

Observation no: 135 (Six-Day War)

Country-year: Egypt - 1966

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 the rule of King Faruk led a bloodless coup that subsequently turned into a revolution that overthrew the monarchy, ended the British occupation of the country, 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 military coup the country had experienced in 1966. However, that same year, the country did experience two abortive political coups on February 5 and on September 24 that did not involve military factions.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.

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

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.

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.³ Otherwise, at the ethnic and political levels, the Egyptian armed forces were diversified.⁴

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

No.

By 1966, Nasser had formally lost the control of the armed forces to Abdel al-Hakim 'Amer, the commander of the armed forces and Nasser's best friend. The senior officers had defeated the attempts of Nasser's party, the Arab Socialist Party (ASU), for ideological indoctrination and education in the principles of pan-Arabism and socialism. Rather than over its ideology then, the officer corps was controlled over its loyalty to 'Amer.⁵

Moreover, the political and military leaders were themselves divided on ideological grounds. They diverged on their definition of socialism and of the place of Islam, Arab unity, and socialism in the state. On May 21, 1962, Nasser presented to the National Congress the National Charter, the regime's manifesto that aimed to establish the ASU, a single and massive hierarchical political organization. However, the charter's ambiguities and personal and ideological rivalries, led the regime to be fragmented between a "rightist" Arab socialist faction, formed by many senior officers such as Sadat, and more "centrist" pro-Nasserist socialists.⁶

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. See answer to question 5.

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

No.

³ Be'eri, Eliezer. *Army Officers in Arab Politics and Society*. New York: Praeger, 1970, pp. 317-322.

⁴ Baker, Raymond W. *Egypt's Uncertain Revolution Under Nasser and Sadat*. Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1978, p. 159.

⁵ Hashim, Ahmed S. The Egyptian Military, Part One: From the Ottomans through Sadat. *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XVIII, No. 3, Fall 2011, p. 69.

⁶ Beattie, Kirk J. *Egypt During the Nasser Years*. Boulder & San Francisco & Oxford: Westview Press, 1994, pp. 163-175.

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 its head, and conducted the repression.⁷

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.⁸

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.

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

No.

From 1961, Nasser felt threatened by the popularity and control over the officer corps by Abdel al-Hakim 'Amer. Nasser subsequently tried to remove 'Amer from his positions and encountered a near rebellion from the officers in response. As a consequence, 'Amer stayed in power and little or no attempts were made to control the regular armed forces through the means of security surveillance.⁹

⁷ Beattie, Kirk J, pp. 195-196.

⁸ Hashim, Ahmed S, p. 68.

⁹ Hashim, Ahmed S, p 69.

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

No.

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

The last purge of the officer corps occurred after the 1952 coup among the highest echelons of the army. The only attempt since then was when Nasser tried to remove 'Amer from his position in 1961.¹⁰

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

No.

By 1966, Nasser had formally lost control of the military at the hands of Abdel al-Hakim 'Amer, the commander of the armed forces until 1967 and strongest man in Egypt at the time, being in control of the military, internal security, and the intelligence agencies.¹¹ Under 'Amer, the armed forces had grown as a politicized "state within a state"¹². Moreover, there was a problem of communication between the civilian and military institutions at the leadership level. According to Mohammad Fawzi, chief of general staff at the outbreak of war in early 1967, interviewed about the reasons of the Egyptian military failure of the 1967 war with Israel: "*the military leadership had separated itself from the constitutional organization of the state*".¹³

¹⁰ Hashim, Ahmed S, p. 67.

¹¹ Beattie, Kirk J, pp. 159-162.

¹² Hashim, Ahmed S, p 70.

¹³ McGregor, Andrew, p. 272.