

Observation no: 152 (Yom Kippur War)

Country-year: Egypt - 1972

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

No.

Anwar Sadat, who has served as the vice president of Gamal Abdel Nasser in his last year of presidency and life, took power as the new president on October 15, 1970 after Nasser's death on September 28, 1970.¹

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 1972. 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 faction 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.

Anwar Sadat was an Egyptian officer who had participated to the 1952 coup as a member of the Free Officers Movement as Lieutenant Colonel. Put in jail several times for his opposition to the monarchy, he reintegrated the army in 1950.³

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

¹ McGregor, Andrew. *A Military History of Modern Egypt: From the Ottoman Conquest to the Ramadan War*. Westport & London: Praeger Security International, 2006, p. 274.

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 McGregor, Andrew, p. 249.

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.⁴ Otherwise, at the ethnic and political levels, the Egyptian armed forces were diversified.⁵

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

Yes.

From the post-war defeat period of 1967 and up until Nasser's 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 more pro-Nasser "centrists" socialists. After the death of Nasser and during the succession period, Anwar Sadat, the new president, appointed a supporter of him, Mohammad Ahmad Sadiq, as the new minister of war to counter the conspiracies among the Nasserist political and military elites to overthrow him and in order to control the armed forces.⁶ Moreover, in the years preceding the 1973 war, appointments for important positions in the army depended more on personal loyalty to Sadat than on military experience.⁷

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.

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

With Sadat in power, the officer corps was urged to concentrate on the struggle with Israel rather than on internal politics with an emphasis on professionalization. For this reason, language classes in Hebrew were imparted and the officers studied Israeli defense tactics.⁸

⁴ Be'eri, Eliezer. *Army Officers in Arab Politics and Society*. New York: Praeger, 1970, pp. 317-322.

⁵ Baker, Raymond W. *Egypt's Uncertain Revolution Under Nasser and Sadat*. Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1978, p. 159.

⁶ Hashim, Ahmed S. The Egyptian Military, Part One: From the Ottomans through Sadat. *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XVIII, No. 3, Fall 2011, p. 72.

⁷ McGregor, Andrew, p. 281.

⁸ McGregor, Andrew, p. 275.

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

No.

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

After the 1967 defeat, 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 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.⁹ Simultaneously, the armed forces were engaged in a war of attrition with Israel mostly between fall 1968 to the summer of 1970 along the Suez front.¹⁰

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

Yes.

Since the Free Officers coup of 1952 and under both the presidencies of Muhammad Naguib and Gamal Abdel Nasser, the military had a strong influence over the state institutions. Particularly, the armed forces were in charge of the defense and security ministries. However, with the death of Nasser and Sadat's takeover in 1970, efforts to reduce the army's influence in politics and several officers were discharged from important government positions, with the exception of the future president Air Force Commander Hosni Mubarak promoted in 1972 as Commander of the Air Force. In order to further diminish the army influence over his own power, Sadat appointed as the new minister of war, General Ahmad Ismail Ali, who was notoriously incompetent and dying of cancer.¹¹

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?

⁹ Beattie, Kirk J. *Egypt During the Nasser Years*. Boulder & San Francisco & Oxford: Westview Press, 1994, pp. 215-218.

¹⁰ McGregor, Andrew, p. 273.

¹¹ McGregor, Andrew, pp. 275-276.

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 represent 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 his positions. On August 27, 1967, 'Amer and his supporters set up an abortive coup to overthrow Nasser. 'Amer' was arrested and allegedly committed suicide on September 14. After 'Amer's death, his supporters were arrested and over 1000 officers were purged from the armed forces.¹²

After the death of Nasser in 1970 and as part of his post-Nasser "corrective revolution", President Sadat ordered on May 13, 1971 a purge of potential rivals within the army considered "leftists" or too supportive of the Soviet Union. Subsequently, the Soviet advisors of the Egyptian armed forces were dismissed in mid-1972 in an effort to undermine foreign influence.¹³

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

Yes.

Sadat's military background and overlap of the civilian and military spheres under Nasser regime following the 1952 revolution imply that the civilian and military leaders exchange information regularly. However, Sadat's regime also corresponds to a period of depoliticization of the army and limitation of its influence in politics. Indeed, Sadat reduced the officers' presence in ministries (only 20%) and purged the armed forces from the elements not loyal to him. These moves resulted in the army to be more autonomous and less politicized than under Nasser.¹⁴

¹² Beattie, Kirk J, pp. 211-212.

¹³ McGregor, Andrew, p. 275.

¹⁴ Hashim, Ahmed S, pp. 72-73.