EBTISAM HUSSEIN[1] AND CLAUDIA DE MARTINO[2]
[1]School of International Studies, Sun Yat-Sen University, Zhuhai, China, and tenure holder of Political Science, Cairo University, Cairo, Egypt
[2]Studies and Research Department, UNIMED, Mediterranean Universities Union, Rome, Italy

Egypt's Military Post-2011

Playing Politics without Internal Cracks

ABSTRACT Seven years after the 2011 uprisings, the Egyptian military shows no evident signs of internal cracks. This article argues that the Egyptian army's unrivalled dominance, both in politics and within the security apparatus, could be explained as the result of three combined factors: substantial economic interests, a long-time legitimacy buttressed by the army's active involvement in welfare and development initiatives, and the reliance on universal conscription as the main avenue for the successful accommodation of class and social cleavages—key elements underpinning the army's status of supreme political arbitrator in Egyptian politics.
KEYWORDS: military, Egypt, autonomy, social cleavages, conscription

INTRODUCTION

The Egyptian army has been the main political backroom actor in Egyptian politics since 2011. Its behavior has been investigated thoroughly, but following Christiansen (2015), so far the literature has largely focused on the army's political role in the uprisings (Kandil 2012; Lutterbeck 2012; Nepstad 2013) or its vested corporate economic interests (Springborg 2016), resulting in an inadequate investigation into its internal structuring, its extensive autonomy straying from the military arena, and its de facto dominance within the security apparatus.

The aim of this article is three-fold: first, to address the sources of Egyptian military power as the superior arbitrator of national political life; second, to explain the absence of cracks inside the army's structure and leadership since 2011, despite the critical political junctures experienced by the country; and third, to understand why the army has so far remained unchallenged.

Contemporary Arab Affairs, Vol. 12, Number 1, pp. 1–19. ISSN 1755-0912. Electronic ISSN: 1755-0920. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1525/caa.2019.121004

Military autonomy is a broad concept widely tackled in the analysis of the 2011 Arab Spring. Many studies link strong institutional cohesion with the choice of siding with protesters: military insularity from society and the existence of strong internal cleavages would tend to tip the balance in support of regimes (McLauchlin 2010; Nepstad 2013; Taylor 2014). At the opposite end, this article claims that Egypt represents a case of a rather ethnically and sectarian homogeneous country, where the army is selectively representative of the whole of Egyptian society. This selective incorporation translates into an official universal recruitment accommodating a cautious inclusion of minorities while, in practice, filtering loyal and majoritarian elements up through the hierarchical ladder. In addition, the Egyptian army stands on its own feet, enjoying evident autonomy (Kohn 1997) in the absence both of civilian control and checks and balances.

Focusing on the socioeconomic background of military echelons, the article addresses the generational, ethnic, and religious factors underpinning the army's cohesion in the post-Spring Egypt, and the subtle ability of its top-down pyramidal hierarchy in ensuring compliance of the lower ranks, taking advantage of its conspicuous economic power to avoid overt internal cracks. In addition, its cultural identity matters: if some armies are deemed to have a quasi-ethnic character (Zirker 2015, 6), that is, to embody a coherent and cohesive group separated from broader society, the Egyptian army as an institution has both succeeded in closing its ranks while engaging at various levels with civil society.

This article addresses the sources of the Egyptian army's source of autonomy, its selective representativeness policy as the byproduct of horizontally inclusive and homogenizing strategies, the social basis of its economic power, the close internal command chain within its upper echelons, and its supremacy in the security establishment.

AN AUTONOMOUS ARMY AT THE FOREFRONT OF POST-2011 POLITICS

During the 2011 uprisings, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) adopted a "wait and see" approach to try to keep itself aloof from direct political intervention. It took care in distancing itself from other security forces—and the so-called thugs (*balṭajiyya*)—involved in the violent crackdown of demonstrators. This strategy paid off, as the army was judged an impartial arbitrator above the fray of petty politics (Taylor 2014, 32).

Yet, from a structural point of view, the army had strong interests in leading the process offstage even before the revolution. In fact, it did not want to risk its interests being jeopardized by Husni Mubarak's troubled succession with the possibility of non-military, liberal circles' rising to power (Frisch 2013, 190) with the potential ascension of the first non-military businessman, Gamal Mubarak, to the leadership, identifying him as a threat, as potentially ushering a restraint on its autonomy (Taylor 2014, 47).

With approximately one million soldiers,[1] the Egyptian army is the second largest in the Middle East. Historically, it perceives itself as the true pillar of the country and the primary and last source of authority which it devolves to civilians as long as the latter prove able to run the country without causing internal strife and challenging its autonomy (Moughira 2015).

Egypt is religiously homogenous: 90 percent of its citizens are Sunni, only 9 percent are Copts and 1 percent consists of other groups, whether Shiites or Nubians of Upper Egypt. In the army, there are nominally no provisions concerning the ethnic belonging of soldiers or officers. Since 1909, conscription has been enforced on all males (Elsaesser 2011). Thus, the army advertises its make-up as highly representative of the Egyptian people, with most of its lower ranks coming from poor households and agricultural labor (together comprising almost 60 percent of the total active population; Refworld 2015),[2] and Copts proportionally represented.

As the literature highlights, discriminatory recruitment can be one factor encouraging the military to side with the regime (McLauchlin 2010; Nepstad 2013; Taylor 2014). Thus, on the contrary, the acclaimed universal character of the Egyptian army's recruitment feeds its legitimacy and partly explains its decision to side with the protestors in the 2011 uprisings, since the military did not depend on the regime in terms of legitimacy. The same can be said for its economic autonomy, as a great array of military-sponsored businesses shield the army's autonomous budget, making it possible for the military to defy regime preferences at any time, as the regime was not viewed as the source of benefits for the military (Gelvin 2012; Nepstad 2013), and the army did not depend on the regime either for its institutional survival or economic stability (Barany 2011).

1. This figure includes 468,500 soldiers on active duty plus 479,000 reserves (International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) 2016).

2. A total of 10.7 percent are employed in agriculture, over 40 percent in the black market or informal economy, and some 8.7 percent unemployed. For a detailed account, see Human Capital Research Portal (2016).

In fact, the army is the only national institution able to combine different sources of power and act simultaneously on a wide array of domains, ranging from business circles to local councils and authorities, to major engineering and touristic companies (Sayigh 2012). Engaging in a wide range of economic and civilian activities, it plays on several levels, securing the loyalty and the cooperation of different sectors of society.

Kohn's (1997) concept of military autonomy helps to shed a light on an additional facet of the Egyptian military's power, which covers the historical failure of civilian control in the absence of proper checks and balances and the lack of competitors in the political arena. In Egypt, successive defense ministers came from the ranks of the military and parliamentary oversight of the military budget was ruled out in the 2014 Constitution (Grote and Roeder 2016). Individual army members are not held accountable for their actions by the public prosecutor and only the military prosecutor can define the mandate of military courts' jurisdiction over civilians (Human Rights Watch 2012). Thus, the military enjoys almost self-jurisdiction. In addition, the army is not confronted by any rival force; no other security agency—having worked hand in glove with the former regime—enjoys any legitimacy of its own (Brumberg and Sallam 2012) and could aspire to representing an alternative force.

The key difference between post-2011 and post-2013 developments is that the military switched from having a backroom attitude to be at the forefront of President Mursi's ouster in 2013. After the Tamarrod movement's mass demonstrations, the SCAF decided openly to take the lead in politics (Abdelrahman 2015; Teti, Anceschi, and Gervasio 2014). Acknowledging the firmness of a majority of people to oust Mursi, it moved to label his supporters as anti-patriotic (Brand 2014, 213). Interpreting the clashes with the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) supporters as a security test, it subtly shifted the whole narrative from advancing the revolution to restoring law and order and fighting terrorism.

When President Abdel al-Fattah al-Sisi was elected in June 2014, the SCAF considered him the leader best suited to securing broad cross-national support, ranging from business elites to workers, military officers, and middle-class women alike (Korshid 2014). Sisi moved to securing the army`s complete independence; hundreds of decree laws were issued promoting the economic activities of the military,[3] shielding its autonomy from virtually any regime (Abul-Magd 2014).

3. Decree no. 48/2014 amends the public tenders' law to allow the government to conclude agreements with contractors through direct allotment for construction projects of 10 million Egyptian pounds.

MILITARY CONSCRIPTION: A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

Mass conscription may look like an outdated instrument to elicit popular legitimacy in the twenty-first century, but in Egypt the army still plays an important social function. According to many scholars (Huntington 1968; Janowitz 1977; Shils 1962), the popular support enjoyed by Arab armies was historically linked to their role as modernizing agents, uniting pluralistic societies, reforming autocratic systems, and spearheading innovation in societies (Huntington 1968, 203). Conscription is still regarded as a fundamental pillar of statehood reinstated in the 2014 Constitution,[4] together with heavy penalties targeting draft-dodgers.[5]

The army claims to be representative of the Egyptian people as a whole. It consists of some 320,000 yearly conscripts out of 468,500 enlisted men of the 585,000 reaching conscription age, plus some 479,000 men serving in the reserves[6] or in paramilitary forces (Sayigh 2012). Between 60 percent and 70 percent of its personnel is composed of conscript soldiers (Aclimandos 2012a, 44).[7] Its structure is top-down and hierarchical. Discipline and obedience are strictly enforced. After three months of training, recruits are considered fit for combat service and can be dispatched to war zones, though the majority are assigned to guard army facilities and industrial sites (Zohny 1987, 48). However, terms and conditions of service vary according to educational levels. University degree recipients can serve three years as officers with the same full privileges of career officers or enroll as plain soldiers for the limited term of one year, while it is compulsory for lower degree or no-degree holders to serve a full three-year term as conscripts (Fayek 2014a).

In addition, despite the official rhetoric of recruiting all Egyptians without discrimination, army enrolment is reportedly subject to political criteria. According to anonymous colonels interviewed by the daily *al-Monitor*, "When students or young people are arrested [on Islamists or other charges], they have a file in State Security and are selected and silently exempted from service" (Nader 2015). This is corroborated by the Egyptian Organization for

4. Article 86 stipulates that military service is mandatory. The only exceptions are youths with disabilities, only sons, and offspring of members of the Egyptian military killed during the 1973 October War (Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt 2014).

5. Some four thousand draft evaders are arrested yearly by the security forces (see Agence France Presse (AFP), May 27, 1993, cited in War Resisters International 1998).

6. See note 1 above.

7. Up to the 1970s, only uneducated Egyptians had to serve, but this changed in 1971, after the 1967 Naksa and the setting up of special intelligence units.

Human Rights, according to which "those suspected of being members of the outlawed Islamic militant groups [. . .] are excluded from military service" (War Resisters International 1998). In the case of career officers, the screening is applied through security investigations carried out by the special military unit of the Military Intelligence Department (MID) (Kechichian and Nazimek 1997).

Egyptian Copts are enlisted as conscripts, despite the general claim of the existence of an informal glass ceiling filtering their access to more high-ranking positions (Fayek 2014b); they reportedly encounter rejection from Muslim fellow soldiers protesting against having to obey a Copt (Taylor 2014, 129).[8] Although there are parallel claims on other religious minorities' exemption out of the suspicion of double political affiliations (Fayek 2014b), the scant number of Jews and Armenians makes it difficult to assume systematic discrimination, especially considering that the majority of these minorities would anyhow opt out to devote themselves to their professional careers.

Finally, Bedouins as a group are neither officially exempted from serving nor enlisted. They account for fewer than 1 million inhabitants (987,000 in 2013) and are entitled to Egyptian citizenship but not to passports. Distrust of Bedouins dates back to the Israeli occupation of Sinai and their collaboration with the Israeli administration up to 1982, but it is also fuelled by Bedouin inclinations to carry out informal economic activities, illegally smuggling products over the borders with Gaza and Israel (IRIN 2011; Lavie 1990). Mistrust between continental Egyptians and Bedouins still prevails on both sides and is nourished by the Egyptian perception of Bedouins as a non-patriotic group and by the Bedouins' perception of the Egyptian government as a repressive group. Most Bedouins are not willing to give up three years of labor in order to enlist in the army. In addition, the army's business role in Sinai is a source of contention since it is claimed to favor the employment of continental Egyptians over local Bedouins in its mines and oil fields (Lavie 1990, 58–59).

In conclusion, according to Gaub's (2011) ethno-stratification theory, the majoritarian ethnic group on which the Egyptian army relies are the non-Bedouin, Sunni Muslim majority, coming from a lower to middle-class background and strictly not affiliated with the MB. Religious and ethnic cleavages are successfully accommodated within the army and defused, further legitimizing the army's core popular identity.

8. Historically, non-Muslims were *dhimmis* and thus paid taxes in exchange for protection.

CLASS-INCORPORATION IN THE ARMY: A CASE OF SELF-SELECTION?

The Egyptian military cannot be labeled as a "discriminatory" institution, but its inner social engineering is the product of deliberate homogenization strategies reaching their peak at the top of the hierarchy (senior officers and the SCAF).

Owing to the class-based differing paths applied to military personnel, horizontal rather than vertical cohesion among its ranks is enforced across the different levels of the hierarchy. Class gaps within the military are indeed wide, but so far have not spurred any clash within its ranks. As Kandil (2012) points out, "Although there is a clear distinction between the middle-class corps and lower class conscripts and non-commissioned officers (NCO), historically this has not produced class tensions" (235). However, there is awareness among the army's lower echelons of the widening salary gap between higher and lower ranks, though it seldom leaks to the press. A retired officer, for example, revealed to Reuters that army revenues were held by about 15% of the army's officer corps, upper ranks, through a system of patronage (Awad 2012). Furthermore, there is a widening gap between an enclosed circle of high-ranking officers reportedly earning very high monthly salaries, and the salaries of mid-ranking officers are much higher than those of ordinary soldiers (Sayigh 2012; Suleiman 2016).

This salary gap has not resulted in internal break-up (Ali 2016). Looking for an explanation, Masoud (2014) points to the lack of politicization of Egyptian lower and medium-class conscripts, mostly stemming from the country's poor workforce (Mounir 2017) and a huge informal sector as simply not conducive to a large-scale, class-based mobilization (Masoud 2014, 6). In other words, the great majority of Egyptian youth enrolled in the army are peasants and peddlers with no political standing, whereas the middle-class youth are strategically channeled into the officers' ranks, and the upper classes are allegedly exempted from conscription upon payment or connections (Nader 2015).

Cracks in the "in-between" army ranks constitute a serious threat to internal cohesion, but the real existential menace is still considered the potential of conscripts for pro-MB sympathies. As the military is fully aware of the disruptive force of MB affiliation, it cultivates its own religious unit in charge of reconquering the hearts and minds of Islamist-leaning soldiers. To this purpose, it has introduced a new Department of Moral Affairs, overseeing religious activities and preaching moderate Islam through Friday sermons and the publication of a monthly magazine called *al-Mujahid* (Wenig 2014).

THE ARMY'S SELF-ASSIGNED WELFARE AND DEVELOPMENT TASKS: THE SOCIAL ASPECTS OF ITS ECONOMIC POWER

In Egypt, the army still plays an important social function. Against the backdrop of an overall poverty rate further increasing since 2011 (Mansour-Ille 2016), the US Department of Defense has estimated that the army is the second most powerful actor in providing alternative welfare, after a thick network of mosques, and concluded that "Arguably, no other institution in Egypt could provide as effective a socialization instrument as the military in terms of . . . social mobility, exposure to technology, civic responsibility and nation building" (Gotowicki 1997, 4).

During Ramadan, army conscripts are deployed to distribute to the population food items carrying the label of "The Armed Forces' Supply Authority" together with "Tahya Misr," the charitable fund established by the president (Abul-Magd 2017). These activities contribute to the political legitimacy of the military both among its personnel and the larger society, but also illustrate the social facet of military power in Egypt. The army portrays its own economic activities as both socially sensitive and in the national interest, that is, capping the prices of general products and promoting the welfare of the poor (Hauslohner 2014),[9] and portraying itself to lower-class, young Egyptians as the best avenue to a stable job in a country plagued by a 34.4 percent skyrocketing rate of youth unemployment (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2016). During their compulsory service, lower-rank conscripts, otherwise left on the margins of society, are at least offered the opportunity to obtain training. They are taught basic skills as literacy, paid a little (between US$10 and US$40 per month) and provided with vocational training useful for civilian employment (Aclimandos 2012a). In carrying out these tasks, the military acts more as a civilian government institution, offering job opportunities rather than demanding loyalty in strictly military terms.

However, its military role in society does not end there. Sayigh (2012) documented a wide array of domains where the army gets involved, including civilian affairs, through the assignment of military personnel to civilian structures or the self- and exclusive allocation of state resources, such as land and infrastructures. Sayigh (2012, n.p.) claims that "When the Egyptian Armed Forces build bridges, intercity highways and ring roads, bakeries and butcheries in poor urban neighborhoods, and water purification and desalination treatment plants, these are presented as 'gifts to the people of Egypt.'"

9. This refers to the new huge commercial center established in 2013 in the Suez region.

Besides welfare, the army is spearheading ambitious national development projects, such as the Sinai Development Plan, designed in 2012 to develop the peninsula by constructing highways, factories and moving in 3 million residents in ten years' time, and the building of the new capital between Cairo and the Red Sea; a project buoyantly expected to be completed by 2030 (Zarad 2016).

Therefore, the army skillfully plays on two fronts. On the one hand, it cuts subsidies and initiates giant development projects impinging on national debt and, on the other, it enters the market to sell basic goods at half price, portraying its economic activities as socially sensitive to the plague of millions of Egyptians living in poverty and unable to afford basic commodities, such as shown by the 2016 baby milk case (El-Tablawy 2016).

MILITARY COHESION: SEEMS TO BE ENDURING

Part of the possible explanation for why the SCAF sided with the demonstrators in 2011 was that they were already searching for political alternatives (Frisch 2013, 190). However, immediately after seizing power in 2013, the army's steering committee encountered difficulties in restoring order. Despite Frisch's (2013) assertion about the SCAF's claims of its successful ability to navigate the political transition, following Mursi's ouster the military succeeded in keeping the country in check, despite the questionable loyalty of the lower ranked officers and ordinary soldiers (181); nonetheless, the decision to deploy special forces side by side with ordinary soldiers during demonstrations does not necessarily point to soldiers' disloyalty, but rather to their questioned ability to meet the requirements of the task. For instance, when military armored vehicles crushed protestors in the infamous Maspero massacre of 2011, the court sentenced the rank-and-file soldiers involved in the incident to prison with charges of negligence (Ibrahim 2012), not of sedition. In this, as in similar cases occurring after 2013, claims on betrayal of the lower echelons could not be univocally established.

Yet, some sources report that the military has already endured dozens of desertions since the fall of former President Mubarak, predominantly among its officers' class (Galey 2012). Besides, even before the revolution, the army reportedly centralized its command, limiting horizontal communications among units, because it was concerned about rebellion among its lower ranks (Henry and Springborg 2011, 5) and in the post-2011 aftermath, it took the

hard line, arresting all officers joining pro-revolution demonstrations or inciting to revolt, as the case of Mj. Ahmed Shouman revealed (Awad 2012).[10]

In October 2015, a large process attracting much attention in the country ended in a military court condemning to life imprisonment twenty-six military officers suspected of conspiracy with the MB to inspire a thwarted counter-coup d'état. Soldiers were tried under the Code of Military Justice for disobeying the President of the Republic, opposing state policy on internal matters and advocating these tendencies within the armed forces (Bahgat 2015). Finally, the ongoing war on terror launched by President al-Sisi was meant to curb a few army officers being recruited into *jihadi* groups active in Sinai (Bayoumi 2015; Joscelyn and Weiss 2015).[11]

In the upper echelons, instead, defections so far have been few and all observers concur that since 2013 the SCAF has acted with a single voice, without allowing any potential clashes among its members to creep into the media. Kandil (2014) contends that the reason why the SCAF has been so powerful since 2013 is that its counterparts—civilian political parties and the MB—were so weak that all Egyptians started to fear a power vacuum more than military rule (261).[12] The power vacuum greatly benefited the army as the single institution left with both authority and agency, further boosting its internal cohesion.

Nonetheless, army internal cohesion did come at a cost. [AQ10] According to Roll (2016, 26, 23–43), in 2011 the SCAF did not hesitate to sideline former military comrades to smooth out the transition.[13] Between January 2011 and June 2012, an internal reshuffling took place aimed at the gradual ousting of a generation of older senior officers who colluded with the Mubarak regime and replaced them with junior officers less known to the public. This discreet maneuvering points to the army upper echelons' acknowledgement of the growing discontent against its elites' most prominent figures (Hamed 2014, 38).

10. Ahmed Shouman, a Cairo-based major, joined the crowds demanding an end to Mubarak's rule. He was arrested twice.

11. In July 2015, an officer from the special forces crossed the lines to join the pro-Al Qae'da group of the *al-Murābiṭūn*, claiming that he was taking revenge for the mass killing by the army of pro-Morsi demonstrators.

12. Since 2013, the MB has claimed to have recruited many troops and junior officers

13. The following are three examples of this: the exclusion of 'Omar Suleiman, former head of the Egyptian General Intelligence Service (EGIS), from the junta, the arrest of intelligence senior officer Tharwat Gouda, and the removal of Ahmed Shafiq.

Furthermore, at Mursi's ouster in July 2013, Ashour (2015, 19) points to the deepening of factionalism within the SCAF and the increasing disagreement between coup-supporters, advocating the total eradication of the MB and soft-liners, calling for limited inclusion and controlled repression.

In the June 2014 presidential elections there were claims that some top military generals were prevented from entering politics. During the first half of 2014, SCAF members Shafiq, Muwafi, and Enan all made moves signaling their interest in running for positions, but were dissuaded in one way or another (Heinrich Böll Stiftung 2017, 9). Tensions among SCAF members are simmering—as the recent abrupt dismissal of Chief of Staff Hegazy and the progressive marginalization of the first companions of Sisi seem to suggest (Ali 2016)—but so far the military has managed to keep its ranks united around Sisi's first (June 2014) and second (March 2018) mandates, avoiding overt political rivalry. This astounding display of unity could be explained as the result of Sisi's successful strategy of centralization, but also as the byproduct of the dominance of the army corporate interest at the height of its power.

OTHER SECURITY AGENCIES: COOPERATION VERSUS COMPETITION

During Mubarak's time, power used to be dispersed among various independent security agencies somehow competing with the army. Less visible in the political arena, the other governmental security forces active in Egypt—among which the major groups are the Central Security Forces (CSF), the police (including the military police), the State Security Investigation Service (SSIS), known as *Jihāz ʾAmn al-Dawla*, renamed the Homeland Security Agency or *Qiṭāʿ El Amn El Waṭanī* in 2011, and the Egyptian General Intelligence Service (EGIS) (*Al-Ahram Online* Editorial Team 2015), also known as *Mukhābarāt* (or *al-Mukhābarāt al-ʿĀmmah*)[14] —have lost much of their clout since the 2011 uprisings. Once described by el-Sherif (2014) as "independent fiefdoms," in terms of patterns of recruitment, training, and promotion, they suffered a major blow in 2011 being associated with the Mubarak regime they had unpopularly tried to shield.

Historically, security agencies were designed to counterbalance the power of the army, conceived as a body not entirely committed to the regime (Springborg 1989, 140–42). Thus, they developed as "a state within the state" with the objective to secure the regime. Since the 1970s, thanks to

14. Unlike the army, the CSF, police falls under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior.

state-of-emergency legislation continuously in force, the regime has expanded its personnel from the original 214,000 to the current 1.5 million members, with the goal of building a second security pillar able to outbalance the army in a classic coup-proofing strategy (Aclimandos 2012a).

In 2011, when the regime was challenged by popular protests, it tried first to rely on other security forces and only as a last resort on the military when it became clear that the first could not rein in the unrest. However, once the military sided with protestors, no other security agency defied its stance. This revealed an implicit existing hierarchy between the army and the other security forces as the military remained the only institution within the security establishment enjoying public legitimacy transcending the security field.

In the security agencies responding to the Ministry of Interior (MoI), conscription is applied in similar terms to the army, but illiterate and poor conscripts represent the wide majority (Hashemi 2011, 107–08). Adam and Carr (2016) confirm, "Of all army conscripts, CSF soldiers are drawn from the most disadvantaged social backgrounds [. . .]." Conscription is also reportedly more discriminatory; no minority can enroll, with the exception of a few Copts (Aclimandos 2012b, 8).

After the restructuring of the CSF in 1986, the army's, CSF's, and SSIS's terms of service were blurred, with the latter being also assigned the task of quelling terrorism. The SSIS, for example, became as centralized and as hierarchical as the army (Sirrs 2010). Nowadays it is deployed nationwide and counts many thousands, but no minorities are allowed in its senior ranks.[15] Reportedly, there is also a special unit in charge of sectarian activity recently renamed Protection of Religions and Beliefs (Ashour 2012).

Since 2011, the low professional standards of the police have been presented as a problem. Therefore, various reforms have been proposed. Interim Prime Minister Sharaf renamed all state security institutions and discharged many police officers (Revkin and Auf 2013); Mursi pledged police reforms, but eventually increased police officers' benefits even further so as to tame them, considering them as being close to the previous regime (Allam 2015). In March 2016, the then-minister of the Interior, 'Abd al-Ghaffar, announced a reform[16] that would lengthen police training from four to six weeks and introduced penalties in case of brutality (Morsy 2016).

15. Interview with Fouad Allam, *Watani*, September 2, 2007 (cited in Sirrs 2010, 164).

16. See the replacement of Article 2 of Ministerial Decree No. 367/2013 (cited in Morsy, 2016).

President al-Sisi's stance on police abuses is worth scrutinizing, as reports on violations of human rights and freedoms prove that they continue at the same rate. In 2015, he announced the setting up of yet another committee of inquiry on police officers' behavior to investigate the torture of detainees in prison (*Aswat Masriya* Editorial Board 2015). Yet, sentenced officers of the secret police continue to be released on bail.

Ironically, alleged cases of torture by the police and Homeland Security indirectly enhance the status of the military as the only clear-headed and accountable actor within the security apparatus. Besides, the SCAF is aware of other security forces' stabilizing effect on society. By integrating the most desperate elements considered more prone to indoctrination by radical Islamist groups, they spare the army the burden of incorporating them within the military or to deal with them as a criminal problem (Hashemi 2011, 108).

Thus, it is safe to assume that the de facto relation between the military and other security forces is an uneven but complementary one, whereby the latter are supposed to do the legwork. This was observable in the 2011 transition when, confronted with the police and CSF's collapse in January, the army filled the security void while pressing for the rebuilding of the other agencies to hand to them the unpopular task of policing domestic security. Since then, the military has maintained patronage over them, profiting from their compliance with the new system in power. In exchange, few senior members were rewarded with civilian high-ranking positions (al Jawadi 2003).

In synthesis, there is no official set course for the mutual relationship between the army and the other security agencies (Federation of American Scientists (FAS) 2016). However, since Mubarak's demise, the army has by far been the most powerful of all. In the post-2011 popular uprisings, for example, it was spared any purge and only the SSIS and police officers were tried for shooting demonstrators, while the army members involved were reportedly transferred (Kandil 2012, 237). By doing so, the army sent a double message to both the people and the other security agencies: to the people, by getting rid of heinous elements responsible for civilian casualties, and to the other agencies, by making it clear who holds the reins of the country thereafter. Once the message was sent, it moved to restore the status quo ante of both hierarchical cooperation and mutual toleration, proving itself able to gain popular legitimacy while securing its economic business and reinstating a new army-centered security apparatus.

CONCLUSIONS: THE MILITARY'S UPPER HAND—A FIRM GRIP ON POWER

The Egyptian army claims to be the single institution able to unite the country, a declaration that eventually proved to be true. The army builds its legitimacy on its national representativeness of the whole of Egyptian society, taking advantage of Egyptian society's relative homogeneity and a nominal universal conscription.

Class stratification is officially denied through the same principle of universal conscription, but is, in fact, reinstated through regulations linking terms of service to educational levels. It is reinforced by the establishment of differentiated career paths for middle-class conscripts trained as career officers and rank-and-file soldiers serving as low-skilled manpower. The fact that class identity largely defines career paths, does not pose a threat to its cohesion, despite public acknowledgement of the abyssal income gap dividing its upper and lower ranks.

Furthermore, army upper echelons' cohesion is enforced through entry controls and periodical inquiries of the MID, ensuring that senior military personnel would come from middle-class, non-Bedouin Sunni Muslims without any affiliation to the MB (or *jihadi* groups).

Seven years down the line, the army stands out undoubtedly as the most powerful actor within the security establishment. It has reinstated its firm authority over its security counterparts, secured its economic power, enhanced its popular legitimacy, and claimed a leading political role in all the key sectors, including welfare and development. Today, it maintains a clear competitive edge thanks to its own parallel and gigantic economic empire, portrayed as beneficial to the larger society, and strong disciplinary techniques, without suffering internal cracks, closely tying the country's future and fortunes to its own. ■

Ebtisam Hussein has a Ph.D. in Political Science from the Free University of Berlin, 2014, is an Associate Professor of Middle Eastern Studies at Sun Yat-Sen University, School of International Studies, Zhuhai, and is a tenure holder of Political Science at Cairo University. Email: ebtisam.mostafa@feps.edu.eg

Claudia De Martino has a Ph.D. in Mediterranean Social History from Ca' Foscari of Venice, 2012, and is a Senior Research Fellow in the Studies and Research Department, UNIMED, Mediterranean Universities Union, Rome. Email: claudiadema@hotmail.com

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