Civil–Military Relations in the Middle East: Comparing the Political Role of the Military in Egypt and Turkey

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This work focuses on Civil-Military Relations (CMR) in Egypt, a country that witnessed uprisings calling for democratic change in January 2011, which led to the ousting of Hosni Mubarak from the Presidency, the suspension of the constitution, and the dissolution of the parliament as well as the ruling of the National Democratic Party (NDP). Ironically, revolutionary forces in Egypt were dependent on the Egyptian military in taking these steps, with the military ultimately taking power some 30 months later.

Turkey is another Middle Eastern country with a long history of a politically active military, which has always regarded itself as the guardian of the secular democratic goals proclaimed by Atatürk (Momayezi 1998, 3) and as responsible for dealing with internal as well as external threats. Indeed, the military has intervened in government four times, taking power into its own hands on three of these occasions (1960, 1971, and 1980), and pressuring the government to resign on the fourth (1997) (Heper 2011, 241). However, despite these military measures, Turkish civilians have managed to impose a kind of democratic civilian control over the military. A simple question in the context of these two countries concerns what causes this difference.

The establishment of a republic in Egypt in June 1953 was the consequence of a bloodless coup in 1952, later referred to as the "July Revolution." The "Free Officers" plotted against King Farouk, assuming power after forcing him out. The state was then governed by the military "Revolution Command Council" until Gamal Abd-El Nasser was elected president in 1954. Following this, Egypt remained a quasi-military state led by a former military general who left the army to assume the presidency. This pattern appears to be repeating itself once again with Field Marshal Abdel Fatah El Sisi, who resigned from the military a few weeks before the 2014 presidential elections in order to run for the presidency.

Thus, for over 60 years, Egypt has been governed by military leaders in civilian suits, namely Nasser, Anwar El Sadat, and Mubarak, the latter forced to leave office in February 2011 by the above-mentioned popular revolution. Upon leaving office, Mubarak handed over power to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), the military's top leadership structure, which collectively governed Egypt for nearly 18 months until the June 2012 election of Mohammed Morsi, the first civilian president since 1952. Weakened by rising political polarization among his supporters, the Islamists, and he liberal-oriented forces, President Morsi was easy prey for the military.

Indeed, the military ousted him only three days after the eruption of popular demonstrations demanding his removal after one year in office. The common denominator between the Egyptian and Turkish cases is the traditional involvement of their militaries in politics, either in the role of guardian (as in Turkey) or by fusion with the state's structures ensured by an ex-military president (as in Egypt). Whereas Turkey's civilian leadership has recently—and to a large extent—managed to keep its military at bay including suppressing the failed coup of July 2016, Egypt has witnessed a resurgence of the military in the political sphere. Against this background, the present study aims to analyze CMR in the Egyptian case in light of lessons and experiences from the Turkish model of CMR.

Turkey and Egypt have various elements in common. For example, both are leading regional powers with populations similar in number, and both feature substantial Muslim majorities. The armed forces of both countries enjoy tremendous respect, both as political actors and as the founders of the modern nation-state. Furthermore, the people claim to follow a moderate version of Islam in theory and practice, although political power has often rested in the hands of non-Islamic forces. Given these and other similarities, Turkey and Egypt are analytically comparable. The aim of this study is to propose a number of specifically designed strategies, based on the Turkish experience that may be used within such a distinctive historical context to enforce civilian control, or at least to distance the military from politics.

This work is guided by a number of questions, the foremost being "what strategies might help Egypt's civilians keep the military at bay?" In order to address this guiding question, further sub questions need to be answered regarding factors governing CMR in Turkey and Egypt, and the

military's stance on civil-Islamist competition in these countries. Specifically, these sub questions are "Why is the Egyptian army once again at the forefront of the country's political scene only one year after the SCAF delivered authority to an elected president?" and "How, in general terms, might Egypt benefit from the Turkish experience, the latter having made considerable progress along the lengthy pathway to civilian control?

In order to address these questions, the present work is divided into five chapters. Chapter one sets the stage by reviewing theories developed thus far to study CMR in both developed and developing countries. Chapters two and three set out the history and the establishment of the military in Turkey and Egypt, respectively, focusing on the role(s) the military has played in both state and society. Finally, chapters four and five build on the content of the previous two chapters to suggest strategies for imposing civilian control, particularly over Egypt's military.

As this study has shown, middle and lower class officers do not derive the same economic advantages, as do the top generals. They mainly join and swear loyalty to the army because they believe that they are guarding the republican its national security. Throughout my personal contacts with these officers in classroom settings, they come across as having conservative attitudes and as not benefitting from the army's economic interests as much as do the top generals. However, this realization is somewhat offset by their deep belief, as well as that of the general public, that officers play a sacred role in defending the country. In fact, one can say that those who have supported it from June 30, 2013, onward regard the army as the country's only remaining unified institution and supporting it as a national duty.

Second, one should clearly state that the ongoing struggle makes civilian control and consolidated democracy highly unlikely. Civilian control might be achieved through and as an outcome of political struggles, as happened in Turkey. However, the ongoing security struggle, in which the army and other security institutions are depicted as being engaged in a sacred anti-terrorism mission as opposed to being weak civilian and political establishments, does not support any return to civilian control. Henceforth, negotiations are needed to calm the heated atmosphere so that a new scenario for civilian control can be formulated. In this context,

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one can suggest two broad scenarios under which civilian control could be achieved: (1) a sudden shift in the current political equation that would force Egypt's generals to leave politics immediately and focus on national security. For example, a military defeat or an economic disaster would make it very hard for the military to remain in politics, as would a third revolution that might force it out of power and (2) the army leaving politics after a prolonged process of self-learning that finally convinces it that the price of direct intervention in politics is too high to bear, whereas the country's civilians, politicians, scholars, and academicians manage to rebuild and consolidate democracy, all the while waiting for the right historical moment to assert their control over it. The first scenario is actually pretty unrealistic, for the army's historical discourse does not seem to support its retreat from politics after sudden changes in CMR equations. In fact, its deep relationship with all state institutions, including the bureaucracy, security, local governance, and media, have always enabled it to maneuver, change faces, and return to political power. The 1967 military defeat and the 2011 ouster of Mubarak are but some major examples in this regard. Under this scenario as well, there is more than one alternative to military rule. One must realize that civilian rule is not only the opposite of military rule, but also of religious rule, for forcing a particular religious platform or interpretation into the political sphere excludes other civilians from the political process.

The current discourse of many Islamist factions, among them Salafists and Jihadists, seeks to exclude all other citizens from governance and place the entire political process under the Sharia, which deprives millions of non-Muslims and those Muslims who do not agree with them of their political and civil rights. If these groups replaced the military rule, can one really call this civilian control? Thus a paradox emerges: does such a reality mean that we should exclude Islamists from the political process when the military is in power?

Given the above, the second scenario seems more achievable (and desirable) because it involves a prolonged process of negotiations and conditioned concordances during which civilians and politicians can consolidate their establishments and organizations. The army can also use this period to learn some harsh lessons by remaining in politics. This scenario may lead to a more solid and realistic form of civilian control. The following sections suggest policies for stakeholders who have an interest in civilian control, namely, civilians, politicians, scholars, Islamists, and

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international actors.

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