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**Brothers in Arms? Military Economic Entitlements and Public  
Quiescence in Modern Egypt**

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**Brothers in Arms? Military Economic Entitlements and Public  
Quiescence in Modern Egypt**

**by**

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**Thesis**

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## **Dedication**

To my mother, who told me to get working and have a good time.

## **Abstract**

# **Brothers in Arms? Military Economic Entitlements and Public Quiescence in Modern Egypt**

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This paper uses modern Egyptian history to challenge the notion that public quiescence about an unjust situation necessarily stems from causes like apathy or a lack of political consciousness. The Egyptian armed forces have acted as a drain on state resources since the 1952 revolution, squandering public money on corruption and the development of a largely impotent fighting force. The military has also undermined the Egyptian economy with its extensive private sector interests, which benefit from state subsidies and conscript labor. By contrast, the general population has suffered widespread poverty and deprivation during the same period. Yet the Egyptian people have not seriously contested this grossly unfair distribution of economic resources. Indeed, the military consistently attracts very high public approval ratings.

I argue that the military elite has promoted general quiescence about the armed forces' financial privileges through the exercise of "third-dimensional" power (Lukes: 1974; Gaventa: 1980). Specifically, top officers colluded with the regime to convert this

inequality into a “non-issue,” such that a critical mass of Egyptians did not form grievances about the situation in the first place. The powerbrokers supplemented these control mechanisms by developing coercive apparatuses capable of eliminating any dissent that did manifest in the community. Historical and textual analysis will explain how the military implemented these mechanisms of control from the 1952 revolution onwards. I conclude that these power structures remain in place today, providing a significant obstacle to any future social transformation that would subject the military’s financial interests to civilian control.

## Table of Contents

<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>OVERVIEW</b> .....	<b>3</b>
Chapter One: Cultivating Popular Support for the Military (1952-1967) .....	9
A The Basis for a “Non-Issue” Arises .....	10
(i) A Glaring Inequality of Economic Resources .....	10
(ii) No Ameliorative Influence Emerges.....	13
B Shaping the “Consensus” .....	16
(i) Nationalistic Appeals .....	16
(ii) Emphasizing the National Security Threat .....	19
C Sidelineing Alternative Views .....	20
(i) Eliminating the Liberal Democratic Threat .....	21
(ii) Targeting Potential Sources of Dissent.....	24
D Conclusion .....	26
Chapter Two: Staring Down “The Setback” (1967-1973).....	28
A Testing the Limits of Dissent.....	29
(i) The Activists of Egypt vs Nasser .....	29
(ii) The Activists of Egypt vs Sadat.....	31
B The Military: Battered, But Far From Broken .....	33
(i) Changed Political Role, But Limited .....	33
(ii) Public Criticism, But Circumscribed .....	35
C Fightback: Sidelineing Dissent .....	38
(i) Violence and Coercion.....	39
(ii) Isolating and Containing Opposition .....	40
(iii) Redirecting Grievances.....	43
D Conclusion .....	46
Chapter Three: Cementing the Military’s Economic Empire (1973 –) .....	48
A Structured Inequalities, 2.0 .....	49

(i) The “New Deal” for Civil-Military Relations.....	49
(ii) New Circumstances, Same Unfairness .....	50
B Encouraging Quiescence .....	53
(i) Patriotic Appeals .....	53
(ii) Construction Project Acumen .....	56
(iii) National Security Threats .....	57
C Sweeping Aside Manifest Challenges.....	59
D Conclusion .....	61
Concluding Remarks.....	63
Bibliography .....	65



## INTRODUCTION

“The army and the people are one hand!”

– A popular chant amongst anti-regime protestors during the Egyptian revolution of 2011.

With this slogan, thousands of protestors celebrated the Egyptian armed forces’ decision to withdraw support for President Hosni Mubarak in early 2011, effectively bringing his thirty-year autocracy to an end. But the demonstrators did not know – or perhaps did not want to believe – that Egypt’s military figures served themselves before any other master. Leading officers had built up an economic empire over decades, one that spread across both public and private sectors. Egypt’s ensuing move towards democracy revealed that the top brass would not tolerate a new political order that subjected those financial interests to civilian control. Indeed, military leaders seized control of the transition period by forming the Supreme Council of Armed Forces, and then used that position to crack down on pro-democratic elements, often violently (Said 2012: 399-400). The officers eventually allowed Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood to form Egypt’s first democratically elected government in 2012, but then supported Morsi’s overthrow in a military coup within a year. The officers currently enjoy an unprecedented level of economic privilege under Morsi’s autocratic successor, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

This paper considers why the Egyptian people have failed to challenge the military’s array of economic entitlements in any serious way. The military establishment has consistently acted as a drain on state funds since the 1952 revolution, squandering public money on corruption and the development of a largely impotent fighting force. Even the military’s private sector interests hamper the Egyptian economy, receiving state subsidies and uncompetitive conscript labor on the one hand and then hoarding the proceeds in private bank accounts on the other. While observers have estimated that the military’s economic empire commands anywhere between 5 percent and 60 percent of Egypt’s gross domestic product, we cannot hope for an exact figure (*Washington Post*, 16 Mar 2014). By law, the military is not required to disclose its budget for public review.

The Egyptian masses bear the brunt of this unequal distribution of economic resources. Unemployment hovers at around 12 percent. Youth unemployment falls anywhere in the alarming range of 30 percent to 40 percent (*The Economist*, 6 Aug 2016). The al-Sisi regime has been cutting back long established subsidy programs to reduce state expenditure, leading to widespread price hikes on food products. Yet this unfairness has not come under significant public critique. On the contrary, the military consistently enjoys far higher public approval ratings than any other state institution. I argue that this counter-intuitive situation has emerged due to the exercise of power – not just in the typical sense of coercion, intimidation or violence – but also due to control mechanisms so insidious that they prevent the very *formation* of grievances.

## OVERVIEW

In recent decades, scholars have considered mechanisms for explaining why certain communities seemingly accept an unequal distribution of power that we might otherwise expect that community to challenge. According to Lukes, traditional conceptions of power relations assume that the quiescence of a disempowered group stems from either:

- (a) the disempowered community's defeat in an open contest of ideas (the "one dimensional" view of power); or
- (b) the powerful community's success in preventing existing grievances from arising in public discourse (the "two dimensional" view of power).

By way of illustration, we might explain former Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak's overwhelming success during three decades' worth of elections with reference to the first dimension of power. Mubarak increasingly tolerated electoral contestation, but only to a point. He always ensured that his National Democratic Party commanded far superior political and economic resources, enabling it to crush opposition parties. We might perceive power's second dimension in operation in the direct censorship policies of Gamal Abdel Nasser, which tasked military officers with reviewing all print media publications and redacting any dissenting views before those opinions could reach the Egyptian public.

Lukes argues that these two conceptual perspectives fail to explain a separate, more insidious exercise of control. He proposes a "third dimensional" view of power, the exercise of which prevents a disempowered community from even *forming* grievances about its unfair situation, let alone acting upon those grievances. The first and second dimensional views focus on *activity*, or lack thereof. Power imbalances subsist either because the powerless lose an active public contest for control, or because the powerful successfully prevent the powerless from acting on their manifest feelings of injustice. Lukes' conception suggests that *inactivity* (or acquiescence) may originate from the implementation of power structures, as opposed to apathy or inertia (Lukes 1974: 23-24). That is, powerbrokers might put in place systems of control that short circuit the very formation of dissent. Over time, such

mechanisms promise to benefit the ruling elite by reducing the often-significant costs associated with suppressing manifest dissent.

This third-dimensional analysis of power offers a deeper explanation as to why obviously deprived communities may not challenge the political situation that promotes inequality. We might be tempted to explain the Egyptian public's longstanding quiescence about military hegemony as the result of general apathy, or a lack of political consciousness, or tacit acceptance. These assumptions tend to "blame the victim" for his [sic.] non-participation" (Gaventa 1980: 8). By contrast, the third dimension explores the possibility that power can be exercised to create this lack of political action in response to a situation of inequality. That is, powerbrokers have coerced those getting less of the relevant values into a state of submissive quiescence. If we can establish the operation of third-dimensional power, this challenges any assumption that a genuine "consensus" exists in favor of the unequal situation.

Gaventa offers a methodological framework for establishing the existence of Lukes' third dimension of power, whereby the "hidden aspects of power" convert potential grievances into "non-issues" (Gaventa 1980: 25-30). First, the researcher must identify a grossly unequal distribution of some resource valued by all stakeholders, powerful or otherwise, in the relevant power structure. Already, this paper's introduction has highlighted indicia suggestive of such a situation existing in Egyptian society today. The military establishment commands economic resources that seem disproportionate to the armed forces' contribution to the nation's wellbeing. Moreover, the military's financial dominance comes at the expense of large sections of the Egyptian population. This paper sketches the Egyptian military establishment's preferential access to state resources from the 1952 revolution until the present day. Egypt's underprivileged masses have rarely, if ever, challenged this unequal state of affairs.

Gaventa points out, however, that the bare existence of an inequitable distribution of resources does not demonstrate the exercise of third dimensional power. He falls back on Lukes' enquiry, being "can we always assume that the victims of injustice and inequality would, but for the exercise of power, strive for justice and equality?" (Lukes 1974: 46).

Gaventa proposes that we can satisfactorily answer this question only by proving that the disempowered community *would have acted* against this inequality, *but for* the powerbrokers exercising mechanisms of control (Gaventa 1980: 26-27). Therefore this paper sets out to test whether or not:

(a) the Egyptian public would have contested the military's lopsided command of state resources; *but for*

(b) the military establishment converting its privileged economic position into a "non-issue" by exercising control over the Egyptian public.

We might conveniently address point (b) first, identifying specific power constructs that operate on the disempowered community. These processes should operate such that the actions of the powerful cause their subjects' acquiescence, in spite of an imbalanced distribution of resources.

Gaventa's own survey evaluated the formation of a "consensus" between working class Appalachian miners and their mighty employer, the American Association ("the Mining Company"). This consensus meant that the local population generally acquiesced with the Mining Company's mass acquisition of land (often at a gross undervalue) and / or worked in the newly constructed mines on grossly unfair terms. Gaventa begins his enquiry by determining how the Mining Company might have first established widespread acceptance of these successive inequalities. To be sure, he identifies overt exercises of power, such as intimidation of dissenting voices in the local community. Yet Gaventa argues that the Mining Company also utilized more subtle mechanisms of control. For example, it encouraged ideological shifts in Appalachian communities, emphasizing a new "industrial loyalty" over pre-existing familial ties. These cultural shifts laid the foundation for decades of quiescence on the miners' part.

The first chapter of this paper considers the establishment of a "consensus" amongst the Egyptian public in favor of the military establishment receiving preferential access to public funds. It will outline how the armed forces became the beneficiary of a grossly unfair distribution of economic resources, a process that began from the earliest days after the 1952 revolution. The Egyptian masses did not seriously challenge these circumstances – especially

once Nasser had consolidated his own autocratic rule by mid-1954 – despite ongoing military corruption and the poverty endured by many Egyptians. Nasser and his allies sidelined manifest challenges to the unequal situation with second-dimensional exercises of power, such as censorship and violence, especially during the pre-consolidation period. Yet I argue that those same powerbrokers used third-dimensional power gradually to convert the military’s economic entitlements into a “non-issue” amongst the public at large. The military elites encouraged cultural shifts not dissimilar from those considered in Gaventa’s study. This program emphasized the importance of the armed forces to Egypt’s nationalist project, while binding potential sources of dissent to the Nasser regime through co-optation. By 1967, the inequality had become a “non-issue,” and military hegemony over economic resources went largely unchallenged.

We might further observe the operation of third-dimensional power structures by analyzing what occurs if the mechanisms of control weaken at some point. Gaventa focuses on how the Mining Company responded to a rare outbreak of protests in the Appalachian community during the early 1930s against the prevailing inequalities. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Mining Company utilized elements of massive repression by threatening the livelihoods of miners and prosecuting key protestors through the court system. The Mining Company also colluded with local elites to assume a “gatekeeping” role, distorting information about the demonstrations in order to “isolate, contain and redirect the conflict” (Gaventa 1980: 106). First, the powerbrokers controlled the media narrative and downplayed the scale of public opposition to the status quo. Gaventa demonstrates this by comparing local and national coverage of the Appalachian protests. Next, the mining elites redirected that narrative towards issues unrelated to the popular grievances, such as patriotism and religious piety (Gaventa 1980: 106-08).

These moments of stress also help us address the third and final obstacle to establishing the existence of “third dimensional” power. Can we show that the disadvantaged actors *would have behaved differently* in the absence of the relevant power structures? Gaventa suggests that disempowered groups might demonstrate their “true” grievances at moments when their subjugation to “the powers that be” relaxes (Gaventa 1980: 27-28). The

rise of mining unionism constituted the first serious challenge to the Mining Company's role within the Appalachian communities. This development converted apparent "non-issues" (i.e. the Mining Company's extraction of enormous profits from the mining community's pool of natural resources) into actively expressed dissent, albeit fleetingly. This grass roots dissent arguably demonstrated that the impoverished miners' previous acquiescence stemmed from an exercise of power rather than genuine consent.

This paper's second chapter will explore how the Egyptian military establishment engaged in comparable practices when remedying cracks in its own power structures. The Egyptian armed forces faced rare levels of popular opposition after losing 1967's Six Day War to Israel in humiliating circumstances. Mass protests erupted around the nation in February 1968 – and then again from 1972 to 1973 – on a range of issues that had previously existed beyond public critique, from military fallibility to demands for democratization. Broad public support of these protests suggests that Egyptians might well have contested social inequalities before the shock of the Six Day War, but for the effective exercise of third-dimensional power. Despite this, the manufactured "consensus" in favor of the military's economic entitlements remained strong enough that this issue did not seriously arise amongst the demonstrators' stated grievances. I argue that the Nasser regime compensated for this temporary lapse in third-dimensional power by suppressing manifest challenges to the status quo through manipulation and violence.

The paper concludes by exploring how the Egyptian military elite not only cemented its economic entitlements within the public sphere, but also amassed a sweeping portfolio of private sector interests. The armed forces had succeeded in re-establishing their institutional prestige by securing a partial victory in the 1973 October War. Nevertheless, the ensuing peace with Israel might have threatened the military's institutional pre-eminence, and therefore access to financial resources. These changed circumstances required that the top brass manufacture a new "consensus." It needed to encourage public quiescence about the military's continued access to public funds and daring move into the private sector, especially at a time when the Egyptian masses suffered crippling poverty due to inflation and unemployment. The military elite prevented grievances from forming through intense

socialization, which emphasized the armed forces' patriotism, ability to lead infrastructure projects and importance to national security. As before, the regime and its military allies undergirded these third dimensional power structures with coercive apparatuses, which allowed for the swift elimination of manifest challenges to the prevailing economic order.



## Chapter One: Cultivating Popular Support for the Military (1952-1967)

“(A)ccording to what has been mentioned and published, our losses in the recent wars alone are evaluated at about four billion pounds. As someone has said, had this amount been spent on the villages of Egypt, which number about four thousand, the share for each village would have been a million pounds. Such a sum would completely re-create the villages and raise them to the level of the villages in Europe. But our Egyptian villages have remained in their sad condition, and our poor peasants in their ignorance, disease and poverty.”

– Tawfiq al-Hakim, Egyptian playwright and journalist, commenting on Egyptian military expenditure during the Nasser era (al-Hakim 1985: 37).

A grand yacht glided out of Alexandria harbor on 26 July 1952. It spirited away from Egypt the country’s last effective monarch, King Farouk. The conspirators – a band of young, middle-ranking military officers – remained ashore, now clutching the metaphorical keys to the erstwhile Egyptian kingdom. Three days earlier, these self-proclaimed “Free Officers” had left the barracks and orchestrated a swift *coup d’état* against the king. The rebel soldiers rallied together around shared nationalist goals, including the toppling of Farouk’s venal court and the expulsion of British colonial forces from Egypt. Beyond these specific objectives, no comprehensive ideology held sway over the Free Officers. For this reason, uncertainty plagued the nascent Egyptian revolution. By mid-1954, however, Gamal Abdel Nasser had dispatched his main political rivals and consolidated his autocratic rule. And one institution loomed especially large over Nasserite society: the armed forces.

I argue that the Egyptian armed forces placed their increasingly privileged economic position after the 1952 revolution beyond serious public critique through the exercise of third-dimensional power. First, I will demonstrate how the military establishment colluded with Egypt’s political leaders to implement a “structuring of inequalities” in favor of the military’s financial interests between 1952 and 1967 (Gaventa 1980: 56-57). The unequal distribution of state economic resources did not occasion ameliorative influence from the Egyptian public, despite widespread poverty and the military’s relative lack of effectiveness (Gaventa 1980: 26). Instead, key social groups – such as Egyptian students and workers – remained largely quiescent during this formative phase of post-revolution Egypt. The military establishment brought about this favorable outcome by gradually converting its preferential access to public funds into a “non-issue.” The regime and military elite shaped a public

consensus in favor of the nation's defense apparatus, through using nationalistic and existential appeals and co-opting potential sources of dissent. These same powerbrokers also sidelined alternative visions for Egypt's economic structure – most notably, from pro-democratic forces and the Muslim Brotherhood – which advocated greater restrictions on the military's access to economic resources.

## **A THE BASIS FOR A “NON-ISSUE” ARISES**

### **(i) A Glaring Inequality of Economic Resources**

The Egyptian military establishment used the period immediately following the 1952 revolution to establish a grossly unequal distribution of state economic resources in its own favor (Gaventa 1980: 25-30). This trend accelerated once Nasser consolidated his political supremacy by the summer of 1954. Nasser publicly emphasized the need to bolster the military capabilities of the Egyptian armed forces, making significant budgetary allowances for their modernization (Hashim 2011: 69). In addition, the Egyptian people paid “national-defense” and “national-security” taxes, both of which acted as surcharges on the amount usually payable to the state (al-Hakim 1985: 41). The new president candidly acknowledged the strategic necessity of sating the military's demands for an improved arsenal. He told *The New York Times* in October 1955 that “our revolution was stimulated in the army by a lack of equipment,” and failure to rectify this situation would cause Egypt's soldiery to “lose faith in the government.” These comments reflect the crucial importance of the armed forces to the political legitimacy of the fledging Nasser regime.

The unfairness of this wealth distribution became apparent when the Egyptian military began to enjoy perks from public finances that existed outside the official defense budget. The Nasser regime went beyond fulfilling the military establishment's wishes for more equipment and funding; it catered directly to the personal interests of the officer corps. Military elites used their position to obtain financial advantages far beyond the armed forces' traditional sphere of influence. Officers moved into the luxury villas and apartments vacated by royal family members or well-heeled foreigners after the revolution (Beattie 1994: 124).

The state signed off on senior military men acquiring extensive business and property portfolios (Hashim 2011: 69). Some of these gains filtered down through the military hierarchy. For instance, the regime introduced an extravagant benefit scheme for those serving in the bloody Yemeni Civil War, in which Egypt participated from 1962 until 1967. The reward program offered double pay, low interest government loans and the freedom to import luxury goods from outside Egypt. Yemeni veterans also received better medical care and preferential access to universities, a privilege that extended to veterans' families (Hashim 2011: 71). No one profited more from this Yemeni splurge than high-ranking military officials, a venality that provoked disgust even within the armed forces (Hashim 2011: 71).

Importantly, the military elite institutionalized this preferential access to state economic resources by directly infiltrating the Egyptian political system. Pro-Nasser officers had begun to transition into public office before Nasser's consolidation of power in mid-1954. After that point, military men seized upon civilian governmental posts with a vengeance. Officers exclusively occupied the vice-presidency under Nasser, and dominated important ministries such as War and Interior. Hammad points out, for instance, that 72 percent of important Foreign Ministry positions in 1962 fell to former soldiers (quoted in Harb 2003: 279). These developments represented a far cry from Naguib's first cabinet as prime minister, which comprised of civilian technocrats (Cook 2012: 46). The revolutionaries justified this *volte-face* by asserting that the military alone possessed "the bureaucratic organizing skills to run the affairs of the state" (Harb 2003: 278). Harb ascribes this elevated political standing to a separate, less idealistic motivation; the armed forces wanted to secure control over the traditionally independent state structure (Harb 2003: 278). In this way, the military elite established a power base for its "concentrated economic control of [state] resources and the means of their extraction" (Gaventa 1980: 57).

Conversely, indicia abound that the military's economic entitlements amounted to a "glaring inequality" from the perspective of the Egyptian masses. Most Egyptians lived in poverty at the time of the 1952 revolution (al-Hakim 1985: 37). The Free Officers had garnered popular support for their revolution by promising to redress the economic inequalities and corruption that had long been endemic in Egypt's social structure. Yet as al-

Hakim sadly reflected in 1972, two years after Nasser's death, "our Egyptian villages have remained in their sad condition, and our poor peasants in their ignorance, disease and poverty" (al-Hakim 1985: 37). As we have seen, Egypt's military officers did not share in this state of economic deprivation. Indeed, the enormous peasant class helped to finance the officers' largesse, scrounging the funds to pay national security levies from their meager finances (al-Hakim 1985: 41). For this reason, we might typically expect grievances to form amongst the public on account of this imbalance of economic power.

This *prima facie* assumption is amplified when we consider the limited benefits that the Egyptian public derived from enormous state expenditure on Egypt's armed forces under the Nasser regime. The military establishment actually added to Egypt's developmental malaise through its preferential access to state funding. Under Nasser, the armed forces were "at their worst in terms of military effectiveness," despite receiving ample state resources for their improvement (Hashim 2011: 69). The 1956 Suez Crisis provides an apt illustration of the Egyptian military's inadequacy. In July 1956, Nasser had nationalized the Suez Canal. This initiative directly compromised British and French economic interests in the vital waterway. Egypt's two former colonial masters therefore allied with Israel and invaded Suez in October 1956, attempting to reclaim the canal and depose Nasser. The foreign invaders won a decisive victory on the battlefield, despite the Egyptian state's heavy investment in the armed forces, which had included an enormous purchase of arms from Czechoslovakia in the previous year (Beattie 1994: 116). Indeed, the Egyptian armed forces did not enjoy any significant military victory during the Nasser era.

I argue that the state condoned this glaring imbalance of economic resources not primarily to create a competent military, but because the armed forces had offered Nasser an invaluable source of legitimacy. The military brass ensured the cooperation of the regime by providing decisive political support in favor of Nasser, the eventual victor of Egypt's post-revolutionary leadership struggle. In particular, the armed forces proved crucial in swinging popular support away from Nasser's main political rival, General Muhammad Naguib (Beattie 1994: 90). Along with the other revolutionaries, Nasser had put forward Naguib as the first president of the Republic of Egypt in June 1953. Naguib boasted a decorated military

career and a higher public profile than Nasser and the other Free Officers, all of whom were significantly younger and less experienced (Cook 2012: 46). Yet Nasser had expected Naguib to act as a figurehead for the revolution only, while he wielded real political power from behind the scenes (Sadat 1957: 132-33). Instead, Naguib advocated the return of democratic elections soon after he assumed the presidency, a proposal opposed by most of the Free Officers (Beattie 1994: 90). Naguib, however, proved difficult to dislodge from power; when the Free Officers forced him to resign the presidency in February 1954, mass public protests secured Naguib's immediate reinstatement.

The military establishment thus cemented its privileged economic position in Nasserite Egypt by enabling Nasser to usurp the popular Naguib. In 1953, Nasser had broken with all hierarchical structure and appointed Abdel Hakim Amer, his closest friend, as the army's commander-in-chief. Amer boasted remarkable rapport with the Egyptian officer corps and could mobilize the armed forces behind Nasser simply because, in Nasser's words, "the whole army loves Abdel Hakim Amer" (quoted in Hashim 2011: 68). At the same time, pro-Nasser officers began leaving their military posts and entering civilian government. And, most dramatically, Nasser undermined Naguib by arranging for six explosions to take place across Cairo in March 1954, just after Naguib's reinstatement as president. These terrorist attacks led to panicked calls from the public for the military to take charge and restore order. Conveniently, of course, it was Nasser rather than Naguib who directed the armed forces to resolve this apparent security crisis. In these ways, the military helped bring about the decisive consolidation of power around Nasser's presidency, which scholars date – at the latest – to the summer of 1954 (Beattie 1994: 91). These political circumstances support the conclusion that the military establishment received generous economic entitlements in exchange for political services rendered to Nasser, rather than out of some genuine necessity for building a strong army.

## **(ii) No Ameliorative Influence Emerges**

As the military entrenched its command over state resources, this economic inequality did not occasion any significant ameliorative influence from those getting less of the

resources: the Egyptian public (Gaventa 1980: 26). To be sure, crucial actors did contest the notion of untrammled military hegemony in the immediate aftermath of the 1952 revolution. For one, there was a pro-democratic movement – championed by the established political parties and officers like Naguib – which presumably would have subjected the military and its economic entitlements to greater civilian control. Another key political faction – the Muslim Brotherhood – entertained policies of serious wealth redistribution throughout Egyptian society (Beattie 1994: 26). Yet these alternative economic visions gradually slid from prominence, especially after Nasser defeated his political rivals and consolidated power in mid-1954. A remarkable public quiescence fell upon Egyptian society from this point until the Six Day War of 1967, when the military's abject failure exposed it to a level of open criticism.

This quiescence affected not only the Egyptian masses at large, but also specific social groups with a strong tradition of political activism. For example, Egyptian labor unions had rebelled intensely against the Egyptian monarchy after the Second World War, and their frequent waves of strikes and demonstrations had helped to facilitate the overthrow of King Farouk. Yet the Free Officers stamped out any notion of a truly independent labor movement within months of the 1952 revolution. Textile workers did engage in a destructive strike in the industrial city of Kafr al-Dawar in August 1952, which the RCC violently suppressed (Beattie 1994: 74-75). This early activism gave way to a period of extended docility from Egypt's workers (Quataert 1995: 119). Quataert asserts that no major wave of labor unrest took place in Egypt between the Kafr al-Dawar incident and 1977, when Nasser's successor Anwar Sadat faced nationwide riots over state-mandated austerity measures (Quataert 1995: 121).

Similarly, the Egyptian student body defied its roots of restive activism and left the military command of state resources unchallenged during the Nasser era. The Free Officers had identified university students, along with labor movements, as the most likely sources of political disturbance in Egyptian society (Abdalla 1985: 119-20). This suspicion proved justified when teachers and students at Alexandria University called for an end to martial law during the March 1954 political showdown between Naguib and Nasser (Abdalla 1985: 120).

Students violently resisted the presence of the state-founded political organization, the Liberation Rally, during that same year (Abdalla 1985: 122). These incidents, however, “marked the beginning of a long period of hibernation for the student movement in Egypt” (Abdalla 1985: 123). Nasser’s consolidation of power ushered in a protracted political apathy on Egypt’s campuses, with one university professor summarizing the era as follows:

From my personal experience I can assure you that 90 percent of student discussions at the university are on the subject of football ... The young men on whom the future of this country depends are obsessed with an opium called football.” (quoted in Abdalla 1985: 123)

Significant student political activism did not resume until February 1968, when students joined with workers to protest against the Nasser regime in the aftermath of the Six Day War (Abdalla 1985: 123).

Ultimately, however, perhaps most surprising was the lack of political challenge from those most disadvantaged by the officers’ hoarding of economic resources: the Egyptian masses. Blanga points out that Egypt boasts a proud tradition of civilian uprisings, and that the populace “knew how to stage stormy protests, to the point of overthrowing the regime” (Blanga 2014: 366-67). For instance, the British had needed the armed forces to put down the nationwide revolt that accompanied the 1919 independence movement (Blanga 2014: 366). Nasser himself needed to make hasty political concessions when the masses joined students and workers protesting in February 1968. Yet the military establishment did not face any groundswell of public opposition to its economic privileges between 1954 and 1967. This quiescence subsisted despite public awareness of military corruption. For instance, most Egyptians had personally encountered the venality of those who had served in the Yemeni Civil War between 1962 and 1967, with these veterans seizing upon lavish economic entitlements (Ferris 2008: 275-76). This consciousness did not manifest in popular unrest, however, as the Egyptian public continued to venerate the armed forces right up until the Six Day War. How could this be?

## **B SHAPING THE “CONSENSUS”**

I argue that the Egyptian military establishment established this trend of public quiescence by exercising third dimensional power, which effectively converted the armed forces’ economic entitlements into a “non-issue” (Gaventa 1980). We have seen that the Free Officers, and then Nasser alone, faced an Egyptian society with an established history of political activism. Significant actors advocated competing visions for the future of the Egyptian republic, some of which proposed greater restrictions on military hegemony than the effective autonomy offered by the Nasser regime. For this reason, the military elite cultivated popular support for enormous state expenditure on the armed forces. It did so by creating a powerful ideological apparatus in favor of the military’s economic entitlements, which was based on both nationalistic appeals and scaremongering over national security. Crucially, this process of “shaping wants” necessitated the distortion of information, such that a critical mass of Egyptians would support a system of military perks that fundamentally undermined their own economic interests (Gaventa 1980: 63).

### **(i) Nationalistic Appeals**

The military establishment wasted no time in developing a “powerful ideological apparatus” in favor of the armed forces, portraying Egypt’s soldiers as the unwaveringly loyal champions of Egyptian nationalism (Gaventa 1980: 61-68). If any policy platform had united the Free Officers, it revolved around independence for Egypt – that is, independence from the monarchy and from Britain. These anti-establishment causes tapped into a tidal wave of popular sentiment at the time. Cook argues that virtually all Egyptians longed for the expulsion of British forces from their homeland by the 1950s (Cook 2012: 42). Tawfiq al-Hakim reports a similar groundswell of contempt amongst the people for the crass and hedonistic lifestyle of King Farouk (al-Hakim 1985: 2). From mid-1950, the Free Officers drew a distinction between the nationalist credentials of the armed forces and those of other state institutions. They reserved particular criticism for ambivalence on the nationalist question from the parliamentary parties – the very same actors who were advocating a swift transition to parliamentary democracy. For instance, the RCC pointed out that the leading



Wafd Party had abrogated the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936 on the one hand, but then failed to declare open war against the ongoing British presence in Egypt on the other. By contrast, leaflets distributed by the Free Officers emphasized the military's potential to "take the lead in its national duty in the struggle against imperialism" (quoted in Gordon 1992: 49). The argument followed that Egyptians could entrust this task to the armed forces, given that "the army is the people's army, not the army of any particular individual" (Gordon 1992: 49).

This value-shaping exercise extended to distorting the level of the armed forces' commitment to the nation-building efforts of the new Egyptian republic. The regime enhanced the military's institutional prestige by representing the armed forces as "the vanguard of modernization and development" (Hashim 2011: 68). This propaganda linked the armed forces with the key populist policies of the early post-revolutionary phase, even though the bulk of the army remained unconvinced by this legislative package. No policy served this propaganda purpose more effectively than the Free Officers' land reform scheme. The Free Officers had promised to break the stranglehold of wealthy landowning elites over the Egyptian economy, which remained essentially feudalist in nature at the time of King Farouk's abdication. For this reason, Naguib enacted land reform legislation within 24 hours of forming his first government in September 1953 (Cook 2012: 71). The law restricted the amount of private land that any one Egyptian could own to 200 feddans.<sup>1</sup> This reform bolstered the RCC's anti-imperialist credentials. It also allowed the Free Officers to highlight the bright economic future that Egypt's enormous peasant class stood to enjoy under the military-backed regime's tutelage. Egyptians responded enthusiastically. Al-Hakim recalls his sheer joy when a friend approached him in a Cairo café with news of the land reform legislation (al-Hakim 1985: 11). Indeed, public approval for land reform was so powerful that it drowned out criticism of the Naguib government's Parties Reorganization Law, which imposed serious restrictions on the formation of political parties (Beattie 1994: 78). In this way, the Egyptian public to ascribe agency to the armed forces in relation to the key achievements of this populist initiative.

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<sup>1</sup> Initially, the Free Officers had allowed the civilian Ali Mahir to remain as prime minister after the revolution. Mahir insisted that the land reform program allow private land ownership at up to 500 feddans, a demand that caused the Free Officers to depose him as prime minister.

I argue that the regime built upon this growing nationalist mythology surrounding the military in order to justify allocating additional economic resources to defense spending. Symbolically, Nasser tied the creation of a powerful Egyptian fighting force to the very heart of the Egyptian nationalist cause. The Free Officers identified the previous ineptitude of the Egyptian military as a key justification for the 1952 revolution. In 1948, most of the Free Officers had served in the calamitous Palestinian War, in which Egypt failed to defend the Palestinians against annihilation at the hands of the nascent state of Israel. Nasser decried his military superiors from that campaign as “a disgrace to the uniform they wore,” a corrupt and incompetent extension of King Farouk’s court (quoted in Hashim 2011: 67).<sup>2</sup> The president was not alone in attaching special symbolic significance to the wellbeing of the Egyptian armed forces. On the revolution’s eve, a British commentator wrote that Egypt did not require a stronger army out of strategic necessity, but having one would contribute to “the bolstering of Egyptian prestige and pride” (quoted in Hashim 2011: 66).

Accordingly, Nasser promoted the state’s spending spree on the Egyptian armed forces – and the economic inequalities that flowed from that expenditure – as an essential component of Egypt’s nationalist project. The regime communicated this message through a variety of strategies. With little subtlety, it drew up a National Charter setting out the key objectives of the Nasserite revolution, a document that became required reading in all Egyptian schools (Abdalla 1985: 116). Taking pride of place amongst the Charter’s aspirations was the goal of building a “powerful national army.” The regime also conducted countless public displays of military hardware, especially after upgrading the decrepit national arsenal with new weaponry from the Soviet Union (al-Hakim 1985: 40). State-funded documentaries supplemented these symbolic gestures, extolling the virtues of the rapidly improving Egyptian defense force during the Nasser era (Mostafa 2012: 263). I argue that these instances of propaganda went simply beyond demanding economic support for the military, and amounted to “influencing, shaping or determining [the public’s] very wants” (Gaventa 1980: 12).

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<sup>2</sup> By most accounts, Nasser had a point about the Egyptian military’s overall weakness during the Palestine campaign. Egypt had only obtained control of its national army in 1936, and the British had disbanded the army by fiat during World War Two (Gordon 1992, 40-41).

## **(ii) Emphasizing the National Security Threat**

Secondly, the regime insulated the military's economic entitlements from public critique by distorting information about the armed forces' ability to defend Egypt's national security interests. To be sure, post-revolution Egypt did face a number of security threats from abroad. Most obviously, the Free Officers' stated commitment to free Egypt from the shackles of colonialism meant that the Egyptian armed forces could not remain a mere adjunct to the British army. A second enemy, Israel, attacked Egypt's national security interests more directly by destroying an Egyptian army base in Gaza on 28 February 1955. This raid precipitated the Nasser regime's daring arms purchase from Czechoslovakia in September of the same year. Egypt acquired an enormous amount of military equipment through this deal, including 200 tanks, 50 bombers and two submarines. The regime justified this brash decision – which defied the Cold War superpowers' moratorium on arms purchases in the Middle East – with the claim that Western powers had supported the state of Israel's creation in a deliberate attempt to weaken the Arab world (Sadat 1957: 102). For this reason, the regime argued, Egypt needed to allocate a good deal of economic capital to developing a respectable military independent of Western interference.

The military elite galvanized support for this heavy defense spending by misleading the Egyptian public about the effectiveness of the military. As noted earlier, the Czech arms deal did not convert the Egyptian armed forces into a strong fighting unit. On the contrary, the Suez Crisis of 1956 demonstrated to any objective observer that the military could not defend Egypt on the battlefield, at least against a force as strong as Britain or Israel. Yet the Nasser regime manufactured a political victory from the joint Soviet and American order for Britain, Israel and France to withdraw from the Suez War, right before they could rout the Egyptians. In al-Hakim's view, the regime promoted this outcome as an unqualified victory for Egypt “in order to conceal from the people the causes of our inability to defend our soil” (al-Hakim 1985: 36). Nasser's Suez “victory” gave fresh impetus to the regime's already booming propaganda apparatus. Patriotic songs, films and parades celebrated the supposed might of the Egyptian military establishment, “the strongest striking force in the Middle East” (al-Hakim 1985: 28). Mohammed Heikal, a Nasser confidante and Egypt's foremost

journalist of the period, retrospectively described the Suez invasion as “doomed to failure” from its outset (Heikal 1986: 195). This account obscured eyewitness testimony that Nasser had actually wept during the battle, resigning himself to a crushing Egyptian defeat (Jankowski 2001: 68).

The propaganda campaign succeeded in shaping community values in support of the military and its central importance to Egyptian society. The myth of the Egyptian army’s strength flourished amongst the Egyptian public (Hashim 2011: 70). The propaganda successes extended beyond the working classes. Many years later, al-Hakim expressed his personal regret at “believing the lies which we broadcast about ourselves” after the Suez Crisis (al-Hakim 1985: 36). More generally, he contrasted the Egyptian public’s acceptance of Nasserite propaganda with his own gullibility as such:

What is not surprising is that the people, in the heat of their affection, received (Nasser’s) speeches with jubilation and glorification. What *is* surprising is that an intellectual like me, accountable to his country, whom the revolution overtook when he was fully mature, could also be pulled along behind this affectionate heat (al-Hakim 1985: 20).

### **C SIDELINING ALTERNATIVE VIEWS**

We have seen, however, that manifest challenges to this military-dominated economic structure did exist in the early days of post-revolutionary Egypt (Gaventa 1980: 14). Indeed, Brownlee argues that “(a)t the time of the [1952] coup, military rule seemed an unlikely outcome for Egypt” (Brownlee 2007: 48). Most soldiers involved in the coup had advocated a transition from the monarchy of Farouk towards liberal democracy. Naguib himself embodied this attitude, believing that the military’s proper function was to secure the revolution and then allow civilians to govern (Brownlee 2007: 52). The pro-democracy soldiers shared this sentiment with the established political parties like the Wafd Party, whose capacity for electoral mobilization would have made it virtually unbeatable in open and fair parliamentary elections (Beattie 1994: 25). This liberal-democratic proposal would have placed the government – and the armed forces – under the control of civilian leaders (Brownlee 2007: 48). The Muslim Brotherhood offered another competing vision for

Egyptian society – “a society based on Islamic principles” (Beattie 1994: 26). Although the Brothers remained vague about how their ideal Egypt would look, wealth redistribution featured as a possible policy platform (Beattie 1994: 26).

I argue that the military elite supplemented its efforts to shape community values in favor of the armed forces by exercising second-dimensional power to sideline these competing economic visions (Gaventa 1980: 14-15). The liberal democratic and Islamist proposals directly challenged the system that would eventually emerge in Nasserite Egypt, whereby officers entered public office and the military establishment amassed preferential access to state economic resources. The regime thus colluded with the military establishment to drive these alternative economic visions away from the political arena. They achieved this objective by exercising various forms of second-dimensional power, including direct oppression, co-optation and mobilization of existing biases in Egyptian culture (Gaventa 1980: 14). The Nasser regime then cemented its dominance of public discourse by creating new barriers for liberal democrats and Islamists to participate in the political system (Gaventa 1980: 14-15).

### **(i) Eliminating the Liberal Democratic Threat**

Nasser’s political allies set about undermining the liberal democratic movement by devising ways to prevent those rivals from participating in the decision-making arena (Gaventa 1980: 14-15). Nasser first turned his attention to the political parties, and especially the Wafd, which stood to gain the most from a swift transition to civilian rule. The RCC carried out a wave of arrests on 5 September 1952, a little over a month after Farouk’s ouster. Beattie describes those taken into custody as a “*Who’s Who?* of civilian party leaders” (Beattie 1994: 77). The Free Officers dissolved all political parties by issuing the Parties Reorganization Law four days later, before banning them outright on 17 January 1953. The party ban ushered in what the RCC described as a three-year “transition period,” after which parliamentary elections could take place (Beattie 1994: 79). Of course, Nasser would consolidate supreme political power around his regime well before the expiry of this period.

The “transition” phase ended with Nasser supposedly winning 99.9% of votes cast in the 1956 presidential election (Brownlee 2007: 56).

The RCC succeeded in forcibly sidelining Egypt’s established political parties by mobilizing public bias against the alleged corruption of the old guard of Egyptian politics. The Free Officers justified the September 1952 arrests on the basis that the impugned politicians had been meeting with members of the former landowning elite, and were planning to undermine the revolution (Beattie 1994: 77). The Parties Reorganization Law afforded a legal imprimatur to these accusations. It gave the RCC a basis in legislation to exclude individual politicians – including the Wafd’s most senior member, Mustafa al-Nahhas – from any participation in the political system on vague charges of “corruption” (Gordon 1992: 74). This narrative of impropriety fed off the Wafd’s chequered history, which ranged from leading Egypt’s struggle for independence in the 1919 revolution to becoming, by the 1940s, “a virtual partner in a conservative alliance with the monarchy” (Brownlee 2007: 49). The RCC could compare its ostensible determination to carry out populist policies, such as the land reform legislation, with the Wafd’s historical willingness to collaborate with Egypt’s wealthy elite. The political parties did not help their own cause by responding to the RCC’s restrictions with a series of internecine struggles. This unsightly behavior gave weight to the RCC’s allegations of corruption and incompetence against the established politicians, thus “nurturing public acceptance of a transitional authoritarian alternative” (Beattie 1994: 79).

Nasser also set about expunging pro-democratic elements amongst the military officers, ensuring that they would not resuscitate a liberal democratic vision for Egyptian society after the supposed transition period. Naguib had supported the RCC’s restrictions on the political parties, on the basis that he too “felt no love for the old party regime” (Beattie 1994: 90). Yet Naguib did not disavow his conviction that the Free Officers should cleanse the broken system of constitutional monarchy before allowing for genuine civilian sovereignty to exist (Brownlee 2007: 50). By this stage, however, Nasser had decided upon a military-led society. To this end, he had stacked the RCC with military officers who shared his skepticism about a liberal democratic transition (Brownlee 2007: 50). Nasser then

undermined Naguib by making public speeches in late 1953 linking his rival with loaded terms like “tyranny,” while simultaneously restricting Naguib’s access to the Egyptian press (Beattie 1994: 91). Even when the RCC restored Naguib to the presidency after the infamous March 1954 showdown, Nasser orchestrated the bombings that led to widespread calls for the return of military intervention. In this way, Nasser manufactured a powerful counter-narrative, pitting the military’s reputation for nationalism and stability against Naguib’s supposed venality and weakness. These marginalizing tactics eventually drove Naguib’s conception of Egyptian society from the decision-making process; the same public that had furiously protested Naguib’s resignation in March 1954 largely accepted his arrest on dubious charges later that same year.

Nasser and his military allies then exercised second-dimensional power to suppress the last significant challenge to military hegemony remaining: the Muslim Brotherhood. The Brothers had their own cause for optimism after the 1952 revolution, given that their members had strong connections throughout Egyptian society, including within the ranks of the military (Beattie 1994: 72). Nasser had co-opted the Muslim Brotherhood at certain points during his struggle against the proponents of liberal democracy, even though the Islamists would not offer economic autonomy to the armed forces if they assumed political power. Most notoriously, Nasser had persuaded the Brothers not to support pro-Naguib demonstrations during the March 1954 debacle, intimating that a special Islamist-military relationship could exist in the future (Brownlee 2007: 55). Yet Nasser suppressed the Brothers and created lasting barriers for their participation in the Egyptian political system once he had subdued the pro-democracy factions. After March 1954, Nasser denounced the Muslim Brotherhood in the media and drove its leaders underground (Brownlee 2007: 55). This propaganda campaign culminated in a large-scale crackdown following an apparent attempt on Nasser’s life by a Muslim Brother on 24 October 1954. The RCC used this event to justify arresting thousands of Muslim Brothers, ensuring that the organization would offer no serious political challenge for decades.

## **(ii) Targeting Potential Sources of Dissent**

Nasser also cleared the path for military hegemony by snuffing out potential sources of dissent, often through co-optation or the threat of positive sanctions (Gaventa 1980: 14). That is, the regime encouraged quiescence about the military's privileged position by shrewdly allocating economic resources in areas of potential dissent. Then-president Anwar Sadat wrote in a 1977 newspaper column that anyone who wants to cause political turmoil in Egypt "will find the incendiary device in the students or the workers" (quoted in Abdalla 1985: 120). Many students and professors had championed the Egyptian nationalist cause for years leading up to the 1952 revolution. Despite some protests, campuses generally supported the Free Officers from the outset due to their stated commitment to forging national independence for Egypt (Cook 2012: 80). The regime strengthened this nascent alliance by providing tangible benefits to university students. Education became free. Students received secure jobs with the state upon graduation. These economic inducements, coupled with the apparent social policy successes of Nasser's early years, led to a decade of unprecedented quiescence amongst the Egyptian student population between 1954 and 1967 (Cook 2012: 80-81; Abdalla 1985: 137).

The new military elite made similar efforts to reduce the political threat posed by the labor movement's through co-optation. Like the students, workers had generally supported the nationalist goals of the 1952 revolution. Yet Egypt's workers posed a potential challenge to the Free Officers, as demonstrated by the Kafr al-Dawar industrial action in August 1952. Although the RCC issued a violent crackdown after this incident, it followed up in April 1953 by providing industrial workers with an unemployment insurance scheme (Beattie 1994: 98). In the same year, workers received improved leave entitlements, higher severance pay and free transportation to faraway factories (Cook 2012: 79). These initiatives did not meet with the same level of success as the regime's pivot towards the student body, but Nasser did manage to obtain autocratic leadership without significant resistance from the labor movement. The regime capped this process of co-optation in 1961, when it placated lingering stand-offs with the workers' unions by passing additional, favorable legislation (Cook 2012: 79). In this way, Nasser precluded a challenge to the military's economic



entitlements from the Egyptian labor movement by effectively absorbing the workers into the new corporatist state.

By contrast, the regime utilized much less subtle tools of coercion in order to secure the quiescence of the Egyptian press in relation to the military's increasingly unchecked power. The RCC had experimented in March 1954 with lifting press censorship, a practice in place from the outset of the 1952 revolution. Journalists immediately demonstrated their dissenting potential by denouncing the military's lingering role in politics and calling for a return to parliamentary elections (Dabous 1993: 102). Nasser responded by asserting his regime's control over public information upon consolidating power. The Bureau of Censorship meticulously eliminated any serious press criticism of key state institutions. Dissenting journalists swiftly met with exile, imprisonment or dismissal from their positions (Dabous 1993: 108). The Bureau of Censorship dedicated its most enthusiastic efforts towards suppressing any accusation whatsoever of corruption against the regime or its allies (Beattie 1994: 109). These tactics seem to have concealed the military's rapidly increasing financial power during the Nasser era. No Egyptian press outlet raised serious questions about the military's budget or the financial entitlements of its members until at least 1967, when Egypt faced the aftermath of the calamitous Six Day War. The media blackout on this issue even affected international press coverage. *The New York Times*, for instance, profiled the armed forces' commander-in-chief, Amer, in October 1957. *The Times* reported that "no one has ever accused (Amer) of having a single spark of political ambition" (New York Times, 14 Oct 1957).<sup>3</sup> Of course, retrospective accounts indicate that Amer harbored plenty of political ambition, much of which he directed towards entrenching the military's preferential access to Egyptian state resources. For the time being, however, military impropriety remained offstage.

Crucially, Nasser returned to the third-dimensional power structures based around Egyptian nationalism to justify his regime's extensive control over public information. In 1963, a journalist directly asked Nasser why his government placed such serious restrictions

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<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, Amer's bungling track record as a military commander called into question *The Times*' description of him as "a shrewd and careful planner" (New York Times, 14 Oct 1957).

on domestic press content. Nasser claimed that freedom of expression was a “complicated subject” in Egypt (quoted in Dabous 1993: 108). High production costs had made pre-revolution newspapers beholden to the whims of the landowning elite and foreign powers, both of which would exchange capital for editorial control (Dabous 1993: 108). Accordingly, Nasser marketed tight press controls as necessary to prevent Egypt from regressing to the endemic social inequalities of the pre-revolutionary period. The regime had used the same logic when explaining its rationale for reinstating press censorship after the brief moratorium in early 1954. Some columnists had attacked the efficacy of the much-vaunted land reform legislation during that fleeting period. The RCC claimed that these critiques in fact originated from members of the *ancien* regime, who were trying to undermine the revolution rather than to express a genuinely held viewpoint (Dabous 1993: 103-04).

## **D CONCLUSION**

This chapter posited that the Nasser regime and its military allies colluded to exercise third-dimensional power over the Egyptian public from the early days of the 1952 revolution. This manipulative strategy centered on converting the armed forces’ preferential access to state funds into a “non-issue,” whereby a critical mass of Egyptians did not even form grievances about this grossly unfair distribution of economic resources. Gaventa’s analysis helps to explain the eerie quiescence that descended upon Egypt between Nasser’s consolidation of power in mid-1954 and Egypt’s defeat in the Six Day War of 1967. The regime governed effectively unopposed by rival political movements or traditional sources of dissent like students, workers or the media. Indeed, Beattie suggests that Nasser eventually loosened press restrictions after the Six Day War because he felt that some level of public critique before the war might have helped Egypt avoid disaster (Beattie 1994: 222).

Yet these powerbrokers did need to exercise second-dimensional power to sideline well-supported viewpoints that threatened the security of military hegemony. This resort to coercive measures indicates that resistance did exist in the community, which in turn suggests that the Egyptian public at large might have contested the military’s disproportionate command of state finances, *but for* the exercise of third-dimensional power in relation to this

injustice (Gaventa 1980: 26-27). This hypothesis gains momentum with the onset of the Six Day War. Lukes suggests that we might best be able to establish the existence of third-dimensional power in “abnormal times ... when the apparatus of power is removed or relaxed.” (Lukes 1974: 47; Gaventa 1980: 28). One would struggle to find a more apt adjective than “abnormal” to describe the post-war public furor directed against regime and military alike, especially in light of the thirteen year political slumber that preceded it.

## Chapter Two: Staring Down “The Setback” (1967-1973)

“Egyptians are a simple people, but there are two issues which make them want to fight to the death: land and dignity.”

– President Anwar Sadat, explaining his country’s outrage following the Six Day War to Donald Bergus, a United States diplomat (quoted in Beattie 2000: 54).

This chapter considers the implications for Egyptian military hegemony of the Six Day War, the disastrous outcome of which created a fleeting window of opportunity for open challenge to certain prevailing political assumptions (Gaventa 1980: 26-27). The Six Day War rocked to the core the hitherto immense faith of the Egyptian people in the effectiveness of their armed forces. Egypt’s military received a thorough beating at the hands of the Israeli Defence Force. Anywhere between 10,000 and 15,000 Egyptian servicemen died, with an additional 5,000 falling into enemy hands as prisoners of war (Cook 2012: 92-93). Additionally, Egypt lost hundreds of tanks, planes and artillery pieces: the very same military hardware that the Nasser regime had so ostentatiously paraded before the cheering Egyptian masses in years gone by.

Israel’s comprehensive victory posed a significant challenge for the public “consensus” that the Nasser regime had painstakingly built up in favor of the armed forces and their privileged economic position (Gaventa 1980: 23). The battlefield outcome threw state bravado into sharp contrast with actual performance. History remembers this military campaign as the Six Day War, but even that timetable is generous to the Egyptian armed forces. In reality, Israel had routed the leading fighting force of the Arab world within 72 hours (Cook 2012: 92). Egyptians still refer to this dramatic event as the *naksa*, or “setback.” Al-Hakim points out that Egyptians had heard endless propaganda extolling the prowess of the nation’s armed forces, which made such a cataclysmic military defeat “impossible” to accept (al-Hakim 1985: 40). This state-mandated delusion survived for the first few days of the campaign, during which state radio falsely broadcast news of Egyptian troops bearing down on Tel Aviv (Beattie 1994: 209). Al-Hakim himself refused to accept the initial reports of wholesale defeat, preferring to believe that the Egyptian retreat would lure Israeli forces into a clever military trap (al-Hakim 1985: 40). When Egyptians discovered the painful truth of the war’s outcome, despair turned to contempt. The Nasser regime and the armed forces

surrendered much of the political legitimacy that they had established since the 1952 revolution (Beattie 1994: 209).

I will explore how the regime and military establishment exercised power to shield military hegemony against public critique during the interwar period, which began with the Six Day War and ended in the political triumph of the 1973 October War. First, I outline how public protests against both Nasser and Sadat began to challenge the regime on issues that were previously off-limits for serious debate. These student-driven protests attracted wider support from the Egyptian people, supporting the hypothesis that Egyptians would have contested the “non-issue” of military economic privileges but for the extensive exercise of third-dimensional power (Gaventa: 1980: 26). Second, I argue that the manufactured “consensus” in favor of the armed forces nevertheless remained strong enough to preclude any serious public criticism of military privileges, even at a time when the demonstrators were extracting other political concessions. Finally, this chapter explains how the Nasser and Sadat regimes compensated for the temporarily weakened third-dimensional power structures by sidelining manifest political challenges through coercion and manipulation (Gaventa 1980: 14). The success of this strategy supports Gaventa’s observation that “other dimensions of power may be able to ‘hold the line’ until quiescence is re-established” (Gaventa 1980: 79).

## **A TESTING THE LIMITS OF DISSENT**

### **(i) The Activists of Egypt vs Nasser**

The Six Day War brought about the temporary weakening of the power wielded over the Egyptian public by Nasser and his military allies (Gaventa 1980: 27-28). The armed forces’ defeat exposed Nasser (and later Sadat) to a force that had not manifested in Egypt for well over a decade: the widespread expression of popular dissent. Demonstrations first erupted against the Nasser regime in February 1968. Crucially, the hitherto venerated military provided the trigger for this public opprobrium. On 21 February, workers stormed away their posts in Helwan and protested against lenient sentences handed down to air force officers

convicted of negligence during the Six Day War. These street protests spread to Egypt's university campuses. Students in Cairo and Alexandria, led by Marxist elements, joined in the outraged call for heavier punishment of the military top brass (Abdalla 1985: 150). The workers and students received support from various quarters, including the Egyptian Press Syndicate, which still generally operated under tight state control (Beattie 1994: 222).

This period of social upheaval relaxed the mechanisms of control that the Nasser regime had established in relation to likely sources of dissent within Egyptian society. Of these groups, university students assumed the most important role in spearheading the 1968 demonstrations. Their role took on special significance because Egypt's traditionally restive student body "had remained politically silent between 1954 and 1967" (Abdalla 1985: 149). Egypt's military capitulation had emboldened the nation's students to express political opinions that were off limits before the Six Day War. The once docile students now chanted slogans such as "Heikal, you are a liar ... stop lying, you cheat!" and "On the ninth of June (1967) we supported you ... now we oppose you!" (Abdalla 1985: 153). Activists vandalized university walls with provocative graffiti such as "Stop the rule of Intelligence!" (Abdalla 1985: 152). These open displays of dissent added momentum to protests beyond the university campuses, with Helwan's workers planning follow-up demonstrations soon after.

Importantly, the scope of the protestors' demands expanded as the demonstrations continued, suggesting that the activists increasingly felt emboldened to challenge the status quo due to the regime's unusually weak political position (Freire 1972: 68; Gaventa 1980: 208). Freire argues that oppressed groups may begin to shake off enforced quiescence by challenging powerbrokers in certain "limit situations." A "limit situation" might concern an issue confined enough for the oppressed to entertain victory, rather than a "major issue of oppression" (Freire 1968: 72). Demanding sterner justice for the air force officers might qualify as such a "limit situation." Yet the activists did not stand down when Nasser announced the retrial of the impugned officers. For example, students generated a list of formal demands during a sit-in at the engineering department of Cairo University on 24 February. This catalogue of proposals included the freeing of state restrictions on both university students and journalists, in addition to re-sentencing the disgraced military leaders

(Abdalla 1985: 150). At Alexandria University, pharmacology students echoed these broad themes in their own protest document. They even proposed a more general cessation of state intelligence services interfering with the liberties of all Egyptians: student, journalist or otherwise (Abdalla 1985: 152). This widening base of dissent suggests that the regime's power structures faced a formidable challenge, as "a climate of hope and confidence develop(ed) which (led) [the protestors] to overcome limit situations" (Freire 1972: 72).

For this reason, the February 1968 protests gave the demonstrators some tangible influence over the national decision-making process – irrespective of how fleeting that influence would eventually prove to be. Nasser did react to the protestors' sudden antipathy towards Egypt's military establishment. He ordered the retrial of the air force officers, which resulted in far heavier punishment for their misdemeanors (Abdalla 1985: 158). Nasser also commenced the demilitarization of his cabinet, transferring ministerial roles from army officers to civilian bureaucrats. Beyond these changes, Nasser responded to demands for liberalization of the political system by unveiling his Programme of 30 March. The reform package centered on holding fairer elections for the Arab Socialist Union, then Egypt's sole political party. In practice, however, Nasser retained control over selecting a critical mass of ASU delegates, eviscerating the democratic potential of the reforms. For this reason, Beattie concludes that the Programme of 30 March stands as an example of the wily president's "classic deception" (Beattie 1994: 217). Nevertheless, the February 1968 protests had succeeded in at least forcing the previously impervious Nasser to make such a dramatic grab for political legitimacy (Abdalla 1985: 158).

## **(ii) The Activists of Egypt vs Sadat**

Within four years, dissidents challenged the existence of Egyptian military hegemony once again with another groundswell of popular dissent covering a range of military and civilian issues. Sadat had assumed the presidency upon Nasser's death in September 1970, but he had not yet made any apparent progress with reclaiming the occupied Sinai for Egypt. In January 1972, engineering students responded to Sadat's indecision by organizing another round of mass protests at Cairo University. The president answered these calls with a speech

a few days later, on 13 January 1972, which *The Guardian's* correspondent described as “a red rag to a bull” (quoted in Abdalla 1985: 178). Sadat blamed Egypt’s lack of military action on the “fog” created by the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, which had forced the Soviet Union to redirect arms shipments from Cairo to another Cold War client state, India (Beattie 2000: 100). Sadat had hoped that this reasoning would exculpate him from failing to resume hostilities with Israel in 1971, which he had previously declared “the year of (military) action.” For Egypt’s students, however, this further delay was too much. Beattie argues that a stressful war psychosis afflicted the students under this “no war, no peace” scenario, given that students were liable to be conscripted to fight in the conflict – if it ever came (Beattie 2000: 95).

The 1972 demonstrators expanded their range of demands even further than their 1968 counterparts had done, suggesting that activist confidence from the victories of those earlier protests remained (Freire 1972: 72). As in February 1968, student protestors did not confine their demands to avenging Egypt’s defeat in the Six Day War. Again, freedom of the press was a common thread amongst the demonstrations held at universities across the country (Abdalla 1985: 191). Some of the 1972 protests added much stronger calls for liberalization than had existed in 1968. For instance, Cairo University students issued a statement featuring the pointed assertion that “the way to play a real role in political life is by participating in making decisions, not simply by watching them being made” (Abdalla 1985: 190-191). In this way, activist movements began calling for a wholesale democratization of the Egyptian political system. Thus Abdalla argues that the 1972 protestors were “the most politically conscious group since the dispersal of the student movement in 1954” (Abdalla 1985: 192).

Crucially, the Sadat regime failed to control this emerging conflict by confining it to university campuses, as the activists attracted support and solidarity from non-student actors in Egyptian society (Gaventa 1980: 105). Professional union delegates stood alongside student activists when they held public demonstrations on the streets of Cairo (Abdalla 1985: 186). The Lawyers’ Syndicate endorsed all of the students’ demands, whether they related to the acceleration of military preparations or increased civil rights (Abdalla 1985: 187). The



Journalists' Syndicate also issued a formal declaration of support, despite some press outlets having slammed the activists at the protests' outbreak (Beattie 2000: 120). Months later, three of Egypt's most celebrated writers – al-Hakim, Louis Awad and Naguib Mahfouz – defied Egyptian censorship laws by publishing a letter of support for the protests in a Lebanese newspaper (Beattie 2000: 121). Accordingly, we can conclude that the Sadat regime did not face opposition confined to the surrounds of Egypt's higher education institutions.

Ultimately, the activists again succeeded in overcoming (albeit briefly) the established obstacles to political participation and imposing their will on state decision-making. For instance, Sadat demonstrated a personal preference for seeking a diplomatic, rather than military, resolution to the conflict with Israel. He had made overtures to the Nixon administration from early 1971 about brokering some kind of peace deal, a position that Beattie traces to Sadat's "belief that the United States alone held the key to the conflict's resolution" (Beattie 2000: 50). Yet the domestic protests, which dragged on into 1973, ultimately succeeded in forcing Sadat's hand towards a more belligerent approach to the question of the occupied territories. Student activists refused to accept further vacillation on the timing of another war with Israel. Important social actors continued to support the demonstrators throughout this period. Courts acquitted scores of arrested protestors, much to Sadat's chagrin (Abdalla 1985: 210-11), while intellectuals such as al-Hakim spoke out publicly in defense of the restive students (Abdalla 1985: 208). This support made clear to the regime that the roots of discontent ran deeper than the student population, and therefore necessitated some sort of action. In this way, the 1972 protests helped remove diplomatic options from the table, and thus paved Egypt's path towards the October War with Israel (Abdalla 1985: 197).

## **B THE MILITARY: BATTERED, BUT FAR FROM BROKEN**

### **(i) Changed Political Role, But Limited**

These waves of popular dissent also allowed the demonstrators to overcome some of those power structures that had previously protected the particular vested interests of the

military elite. As noted earlier, the 1968 protests forced Nasser to re-try air force commanders for negligence during the Six Day War. Yet the price paid for defeat by Egypt's military officers did not end there. Nasser had famously tendered his resignation as president, which the Egyptian people resoundingly rejected. Nasser used this popular vindication to shift blame for the Six Day War onto powerbrokers within the Egyptian armed forces, a base that of course centred on Amer and his cronies. He swiftly purged over 1,000 officers, while Amer himself committed suicide (or, according to other accounts, was executed). This move helped sate the public's thirst for military accountability, while also allowing Nasser to rebuild the armed forces as he saw fit (Beattie 1994: 212).

More broadly, the armed forces largely surrendered their direct control over the national decision-making process as a result of the Six Day War and its consequences for the military's reputation. Nasser's 30 March Programme promised, and effectively delivered, the removal of military officers from formal, day-to-day politics. Scholars have most often demonstrated this development with reference to cabinet appointments (See, Cooper 1985; Oweiss 1990). In 1967, Nasser drew 65.5 percent of his cabinet members from the military. He had reduced this proportion of officers to 39.4 percent within nine months of the Six Day War, replacing them with ministers from civilian backgrounds (Cooper 1982: 207). Cooper identifies this shift as a direct response to the 1968 protests and riots (Cooper 1982: 207). Sadat continued this project of civilianization, steadily reducing the military presence in the cabinet room throughout the 1970s, with the exception of 1973 (when Sadat formed a cabinet in anticipation of the October War) (Cooper 1982: 208). The trend fit neatly with Sadat's wider promises of liberalization for the Egyptian political system.

Cook, however, offers a more qualified assessment of the demonstrators' success in decreasing the military's practical control over Egyptian politics. He describes this reduction of ministers as the "standard narrative," pursuant to which the Six Day War apparently precipitated the demilitarization of Egyptian governance (Cook 2007: 63). Cook goes on to argue that these changes did not result in the military establishment as a whole ceding its dominant influence over Egyptian society. First and foremost, the armed forces continued to command preferential access to state economic resources, even after the popular backlash of

1968. Israeli forces still loomed menacingly on Egypt's eastern borders. Therefore, Cook asserts, it is little wonder that the "military remained the most privileged of state organizations," irrespective of its catastrophic defeat at the hands of Israel (Cook 2007: 67). The Egyptian national budget supports Cook's claim. Nasser and then Sadat spent 15 percent of the nation's gross domestic product on defense during the period from 1967 until 1974 (Beattie 2000: 94). Accordingly, the armed forces retained their privileged economic position during the interwar period, even as the third-dimensional power structures guarding this position were temporarily weakened.

Indeed, the military elite remained an integral part of the national decision-making process even after the Six Day War, including on issues outside the ambit of defense spending. Sadat's political maneuvering further demonstrated the military's ongoing political clout. Nasser's successor faced various threats to his presidency, but none was greater than elements within the military establishment. Sadat moved swiftly to crush the very real potential of his deposal at the hands of politician Ali Sabri and Amer's successor as military commander-in-chief, Muhammad Fawzi. He achieved this objective primarily by using "divide-and-rule" tactics to break down any consolidation of hostile power in the military. Sadat dumped Fawzi in favour of Fawzi's second-in-command, Muhammad Sadiq, and then continued to shuffle top military positions constantly well into the 1970s (Beattie 2000: 46-48). But the officer corps also extracted key concessions from the president during this period. In 1971, for example, Sadat reinstated most of the officers dismissed after the Six Day War. He also expressed sympathy for the post-war treatment of the military leaders, on whom Nasser had imposed the brunt of blame and punishment for Egypt's battlefield failure (Beattie 2000: 48). Sadat's maneuvers suggest that the armed forces remained the foremost kingmaker in the Egyptian political system, even as the officers withdrew from direct governance.

## **(ii) Public Criticism, But Circumscribed**

Moreover, we may observe the persistence of third-dimensional power as demonstrated by the issues that the interwar protests *failed* to challenge, including the

preferential economic entitlements of the armed forces. As noted earlier, the post-1967 protests broke new ground insofar as the Egyptian public was leveling criticism against the military establishment. In 1968, activists savagely denounced the armed forces' performance during the Six Day War and demanded accountability for the failings of military officers. During Sadat's presidency, dissenters decried the regime's procrastination in confronting Israel once again on the battlefield. In neither case, however, did protestors call for the dismantling of Egypt's military apparatus. Protestors occasionally issued chants such as "Down with the military state!" during the 1968 protests. Similarly, Sadat claimed that he had read some "obscene" content in university magazines in 1972 that related, *inter alia*, to the armed forces (Beattie 2000: 198). Overall, however, both protest waves demanded a continued – if not increased – state focus on military spending and development. The vast majority of slogans focused on countering regime maladministration or championing civil liberties, rather than military corruption (Abdalla 1985: 153).

The circumscribed nature of dissent attains special significance, because the Egyptian public had knowledge of the gross inequality caused by the military's generous access to public funds (Gaventa 1980: 26-28). The military's venality had increasingly become public knowledge in the lead-up to the October War. The armed forces had already inspired widespread condemnation during the Yemeni Civil War with their wanton misuse of public funds (Ferris 2008: 237). Egyptians saw veterans returning from that campaign with ostentatious rewards, including preferential access to housing, healthcare and luxury goods. In the eyes of many Egyptians, these perks were more commensurate with the war's importance to Nasser's political legitimacy (Ferris 2008: 271). The regime had successfully prevented this discontent rising to the surface of public debate, threatening any criticism of the Yemeni campaign with imprisonment (Ferris 2008: 237). By 1972, however, scandalous information about military corruption had well and truly made its way into the public domain. From 1970 onwards, Egyptian newspapers started to reveal damning snippets about the men and treasure lost during the conflict (al-Hakim 1985: 56). Even Heikal, the semi-official state journalist, later reflected that the Yemeni War "had a generally corrupting effect on Egyptian life" (Heikal 1983: 33). These reports of military profiteering had a significant impact on

public opinion. Following Ferris, they amplified a sense of injustice that had already widespread amongst the Egyptian masses for the best part of a decade (Ferris 2008: 270-71; Cook 2011: 111).

Despite this, the third-dimensional power structures continued to shield the military elite's economic entitlements from serious public critique, even during the tumultuous interwar period. Even the more radical 1972 protests did not call for the reduction of state expenditure on the armed forces. On the contrary, activists demanded that the Sadat regime support – both politically and financially – yet another military adventure. To be sure, certain voices emphasized the link between the armed forces' financial mismanagement at war and Egypt's impoverished home front. Most famously, al-Hakim lamented in his 1974 polemic *The Return of Consciousness* that Egypt had foolishly endured “successive military defeats ... with the wealth of a poor people” (al-Hakim 1985: 43). Al-Hakim thus seized on the crucial corollary of the army's corruption and incompetence; Egypt's masses needed to pay for this largesse with their meager financial resources. Yet this reasoning did not translate into any popular demand for imposing some level of financial restriction, or even official oversight, upon the Egyptian military establishment.

The protestors' continued quiescence becomes more remarkable when we consider that Egyptian students, the de facto leaders of the interwar demonstrations, suffered especially from the unfair distribution of state resources. If misuse of public funds upset the Egyptian working class, then it should have made those pursuing a tertiary degree positively livid. For years, Nasser had held out state employment as a guaranteed right for any graduate of an Egyptian university. The regime had also relaxed admission requirements, leading to a rapid increase in university enrollments. Thus emerged a far greater mass of students, all of them with heightened expectations for career advancement (Beattie 2000: 95). By 1971, however, Egypt was attracting less than half the amount of economic investment required to place all of Egypt's graduates in gainful employment (Beattie 2000: 95). Even those graduates receiving jobs could hope for little more than “a dreary, if secure, career in the enormous civil service” (The Times, 5 Jan 1973). Indeed, *The Times'* correspondent reported that this pitiful employment market had fed into student protests in early 1973. Despite this, a

critique of military corruption did not appear amongst the many different lists of formal grievances. Instead, the students restricted their criticism of the armed forces to their apparent reticence to tackle Israel again on the battlefield. This remarkable example lends weight to Gaventa's observation that "the most insidious use of power is that which maintains non-challenge ... even after the powerful have fallen" (Gaventa 1980: 82).

### **C FIGHTBACK: SIDELINING DISSENT**

In response, the regime supplemented the "consensus" in favor of the armed forces, which the protest movement had weakened, by sidelining alternative views in an exercise of second-dimensional power (Gaventa 1980: 79). Both Nasser and Sadat sought to repress the mounting political threat through a combination of direct suppression and encouraging quiescence. They cracked down on demonstrators as a first response to the challenge that their cause represented to the existing political structure. These approaches ranged in severity, from employing brute force to bringing forward the beginning of university summer holidays. These coercive mechanisms demonstrate the potential for other dimensions of power to "hold the line" until a general "consensus" can be re-established (Gaventa 1980: 79).

Despite this, both regimes continued to exercise third-dimensional power throughout the interwar period rather than relying on pure coercion. Nasser and Sadat would not have been able to overcome the protest movement if a critical mass of the Egyptian public had actively joined the protests. Hosni Mubarak discovered as much decades later, when nationwide demonstrations forced him to resign the presidency in February 2011. For this reason, Nasser and Sadat encouraged quiescence amongst the masses in addition to exercising second-dimensional power over the activists. This regime strategy involved *isolating* and *containing* the scope of public dissent – in terms of both issues and popularity – and then *redirecting* grievances to other emotional (yet irrelevant) issues (Gaventa 1980: 105-09). This process helped to ensure that the size of the dissenting movement never exceeded the regime's coercive capacity. Accordingly, the regime could crackdown on the protests with violence where appropriate.

### **(i) Violence and Coercion**

Nasser and Sadat's limited political concessions did not obscure the fact that both leaders used coercive power against protestors, a force that originated from both within and outside formal decision-making structures (Gaventa 1980: 104-05). We have seen that Nasser championed his 30 March Programme as a conciliatory response to the February 1968 protests. Yet regime security forces had already tried and failed to dispel the popular demonstrations with violence before Nasser resorted to this legislative package. Police had fought with both factory workers in Helwan and the students at university campuses (Abdalla 1985: 154; Cook 2012: 101). On 24 February, police carried out mass arrests of students activists, the same day that then-Speaker Sadat had given his "word of honor" that the protestors would not be molested (Abdalla 1985: 150). Moreover, the 30 March Programme did not usher in a new era of peaceful demonstration, despite its promises of new inalienable rights such as freedom of expression. Indeed, state-sponsored intimidation and violence arguably increased after the passage of this legislation (Cook 2012: 112).

Instead, the Nasser regime purchased time for itself by promising reform and employing coercive tactics, and then used that political breathing space to strengthen core authoritarian institutions (Gaventa 1980: 71; Cook 2012: 104). For example, the 1968 protests had caught Nasser by surprise with their breadth and intensity. The relatively underequipped riot police had failed in its attempts to quell the protests; Nasser ultimately decided to withdraw these security forces from the picket lines. The regime swiftly addressed this weakness in the state's coercive apparatus after the 1968 protests, transforming the police riot squad into the fearsome Central Security Forces. The Sadat regime deployed this crack battalion when facing down its own opposition movement, ordering the Central Security Forces to storm Cairo University and arrest protesting students on 24 January 1972 (Abdalla 1985: 183). Thus the 1968 demonstrations indirectly helped to sow the seeds for more effective state crackdowns on future dissent, which in turn would allow time for the reconstruction of third-dimensional power.

Nasser and Sadat also employed more subtle exercises of second-dimensional power to suppress views that challenged the regime's core interests. The Nasser regime focused its attention on the student activists driving protests, using various tactics to disrupt university-based activism. Nasser ordered universities to bring forward the 1968 summer holiday period in an effort to counter the concentration of restive students on university campuses. Sadat responded to protests with similar tactics in January 1972, by which point the manipulation of the university holiday schedule had become the regime's "usual practice" (Abdalla 1985: 151). The Sadat regime also showed a great propensity to interfere with internal university politics. In particular, Sadat supported the proliferation of religious and ostensibly apolitical groups on campuses, which he hoped would act as a "countervailing ideological force" to the more rebellious Leftist and Marxist factions (Beattie 2000: 102-03). More malevolently, the regime infiltrated activist groups with state-employed informants (Beattie 2000: 102) and sponsored thugs who attacked dissenting students (Abdalla 1985: 198-99).

## **(ii) Isolating and Containing Opposition**

Simultaneously, the state ensured that it could continue to carry out this campaign of direct suppression by exercising third-dimensional power over the wider Egyptian public, with a view to preventing the protest movement from spreading any further. The first step involved isolating the activists from the population at large, and containing the breadth of their grievances (Gaventa 1980: 105-09). The Nasser regime employed this double-barreled strategy in response to the February 1968 protests. First, it attempted to limit the scope of the grievances raised by the protestors. The Speaker, Sadat, asserted that dissent revolved around the sentencing of the air force officers, along with the behavior of security forces on campuses and in relation to the workers' protest at Helwan (Abdalla 1985: 151). This narrative constricted the extent of the demonstrators' grievances. Indeed, protestors had addressed this oversimplification directly, brandishing signs such as "Don't discuss the air force question, discuss freedom" (Abdalla 1985: 152). Foreign press coverage supports the presence of this wider scope of dissent. *The Times* reported that the February 1968 protests reflected a more general "mood of growing frustration among the young in all Arab



countries, particularly in Egypt” (*The Times*, 27 Feb 1968). Similarly, the *Los Angeles Times* concluded that the Egyptian youth evinced a broader loss of faith in the regime’s performance than its lenient treatment of the officers (*Los Angeles Times*, 18 Feb 1968).

The regime complemented this strategy of containment by using its dominance of public information to isolate the protest leaders from the community at large (Gaventa 1980: 106). We can perceive this exercise of third-dimensional power by comparing how the interwar protests were covered by *Al-Ahram*, the Egyptian state newspaper, against the accounts of international news outlets, which had a much less vested stake in the conflict (Gaventa 1980: 106-09). In February 1968, *Al-Ahram* printed the Minister of Interior’s warning that students should disperse from all protests on the basis that “other elements” had infiltrated the movement. The minister’s statement elaborated on this claim, asserting that imperialist and Israeli conspirators had hijacked the uprising (*Al-Ahram*, 25 Feb 1968). Ingeniously, the regime praised the majority of students in the same breath, thus attempting to drive a wedge between them and the protest leaders (Abdalla 1985: 155). Nasser and Sadat confirmed this official rendering of events; the former referred to past occasions on which “workers and students were misled by reactionaries,” while Sadat claimed that representatives of Egypt’s former landowning class had been spotted provoking unrest on campuses (Abdalla 1985: 156-57). International news outlets, however, displayed skepticism about the role performed in the protests by “so-called feudalists” (*Los Angeles Times*, 18 Feb 1968). Moreover, the students themselves contradicted the regime’s claims in this respect. A student aligned with Islamic fundamentalists, an underrepresented faction at protests during this period, recalled:

While the right and left were heavily represented in the discussions, the Islamic tendency was absent ... The leftist tendency was influential but the majority consisted simply of students who advocated for freedom and reform without a defined ideological approach (quoted in Abdalla 1985: 158).

The Nasser regime again used the dual tactic of isolating protestors and containing their grievances in relation to student protests later that same year. In November 1968, students arranged a sit-in at the University of Alexandria to protest brutal police treatment of a student uprising in Mansoura. *Al-Ahram* claimed that the students eventually decided to end

the Alexandria demonstration out of shame, along with the realization that “the man-in-the-street was bewildered at their unwarranted attitude” (*Al-Ahram*, 28 November 1968). Abdalla argues that non-students played a significant role in the sit-in, thus contradicting *Al-Ahram*’s rendering of events (Abdalla 1985: 164). *The Times* pointed out that the regime could have defused tension by publishing the students’ formal demands for police accountability and greater civil liberties (*The Times*, 29 Nov 1968). As it was, however, Heikal returned to drawing his standard dichotomy between the good-natured and responsible youth movement in Egypt, and a fringe element that caused “the convulsive unrest experienced in Alexandria” (*Al-Ahram*, 29 Nov 1968). Non-regime sources perceived a wider sympathy for the Alexandrian uprising, noting that the government had closed all Egyptian universities out of fear that “dissatisfaction was widespread amongst students” beyond Alexandria (*The New York Times*, 25 Nov 1968).

Sadat continued this trend of containment when attempting to sideline his own round of protests in January 1972. Sadat blamed pro-war demonstrations on a “deviant minority” of thirty students that had instigated the revolt from “outside the university” (quoted in Abdalla 1985: 185). As usual, the regime traced the protests to the hands of a few shadowy treason-mongers, including “deposed centers of power” (quoted in Abdalla 1985: 185). *Al-Ahram* supported this regime-friendly version of events. It ran Sadat’s decision to meet with the rebellious students as front-page news, while refusing to publish the students’ relatively tame demands (Abdalla 1985: 181). By contrast, the *Washington Post* reported scenes of police brutality in breaking up demonstrations, in addition to portraying the protests as “a weathervane indicating the mood of a larger segment of Egyptian opinion” (*Washington Post*, 25 Jan 1972). The regime narrative was also contradicted by claims that non-student bystanders had supported demonstrators in Cairo’s Tahrir Square by providing them with food and blankets (Abdalla 1985: 183).

The final major protest before the October War drew another response of containment, with the Sadat regime yet again trying to minimize the breadth of protests held in early 1973. *Al-Ahram* depicted a Cairo University sit-in as the action of a “small minority” of students, aimed at destabilizing Egypt in service of “the enemy’s purpose” (*Al-Ahram*, 3

Jan 1973). It also alleged that protestors had beaten their lecturers during the course of the demonstrations, an accusation refuted by the teachers themselves (Abdalla 1985: 202). *The New York Times* treated the state's version of events with extreme skepticism, noting in an editorial that the Sadat regime tended to bandy about the term "conspiracy" very loosely indeed (*The New York Times*, 11 Feb 1973). *The Times* opined that the protestors' demands went well beyond mere campus politics, while *Al-Ahram* yet again refused to print the students' complaints (*The Times*, 5 Jan 1973).

This pattern of isolation and containment allowed the Nasser and Sadat regimes to retain some control over how the wider Egyptian public perceived the protests and the political challenge that they constituted (Gaventa 1980: 12). Many Egyptians could not witness the protests firsthand, and therefore relied upon news coverage to keep up with events. Tight media controls enabled the regime to portray the demonstrations during the interwar period as driven by a small minority of treasonous troublemakers, none of whom represented a significant portion of the Egyptian population with their advocacy. In this sense, the state acted as the powerful "gatekeeper" of information (Gaventa 1980: 105). Of course, international coverage stood limited chance of mediating this depiction, given that most Egyptians could not read newspapers printed in foreign languages. Accordingly, the state acted as the prime mediator between the local situation (i.e. the protests) and the national Egyptian audience (Gaventa 1980: 105). I argue that the regime exploited this position of power in order to distort information about the size and depth of the protest movement, thus making the Egyptian masses less likely to participate.

### **(iii) Redirecting Grievances**

Both Nasser and Sadat built upon limiting the exposure of the protests' breadth of grievances and support by redirecting public discourse away from those complaints (Gaventa 1980: 108). This tactic involved releasing re-directive information whenever the regime faced an escalating political challenge (Gaventa 1980: 109). We have seen that the Nasser regime explained student activists' decision to end the Alexandria sit-in of November 1968 with reference to the demonstrators' sense of "guilt and regret" at their actions (*Al-Ahram*, 28 Nov

1968). Abdalla argues that the protest came to a halt for more pragmatic reasons; the students faced a food shortage, electricity cuts and irate parents (Abdalla 1985: 164-65). In any event, *Al-Ahram* emphasized the protestors' apparent immorality without addressing the substance of the students' demands. In this way, the regime shifted the issue away from the potentially costly grievances of police brutality and non-existent civil liberties, instead privileging emotional yet arguably irrelevant concerns of wantonly destructive youth (Gaventa 1980: 108-09).

Sadat proved especially prone to using this tactic of redirecting public attention away from the substantive concerns of protestors, therefore reducing the likelihood of ordinary Egyptians joining the resistance movement. By 1972, several Egyptian university campuses had witnessed the proliferation of wall-magazines, informal forums where students could erect political posters. This phenomenon flourished to such an extent that one student described the wall-magazines as "the freest press in Egypt" (quoted in Abdalla 1985: 158). Naturally, the wall-magazines often featured the grievances of student demonstrators during the interwar period. Sadat identified the threat posed to the regime by this uncensored form of political expression, and therefore set about shifting public scrutiny away the wall-magazines' ideas and towards their supposed impropriety. The president described the wall-magazines as "obscene" (quoted in Abdalla 1985: 198). A January 1972 parliamentary report emphasized that the posters "included articles violating moral and religious values" and were often "extremely frivolous" (quoted in Abdalla 1985: 202). The regime again tried to shift coverage of the protests from the political into the moral realm, in this way providing "information of little consequence to the issue(s) at hand" (Gaventa 1980: 109).

The unresolved Israeli conflict gave both Nasser and Sadat another avenue for converting popular unrest to widespread concern at an issue that was, at best, tangential to the protestors' demands. Israel's armed forces remained on the nation's eastern flank, launching air raids intermittently and engaging the crippled Egyptian army along the Suez Canal (Beattie 1994: 224). This threat allowed the Nasser regime to deflect criticism, including from protestors, with Heikal's snappy rallying cry "No voice higher than that of the battle!" (quoted in Beattie 1994: 224). Public recriminations would need to wait until Egypt could

once again guarantee its own national security. Perversely, the continuing Israeli threat reinforced the position of both the Nasser regime and the Egyptian military establishment after the disaster of the Six Day War. In what other circumstances would protestors angrily demand accountability for military incompetence, and then call for that same military to enter another war as soon as possible?

Nasser and Sadat both capitalized on these exceptional circumstances in an attempt to replace public discontent with wartime patriotism. For example, national pride underpinned one of the Nasser regime's typical "divide-and-rule" gambits in responding to the February 1968 protests. The Minister of the Interior expressed his confidence that the majority of Egypt's students would desist from protesting, lest they undermine the unity of the home front during a state of emergency. By contrast the Minister characterized those leading demonstrations as offering an "insult to the national struggle" (*Al-Ahram*, 25 Feb 1968). The Minister's comments therefore sought not only to isolate the protests' leaders from the student body at large, but also to inspire the majority to abandon their activism out of patriotic duty (Abdalla 1985: 155). These appeals likely resonated with many Egyptians due to the broad public consensus that Egypt faced an extremely perilous situation. Predictably, Heikal clamored for all Egyptians to provide "a solid basis for the country's steadfastness in the face of the enemy" (*Al-Ahram*, 1 Mar 1968). Yet even the radical parliamentarian Khalid Mohieddin cautioned protestors that "the enemy on our doorstep cannot wait" (*Al-Ahram*, 29 Feb 1968). The virtually unanimous acknowledgement of existential danger gave Nasser a relatively easy "out," allowing him to emphasize national solidarity over divisive dissent.

On the other hand, Sadat faced a greater challenge than Nasser had in mobilizing bias against the protest movement on the basis of Egyptian nationalism, given that Sadat's own patriotism was under scrutiny. Sadat had vacillated on the war question, while the 1972/73 protests advocated the essentially nationalist platform of resuming hostilities with Israel. Nevertheless, Sadat questioned the protestors' national pride in January 1972, arguing that they were effectively asking their president to undermine the Egyptian military by giving details about the upcoming battle's timing. He compared the situation with Britain's during World War II, asking if the British public ever "face(d) Churchill and (said) 'Come here and

account for your actions’?” (Al-Ahram, 25 Jan 1972). In reality, however, the protest movement did not demand detailed information about the war preparations; activists merely wanted assurances that plans were in motion (Abdalla 1985: 184-85). Rather, Sadat had exaggerated (and then taken issue with) the protestors’ demands on the timing question for an alternative reason: he wanted to avoid confronting the dissenters’ real grievances, almost all of which were political rather than military in nature.

## **D CONCLUSION**

Ultimately, Sadat managed to establish his own nationalist credentials when he at last undertook the military campaign demanded of him: 1973’s October War. The Egyptian military’s surprisingly competitive performance alleviated much of the pressure that had built up against both the regime and the military establishment during the interwar period. The masses conferred the title ”Hero of the Crossing” upon Sadat, who enjoyed widespread public support for the first time in his presidency (Cook 2012: 135). Sadat had also forged something of a truce with the mainstream protest movement right on the eve of the attack. The president had reached out to dissidents by amnestying arrested student activists and reinstating sacked journalists (Abdalla 1985: 208; Beattie 2000: 123). The regime, along with the military establishment, had survived the interwar period.

Sadat’s eventual recovery does not obscure the reality that the regime and its military allies had confronted “abnormal” times, during which the usual “apparatus of power (was) removed or relaxed” (Gaventa 1980: 28). This temporary lapse allowed for the emergence of manifest challenges to issues previously beyond public critique during the Nasser era. Student-led protests had initially broached the issue of military culpability for Egypt’s abject battlefield performance in the Six Day War. These grievances met with some tangible effect on the political decision-making process, resulting in re-trials for certain air force officers and the formal demilitarization of politics. These achievements caused the protestors’ demands to broaden – a phenomenon that continued into the 1972/73 demonstrations – which arguably illustrated the protestors’ growing emboldening upon gaining success in these “limit situations” (Freire 1972: 68; Gaventa 1980: 208-09). The interwar protests also attracted

wider popular support, suggesting that Egyptians might have challenged political norms before the Six Day War, but for the exercise of third-dimensional power. Despite that, the military's economic entitlements remained a "non-issue" during the protests, indicating that third-dimensional power did not entirely collapse.

I argue that the Nasser and Sadat regimes recovered from the "setback" of the Six Day War by exercising a combination of second and third dimension power over the Egyptian public. Nasser's apparent political concessions gave way to sidelining the political challenge of the student-driven demonstrations through manipulation and coercion. Sadat also demonstrated a willingness to put down his own wave of protests through violence. Simultaneously, both regimes deployed third-dimensional power to prevent the active demonstrations from spreading to a critical mass of the Egyptian population. The powerbrokers achieved this outcome by shaping how non-demonstrators perceived the manifest challenge to authority: containing the breadth of grievances, isolating the student protest leaders from their fellow citizens and re-directing public attention to emotive yet less costly issues (Gaventa 1980: 109). Ultimately, these initiatives gave the regime and its military allies breathing space, with which it could re-establish military hegemony.

### **Chapter Three: Cementing the Military's Economic Empire (1973 –)**

“The (Egyptian) people trust the final product from the military.”

– An anonymous, high-ranking Egyptian military officer, explaining why companies controlled by the armed forces often win tenders for large-scale public infrastructure projects (quoted in Washington Post, 16 March 2014).

Egypt finally began to restore its wounded military pride at 2:00pm on 6 October 1973, when its armed forces initiated the October War with a daring – and successful – crossing of the Suez Canal. The Egyptian armed forces managed to transport 90,000 troops and almost 12,000 vehicles across Israel's daunting fortifications and set up a series of bridgeheads in the Sinai. Egypt's soldiers impressed outside observers with their tactical acumen and combat tenacity, even though Israel would almost certainly have won the overall conflict, but for Cold War superpower intervention.

Ironically, this heartening battlefield performance contributed to a matrix of circumstances that might well have threatened the military's economic entitlements. The October War laid the basis the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty embodied in the Camp David Accords of 1979. On paper, the treaty eliminated from Egyptian strategic calculations the nation's main existential threat: the Israeli Defense Force. What use did Egypt have for an enormous standing army under these changed circumstances? Second, Sadat introduced his *Infitah* (“Openness”) economic reforms, which sought to move Egypt away from Nasser's state-led economy and attract heavy foreign investment in the private sector. The military establishment could no longer expect wealth to be concentrated in the public treasury, to which it had enjoyed priority access for over twenty years. Ordinarily, we might perceive these changes as a natural consequence of transitioning from wartime to peacetime, in which the armed forces move from institutional pre-eminence to being “just another bureaucratic claimant for a share of available funds” (Springborg 1989: 95).

This final chapter explains how the Egyptian military establishment exercised power over the Egyptian public to ensure that its privileged position would survive the October War and the ensuing peace with Israel. First, I demonstrate how the military elite colluded with the Sadat and Mubarak regimes to structure a new, unfair distribution of economic resources. Both presidents rewarded the military's political loyalty by securing Egyptian and foreign



funding for the armed forces. They also allowed the officers to preside over a sprawling economic empire in the private sector. These public and private entitlements created a glaring inequality for Egyptians at large, who simultaneously endured widespread poverty due to chronic inflation and unemployment (Brownlee 2012: 24-5; 39-40). The military establishment manufactured a “consensus” in favor of this unequal distribution, employing processes of socialization and propaganda centered on patriotic appeals, construction project acumen and national security threats. As before, the armed forces supported these third-dimensional power structures with a coercive apparatus for sidelining any manifest challenges to military hegemony.

## **A STRUCTURED INEQUALITIES, 2.0**

### **(i) The “New Deal” for Civil-Military Relations**

The military elite ensured that its vast economic interests would survive in the post-October War circumstances by developing a “transactional relationship” between the armed forces and the regimes of Sadat and his successor, Hosni Mubarak (Cook 2007: 73). The officers would accept Sadat’s drastic downsizing of the military’s headcount, which resulted in shedding hundreds of thousands of lower-ranking soldiers (Springborg 1989: 104). The military elite would also acquiesce to Sadat’s continued demilitarization of formal politics, a process that had begun after the Six Day War (Cook 2007: 77). This withdrawal afforded the presidency virtually undisputed power over decision-making, with the military providing supplementary “backbone” for the regime’s security (Sassoon 2015: 111). The armed forces did serve as this ultimate guarantor of public stability for both Sadat and Mubarak; for the former during the Bread Riots of 1977, and for Mubarak when he faced police rioting and terrorist attacks in 1986 and 1997 respectively. These circumstances proved exceptional, however, with the military preferring to leave less-than-extraordinary crackdowns to Egypt’s internal police, the Central Security Forces (Hashim 2011: 110).

In exchange, the regime would ensure that the public defense budget remained high, supplementing Egyptian spending with significant foreign military aid. The Egyptian

parliament continued to allocate a great deal of funding to the armed forces after the October War, even as the armed forces underwent its large-scale downsizing. Egypt spent \$6.1 billion on its military in 1975, which amounted to more than half of its gross national product (Brownlee 2012: 24). A decade later, Egypt continued to lavish public funds on the armed forces, which received over a quarter of the 1985 public budget (Brownlee 2012: 52). In addition, the Sadat and Mubarak regimes obtained military aid from the United States. The former had made this issue crucial to the Camp David Accords, such that Brownlee describes the United States' military assistance commitments in the final agreement as "the linchpin of peace" (Brownlee 2012: 36). In 1984, the Reagan administration increased the amount of defense aid to around \$1.3 billion annually, its approximate benchmark since.

Both regimes also allowed the military establishment to expand its economic clout by generating expansive financial holdings in the private sector. Sadat furnished the military with complete independence from state financial regulations with Law 32 of 1979. This legislation excluded defense spending from the national budget and permitted the military to open special accounts in private banks (Harb 2003: 285-86). This economic opportunity was increasingly exploited under Mohamed Abdel Halim Abu Ghazala, who used his position as Minister of Defense (1981-89) to spearhead the officers' acquisition of a dizzying array of financial portfolios. The military began to run for-profit, privately held companies specializing in virtually anything: from weapons manufacturing to civilian vehicle production, from agriculture to public infrastructure (Cook 2007: 81). Crucially, the regime does not require that the military publicly declare the revenue derived from these adventures into the private sector, also placing that set of earnings "off-budget" (Gotowicki 1999: 110-16). This institutional secrecy does not tend to raise any problems with members of the Egyptian parliament, who one military informant states "are not culturally inclined to question the military" (quoted in Cook 2007: 74).

## **(ii) New Circumstances, Same Unfairness**

The military elite's economic empire generates alarmingly unfair outcomes from the perspective of the Egyptian public at large. First, the most ardent supporter of the Egyptian

armed forces would struggle to make the case that Egyptian taxpayers have received value for money on public defense spending. The military continued to receive generous allowances from the public purse, on the basis that its enormous standing army needed to convert itself into a much more nimble, expeditionary force (Springborg 1989: 95). Despite this, the military elite has proved strikingly conflict-averse since the October War. The army has attended to the aforementioned internal peacekeeping missions for Sadat and Mubarak, played a minor support role behind the United States in the Gulf War, and battled radical terrorists during President al-Sisi's ongoing "war on terror." Otherwise, senior officers supported Sadat in seeking peace with Israel and, until recently, had repeatedly refused to deploy the military against extremists (Hashim 2011: 75, 110). This record of conflict suggests that the military officers have grown comfortable with their post-1973 position, whereby their institution receives significant public funding without the immediate threat of engaging an enemy anywhere near as formidable as Israel in combat.

The military's largely unimpressive progress suggests that the Egyptian people have not received a significant benefit from the armed forces' preferential access to state economic resources. The Egyptian armed forces had still not achieved a state of interoperability with the United States' military as at 2012, despite almost three decades of strong collaboration between the two countries (Brownlee 2012: 120). Brownlee argues that the Egyptian officers largely brought about this outcome by resisting change, preferring to maintain an "outdated behemoth" suited to traditional, state-on-state war scenarios (Brownlee 2012: 98). By contrast, radical terrorism has posed the most consistent menace to Egyptian national security since the October War, a non-state threat better handled by a counter-insurgency force. The Bush administration encouraged this kind of transformation in 2005, justifying American military aid to Egypt on the basis that Cairo could assist the United States with tackling insurgencies in Gaza. Yet the Egyptian military actively resisted undergoing this pragmatic transformation, with one officer asserting "(w)e need tanks, we need mobility ... we don't work in the city" (quoted in Brownlee 2012: 120).

Second, scholars argue that even the military's private sector holdings generate unfair outcomes for the Egyptian public as a whole. For decades, military-owned private companies

have received state subsidies for their business ventures. For example, military-run companies enjoy access to an especially cost-effective labor force: the rank and file soldiery. These workers have contributed extensively to several large-scale projects in recent decades, including digging enormous trenches for the New Suez Canal development project. Of course, the state pays the meager wages of these soldiers out of public funds. And, as noted earlier, the military does not need to return (or even declare) any profits generated by these activities, meaning that the military's "free market" initiatives constitute a drain on public funds (Springborg 1987: 109). In addition, no private company could seriously compete with the military in a tender process, given a regular outfit's need to pay proper wages to employees. In this way, military-run projects operate on public funds and undercut the private sector at once.

By contrast, the Egyptian masses endured decades of economic misery in the aftermath of the October War. Sadat's policies of market liberalization did not usher in an era of prosperity for most Egyptians, with only a wealthy clique of businessmen enjoying the fruits of foreign capital. As Sadat faced a mounting budget deficit in early 1977, he slashed state subsidies for essential items like rice and cooking gas rather than impose limits on defense spending or foreign debt repayment (Brownlee 2012: 23-4). The ensuing Bread Riots forced Sadat to reinstate the subsidy program, but the regime continued to privilege foreign and military obligations over the public. In 1985, Mubarak responded to another debt crisis by instituting a wage freeze for Egypt's gigantic public sector, which had paid the salaries of many Egyptians since the Nasser era. This policy also included a hiring moratorium, leaving Egypt's students with precious few opportunities to earn a living. On both occasions, the regime demonstrated that the economic prosperity of the armed forces outweighed the state's need to provide for the masses (Brownlee 2012: 52). This trend has largely continued until the present day. Beginning in 2014, the al-Sisi administration has implemented rounds of cuts to state-subsidies for fuel and presided over youth unemployment rates anywhere between 30 and 40 percent. Meanwhile, the military elite remains unscathed at the head of its mighty economic empire.

## **B ENCOURAGING QUIESCENCE**

Yet again, however, this glaring inequality has not occasioned any ameliorative influence attempts from those disadvantaged by the situation: the Egyptian public (Gaventa 1980: 26). Even when mass protests have emerged about Egypt's economic woes – for example, during the Bread Riots of 1977 and recent subsidy cuts under al-Sisi – demonstrators have not seriously called for reform of the armed forces' financial entitlements. On the contrary, the military has consistently outperformed all other state institutions in public opinion polling, despite the military's contributory role to Egypt's underperforming economy. Many Egyptians venerate the very same army that drains precious economic resources from the state, despite its lack of combat effectiveness. I argue that the military elite encouraged this “consensus” in favor of the armed forces' economic empire through decades of socialization and manipulation. These third-dimensional exercises of power emphasized the military's patriotic credentials, construction project acumen and importance to national security.

### **(i) Patriotic Appeals**

First, the military establishment shaped public values through a decades-long socialization program concerning the armed forces' performance in the October War (Gaventa 1980: 27; 67). Officers and soldiers alike enjoyed hero status amongst the Egyptian people for their participation in the battle with Israel (Blanga 2014: 366-67). As noted, the October War did not in fact result in triumph for Egypt from a military perspective; indeed, Israel could have destroyed the Egyptian forces but for diplomatic intervention from the Cold War superpowers. Despite this reality, the Egyptian military used extensive propaganda to emphasize the army's supposed strength and importance. The public witnessed an inordinate number of official parades through the streets. In October 1974, the military staged a dramatic reenactment of the crossing at Cairo Stadium, which tens of thousands attended. Egyptians flocked to the Cairo Citadel to inspect captured Israeli weapons during the same week (Gershoni and Jankowski 2004: 284-85). These celebrations commemorated the sacrifices made by Egypt's soldiers on behalf of the nation, setting up a powerful symbolic narrative in favor of the military.

Multiple regimes demonstrated the potency of this mythology surrounding the October War by attempting to co-opt this source of popular legitimacy for their own political purposes. The Sadat regime constantly issued propaganda that centered on the battle, often changing the narrative for a range of strategic reasons. For example, the aforementioned public celebrations served as a “demonstration of Egyptian military competence and strength” immediately after the October War (Gershoni and Jankowski 2004: 287). This underlying message changed within a few years, as state newspapers treated the October War as a prelude to peace with Israel, which fit more neatly with Sadat’s diplomatic efforts. Mubarak, who had led the Egyptian air force during the October War, sought to associate himself rather than Sadat with the supposed victory over Israel (Cook 2012: 173). Today, the al-Sisi regime continues to give the October War top billing in its propaganda apparatus. In 2013, it held massive public celebrations to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the battle at Cairo’s June 30 Stadium (van de Bildt 2015: 260). These various co-optations of the October War suggest the enormous importance of the military’s performance in 1973 in the minds of Egyptians. This popular appeal allowed the military establishment to justify its continued access to economic resources, even after Egypt made peace with Israel.

This program of socialization has succeeded in causing a critical mass of Egyptians to associate the military with patriotism and national pride. Most tellingly, the average Egyptian still maintains that Egypt triumphed in the October War, irrespective of the reality played out on the battlefield (Beattie 1994: 134). The Egyptian military has consistently received public approval ratings that are abnormally high by global standards. The military establishment has brought about this outcome through means of socialization even more direct than public propaganda, such as school curricula extolling the army’s virtues (Gaventa 1980: 67). The practice of conscription has also assisted to this end, allowing the officers to disseminate pro-military attitudes during army service. Gotowicki calculates that 12.3 percent of young males entering the work force each year during the 1990s had served in the military (Gotowicki 1997). These men have spent at least two or three years within the military system, learning about the mythology surround the armed forces and their centrality to the Egyptian national identity. Harb points out that this influence extends beyond the recruits themselves, given that

the soldiers' families will usually develop sympathy for the military (Harb 2003: 285). Thus many Egyptians tend to accept the military's special economic entitlements because the overwhelming majority of people have a personal connection to current or former military personnel (Harb 2003: 285).

The military establishment further promotes public loyalty to the armed forces by purporting to offer everyday Egyptians – and particularly those from outside major urban centers – with a viable career path. The military postures as an egalitarian workplace, where soldiers can advance their careers based on merit rather than factors of social class or kinship (Gotowicki 1997). In this sense, the military establishment tapped into a key motif of postcolonial Egypt, pursuant to which the army offered a means of social advancement to young men from outside elite social classes (Sassoon 2016: 73). For instance, a military pamphlet pointed out the socialist benefits received by soldiers in Nasserite Egypt, where each serviceman received equal treatment “whether he is a peasant, a manual laborer, or a clerk” (quoted in Sassoon 2016: 106). These claims might reveal more about the extremely limited career options facing uneducated Egyptian youth than the benevolence of the military as an employer. Sassoon points out that rank and file soldiers continued to receive low wages, even compared to the rest of the population (Sassoon 2016: 101). In addition, Egyptian privates enjoy precious little industrial protection from abuse at the hands of their superiors. Nevertheless, an Egyptian proverb persisted, advising “(i)f you want to eat bread, join the army” (Sassoon 2016: 100).

Closer analysis reveals that this military propaganda exerts hidden power, because it creates the perception of class equality when the military had actually installed and maintained structures of strict class stratification (Gaventa 1980: 56-57). Sassoon points out that the military establishment designed marked imbalance between military officers and soldiers in its reorganization following the October War. Most obviously, ordinary servicemen bore the brunt of the armed forces' downsizing as part of the Israeli peace settlement. In particular, Abu Ghazala spearheaded the military's reinvention during the early Mubarak years as a “top-heavy” institution, whereby officers retained their positions while subordinates lost theirs (Springborg 1989: 104). Even soldiers who held down employment

could not expect anything approaching true egalitarianism in terms of military practices. Officers consistently enjoyed wildly greater salaries and benefits packages than non-officers (Sassoon 2016: 100). Moreover, class factors beset the path from regular soldier to officer, given that the sons of military elites enjoy nepotistic benefits when applying to military colleges (Sassoon 2016: 99). The officers conceal these sharp class divides within the military by projecting the exact opposite scenario via propaganda – namely, that a soldier’s career is not compromised by the socioeconomic discrimination that afflicts many Egyptian workplaces.

## **(ii) Construction Project Acumen**

The military establishment built upon these favorable self-depictions by justifying its private sector interests with reference to a supposedly superior capacity carrying out large-scale projects. The military elite has taken over several high-profile public infrastructure projects, specifically to alleviate any public concerns about the armed forces’ command over the nation’s scarce resources (Springborg 1989: 116). The military establishment has repeatedly extracted public relations value when it has completed high-profile infrastructure projects. The state media has assisted with this propaganda campaign, celebrating the completion of construction tasks as “victories” for the armed forces (Springborg 1989: 120). During the 1980s, the armed forces’ communication wing boasted loudly that the military had managed to construct Cairo’s vital Ramses overpass in record time (Springborg 1989: 116). Similar self-congratulation accompanied the military’s contribution to new telephone lines across the country, apparently “proof of the military’s abilities and its commitment to the general welfare” (Springborg 1989: 116). Decades later, the Egyptian army celebrated its guidance of the New Suez Canal construction project in particularly ebullient style in mid-2015, organizing enormous public celebrations and broadcasting songs of praise commissioned by the Ministry of Defence (van de Bildt 2015: 271; *New York Times*, 5 Aug 2015).

The military elite generates these populist appeals by distorting information, which capitalizes on the general public’s relative ignorance of important facts surrounding the



projects. First, it is impossible to know how efficiently the military carried out its infrastructure efforts from a financial perspective, given that the armed forces need not declare their state budgetary allowance. Second, Ministry of Defense accounts ignore the important fact that the military has an enormous advantage due to its cheap labor force, the rank and file soldiery. The armed forces often dispatch recruits in their final months of military service to work on construction projects (Hashim 2011: 109). The military actively undermines the private sector when it carries out such projects, because a private construction company could not seriously compete with the military in any tender process. And, of course, the armed forces do not broadcast the significant cut of profits that they take from these public infrastructure assignments. For instance, the officers retained over 40 percent of profits from the Mubarak-era telephone line project (Springborg 1989: 116). Estimates range about the huge earnings that the military-led Suez Canal Area Development Project accrued. Despite this profiteering, a high-ranking military officer confidently asserted in 2014 that the military wins infrastructure projects ultimately because “the people trust the final product from the military” (quoted in Washington Post, 16 Mar 2014).

### **(iii) National Security Threats**

The military issued a third justification for its transition into the world of business and the private sector: the need for the armed forces to ensure Egypt’s national security. The officers expanded rapidly into military manufacturing from the outset of the Mubarak era, with Egypt reaching “self-sufficiency” in the production of several important grades of weapons by 1984 (Springborg 1989: 107). This development did ameliorate Egypt’s previous reliance upon foreign powers for arms shipments, such as Sadat’s dependence on the Soviet Union before the October War. The officers issued propaganda related to this burgeoning industry. They enjoyed “innumerable occasions for self-congratulation” as Egyptian military companies became the only truly successful arms manufacturer in the Arab world (Springborg 1989: 108; Sassoon 2016: 93). The industry’s boasting reached new heights in 1987, when Major-General Midhat Mustafa published an account of how Egyptian experts had trained American military personnel in how to use range-finders developed in one of the

military's munitions factories (quoted in Springborg 1989: 108). This offers a powerful narrative to the Egyptian public. Not only could Egypt now fend for itself without relying on Western arms, it had excelled to the point where Western experts now sought advice from their Egyptian counterparts.

These claims obscured the reality that the military's private weapons enterprise had not achieved its lofty objectives, on either a strategic or financial basis. Financially speaking, Springborg points out that the state subsidized the weapons export industry by, for example, providing electricity at cut-price rates to the munitions factories (Springborg 1989: 109). Of course, the military deposits earnings from weapons sales in its own private accounts, meaning that the state had effectively invested public funds in the industry without receiving any appreciable return (Springborg 1989: 108-09). This reality tempers the military's proud assertion that the arms manufacturing industry employed over 100,000 Egyptians by the end of the 1990s (Sassoon 2016: 92). Moreover, the military's weapons companies can avoid independent assessments of their efficiency due to the secrecy in which their finances are cloaked. An independent estimate questioned how the aforementioned range-finder technology – which surpassed the equivalent product produced by Western arms manufacturers at the time – could have achieved reasonable cost efficiency. For this reason, the report suggested that these products would be “among the world's most expensive range-finders” (Springborg 1989: 108). And, ultimately, we have seen that successive regimes have relied heavily upon American military aid and weapons in order to satisfy the officers' supposed needs (Brownlee 2012: 42).

In these ways, the military elite encouraged general quiescence about its expanding business portfolio after the October War. The officers made concerted efforts to condition public values in favor of this new financial role for the military establishment, making appeals rooted in the armed forces' patriotism, construction expertise and responsibility for Egyptian national security. These public relations campaigns pre-empted the formation of grievances about the military establishment's disproportionate command over national economic resources (Springborg 1989: 116; Gaventa 1980: 15-17). The military could encourage these beliefs due to its extensive access to the Egyptian population, which

included the steady flow of conscripted soldiers and airtime on state media. As we have seen, these public communications often distorted the true state of affairs, suggesting the exercise by the military of “specific processes of power” in relation to the Egyptian public (Gaventa 1980: 27).

### **C SWEEPING ASIDE MANIFEST CHALLENGES**

The Mubarak era suggests that powerbrokers will almost always retain the capacity to exercise second-dimensional power against manifest challengers, even when power third-dimensional structures are well-entrenched (Gaventa 1980: 22-4). Indeed, Mubarak became increasingly paranoid, rather than relaxed, during the course of his presidency (Brownlee 2012: 62). To be sure, dissenting voices did occasionally question the military’s untrammelled access to economic resources at certain points after the October War. Opposition groups and the Muslim Brotherhood at times offered an alternative vision for Egypt, one in which the armed forces (and their finances) might be subject to more civilian control. For this reason, the regime and its military allies maintained second-dimensional power structures capable of sweeping aside any manifest challenges to the prevailing economic order. These options ranged from co-optation to brute force (Gaventa 1980: 14).

The regime and military elites often thwarted incipient challenges to their dominant economic position by less dramatic means, such as co-opting potential troublemakers (Gaventa 1980: 14). The armed forces frequently awarded lucrative contracts in non-military areas, which gave the officers leverage over business elites throughout Egypt (Springborg 1989: 117). This tactic ensured the acquiescence of those in the private sector that held interests most affected by the military’s economic empire. Springborg suggests that the military, headed by Abu Ghazala, also deployed co-optation as a successful weapon against liberal opposition figures. For example, opposition newspaper *Al-Wafd* demanded in August 1986 that the military submit its finances to heightened civilian control, on the basis that Abu Ghazala’s influence had clearly exceeded his official remit as Minister for Defense (Springborg 1986: 120). Within a month, *Al-Wafd* back flipped on this pronouncement, praising the armed forces for entering the economic sphere and mitigating the civilian

bureaucracy's incompetence (Springborg 1989: 121). Opposition outlet *Al-Shaab* retreated from criticizing the "lack of supervision of (the armed forces') expenses," saluting Abu Ghazala's patriotism and decision-making (Springborg 1989: 121). Springborg adduces testimony from another opposition journalist that his colleagues at *Al-Wafd* and *Al-Shaab* had succumbed to bribery, a circumstance made possible by Abu Ghazala's "sprawling empire and ample funds" (Springborg 1989: 122).

The regime and military elite augmented these third-dimensional power structures by institutionalizing more blunt instruments of repression. Chiefly, the Mubarak regime made extensive use of the 1958 Emergency Law, legislation from the Nasser era that imposes a state of martial law on Egypt for up to three years at a time. The Emergency Law authorizes the state to enact a series of "exceptional" measures – including the restriction of fundamental civil rights – during a "state of emergency" (Reza 2007: 532). The executive may take actions such as restricting citizens' freedom of assembly, increasing surveillance and censorship practices and confiscating private property (Reza 2007: 538). Nasser first invoked the Emergency Law when the Six Day War began in 1967. This state of emergency persisted until 1980, only to be re-imposed after Sadat's assassination the following year. The regime continued to extend the Emergency Law's application every three years until the 2011 revolution, and it remains in force in the North Sinai region today as part of al-Sisi's current "war on terror."

The Emergency Law enabled the Mubarak regime to establish new barriers to political participation, which might have allowed any manifest challengers to broaden the scope of their alternative vision for Egyptian society (Gaventa 1980: 14-15). Mubarak continued a decades-old practice of using the Emergency Law to ban public demonstrations and the formation of certain political parties, particularly by the Muslim Brotherhood (Cook 2007: 71). The regime would often wait for politically convenient moments before prosecuting the Brothers for alleged violations of the Emergency Law. Indeed, one Egyptian journalist observed that "(m)ass Brotherhood trials have become something of an election year tradition in Egypt" (quoted in Reza 2007: 545). These strategies succeeded in forcing the Muslim Brotherhood into the political underground, which in turn likely drove some Brothers

to resort to violent means to achieve social change. In this way, these participation barriers feed back into the regime's mobilization of bias, supporting the state's equation of the Muslim Brotherhood with terrorism (Brownlee 2012: 62). This trend has arguably restarted during the al-Sisi era, in which banning the Muslim Brotherhood from participation in Egyptian politics has not succeeded in curbing non-state violence (van de Bildt 2015: 273).

The Emergency Law has also given a central role to the military elite in controlling public discourse through the creation of special State Security Courts. The Emergency Law allows the executive to appoint military judges to preside over cases, which may concern sweeping charges like "offences concerning state security," "public incitement" and "crimes involving public demonstrations" (Reza 2007: 539). Crucially, normal standards of legal procedure do not apply to hearings before the State Security Courts. This means that the state can compel Egyptian citizens to stand trial for vaguely phrased offences, in a military court, without recourse to the usual rules of evidence. Regime officials have predictable justifications for these relaxed legal procedures that relate to the need for the state to act decisively against security threats during a state of emergency (Cook 2007: 72). Reza points out, however, that the bulk of nongovernmental observers identify "the ultimate purpose of emergency rule in Egypt ... (as being) the suppression of popular opposition" (Reza 2007: 533).

## **D CONCLUSION**

Ultimately, the Emergency Law not only provides these various options for exercising second-dimensional power, but also reinforces the exercise of control in the third dimension. Egyptians lived under a nationwide "state of emergency" for almost the entire period of time between the Six Day War and the Egyptian revolution of 2011. This longevity led Reza to conclude in 2007 that the state of emergency in Egypt was far from exceptional, as the name might suggest. Rather, Egypt existed in a state of "endless" emergency (Reza 2007). Entire generations of Egyptians have grown up knowing only a government that can, under the pretext of national security, suppress violent and non-violent opposition alike. Police forces arrest journalists and activists on trumped-up security accusations, and then send them home

with a warning to exercise more discretion in future. High-profile dissidents, such as Professor Saad Eddin Ibrahim, are incarcerated on flimsy allegations of “receiving foreign money for the purpose of harming Egypt’s national security interests” (Reza 2007: 546). Non-military citizens constantly face trial in the State Security Courts, even on charges as far-removed from national security as homosexuality (Reza 2007: 547). In this sense, “endless emergency” helps normalize the pre-eminence of Egypt’s security apparatus, while also providing a direct disincentive for individuals to express grievances publicly.

We have seen that the Egyptian military elite did not face any serious public challenge to its preferential access to economic resources following the October War. This quiescence subsisted despite the fact that circumstances had changed since the period before 1973; Egypt no longer faced the existential threat of a hostile nation at its border, and the national economy had gradually transitioned away from the state-led Nasserite model, which had favored the armed forces so markedly. This chapter posits that the regime and its military allies ensured this outcome by exercising third-dimensional power. Socialization and propaganda prevented a critical mass of the Egyptian public from forming grievances about the military’s privileged position, whereby it attracted public and private economic resources, even though the officers failed to develop an effective fighting force and proved reticent to engage in any meaningful combat. The officers reinforced these third-dimensional power structures by developing a powerful coercive apparatus tasked with eliminating any manifestation of dissent in the community. Tellingly, these control mechanisms survived even the seismic shock of the 2011 revolution, during which the public venerated Egypt’s soldiers while calling for Mubarak’s deposal.

## **Concluding Remarks**

The world watched on hopefully as Egyptians took to the streets in early 2011 to demand the end of the Mubarak regime and a transition towards democracy. The military officers “sided” with the demonstrators, allowing Mubarak to fall from power, but would never countenance a political system that subjected their financial empire to civilian rule. The top brass soon tired of Egypt’s democratic experiment, and supported the overthrow of the democratically elected Morsi government in 2012. In short, their economic interests are better served under the autocratic rule of President al-Sisi. For now, democracy seems a distant hope for the Egyptian people.

Between 1952 and 1967, the military elite established a “structuring of inequalities” that afforded the armed forces preferential access to state resources (Gaventa 1980: 56-7). The officers colluded with the Nasser regime to sideline alternative visions for Egyptian society that might have placed defense spending under civilian control. They then exercised third-dimensional power, gradually placing the military’s economic privileges beyond public critique, even though those same privileges caused great hardship for Egyptians. These tactics laid the foundation for a period of remarkable quiescence, during which the once restive Egyptian public mounted no significant resistance to the repressive Nasser regime or the military’s venal practices.

During the interwar period (1967-1973), this manufactured “consensus” faltered temporarily due to the disastrous military outcome of the Six Day War. Protestors capitalized on this momentary shock to the power structures established during the Nasser era, publicly challenging the regime and the military on issues that had previously been “off limits.” These expressions of dissent support the hypothesis that the Egyptian people would have resisted the unfair distribution of economic resources before the interwar period, but for the exercise of third-dimensional power (Lukes 1974: 46). Nasser, Sadat and the military elite fell back on exerting power in the second dimension during this period, suppressing manifest challenges with coercion while employing third-dimensional tactics to prevent the protest movement from spreading even further. The military was able to re-establish its third-dimensional power

structures fully in the aftermath of the October War, in which the armed forces performed more creditably.

The interwar period gave way to the late Sadat-Mubarak era, during which the armed forces successfully normalized a new version of military hegemony. The officers enjoyed defense funding from both Egyptian and foreign sources, while simultaneously amassing a vast portfolio of interests in the private sector. Both sets of interests created unfair outcomes for the Egyptian public. Public defense spending went to a largely impotent army that hesitated to engage in combat, while the military's private ventures undermined Egypt's struggling economy without contributing any significant return. Despite this, Egyptians did not seriously challenge the military's economic entitlements. The interwar protests had ultimately proved futile. Therefore we might view the quiescence that ensued since 1973 as the Egyptian public's "adaptive response to constant defeat" (Gaventa 1980: 16).

This paper has sought to challenge overly simplistic explanations for the Egyptian people's non-challenge to military entitlements since the 1952 revolution. We might be tempted to "blame the victim" for this outcome, assuming that non-participation stems from apathy, or the lack of a political consciousness, or genuine consensus (Gaventa 1980: 8). I argue that the Egyptian military establishment has helped shape public quiescence by extensively exercising power over decades. This has prevented a critical mass of Egyptians from even forming grievances about the grossly unfair situation. Whether or not the Egyptian people can ever break the spell of military hegemony remains to be seen.



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