

Militarization and the Reconstitution of Statehood in the Arab World*

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A 250-word abstract:

This paper explores how the interplay of military politicisation, state and societal militarisation, and geopolitical manoeuvring has redefined statehood in contemporary Egypt and Algeria, particularly after the 2011 and 2019 uprisings. These processes have hollowed out core principles of modern statehood—legitimacy, sovereignty, and accountability—by replacing popular consent with coercion, militarised nationalist narratives, and unelected elites. Sovereignty has been weakened by opaque power networks and external dependencies that sustain military-backed personalist regimes or militarised governments behind civilian façades. Confronted with existential threats from mass mobilisation, incumbents—often supported externally—intensified counter-revolutionary strategies, reinforcing authoritarian patterns entrenched since independence.

In both cases, militaries function not only as political actors but as structural pillars of the state. Politicisation blurs the boundaries between state, regime, and government, while militarisation extends through internal security mandates, intelligence dominance, and economic penetration. This shift redefines sovereignty as a coercive project privileging stability over representation. Military-led development models and tightly controlled narratives reframe legitimacy in terms of national salvation rather than constitutional consent or electoral participation, while international complicity entrenches these distortions.

The geopolitical dimension remains central. Egypt and Algeria strategically leverage international alliances to secure legitimacy, resources, and protection for repression, framing themselves as guarantors of stability against terrorism and regional instability. Yet reliance on external partnerships—often via military-to-military ties—undermines autonomy and subordinates national interests to regime survival. Despite sustained high military spending, the operational effectiveness of both armies is doubtful, concealed by secrecy and lack of oversight.

Keywords:

Egypt – Algeria – Arab State - military politicization - state militarization - societal militarization – geopolitical dimensions of authoritarianism – democratic transition – military regimes – regime survival.

Abdel-Fattah Mady's Bio

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Abdel-Fattah Mady

Introduction

Arab states have long suffered from endemic structural weaknesses predating the 2011 uprisings. Research on Arab armies has often focused on military politicisation, that is, its political involvement following coups that installed military figures or established their veto power (Perlmutter 1977, Kamrava 2000), leading to personalist rule. However, this line of research frequently overlooked the concurrent, pervasive militarisation of both state and society, a phenomenon triggered by both domestic power dynamics and geopolitical pressures.

The strategies adopted by incumbents to suppress the 2011 uprisings intensified the pre-existing phenomenon of highly politicized militaries and played a decisive role in shaping subsequent civil-military relations—though with often contradictory outcomes. Counter-revolutionary measures significantly accelerated both the political engagement of military institutions (politicisation) and the entrenchment of military norms within state structures and civilian life (militarisation). The primary goals were twofold: consolidating control over the military and security apparatus to pre-empt internal threats like coups, while extending dominance over the socio-political sphere to suppress popular mobilisation and dissent.

These post-2011 strategies centred on heightened politicisation and militarisation have yielded various adverse effects. Beyond undermining prospects for substantive democratic transitions, they have also undermined core features of stateness. They have also degraded the inherent integrity and effectiveness of the armed forces (Barany 2021), significantly diminishing their capacity to perform essential functions, such as safeguarding national sovereignty, maintaining territorial integrity, and responding effectively to external threats.

Employing a civil-military relations framework, this paper examines the evolution of state militarisation, contrasting the periods before and after the 2011 uprisings. It argues that counter-revolutionary measures implemented following the 2011 popular uprisings exacerbated deep-seated structural imbalances that had long eroded the state's adherence to the principles of a modern state. While the 2011 uprisings posed an existential threat to the status quo, potentially signalling a shift towards differentiating the enduring state from the transient regime, incumbents' responses intensified pre-existing vulnerabilities. This analysis focuses on politicisation of armies and militarisation of state and society as key interrelated processes, examining how counter-revolutionary strategies shaped them.

This paper begins with a conceptual and theoretical discussion, defining key terms and reviewing relevant literature on civil-military dynamics, including both classical and contemporary approaches. It then proceeds with in-depth case studies of Egypt and Algeria, each divided into two main sections: one on the trajectory of military politicization, and the other on the expansion of militarization at both the state and societal levels. The analysis is grounded in empirical evidence, policy developments, and historical events. A comparative table highlights key similarities and differences, followed by a concluding section that examines the broader implications for legitimacy, sovereignty, and democratic prospects in the Arab region.

Theoretical Framework and Approach

At the core of the civil-military interactions is the challenge of enabling the military to defend the state without allowing it to endanger the society it serves (Feaver 1999). Military politicisation arises when armed forces participate in political affairs — shaping policy, backing factions, or seizing power — often due to fragile institutions, societal divides, or the military's pursuit of its own interests. Civilian leaders may also involve the military to bolster their authority against their opponents. Beyond overt interventions, Desch (1999) identifies additional forms of military involvement, such as military influence (non-coercive policy shaping), civil-military friction (visible conflicts with civilian leaders), military compliance (whether civilian preferences prevail), and delegation and monitoring (how civilians assign and supervise military roles). These dimensions offer a broader understanding of civil-military dynamics beyond the traditional focus on coups.

Theorists of civil-military relations offer several frameworks to explain military involvement in politics. Samuel Huntington's (1957) distinction between *objective* and *subjective* control remains foundational. Objective control supports an apolitical, professional military under civilian authority, while subjective control politicises the military by embedding it within ruling ideologies, often at the behest of civilian groups seeking dominance. In contrast, Morris Janowitz (1988, 78-99) proposed a model integrating the military into society without mirroring its divisions. He outlined five civil-military models in postcolonial states: authoritarian-personal rule, authoritarian-mass party control, democratic-competitive systems, civil-military coalitions, and military oligarchies (Mady 2021, 86-90). Complementing these, Peter Feaver's (2003) agency theory presents the military as a rational actor that may disobey civilian directives if not properly monitored.

More recent frameworks challenge the universality of these models. Rebecca Schiff (2009, 32-33) promotes a tripartite model based on context-specific dialogue among the military, elites, and society, emphasizing cultural and institutional diversity. Douglas Bland (1999) introduces the idea of shared responsibility between military and civilian leadership, warning against political instrumentalization of the armed forces. Alfred Stepan's (1986, 138) concept of *new professionalism* captures the military's broadened role in developing states — including internal security and nation-building — later echoed by scholars who legitimize the military's role in managing internal threats. More recently, scholars have criticised these classic models for inadequately addressing factors like political polarisation, civilian complicity in politicisation, and the complexities of hybrid regimes (Brooks 2020), calling for different approaches suitable to the contemporary governance landscape. Others examine how authoritarian leaders control their armies through various mechanisms (S. Finer 2003, 140-163). These include parallel militias, military-affiliated parties, intelligence agencies, mass purges, and secret police. In personalist regimes characterized by weak ideology and limited pluralism, rulers often combine coercion, co-optation, patronage networks, and economic privileges for the military to ensure loyalty and suppress dissent.

Politicisation can be broadly understood, beyond civil-military relations, as the process by which social actors turn issues or institutions into contested political subjects. Drawing on Joseph Gusfield's (1984) framework, this involves 'naming' problems, 'blaming' responsible actors, and 'claiming' solutions. By portraying existing authorities as corrupt or incompetent, coup leaders

justify power seizure through narratives of national salvation, institutional failure, or urgent reform, thereby legitimising their intervention in the political order.

Distinct from, though related to, politicisation is militarisation: it refers to the systematic infusion of military logic, values, and practices into civilian institutions, public life, and state governance (Coyne and Hall 2020, 172-173; Eide and Thee 2021). Unlike militarism, which involves the ideological glorification of the military, militarisation is often a more pragmatic and institutional process. It is driven by perceived internal or external threats and the erosion of civilian authority; it is also a deliberate strategy by a regime seeking greater control and social order (Eastwood 2018, 44–56, Enloe 2000, 3).

At the state level, militarisation manifests in several ways: high defence spending relative to social sectors, the appointment of military personnel to civilian administrative roles, and the dominance of security-centred perspectives in policymaking. These shifts reflect a militarized vision of governance, where the military becomes a central actor in managing not only crises but routine affairs of state. Societally, militarisation is marked by the normalization of military culture and values, such as hierarchy, discipline, and loyalty, in non-military contexts. Media, education, and popular discourse often valorise the armed forces, presenting them as symbols of national unity, integrity, and efficiency—especially in contrast to corrupt or dysfunctional civilian institutions (Bayer 2023). These narratives are reinforced by authoritarian ideologies, historical legacies of conflict, cultural reverence for military service, and economic interests tied to defence industries.

The study of militarisation was primarily shaped by political science, international relations, and security studies. These disciplines often measured militarisation using quantitative indicators, like military spending, coup frequency, and military involvement in governance, focusing on the state as the central unit of analysis (Gusterson and Besteman 2019, 53-64). In turn, anthropological perspectives highlight how militarisation permeates everyday life, shaping identities and behaviours through language, imagery, and institutional routines. Agamben's notion of the 'state of exception' explains how emergency powers become normalised as tools of governance (Agamben 2005). Foucault's concept of governmentality shows how militarised practices regulate populations through surveillance, discipline, and the production of docile subjects (Foucault 2007).

Sociological contributions further enrich this analysis. Michael Mann (1986) described militarism as the normalisation of war and preparation for war, linking it to broader patriarchal systems. Malcolm Shaw distinguished between forces supporting military power and the social structures shaped by it (Shaw 1991). Charles Tilly famously argued that modern European states were forged through war-making, centralisation, and coercive capacity (Tilly 1992). However, in post-colonial contexts — such as many Arab states — this model is contested. These regimes often depend on external support and confront primarily internal threats, producing militarised but institutionally fragile states dominated by executive and military elites, rather than robust bureaucracies developed through external conflict.

This paper employs a conceptual framework that foregrounds the interrelated processes of politicisation and militarisation. It acknowledges the limitations of conventional civil-military relations theories, which often overlook critical dimensions such as geopolitical and transnational influences, informal power structures, and the role of intelligence agencies. By incorporating these often-neglected factors, the study offers a more holistic analytical lens. It illustrates how the

convergence of politicisation, militarisation, and external regional and international pressures has profoundly influenced the political trajectories of contemporary Arab states, frequently eroding state sovereignty, compromising national autonomy, and constraining control over strategic resources.

Egypt and Algeria offer contrasting yet revealing cases of military politicisation and state militarisation. Both regimes maintain strong military influence over politics and the economy, but through different historical trajectories. Egypt's military dominance began with the 1952 coup and has evolved into a personalist regime under Sisi, characterized by direct military control and economic expansion. Algeria's military, rooted in its liberation struggle, institutionalized power early on and has operated behind a civilian façade. The 1992 coup reaffirmed its control, while the 2019 Hirak movement exposed the limits of reform without dismantling military dominance. In the post-uprising period, Egypt briefly moved toward democratization after 2011 before returning to authoritarianism in 2013. Algeria responded to the 2019 protests with symbolic reforms that preserved military authority. Despite different strategies, both cases demonstrate how entrenched civil-military dynamics hinder democratic transitions, reinforce authoritarian resilience, and undermine core principles of statehood—including sovereignty, legitimacy, and institutional accountability—offering critical insights into the varied pathways through which military politicisation and state militarisation shapes regime survival in the Arab world.

Politicization and Militarization in Egypt and Algeria

The militarization of parts of the Arab region can be traced to the early modern period, notably marked by the French campaign in Ottoman Egypt and Syria (1798–1801), which contributed to long-term patterns of military engagement, resistance against occupiers, and external intervention. These legacies laid the groundwork for the wave of military coups that swept across post-independent Arab states, often resulting in personalist regimes led by military elites and bolstered by security apparatuses. These regimes were sustained by oil revenues, foreign aid, and strategic alliances with great powers, enabling them to portray themselves as guardians of national sovereignty. Over time, militarisation expanded beyond defence, as military institutions took on central roles in governance and economic planning. Following the 2011 uprisings, these patterns intensified; regimes tightened control over security institutions to pre-empt dissent, broadening military involvement in civilian sectors to suppress opposition and forestall democratic transformation.

Egypt's Personalist Regime and Military Control

This section explores the politicisation of the Egyptian military and the militarisation of state and society. It examines how power was consolidated through legal frameworks, narratives, and coup-proofing, while militarisation extended to the economy, identity, and domestic security. External alliances reinforced military dominance, eroding legitimacy and sovereignty, and entrenched authoritarian resilience.

Trajectories of Military Politicisation in Egypt

The year 1952 marked the beginning of the first stage of direct military politicisation in Egypt's, a process immediately intertwined with the nation's geopolitical context, reflecting the core

dilemma of the civil-military problematique. The coup was partly fuelled by the free officers' perceptions of political corruption, chronic instability, and the humiliation of military defeat in the 1948 Palestine war. However, rather than resolving these issues, the military's intervention ultimately exacerbated existing problems and introduced new ones. Most notably, it marked the beginning of the military's transformation into a central political actor — one whose influence would come to shape, and be shaped by, both domestic politics and foreign policy.

Following the 1952 coup, Egypt's Revolution Command Council (RCC) initiated a process of military politicisation by dismantling the existing political system. It dissolved political parties, abolished the 1923 Constitution (Gordon 1992, 23, 58-60), and depoliticised public life to consolidate power. The RCC employed Gusfield's 'naming' and 'blaming' framework (Gusfield 1984) by constructing a legitimising narrative centred on identifying enemies of the people and the regime (Gordon 1992, 92-106). Initially, these included remnants of the monarchy, imperialists, and Zionists. As the regime's grip tightened, the definition of the enemy expanded to include domestic rivals, such as political parties, communists, and the Muslim Brotherhood.

After 1952, Egypt's military politicisation intensified and soon turned inward, resulting in a pivotal power struggle within the officer corps (Kandil 2015, 24-45, Filiu 2015). Mohammed Naguib, the new regime's first president, and his faction supported a return to democratic governance and the military's exit from politics, while Gamal Abdel Nasser, backed by Abdel Hakim Amer and Zakaria Muhyiddin, advocated for continued military dominance. Nasser's triumph cemented the military's long-term political role. He quickly consolidated power, launching crackdowns against political opposition, including communists in the 1950s and the Muslim Brotherhood in both the 1950s and 1960s (Gordon 1992, 98-100). This period marked the full entrenchment of authoritarian rule under military leadership.

This internal consolidation of military power under Nasser coincided with, and enabled, a significant projection of Egyptian influence internationally. Following an alliance with the Soviet Union, which provided crucial military support, Nasser established a one-party system domestically. (Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait*. New York: Free Press. 1960). However, military influence remained dominant, suggesting a possible evolution toward a military oligarchy. However, tensions between Nasser and Amer persisted, highlighting the ongoing internal power dynamics within the politicised military elite, which only resolved after the 1967 defeat.

Upon taking office, Anwar Sadat inherited a deeply politicised military and sought to reassert presidential authority. He launched the so-called 'corrective revolution', purging rivals and dismantling Nasser's 'power centers', framing them as enemies — an approach aligning with Gusfield's 'naming and blaming' framework (Gusfield 1984) and Finer's concept of mass purges (S. E. Finer 1976). To manage military politicisation, Sadat regularly rotated senior officers to prevent them from establishing independent power bases (Heikal 1983, 98–102). This strategy reflected a form of executive monitoring aimed more at neutralising threats than ensuring institutional compliance, echoing insights from Feaver (P. Feaver 2003) and Desch (M. Desch 1999) on civil-military relations.

Externally, Sadat initiated a dramatic geopolitical pivot that reshaped the military's role and the nature of its politicisation. While continuing efforts to enhance military professionalism (leading

to improved performance in the 1973 war, arguably a step towards depoliticization in a functional sense), the subsequent Camp David Accords fundamentally altered Egypt's strategic orientation. Egypt shifted from the Eastern bloc to the West, realigning its alliances and military dependencies toward the United States. As part of this shift, Egypt secured substantial annual U.S. military aid (approx. \$1.3 billion) but withdrew from armed confrontation with Israel, repositioning itself as a key partner in the U.S. regional security strategy (Mady, Egypt 2025, Quandt 2005). Robert Springborg criticizes this model of international engagement, arguing that it reinforced the Egyptian military's autonomy and dominance rather than promoting professionalism, civilian oversight, or accountability (Springborg 2012, 103).

This geopolitical realignment had direct domestic consequences for the military's political standing and resource allocation. Egypt supported Western efforts against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and later joined the U.S.-led coalition against Iraq. During the Oslo Accords—and under Hosni Mubarak's rule—diplomatic leadership shifted from the military to the General Intelligence Service, marking a securitisation of foreign policy, a trend that has deepened since 2014. Concurrently, military spending decreased markedly, falling from around 37% of GDP in 1976 to 6.2% by 1980 (Abul-Magd 2017, 251, Military Expenditure-Egypt 2025), eventually dropping to just 1.8% by 2011 (Egypt Military Spending/Defence Budget 2023). This reduction in external military focus arguably created space for the military to consolidate its internal political and economic roles.

Mubarak continued the process of managing military politicisation while diversifying the state's power base, increasingly relying on the security forces alongside the military (Gotowicki and Stephen 1997, Anderson 2018). This was motivated partly by a desire to reduce exclusive dependence on the military and reflected a strategy of using powerful intelligence agencies to secure the regime and possibly creating parallel security structures, akin to Finer's (S. E. Finer 1976) mechanisms. While the 1971 constitution nominally subordinated the armed forces to presidential authority, the mechanisms of civilian oversight—whether exercised by parliament, civil society, or the media—remained largely symbolic and devoid of substantive influence.

Throughout his presidency, Mubarak faced no significant challenges from the military. Even during the 1986 the Central Security Forces (CSF) uprising, the army fulfilled its role in quelling the unrest and subsequently returned to its barracks, posing no threat to the regime. In 1989, Mubarak dismissed influential General Muhammad Abd Al-Halim Abu-Ghazala over arms smuggling and unauthorized technology transfer, consolidating his control over the military. Two years later, he appointed the loyal but unpopular General Muhammad Hussein Tantawi as defence minister, signalling a shift toward tighter presidential oversight of the armed forces.

Mubarak long reign saw the politicisation process evolve towards deeper institutional embedding, culminating in what is often referred to as the 'deep state'. (Springborg 2017) This complex web comprised the military, powerful security and intelligence agencies, a compliant judiciary, state-controlled media, and allied civilians and retired military personnel. A significant aspect of this embedded politicisation was the military's vast economic expansion, overseen by leadership often trained in the West and marked by nepotism and corruption (Sayigh 2012).

The 2011 revolution disrupted Egypt's established political trajectory, placing the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) in direct control after Mubarak's resignation. Viewing the

uprising as a threat to its privileges, the SCAF — led by General Tantawi — sought to preserve military dominance (Mady 2025). Geopolitical backing from anti-revolutionary regional and international actors, along with support from domestic deep state networks, strengthened its position. Rather than fostering civil-military concordance, as Schiff envisioned, the SCAF employed divide-and-rule tactics and managed elections to maintain authority (Mady 2020). This culminated in the 2012 Constitution, which formally institutionalised the military's political role and entrenched its autonomy, marking a pivotal moment in Egypt's military politicisation.

As the SCAF's management deepened political polarization, Defence Minister Abdel Fattah El-Sisi intervened in 2013 by orchestrating a military coup that ousted Egypt's first democratically elected president, Mohamed Morsi. This marked the most intense phase of military politicisation, eliminating any notion of shared civil-military responsibility, as theorised by Bland (1999). Framing his actions as a national rescue from terrorism, Sisi employed Gusfield's 'naming', 'blaming', and 'claiming' narrative strategy (Gusfield 1984). His regime has since relied on control mechanisms, as identified by Finer (S. E. Finer 1976), including intelligence dominance, coercion, economic co-optation, and extensive patronage networks.

Although Egypt participates in foreign military training and peacekeeping missions (peacekeeping n.d.), these activities have not redirected the military's focus towards external threats, nor have they significantly enhanced its professionalisation in a way that would undermine its entrenched role in domestic politics. These international activities primarily serve geopolitical goals, namely strengthening relations (especially with the U.S. army), generating revenue, and enhancing Egypt's international image, rather than fundamentally altering the trajectory of domestic military politicisation.

The high corruption risk in Egypt's defence sector, as identified by the 2020 Government Defence Integrity Index, is closely tied to military politicisation. Under Sisi, the military's expanding economic role has strengthened a mutually reinforcing system of power and privilege. Oversight remains virtually non-existent — parliament and audit bodies lack authority, while the defence sector, especially in Sinai, operates with opacity. Military finances and procurement are concealed, scrutiny is risky, and internal personnel management systems perpetuate impunity and fail to mitigate corruption effectively (Egypt-Government Defence Integrity Index 2020).

The Deepening Militarisation of Egypt's State and Society

After 1952, Egypt underwent significant militarisation, shaped by its active geopolitical role and successive wars — three with Israel and one in Yemen. Rather than consolidating the state through war, as Tilly suggests, Egypt turned inward, combining repression with rising external dependency. A pivot to the Eastern Bloc bolstered military capacity, reinforcing the armed forces' political centrality. Under Nasser, the military became both a domestic pillar and a symbol of Arab nationalism, as Egypt led the Non-Aligned Movement and supported anti-colonial struggles (Gordon 1992). This activism demanded a robust military, absorbing extensive resources — military expenditure reached 11% of GDP in 1965–1966 (Abul-Magd 2017, 251).

Internally, this period was marked by deep state militarisation, as military personnel increasingly occupied civilian roles across local government, governorships, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and public sector leadership following the 1960s nationalisations (Ayubi 1995). Anouar Abdel-

Malek (1968, xxvi) described this transformation as the emergence of a ‘military society’, where military structures, ethos, and organisation permeated civilian institutions. He highlighted the army’s influence within political parties, unions, media, and the economy, resulting in a social order governed by military logic. The 1967 defeat would later serve as a critical turning point within this militarised framework.

Following the 1967 defeat, Nasser began recalibrating the military’s role by withdrawing officers from civilian positions and prosecuting those blamed for the loss. However, rather than reversing militarisation, the regime adapted it to new needs — particularly internal control. In response to growing domestic unrest, including the major protest movement of 1968, the regime expanded its coercive apparatus. The Ministry of Interior created the Central Reserve Forces (CRF) to suppress public dissent, marking a significant evolution in the use of paramilitary units for internal security. This shift reflects Stepan’s view of militaries taking on internal roles and aligns with Finer’s concept of parallel security forces used to maintain regime stability. Thus, militarisation persisted in new forms, even as formal military presence in civilian institutions was reduced.

Sadat initially continued efforts to recalibrate the military’s role, aiming to enhance professionalism — an approach that contributed to the improved performance in the 1973 war. After consolidating power, the 1977 uprising, triggered by economic hardships, prompted further adjustments. Sadat reorganised the CRF, leading to the establishment of the Central Security Forces (CSF) as a parallel internal force (Kandil, 2016, 299-302). Their resources were significantly expanded, and they were equipped for the first time with heavy weaponry and armoured vehicles, marking a clear intensification of the state’s inward-facing militarised capacity.

The geopolitical realignment under Sadat profoundly influenced the trajectory of militarisation. The peace treaty with Israel, sustained by continuous U.S. military aid, facilitated a new form of militarisation: the military’s deep involvement in state development programs. This role helped maintain regime dominance over the army while fostering its participation in the economy as an autonomous actor. Mubarak expanded upon this, granting the military greater privileges, benefits, and autonomy in managing its economic and military affairs. These economic activities sustained military personnel’s living standards and pre-empted internal dissent within its ranks. Despite overall reduced military spending shares during Sadat’s era, consistent U.S. military aid ensured the army’s core needs were met (Sayigh 2012, 20), allowing the focus of militarisation to shift further towards internal and economic domains.

Since the peace treaty with Israel, Egypt’s regime increasingly viewed domestic Islamist groups as the central threat to its stability. In response, Mubarak expanded mechanisms of internal control beyond traditional military means. Following Sadat’s assassination, Mubarak restructured the Ministry of Interior, significantly strengthening internal security bodies—most notably the CSF, the State Security Investigations Service (SSI), and the General Intelligence Service (GIS). Under a continuous state of emergency, reflecting Agamben’s ‘state of exception’ (Agamben 2005), the regime intensified state militarisation by expanding the internal security apparatus. By 2011, the Interior Ministry employed around 1.4 million personnel, and its budget grew at three times the rate of the defence budget (Sayigh 2012). This transformation was designed to reduce reliance on the military for domestic repression, but it also fuelled competition between military and security institutions within the ruling elite. The outcome was a deeply entrenched, militarized state with a vast, repressive internal control infrastructure.

The period after the 2013 coup under Sisi has witnessed an unprecedented intensification and consolidation of state militarisation. This approach is rationalized by Sisi's assertion of a 'sacred duty' to protect national security and preserve internal unity (Hamzawy 2018, 491–504), while covertly preparing to reinstate personalist/ authoritarian rule. This policy resulted in wider military deployment to suppress dissent, reversing earlier democratic reforms.

Beyond the military, the security apparatus also underwent significant restructuring and empowerment as part of this intensified militarisation. The CSF expanded, including units like the Counter-Terrorism Unit, and intelligence agencies received enhanced authority to suppress Islamists through violence and intimidation. Tensions between GIS and military intelligence reportedly subsided under Abbas Kamel, suggesting consolidation within the security sphere. Furthermore, the legal and judicial systems were subordinated to the militarized state's priorities (Salem 2025). Widespread arrests and questionable proceedings against Islamists necessitated new legislation and amendments, eroding judicial independence. This is exemplified by appointing the head of the military judiciary as deputy head of the Constitutional Court, blurring civilian-military lines.

The Sisi era solidified the militarisation process constitutionally. The 2014 Constitution reinforced military dominance, permitting military trials for civilians. The 2019 constitutional amendments went further, entrusting the army with safeguarding the constitution, democracy, and the state's civilian character, creating a symbiotic power relationship where the president and military mutually secure their status and privileges (Mady 2025). The practical process of militarisation under Sisi involves further expanding the military's reach into governance. The SCAF's mandate was broadened (Law 20 of 2014) to include coordination on 'internal hostilities' (Article 4/19, Establishment of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (2021) further institutionalizing Stepan's concept of internal security roles. Reliance on retired officers in key administrative posts became pervasive (Sayigh 2022) — a key indicator of state militarisation — potentially facilitated by policies requiring military graduates to obtain civilian degrees.

Sisi has also reinforced the structural and economic pillars of military politicisation. Policies benefiting high-ranking officers through pay raises and retirement plans have been implemented (Kuimova 2021). Authority to grant monthly rewards was expanded in 2021. Most significantly, the economic dimension of politicisation has dramatically expanded, with military enterprises awarded major national projects and operating largely outside state regulations, exempt from taxes, fuelling concerns about corruption and unfair competition (Egypt Tycoon "Sawiris" Complains of State & Army Involvement in Business 2021).

Sisi relies on a carefully constructed narrative to legitimise this highly militarised rule and promote societal acceptance. This includes fostering a personality cult, portraying Islamists as an existential threat (justifying security measures), conflating opposition with instability (evoking Iraq and Syria scenarios), emphasising the sanctity of the state, and redefining patriotism as unwavering support for the regime and its security institutions. The proclamation of a 'New Republic' aims to frame this consolidation (R. S.-F. Mady 2025). Societal militarisation is further promoted through mandatory training programs at both the Military Academy and the National Training Academy,¹

¹ The National Training Academy, established in 2017 under the oversight of the intelligence services, is a public institution affiliated with the presidency, with the president serving as chair of its board.

targeting young adults and candidates for employment in public and private sectors. These programs — focused on national security, patriotism, and discipline — seek to instil military values in non-military contexts.

Foreign and security policy has remained at the core of this militarized system. Confronted with substantial security challenges—including the insurgency in Sinai, regional rivalries, and instability in Libya and Gaza—Sisi relied heavily on military generals and intelligence agencies, thereby reinforcing their central role in governance. As the regime perceives threats from international patrons—whether through reduced financial inflows or support for political change—its foreign policy has prioritized regime survival by aligning with regional and global powers, frequently leveraging Egypt’s security role. (see Darwich in this volume).

Egypt’s status as a leading arms importer, despite economic challenges and peace with Israel, reflects the priorities of the militarised state. It also reflects a strategic effort to maintain favourable relations with Western powers, thereby reducing external pressure over human rights violations (Roll 2022). The 136% increase in imports (2016-2021 versus 2011-2015) (SIPRI, *International Arms Transfers Level Off After Years of Sharp Growth* 2021) likely benefits supporting countries and manufacturers while appeasing the domestic military elite. Nevertheless, its contribution to military effectiveness remains questionable. For example, Egypt has significantly reinforced its military presence and infrastructure in the Sinai Peninsula and, in a notable shift, has reportedly requested Israeli tactical air support to assist in counterterrorism operations against insurgent groups (Kirkpatrick 2018).

Crucially, Sisi exploits the ‘war on terror’ discourse to fortify alliances with the U.S. and Israel, justify internal repression through the empowerment of security agencies, and consolidate control over North Sinai. This has included the displacement of residents along the border with Israel in Rafah and the construction of infrastructure that could potentially be used to receive expelled Palestinians from Gaza—raising concerns, particularly in the aftermath of the October 2023 Gaza war, about possible population relocation plans.

Finally, Sisi has relied heavily on a borrowing strategy to consolidate his hold onto power, resulting in a dramatic surge in Egypt’s external debt — from \$43 billion in June 2013 to over \$157 billion by March 2022 (IMF n.d.). However, this debt has not been channelled toward building a sustainable economic foundation. Instead, it has exacerbated Egypt’s economic vulnerability by serving the financial demands of a militarised state, including the expansion of the military’s economic influence, large-scale infrastructure projects, and arms procurement (IMF n.d.).

To sum up, in consolidating his personalist rule, Sisi has overseen an intensive depoliticization of the public sphere alongside the unprecedented militarization of the state and the politicization of the armed forces. Narratives of terrorism, foreign relations, and regional policies have been strategically instrumentalized to suppress opposition. The implications of this trajectory are far-reaching: the military’s diversion from its core defense functions risks eroding its operational effectiveness, deviating sharply from Stepan’s (1986) ideal of professional military autonomy. Simultaneously, Egypt’s regional and global influence has waned. Although the long-term repercussions remain uncertain, Sisi’s policies have exacerbated entrenched challenges such as economic stagnation and unemployment, thereby rendering sustainable solutions increasingly difficult within this deeply militarized framework.

Algeria's Military Republic: Oligarchic Power Behind the Façade

Since independence, Algeria has experienced the politicisation of its military and the militarisation of state and society, entrenching an authoritarian model at the expense of state legitimacy and sovereignty. The armed forces assumed a central role in governance — a trajectory broadly comparable to Egypt's yet shaped by the unique legacy of Algeria's anti-colonial struggle.

The Evolution of Military Politicisation in Algeria

Rooted in a long history of French colonisation, the Algerian liberation revolution (1954–1962), led by the National Liberation Front (FLN), was a militarised struggle, resulting in independence in 1962 (Ruedy 2005, Connelly 2002). Unlike Egypt and other Arab states, where the military seized power through coups against civilian regimes, Algeria's military emerged as the dominant force from within the liberation movement itself, shaping post-independence governance from the outset.

In the aftermath of the War of Liberation, the weaknesses of the FLN's armed forces became evident, shaped by the brutal legacy of French colonial repression. Even before independence, internal rivalries emerged between revolutionary leaders and military factions (Stora 2012, 11-13, Phillips 2007, 57-66, Ruedy 2005, 180-186). A key conflict arose between the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic-GPRA and the Border Army, culminating in a power struggle between the GPRA President Yusuf bin Kheda and Colonel Houari Boumédiène. Boumédiène sidelined the GPRA by forming a new FLN political bureau to dominate post-independence governance. This early entrenchment of military dominance laid the groundwork for Algeria's postcolonial authoritarian order, where military elites would remain central to political authority.

Internal divisions and tensions with the Border Army led the interim Algerian government to convene the National Council, an attempt that faced resistance and ultimately failed. On June 30, 1962, the government dismissed the military leadership, prompting a military-political alliance between Ahmed Ben Bella, the head of government of Algeria, and Boumédiène. This sparked a power struggle between the Tlemcen group (Ben Bella and Boumédiène) and the Algiers group, while a third faction in Tizi Ouzou criticized the Tlemcen bloc's authoritarian tendencies. The Tlemcen group ultimately seized control by force, dissolved the interim government, and installed the FLN's Political Bureau. In September 1962, Ben Bella became Algeria's first independent leader, persuaded by Boumédiène's promise of military support. Boumédiène was subsequently appointed Minister of Defence, marking the military's central role in governance.

This transition marked the formal entrenchment of military influence at the core of post-independence governance, establishing a lasting precedent for the army's central role in Algeria's political system. It effectively nullified the decisions of the 1956 Soummam Conference, which had sought to promote unity between the people and the army through three key principles: the primacy of the political over the military, the primacy of the internal over the external, and collective leadership (Filiu 2015, 64-65). These principles could have paved the way for models of "objective control" or "shared responsibility," as articulated by Huntington (1957) and Bland (1999), but this did not happen.

Following the military's consolidation of power, Algeria entered a phase of political centralisation and public depoliticisation. The FLN's military leadership ended the pluralism that had characterised the liberation phase, imposed the 1963 Constitution, and established a one-party system — an example of Finer's military-affiliated party model (1976). Article 8 granted the FLN sweeping control over political, economic, and social affairs, effectively institutionalising the military's dominance within the state's formal power structure.

Following their rise within the FLN, Ben Bella and Boumédiène entered a power struggle reflecting broader civil-military tensions. Ben Bella promoted a populist, pan-Arab socialist agenda, while Boumédiène advocated centralised state control aligned with military hierarchy (Stora 2012, 15-18). Their conflicting visions, leadership styles, and personal ambitions deepened the rift, illustrating how military dominance in post-independence Algeria fuelled internal rivalries over the direction and control of the state.

The regime exploited regional tensions, notably through the failed 1963 Sand War against Morocco, to consolidate internal power, with support from Egypt and Cuba. Both Algerian and Moroccan regimes used the conflict to bolster their domestic standing (Stora 2012, 29). The war paved the way for Boumédiène's 1965 coup, later framed as a 'historical correction' — a legitimising narrative consistent with Gusfield's 'claiming' strategy (1984). Ben Bella's ousting and Boumédiène's rise marked a turning point in entrenching military dominance in Algeria's post-independence political system.

After the 1965 coup, Algeria experienced further coup attempts and assassination plots, reflecting ongoing instability. Yet, Boumédiène's rule marked a decisive deepening of military politicisation. Consolidating authority as president and FLN leader, he sidelined the party in favour of the military, embedding society within a regime anchored in coercive power (Lowi 2009, 63-68, Stora 2012). This consolidation relied heavily on the Military Security, a powerful intelligence agency that suppressed dissent and eliminated rivals, notably from the 'Wujda Clan' — a clear example of Finer's model involving intelligence dominance and purges (1976). Boumédiène established a centralized, military-backed authoritarian state that prioritized stability and control over political pluralism (Filiu 2015, 47-48). While his regime curtailed democratic expression, it succeeded in stabilising the post-coup order. His sudden death in 1978 ended a pivotal era but left a deeply entrenched legacy of militarised governance that would shape Algeria's political trajectory for decades.

Following Boumédiène's death, the military reaffirmed its role as kingmaker by selecting General Chadli Bendjedid as president in 1979. Although he maintained control of the defence ministry, Bendjedid gradually tried to reduce the army's political dominance (Filiu 2015, 71). His efforts faced a major challenge during the October 1988 protests, which were brutally suppressed by the military under General Khaled Nezzar. This crackdown revealed the military's readiness to intervene against perceived threats. Despite Bendjedid's 1989 re-election and political liberalization efforts, including introducing multi-party politics, these reforms weakened presidential authority and empowered rising opposition forces, such as the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS). The military's enduring influence remained strong, setting the stage for an impending confrontation between the army and emerging political actors in Algeria (Ruedy 2005, 231-244, Roberts 2007).

In July 1990, Bendjedid transferred control of the defence ministry to General Nezzar, further consolidating power within the military's hardline leadership. Nezzar soon established the Department of Intelligence and Security (DRS) under General Mohamed Mediène (Toufik), who led it from 1990 to 2015, transforming it into a central pillar of political control, in line with Finer's analysis of intelligence dominance. On December 26, 1991, the FIS won 48% of the vote and 188 out of 231 seats in the first round of local elections, far outperforming its rivals (Official Gazette 1992). Alarmed by the FIS's momentum and unwilling to cede political power to Islamists, the military staged a coup in January 1992, ousting Bendjedid and nullifying the electoral process (Ruedy 2005, 252-256). This marked the military's definitive assertion of political veto power, rejecting Janowitz's democratic-competitive model and Desch's notion of military compliance (2001). The intervention halted Algeria's democratic opening and triggered a devastating civil war.

Following the 1992 coup, Algeria's regime sought to retain military control while preserving international legitimacy. It created a superficial civilian façade to conceal the military's dominance and launched a fierce campaign against the Islamist movement. Framing Islamists as colonial agents and the military as the protector of national sovereignty—echoing Gusfield's 'naming' and 'blaming' tactics—the regime justified repression, which helped trigger a bloody civil war (Martinez 2000, 176-182). Real political power was concentrated in the hands of key military leaders, including Khaled Nezzar, Larbi Belkheir, Abdelmalek Guenaizia, Mohamed Mediène, Mohamed Lamari, and Abbas Gheziel. These figures collectively orchestrated the state's militarised response, reinforcing a trajectory of authoritarian control.

On the international stage, the military leadership adopted a strategic posture aimed at preserving its domestic dominance. The 1992 coup offers a clear illustration of the military's assumption that global powers would privilege regional stability over democratic principles and thus abstain from intervention. The United States' silence during Saddam Hussein's suppression of the Kurdish uprising in 1991 exemplified this logic. A similar pattern unfolded in Algeria, as both the United States and France—under the leadership of George H.W. Bush and François Mitterrand, respectively—effectively undermined the country's nascent democratic experiment (Roberts 2007).

Following the brief presidencies of Mohamed Boudiaf and Ali Kafi, Liamine Zéroual's tenure (1994–1999) introduced a limited reconciliation process that remained heavily shaped by ongoing military control. The FIS remained banned, reflecting the continued dominance of the military over the political landscape. Following a pattern observed in previous presidents, Zéroual amended the constitution in 1996 (Ruedy 2005, 265-270). These amendments prohibited the formation of religiously based parties, limited presidential terms to two, and officially recognized the Amazigh identity, changes enacted under the umbrella of military oversight.

The selection process for Zéroual's successor again highlighted the military's decisive role in presidential politics. Abdelaziz Bouteflika (1937–2021) emerged as the military's preferred presidential candidate, despite opposition from General Nezzar. Serving from 1999 to 2019, Bouteflika pursued a civil peace strategy through referendums and amnesties but maintained a firm stance against Islamists, reflecting enduring military influence. Repressive measures continued under security leadership, notably Mohamed Lamari. Bouteflika also enacted constitutional reforms, including official recognition of the Amazigh language. After his re-election, he

introduced the National Charter for Peace and Reconciliation to formally close the chapter on Algeria's civil war (Ruedy 2005, 274-276).

Bouteflika gradually centralised authority by removing top military leaders, appointing Ahmed Gaid Salah as chief of staff, and taking over the defence ministry. Rather than depoliticising the military, he managed internal rivalries among its factions. Even after the deaths of key generals (Nezzar, Lamari, and Belkheir), power struggles — especially between Gaid Salah and intelligence chief Mediène — persisted. The 2009 constitutional amendment abolished presidential term limits, further entrenching Bouteflika's rule. However, as his health declined, real governance shifted to a coalition of powerful figures, including the military, intelligence agencies, his brother, and the chief of staff, reflecting ongoing militarised influence in Algerian political life.

The 2019 Hirak movement, triggered by Bouteflika's attempt to seek a fifth term, signalled widespread rejection of the military's longstanding political role in Algeria. While the military as an institution remained respected, protesters condemned the ruling elite — especially 'the generals' — for corruption and manipulating presidential appointments (Ghanem 2022, 34-35). The movement called for genuine civilian governance and dignity. The Hirak represented a direct challenge to the entrenched system of military political influence. The rentier state model, long assumed to insulate against mass mobilisation, failed to prevent widespread unrest (????, 2026).

The Algerian regime initially responded to the 2019 Hirak movement with moderation but soon reverted to repression — cracking down on activists, curbing media freedom, and fragmenting the protest movement. These actions blocked the possibility of genuine civil-military concordance, as theorized by Schiff. Army Chief Gaid Salah assumed a central role, using Article 102 to oust Bouteflika while presenting the military as the nation's stabilizer. However, the Hirak rejected these symbolic moves, demanding structural reform. The military orchestrated a managed transition, culminating in the 2019 presidential election. Despite procedural reforms, the vote lacked competitiveness. Abdelmadjid Tebboune, a regime affiliate, was elected amid low turnout and lingering legitimacy concerns. International actors remained largely silent, prioritizing stability and energy interests, which reinforced the regime's securitized narrative.

The outbreak of COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdown offered Algerian authorities a seemingly legitimate pretext to suspend the Hirak protests. This development enabled the regime to circumvent overt repression while simultaneously consolidating military control. Additionally, the Hirak's decentralized nature limited its ability to negotiate or sustain momentum (Ghebouli 2022). In sum, drawing lessons from Egypt, Algerian generals suppressed reforms, deploying populist rhetoric that framed activists as foreign influenced. The regime implemented superficial constitutional amendments to placate dissent, illustrating Brooks' insights on hybrid regimes and the role of civilian complicity. President Tebboune's 'New Republic' strengthened executive authority without institutional balance. Persistently low voter turnout in constitutional and parliamentary elections revealed public disillusionment and underscored the regime's failure to legitimize its reforms. Overall, Algeria's military-dominated leadership effectively used crisis management, rhetoric, and symbolic changes to preserve its hold on power, marginalize the Hirak's demands, and reinforce the politicisation of state institutions. This phase marked the entrenchment of authoritarian resilience under the guise of reform, with military influence remaining central to the political system.

Since independence, Algeria has witnessed the systematic militarisation of the state and society. From the moment of independence, this militarisation began to take institutional shape. Former ALN commanders were integrated into state structures as governors, ministers, and ambassadors—a practice institutionalized under Boumédiène and intensified post-civil war (Werenfels 2007, 49-56). Furthermore, retired officers assumed leadership positions across strategic sectors, including energy, infrastructure, education, media, and major corporations such as Algeria's state-owned national oil and gas company, Sonatrach (Lowi 2009, 88-91, Roberts 2007), effectively maintaining military oversight of Algeria's economic pillars and solidifying the state's militarized character.

From early post-independence, Algeria's regime promoted narratives legitimising militarisation. The FLN itself became militarised, with intelligence services central to controlling dissent, often labelling opposition as unpatriotic. The 1963 Constitution formalized military politicisation and FLN dominance across state functions. Boumédiène deepened this through the 1976 Constitution, using post-1973 oil revenues not only for development but also to secure elite loyalty. The military's role was constitutionally defined as an 'instrument of the revolution' (Ruedy 2005, 216-201). Boumédiène further consolidated power through an overwhelming electoral win and held multiple key roles simultaneously — head of state, prime minister, armed forces chief of staff, and FLN president — cementing military dominance.

An important dimension of societal militarisation involved shaping historical memory. The military undertook a deliberate effort to reshape Algerian history, marginalising rural and urban popular forces in favour of emphasising the army's central role. In 1974, Boumédiène established the National Centre for Historical Studies, and a few years later, the Official Gazette issued a decree limiting historical research to topics authorized by this centre, effectively controlling the narrative to buttress the military's foundational myth (Stora, 80-81).

During the civil war of the 1990s, the militarisation of both state and society reached a new peak. The military not only governed through a security emergency but expanded its institutional presence through empowering intelligence branches to conduct widespread surveillance and extrajudicial repression. Crucially, the regime propagated a powerful narrative both domestically and internationally, vilifying Islamists as existential threats (agents of colonialism) and positioning the military as the sole guarantor of national independence and cohesion, a key element of societal militarisation. This vision of governance aimed to legitimise the military's crackdown and political dominance (Martinez 2000).

This period was also marked by a deepening of the economic dimensions of militarisation. Privatisation, albeit delayed compared to Egypt, began in Algeria during the late 1990s. While intended to stimulate economic growth, these policies primarily benefited influential companies, including those owned by powerful generals. This concentration of wealth exacerbated income inequality and fuelled suspicion of corruption among the public. Furthermore, the stringent border controls with Morocco, implemented under the guise of nationalist slogans, created opportunities for corruption (Ghanem 2022, 137-140) and enabled the enrichment of certain military personnel and smuggling networks operating along the frontier, thereby intertwining security policy with illicit economic militarisation.

The structures of militarisation persisted after the war, although power dynamics shifted. Intelligence figures such as General Toufik dominated political life into the 2010s. Military-linked firms captured key economic sectors, creating a patronage-based system of elite co-optation (Werenfels 2007). Yet, Bouteflika's era was marked by a complex power struggle among the presidency, the army, and the intelligence services. This internal struggle occurred *within* the established militarised system, not as an attempt to dismantle it entirely. Nevertheless, Bouteflika succeeded in restoring peace and order, a notable achievement in Algeria's post-civil war context.

Bouteflika pursued strategic negotiation with Algeria's military leadership, seeking their gradual withdrawal from political life in exchange for shielding them from accountability. Central to his approach was the retirement of key generals associated with the 1992 coup and its subsequent violence. However, this attempt to rebalance power within the militarised state faced resistance. Elements within the military, particularly under Lamari and the General Staff, actively obstructed national reconciliation initiatives. Significantly, they leveraged the global 'war on terrorism' to cultivate international partnerships, thereby using geopolitical alignments to bolster their domestic standing and justify ongoing militarisation. They also incited unrest in Kabylia in 2001 and politically mobilized against Bouteflika by supporting Ali Benflis in the 2004 presidential elections.

Viewing the contest with the presidency as a zero-sum struggle, the military sought to prevent Bouteflika from consolidating power. Their eventual failure was of considerable historical significance: Bouteflika's re-election in 2004 marked the restoration of the presidency as the substantive centre of political authority. Subsequently, he orchestrated the retirement of key generals and curtailed the dominance of the General Staff. Bouteflika's broader project entailed reconstructing and rationalizing Algeria's authoritarian system around a strengthened presidency (Roberts 2007, 14-15), but one still operating within a fundamentally militarised state. This involved limiting military influence, enhancing the power of the ministry of interior, expanding the role of the police, and reinforcing presidential control.

To justify continued militarisation, Algeria's regime promoted a securitised nationalist narrative, employing state media and populist rhetoric to discredit parts of the movement as instruments of foreign powers, portraying the country as under constant threat from neighbouring states, internal jihadists, and instability in Tunisia, Libya, and the Sahel. Drawing on colonial-era tropes, this framing emphasised the necessity of strong military and security institutions. After the civil war, the regime aligned itself with Western fears of Islamist expansion in North Africa, casting Algeria as a stable, counter-terrorism partner (Ruedy 2005, 278-279). This positioning deflected criticism over authoritarianism and human rights abuses. Under Bouteflika, Algeria leveraged the global war on terror by allowing French military access to its airspace for Mali operations (Mundy 2024, ICCT 2020) and by sharing intelligence with the U.S. (Berkouk, 2009). The regime framed itself as both a guarantor of stability and a symbol of Arab nationalism under siege, effectively using external and internal threats to legitimize its militarized governance domestically and internationally.

Finally, Algeri's military funding trajectory reflects key phases of state militarisation and geopolitical positioning. Algeria's military budget has historically been among the highest in Africa, underpinned by hydrocarbon revenues. After steady expansion post-independence (initially with Soviet support), spending peaked by the mid-1970s amid regional tensions. The 1980s saw

moderate growth tempered by the oil crash, while the 1990s civil war triggered a renewed surge in defence and internal security investments despite economic strain. High oil/gas revenues fuelled the significant budget increases of the 2000s and early 2010s (World Bank, *Military Expenditure—Algeria 2025*).

Under Bouteflika, Algeria's militarisation intensified through heightened defence spending and assertive regional policies. The country became Africa's top military spender and ranked among the world's leading arms importers between 2000 and 2009. SIPRI data indicates that most North African arms transfer during 2005–2009 went to Algeria (SIPRI, *Yearbook 2010*, 14-15). By 2019, Algeria was one of the top five global arms importers, alongside Saudi Arabia, India, Egypt, and Australia (SIPRI, *Yearbook 2019*, 8). Defence spending rose from 3.5% of GDP in 2010 to 6.7% in 2020 (World Bank, *Military Expenditure—Algeria 2025*), with a sharp increase in 2023–2024, reaching \$21.8 billion — the highest in its history — due to a gas revenue boom (World Bank, *Military Expenditure—Algeria 2025*). This surge reflects a strategic prioritization of security and military imperatives, reinforcing Algeria's coercive and surveillance infrastructure. It also exemplifies Finer's concept of coercion and intelligence (1976) as tools of control and served as a patronage mechanism for elites, consolidating power within a militarized political framework amid shifting regional dynamics.

Algeria's militarisation has entrenched systemic corruption, with the defence sector ranked among the most corrupt globally. The Government Defence Integrity Index identifies Algeria as high-risk due to opaque procurement, weak audits, and absent parliamentary oversight (Government Defence Integrity Index 2020). The 2019 Hirak protests exposed public discontent and revealed the regime's adaptability. Like Egypt, Algeria's militarized governance preserved elite power, reinforced authoritarianism under a civilian façade, and blocked democratic reform.

In sum, Egypt and Algeria demonstrate entrenched military politicisation and widespread state militarisation, using geopolitical narratives to sustain authoritarian rule (see Table 1). Egypt's military dominance began with the 1952 coup and was reinforced under Sisi, while Algeria's military influence stems from its liberation war and was solidified after the 1992 coup. Both regimes limit civilian oversight, embed military figures in government and economic sectors, maintain opaque military economies, and prioritise internal security through high defence spending. They also leverage international security discourses to legitimise authoritarian practices. In both cases, a military elite captured the state and society, dismantling pluralism and closing the public sphere. Egypt evolved into a personalist regime centred around the military president, while Algeria established a military regime with a civilian façade. As historian Benjamin Stora notes, these elites resemble 'new Mamluks',² obsessed with security and willing to suppress their own

² The Mamluk Sultanate (1250–1517) was established in Egypt after the decline of the Ayyubids, when slave soldiers of Turkic and Caucasian origin seized power and created a rigid military order. The Mamluks defended the Islamic world against Crusaders and Mongols, while fostering cultural, architectural, and scholarly achievements in Egypt and the Levant. Their control of East–West trade routes secured wealth and influence, but internal rivalries, economic pressures, and rising external powers eroded their strength, leading to Ottoman conquest in 1517. In modern times, as noted by Benjamin Stora (2012) and others, the term "new Mamluks" has been used to describe military elites in certain Arab states who, much like their historical predecessors, dominate politics and the economy through military force, patronage networks, and control over key state institutions. This analogy, however, neglects a crucial distinction: unlike their modern counterparts, the historical Mamluks achieved notable military victories as well as significant civil, cultural, and commercial accomplishments.

societies in pursuit of power and privilege, undermining the prospects of sovereign, democratic states.

Table 1:
Military Politicisation and the Militarisation of State and Society in Egypt and Algeria

Feature	EGYPT	ALGERIA
MILITARY POLITICISATION		
Origins & Key Events/Phases	Military rule began with 1952 coup; politicization deepened under SCAF (2011) and peaked with Sisi's 2013 coup.	Military dominance began with independence; Boumédiène's 1965 coup institutionalized control; 1992 coup confirmed veto power over democracy.
Mechanisms	Justified control using nationalist narratives; entrenched via constitutional amendments (2012, 2014, 2019); civilian institutions serve as façade.	Military selects or approves presidents; controls transitions; entrenched role via constitutions and manipulation of internal rivalries.
MILITARISATION OF STATE AND SOCIETY		
State Level	Military deeply embedded in civilian administration; vast opaque economic empire; priority on internal security since Camp David; Islamists as main threat.	Military elites control state companies; intelligence agencies dominates; militarization intensified after 1990s civil war; Islamists as main threat.
Societal Level	Promotes loyalty through narratives of military competence and national salvation; prolonged emergency laws; youth indoctrination programs.	Civil war trauma legitimized repressive security state; dissent framed as threat; state shapes memory around military heroism.
Spending/Oversight	High arms imports despite peace with Israel; defence budget lacks transparency; corruption risks persist.	Consistently among top African military spenders; opaque defence sector with high corruption risk.
GEOPOLITICAL MANIPULATION		
Alliances & Aid	Shifted allegiance from USSR to U.S.; uses \$1.3 billion annual U.S. aid to sustain military economy and secure regime stability.	Historically aligned with USSR/Russia; assumes Western preference for stability over democratic reform.
Narratives & Crises	Uses "War on Terror" and regional instability to justify repression and expand military role; positions itself as a bulwark against Islamism and political instability.	Leverages terrorism and regional threats to reinforce military rule; portrays itself as bulwark against Islamism and chaos.
Outcomes	Reinforced military dominance, justified internal repression, secured foreign support, accumulated economic debt.	Maintained military supremacy, suppressed democratic openings, shielded regime from international pressure.

Conclusion

This paper examined how the intertwined dynamics of military politicisation, state and societal militarisation, and complex geopolitical manoeuvring have profoundly shaped the trajectories of contemporary Egypt and Algeria — particularly in the wake of the 2011 and 2019 uprisings. These processes have fundamentally reengineered and hollowed out Arab statehood, eroding core principles of the modern state, including legitimacy, sovereignty, and accountability. In both countries, legitimacy rooted in public consent has been replaced by coercive control, militarised nationalist narratives, and the dominance of unelected elites. Sovereignty has been undermined by opaque power networks and external dependencies that sustain either military-backed personalist rule or militarized regimes operating behind civilian façades. The findings suggest that the existential threat perceived by incumbent regimes in response to mass mobilization prompted counter-revolutionary forces —often with external support— to intensify these trajectories. As a result, enduring patterns established since independence have been reinforced, leading to the consolidation of deeply entrenched personalist and authoritarian regimes.

In both cases, entrenched military institutions obstruct democratic transitions not merely as political actors but as structural components of the state itself. Their politicization transforms the military from a state organ into a pillar of the regime, thereby blurring the boundaries between the state, the regime, and the government. The militarization of state and society functions—through expanded internal security mandates, intelligence dominance, and economic penetration—redefines state sovereignty from a civic contract into a coercive project, where stability is privileged over representation.

Moreover, military-led development strategies and narrative control recast legitimacy, no longer grounded in constitutional consent or electoral participation, but in claims of historical entitlement or national salvation. International complicity in supporting militarised regimes further entrenches these distortions. Thus, the paper shows that politicisation and militarisation are not merely anti-democratic trends—they are processes that reengineer statehood itself, hollowing out its representative core while preserving its coercive shell.

The geopolitical dimension is critical. Egypt and Algeria have strategically leveraged international alliances to secure legitimacy, resources, and impunity for domestic repression. Framing themselves as bulwarks against instability and terrorism, they cement their role in regional security. However, this reliance on external military aid and partnerships —often reinforced through military-to-military ties— undermines sovereignty and compromises national autonomy. Regime survival takes precedence over national interests. Despite consistently high military spending, serious doubts remain about the operational effectiveness of both countries' armed forces, obscured by secrecy and the absence of meaningful oversight.

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