

Observation no: 113 (Sinai War)

Country-year: Egypt - 1955

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, and established a republic in Egypt. The two main leaders of the coup, the army general Muhammad Naguib and officer Gamal Abdel Nasser successively led the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) established after the 1952 revolution to administer Egypt.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 by 1955.² The Free Officers' Association was formed by politicized officers of medium and low ranks as an exclusive underground movement at the end of 1949.³ By January 1952, public dissatisfaction over Britain's maintained presence in Egypt and social unrest led to five changes of government that failed to restore stability in the country. Meanwhile, opposition groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood appeared as potential successors to the king's regime. The Free Officers - although not the strongest opposition force at the time - had gradually reinforced their political influence and contacts among other political parties in Egypt and American intelligence officers. While initially, the Free Officers' ideology was not particularly anti-monarchy, it did oppose the aristocracy's lifestyle in face of the people's poverty, the deterioration of the army, and lack of Egypt's independence. Eventually, by July 1952, the king's attempts to curb the political influence of the opposition within the officer corps resulted in the Free Officers to launch the July 23 coup that deposed the monarchy and put them in control of the country.⁴

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

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, pp. 76-85

⁴ Be'eri, Eliezer, pp. 90-96.

Yes.

Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser was one of the five members of the Free Officers' Executive Committee and was chosen as president of the movement in 1950.⁵ After the 1952 Free Officers' coup, the popular army general Muhammad Naguib became president of Egypt on July 28, 1953, but a power struggle opposed him to Nasser leading to his final resignation on November 14, 1954. After Naguib was removed from power, Nasser formally became Egypt's top leader as prime minister and was later elected president of the Republic of Egypt by referendum on June 23, 1956.⁶

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.⁷ Otherwise, at the ethnic and political levels, the Egyptian armed forces were diversified.⁸

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

Yes.

After the coup, the Free Officers' leaders occupied some of the military command positions; they also promoted other officers that they considered politically loyal while purging old-regime partisans from the army.⁹

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.

⁵ Be'eri, Eliezer, pp. 84-85.

⁶ Be'eri, Eliezer, pp. 114-120.

⁷ Be'eri, Eliezer, pp. 317-322.

⁸ Baker, Raymond W. *Egypt's Uncertain Revolution Under Nasser and Sadat*. Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1978, p. 159.

⁹ Be'eri, Eliezer, p. 322.

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

No.

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

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

Yes.

The Egyptian army and the Free Officers did not participate in the anti-British clashes of 1951-1952 between the Muslim Brotherhood and Egyptian police. The pre-1952 Egyptian government also mainly decided not to involve the army out of fear that it would fail in the conflict because of its lack of preparation like what had happened during the 1948 Palestine War.¹⁰ However, a labor strike in Kafr al-Dawar erupted in the midst of the Free Officers' revolution and resulted in the sentencing to death of two workers by a Free Officers court-martial on August 1952. Indeed, however sympathetic with the workers' demands, the Free Officers were determined to counter all sorts of political unrest or opposition.¹¹ On January 1954, the army also violently repressed a meeting organized by the Muslim Brotherhood at the University of Cairo denouncing Nasser's dictatorship.¹² After Nasser survived an assassination attempt in Alexandria on October 1954, he permanently outlawed the Islamist movement, arrested, tortured its leaders, and sentenced to death seven of them.¹³

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.¹⁴ Moreover, the Free Officers proceeded to the elimination of the parliamentary parties and Muslim Brotherhood directly after the coup.¹⁵

¹⁰ Be'eri, Eliezer, pp. 87-88.

¹¹ Be'eri, Eliezer, pp. 103-105.

¹² Be'eri, Eliezer, pp. 113-114.

¹³ Be'eri, Eliezer, pp. 118-119.

¹⁴ Hashim, Ahmed S. The Egyptian Military, Part One: From the Ottomans through Sadat. *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XVIII, No. 3, Fall 2011, p. 68.

¹⁵ Be'eri, Eliezer, p. 105.

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.

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.

More than 400 officers among the highest echelons and loyal to the old regime were purged of the officer corps after the 1952 coup.¹⁶ After the revolution, a power struggle among the Free Officers resulted in the systematic ousting of officers opposing the rule or policies of Nasser.¹⁷

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

Yes.

Power in Egypt in the mid-1950's was concentrated around the military regime of Nasser. The Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), the highest governing body of the state after the 1952 revolution was abolished in 1956 when Nasser gained full powers in Egypt as president.¹⁸

¹⁶ Hashim, Ahmed S, p. 67.

¹⁷ Be'eri, Eliezer, pp. 110-112.

¹⁸ Be'eri, Eliezer, p. 109.