The Army and Political Power in the Arab Context: Theoretical Issues[1]

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This study is concerned with the relationship between the army and politics, not as an ailment specific to Arab societies but as the byproduct of historical development, the nature of the Arab state, and the process attendant to its development, structure, and modernization. The paper sets out from the hypothesis that by definition no army is far removed from politics, and that in recently independent states, the military has a role in state building and in accelerating the country through historical stages. The study focuses on the army's political aspirations in the narrow sense of seizing and wielding power. The distinction is made between the concepts of "revolution" and "coup," two concepts which have been historically intertwined in Arab public discourse, as an introduction to thinking about various historical experiences and examples where the military played an important role in the process of political and social change. The study affirms the difficulty of reaching any theoretical generalization governing the relationship between the army and power, and its behavior in power, while it attempts to differentiate between a coup launched by the regime against a political process it had initiated, and a coup launched by radicalized officers with the aim of reforming or changing the regime. Finally, there is an attempt to lay down five common features that characterize the relationship between the military and political power in the Arab world.

Introduction

It is difficult, if not impossible, to make generalizations across time and space about the army and politics, that is, outside a specific historical context encompassing local history, culture, social structure, and other determinants. This paper attempts to define the subject, followed by an analysis of aspects of direct intervention by Arab armies in political power, and an elucidation of some theoretical problems.

This paper will attempt to critique the present state of civil-military relations in the Arab region, not by reference to an ideal nor by pathologizing the Arab specificity but by understanding civil-military relations within the context of broader historical trends, social and economic structures and culture. Analysis of the phenomena means starting with their historicity, their theoretical reproduction, and the refutation of myths and preconceived ideas. These are the components of the critique intended in this study. Equally important is the critical step of drawing out the tension between the results of the analysis and the need of democratization for Arabs, which is our current preoccupation.

For the sake of clarity, I would like to begin with some definitions to demarcate the subject, even if in theory:

1. By army, here, I mean the modern national army, that is armed forces organized into divisions, corps, battalions, regiments, or other formations, trained to follow orders in a hierarchy with a clear chain of command from the private to the General Command, and which exists to defend the state, and may also intervene to preserve its internal stability.[3] The author is specifically not referring to irregular armed forces in the service of a belief, class, issue, or party. Equally, the author explicitly does not want to include pre-modern fighting formations, such as groups of knights or other similar feudal groups of fighters in the service of a lord or a king or similar. The paper will devote itself then to the professional army in the service of a national government, one which may or may not have an attendant reserve army alongside the professional "standing army".

The first regular army in history may have been the Ottoman Janissaries.[4] And it is no coincidence that it was built up out of prisoners and youngsters kidnapped from their families (in the European parts of the Empire) who were provided with physical and military training and religious indoctrination in dedicated camps. Others were trained in to serve other roles, such as in the Sultanate's administrative apparatus. From the perspective of our subject, these methods were necessary to overcome the communal relations, loyalties, and group identities that separated individuals (subjects) from rulers, by building direct allegiance to the Sultan. The modern state had yet to come into existence, with an army coalescing around allegiance to the nation. The only way to produce this direct allegiance at that time was by personal subservience to the Sultan, that is the Sultan's ownership of them. They were in fact a new form of *mamelukes*, organized into a regular army under the Sultan. An examination of how the Janissaries were trained, and their communal living quarters during the first centuries of the Ottoman Empire suggests

something similar to the "Guardians of the City" of Plato's *Republic*.

Subsequently, the Janissaries reversed this arrangement: instead of the Sultan owning the Janissaries, it was this new caste who dominated the Sultan. The subject of the Janissaries corps and their historical development merits its own, dedicated study.

For our purposes however, it would make sense to study the Janissaries of the Ottoman Empire as a way of illustrating how a military could influence politics. As soon as there were signs of economic and political crisis, and once the Janissaries had taken root in Ottoman urban life, they became a burden on the Sublime Porte and another constraint on its power, since it stirred up the grumblings of the population during crises; led, or participated in protest movements in the capital; and intervened directly to oust grand viziers, and kill or depose Sultans. This culminated in the first decade of the nineteenth century with the Janissaries' rejection of the process of their own modernization or even the formation of an additional, parallel professional army. During the Janissaries' rejection of modernization and reform two Sultans were deposed, one of whom was killed.

The Janissaries' intervention as an armed force in the domestic affairs of the state increased with growing greed of their commanders; the involvement of the Janissaries in domestic Ottoman politics was in fact inversely related to their competence as a fighting force able to confront external threats. Their interests became entangled with those of the merchant class in Istanbul, and they turned into

"a mechanism for corruption and chaos; their connection to their barracks weakened, and many only went to their barracks to collect their salaries, termed ulufat [...] Then many of them started to work in different professions, after they sold their ulufat dockets. [...] And many of those who bore the name Janissary only met together to raise the shout of disobedience, demanding a raise in the ulufat and

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3   The concept of this intervention has been expanded by many armies in the contemporary world to include guarding the constitution (or regime) against instability, and also against anything new. Some researchers view it as deserving the designation guardians or guards, including the Roman-derived Praetorian Guard.

4   This was based on Christian prisoners of war after the occupation of Edirne. See: Halil Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300-1800*, Norman Itzkowitz and Colin Imber (trans.), London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1973; and Sati' Al-Husari, *The Arab Countries and the Ottoman State* (Beirut: Dar Al-Ilm lil-Malayin, 1960) (Arabic), pp. 16 - 17.

tribute, or the removal of a minister, the appointment of a minister, or the hanging of group of ministers. [...] When the state decided to dispatch Janissaries to the battlefield, it found only a small number of armed men. "[5]

Subsequently, the name "Janissary" became synonymous with backwardness, chaos, and ineffectiveness, although in the past it had evoked an image of distinction, courage, and superiority.

If we turn for a moment to Plato's text to pursue the idea mentioned above, we see that his socio-political theory rests on the separation of functions, the competencies and talents associated with them, and warns against mixing the money and business sector with the guardians, as in the following dialogue:

"-- There is nothing more damaging and more likely to evoke shame for the shepherd than, in order to protect his flocks, he raises and feed dogs, whose ferocity, hunger, or any other bad trait, make them harm the sheep, and sees them transformed from dogs into wolves or suchlike.

-- Therefore, it is necessary to take every measure to prevent our guardians behaving in such fashion towards their citizens, thereby abusing their power and becoming ferocious masters, rather than vigilant protectors."[6]

Sultan Mahmud II (1808-1839) was able to eliminate the leadership of the Janissaries in 1826,[7] and began to rebuild the army along contemporaneous –Western – lines, following the French, and later the Prussian, models. This allowed Mahmud II to become the first Ottoman Sultan with absolute powers: a new, professional army was subservient to him by virtue of a new system of command and did not interfere in his decisions. Once again, the army was under the direct authority of the Sultan, no longer functioning as a social caste but as a modern army loyal to the Sultan who was no longer constrained by any intermediary institutions. His office became akin to absolute monarchy, and the army no longer represented any kind of limit to the Sultan's powers

alongside the constraints already imposed by other traditional institutions.

With the westernization of the military and it's exposure to new cultural values it became increasingly politicized and demanded a reformist role in state affairs. Particularly as it was the most exposed to the consequences of economic and social failure, as a result of its defeats. It played a major role in the Ottoman constitutional coup of 1908 - 1909 by forcing Sultan Abdul Hamid II (r. 1876-1909) to reinstate the 1876 constitution and then deposing him in 1909.

The structure of the new Ottoman army developed particularly in the period of the *tanzimat*, especially the second *tanzimat*, which guided the process of setting Ottoman education on a modern foundation in order to meet the needs of building the army. Modern education also came into practice in the military colleges (naval, artillery, engineering), "the modern sciences, in all of their diversity first entered the Ottoman realm through the military education. The first modern schools were set up for purely military purposes. The first works in mathematics and natural sciences, and even those in history and geography, were written in the military schools for the military schools. [...] Even the teaching of modern medicine began at the Military Medical School."[8]

The *tanzimat* period witnessed the coalescence of secret political party organizations in the Ottoman army, and the restoration of the constitution in 1908 is due to the most important of those, the Committee of Union and Progress, which would inaugurate the period when *tanzimat*-influenced Ottoman officers controlled politics and the state until the fall of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I.

In the Mashreq, the first modern Turkish and Arab militaries emerged from the incubator of this *tanzimat*-influenced military institution, and at a time when the Turkish military played a major role in destroying the Treaty of Sèvres (1920) and in liberating formerly Ottoman Turkish territory from the French, English, and Greek armies, culminating in international recognition of the unity and independence of Turkey

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5 Al-Husari, pp. 47 - 8.

6 *Plato's Republic*, Allan Bloom (trans.), 2nd edition (New York: Basic Books, 1979).

7 Mahmud II's operation to kill their leaders and disband them was called the "Auspicious Incident."

8 Al-Husari, pp. 83 - 4.

with the Treaty of Lausanne (1923). The Arab military role that grew out of the incubator of the *tanzimat*-influenced Ottoman military institution known as *Al-Ittihadiya* initially came to prominence with the Grand Arab Revolution, and this role became clearer with the experience of the Arab Kingdom of Syria (1918-1920) with the formation of a Syrian-Levantine national army that was crushed by the French after the occupation of Damascus in 1920. King Faisal, meanwhile, entrusted the foundation of the Iraqi army in 1921 as a pillar of the modern Iraqi state to those former Arab officers in the Ottoman *al-Ittihadiya* military institution. It is worth noting that the army of the Arab Kingdom of Syria in Damascus was a Levantine army in the full sense of the term, in that very few of the Hijazi leadership remained. It was the first modern regular Levantine army, and many of its officers were ethnically Turkman or Kurdish. Nonetheless, Arabism was an important cultural and linguistic unifier for them.

The Turkish army was the outcome of internal reforms and modernization in the period of the *tanzimat* that continued for around 100 years in a massive effort to confront the challenges posed by the development of western armies. The Arab armies were formed in the shadow of the briefly lived colonial period. Their structure was governed by the approaches of the mandatory powers and their understanding of the structure of Arab societies, particularly their sectarian and tribal structure. Exceptions to this are the Iraqi army and the Algerian army. Iraq became independent early on and effective links were formed between its officers and officers in the Arab army. In Algeria, the army, until the rule of Chadli Bendjedid (1979-1992), was a continuation of the liberation army .

Beginning with Mohammed Ali's wiping out of the Mamelukes in the The Egyptian army took a course similar to that of the Turkish army, from the time that Mohammed Ali removed the last of the Mamelukes in the infamous "Massacre of the Citadel" which in fact foreshadowed a massacre of the Janissaries in Istanbul (1811 vs. 1826). Similarly, the influence of French military techniques in Egypt preceded the influence of these techniques on the Ottoman army. The success of the Egyptian army was put on display during the 1830s era of Mohammed Ali rule when he occupied Greater Syria. Egyptian supremacy during that campaign combined with the successive setbacks suffered in the battlefield against Russia, helped to

incentivize the modernization of the Ottoman military. In contrast, the further advancement of the Egyptian military was constrained since the Urabi Rebellion (1879-1882) and until the ascendancy of the Free Officers in 1952 and this constriction was the result of subservience to the British mandate system which lasted until the army's relationship with Mohammed Ali's army was severed.

By definition no army is far removed from politics. The military deals every day with matters of war and defense, and other so-called "security" and "national security" issues, ranging from purely military affairs to matters that impinge more directly on the political, economic, and social stability of the state, on the local, regional and global levels. Even in its narrow sense, security is not separate from these issues. Accordingly, the question of military influence on politics is a broad one and is applicable to a large group of countries, democratic and undemocratic alike. This paper shall concern itself however with a narrow range of questions—specifically, questions related to the seizure and exercise of political authority within the state.

Undeniably, the military command in democratic states is well versed in matters related to foreign and domestic issues, and their opinions are generally canvassed. Nonetheless, the military in democratic countries takes its orders from elected officials and is answerable to institutions which embody the sovereignty of the state. One notable feature of how armies behave in electoral democracies is that they remain loyal to the state government regardless of who is elected.

The twentieth century witnessed examples of armies in undemocratic states becoming politicized and ideological, even if they did not always seize power in all cases. This was because they served the ruling regimes and parties. Such was the case, for example, in the former Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact countries. What this shows then is that not all dictatorships are military dictatorships, even in cases where the army was itself politicized. Here, the deliberate indoctrination of the military was not intended to bring the military command to power, but rather to persuade it of it's role to serve a one party regime that shares it's doctrine. The Soviet approach to achieving this was to enlist ideologically sound "Commissars" and put them throughout the ranks

of the army, with individual commissars tasked with ensuring the ideological soundness of the units in which they served.

Attempts to imitate this model were made in Cuba and other Third World states. In the Arab region, successful attempts to indoctrinate the army were found in Salah Jdid's Syria and Saddam Hussein's Iraq. They copied the Soviet post of commissar by creating the post of "Political Guidance Officer" who came under the army's political administration division, meaning that these officers were completely obedient to the ruling regime through political organizations within the army. Meanwhile, the role of military intelligence within these countries was transformed from spying on the enemy to spying on the army and its officers in every unit.

In Iraq and Syria, these two archetypal sites of military coups in the Arab region, the army has in fact not ruled for decades. The officers who undertook the last coups (1968 in Iraq, 1970 in Syria) set about ensuring that there would be no more coups, and they did this by forming an independent army with a clear hierarchy and loyalty to the regime, subject to the surveillance of an advanced modern intelligence apparatus, and deeply entwined with the organizations of the ruling party. The regime would at times consult with senior army officers, grant some of them political posts at the end of their military service, or have them serve as members of the central committee or the "Country-level Leadership" of the Baath Party in Syria. More importantly, the regime allocated them a share of wealth and influence and gave them many privileges to guarantee their loyalty, and also left room for the lower ranks (in the case of Syria) to benefit from networks of corruption, smuggling and graft.

In Algeria, the army represented the foundation of President Houari Boumediene's rule of the country, yet the army did not govern. Rather, the president ruled with the aid of civilians and soldiers. That was after the reconstruction of the liberation army in practice, with the border army becoming its backbone under the leadership of the Oujda Group of loyal officers. Once Boumediene died however, the army was the only institution capable of imposing its candidate for the presidency, Chadli Bendjedid (the most senior figure, both in terms of military rank and age within the upper ranks). Bendjedid built up the army in a way suitable for a modern army. He appointed a general staff, created the rank of lieutenant-general, and supplied it with the appropriate weaponry. He also restored the prestige of the National Liberation Front (FLN), bolstering its role as the leading, ruling political party. The Algerian military quickly reclaimed power after a period of political liberalization initiated by Chadli Bendjedid precipitated a popular uprising in 1988 which ultimately threatened to topple the regime itself. The president was forced to resign, and the army took effective control of the country to stave off the effects of the aborted political process and the societal instability that followed. This led to a proto civil war with the Islamists. The military effectively ruled, moving from the veneer of a system headed by a nominally civilian "presidential council" which was led by figures who had earned their legitimacy during the liberation struggle to the presidency of a military officer, albeit elected (this was president Liamine Zeroual to be precise). A process of national dialogue launched by Zeroual soon made clear the need for national elections (1999) and these paved the way for a new civilian leadership and a civilian president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika. With a legitimacy which stemmed from the FLN—which the army imposed on the post-dialogue electoral system—Bouteflika and his new civilian leadership set about restructuring the army as one which was loyal to the state.

As for Egypt the officers ruled directly following the 1952 revolution. Attempts to elevate the presidency above the military and other institutions led to open conflict with the Chief of the General Staff, Abdel Hakim Amer. The conflict was not resolved in favor of the presidency—staffed as it was by former military officers in civilian clothes—until the defeat of the June, 1967 War, for which Amer and his coterie in the army and intelligence were deemed responsible. Anwar Sadat, the second Egyptian president since 1952, continued to strengthen the presidency and its powers at the expense of the army. He changed the army leadership with a frequency that was new to Egypt. However, the regime needed the army to control the opposition after the Camp David Agreements, or what was called in Nasserite terms "the home front".

This use of this term is significant, revealing that the presidency saw itself as being at war at home and abroad. More contemporaneously, it can allude to

the rebellion of the Central Security forces during the Hosni Mubarak era. Since Field-Marshal Abd al-Halim Abu Ghazala became Defense Minister (during the transition between the Sadat and Mubarak presidencies), the army has obtained many privileges, including the right to fiscal independence and the freedom to administer its own economic, services, housing and other provisions under the guise that the military should remain insulated from the country's wider economic crises. These privileges multiplied under Mubarak and his Defense Minister Tantawi, affording the armed forces a level of autonomy within the borders of the country, and resulting in a parallel community of military of officers. The result was the rise of a highly idiosyncratic Egyptian phenomenon.

Although the regimes in Iraq and Syria were "militarized," neither of these countries, nor Egypt, could be said to have lived under military regimes. The regime was a clique headed by a dictator, with absolute power in practice, and whose orders were obeyed by all state institutions. Despite any theoretical constitutional constraints and some internal balances that had to be taken into account when making decisions, the decisions were ultimately his or of those he granted a particular authority. The leader was "lord of the land" and the source of powers. With time, the sovereignty of the state itself and the sovereignty of the president became interchangeable.

The clique of associates and loyalists around the president came from the party and the leadership of the security agencies and army, and association and loyalty often intersected with family ties, clan and regional affiliations. In the wider circle we find businessmen, senior state and party bureaucrats, and useful cronies (who also benefited from the largesse) of various kinds.

There is a difference between the rule of army officers and their replacement of one president after another on the one hand, and a governing dynasty in a tyrannical regime to which the army is subservient and obedient, as in the case of Syria, on the other. The army deposed Chadli Bendjedid and Mohamed Boudiaf was assassinated; Ali Kafi went and along came Liamine Zéroual then Bouteflika, who (once he sensed his power and the popular support for change) launched the process of changing the relationship between the army and presidency. It is not possible to compare this flexibility, which enabled transitions of power, and which risked fundamental change to the regime, with the case of a president who does not change, even at the risk of the destruction of the country and the displacement of its people. In the case of Syria, we have a regime willing to go to the extreme of changing the people rather than changing the president, that has zero flexibility, and goes as far as launching a war against its people.

The first case is more flexible and open to reform by means of the change in the civilian leadership and empowerment by means of elections to give vent to popular anger against the regime. In contrast to the function of the Algerian military during a historically limited period of rule over the country, today's Syrian regime uses the military as a main if not exclusive tool of oppression: in this, its work is overseen by a network of intersecting security and intelligence agencies all of which spy on each other and which are all simultaneously subject to the tyrant ruler[9] who leaves no outlet for the people, as represented by changing the president for example.

On Military Coups

A significant question has arisen about how, over recent decades, military coups no longer occur in states such as Syria and Iraq. Notably, the Syrian military remained loyal to the ruling regime even in the midst of a popular rebellion, notwithstanding a number of high-profile defections in their ranks.

Syrian citizens took to the streets after they had mustered their courage following the windows of hope that opened in Tunisia, Egypt and the beginning of the revolution in Libya. The willingness of the military to use force against unarmed protestors demonstrated that the "Home Front," to borrow a

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9   I tried and failed to find another term to express tyranny embodied in the ruling individual. In fact, this is more accurate than dictatorship, which gives the potential to conceive of the just or benevolent dictatorship. Tyranny, however, describes a dictatorship based on oppression and injustice.

phrase from the regime's own lexicon, is the only one the Syrian military was prepared to confront. The army went onto a war footing against a large section of the population, turning itself into a loyalist militia along the way. This raises the question: why?

Since the 1970s, it appeared that Sudan and Mauritania are the only two Arab countries to have experienced straightforward coups. This is consistent with the fact that the prospect of tanks driving down boulevards in the capital is no longer a serious prospect for citizens in Syria, Iraq, Morocco or Jordan. Ali Abdullah Saleh's ascendancy also put an end to the prospects of such coups in Yemen. This could also be said regarding the other states. So what happened in Egypt? A country which witnessed the marginalization of the military from political power under both Sadat and Mubarak (1970-2011) yet was home to a new military coup? Once again, the question which raises itself is: why?.

In fact, counterintuitively, the Egyptian case is not an exception to the general rule illustrated above. The coup by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) led by Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi differed from what we have seen in the past, from Abdel Karim Kassem (Iraq, 1958) to Muammar Gaddafi (Libya, 1969) and Gaafar Nimeiry in Sudan (1969) via the long list of Syrian coups and counter-coups. It was not a coup by officers inside the army against the ruling regime, or against their colleagues in other cases, but a coup by the army itself, that is its high command, against the democratic process, to keep hold of power for itself and to maintain the prevailing regime. SCAF's coup led by Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, like the move by the Algerian military led by Khaled Nezzar in January 1992, was not like the coups we had witnessed before, which were led by ideological military organizations that imposed their dominance on the military leadership or took control of the political structures of power. This was a move undertaken by the army leadership itself to halt the political process and protect the regime from the winds of political change and to preserve the gains that the military had made. As such, these were not coups against the ruling regimes but rather coups initiated from the military establishment with ruling regimes against the political process which these regimes were forced to initiate following the wide spread crises and social mobilizations that took place in Algeria in 1988 and after the 25th January revolution in Egypt.

In the case of Egypt, the army's action of July 3, 2013 represented a coup against the elected president and democracy. In Algeria, the move was coordinated with President Chadli Bendjedid who (forcibly) resigned following announcement of the first round of the December 1991 parliamentary elections. After his resignation, President Chadli Bendjedid was not imprisoned, and subsequently appointed Khaled Nezzar as Chief-of-Staff and Minister of Defense. The coup was not actually against him, but against the political process whose results he could not control, and which, if left unchecked, would almost certainly have seen the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) come to power in Algeria

One baffling aspect of the 2013 coup in Egypt stands out for researchers: the use of intellectuals spouting the democracy and liberalism to serve the coup. This was not out of fear or dissimulation, but as a means to promote and justify what could be described as the intellectuals' betrayal of democracy. This is one of the gravest and clearest collective failures of an intelligentsia in the contemporary era, and one with serious consequences. (Increasingly, perhaps, some of the coup's intellectual apologists are now motivated by fear and dissimulation, after having discovered the truly oppressive and uncompromising nature of the coup plotters.) Something similar occurred in Algeria nearly three decades ago when modernist intellectuals gave their blessings as electoral democracy was aborted. This has become a repeated pattern throughout the Arab region, where not only the ruling regimes but the opposition fear the rise of a totally new class of people who threaten to overturn not only the political status quo, but also an entire way of life.

Doubtless that the conclusion of most of free elections in the Arab world with military coups since Sudan in 1989, and Algeria in 1991-1992, and the difficulty presented by the electoral victories of Islamists—including the suspicions surrounding their attachment to democratic principles—should give us all pause, and provide a fertile ground for social sciences research. To these two themes, a third should be added: the fracturing of Arab elites, and even entire societies once they are liberated from authoritarian rule, with no hope for the "containment" of such a fracturing by state institutions.

Take for example the three distinct periods marked by relatively pluralist democratic rule in post-independence Sudan. None of these periods ever stabilized and developed into a long-lived political coalition; each in fact was followed by a military coup supported by one or more political parties, and military rule (which in turn was disrupted by attempted coups). In the author's opinion, the civilian political elite in Sudan since independence has failed to agree upon the nature and identity of the regime. Conflicts over its borders and its ethnic-geographic make up (such as in South Sudan and Darfur) have also prevailed. In this case, the army seemed to be the singular force capable of imposing a cohesion in the country by force; not a cohesion based on state legitimacy, but a coerced unity imposed from above.

Rule by military officers in this case appears as if it demonstrates the military's capacity to impose the public over the private, the national over the particularistic, and the state over warring factions. Yet, the Sudanese army itself was politicized, and penetrated by modernist parties like communist, Islamist, and nationalist parties, or by political factions with sectarian roots in the Sudanese population. As such the army was not able to bring about a legitimate ruling regime accepted by the Sudanese population.

In dealing with the July 3, 2013 coup in Egypt, we made a distinction between a coup by the army command—which is in fact the regime—against the process of change, and a coup as a vehicle by generally middle-ranking officers within the army itself against the regime alongside the higher ranked officers within the army itself . Because the issue revolves around military coups, it is important to define coup, which also makes it necessary to differentiate it from revolution.

While the word *inqilab* has come to be used exclusively for (military) coups in Arabic, the parallel development of Persian and Turkish means that the word *inqilab* signifies "revolution" in both of these languages. In Arabic, the word *thawra* is usually reserved for this purpose. Nonetheless, *inqilab* in Arabic has gone through its own semantic shifts and can be used to refer to revolutionary change or transformation in a broader sense, for example in

the case of an *inqilab fikri*, meaning an intellectual or paradigm shift.[10]

Beyond academic definitions, *thawra* is also used to describe any popular rebellion or mutiny from outside of the regime against the ruler, and is a synonym for *intifada* (uprising), and *qawma* (insurgence, rising). But in its use as a term it mostly means large-scale popular action to bring down the ruling regime. Mostly, the popular rebellion in and of itself is not enough, but rather we consider the actual change of the regime as the completion or success of the revolution. Therefore, there is often a discussion as to whether a popular rebellion to change the regime warrants being described as a revolution (thawra) if it is unsuccessful or has been repressed or did not lead to regime change. This is a source of considerable ambiguity. While some authors do not apply the appellation "revolution" to popular movements which do not meet success, others refuse to accept as a revolution a popular movement not controlled by a leadership with an ideology that imposes a defined picture of the regime after the revolution.

A military coup, on the other hand, is rooted within the regime itself and in fact in what is usually the most organized group in society, the armed forces. It usually ends in a change in ruler while maintaining the regime, and its aim may essentially be to maintain the regime. In some exceptional cases, a military junta may ally itself with social groups that have been harmed by the regime to change the regime society. Regardless of whether or not military coups bring about such change, several coups in the Arab context have been described as "revolutions," thawrat reflecting the fact that the word *thawra* has escaped, in Arabic, the negative connotations associated with the word *inqilab*.

Significantly, there is no conclusive proof from the angle of democratic transition that popular revolutions are any more effective than leadership-driven reforms, whether they are by a military junta or a political leadership, in bringing about democratization within a country. In fact, viewed from the same angle, revolutions are a major risk that may lead to anarchy or totalitarian regimes, and even in cases where they result in democracy, this is more often than not a foregone conclusion,

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10   We find this use of *inqilab* by Constantin Zureiq in *The Meaning of Disaster*, translated by R. Bayly Winder (Beirut: Khayat's College, 1956).

but the result of long-term political dialogue and constitutional conciliations. Revolutions change the regime, which entails building democracy after power has been reached. This dichotomy is not always clear to revolutionaries. It should be the case that democratic revolutionaries possess a vision not just of the revolution but also the political reform process that comes after it.

As a result of all of the above, this paper will seek to avoid placing value judgements on the labels "revolution" and "coup". What matters for the purposes of this paper is to distinguish between coups which aim to change the leadership and preserve the regime and coups which further a process of socio-political change.

From the First Coups to Radical Coups

The earliest military government in the modern era can be traced to England, with Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) who issued the decision to execute King Charles I in 1649, dissolved his own parliament, earning the title of "military dictator" from Winston Churchill.[11] Later but more significantly was Napoleon's rise against the power of the administration. This series of military takeovers of power in Europe continued through Mustafa Kemal's (Ataturk) formation of the Republic of Turkey following both his resistance to European invading armies and his subjugation. All of these are examples of the army's role in founding the modern state and accelerating the transition from one stage to another.

This was especially true for Napoleon following the French Revolution, as well as Ataturk's efforts to build a Republic of Turkey after the failure of the programmatic Turanian ideology of the nationalist Turks, and the defeat of the Party of Union and Progress's government in the First World War and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Not to also overlook two important coups by officers loyal to the Ottoman modernizing movement, "the Committee of Unity and Progress" (CUP); One against Sultan Abdel Hamid II (1908) to end his tyrannical rule and bring back the constitution. The second against the decentralizing forces of the Freedom and Accord party which had recently became dominant in parliament (in 1913).

The leadership of the CUP took a meeting of cabinet ministers at the Sublime Porte by surprise, killing the Minister of the Navy, Nazim Pasha, as well as his valet and forcing the Prime Minister, Kamil Pasha, to resign.[12] They then reversed the former governments' efforts to decentralize Istanbul's control over the provinces and brought back the idea of centralization. These moves led to a reaction in Arab regions against Ottoman rule which had taken on the form of centralized Turkish rule. Mustafa Kemal inherited the modern and centralist tendencies of the *tanzimat*, but with a radical shift in their maximalist Turanian nationalist ideology, choosing instead to focus on the building of a modern "Turkish" nation state. The influence of the *tanzimat* was apparent in the strength of the military, as well as the solidity of the governmental administration in the Turkish-speaking former Ottoman provinces (Anatolia) which would form the Republic of Turkey, particularly as contrasted with the Arab realms formerly under Ottoman control. For its part, the short-lived Arab experience of an independent army, under the Kingdom of Syria, did not enjoy such a strong statist tradition.

In general, military interventions in politics have tended to take place to bring about a process of change, during the phases of civil war and political instability. While in some cases a military coup has been tantamount to a victory in civil war, in other cases military officers have intervened to prevent a civil war. The latter motive has been the most impressionable one until the current era.

For Samuel Finer, military interventions in politics are the result of a power vacuum arising from institutional weakness and political impotence, all combined with a political and ideational leaning to

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11   Winston Churchill, *A History of English Speaking Peoples* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1956), p. 314.

12   Al-Husari, p. 121.

intervene in political affairs by the military officers[13]. Throughout the 1950s and 1970s, several theorists of modernization helped explain the role of the military as a modernizing force, explaining that as the single most cohesive and "modern" institution within newly independent states, it was natural for the army to intervene to preserve stability and maintain social cohesion and in some instances it had a revolutionary and modernizing role.[14]

In the author's opinion, the association of the military with the nation-state is inherent to, and dates to, the foundation of the state itself; the army, in these cases, seems to be the representative of the singular, unified nature of the state as opposed to fragmentation and disarray; it carried the interests of the state government and not disparate social and political forces. Additionally, armies are demonstrably strong and powerful. Such explanations can be useful in cases where the army must be relied on to temporarily restore order and social peace following civil unrest. The problems arise afterwards however, as there is only a fine line between the army's claim to represent the public good and the army identifying itself as the public good, and between the army identifying itself as the embodiment of the state and it becoming the state itself. There is also a fine line between the army representing national unity as opposed to uncontrolled pluralism, and becoming the one and only.

The matter is closely bound up with the cohesion of the state, the unity of its makeup, and the multiplicity of its functions and institutions. Fragile, unstable states with weak institutions are conducive to military interventions which try to impose order from above. Being a disciplined, armed force linked to the state, it would appear that the natural tendency for the military is not to refrain from rule but rather to interfere in it; this is what makes the establishment of institutional checks on military involvement in politics necessary. Only a strong legitimate state is able to impose such order, limiting the influence of violent coercion as a rule or norm and at the same time maintaining the state's monopoly of violence. Democratic states are preoccupied with

the imposition of an elected, civilian leadership on the military, theoretically and practically, in terms of educating the army and society, and in terms of putting in place the proper institutional and legal arrangements that guarantee that the army does not intervene in conflicts and political disputes in society and the state. Democratic states are also preoccupied with arrangements to guarantee the loyalty of the army to an elected government and the manner in which it follows the government's orders.

This drive for separation is as old as philosophy. Perhaps this was also Plato's motivation for devoting Book V of the *Republic* to the task of training the guardians of the city to convert them from fighters into soldiers. The important distinction is that between fighters and soldiers, and what is intended here is turning them into soldiers in the service of the state, subservient to the rulers of the state and not rulers themselves. In this Platonic vision, ruling the state is assigned instead not to soldiers but to philosophers, uniquely capable of achieving a comprehensive vision of justice and defining the public good.

The military capability to act is rooted fundamentally in the paradigm of strength or power, what Arabs call *Shawka*. The components of this paradigm are force of arms and deterrence, organization, obedience, hierarchy, differentiation between friend and foe, defense and offence, and a willingness to kill the opponent before he kills. There is a fundamental debate as to how valid this paradigm is fit for creating an approach to administrating the state and society. It is not just a practical debate over the possibility of this, but also an ethical debate over values related to stances on humanity and human society.

In cases where state institutions are weak and fragile, civilian culture unstable, and the legitimacy of civilian institutions and parties shaky compared with the army, then the army takes upon itself the task of preserving unity. What emerges is a self-fulfilling concept of the army as the guarantor of the public good, thereby making debate, political dialogue and political pluralism and institutions a moot point. This was idealized in Khaled Nezzar's description

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13   See Samuel E. Finer, *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics*, with a New Introduction by Jay Stanley (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2002), pp. 164-84

14   There are many examples, but it will suffice to mention the main ones: Morris Janowitz, *The Military in the Political Development of New Nations* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1964); Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2006), especially the chapter entitled, "Praetorianism and Political Decay," pp. 192 - 263.

of Houari Boumedienne's approach to the governing of Algeria:

"Without being open about it, he thought that if everything was running to fulfill the happiness of the people, then what was left to discuss? [...] Can we choose the style and method? The parliamentary game in western democracies reflects their societal advancement [...] the state of Algerian social advancement does not bear comparison. [...] The shortest path to success may be in restricting power [and sovereignty], for which the highest of prices has been paid, to the hands of a competent team dedicated to the public interest."[15]

This is echoed in Bernard Lewis's description of Ataturk's attitudes, with the difference that Ataturk was not a radical rebellious officer, but a part of the *tanzimat*-influenced reformist Ottoman elite in the nineteenth century and carried this legacy.[16] Similarly, no comparison can be made between post-independence Algeria and Turkish society, which had never been the victim of colonialism. Nor can the elites of the two countries be compared.

The issue that arises in the Arab context, and any research on the military and politics should address it, is that militaries are often based on their own form of parochial, societal distinctions, because the chain of command in these armies is based on loyalties that produce social solidarities or `Asabiyyat[17]; In that case, the army's imposition of national unity on society becomes an imposition of a specific `Asabiyya, meaning a unity subservient to it. Some important examples of this exist in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Mauritania.[18]

A 1936 coup led by Lt-Gen. Bakr Sidqi in Iraq gives us the first post-Ottoman example of a military coup in the Arab region, and the creation of independent Arab states either politically through conventions or under the protection and mandate system in the region. Sidqi's coup was backed by the Fabian-inspired Ahali Association,[19] and was supported by the *Al-Inqilab* newspaper edited by renowned poet Mohammed Mahdi Al-Jawahiri and dominated by the communists.

Bakr Sidqi had already led the politicization of the Iraqi military, after having led the suppression of a clan-based insurrection[20] in the Middle Euphrates region at the beginning of the 1930s. Sidqi's crushing of the Assyrian uprising in 1933 led to displacement of a large Assyrian population to the Syrian Euphrates, following a set of Anglo-French agreements.

This history is symptomatic of the fact that the Iraqi monarchy was not fully capable of managing the ethnic and confessional diversity of Iraq. It remains to be true, however, that a conflict between the formal state and nomadic and pastoralist groups in Iraq has been in existence for decades, if not centuries. It was not a conflict born of the inability of Arab nationalists—in all of their ideological guises—to accept complex, multiplicative identities, but in fact a far more fundamental conflict between the state and tribal or sub-national identity groups. This is a feature wherever a modernizing state is faced with a tribal society in which tribalism exerts a powerful, "centrifugal" force and a challenge to the state's modernization, such as compulsory military service. This was at a time when British policy favored tribal leaders and allowed them to hold on to their weapons,

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15   Khaled Nezzar, *L'armée algérienne face à la désinformation : le procès de Paris*, (Paris : Médiane, 2003).

16   Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 3rd ed. (Oxford & NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 2003), pp. 290 - 1.

17   In the author's view, the search for regional or tribal loyalty leads to partisan results and not the reverse. This is the opposite of Ibn Khaldun, which was true in his period. Partisanship aspires to conquest and the seizure of power, to become the state. In the modern Arab state, the authorities by their insistence on direct loyalty awakens partisanship and links it with government, reproducing it.

18   Issues of regional loyalties (that turned into sectarianism in Syria and Iraq under Baath rule) that became outright sectarianism in Iraq after the occupation, are well known. Similarly, tribal loyalties and their intersection with loyalties in the Yemeni army, but even in a state like Mauritania, the army went through a conflict that took on an Arab vs black form at one of its stages. See Al-Sayyid Ould Abah et al., *Mauritania: Culture, State, and Society*, 2 vols., (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2000), (Arabic), pp. 127 - 8.

19   Led by Jaafar Abu al-Taman and Kamil al-Dżadirdżi at the time. The communists had doubts about the coup which, aside from Bakr Sidqi, appeared to be driven by Hikmat Sulayman the opponent of Prime Minister Yasin al-Hashimi at a period of instability that prevailed in Iraq after the death of King Faisal I when the government changed more than ten times in three years. However, Kamil al-Dżadirdżi, who hoped for democracy and the peaceful handover of power to civilians, was disappointed and so did not fulfil the request of Abdel Karim Kassem for support after the coup, and took a suspicious position towards military coups.

20   He later looked at them as popular revolutions, although in reality they were tribal uprisings by tribes who professed the Shia doctrine.

and this allowed them to prevent the state from enlisting tribesmen into the army and enshrined the turning of tribesmen into peasants working for tribal chiefs who effectively became feudal lords. The army was unable to confront the incursions of the Wahhabi forces launched from Najd to attack southern Iraq in 1922, 1924, and 1927 - 8.[21] King Faisal's ideal of an army to serve as the institution to forge a unitary Iraqi identity soon met with the reality of internal discord.

Despite this, the integration and assimilation within the state's institution as well as the culture of the political and military elites was evidenced in the fact that Bakr Sidqi himself, a coup leader and strongman, was of Kurdish descent. Yet as a whole, the Iraqi state had yet to crystalize, in the sense of an established, legitimized institution, instead being a loose collection of social sectors. That is true for Iraq and the states of the Arab East in general, as well as Libya, Algeria, Sudan. Iraq, therefore, needed to unify around an external historical legitimacy (the Hashemite Dynasty), or around the army as the state entity embodied outside of society, which is what happened in most of the states mentioned above.

The Iraqi state's conflict with rebellious Assyrians, who resisted being integrated into the wider Iraqi state because Iraq's independence and it's recognition by the league of nations in 1932 did not contain any of the British promises to them, had a considerable effect on the structure of the Iraqi state and it's direction. This was particularly noted in the fact that the Assyrians were in fact drafted into the British military prior to Iraq's accession to the league of nations, and they also in fact were the backbone of the British-formed "Iraq Levies" military fighting force. These units were used by the British to protect their military installments and to quell Kurdish insurrections. Notably the quelling of the Assyrian's by Bakr Sidqi paved the way for him to initiate the first military coup in the Arab world on November 1936.

Bakr Sidqi's coup helped set up a new government led by Hikmat Sulayman, one which was diametrically opposed to the previous cabinet led by Yasin

Al-Hashemi. The leftist Ahali Association had their hopes dashed, not for the first time, when Iraq's military-backed government refused to either hold democratic elections as promised or implement social reforms. This theme was played out again following the coup of 1958, which ended the Iraqi monarchy and brought Abdulkarim Kassem to power, and in which the Iraqi Communists, despite their dogged support for the junta, failed to see their agenda implemented. In 1958, Kamil al-Dżadirdżi did not repeat his mistake of joining the government as he had done with the 1936 coup, since his National Democratic Party made their support of Abdul Karim Kassem conditional on holding elections, which he failed to do.

Sidqi's 1936 coup was seminal, creating an archetype for military takeovers of power which would play out repeatedly across the Arab region. Some of the features which would later become common to coups by Arab military strongmen include the purported move to bring about stability, accusing the previous regime of failing to do so; promises to combat the corruption of political parties and politicians; and the insistence that all of this would be followed by free elections and a civilian government, only to be ignored later in place of a repressive military regime. The emergence of an ideological Arab nationalist officer class would become clear a few short years later, with the short-lived junta led by Rashid Ali Al Kilani (in 1941), which was based on the "Golden Square" of four military officers who were in collaboration with a wider, clandestine and loose network of Arab nationalists based in Baghdad at the time.[22] The rise of Arab nationalist coterie of officers and their alignment with the Axis Powers was made possible by the Second World War, with the potential it held out of being able to join an international alliance against Great Britain.

During this era the distinction between a coup and a revolution obliterated, in the political culture of the middle classes in general and politicized intellectuals, members of political parties and/or those close to them and to youth and student movements. Critical

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21   Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

22   These included the Mathni Club (led by Farid Zayn al-Din, Siddiq Shunshul, Naji Maaruf, and Salaheddin al-Sabagh) and the National Labor Organization (Yunis al-Sabawi, Said al-Hajj Thabit, and Darwish al-Miqdadi) along with al-Hajj Amin al-Husseini and a number of nationalist figures who had left Lebanon and Syria for Iraq as a result of the conditions prevailing there at the time. See Aziz al-Azmeh, *Constantin Zureiq: An Arab for the Twentieth Century*, (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2003), (Arabic), p.55.

political culture became more sympathetic to coups, and increasingly populist and less democratic, and the left later gravitated towards it. The military thinking which drove coups exploited the fragility of the liberal democratic model in the Arab states; they worked to bring down the post-independence regimes and never furthered democracy or attempted to work towards it. Growing popularity for military coups in the Arab region coincided with the ebbing of democratic values across the globe, particularly with the rise of nationalist and fascist forces in Europe. This trend was echoed in the Arab countries, where even established liberal parties like the Egyptian Wafd and the National Bloc in Syria established paramilitary youth wings complete with uniform-like coloured shirts (the "Blue Shirts" and "Iron Shirts" respectively). The Muslim Brotherhood were not left uninfluenced by this milieu, and formed "mobile teams" *Jawwalah*. There were also the League of National Work, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, and the Egyptian Socialist Party's Masr al-Fatat ("Young Egypt"). To absorb these militaristic tendencies of the young, Arab governments included on their official school curricula educational programmes on chivalry [futuwa], an essentially paramilitary preparation module.

Subsequently, the concepts of "coup" and "revolution" became entwined. Military takeovers of power were viewed preludes to a processe of socio-economic change (revolution or thawra). This pattern could be seen in the takeover of power by Egypt's Free Officers in July of 1952 and later to the 14 July 1958 Abdulkarim Kassem-led coup in Iraq—which described itself as a "revolution" from the very outset—as well as the later, ideologically motivated takeovers of power by Baath-aligned officers in both Syria and Iraq.

Understanding how the new post-*Nakba* Arab armies related to military coups cannot be done in isolation from the structural flaws inherent to the fragile and elitist form of Arab liberalism which had gradually started to open up for the new rising social forces belonging to the middle class. Yet it was other features of this liberalism that have sealed its fate.

Some of these features included the preponderance of aristocratic elite dominance; the conflicts of interest between the economic and business interests of parliamentarians and their duties as parliamentarians per se; the constant rigging and manipulation of democratic elections; and the refusal to abide by majorities when forming governments in Egypt. One of the most egregious early developments of this trend was the rigging of the 1948 Syrian elections, coupled with a constitutional amendment, which allowed Shukri Quwatli a second presidential term . Yet the most dangerous of these ailments was the failure of this liberal trend and these parliaments to address the agrarian question and the addressing of the peasants' grievances, as well as the inability to confront the Zionist Project in Palestine.

In place of dithering by the liberal elites, the new military leaders offered immediate, instant solutions to try and resolve the agrarian problem. This lead to a historic transformation where peasants and the general population were integrated into the major historical and social transformations of agrarian peasant societies. The inflow of members of the peasantry and the middle classes into the military ranks lead to a massive change in the balance of social forces, and this in turn led to a change in the character of the ruling powers.

Liberal parties in these countries initially sympathized with army's moves against the monarchies in Egypt and Iraq, but their hopes were quickly shattered. In Syria, liberal political forces, together with the Masonic Lodges of the Levant were early backers of military interventions in politics, and pinned their hopes on the army as a modernizing force. Of particular relevance here is the support which the People's Party, a Syrian bourgeoisie political party, lent to the coup led by Sami al-Hinnawi in 1951, the country's second military coup since independence in 1947.[23] The liberal and modernist groups, influenced by western culture, looked to the army to play a modernist role that would rapidly overstep the different stages of change required to overcome reactionary forces. Yet the army did this following it's own course, quickly becoming mired in internal

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23 The leaders of the Masonic Lodges were active in the coup of Hosni al-Za'im in 1949. His foreign minister (Adel Arslan) was one of them. Hinnawi's coup witnessed greater action by the Masons. This is not studied in the modern history of Syria and was elucidated by our colleague at ACRPS Mohammed Jamal Barut in light of an analysis of the documentary and historical records of the Syrian Lodges and the personalities who tried to consolidate the second coup and market it politically in the circles of the enlightened elites.

power struggles between the army offices, and eventually turning against the forces which backed them.

In the author's opinion, this confidence in the army to lead society was founded at least in part on the example provided by Ataturk who was thought to have successfullly lead a reactionary society characterized by traditional values in a setting where freedom without the modernist values could lead to chaos. The army from the perspective of these forces was uniquely capable of mediating the transition of societies towards democracy, and of avoiding the breakdown of societies which are exposed to democracy before they are ready for it. This way of thinking has resurfaced in the wake of the Arab popular revolutions of 2011.

After the revolutions of 2011 another concern arose among the Arab middle classes, not of political instability, but rather of a disruption of their way of life following Islamist dominance. The concerns of the middle classes led them to bet on the army and the old regime, despite the fact that they are the class that should form the reservoir of any process of democratic transition.

The coups led by radical small rank officers and inspired by the Egyptian revolution of 23 July 1952, were directly linked to the fragility of the Arab liberal era, and the failure of the pluralist party system capable of reaching consensus regarding a system of governance that can contain pluralism withing the context of constitutional arrangement. This in addition to the same system's incapacity to resolve the agrarian and peasant issue and the failure to confront Zionist settlement in Palestine which culminated in the defeat of 1948. Yet what is problematic is that even in the case of genuine devotion to the cause of state building and modernizing the state as in the case of Egypt's Nasser and Algeria's Boumeddine, it is hard to bridge the gap between aspiration and reality, the magnitude of unlimited goals and the capacity of the leader, the magnitude of limitless goals and the limited capacity of any person, the actual popularity

and his legitimacy and his of the leader and his incapacity to accept competitors, the egotism of these leaders, their insistence on personality cults, and their to hold long grudges .[24]

It is difficult to arrive at a theoretical law that explains the relationship of the army to political power, and how it utilizes it. This is because of the multiplicity of factors which affect the behavior of armies: the the historical stage the country is in, the degree of society's development, prevalent belief systems and the army's social structure. Despite the admiration which many Arab officers--Bakr Sidqi and Husni al-Za'im, and even Nasser and Kassem, and earlier if albeit to a lesser extent, Adib al-Shishakli— had for Ataturk and his model the gulf between their experiences remains vast and undeniable. There is a huge difference between a commander of the army leading an armed resistance from within the state to foreign occupation and creating a modern republic founded on the heels of an ascendant elite as in the case of Ataturk Turkey, and the rebellion of middle- and lower-ranking officers leading a coup against a monarchy before descending into their own personal internal competition over leadership. There are however some common attributes that do not reach the degree of generalized law or theory and they are as follows:

1. The Army as Means for Socioeconomic Advance in Agrarian Societies

The military stands out as a modern institution in as it exists to serve a specific, dedicated purpose; with a rational relationship between means and purpose; it deploys its means to serve a complex end; it employs strategic planning; and is an institution based on hierarchy and discipline. It officially serves a role that is national by definition which is defending the motherland. In the circumstances of the third-world states, or in post-colonial periods, the army mostly appears as the largest, strongest, and most disciplined apparatus of the state among all the institutions of state and society. In terms of its relationship not only to the state, but to the nation, the army is the most

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24   Khaled Nezzar also wrote: "President Boumediene, who was a statesman of a level comparable to the great statesmen of his age, was never able to transcend the selfish considerations and petty hatreds that he carried with him. … Deep resentments and pathological mistrust and suspicion would cast dark shadows over his noble personal traits. … Houari was always making Boumediene see a contingent adversary as an enemy who had to be got rid of and would push him to crush without mercy those who dared to confront him, one after another," Nezzar. Boumediene is certainly not the worst example, and we mention below personal animosities that hindered development, and represented a key driver of the decision-making process.

palpably modern institution. In my earlier writing, I referred to the military's ability to "embody the state apart from society," a reference to the role which armies play in states where there is no clear relationship between citizens and state institutions. Equally, in states with well-formed identities, the army with its pomp and circumstance and ability to use ceremony was able to engender and make use of deep sentimental loyalties. The army's historical roots vary in the the Arab so while the Syrian military was fashioned out of the remnants of the forces left behind by the French mandatory authorities, the composition of the Jordanian and Iraqi militaries had elements left by the Ottomans, the British colonial forces and the officers of the Great Arab Revolt, and in Egypt it was patriotic elements who rebelled against British dictates. In Algeria, the army was formed by the victorious National Liberation Front before it in turn created a state: the Algerian case was the complete reverse of the others, with an army creating a state and not the other way around.

In many recently independent, developing countries the military served as the single institution which the children of the peasantry and small craftsmen could turn to as a means of social mobility. Previously, political and social power had been concentrated in the urban centers, and specifically with the scions of the nobility and the merchant borgeousie; with access to education restricted, the children of the peasantry did not even have, generally, the option of joining the middle classes through education. It was colonial/mandate era attempts to create militaries in the Arab countries which made way for the social advancement of the rural classes, opening the doors of social advancement via the military academies to them. The clearest instance of this is El Nahhas Pasha's use of the military levies imposed on Egypt as part of the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty as an excuse to allow the promotion of the middle classes to the higher ranks of the army, after a long period when the officer class was dominated by the children of the land owning and agrarian aristocracy.[25] Gamal Abdul Nasser, together with the other members of the cell which would one day seize power as the "Free

Officers" were one of the earliest beneficiaries of this move. As state institutions formed and expanded, so did the middle class, which in turn came to account for a larger proportion of the officer class.[26] This Egyptian pattern was echoed throughout the Arab region during different periods of time.

After Adib Al-Shishakli appointed socialist Akram Hourani, a strong supporter of the cause of the peasant farmers whose party was distinct in adopting the agrarian cause, as Minister of Defense, Syria's Military College and the path to becoming an officer was opened to the children of the peasantry. Hafez Al-Assad became a graduate. In fact, many of the orchestrators of the succession of coups witnessed in Syria were graduates of the 1950—1952 cohorts. This was the generation of the children of the lower middle class and impoverished, rural families who were influenced by nationalist, leftist and islamist ideologies and orchestrated many coups in the 1950s ,1960s and until 1970. They were the products of a period of explosive political, social and ideological circumstances. These circumstances were not repeated under the period of their rule and no generation similar to them would develop.

It can be said that some of them were intellectuals or a kind of intelligentsia in uniform, the archtype being, the most famous coup officer in modern Syrian military history from 1949-1969, Mohammed Umran, later head of the military committee of the Baath.

Today, it can be said that some youth may opt for joining the military for the purposes of social and economic mobility, yet it is also true that non-military industries are today more able to accommodate them. Moreover, the ideological motivations for young Arabs to join the army are much diminished, and all states today ensure that the officer corps is composed of loyal, or at the very least non-politicized, elements.

Following the withdrawal of French forces on 17 April, 1946, the newly independent Syria inherited the "Army of the Orient" composed of Syrian soldiers, officers and warrant officers from France. The newly distinct Syria found itself with an army

25 Anouar Abdel-Malek, *Egypt: Military Society; the Army Regime, the Left and Social Change under Nasser, Charles Lam Markmann (trans.),* (New York: Random House, 1968). The first Arabic translation of the book appeared in 1974. See also: Azmi Bishara, *The Egyptian Revolution,* vol. 1, *From the July Republic to the January Revolution* (Beirut, Doha: ACRPS, 2016), (Arabic), p.24.

26 Ahmed Abdullah, "The Armed Forces and Democratic Evolution in Egypt," in: Ahmed Abdullah (ed.), *The Army and Democracy in Egypt* (Cairo: Sinai lil-Nashr, 1990), (Arabic), p. 10. See also, Bishara, *Egyptian Revolution*, (Arabic), pp. 25 - 6.

of 17,000 while the Lebanese forces totaled 7,000.[27] By mid-1948, Damascus' Ministry of Defense shrunk the size of the army in mid-1948 to around only 7,000 men,[28] on the grounds of dismantling the racist blocs within the army's ranks.[29] The process by which the Syrian state inherited the former Army of the Orient led to tensions between "Syrian" and "French" officers—by which it was meant those officers who had been commissioned while Syria was still a French Mandate. Notably Syria's first homegrown military officers, amongst whom new Arab nationalist and leftist ideas had spread, all graduated from the first cohort of the military school of Homs in 1945. Much like their counter parts, the leaders of the coups in Egypt and Iraq, they were further radicalized due to their frustrating experience in the war for Palestine. The Syrian officers who had served in the French ranks, meanwhile, did not constitute a homogenous bloc; one of them, Adib Al-Shishakli, was a close associate of Akram Hourani, introduced earlier, who was the leader of the youth pary, and later one of the three historical leaders of the Socialist Arab Baath party. During that alliance the first clandestine ideological military organization within the army was born, and it was in a sense the forerunner to the military committee of the Baath that existed during the period of Syrian-Egyptian unification and some of whose members hailed from the former Shishakli-Hourani organization. Shishakli (of Kurdish origin) tried to make the army a more Sunni and Arab army and to break up Kurdish influence within it. In the end however, the measures he ended up taking were piecemeal, and had the worst impact on Christians more so than other communities. This conflicted with Hourani's attempts to open the army up to the children of peasant farmers, including many Alawites. Because of the short period of Shishakli's rule, he was unable to continue this policy. With the first coup in Syrian history the army entered into a

period of politicization where it left the barracks and never returned.[30]

In Iraq, the officers who seized power on July 14, 1958 were mostly colonels or lieutenant-colonels, with the exception of Mohammed Al-Sabie,[31] who was an Air Force Major. The highest-ranked of them was Abdel Karim Kassem, a brigadier. Among these Iraqi "Free Officers", all came from poor families with the exception of Naji Taleb, the son of a Shia landowner and member of parliament. The members of this "Free Officers" network, with its series of subsidiary organizations, had received their secondary education in Iraq before their military in the country or, in some cases, elsewhere. Many of these officers were in fact Shia's and their participation in the organizations affiliated with the "Free Officers" was based on patriotic motives. [32]

Two major events imprinted themselves on the imaginations of the Free Officers of Iraq: the Palestinian *Nakba* in 1948 and what Iraqi army officers related about the course of the war and the failure of the Arab regimes; and the 1952 ascendancy of the Egyptian "Free Officers," who resembled themselves in many ways, in what came to be called a "Revolution".

It is instructive to review the descriptions of the historian Majid Khadduri of Abdul Karim Kassem's experience in the military academy and how he viewed the military as a vehicle for the social advancement of historically underprivileged classes. He describes how the fact that "courage and discipline"—and not social status or family background—were the only important criteria for advancement within the Academy. It is in this academy that Kassem was relieved of relying on his poor father, given that the academy provided the students with food and shelter. "Most of the students in this academy were from relatively poor families, because the children

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27 Nizar al-Kayyali, *A Study of Contemporary Syrian Political History*, 1920 - 1950 (Damascus: Dar Tlas, 1997), (Arabic), p.195.

28 Arif al-Arif, *Al-Nakba: The Disaster of Jerusalem and the Lost Paradise*, 2 vols. (Sidon: Al-Maktaba Al-Asriya, 1956), (Arabic), pp. 349 - 58.

29 Ahmad al-Sharbati (Minister of Defense), Second Meeting of August 28, 1948, *The Official Gazette* (Damascus), (Arabic), November 4, 1948.

30 The author has dealt with this topic before more broadly, and the paragraphs above are from his 2013 book. See Azmi Bishara, *Syria's Via Dolorosa Towards Freedom: An Attempt at Contemporary History* (Beirut, Doha: ACRPS, 2013), (Arabic), pp. 279 - 83.

31 He started by killing the royal family on the night of the coup, despite his desire for understanding and surrender, even though the majority of Free Officers were against killing them.

32 Majid Khadduri, *Republican Iraq: A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958,* (London, New York: Oxford University Press for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1969.

of wealthier families, chose to either study abroad or to attend either the Law or Medical colleges of Baghdad".[33] This experience of the military academy helps to explain much of Kassem's life before the formative experience of the war in Palestine in 1948; a similar story could be told of Gamal Abdul Nasser.

The political awareness of officers who launched the first military coups was born in a period of political, intellectual, and national ferment marked by the relative pluralism under colonial rule coupled with the leadership of conservative or conservative-liberal politicians from notable families. Indeed, the diagnosis of these officers of the reasons for the 1948 defeat often intersected with their stance towards the prevailing sociopolitical state of affairs. The defeat of the Arab states in the war of 1948 in the context of the aforementioned political environment was also key in shaping the political awareness of these officers. Rarely were the memories released by these officers devoid of any mention of the effect of the shock of the 1948 defeat regardless of whether or not they participated in the fighting in Palestine.

The subsequent development of the Arab states in question was tied to a number of factors, including the character, charisma and other traits of the military officer who eventually took power. Once internal disputes with fellow officers who may have taken part in the coup were over, the officer who emerged triumphant would set about silencing political opposition. The rich political culture which gave rise to these officers and politicians, and intellectuals of the same generation was stifled.

This suffocation of political life is one of the main reasons why the coups which overthrew monarchies in Iraq, Egypt, and the post-independence liberal order in Syria have prevented similar coups in the Arab region since the 1970s. This is in addition to other factors such as the stabilization of the structure of the political system after the struggle for power was determined, the creation of a relatively large regular army, the foundation of military intelligence apparatus to spy on other officers and army units,[34] and the creation of special forces which acted as

parallel armies (like the Republican Guard and the Defense Brigades). Here, the long-term surge in oil prices allowed Arab governments not only to shore up social stability, but also to create armies so large that they were effectively beyond the control of a small group of coup plotters.

2. Comrades in Arms

Groups of military officers, particularly those in combat units, have been known to develop their own fraternal bodies reminiscent of the fraternities of residential colleges, and prefigured by the *khasdashiya* order of the Mameluke army. Such bonds formed between officer cadets grow into a network of personal loyalties, allowing them to turn into comrades-in-arms. Such bonds, then, make it easier for the officers to be recruited for coups. These types of bonds prevail in armed militias, clandestine movements, and military academies. The implicit assumption is that the structures of the formal army will overcome and breakup these bonds which are formed in specific units, through military academies and paramilitary groups. Yet these fraternal bonds which tie comrades-in-arms together persist, especially in combat units where the officers are likely to have gone through arduous experiences together, sometimes including direct contact.

Such bonds also make it easier that the combatants in question will be willing to actually fight, with the soldiers being in fact more willing to die for the comrades alongside him/her in a trench or in a plane, much more so than the abstract idea of a nation. This is the same camaraderie which allows soldiers to cover up crimes committed by their fellow comrades-in-arms, allowing ultimately for the concealment of massacres, murders and rape barring an awakening of conscience from one of the perpetrators.

Coups, and the lead up to them, lead to the formation of such fraternal bonds: the coup is a shared dramatic experience which reveals the strengths and weaknesses of individuals. Yet the same coterie of officers quickly becomes a stumbling block for the junta; the officers involved, having been involved in

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33 Ibid., p. 108.

34 This is prominent in the case of Syria. Military Intelligence reports are submitted directly to the president and not the chiefs of staff. In Algeria their power increased greatly after the failed coup attempt of army head Colonel Tahar Zbiri (there was no rank of general in the Algerian army in the period of Boumedine). Since then the president has relied on the strength of the Central Security Forces, whose head, Mohamed Mdin (Taoufic) subsequently became famous when he pensioned off Abdel Aziz Bouteflika in 2015.

the coup, feel entitled to freely and openly criticize the rulers, they begin to see the leader of the junta as merely the *primus inter pares*. As a consequence, the "military councils" which led the coups become the only body in post-coup states in which voting is actually consequential. Nonetheless, once, a hierarchy is established in the post-coups period, feeling of jealousy and envy begin to gnaw in this collective leading to feelings of mutual suspicion and hate. This is given that each member of the collective now aspires to become the leader.

There is hardly a single instance of a regime ruled by middle-or low-ranking coup officers that has been devoid of personal conflict over influence or bitterness and feuds arising from being overlooked for a post or not receiving the respect to which an individual feels entitled. Mostly, this is explained as conflicts between left and right, nationalist and Islamist. While those factors are not absent, conflicts within juntas tend to revolve around power, influence, prestige, and status, and sometimes around working methods and styles, even if dressed up with ideological pretensions. This has also often led officers to ally with neighboring adversary states, such as when Sudanese officers built bonds with either Egypt or Libya, or when Syrian and Iraqi officers coordinated with the leadership of the other country. Such conflicts between ambitious coup officers preoccupied military regimes. Take for example the conflict between Abdel Karim Kassem, Abdel Wahhab Al-Shawwaf, and Abdel Salam Aref; or the conflict between Nasser, Abdel Hakim Amer, Salah Salem, Anwar Sadat, and Ali Sabri; or Hafez Al-Assad, Salah Jadid, and Mohammed Umran, and even the conflicts within the Military Committee of the Baath throughout the years 1963 - 1970. Consider also the suspicions and mistrust of Boumediene, and his distancing of his colleagues from power, and his particular reliance on what he termed the officers of the "French Army", meaning those Algerians who had earlier served in the French colonial forces and had been relegated to border protection on the country's Western fringe because no other units in the post-independence Algerian army would accept them.

These conflicts are a very significant factor in instability. The consequences of losing out vary from ambassadorial appointments, marginalization in a governmental post, to life sentence and execution. In many cases, these grudges drive vindictiveness to the point of foreign collaboration. It is such internecine conflicts within the comradeship of arms that fuels instability in the early stages of post-coup states.

3. Party and Ideological Conflicts

Throughout the stage of the politicization of Arab societies, particularly the first liberal period following independence and its heady mix of ideological trends, local political currents, and local echoes of global political ideologies—communism, nationalism and fascism—we find that the diversity of political views among military officers reflected that of the wider elite. This varied by country: ideological differences within both Syria and Iraq were more intense than in Egypt. Once Nasser had finished off his leftist rivals (first Yousef Siddik then Khalid Mohyideen) and resolved the conflict with the Islamists, the only officers left standing were those not ideologically affiliated, except to adopt a loyalist, Egyptian vision which embraced Arab nationalism, socialism and "Third Worldism" as the pillars of a state ideology which supported centralized economic planning. In broad terms—a notable exception is the Baath-led juntas in Syria and Iraq—military regimes in the Arab region tended to marginalize political ideologues, even from the political parties which supported their rise to power (such as the Communists for Kassem's Iraq and Nimeiry's Sudan, or the leftists and Islamists in the case of Nasser). Instead, the military governments generally tended towards a position which could be seen as patriotic and statist, adopting an "Arab nationalist" and modernist outlook as well as one that encouraged state intervention in economic planning which was considered "socialist". A radical generation of officers plunged into a conflict that was frequently principled, but military regimes tended in the end towards a pragmatic compromise that aimed to preserve military rule in light of the need to balance domestic social and political considerations, domestically, regionally and globally.

This pragmatic attitude actually prevailed along with the flexibility required to keep power and went as far as altering positions and international alliances. Only in rare cases did successful (in the sense of being long-lived) military regimes not display sufficient flexibility to adapt to regional and international changes. It suffices to review the changes in Saddam Hussein's policies after the invasion of

Kuwait, the changes in the positions and attitudes of Hafez Al-Assad, and Gaddafi to make it clear that maintaining power was paramount for these regimes.

Hardline, inflexible behavior unwilling to adjust to the times did not arise from ideological extremism, but from the personal characteristics of the leader, or his realistic and pragmatic assessments that these apparently hardline policies were the best way to maintain the regime, while flexibility and what looked like reforms from the outside would cause reactions that might lead to the loss of power. Such a position does not arise from a different ideology, but from a different diagnosis of the nature of the regime and society, and different pragmatic calculations. Sometimes the reformist intellectual thinks that the ruler is narrow-minded in his rigidity, and that this has a negative effect for the continuation of his regime, while the ruler thinks that the reformist intellectual lacks experience and is naïve, and that if he followed his advice, things might uncontrollably decline, so some regimes do not tolerate even a small amount of flexibility. This is essentially a debate over pragmatism.

In the case of the officers of the 1958 coup in Iraq, it can be said that they all, to varying degrees, agreed upon the call to Arab nationalism. Abdel Salam Arif was the most passionate about unity, while Abdel Karim Kassem and Mohieddin Abdel Hamid tended towards a more liberal nationalism and the affirmation of a distinct "Iraqiness". The nationalism of Abdel Wahhab Shawwaf was "tinged with a Marxist hue" in the words of Majid Khadduri.[35] The July 14 officers were Sunnis apart from the two Shias Naji Taleb and Muhsin Hussein Al-Habib. While Kassem's mother was Shia, "he never gave any sign in public life indicating any bias in favour of the Shia."[36] While sectarianism was not a factor at that stage and in that era, Kassem's alliance with the Communists during

his term of power served to create a Shia support base loyal to him. Equally, the Arab nationalism with an Islamist tinge of Abdel Salam Aref influenced how this reality was distorted at a later stage. The process of the Baathification of the army began after the Baath coup against Abdel Rahman Aref in 1968. The memoirs of Abdel Wahhab Al-Amin in particular seem to demonstrate that the plotters of Iraq's 14 July, 1958 coup genuinely believed in parliamentary democracy, and the need to transition to it after ending the monarchy and establishing a provisional civilian government.[37] They also supported a policy of non-alignment abroad. Whether in their ostensible belief in democracy, or their later abandonment of democratization, the Iraqi coup plotters resembled their Egyptian counterparts.

The officers did not have a defined ideology. Some were influenced by the thinking of the liberal National Democratic Party, as was the case for Abdel Karim Kassem and Mohieddin Abdel Hamid, while others were influenced by Arab nationalism imbued with Islam, such as Abdel Salam Arif, Nazim Al-Tabakjali, and Rifaat Al-Hajj Sirri (who was a central figure in forming the free officers associations, and an opponent of the communist influences on Kassem).[38] Wasfi Taher and Ismail Ali[39] were close to the communists and intermediaries between them and Abdel Karim Kassem. Saleh Mahdi Ammash, meanwhile, was influenced by Baathism.[40] As was the case for the Egyptian Free Officers, the main struggle between them was a struggle over the leadership, like between Abdel Karim Kassem and Abdel Wahhab Al-Shawwaf, and between the former and Abdel Salam Aref.

In Syria, from the coup of Adib al-Shishakli through to the Baathification of the army, the officers who formed the Shishakli-Hourani alliance were divided into two major blocs: the liberationists, named after

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35   Khadduri, *Republican Iraq*.

36   Ibid.

37   Ibid.

38   On his central role with Rajab Abdel Majid in founding the Free Officers, see: Hanna Batatu,

The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Ba'thists, and Free Officers (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979).

39   Lieutenant-Colonel Wasfi al-Taher was field assistant to Nouri al-Said. Staff brigadier Ismail Ali was the commander of the first artillery division and close to the Communist Party and its military organization, the Union of Soldiers and Officers, and is not the same as Staff lieutenant-colonel Ismail Arif, secretary to the chief of staff. Ibid.

40   Ibid., pp.. For more details, see also pp..

the Arab Liberation Movement founded by Shishakli, and the socialists of whom Hourani was the most prominent member. To these should be added the military wing of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Ghassan Jadid and a group of officers aligned with the Syrian Communist Party. A further large bloc emerged that had more of a professional military nature than the others. This was the "Damascene Officers" bloc which rallied around Lieutenant-Colonel Adnan Al-Maliki and attracted some independent and conservative officers. After Adnan al-Maliki's assassination, the pull was towards the two main blocs, the socialist and the liberationist (Shishakli's officers). Conflicts within the military also conflated and criss-crossed with separate intra-elite conflicts over Syria's regional alliances: while one camp supported Egypt and Saudi Arabia, a second was aligned with Iraq.

The union between Syria and Egypt in 1958 represented a way out of the fragmentation that had afflicted the Syrian elites. These blocs temporarily accepted the Nasserist principle to sideline the military from partisanship and political activity. Yet as soon as Nasser began to dismantle the blocs of Syrian officers and transfer their figureheads to civilian posts, or transfer them to the 2nd Army in Egypt, the blocs of politicized Syrian officers reformed and turned against him. The Damascene Officers bloc remained intact because of its professionalism and non-partisan character, and in fact Nasser was able to rely upon them. Nonetheless, it was from this Damascene bloc that the first stirrings of Syrian secession from the United Arab Republic emerged, before the breakup of the union in September of 1961.

Following the breakup of the United Arab Republic, a smaller clique of Baathist officers, most of whose founders were from the Alawite and Ismaili communities, remained steadfast and could not be disbanded. It is important to note that sectarianism played no tangible role in the politics of the time. Divisions were based on issues of power and politics in the midst of the Cold War. While the officers made use of parochial-local loyalties to fight their battles for power within the military apparatus, these were not specifically colored as sectarian conflicts.

Rivalry drove officers to utilize personal loyalties in any way they could. This approach led to sectarian splits between rulers and ruled after the Baath officers came to power in Syria following a series of internal purges.[41]

Arab armies were politicized after the Second World War , especially during the intensification of the Cold War during the 1950s. They came out of their barracks with the call to liberate Palestine and for change, while promising to return to barracks once "healthy democracy" had been installed, but never did so. Instead, the internal political struggles of the military establishment recreated their own internal coups, and the officers were quick to blame civilian politicians for numerous failures, such as the loss of Palestine and the *Nakba*, and for domestic social and political corruption.

Following the success of the Free Officers model, all of the major political parties in the Arab region sought to have a group of military officers loyal to them. This includes the Communist Party, the Baath party, and before it the Arab Socialist Party, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the Arab Nationalist Youth Movement (later the Arab Nationalists Movement), and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party. Those parties which did not have military organizations had their own groups of closely aligned officers, in a sort of loose association which did not rise to full-on membership. This included the People's Party and the National Party in Syria and the National Democratic Party and the Independence Party in Iraq .

Military wings that operate within the army were set up by the ideological parties, chief among them the Baath organization following the July 14, 1958 coup in Iraq.[42] The military committee of the Syrian Baath was established in 1960 by Syrian soldiers who had been dispatched to serve in the southern region (Egypt, and Sinai specifically). Internally it was known as the Sinai organization. This committee became the strategic power in deciding Syria's political future.

Organized groups of "Free Officers" were common across the Arab region, as far afield as Syria and Yemen. Baathists and Communists would develop

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41   See: Bishara, *Syria's Via Dolorosa towards Freedom*, pp. 283 - 4.

42   Perhaps Saleh Mahdi Ammash worked essentially in an organized party-political capacity within the Free Officers group before the coup, but the military committee was set up after it.

their broad political tendencies into doctrines. Baathist theoreticians, especially Yasin Al-Hafez after the movement/coup of March 8, 1964, developed the concept of the coup-as-revolution, which Shishakli first expressed at the beginning of the 1950s. In this view, officers could use a coup to try to ally with the movements of the workers, peasant-farmers, and revolutionary intellectuals. The Baath Party officially embraced the teachings of Hafez and endorsed his writings on the question of the coup as revolution. The transformations in the relationship between the new military, born of the rural and middle classes as well as the newly expanded educational systems with a new political ideology, gave rise to a reconception of the nation and the adoption of a theory of organic correlation between nationalist (read: Arab nationalist) struggle and socialist class struggle.[43]

These attitudes undoubtedly affected all the parties with a leftist nationalist tendency. There was competition between them over setting up organizations within the Arab armies, in recognition on their part of the importance of the army and its ability to drive political change and accelerate transformation.

One should not confuse between these attitudes and the position of the first generation of Arab nationalists who cooperated with the monarchies, but also welcomed the zeal of the coup officers and cooperated with any regime that might serve the nationalist idea and Arab unity or influence it in that direction. This was the behavior of Constantin Zureiq, who was willing to be Syria's ambassador to Washington, before Husni Al-Zaim appointed him head of Damascus University. This was also the position of the Arab nationalists towards the rule of Faisal and others. It was also, relatively speaking, the position of Mohammed Kurd Ali, a prominent figure who acclaimed the first coup in Syria led by Zaim, in defiance of the former National Bloc.

It would be instructive to distinguish here between the Arab nationalism of the Baathists and Nasserists and

other partisans and their theoreticians and the earlier, non-doctrinaire generation of Arab nationalists who used the word inqilab. This term, now used to mean a coup, referred instead to the intellectual movement by which a people were transformed into a nation, and modernization to prepare Arab societies for modern science in the economy and rationality in state administration, in a secular fashion devoid of sectarianism. Nevertheless, the members of this generation themselves welcomed the zeal of the officers who mounted coups and thought well of them. A third generation of Arab nationalists was needed to transcend both of these groups.

4. International Stakes on the Army in Politics

With the expansion of Soviet power after World War II and the defeat of Nazism, and given the attractiveness of its model of development, and after the Chinese Revolution, there was a prevailing fear in western, particularly American, circles of communist expansion into the Third World and the newly independent developing countries. At that precise moment, the traditional forces that had been relied upon by the French and the British in what would become the Third World and the Arab region were weakening, and in the recently-independent states new forces were emerging that attracted the attention of American policy makers. The militaries in particular were ideal candidates as a particularly organized force. This would enable them to hold on to power, while it was also possible to exploit the cultures of local societies to mobilize against communism. In ideal circumstances, the officers would be qualified to solve the agrarian question, thereby aborting any possibility of exploiting peasant grievances by communists, or the slide into social revolutions and the establishment of alliances with communist forces as a result of backwardness, poverty, and a failure to resolve the agrarian question.

At that time, American policy tended to support agrarian reform. It aspired to set up modernizing

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43   These ideas have been reprinted in articles and chapters of the book *On Some Issues of the Arab Revolution* which al-Hafez wrote in the 1960s. In his assessment, the July Revolution demonstrated that it was a revolution and not a coup, because it opened the door to profound changes in Egypt's political system and socioeconomic structure. However, he clearly distinguished between a revolution from above, as he considered the July coup, and a grassroots popular revolution. He thought that Abdel Nasser did not succeed in turning it into a popular revolution, for he did not organize the workers and the peasants or let them join in the process of decision making and governing the country, which brings us back to the question related to democracy. I believe that Yasin al-Hafez was ahead of his generation of nationalists in raising these issues and the relationship between nationalism and democracy. Yasin al-Hafez, *Complete Works of Yasin al-Hafez: On some issues of the Arab revolution* (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2005), pp. 110 - 204.

anti-communist regimes, and independence from the British and the French was an additional bonus. The major hurdles officers' regimes, from Shishakli to Nasser, faced in forming an alliance with the United States were the US's other Cold War alliances against the Soviets (like the Baghdad Pact); the opposition of Israel towards regimes like that of Nasser in its modernization and armament endeavors; and the position of the United States and the Western states on the Palestinian issue at the time.

The United States had a stake in the modernization of Egypt as a means of countering the risk of the spread of communism by the conduit of peasant resentment, as had been the case in China and elsewhere in Asia. The US believed in the ability of the Egyptian army to play a role in avoiding the same fate as China. Therefore, the American Administration took a close interest in the question of agrarian reform, and prepared draft plans for such reform including a pamphlet produced by the US State Department in February 1952 entitled, *Agrarian Reform: A Global Challenge*.[44] (Shishakli was the first to try to attempt agrarian reform at the beginning of 1952, before Nasser, but only partially and with limited success.) It seems that State Department experts also studied the Turkish experience, which involved an early agrarian reform in 1945 without steps towards communism.[45] In August 1952, the

State Department cabled the Embassy in Cairo to inform the new leadership that America was willing to support agrarian reform. Scholars have found evidence of American opposition to Mohammed Naguib's (a fellow coup plotter and Free Officer who was pushed out by Nasser early on) call for pluralist democracy (the apparent opportunism of Naguib notwithstanding), because of the indeterminate risks held out by that possibility. Dealing with an organized group of officers was easier than dealing with elected parliaments [46].

Kermit Roosevelt, the US intelligence envoy to the Middle East, including Iran, Syria, and Egypt, had also cultivated relations with a number of the Arab army officers in question. Roosevelt held meetings with the Free Officers before the coup and drew up a training program for 50 Egyptian officers, six of whom took part in the preparations for the coup.[47] The fact of US knowledge of the intended date of the 1952 coup has been dealt with sufficiently elsewhere.

In the depths of the Cold War, the Soviets, who had an ideological antipathy to the coup, were prepared to back military takeovers of power where these produced client regimes. These regimes were termed progressive, or "on the path to non-capitalist development", by adopting a key role for the state in the economy and by allying with the socialist camp. After the success of the Free Officers' coup

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44   Hazem Kandil, *Soldiers, Spies, and Statesmen: Egypt's Road to Revolt* (London, Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2012), p. 25.

45   Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, p. 474.

46   Kandil, p.26. See also the American position on Al-Sanhouri's being charged with forming a government and the acceptance of the Free Officers of this position: Bishara, *Egypt's Revolution*, vol. 1. p. 44.

47   Miles Copeland, *The Game of Nations: The Amorality of Power Politics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), pp. 51-3; nobody has produced evidence that Abdel Nasser took part in any of those meetings before the revolution. Ahmad Hamroush has written about the activity of Kermit Roosevelt with King Farouq, and relied upon the abovementioned book of Copeland's to present his activity in Egypt. Although Roosevelt did not deny his contacts with the Free Officers, Harmoush affirms that there was no proof of direct contact with Abdel Nasser personally: "Nevertheless, there is not a single piece of evidence that Gamal Abdel Nasser had personal contact with Kermit Roosevelt before the move, although the communications of some of his colleagues with the Americans had made him ask Khaled Mohieddin not to use the phrase 'Anglo-American colonialism' in the publications of the Free Officers, but to make do with the mention of British colonialism. That was in March 1952, and a result of the support those colleagues had felt from American officials in the region." See: Ahmad Harmoush, *The Story of the July 23 Revolution* (Beirut: Al-Muassasa al-Arabia lil-Dirasat wal-Nashr, 1977), (Arabic), p. 187; we would have relied on Copeland's book alone, were it not that one of the participants in the meetings confirmed it in his memoires, see: Hussain Mohammed Ahmad Hamouda, *The Secrets of the Free Officers Movement and the Muslim Brotherhood*, 2 vols. (Cairo: Al-Zahra for Arab Media, 1985), (Arabic), pp. 88 - 9. Hussain Ahmad Hamouda, an officer from the Brotherhood who participated in meetings at the house of the American military attaché with Abdel Nasser in the period 1950-1952, states that the meetings concerned the Egyptian army's relationship with the United States, the danger communism posed to the Middle East, and US backing for any revival in Egypt, because the status quo in Egypt might encourage the spread of communism. In his view, the officers had an interest in the United States' stopping British intervention against their move, and that the United States backed the revolution and opened the door of its military institutes to train Egyptian army officers in their hundreds immediately after the revolution. The officer Hamouda himself completed his studies at the Higher War College in America (Hamouda, p. 90). He also states that Abdel Nasser opposed the idea of an Islamic alliance against the Soviet Union (Hamouda, p. 91); Anwar Sadat also relates that the US ambassador considered his notification of the date of the move as a "good gesture from us," and "our contact with him really was the beginning of a good relationship between us and him … even when the English were exerting every effort to discover who the men of the revolution were, the US ambassador invited us for dinner at his residence at the embassy, and all of us accepted the invitation … all the members of the Council of the Revolution."

in 1952 in changing the regime in Egypt, even if the Free Officers directly clashed with the Egyptian Communists, the Soviets came to support the coup d'etat as a modus operandi and backed the July 14, 1958 coup in Iraq, and in a certain sense created its political party.[48] They also used it to manage their conflict with the nationalists within Iraq and regionally against Nasserite influence.

5. Officers Do Not Mount Coups for Others to Rule

Political and social forces in the Arab countries have fallen victim on a number of occasions to the illusion that military officers leading coups are doing so to serve their agendas. It has become clear that officers only rarely give up power in favor of a political party.

What usually occurred was that they donned civilian garb, since they were taking on government positions in a civilian capacity. Ataturk did this, since he was careful that his movement should not seem a military revolt against the Sultan's orders, after the Minister of War asked him to return to Istanbul in 1919—when it was clear that he was doing the opposite of his commission as General Inspector of the 9th Army, and rather than disbanding the militias of the armed resistance he was busy organizing them. Mustafa Kamal took off his uniform during the mobilization so as not to disobey military orders, and he asked his colleagues to do the same, and then went about building a new army.[49] This is totally different from the actions of Hafez Al-Assad and his comrades, or Nasser and his comrades after they reached power, despite the superficial similarity of former military officers in civilian clothing.

Civilian clothing does not actually make a civilian government. Such governments continue to issue diktats which become laws, and brook no opposition, deeming any divergence of opinion as an attack on the nation and the state. To the military mind, there can be no tolerance of "political" opposition. Therefore, opposition to them is a hostile position against the state and nation. Civilian pretenses notwithstanding, this is simply the military mindset.

This problem is repeated in the case of forces that do not acknowledge their role as parties with a specific platform. Those who rule in the name of liberation movements, even after the end of their role in liberating the country from colonialism, and those who rule in the name of the army, or religion, tend to portray disagreements with them as a betrayal of the nation or of religion.

Rulers taking off their military uniforms in power does not usually lead to a civilianized military, but to the militarization of politics. If we take as an example the case where a political party has mounted a military coup—such as the Syrian Baath—we find that the party itself gradually becomes militarized. This happens to begin with the "Nationalist Guard" paramilitary movement, then by making promotion through party ranks subject to military training. This militarization ended during the 1970s and came back again in 1980 with the formation of armed units in community-level party organizations, and the militarization of the youth organization along fascistic lines. This led to the control of socio-political elites who saw the army as the main means to social mobility, meaning climbing the social ladder. This was the case for marginalized and poor groups and religious minorities; the army was the avenue for youth from families on the periphery of the country to secure a job and social progress in terms of status.

In the Mandate period, the army had opened its doors to these groups. We should not forget that the relatively high proportion of members of marginalized communities within the military ranks did not change its status as the most effective and modern institution within the state. Yet Baathist monopolization of power and curtailment of freedoms, including freedom of expression and political organization, ultimately led to the Party's reliance on the Security Services and their milieu for political power, thus relegating the role of other groups. This served to heighten the significance of other social ties in the country, including in particular the role of Alawite sectarian loyalties . Yet ultimately, the most important consequence was the preeminence of military officers within the state as a whole and of course within the Baath Party.[50]

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48   As far as the communists' using the nickname "supreme leader" to describe Kassem, which they disseminated widely according to Hana Batatu. In this way they undoubtedly elevated Kassem compared to Arif and Abdel Nasser. See: Batatu, p..

49   Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, p. 248.

50   See: Bishara, *Syria's Via Dolorosa towards Freedom*.

There are exceptional cases of officers stepping down from power in favor of civilian forces following a coup. These include the coup in Portugal of April 25, 1974 against the fascist Estado Novo regime and the dictatorship established by Salazar, which under Caetano had initiated political reforms starting in 1969 but rescinded them in 1973. The military coup launched by the Armed Forces Movement was accompanied by a popular revolution. It is worth noting that the army leadership acted as a result of the pressure of the movement of revolutionary junior officers. There were struggles between left and right, and within the left between communists and socialists, until elections under a new constitution and the handing of power to an elected civilian regime in 1976. The officers who competed in the elections did not do well.

The decisive factor in [the Portugese] case was the aspiration of civil and political society in Portugal, parties, unions, and a large part of the army, for a democratic regime in Portugal's European environment. In the Arab region we have the coup of Lieutenant-General Abdel Rahman Suwar Al-Dahab after the April 1985 uprising in Sudan. Later, scholars learned that the coup was plotted in consultation with the political leadership of the popular uprising. It was also preceded by pressure from more politicized lower-ranking officers who had interacted with the popular protest. He stepped down in favor of elected politicians, Prime Minister Sadiq Al-Mahdi and Ahmad Al-Mirghani, head of the Committee of Sovereignty, after promoting himself to the rank of Field Marshal. The Arab public feted him for his magnanimity. It was not long before the Islamist current launched a coup against the democratic process, turning to Islamic army officers for help, in the belief that the latter were mounting the coup for the benefit of the former, until it became evident that the army would not give up power for anyone, and that Omar Al-Bashir would rule, whether as an official member of the military or otherwise. The Islamist current paid the price for this affair. This last coup is the rule: after the exception of Suwar Al-Dahab was done with as though a mere flicker in the long arc of history, the general rule of military power returned to dominance.

Recently, in 2011, the movement by Egyptian Defense Minister Field Marshal Tantawi, Chief-of-Staff Hafez Annan, and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, with their pressure on Mubarak to resign, appeared a coup of this kind. SCAF remained in power until it handed it over to the elected government. Was this on the model of the Portuguese coup? In Portugal, it was clear that the army began the revolution and the people followed them. In Egypt, however, the people took to the streets, and the army moved at the order of the President of the Republic. There are varying interpretations of how and why the Egyptian military acted the way it did at given moments, particularly after the "Battle of the Camel" during which pro-Mubarak tour guides from near the pyramids at Giza attacked demonstrators in central Cairo, after which the military declined to take sides in the revolution. Without doubt, there was a moment when the Army recognized the force of popular will and saw in it an opportunity to prevent a much hated prospect of the creation of a political dynasty with Mubarak set to hand power over to his son. Even at those moments, however, all the army wanted was to save its privileges that had been established in a historic deal during the Mubarak era. The ability of the army to impose its will, however, was contingent on the action of the street, the source of legitimacy in those days, that is on Egyptian civil society and its determination to implement the democratic program by forging unity over the democratic foundations and agreeing to manage their differences.

When the chance arose, the army came back and exploited the inability of Egypt's political parties to limit their differences to the political, democratic realm, and further exploited the desire of some groups to seek military assistance to further their aims. In fact, the army took advantage of all and turned itself into the single institution which a wide variety of political factions could unite around. In those difficult days for Egypt following the election of the president of the republic in 2012, the army seemed the only constant among a plethora of political factions which came and went. All of them resorted to the army to bring it over to its side. The army made its move only after the masses had moved to ask the army to act.

In the author's opinion, the July 2013 coup in Egypt, which was a turning point in the history of what may be termed "the Arab Revolution for Democracy", has more in common with the coup led by Chile's Augusto Pinochet, that is a coup by the regime army against the political process, than with the radical political coups in the Arab region during the post-

colonial period. Pinochet's coup was against the elected leader, Salvador Allende, who in 1973 had appointed Pinochet, chief-of-staff since 1972, as head of the armed forces. Allende appointed him on August 23 and Pinochet mounted his coup against him on September 11.[51] It is clear that the coup against the government of the Popular Socialist Union in Santiago would not have succeeded without the support of the American administration and intelligence and would not have lasted in power without that support. Once in power, Pinochet implemented neo-liberal policies, lifted protections for local production, banned trade unions, stopped commodity subsidies, and reduced public expenditure by privatizing social services. During the 1970s, Chile, according to the World Bank and IMF, was the best performing economy in Latin America, in what was known as the "Chilean Miracle". This is not to suggest any similarity between the Chilean and Egyptian economies, or to predict a similar "Economic Miracle" from now-president Sisi of Egypt, formerly Chief of the SCAF.

Egypt's July 3 coup was a move by the old regime against the political process which was moving towards changing the regime, and attempted to preserve the privileges of sections of the old regime even after Mubarak had been ousted. This was not a movement of junior officers aspiring to rule and try out a better system of government, shifting from right to left, and from left to right, implementing agrarian reform and widening access to education. Rather it was a coup by the high command of the army and the army establishment. It was a coup as narrowly defined, a coup from inside the regime to preserve the regime from those whom the army saw as a threat, and not the kind of coup that leads to the establishment of a new regime, and which is usually called a revolution: the July 23 Revolution, the July 14 Revolution, etc.

The results of such a coup are, unfortunately, generally stable. This is no group or clique, or brotherhood of officers, but the regular army itself. After the coup there are no struggles between the officers,

the hierarchy is totally clear, and the head of the army becomes president. The maximum that can be achieved is socioeconomic measures that no civilian government concerned with public opinion and the results of popular votes would dare to undertake. That is why Chile under Pinochet achieved notable stability and economic growth, and his rule continued for a relatively long time and ended with a gradual opening up of a space for parties and unions, and referendums that led to democratic transformation. That may not be possible in Egypt. The Sisi junta may not be burdened with the internal struggles of officers, but it does not seem capable of achieving socioeconomic stability and continues to rule by brutal oppression of any dissent.

The army is an institution that acts in its own interests. During periods of transition it tends to imagine its interests as general national interests. This institution does not operate according to a system of ideas. It is an organized institution above a party or a movement bearing ideas. Should it be seen, at times of democratic transition, as an internal force? Or will it continue to be seen as an institution that defends the borders of the nation? Studies of democratic transition must learn a lesson from the latest military coup in Egypt.

On the other hand, it has been demonstrated in Turkey as well as in Egypt that coups need alliances with civil and political forces before they can impose their writ on society. They fail without them, which is what happened in Turkey, particularly as a split developed between supporters of democracy and supporters of the coup. The failed Turkish coup of 2016 found no civil forces willing to ally with it. In Egypt, however, when social forces split between the supporters of a specific political party—specifically, the Muslim Brotherhood—and its opponents—and not between proponents of democracy and those opposed to it—the military were successful. Because of this division, the coup forces found many allies who backed them for different motives.

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51   The same thing happened in the Syrian precedent when Shukri al-Quwatli appointed Husni al-Za'im commander of the army—he had been head of the police—and he launched a coup against him a few months later.

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