Sisi, the commander-in-chief. According to Egyptian billionaire, Naguib Sawiris, the

⁶¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dJSoGJMvF4>

⁶² Among these institutions are a center for coordinating state defense operations, a unified strategic data center that contains all state institutions' data, a control center for the closed strategic network, a center for managing and operating state facilities, a control center for the state-level communication network, a center for controlling emergency and field safety services, a weather forecasting center, and a number of warehouses that secure the state's needs for strategic goods. See: <https://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/2529263.aspx>

⁶³ Alexandra Kuimova, “Understanding Egyptian military expenditure,” *SIPRI Background Paper*. October 2020. Available at: <https://shorturl.at/eDJX3> (Accessed: 28 July 2023).

⁶⁴ Sayigh, Owners of the republic.

⁶⁵ "Video: Egyptian Army: We work in 2,300 projects and will not respond to every rumor, (In Arabic) *Sputnik*, September 3, 2019, <https://shorturl.at/npuL3>

⁶⁶ Staff Reports, “Under Sisi, Firms Owned by Egypt’s Military Have Flourished,” *Reuters*, 16 May 2018, Available at: <https://shorturl.at/rtKT0>

involvement of army enterprises in business generates unfair competition and an uneven playing field.⁶⁷ His brother, Samih Sawiris, held off on new investments in Egypt owing to the country's exchange rate volatility.⁶⁸ Ten years after Sisi's ascension to power, however, there is mounting concern that the military's robust economic expansion will prove irreversible.⁶⁹

A law titled "*Regarding the Treatment of Certain Senior Leaders of the Armed Forces*"⁷⁰ was enacted in 2018 for certain generals who have held positions of authority. These individuals are handpicked by the president, and the law allows the president to summon them by name "to serve the armed forces for life." The stated purpose of the law is to honor these individuals, akin to how Sadat honored the leaders of the October War, by preserving their privileges and safeguarding them from any legal action taken against them in Egypt without the consent of SCAF. The law grants these leaders the same diplomatic immunity afforded to diplomats while traveling overseas.⁷¹ Regardless of the seemingly odd title of the law, it is undoubtedly intended to appease those who collaborated with the regime and prevent any animosity from arising against Sisi from those who were left out.

Efforts to appease the military also include the creation of numerous commemorative medals across the various branches of the armed forces, which are frequently accompanied by a monetary reward. Other privileges pertain to the appointment of military advisors in each governorate, educating civilians at the military academies.⁷²

The military has been heavily politicized under Sisi. First, the 2014 Constitution does not prohibit the use of military tribunals for the trial of civilians. This measure has typically been used to target political opponents since Mubarak. As discussed in Section 4.3, politicization has involved the use of the military to crush opposition.

The 2019 constitutional amendments⁷³ assigned the army, for the first time in Egypt, the responsibility of safeguarding the constitution, democracy, the state's civil character, and individuals' rights and freedoms. The amendments also expanded the president's powers, allowing him to seek re-election in 2024 and extending the presidential term from four to six years.⁷⁴ The

⁶⁷ "Egypt tycoon 'Sawiris' complains of State & Army involvement in business," *Middle East Observer*, November 22, 2021. Available at: <https://shorturl.at/irAPR> (Accessed: 25 July 2023).

⁶⁸ "Egypt's business tycoon 'Samih Sawiris' suspends investments in homeland, eyes KSA," *Middle East Observer*, May 3, 2023. Available at: <https://shorturl.at/mELV8> (Accessed: 25 July 2023).

⁶⁹ The business community was pleased that Sisi got rid of the Muslim Brotherhood government. But Sisi never returned the favor of the business community's warm reception. Businesspeople say that Sisi told them to give the government £100 billion because they made money from Mubarak's rule. See: Andrew England, "A New Capital in the Egyptian Desert: Sisi's Military Model for The Economy," *Financial Times*," Available at: <https://shorturl.at/kwCK6> (Accessed: 03 June 2023).

⁷⁰ Law 161 of 2018: "On the Treatment of Certain Senior Commanders of the Armed Forces", Official Gazette, (In Arabic), No. 29 bis (e) of 25 July 2018, p. 9-10.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Nasser High Military Academy, Courses, Academy Website: <https://shorturl.at/eoIWZ> and <https://rb.gy/fst19>

⁷³ "TIMEP brief: 2019 constitutional amendments," *The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy*, April 17, 2019. Available at: <https://shorturl.at/hkmt4> (Accessed: 31 May 2023).

⁷⁴ This appears to be a beneficial exchange between the president and the army, similar to what Sadat did in the 1980 constitutional amendment in which he allowed for the possibility of a presidential term extension in exchange for other concessions, such as the addition of the second article regarding Sharia as Egypt's primary source of legislation.

president aims to maintain his hold on power while increasing the military's involvement in politics. The military's guardianship clearly indicates that the president wants the army to protect him and is afraid of a coup, while the military institution has allowed the president to remain in power without compromising its own status and privileges.

SCAF's responsibilities have been expanded to include non-military internal issues and any other topics deemed appropriate by the Minister of Defense. The regulation governing the council (Law 20 of 2014)⁷⁵ stipulates that it should collaborate and coordinate with the National Security Council to identify “internal hostilities” connected to the armed forces' role in this regard, as well as any other subjects presented to the council by the defense minister.⁷⁶

Moreover, the iron regime's grip on political parties, along with Sisi's distrust of citizens, drove him to rely on the army and retirees. Key administrative and executive positions have been increasingly filled by retired military and security officers. Hundreds of retired officers are appointed as heads or members of boards of directors and general managers in public-sector companies and economic institutions in the public and private sectors.⁷⁷ Additionally, thousands of retired personnel occupy executive positions in appointed local government bodies, provinces, and advisory bodies in ministries.⁷⁸

In a move that could be seen as preparing military officers for political sphere, all graduates of military colleges must now have bachelor's degrees in subjects such as political, economic, administrative, and engineering sciences from civilian universities.⁷⁹

Broadly speaking, although coup-proofing measures have advantages in terms of securing the military's loyalty, but concessions made to the military in return have strengthened its autonomy. This could lead to a coup if the military perceives a threat to its status and privileges or if Sisi has failed miserably in managing the country and economy. Furthermore, the growth of the military economy runs counter to the regime's commitments to its regional and international allies. The terms set by the World Bank and IMF to continue providing support to Egypt during its severe financial and economic crisis conflict with the unique situation of military companies with respect to transparency, governance, and tax exemptions, as we will elaborate further in the following section. In other words, even though the military advantages appeared to exceed the president's accumulated powers over the past decade, the future of the relationship between the president and the military depends on factors such as the domestic economy and the stances of regional and international allies.

⁷⁵ E. Goldberg, “Egypt’s New Political System Of One: Its President,” *The Washington Post*, 15 August 2018. Available at: <https://shorturl.at/qFOT6> (Accessed: 31 May 2023).

⁷⁶ Article 4/19: See: “Establishment of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (2021)”, legal publications (*Manshurat Qanoniya*). Available at: <https://shorturl.at/uOY36> (Accessed: 31 May 2023).

⁷⁷ Sayigh, *Owners of the republic*.

⁷⁸ Yezid Sayigh, “Dismantling the Officers’ Republic,” *Carnegie Middle East Center*, February 21, 2022, Available at: <https://t.ly/JQaQ7> (Accessed: 31 May 2023).

⁷⁹ “Control the joints of the state or raise the efficiency of officers? What does it mean to award degrees to graduates of military colleges in Egypt?” July 22, 2022, Arabic Post (*Arabi Post*). Available at: <https://shorturl.at/eowMQ> (Accessed: 05 July 2023).

4.3. Proactive measures to prevent revolution and the diffusion effect

To prevent revolution and the spread of protest, the regime adopted many measures. The first is a policy of social engineering that employs discriminatory economic measures for the benefit of a select group of wealthy individuals and loyal groups. The regime seeks to align itself with the wealthy by offering them security in exchange for contributions to state private funds, while instilling in them the fear that any move toward democracy will result in the redistribution of their wealth. The regime partially alleviates the burdens on the poor and marginalized by providing them with housing through social care program⁸⁰ as a preemptive measure against the possibility of a revolution by the impoverished.

As part of these measures, the military establishment has been brought in to suppress opposition on a wider scale than in 2011 and 2012, with the justification that it has a sacred duty to protect the nation and maintain army unity.⁸¹ In 2021, *Human Rights Watch* noted that the Egyptian military's continued destruction of homes and forced evictions of people during the fighting in North Sinai province are violations of international humanitarian law, or the laws of war, and probably amount to war crimes.⁸² This amounts to the military institution's political involvement in the conflict.

The National Security Agency (NSA) (*Qeta' El Amn El Watani*) and other intelligence agencies were given more authority to suppress opposition through violence, infiltration, intimidation, and the suppression of coordination between political parties and unions, thus preventing social mobilization on the streets. The regime achieved this by gradually taking control of the General Intelligence Service (GIS) (*Gihaz El Mukhabarat El 'Amma*) and using it to monitor other security and military agencies to prevent any defection to the opposition. Additionally, it increased the role of the military intelligence agency, which Sisi was in charge of before the January revolution. The politicization of GIS began during the reign of Hussein Tantawi and continued after the coup. In 2012, Tantawi issued a decision that included GIS within the National Defense Council, and the agency has been part of SCAF since 2014.⁸³ In recent years, presidential decrees have been issued to remove hundreds of agency leaders by transferring them to positions in different ministries or retiring them.⁸⁴ Since Abbas Kamel's appointment as director of GIS, the apparent conflict between GIS and military intelligence agencies has disappeared.

Sisi implemented a policy of widespread arrests and unfair trials for detainees, necessitating the creation of new laws and the amendment of existing ones. The laws covered various aspects, such

⁸⁰ "Solidarity and Dignity Project," *the official website of the Ministry of Social Solidarity*, <https://shorturl.at/ksFQW>

⁸¹ Amr Hamzawy, "Conspiracy Theories and Populist Narratives: On the Ruling Techniques of Egyptian Generals," *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 44 (4), (2018) 491–504. <https://t.ly/AmNbZ>

⁸² "Egypt: Massive Sinai demolitions likely war crimes (2021)" *Human Rights Watch*. Available at: <https://t.ly/NfJfB> (Accessed: 05 July 2023).

⁸³ "Formation of the National Defence Council (2019), Legal publications, (*Manshurat Qanoniya*). (In Arabic). Available at: <https://t.ly/vDTWn>

⁸⁴ "Sisi sends 11 intelligence officers into early retirement," *Middle East Monitor*, June 19, 2015. Available at: <https://shorturl.at/bijfF> (Accessed: 20 July 2023).

as prohibiting demonstrations, cybercrimes, and pretrial detention, among others. Furthermore, the laws institutionalized the state of emergency in terrorism-related laws, granting members of the armed forces judicial control over civil cases and intelligence agencies control over political parties, elections, and government bodies. This resulted in the erosion of the already limited independence of the judiciary and regulatory bodies, with the head of the military judiciary even being appointed as the deputy head of the Constitutional Court. The regime also tightened its grip on civil society, unions, student activities, non-governmental and charitable work, the press, universities, and research centers.

Indeed, the measures cementing the military's exceptional position in the constitution, economy, and politics have transformed it into a political actor in the conflict resulting from the 2013 coup, with significant financial interests that it seeks to defend against any democratic change that may threaten them.

These measures would not have been successful without the regime's narrative, which is the story that rationalizes the defense minister's rise to the presidency, defends his actions to the public and supporters at home and abroad, and gives the regime control over the public sphere and both public and private media sources. Although this is thoroughly explored in other papers, I just give it a cursory treatment here in order to highlight the centrality of the military to this narrative.

First, the promotion of a personality cult: the main message is that only Sisi can save Egypt and bring security and peace. Sisi claims that he has a comprehensive understanding of the complex and deteriorating Egyptian situation and the appropriate solutions. In his speeches, he frequently alludes to his military background, and his adherents view him as the savior and deliverer.⁸⁵ Therefore, the narrative justifies the concentration of power in the president's hands due to his understanding of Egypt's problems, ability to address them, and vision for a "new republic."⁸⁶ It also justifies the leader as a crucial component in the global battle against terrorism, with the "world" requesting his advice.⁸⁷

The second component of the regime's narrative is the fear of an adversary who poses an existential threat to the nation and the entire globe. Sisi refers to this group as "the proponents of evil," initially including the Muslim Brotherhood and expanding to include other Islamist movements and political opponents. The regime links its internal political opponents to the global "war on terror," exploiting this issue to its fullest potential in its security, financial, and political foreign relations, going beyond what Mubarak did. According to this understanding, changing the regime poses an internal threat to Egypt, as "terrorists" would transform it into a different destination or lead it towards the situation in Iraq and Syria, with repercussions for the cohesion of the army, the security

⁸⁵ Examples of Sisi's video are available at YouTube: (In Arabic).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=htAZadDuZbw>

<https://arabic.cnn.com/miscellaneous/article/2023/05/06/sisi-pic-quraan-verse-social-reaction>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HRn-Ry34l-U>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5nitY4-un3E>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1LFp5sbHq8>

⁸⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1LFp5sbHq8>

See:

⁸⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LExnXGt9JYI>

of citizens, the stability of society, and the interests of businesspeople. The replacement of the current regime with "terrorist Islamists" would imperil Israel, the civilized world, and the principles of freedom.⁸⁸

The third part of the regime's narrative refers to the "sanctification" of the "state" and patriotism," according to an interpretation that has nothing to do with notions of the modern state. Sisi stated that he has spent the past 50 years studying the meaning of the state, and there will be an academy where people can learn what the state is.⁸⁹ According to Sisi, the role of the state is to grant the military and security agencies significant roles while also emphasizing the centralization of power in the hands of the president, the monopolization of power in controlling societal institutions, the promotion of a single viewpoint, the use of oppression against any forces that challenge the legitimacy of the regime, and so on. Sisi defines patriotism as a willingness to assist the government and its institutions, including the military and police, in their efforts to keep the country safe and secure. The regime creates the perception that the army backs it, weakening opposition and turning people into a conservative force that supports the regime. Indeed, personalist and totalitarian governments have most of these characteristics.

The fourth component is that the regime uses softer methods, like religion, media, and TV episodes, to spread its narrative in ways that have never been done before. Sisi uses religion to get what he wants and to make his ideas and deeds seem "holy".⁹⁰ Ironically, this approach came about after Egypt's first freely elected president, Mohamed Morsi, was thrown out of office on the main charge that he used religion for political gain. Companies run by intelligence and security agencies and led by retired generals have seized control of all public and private media outlets and a significant number of entertainment production firms. Songs, TV shows, and movies, as well as other forms of art, help the regime show how it sees the state and how it wants to run society, which justifies its harsh policies. Furthermore, security services are in a competition to get perks and gain the president's favor. As explained earlier, this competition itself is a safeguard against a coup.

Finally, the regime has taken on a propagandist or doctrinal mission since 2013, including the instruction of young adults aged 20 to 35. Candidates for administrative posts in Egypt's bureaucracy, such as diplomatic attachés and officials in the ministries of finance, education, and transportation, are required to finish a training program at the Egyptian Military Academy. The selection of participants in many training programs is also based on a personal interview with a committee of military and national security experts. The programs include physical training as well as classes on national security, Egyptian state protection, patriotism, discipline, and time management. The security aspect predominates over this propaganda function, as seminar and training courses include topics such as "facing rumors and their impact on national security" and

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⁸⁹ "Sisi's speech during the opening of Zohr in Port Said," <https://almanassa.com/stories/2775> (In Arabic). (Accessed: 03 June 2023).

⁹⁰ <https://urlis.net/9efv8b5x> (Accessed: 03 June 2023).

"strategy and national security." Sisi, together with a group of generals, has been leading one of the training sessions.⁹¹

One important thing that makes it different from both totalitarian regimes and Egypt in the 1960s is that the process of political indoctrination or brainwashing doesn't depend on a single organization. Instead, the task is distributed among several government, military, and civil society organizations, but the military/security actor remains the primary one in this process, including the Egyptian Military Academy, the Nasser Military Academy for Higher Studies, and the National Defense College. Other organizations, such as the regime-controlled National Training Academy, came into being after 2013.

The regime's narrative serves a purpose similar to that of an ideology in totalitarian regimes. Despite not being presented in a single document, it has developed into a political dogma with characteristics that gradually become apparent, and Sisi continues to use its components to legitimize his policies, promote himself as the rescuer, and justify the army's receipt of numerous privileges.

In sum, over the last decade, the regime has managed to control public outrage by leveraging its control over security agencies and maintaining its relationship with the military. This has prevented the formation of a unified opposition and any significant popular mobilization against the regime. However, with the economic situation in decline and the refutation of the regime's narrative among the people, it is uncertain whether the regime can continue to maintain this level of control, especially as the 2024 presidential election approaches. Despite all of Sisi's economic failures, he may continue in office if he is able to secure the backing of the military for a third term in power through flawed electoral processes, as he successfully did during his initial two tenures. Another possibility is that the military would propose a new general for presidential elections, or, as in Algeria, a civilian who can be trusted with army privileges. The latter scenario is feasible if it wins international and regional support. There is a third possibility: the military could seize power directly based on Article 200 of the Constitution, arguing that its actions are required to defend the country from the chaos that a severe economic catastrophe could cause. This requires that intelligence agencies pave the way for this scenario by exacerbating the repercussions of society's economic crisis while also securing the consent of regional and international partners.

As we'll see in the next section, regional and international support has been crucial to the success of this approach. The regime's foreign policy ensures its regional and international backers will benefit from its survival.

4.4. Measures to ensure continued external support

Regarding the external support it receives, the regime sees two big threats: the halt of financial inflows through borrowing and investment and the backing for change in Egypt, either through

⁹¹ Al-Masry Al-Youm newspaper, February 27, 2023. <https://urlis.net/iuvv78q5>

democratic elections or backing a new general. To address these threats, the regime's foreign policy focuses on aligning its survival with the interests of regional and global powers, with the military playing a pivotal role in this policy.

First, despite financial and economic troubles and living in peace with Israel, Egypt has become one of the world's major importers of guns (with imports growing by 136% during 2016–2021 compared to 2011–2015).⁹² For the sake of regime survival, increasing military armament has two goals. Massive arms deals benefit military manufacturers and countries that support Sisi, such as deals with Germany,⁹³ Italy,⁹⁴ Russia, and other countries. These armament agreements have been struck notwithstanding the opposition's and human rights defenders' concerns about severe human rights violations in Egypt since 2013. Furthermore, the armament policy is viewed as a tactic to appease the military and its reputation in society. However, it is unclear if these amendments are accompanied by significant reforms to the systems for recruitment, training, administration, monitoring, and accountability.

Second, as noted earlier, Egypt's foreign military training programs and participation in international peacekeeping forces did not result in a shift towards a military doctrine that prioritized external threats or improved the army's professionalism. Instead, they strengthened relations with the U.S. military and contributed to increasing income and the state treasury, as well as improving the country's international reputation as a contributor to global peace-building efforts.

Third, Egypt has benefited from the U.S. training program, including Sisi himself, but there has been no significant pressure to promote human rights or establish civilian control over the military. Some studies suggest that coup plotters who overthrow “democratically elected leaders are less likely to hold elections” unless they receive U.S. military aid.⁹⁵ This may partly explain why the regime sought to hold elections after 2013. The goal was to keep the country's legitimacy in the eyes of other countries and international organizations. I disagree that post-Cold War coups will be similar to the 1974 Portuguese coup, which embraced democracy in response to intense international pressure.⁹⁶ Protests by international organizations against coups are not always effective in putting pressure on the coup plotters, as some assume.⁹⁷ Indeed, some major international organizations have expressed opposing positions. Unlike the African Union, Egypt has not faced substantial pressure from Western nations or other international organizations.

⁹² “International Arms Transfers Level off After Years of Sharp Growth; Middle Eastern Arms Imports Grow Most,” SIPRI, 15 March 2021. Available at: <https://shorturl.at/aeqsF>

⁹³ Deutsche Welle, “German Weapons Exports Hit Record with Bumper Egypt Sales,” – DW – 01/18/2022, dw.com. Available at: <https://urlis.net/9h865632> (Accessed: 05 July 2023).

⁹⁴ “Italian Arms Exports: Almost 4 Billion Authorized in 2020, Egypt The Leading Buyer,” *Italian Network for Peace and Disarmament*, 2021. Available at: <https://urlis.net/v3xcdarp> (Accessed: 05 July 2023).

⁹⁵ Sharan Grewal and Yasser Kureshi, “How to Sell a Coup: Elections as Coup Legitimation,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 63, no. 4 (2019): 1001-1031.

⁹⁶ Nikolay Marinov and Hein Goemans, “Coups and Democracy,” *British Journal of Political Science* 44, no. 4 (2014): 799-825.

⁹⁷ Clayton Thyne, Jonathan Powell, Sarah Parrott and Emily VanMeter, “Even Generals Need Friends: How Domestic and International Reactions to Coups Influence Regime Survival,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 62, no. 7 (2018): 1406-1432.

Fourth, the regime exploits the war on terrorism to achieve multiple goals for its survival, including strengthening its alliance with the United States and other countries. It also uses the fear of terrorism to justify its policy of suppression and empower its security and intelligence agencies. The war on terrorism has enabled the regime to gain control over almost the entire North Sinai region, forcibly displacing numerous residents and constructing new infrastructure. Current literature suggests that authoritarian regimes prioritize aid to consolidate their rule, as is the case in Egypt today, where a ruler who relies on a small group's support to remain in power uses foreign aid to reinforce these narrow alliances rather than seeking legitimacy from the broader population.⁹⁸ The regime's objectives are in line with Western interests, as the West also politically exploits the war on terrorism to maintain its dominance and achieve strategic interests, often at the expense of democracy and human rights.⁹⁹

Fifth, the regime under Sisi has employed a borrowing policy to maintain its grip on power since 2013, resulting in a significant increase in external debt (more than tripling from \$43 billion in June 2013 to over \$157 billion in March 2022¹⁰⁰). Ishac Diwan, an economist and former senior World Bank official, said the loans were used by the IMF to prop up the Sisi government politically and block any reforms that Egypt desperately needed.¹⁰¹

Sisi and a small group of technocrats developed this borrowing policy with no input from parliament. Stephen Roll argues¹⁰² that Egypt's borrowing policy has enabled the regime to generate short-term revenue without the need to impose new taxes and risk upsetting its allies domestically, while also facing various financial challenges.

The borrowing policy has employed a variety of tactics, including making some concessions in economic reform, awarding numerous lucrative contracts to foreign companies, and linking the debt to other foreign and regional policies relevant to Egypt. In 2016, the regime agreed to an IMF deal worth \$12 billion in exchange for implementing economic reforms that brought about macroeconomic stability, increased the central bank's reserves, and reduced the budget deficit.¹⁰³ However, crucial reforms such as increasing tax revenue from the wealthy were neglected, and the private sector remained weak, raising significant doubts about corruption control.

⁹⁸ Bruce Bueno De Mesquita, Alastair Smith, Randolph M. Siverson and James D. Morrow, *The Logic of Political Survival* (MIT press, 2005).

⁹⁹ Jack Donnelly and Daniel J. Whelan, *International Human Rights* (Routledge, 2020) and Thomas Carothers, "Promoting Democracy and Fighting Terror," *Foreign Affairs*, 82 (2003): 84.

¹⁰⁰ "Arab Republic of Egypt: Request For Extended Arrangement Under The Extended Fund Facility," *Press Release; and staff report*, IMF. 10 January 2023. Available at: <https://shorturl.at/nyAM7>

¹⁰¹ "How IMF Loans Keep Sisi Afloat as Egypt Sinks Deeper into Debt," *Middle East Eye*, 28 January 2023. <https://urlis.net/u80cmnka>

¹⁰² Stephan Roll, "Loans for The President, External Debt and Power Consolidation in Egypt," *German Institute for International and Security Affairs*, SWP Research Paper 12, December 2022, Berlin. Available at: <https://shorturl.at/itvS2>

¹⁰³ "IMF Executive Board Approves US\$12 Billion Extended Arrangement Under the Extended Fund Facility for Egypt," *International Monetary Fund*, 11 November 2016, IMF. Available at: <https://shorturl.at/bijoO>

Roll's study reveals that positive evaluations from the IMF have enabled further loans and restored the trust of foreign banks and investors. Thus, the regime has persuaded Europe to resume its aid by awarding large-scale contracts to European companies for infrastructure projects and arms purchases, financed through loans from foreign banks.¹⁰⁴

The debt has not been allocated towards establishing a productive foundation, as only a small portion was utilized to bolster the central bank's reserves, while the bulk was appropriated for financing government expenditures, granting the military the ability to widen its economic reach, and financing infrastructure ventures and arms deals.¹⁰⁵ Roll argues that debt policy and repression policy are mutually reinforcing, as loans allow the state to maintain repressive mechanisms that support the regime, while repression policy bolsters the use of debt policy to solidify the regime's policies.¹⁰⁶ The regime benefits from the loans as a means of resolving its financing problem without having to make significant concessions that could expose the regime to instability.

The regime assured the IMF that it would follow the terms required to continue receiving loans in order to keep Egypt from going bankrupt and to address the private sector's involvement in the economy, which Sisi sees as a result of the government's mismanagement of projects. The government's promises in a memorandum submitted to the IMF call for a complete withdrawal of the state from 79 economic sectors and a partial withdrawal from 45 others within three years, as well as an increase in private sector participation in public investments from 30 to 65 percent, while reducing military involvement in the economy.¹⁰⁷ This strategy, if enacted, would imperil the interests of military corporations and those that profit from them.

Finally, since 2015, the debt policy has also been connected to migration concerns, with warnings of a potential influx of refugees from Egypt.⁹² Egypt significantly reduced border controls, leading to a substantial rise in illegal migration across the Mediterranean to Europe between 2014-2016 compared to previous years. Roll's study confirmed that Egypt's acquisition of loans in 2016 was linked to closing its maritime borders to refugees.⁹³ As the migration issue subsided, the climate crisis emerged, which the regime exploited by connecting it to the debt policy. In 2020, Egypt made history as the first African country to issue green bonds worth \$750 million, an accomplishment lauded by the World Bank.⁹⁴

For many years, the policy of assuring external support has been effective, but at a tremendous cost. On the one hand, the government's external debt had reached an unprecedented level. Regional backers in the Gulf have also begun to question their relationship with Sisi, who has failed to manage the economy. The repercussions of the debt policy have gotten worse, especially in light of the war in Ukraine. The regime has exhausted all efforts to get the funds required to make the annual debt payments. All that remains is to sell the remaining State assets and successful public enterprises. Faced with such an impasse, Sisi tried to open up the political sphere through a carefully orchestrated process of national dialogue. In foreign policy, he has limited choices, but he hopes Egypt's supporters will keep it from crumbling due to concerns about the impact on migration to Europe. Because of these issues, Sisi's strategy for dealing with the army, the people,

¹⁰⁴ Roll.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Yezid Sayigh, "Assessing Egypt's state ownership policy: Challenges and requirements." *Carnegie Middle East Center* 8 May 2023, Available at: <https://shorturl.at/dfkyI>

and external supporters is likely to be less successful in the future, as stated in the paper's conclusion.

5. Conclusions

This paper looks at the measures used by Egypt's counterrevolutionary regime to maintain control over the armed forces, as well as the impact these measures have on power dynamics and decision-making processes. The president employs a multifaceted strategy to uphold and reinforce his regime, with the military playing a pivotal role in this strategy. Offering concessions to overseas sponsors and appeasing internal supporters are both part of this strategy. The regime seeks to retain its power and eventually establish absolute personalist rule by pursuing three key objectives: preventing military coups while preserving the army's efficiency; avoiding popular uprisings; and obstructing external support for regime change.

Sisi has not yet established the highly personalist regime he desires. He neither has a monopoly on power nor the resources to achieve one. The power dynamics inside the regime still involve a number of players. The survival of the regime continues to rely on internal actors, guided by the military and other security agencies. While coup-proofing measures offer benefits in terms of ensuring the military's allegiance, the concessions granted to the military in return reinforced its autonomy. This autonomy may permit the military to abandon the president if circumstances change, such as if the privileges granted to the army are reduced in response to pressure from international financial institutions or if public outrage against the regime's economic policies escalates and the regime fails to respond. In addition, the regime has no alternative but to continue to rely on the military and retired officers because it lacks a robust and cohesive party organization.

The regime also continues to believe that any effective political mobilization by the opposition will result in a return to street protests. And if this occurs, the military will become the primary menace and will not defend the regime against the people. Therefore, the regime's iron fist remains strong and will endure as long as the opposition remains divided.

The regime is aware that measures taken to prevent coups do not necessarily diminish the inclination of officers to overthrow leaders in dictatorships. Such measures allow the ruler to buy some time while acknowledging that the threat of a coup persists as long as there are underlying structural factors such as the perpetuation of authoritarianism and the lack of a standardized process for presidential succession. Consequently, coups remain a viable and appealing avenue for ambitious officers to attain power.

Egypt's foreign policy is centered on aligning the regime's existence with the interests of regional and global powers. This policy takes numerous forms to ensure the regime's survival, with the military playing a key role. It has used several techniques, including compromising on some economic reforms, giving out lots of lucrative military contracts to foreign corporations, and connecting the debt to other foreign and regional policies that affect Egypt. Indeed, the armament policy benefits military firms as well as countries that back Sisi. It is also considered a tactic that pleases both the military and its public image. Moreover, Egypt's armed forces have not become more professional or shifted their focus to dealing with external threats as a result of the country's involvement in international peacekeeping operations or foreign military training programs.

However, the regime's strategy for addressing the dire economic situation may not be sustainable, especially if the economy continues to decline, government spending on non-productive projects continues, external sources of money dry up, corruption persists, and the wealth divide widens. Egypt is not an exception to what is happening in the Arab region, which has witnessed waves of popular uprisings since 2011, as worsening economic conditions could trigger a popular explosion. This public uprising may have many negative repercussions due to the absence of an organized opposition coalition. It is probable that the military will intervene once more, not only to regain its privileges but also to prevent anarchy and civil strife. If this occurs, the question will remain as to whether the military will learn from Sisi's blunders and not directly assume responsibility for running the country, allowing for a degree of civilian rule, or if the army will not learn and repeat the mistake with a new general.

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