

Observation no: 142 (War of Attrition)

Country-year: Egypt - 1968

1. Did the current regime come to power in a military coup?

Yes.

On July 23, 1952, a coalition of army officers known as the Free Officers that opposed King Faruk's rule led a bloodless coup that subsequently turned into a revolution that overthrew the monarchy, ended the British occupation, and established a republic in Egypt. The two main leaders of the coup, the army general Muhammad Naguib and the officer Gamal Abdel Nasser, both later became president of Egypt, the former on July 28, 1953, and the latter on June 1956.¹

2. Has the country ever experienced a military coup?

Yes.

The July 23, 1952 Free Officers coup was the first and only successful military coup the country had experienced by 1968. However, in 1966, the country did experience two abortive political coups on February 5 and on September 24 that did not involve military factions. And again, on August 27, 1967, a coalition of army and political factions led by Abdel al-Hakim 'Amer, the former commander of the armed forces, conducted a failed coup.²

3. Is the country's top leader a former military officer?

Yes.

Gamal Abdel Nasser, an army officer that had led the Free Officers Movement of 1952, was elected the second president and prime minister of the Republic of Egypt on June 23, 1956. Egypt's other strong man, the commander of the armed forces and minister of defense from 1956 to 1967, and former vice-president, Abdel al-Hakim 'Amer, was driven to suicide in September 1967 after his arrest for mounting a coup to depose Nasser.³ After the 1967 Arab debacle, Nasser resigned from office, only to be immediately recalled as president by massive public support.⁴

¹ McGregor, Andrew. *A Military History of Modern Egypt: From the Ottoman Conquest to the Ramadan War*. Westport & London: Praeger Security International, 2006, pp. 249-250.

² Verified in Luttwak, Edward. *Coup d'État. A practical Handbook*. Table II Basic List of Coups and Attempted Coups, 1945-78. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979, p.197.

³ Be'eri, Eliezer. *Army Officers in Arab Politics and Society*. New York: Praeger, 1970, p. 325.

⁴ Smith, Charles D. *Palestine And The Arab-Israeli Conflict, A history With Documents*, Seventh Edition. Boston and New York: Bedford/St Martin's, 2010, p. 300.

4. Are ethnic, sectarian, or racial criteria used to exclude segments of the population from the officer corps?

No.

However, social classes did historically influence the Egyptian officers' background. The expansion of the army's ranks following the 1952 coup opened the door to factions of the society that had been significantly unrepresented pre-1952 such as poor peasants or laborers. The officers, in opposition, both in pre and post-1952 coup, were in majority from middle-class urban families, rather secular, and with a family history within the army.⁵ Otherwise, at the ethnic and political levels, the Egyptian armed forces were diversified.⁶

5. Are there strict ideological requirements for entry into the senior officer corps?

No.

In the years leading to the 1967 Six-Day War with Israel, Nasser had formally lost control of the armed forces to Abdel al-Hakim 'Amer, the commander of the armed forces and Nasser's former best friend. Nasser's attempts to ideologically indoctrinate the senior officers with the principles of pan-Arabism and socialism had failed and the officer corps remained largely loyal to 'Amer.⁷ In post 1967 war and after 'Amer's death up until Nasser's own death in 1970, the senior officer corps, which had been under a process of politicization in the 1960's, was ideologically divided between "rightists" and pro-Nasser "centrists" socialists.⁸

6. Is party membership required for entry into the senior officer corps?

No.

I cannot find evidence of this in the major histories already cited.

7. Does military training involve extensive political education or ideological indoctrination?

No.

⁵ Be'eri, Eliezer, pp. 317-322.

⁶ Baker, Raymond W. *Egypt's Uncertain Revolution Under Nasser and Sadat*. Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1978, p. 159.

⁷ Hashim, Ahmed S. The Egyptian Military, Part One: From the Ottomans through Sadat. *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XVIII, No. 3, Fall 2011, p. 69.

⁸ Beattie, Kirk J. *Egypt During the Nasser Years*. Boulder & San Francisco & Oxford: Westview Press, 1994, pp. 163-175.

I cannot find evidence of this in the major histories already cited. See answer to question 5.

8. Has the military been used to repress internal dissent in the last five years?

Yes.

In April 1966, the murder of an ASU official by a landowning family rejecting the state's land reform limitations triggered a wave of repressions and humiliations to rebellious and anti-regime landowning families by the armed forces. The army created the Committee for the Liquidation of Feudalism the next month with Abdel al-Hakim 'Amer, the commander of the armed forces at the time, at its head, and conducted the repression.⁹

After the army's crushing defeat in the Six-Day War, the country experienced unprecedented students and workers demonstrations in June 1967 and February 1968 calling for more democracy and civilian participation within the state. Nasser called for elections within the state's party, the Arab Socialist Union (ASU), but did not feel the need for real democratization and instead insisted on the army's post war rebuilding with massive Soviet material assistance.¹⁰

9. Has the military been used to govern the country in the last five years?

Yes.

The military had been in power since the July 23, 1952 coup that abolished the monarchy and subsequently established a republic. During the presidency of Nasser, 32 to 65% of the cabinet positions were occupied by army officers and from 1952 to 1967, only one civilian hold a top position in the government.¹¹ Moreover, the Free Officers proceeded to the elimination of the parliamentary parties and Muslim Brotherhood directly after the coup.¹²

10. Is there a paramilitary organization separate from the regular military, used to provide regime or leader security?

No.

I cannot find evidence of this in the major histories already cited.

⁹ Beattie, Kirk J, pp. 195-196.

¹⁰ Beattie, Kirk J, pp. 215-218.

¹¹ Hashim, Ahmed S, p. 68.

¹² Be'eri, Eliezer, p. 105.

11. Is there an internal intelligence apparatus dedicated to watching the regular military?

No.

I cannot find evidence of this in the major histories already cited.

12. Has a purge of the officer corps occurred in the last five years?

Yes.

After the crushing military defeat of 1967, Nasser dedicated himself to rebuilding the army in suppressing the too powerful officers that could present a threat for his regime. Abdel al-Hakim 'Amer, the commander of the armed forces, still benefited from great influence and popularity even after assuming with Nasser the responsibility of the 1967 defeat and resigning from office. On August 27, 1967, 'Amer and his supporters set up an abortive coup to overthrow Nasser. 'Amer was arrested and committed suicide on September 14. After 'Amer's death, his supporters were arrested and over 1000 officers were purged from the armed forces.¹³

13. Is there an institutionalized forum through which civilian leaders and military officers regularly exchange information?

Yes.

Considering the nature of Nasser's military regime, and after the purge of officers loyal to 'Amer in September 1967, we can assume that Nasser regained his authority within the army.

¹³ Beattie, Kirk J, pp. 211-212.