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The Army and Political Power in the Arab Context: Theoretical Problems

Azmi Bishara | Mar 2017

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Abstract

This study concerns the relationship between the army and politics, not as something wrong or a symptom of the Arab affliction, but as a product of historical stages, the nature of the Arab state and the process of its development, structure, and modernization. The study starts with 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 speeding up the transition from one stage to the next. 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 "revolution" and "coup" 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 law governing the relationship of the army and power, and its behavior in power, while it attempts to differentiate between the coup launched by the regime against the political process, and the coup launched by radicalized officers in the aim of reforming or changing the regime. Finally, there is an attempt to derive the main features in common to military coups.

Table of Contents

Introduction

It is difficult, if not impossible, to make generalizations across time and space about army and politics, that is, outside a specific historical context encompassing local history, culture, social structure, and other determinants. This study is an attempt 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 attempt aims to critique – critique here being a synonym for theory. Criticism is not based on what ought to be, but on what exists in the relationship between army and politics, not by describing it as wrong, or a symptom of the Arab affliction, but as the product of historical conditions, 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 obey orders in a hierarchy with a clear chain of command from the private to the high command, and which exists to defend the state, and may also intervene to preserve its internal stability.[2] By this I am not referring to irregular armed forces in the service of a belief, class, issue, or party. Equally, I do not intend the cohorts of knights who answer the call to military service, along with their soldiers, and join a military campaign at the request of the king or emperor, and usually administer a feudal estate or collect taxes for the sultan, though this arrangement was termed an army in the past. In this study, the term refers to the regular army of the state. In our times, this is usually associated with a reserve army, and if during wars or in emergencies it is reinforced by the draft or

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[2] 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.

other means, its core essentially remains the permanent regular forces made up of professional officers and soldiers subject to the command.

The first regular army in history may have been the Ottoman Janissaries.[3] 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 actually brought to special camps where they were given physical, military, and religious training, and educated in loyalty to the sultan. Some were trained to work in the sultan's administration and other facilities. 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. If we look at their training and shared life in the first centuries of the sultanate, we see something close to Plato's "guardians of the city" in his *Republic*.

Subsequently, during the phases of the sultanate's decline, the sultan's ownership of the Janissaries turned into the Janissaries' ownership of the sultan. Tracing this process in Ottoman history requires a study of its own, that intersects directly with the subject of this study, the army and politics. Notwithstanding, the roots of the army's—as an organized professional force—intervention in politics strike deep into Ottoman history. Since the sultanate created a professional army linked to the sultan, this can be viewed as the first organized and trained professional army in Europe. But as soon as there were signs of economic and political crisis, and once the Janissaries had taken root in Ottoman urban life, this army 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 a modern army in addition to themselves.

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[3] 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: Weidenfeld 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.

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 affairs of the Asitana increased whenever their fighting effectiveness declined, rendering them unable to fight enemies at vulnerable points and defend the sultanate, and whenever their commanders became greedier for a share of wealth. 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 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."[4] Subsequently, the name, or even description, Janissary, was applied to 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 and the capabilities 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."[5]

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[4] Al-Husari, pp. 47-8.

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

Sultan Mahmud II (1808-1839) was able to eliminate the leadership of the Janissaries in 1826,[6] and began to rebuild the army on contemporary modern – in fact Western – lines, following the French, and then Prussian, models. Mahmud II became the first Ottoman sultan with absolute powers: the army was subservient to him by virtue of a new system of obedience, and it did not interfere in his decisions. Once again, the army was under the direct authority of the sultan, not as a social class, 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 additional to the constraints imposed by other traditional institutions.

With the westernization of the army and its exposure to new cultural values, it became more politicized and ambitious for a reformist role in the state, particularly as it was highly 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 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 reconstructing the schools on a modern basis to meet the needs of building the army. Modern education also came into practice in the military colleges (naval, artillery, engineering), "because modern sciences – despite their different kinds – first entered the Ottoman realm through the military schools. 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."[7] 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 state as a result of World War I.

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

[7] Al-Husari, pp. 83-4.

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 with the Treaty of Lausanne (1923). The Arab military role that grew out of the incubator of the *tanzimat*-influenced Ottoman military institution (al-Ittihadiya) initially came to prominence with the Arab movement, 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 (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 descended from Turkman and Kurdish stock, yet it was Arabized in culture and language, and saw Arabism as a unifying identity.

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 same short 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, was a continuation of the liberation army.

The formation of 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. The Citadel Massacre occurred before the Massacre of the Janissaries. The Egyptian army was also influenced by French military technique in the early decades of the nineteenth century, before the Ottoman army. This is revealed in the success of the Egyptian army in the 1830s during the age of Mohammed Ali Pasha in occupying Syria. This was in addition to the continuous setbacks in the conflict with Russia, a factor in the acceleration of the development of the Ottoman army. The development of the Egyptian army was

checked, since from the Orabi revolution until 1952 it was constrained by the British protectorate and lost its connection with the army of Mohammed Ali.

2. 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 issues related to political, economic, and social stability, globally, regionally, and for the state. Even in its narrow sense, security is not separate from these issues. Therefore, the subject of the army and politics is a broad one. It exists in democratic and non-democratic states. However, we are interested in a specific case here--the army's political aspirations, in the narrow sense of wielding, seizing, or sharing power, or taking the decision about it.

It is well known that the army leadership in democratic states usually follows foreign and domestic political issues, so as to assess and predict political developments, and its specialist opinion on these issues may be sought. However, the military takes orders from elected institutions that represent the sovereignty of the state. The difference between the army and government is that the army serves the sovereignty of the state, regardless of who has been elected to rule, meaning that for the army, the government does not change with a change of ruling party.

The twentieth century saw extremely politicized, and even ideological, armies in undemocratic states, without those armies being in power, because they were led in the service of the ruling party, and embraced its doctrine, as was the case in the Soviet Union and the states of the socialist camp. Not all dictatorships are military dictatorships. True, the army in these cases was politicized, and even doctrinaire as it is put in our countries, but the goal of indoctrination of the army was not to rule, but to convince if of its role serving the one-party regime and its ideology. Party delegates were a way to make the army ideological from the lowest units to the high command (via the Soviet system of party commissars in the institutions and units of the army from top to bottom). These delegates were supposed to ensure the army's education, its ideological "purity", and its orthodoxy. Attempts to imitate this model were made in Cuba and other third-world states. The cases of Syria (since Salah Jadid) and Iraq (under Saddam Hussein) are examples from recent decades of the regime successfully politicizing the army. They copied the post of Soviet 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, while the role of military intelligence was

transformed from spying on the enemy to spying on the army and its officers in every unit.

In the two paradigmatic countries for military coups, Iraq and Syria, the military has not ruled the state in recent decades. The officers who undertook the last coups (1968 in Iraq, 1970 in Syria) made it a goal 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 regional 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 a network of corruption, smuggling, and so on.

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. When the president died, the army was the only institution able to impose its presidential candidate, Chadli Bendjedid (the highest ranked and most veteran figure). 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 armed the army like in modern states. He reconsidered the role of the Liberation Front (FLN) as a ruling party, and boosted its prestige. However, the army came back to power directly after the coup against the political opening up initiated by Chadli Bendjedid following the 1988 uprising in particular, and which began to slip out of the regime's control. The president was forced to resign, and the army assumed power in practice to deal with the effects of the political process and the state of social instability that ensued and led to a near civil war in the conflict with the Islamists. The army governed the country, switching from a presidential council with a nominal leadership of figures from the period of national struggle to a military presidency, albeit elected, in the form of Liamine Zéroual who launched the process of national dialogue,[8] after

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[8] And perhaps paid the price for this.

which emerged the need to summon a civilian leadership (Bouteflika) and hold elections. This civilian leadership, which enjoyed the legitimacy of the liberation movement (which the army had imposed in the elections) worked to rebuild the army and make it loyal.

In Egypt, after the July Revolution army officers ruled directly. With the attempt to build the presidency as the supreme state institution, above all others including the army, conflict developed with the free officer leader of the army, Abdel Hakim Amer. The conflict was not resolved in favor of the presidency, and along with it the officers in civilian clothing, until after the 1967 defeat, responsibility for which was assigned to Amer and his coterie in the army and intelligence. Anwar Sadat continued to strengthen the presidency and its powers at the expense of the army. He changed the army leadership in a frantic way 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 term has some significance, revealing that the country was at war at home and abroad. The reference now, however, was to the rebellion of the Central Security forces during the Hosni Mubarak era. Since Field-Marshal Abd al-Halim Abu Ghazala became Defense Minister (at the end of the Sadat era and during the Mubarak era), the army has obtained many privileges, including the right to have its own bank account separate from the government account, and involvement in economic, service, housing, and other activities, on the grounds that it was necessary to meet the needs of the army and its officers without being affected by Egypt's economic crises. This set the army above Egyptian society and its issues. These privileges multiplied under Mubarak and his Defense Minister Tantawi, becoming a form of economic and military autonomy for the armed forces. This resulted in the institution of a military community or officers' republic with a parallel economy and its own network of services. This is a highly specific Egyptian phenomenon.

The regimes in Iraq, Syria, and Egypt were not military regimes in the sense of military rule, and although Syria and Iraq went through a process of the militarization of the regime, that is different to military rule. The regime was a clique headed by a single ruler, 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, until the country shifted from the sovereignty of the

state to the sovereignty of the president, and then to a stage when the two were identical.

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 and tribal and geographical commonalities. In the wider circle we find businessmen, senior state and party bureaucrats, and beneficial cronies (usually benefitting too) 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 ruling 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 the change of faces and personalities, including the risk of real change, with the case of a president who does not change, even if the country is destroyed and the people emigrate or are killed. 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 (in every sense) on 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. Contrary to army rule at a particular stage in the history of Algeria, the prevalent tyrannical regime in Syria uses the army as a main instrument of oppression, but not the only one, since many security agencies are in action alongside it and independent of it, each surveilling the other and subject to the tyrant ruler[9] who leaves no outlet for the people, as represented by changing the president for example.

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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.

On Military Coups

A significant question has arisen about how, over recent decades, military coups have stopped occurring in states considered to be coup countries, such as Syria and Iraq. When the popular revolution erupted in Syria, a coup country in the past, there was no coup, and the army remained loyal to the regime, while being depleted by many individual defections, but without a vertical split of any kind within the same army.

Syrian citizens took to the streets after they had mustered their courage following the window of hope opened in Tunisia, Egypt, and the beginning of the revolution in Libya. They bared their chests to the army, and in return the defenders of the homeland opened fire on them. It was proved that the "home front", in the language of these regimes, is the only front they have prepared for. The army went onto a war footing against a large part of the people, and was thus turned into something akin to a militia in a civil war loyal to the regime. It is necessary to ask the simple question: Why?

Since the 1970s, it seems that Sudan is the only Arab state to have experienced a straightforward military coup (Bashir's coup). There is also Mauritania. This corresponds to the fact that the age of coups and tanks at dawn has ended in Syria, Iraq, Morocco, Egypt, Jordan, and elsewhere. It is also true for Yemen since Ali Abdullah Saleh took power. It is true for all states today, so how was it not true for Egypt? In a country that witnessed the exclusion of the army from politics and government in the Mubarak and Sadat periods, a military coup took place. Once again we must ask why. That is our second question.

In fact, the above generalization applies equally to Egypt. 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 to Muammar Gaddafi and Gaafar Nimeiry via the Syrian 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, in the context of the existing 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 seized leadership. This was a move undertaken by the army leadership itself to halt the political process and thereby defend the foundations of the existing political regime from its results and also

defend the privileges of the army itself which it had acquired under the wing of the regime. It was not a coup against the regime, but a coup by the military establishment from within the regime against the political process that the regime itself had been forced to launch following the crises of the mass popular movement in Algeria in 1988 and after the January 25 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 resigned – or was forced to resign – after the results of the first round of the December 1991 parliamentary elections were announced. 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 led to the near certainty of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) obtaining a legislative majority, based on the first round results.

The Egyptian coup presented another "surprise" to researchers: the use of intellectuals spouting about the democracy and liberalism of the coup. This was not out of fear or dissimulation, but as a means to promote and justify in what could be described as the intellectuals' betrayal of democracy. This is one of the gravest and clearest collective betrayals by intellectuals in the twentieth century, and the one with the most serious effects. (Recently perhaps, fear and dissimulation have replaced marketing and justification, once some of them realized the nature of the coup regime, which is oppressive and arrogant.) Something similar occurred in Algeria nearly three decades ago when modernist intellectuals gave their blessings to the abortion of the electoral process. The same issue keeps repeating, except it is the fear of the ruling and opposition elites of the rise of new forces with a new political and cultural discourse that might not change just the rulers but also the foundations of the regime and an entire way of life.[10]

There is no doubt that the upshot of all free Arab elections being military coups—since Sudan in 1989 and Algeria in 1991-1992—and the problem of the Islamists as a main political cultural force in Arab societies and their ambiguous relationship with democracy, and negative view of its principles, together represent two main dilemmas that should preoccupy us when seeking democratization in our region. I would add a

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[10] I have written about this subject and possible solutions elsewhere.

third dilemma: the division of the Arab political elites, and even societies, and the inability of existing state institutions to contain them in the case of a phase of liberation from dictatorship and authoritarian rule. Take for example three periods of relative democratic pluralism in Sudan since independence that failed to stabilize in the form of a coalition or something else ruling the country. Each of them was followed by a military coup supported by one or more political parties, and military rule (itself disrupted by attempted coups). In my 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 (South Sudan, Darfur, etc.) have also prevailed. In this case, the army seemed the force able to impose unity by force, and what is meant here is coercive unity from above, not unity and cohesion based on the legitimacy of the state and its institutions.

In this case, military rule seems able to impose the general on the particular, the national on the factional, and the state on conflicting groups. However, the Sudanese army itself was politicized and penetrated by modern communist, Islamist, and nationalist parties, or parties with sectarian depth in the Sudanese context, as demonstrated by the repeated coups, and was unable to impose a legitimate system of government enjoying the consent of the Sudanese.

In dealing with the July 3, 2013 coup in Egypt, we made the distinction between the coup by the army command—in fact the regime—against the process of change to make it fail, and the coup by usually middle-ranking offices within the army itself against the regime, including the high command of the military too. Because the issue revolves around military coups, it is important to define coup, which also makes it necessary to differentiate it from revolution.

It is in fact common in Arabic to use the word coup (*inqilab*) for military coups, even though in Persian and Turkish it applies to major popular movements to change the system of government, which is usually termed a revolution (*thawra*) in Arabic. Contrary to Persian and Turkish, *thawra*, and not *inqilab*, is the Arabic word for revolution. However, *inqilab* in Arabic can also mean something close to revolutionary change or transformation, for example *inqilab fikri/siysasi/thaqafi* (intellectual/political/cultural revolution).[11]

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

Apart from academic definitions, the word *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), *qawma* (insurgence, rising) and other terms. But in a technical sense it mostly means large-scale popular action to bring down the ruling regime. Mostly, we are not satisfied with the action itself, but consider the actual change of the regime as the completion or success of the revolution. Therefore, there is always a debate as to whether a large-scale popular movement to change the regime deserves to be called a revolution if it fails or is quashed and does not end in regime change. This is a source of considerable ambiguity. Some do not call popular uprisings a revolution unless it succeeds, while others do not call it a revolution unless it is controlled by a leadership with an ideology that imposes a defined picture of the regime after the revolution.

The military coup, on the other hand, comes from within the regime and usually from the most organized group in society, the armed forces. It usually ends in a change in ruler while keeping the regime, and its aim may essentially be to maintain the regime. There are cases, however, where the coup sets in motion a process of change whereby the coup authority allies with social sectors damaged by the regime to change the regime, and this in fact occurs.

Many coups have been painted with the term revolution whether or not they led to such change. Over the past five or six decades, the term revolution has generally acquired a positive sense, while coup has a negative connotation.

It is important to state here that from the perspective of democracy and democratization, it has not been proven that popular revolution is less effective in leading a society towards democracy than reforms from above, whether undertaken by a military leadership following a coup or a political leadership, or both of them together. From the perspective of democracy, revolutions are a major risk that may lead to anarchy or totalitarian regimes, and even if they end up with democracy, this is not a direct result of the revolution, but comes after a series of constitutional and legal reforms, and the dialogues and political bargaining that follow them. Revolutions change the regime, while reform builds democracy after taking power. This dichotomy is not always clear to revolutionaries. It is assumed that democratic revolutionaries possess a vision not just of the revolution but also the political reform process that comes after it.

Hence, and without meaning to praise or censure, we do not use the terms as value judgements when we distinguish between the military coup and the popular revolution.

13

What matters in this paper is to differentiate between the coup to change the leadership and preserve the regime and the coup that comes as part of a process of socio-political change.

From the First Coups to Radical Coups

The first military rule in modern times came with Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) who issued the decision to execute King Charles I in 1649, dissolved his own parliament, and became a "military dictator" in the words of Winston Churchill.[12] The most significant military coup in Europe was that of Napoleon against the power of the administration. This series continues with Mustafa Kamal Ataturk (who organized a military resistance movement against the occupying forces of the allies and the invading Greek forces who had landed in Izmir and headed inland, and who also clashed with the forces of the sultan who had submitted to them before and after the Treaty of Sèvres). 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 the role of Napoleon after the French Revolution and that of Ataturk after the failure of the programmatic pan-Turkic (Turanian) ideology of the Turkish nationalists, the defeat of the Unity and Progress government in World War I, and the loss of the empire. Let us not forget of course the two coups by the Committee of Unity and Progress, the first against Abdel Hamid II in 1908 to stop his authoritarianism and reinstate the constitution, and which became in effect regime change, that is the transformation of a coup into something akin to a revolution; and the second in 1912 against the decentralizing group (the Freedom and Accord Party) after they defeated Unity and Progress in parliament. The leaders of Unity and Progress surprised "the cabinet of ministers during its meeting at the Sublime Porte and killed the Minister of War and his contingent and forced the prime minister to resign.[13] They annulled the steps towards decentralization taken by the government in the provinces and restored the idea of centralization. This step gave birth to the Arab reaction to the rule that had swung towards Turkish centralization. Mustafa Kamal inherited the modernity and centralization of the *tanzimat*, but with a radical core to their comprehensive pan-Turkic nationalist ideology at the period of Unity and Progress

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

[13] Al-Husari, p. 121.

rule (1908-1918), with a transformation to building a nationalist Turkish state. The role of the tanzimat was highlighted in the strength of the Turkish military and in the impact of the administrative centralization of the Turkish state in Istanbul, to a higher degree than in the Ottoman countries in the Levant for example. The short Arab military experience during the rule of the Arab Kingdom of Syria did not have these statist traditions.

Armies generally intervened to lead the process of change at times of civil war and political instability. Although their coups at times led to a victory in a civil war, at other times they intervened on the grounds of preventing a civil war. This latter motivation sticks in the mind until our times. Samuel Fines has explained cases of intervention because of the vacuum arising from institutional weakness, the incapacity of politicians, and the combination of such circumstances with a political-intellectual leaning towards intervention on the part of the army (see his *The Man on Horseback*).[14] Many other theorists of modernization (from the 1950s to the 1970s) have explained that the army is the most modern and cohesive institution in the recently-independent third-world states, and accordingly, it is only natural for it at times to perform the role of creating stability and cohesion within society, and a revolutionary modernizing role at other times.[15]

The tendency to intervene has, in my opinion, been in existence since the formation of modern armies and their link with the idea of the state, since they appeared to represent the state as opposed to groups and classes, the one as opposed to the many, order as opposed to fragmentation, and the public interest as opposed to the partial interests of social and political forces. In addition, armies have strength. In fact, this may be true when it is the temporary task of the army to restore civil peace and then places itself at the service of the state once it has implemented it. Otherwise, there is a fine line between the army's claim that it represents the public good and its becoming the public good, between its claim to embody the state and its becoming the body of

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[14] 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.

[15] There are many examples, but if 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.

the state, and between the representation of national unity as opposed to plurality, or it becoming "the one and only".

The matter is closely bound up with the cohesion of the state, the unity of its makeup, and the plurality of its functions and institutions. The fragile, unstable state with weak institutions drives the army to embody the state from the outside to impose it by force.

The army is an organized armed force associated with the state, and it is correct to say that the natural thing is not the army's abstinence from power, but its interference, thereby mandating institutionalized arrangements to ensure its non-interference. It is the strong state with legitimate institutions that is able to set down such arrangements and able to forego violent coercion as the rule and, on the other hand, maintain its exclusive right to use violence. The issue of making the army subject to elected institutions preoccupies democracies, in theory and practice, whether in terms of educating the army and society, or in terms of setting out institutionalized constitutional and legal arrangements to ensure the non-intervention of the army in political conflicts and disputes in society and state and its loyalty to the elected government so that it carries out its decisions.

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 who obey the command of the rulers and not into rulers. Those who rule have a comprehensive vision of justice, and the public good (Plato calls them philosophers).

The action of the army rests in essence on a paradigm of strength (what the Arabs called *shawka*—valorous might). The components of this paradigm are force of arms and deterrence, organization, obedience, hierarchy, discrimination 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 for grounding an approach to the administration of state and society. It is not just a practical debate over the possibility of this, but also an ethical debate over values related to the position on humanity and human society.

In cases where state institutions are weak and fragile, civilian culture unstable and flawed, and the legitimacy of civilian institutions and parties shaky compared with the

army, then the army takes upon itself the task of preserving unity to the point of understanding that since the army represents the public good and works for the benefit of citizens, what need is there for dialogue and debate, opinions, parties, and institutions? Such a description can be read in Khaled Nezzar's description of Houari Boumedienne from a partisan position towards him: "Without being open about it, he thought that if everything was running for the happiness of the people, then what was left to discuss? […] Can we choose the style and method? The parliamentary game in western democracies is a reflection of the state of advance their societies are going through […] but the image of Algerian society does not warrant the comparison. […] The shortest path to success may be in restricting power, the struggle over which has come at a high price, to the hands of a competent team dedicated to the public interest."[16] We find something similar 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 bearing its legacy.[17] There are no grounds for comparison between Algerian society after independence and Turkish society, which was never colonized, nor between their two elites.

The problem that is highlighted in the Arab context and that must be addressed by any investigation into the army and politics, is that armies in some cases reflect a unity based on discrimination between the components and elements of society, because the chain of command in them may rest on partisan loyalties.[18] In that case, the army's imposition of national unity on society becomes an imposition of a specific partisan rule, meaning a unity subservient to it. There are important examples of this in many Arab armies from Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and even Mauritania.[19]

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

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

[18] 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.

[19] 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

The first coup in the history of the new Arab military following the collapse of the Ottoman state and the creation of a system of (politically) independent states (by virtue of treaties) or states under protectorates or mandates in the region is connected with the Iraqi military. It is the coup of Lieutenant-General Bakr Sidqi (1936) which received backing from a Fabian group of the Iraqi intelligentsia, the Ahali Association.[20] He was even supported by *Al-Inqilab* newspaper, edited by the poet Mohammed Mahdi Al-Jawahiri and dominated by the communists. Under the command of Bakr Sidqi the army had already undergone politicization. He had put down the tribal revolts[21] in the Middle Euphrates region at the beginning of the 1930s and crushed the Assyrian uprising in 1933, which led to the modern settlement of Assyrians in the Syrian Euphrates by virtue of Anglo-French agreements. True, the monarchy did not understand the ethnic and cultural diversity of Iraq early enough it seems, no easy matter in any case, but the fact is that the conflict between the state and nomadism in Iraq had been going on for decades, centuries even. The matter was not just related to the Arab nationalists, in their royalist and right- and left-wing republican forms, and their unwillingness to accept multiple loyalties, but to the relationship of state and society generally. I mean any modern state in a society where tribalism remains a powerful force generating centrifugal loyalties, including opposition to military service in a regular army. This was at the stage when British policy favored tribal leaders and allowed them to keep hold of their weapons, 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 in reality became feudal lords. The army was unable to confront the incursions of

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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.

[20] 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.

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

the Wahhabi brothers launched from Najd to attack southern Iraq in 1922, 1924, and 1927-8.[22] Equally, the army sought by Faisal as the melting pot of Iraqi national identity was soon afflicted by internal conflicts after independence.

Bakr Sidqi, the leader of the coup and the strongman in Iraq, was of Kurdish descent, which is evidence for the assimilation prevalent at that time on the level of the state apparatus and the culture of the political and military elite. The status of the state itself, however, had not yet stabilized in terms of its historical legitimacy and its relationship with society, or even the societies from which it was composed, and which were not bound together by the ties of the nation state. That is true for Iraq and the states of the Arab Mashreq in general, Libya, Algeria, Sudan, and others. 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 clash with the uprising of the Assyrians, who rejected absorption into Iraq (because Iraqi independence and League of Nations' recognition in 1932 did not include Britain's previous promises to them. Before Iraq joined the League of Nations, Assyrians enlisted in the British army, and enjoyed special units that formed a key component in what was known as the levy or the Orient Units, which had a French counterpart in Syria and Lebanon known as the Levant Battalions) undoubtedly had a major effect in the construction and attitudes of the Iraqi state. The British used a large unit from the Orient Brigades, the Iraqi Contingent, to defend their military facilities and suppress the Kurds.[23] Bakr Sidqi's suppression of the Assyrians paved the way for him to the first military coup in the Arab world in November 1936.

The government of Hikmat Sulayman, who supported the coup, adopted positions opposed to those of the previous government headed by Yasin al-Hashimi. As for the

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

[23] They played a role in the suppression of the 1920 Revolution. They also rejected their new situation as Iraqi citizens after the war once their return to Turkey had become impossible. Historically, the Assyrian community settled in eastern Turkey, north-western Iran, and northern Iraq. The Arabs and Kurds had a unified view of the Assyrians as a British protectorate not subject to the control of the state. Their salaries in the British army were double that of the Arab army. See: Mohammad A. Tarbush, *The Role of the Military in Politics: A Case Study of Iraq to 1941*, (London: Keagan Paul, 1982).

leftist Ahali Association, their hopes had been dashed because the coup government did not implement the needed social reforms and did not hold democratic elections as it had promised. This disappointment was repeated subsequently regarding the expectations of the Communist Party for the July 14 coup, even though it backed it till the end. 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 it conditional on Abdul Karim Kassem holding elections, which he failed to do.

In the 1936 coup we find some of the core components of what would subsequently become repeated patterns in Arab coups. These include mounting the coup on the pretext of regime failure to maintain stability, fighting the corruption of the political parties and politicians, and the promise of free elections and a civilian government followed by the institution of an oppressive military regime. The relationship with the Iraqi military of an Arab nationalist tenor would emerge during the mobilization of Rashid Ali al-Kaylani supported by the Secret Arab Movement, which was made up of Arab nationalist elites working in an overlapping fashion.[24] It relied on army officers, the four lieutenant-colonels who were designated the "golden square". This movement came about because of the repercussions of World War II and the emergence of the possibility of entering an international alliance against Britain.

At this period, the line between coup and revolution was effaced in the political culture of the middle classes in general, the politicized intellectuals, those involved in parties or close to them, and youth and student movements. Critical political culture became more coup-oriented and populist than democratic, and the left were subsequently attracted to it. Coup thinking exploited the flaws in the fragile liberal model to bring down the regime and not to implement democracy or to work for it. These trends had started to crystallize since the 1930s which were a time of the general ebbing of the geographic scope of democracy around the world, as a result of the rise of patriotic, nationalist, socialist, fascist, and Nazi currents in Europe. In the Arab region movements of youth in colored shirts spread, and this even affected the major liberal parties like the Wafd (the

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[24] 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.

blue shirts) and the National Bloc in Syria (the iron shirts). The Muslim Brotherhood were not uninfluenced by this atmosphere, and formed "mobile teams" [*Jawwalah*]. There were also the League of National Work, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, and Masr al-Fatah (the socialist party). To absorb the military leanings of youth, governments included the paramilitary subject of chivalry [*futuwa*] and its system on the school curriculum.

Subsequently, there was a merging of the idea of the coup and the revolution, or an interpretation of the coup as revolution. Coups were understood as the prelude to the process of socio-economic change (revolution). This happened first with the July coup in Egypt, then with the Baath coups in Syria and Iraq, and to a large extent with the July 14 coup, which called itself a revolution from the outset.

The relationship between the new military after the nakba and coups cannot be understood in isolation from an understanding of the structural flaws in the fragile and elitist form of Arab liberalism that had started to open up to some extent to representatives of new social forces from the emerging middle class. Other factors, however, determined its final outcome. These included the dominance of members of the upper classes, the discrepancy between the duties of members of parliament and their socioeconomic interests, particular the large landowners, the rigging of elections and manipulation of the results, not adhering to the electoral majority to form Egyptian governments (and the precedent of amending the constitution to allow Shukri al-Quwatli to serve a second term when the elections were flagrantly rigged; a relative exception were the 1954 Syrian general elections), and more seriously, the inability of parliaments and the liberal system to solve the real objective social problem of the peasants, when the problem was a major item on all their agendas, including the Egyptian parliament before July 1952, and lastly the failure to confront the Zionist project in Palestine.

What the liberal elites were unable to solve on the level of the agrarian question, the officers solved by immediate "revolutionary" decisions. The historical transformation of bringing peasant farmers and ordinary people into the major social transformation in societies where peasants make up the majority of the population and where agriculture represents a main source of income was brought about. With the inflow of peasants and the middle classes into the army, a major change happened in the balance of power in society, and the nature of the governing forces gradually changed.

The liberal parties were sympathetic with the army mobilizations against the monarchies in Egypt and Iraq and were optimistic about them to begin with, although these hopes were soon dissipated. In Syria, all the political forces, including liberal ones, and the Masonic Lodges of the Levant were involved in the early coups, building up hopes for the modernizing role of the officers. Of the same model is the People's Party and the second coup in Syria, that is the coup of Colonel Sami al-Hinnawi.[25] The liberal and modern enlightenment parties influenced by western culture expected that the army would undertake a rapid modernizing role to leap forward in overcoming the forces of backwardness and reaction. Hinnawi did that in his own way, however, including struggles among the officers over power, and he turned against the forces that had counted on his role.

I think that the model of Ataturk was present in terms of the confidence in the army's ability to lead a backward society where traditional culture prevailed and where freedom without modern traditions would lead to anarchy. The army in the view of these forces was able to accelerate the process of society's transition to modernity without the state of anarchy that premature democracy might cause in societies unprepared for it. We can note the return of this kind of thinking after the Arab revolutions of 2011.

After the 2011 revolutions, another thing was prominent: middle-class fear, not of instability, but of their way of life from Islamist dominance. This fear in itself pushed them to bet on the old regime and the army, although they were the class supposed to bet on it as the basis for the process of democratic transition.

The coups of radical junior officers influenced by ideologies ushered in by the July 23, 1952 coup were linked with the crisis and fragility of the liberal period, the inability of the multiparty system to agree upon the national ceiling of demands connected to the nature of the country and the system of government in order for pluralism to operate in a framework of constitutional agreement, the inability to solve the agrarian problem and the issue of the peasant farmers, and the failure in the confrontation with Zionist

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[25] 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.

colonization in Palestine which was revealed in the 1948 defeat. The problem was that even in the case of real sincerity about the issue of building the nation state and modernization, as was the case with Abdel Nasser and Houari Boumediene, it was difficult to bridge the divide between aspirations and reality, between the unlimited scale of the goals and the level of the leader and his effectiveness and abilities which are limited for all people, between his real popularity and his representation of the public and his annoyance at any rival, between the proclaimed unity and individual tendencies and disputes like populist leanings, ostentation, the personality cult, doubts about "comrades", and the nursing of grudges for long periods for all of them.[26]

It is difficult to arrive at a theoretical law that fixes the relationship of the army with power and its behavior in power. Armies differ according to the historical period, the degree of development in society, the prevailing beliefs, the social structure of the army, and other factors. Despite the admiration of the likes of Bakr Sidqi and Husni al-Za'im, and even Abdel Nasser and Abdel Karim Kassem, and before him albeit to a lesser degree, Adib al-Shishakli, for the model and traditions of Ataturk in some things, the difference is vast between the leaders of the army leading a military campaign against occupation and founding a modern republic based on emerging modern elites within the same regime as was the case of Ataturk, and another made up of middle-and lower-ranking radical officers in their coup against the monarchy, and then in a series of arguments and rivalries over leadership and the presidency.

There are however common features, which while I do not believe reach the level of a law or complete theory, I will deal with below:

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

The army is a modern institution in terms of being established for a purpose, the rationality of the relationship between the means and the end, the administration of

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[26] 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.

complex systems, the drawing up of strategies, the supply of armaments, adherence to discipline and hierarchy, and others. It also officially performs a role that is supposed to be patriotic by virtue of its definition as defending the nation. 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. It is also the most modern in terms of its relationship with the two concepts nation and state. Previously, I used the phrase "embodying the state outside of society" in states whose unity does not rest upon the relationship between society and modern institutions. Equally, in the case of states with a variety of identities, the army enjoys prestige because it speaks to patriotic feelings and stands for sovereignty, and with its uniform and ceremony represents the glory and pride of the nation. Its historical sources range from the remnants of the mandate army in the case of Syria, to the remnants of the Ottoman army, the mandate army, and the officers of the Arab revolt in the cases of Iraq and Jordan, and patriotic roles in cases of rebellion against the diktat of the English in the case of Egypt. In Algeria, the liberation army turned into a national army, and it seems that it set up the state, in contradistinction to the other states above where the state set up an army. In all these cases, the military was the institution most able to take organized action during social conflicts and crises, and even natural disasters.

Furthermore, the military in developing and recently-independent states became the main avenue for the sons of peasant farmers and craftsmen to climb up the social scale. Previously, traditional structures and their culture determined the course of their lives and fixed their fates in advance and prevented them from changing their socioeconomic status. The effective action of the structures of the modern state was also in practice restricted to cities which were dominated by the old classes of nobles, the merchant bourgeoisie and the new middle classes that the sons of peasant farmers rarely infiltrated by means of education or otherwise. Education was not accessible for all. Military service during the colonial or mandate period opened up access to the officers corps and it became a means for social advancement that the sons of the poor and the middle classes were able to make use of, particularly after the national military academies opened their doors to such groups. For example, in 1936 El-Nahhas Pasha used the military obligations imposed on Egypt by the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty as a justification for opening the doors of the Military College to petty officers among middle class citizens, at a time when enrolment was limited to the sons of property owners and

the Egyptian landed aristocracy, who exclusively made up the officer class.[27] Among the graduates were Abdel Nasser and his generation who were subsequently organized in a secret group, the Free Officers, that aimed to mount their coup, that was termed at the time, "the army movement". With the development of the structure of the state, and with it the civil service in the big cities and towns, and the development of a system of services and education, the middle class expanded. The number of the sons of the middle class who enrolled at the Military College in Egypt increased, and they formed a greater proportion of the officer class.[28] Something similar happened in most of the Arab states at various times.

After Adib al-Shishakli appointed Akram al-Hourani, the populist socialist who was aligned with the peasant farmers and whose party was distinct in taking on their issue, as minister of defense, al-Hourani opened the doors of the Military College to the sons of peasant farmers in particular. Officers such as Hafez al-Assad were graduates. It is even possible to say that the Syrian coup officers in general during the period starting in the mid-1950s were graduates of the 1950-1952 cohorts. This is the generation of the sons of the lower middle classes influences by nationalist, leftist, or Islamist ideologies who mounted military coups in the 1950s and 1960s until 1970. In fact, they were the product of that period of political, social, and ideological ferment. These phenomena came to an end under their rule which did not create a generation like theirs. It can be said that some of them were intellectuals or a kind of intelligentsia in uniform, like the type of the most famous coup officer in modern Syrian military history from 1949-1969, Mohammed Umran, later head of the military committee of the Baath.

Perhaps some young people, until our own day, enter the Arab armies for socioeconomic advancement, but the number of non-military fields open to them has increased. Ideological motivations have faded considerably, and all the states have become keen to select elements aligned with the regime, or at least non-politicized elements, for the officer corps.

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[27] 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.

[28] 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.

In Syria, the army of independent Syria did not emerge out of a vacuum. Rather, the nation state after the Evacuation (April 17, 1946) inherited the *Jaysh al-sharq* (Orient Army) composed of Syrian soldiers and officers from the French Forces. The Syrian contingent in armed units was around 17,000 men, while the Lebanese contingent totaled 7,000.[29] However, the Syrian Ministry of Defense shrunk the size of the army in mid-1948 to around only 7,000 men,[30] on the grounds of disbanding "the discriminatory blocs" within it.[31] The process of the nation state inheriting the *Jaysh al-sharq* led to the appearance of discrimination between officers of the Syrian army and officers of the French army (meaning Syrian officers who had been in the army that the Syrian government took over from the French). The first officers of the Syrian army graduated from the Homs military school in 1945, and in their circles spread new political and ideological ideas, such as those of the left and Arab nationalism. Their propensity to become ideological grew with the frustrating experience many of them had in the Palestine war and with the birth of the first movements for military coups. A similar situation applied to the leadership of the coups in Egypt and Iraq. The officers of the French army were not a homogeneous bloc, rather, some of them were close to the new officers, prominent among them Adib al-Shishakli, who was in alliance until 1952 with Akram al-Hourani, leader of the Youth Party, and later on one of the three historical leaders of the Arab Socialist Baath Party. During that alliance was born the first clandestine ideological military organization within the army, which in that sense was a 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 Sunni and Arab, and break up Kurdish influence within it. However, his actual measures were partial, and covered Christians more than others. This conflicted with the tendency of Akram al-Hourani, a son of Hama, to open the army up to the sons of peasant farmers, including many Alawites. Because of the short period of al-Shishakli's rule, he

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

[30] 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.

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

was unable to continue this policy. The first coup took the Syrian army into the period of politicization. It came out of the barracks and never went back.[32]

In Iraq, the officers who mounted the revolution of July 14, 1958 held the rank of colonel or lieutenant-colonel, with the exception of Mohammed al-Sabie,[33] who was an air force major. The highest-ranked of them was Abdel Karim Kassem, a brigadier. Of the Free Officers, apart from Naji Taleb, all came from poor families, that is the only one of them who was the son of a landowner and member of parliament, was Naji Taleb, a Shia. All of them were educated in secondary school or military school inside Iraq or abroad. Many of the officers in sub organizations of the Free Officers and who participated in their cells were Shia, and were affiliated for nationalist motives.[34] The Free Officers were affected by two major events: the 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 Egyptian Revolution mounted by officers like themselves. It is instructive to examine historian Majid Khadduri's description of the experience of Abdel Karim Kassem at the military college because he depicts the military as a means of social advance for the sons of the poor classes. Courage and discipline were the two criteria that counted, not social status or family background. Kassem was freed from reliance on the support of a poor father, because the military college provided students with food and clothing. "Most of the students at the college were from relatively poor families, because the sons of the well-off preferred to study abroad or enroll at the colleges of law or medicine in Baghdad."[35] This biography can be followed until the experience of the 1948 war and its effect on his political education and his position on the existing regime. The same applies to Abdel Nasser and others.

The political awareness of officers who launched the first military coups was the outcome of those years of political, intellectual, and national ferment at a period

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[32] 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.

[33] 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.

[34] 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.

[35] Ibid., p. 108.

marked by relative pluralism under the mandate and the prominence of conservative liberal or conservative elites from the nobility on the political scene. There was also an exposure to the effect of the defeat of the Arab states in the 1948 war in that atmosphere. These officers diagnosed the reasons for this defeat, and that together with their responses to it intersected with their position on the existing socioeconomic situation. It is rare for the memoires or biographies of this generation of disgruntled officers in revolt at the Arab condition not to mention the effect of the shock of 1948 on them, whether they participated in the fighting in Palestine or not.

The subsequent development was linked to many factors including the abilities of the prominent figure of that generation who became president or leader to propose a real political project, his ability to resolve the struggle over influence among his fellow offices, because the figure who dominated and settled the matter in the end established an anti-pluralistic regime that curtailed freedom of expression and associations and others. The political life that had produced their generation of politicians, intellectuals, and soldiers was stifled.

The stifling of public political life that stopped producing ideological and politicized officers is one of the main reasons why coups of the kind witnessed before the 1970s no longer occur. That is just one of many other reasons including the stability of the structure of the regime after the struggle for power had been settled, the creation of a relatively large regular army, the foundation of military intelligence to spy on officers and army units,[36] the creation of private armies (like the Republican Guard and the Defense Brigades) and others. There is also the role of the revolution in oil prices in the second half of the 1970s in the construction of large armies that were difficult to mobilize for a coup, and also to the achievement of stability in the republics. In this fashion the phenomena of the military coup halted at the beginning of the 1970s.

2. The Fraternity of Comrades in Arms

Generally, among officers, especially in fighting units, and among graduates of the same class at military colleges, there develops a comradeship akin to student

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[36] 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 Boumediene). 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.

brotherhoods at universities in the past or the *khasdashiya* order of the Mameluke army. This comradeship turns into a sort of personal loyalty to the group or comrades in arms including the group of classmates. This makes it easier to recruit them in the planning for a mobilization or coup. These relationships prevail in armed militias, secret movements, and military colleges, and are subsequently weakened in regular armies, since it is assumed that the organizational structure and hierarchy will overcome them and cause them to break up. However, they remain in existence, particularly in fighting units, since soldiers and officers go through an intense shared experience of arduous training and maneuvers, and battle itself. In such an atmosphere, officers' names are shortened or they are given nicknames.

These bonds have a significant effect on the motivations of fighters, because a sense of belonging strengthens the willingness for self-sacrifice. A soldier is not usually willing to die for the abstract idea of the nation, but is willing to die before his comrade sitting next to him in a military vehicle or plane, or lying nearby in the trenches. He is also concerned by the image he projects to his comrades and their opinion of him. Yet this same camaraderie often drives soldiers to cover up crimes committed by individuals or a group of them. This may conceal massacres, murder, and rape, even when they are being investigated, and which will remain unknown until the conscience of one of them is awakened.

During coups and their preparation, such a brotherhood or band of comrades is also formed. A military coup is a true shared dramatic experience which reveals the strong and weak points of every person involved. This group or clique soon turns into a headache for any leadership, because the intimate group creates feelings of fellowship, permits for free and frank expression within it, and encourages a rejection of the idea of an absolute leader. The first among them is a first among equals. Therefore, military councils are the only organizational revolutionary councils where voting is respected. But as soon as a hierarchy is established after the coup, feelings of jealousy and envy gnaw at the group, leading as far as hatreds and mutual suspicions, with a possibility of all of them aspiring to lead.

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 that an individual feels is his due. Mostly, this is explained as conflicts between left and right, nationalist and Islamist, etc. While those factors are not absent, conflicts mostly revolved around power, the presidency, influence, prestige, and status, and sometimes around working

methods and styles, even if dressed up with ideological pretensions of left and right. This has also often led officers to ally with neighboring adversary states, such as Egypt and Libya in the case of Sudan, and Iraq and Syria in the cases of the conflicts of officers in the two countries. Such conflict between ambitious coup officers was a main preoccupation of military regimes. Take for example the conflict between Abdel Karim Kassem, Abdel Wahhab al-Shawwaf, and Abdel Salam Arif, or the conflict between Gamal Abdel 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 who left the French army and joined the army of Algeria's western borders after the other brigades of the revolution had refused to accept them.

These conflicts are a very significant factor in instability. They may end up with the exclusion of opponents or their appointment as a foreign ambassador or marginalization in a government job, or they might end up in prison for life or executed. In many cases, these painful conflicts have encouraged unpatriotic alliances with foreign powers for the purposes of revenge. However, these conflicts within the clique of offices, the inability to institutionalize them, and their unofficial continuation in spite of the establishment of institutions, had a main role in the instability that accompanied the first stages of military coups.

3. Party and Ideological Conflicts

Over the stages of the politicization of Arab societies, particularly the first liberal period after colonialism that heaved with ideological parties, local political currents, and those influenced by the ideas and struggles circulating globally: communism, nationalism, fascism, and others, we find that officers were divided between these currents, just as the elites in general were. However, their divisions varied in degree: in Syria and Iraq, conflicts were more intense than in Egypt. Once Abdel Nasser had finished off the left (Youssef Seddik first, then Khaled Mohieddin) and resolved the conflict with the Islamist trend, the officers were not committed to a specific ideology other than Egyptian nationalism that took on an Arab-nationalist, socialist, and third-word ideological hue in the context of these three elements of the philosophy of the revolution supporting state intervention in the economy. It can be said that apart from the case of the Baath, the officers marginalized party ideologies, and even the parties that supported them (the Communist Party in the cases of Abdel Karim Kassem and Gaafar Nimeiry, the left and

the Islamists in the case of Abdel Nasser) and adopted a patriotic position with an Arab-nationalist dimension and a modernizing slant based on state intervention in the economy, considered socialist. The radical generation of officers plunged into a conflict that was frequently over principles, but the phenomenon of the military in politics generally ended up with the adoption of a pragmatic position directed to preserve power in light of the domestic social, regional, and international balances.

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 the officers who ruled for a long period 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 the main factor was keeping power.

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 in essence a pragmatic debate.

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 an Iraqi nationalism. The nationalism of Abdel Wahhab Shawwaf was tainted with a Marxist hue according to Majid Khadduri.[37] The July 14 officers were Sunnis apart from the two Shias Naji Taleb and Muhsin Hussein al-Habib. Abdel Karim Kassem's mother was Shia, "although he

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[37] Khadduri, *Republican Iraq.*

never gave any sign in public life indicating any Shia leanings."[38] The Shia factor did not play a role in his positions, although his alliance in power with the Communist Party established a Shiite social base for him. Equally, the Arab nationalism with an Islamic tinge of Abdel Salam Arif played a role in portraying the matter differently later on. The process of the Baathification of the army began after the Baath coup against Abdel Rahman Arif in 1968. From the memoires of Abdel Wahhab al-Amin in particular it seems that the July 14 group really believed in parliamentary democracy, and the need to transition to it after ending the monarchy and establishing a provisional civilian government.[39] They also supported a policy of non-alignment abroad, and in fact were somewhat similar to the Free Officers in Egypt, whether in terms of their faith (or to be accurate their pretended faith) in democracy or in terms of their subsequent disavowal of it. The officers did not have a defined ideology. Some were influence 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).[40] Wasfi Taher and Ismail Ali[41] were close to the communists and intermediaries between them and Abdel Karim Kassem. Saleh Mahdi Ammash was influenced by the idea of the Baath.[42] 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 Arif.

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[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

[40] 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).

[41] 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.

[42] Ibid., pp.. For more details, see also pp..

In Syria, from the coup of Adib al-Shishakli through until the Baathification of the army, the officers who formed the Shishakli-Hourani alliance were divided into two major blocs: the liberationists (named after the Arab Liberation Movement founded by al-Shishakli) and the socialists (of whom al-Hourani was the most prominent). To the latter should be added the military wing of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Ghassan Jadid and the group of officers influenced by the Syrian Communist Party. A third large group emerged that was more of a professional military nature than the others. This was the Syrian 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). At that period there was also a conflict between the elites who supported Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and those whose supported Iraq. This division had some involvement with the conflicts within the military throughout the period until Baath rule.

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 principle of Abdel Nasser to remove the army from partisanship and political activity. However, as soon as Abdel Nasser had started to dismantle these blocs and transfer their figureheads to civilian posts, or other posts in the 2nd Army in Egypt, then they reformed against him. The Syrian Officers bloc remained unified because of its professionalism and non-partisan character, and Abdel Nasser relied upon it. However, it was from that bloc that emerged the group of officers who launched the movement for secession on September 28, 1961. This group was not able to dissolve the organization of Baathist officers, whose major bloc in Egypt during the Union was the secret Arab Committee, most of whose founders were from the Alawite and Ismaili communities. We point this out, although at the time sectarian factors had no active tangible importance in the formation of this bloc. Rather, the split was over issues of power and politics in the Cold War era. This matter would, however, have significance in the future of Syria with the reliance of officers on regional loyalties for enlistment in the service of struggles over influence within the army, but not for specific sectarian motives. Rivalry pushed officers to mobilize personal loyalty to them any way they could. This approach ended up with sectarian splits between rulers and ruled in Syria

after the Baath officers came to power in Syria following a series of purges amongst themselves.[43]

After World War II, especially in the period when the Cold War was heating up in the 1950s, armies were politicized. 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 instituted. However, they did not go back to the barracks, rather the struggles of military-political institutions reproduced their internal coups and they accused conventional politicians of being responsible for the nakba and internal political and social corruption. All the political parties had military organizations in the army after the spread, success, and transformations of the model of the Free Officers, including 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 who did not have military organizations had officers close to them, like the People's Party and the National Party in Syria, the Independence Party in Iraq, and the National Democratic Party, where a kind of relationship existed but not membership for some secessionist and Brotherhood officers.

Military wings were set up by the ideological parties operating within the army, chief among them the Baath organization following the July 14, 1958 coup in particular.[44] 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.

Patriotic organizations of Free Officers were common in the Arab armies in the Mashreq and went as far as Yemen. They had ideological characteristics that the Baathists and Communists would develop into doctrinal ones. Baathist theoreticians, especially Yasin al-Hafez after the movement/coup of March 8. 1964, developed the concept of coup into revolution, which al-Shishakli had expressed at the beginning of the 1950s: doctrinaire coup-minded officers trying to ally with the movements of the workers,

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

[44] 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.

peasant-farmers, and intellectuals. The Baath Party officially embraced the ideas of al-Hafez by adopting his text "*Some theoretical groundings*". The transformations in the relationship between the new military, descended from the sons of peasant-farmers and the middle classes, and the outputs of the expanded education system, and political thought came through a redefinition of the concept of nation and the adoption of a theory of organic correlation between national (unifying) struggle and socialist class struggle.[45]

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 cause 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-Za'im 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 al-Za'im, in defiance of the former patriotic bloc. It is preferable to distinguish between Baathist and Nasserite party-political Arab nationalism and their theoreticians and the first non-party generation of Arab nationalists who, if they spoke about a coup (*inqilab*), meant an intellectual revolution (*inqilab*) to transform the people into a nation, and modernization to prepare the Arab societies and states to absorb

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[45] 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.

modern science in the economy, rationality in state administration, and 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 this and that.

4. International Stakes on the Army in Politics

With the expansion of the Soviet Union after World War II and the defeat of Nazism, and given the attraction of its development model, 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 states. At that precise moment, the traditional forces that had been relied upon by the French and the British in the Third World and the Arab world were weakening, and in the recently-independent states new forces were emerging that attracted the attention of American policy. Armies stood out among them as an organized force at the time. 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, officers would be qualified to solve the agrarian question, thereby foiling the chances for Soviet expansion in the name of peasant grievances, 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 period, the American administration tended to support agrarian reform. It aspired to set up modernizing anti-communist regimes, and it was mighty fine for them to be independent of the British and French too. The major hurdles officers' regimes, from al-Shishakli to Abdel 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 negative position of Israel towards support for regimes like that of Abdel 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 was interested in the modernization of Egypt to confront the risk of growth of communism in the East because of the underdevelopment of agrarian relations and the resentment of peasant-farmers, as had happened in China and other Asian countries. The US believed in the ability of the army to play a role to thwart any repetition of events in 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*.[46] (Al-Shishakli was the first to try to apply a program of agrarian reform at the beginning of 1952, before Abdel 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.[47] In August 1952, the State Department cabled the Embassy in Cairo to inform the new leadership that America was willing to support agrarian reform. Researchers have found testimony to the American position against Mohammed Naguib's call for pluralist democracy (despite his opportunistic motivations following his failure to monopolize power), because that contained unquantifiable risks. Dealing with an organized group of officers was easier[48] than dealing with elected parliaments.

Relationships had developed between some officers and Kermit Roosevelt, the US intelligence envoy to the Arab region, which included Iran, Syria, and Egypt. 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.[49] As to

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

[47] Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, p. 474.

[48] 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.

[49] 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-

whether the US Embassy knew the date of the coup, sufficient material has already been published on the matter.

In the depths of the Cold War, the Soviets, who as part of their ideological heritage rejected military coups, backed them, provided they ushered in regimes who allied with them. 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 in 1952 in changing the regime in Egypt, even if in opposition to the communists, the Soviets began to support the coup approach and backed the July 14 coup in Iraq, and in a certain sense created its political party.[50] 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 fell victim on a number of occasions to the illusion that officers mount coups to serve them. It has become clear that officers only rarely give up power in favor of a political party.

What usually occurred was that the officers took off their military uniforms and put on suits, since they were taking on government positions in a civilian capacity. Ataturk did

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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."

[50] 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..

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.[51] This is totally different from the actions of Hafez al-Assad and his comrades, and Gamal Abdel Nasser and his comrades after they reached power, although the result, military men in civilian clothing, looks the same.

Civilian clothing does not actually make a civilian government. It usually rules with imperative language that becomes laws, and brooks no opposition, since it views any opposition to it as a position against the nation and the state. This is the origin of calling the opposition in such regimes traitors. In the military mind it is not the opposition of a party out of power to another party in power, because the military is not a party among others. Therefore, opposition to them is a hostile position against the state and nation. This is the self-perception of the military, even after it has put on civilian clothes.

This problem is repeated in the case of forces that do not govern in their capacity as parties with a platform derived from a specific idea, as opposed to other parties with a different program. 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 propagate the understanding that any disagreement with them is a position that goes beyond disagreement with their policy positions to represent antagonism to the nation or religion. At this point accusations of treason and apostasy meet.

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 through the "national guard", then by subjecting promotion through the membership ranks from supporter to active member to the condition of having received military training, which

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[51] Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, p. 248.

was termed guerrilla training and then training for warfare at the front. This militarization stopped during the 1970s and came back again in 1980 with the formation of armed units in community and party organizations, and the militarization of the youth organization on 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 scale. 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 has opened its doors to these groups. We should not forget that the relatively high proportion of those descended from these groups did not change the fact that the army was the most powerful and modern organization in the state after independence. However, the Baath Party's monopolization of power and curtailment of freedoms, including freedom of expression and political organization, ultimately led to the Party's reliance on security and its social environment to secure manpower for itself, and the shrinking ability of other social and political groups to have political influence. This contributed to the increase in the strength of social loyalties based on security, including Alawite sectarian ties in the case of Syria. The most important effect, however, was the officers' control over the Baath Party, then over power in general after the decisive battles that were settled within the army and within the Party.[52]

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 this 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-

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[52] See: Bishara, *Syria's Via Dolorosa towards Freedom*.

General Abdel Rahman Suwar al-Dahab after the April 1985 uprising in Sudan. It has emerged that his coup took place in coordination with the leaders of the uprising and the parties. 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. Arab public opinion feted him for that reason. 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, be it in uniform 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 tremor of history, the coup returned to its usual rule.

Recently, in 2011, the movement by 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 estimations of the motivations for the army's having at a certain point (after the "Battle of the Camel") taken a neutral stance between the regime and the people. Without doubt, there were moments when the army recognized the strength of the demand for democracy, and the idea of getting rid of Mubarak and ending the process of his son inheriting power occurred to them. 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 leaving disagreement to other less significant demands.

When the chance arose, the army came back and exploited the inability of the political forces to disagree under the ceiling of democratically elected institutions and the attempts by a number of them to swing the army over to its side. In fact, the army took advantage of all of them to become the one institution that political forces who could not agree about anything else 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 the political forces which were in flux and unable to agree. All of them resorted to the army to bring it over to its side. The army made its move after the masses had moved to ask the army to act.

In my opinion, the July 2013 coup in Egypt, which was a turning point in the history of the Arab Revolution for Democracy, resembles the coup of Augusto Pinochet, that is a coup by the regime army against the political process, more than it resembles the radical coups. 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.[53] It is clear that the coup against the government of the Popular Socialist Union would not have succeeded without the support of the American administration and intelligence, and would not have lasted in power without that support. Pinochet implemented neo-liberal policies, lifted protections for local production, banned the 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. (We do not see any similarity between the Egyptian economy and its structural problems and the Chilean economy, and do not expect an economic miracle from Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.)

July 3 was a coup by the old regime against the political process which was moving towards changing the regime, in an attempt to preserve its privileges and maintain the ruling regime that had endured after its head was cut off. This was not the 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 universalizing education. Rather it was a coup by the high command of the army and the army establishment. It was 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 of 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.

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[53] 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.

This model of coup is, unfortunately, characterized by stability. 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 with an eye on 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 coup may not be marked by 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. At 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 in order to impose themselves 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 Turkish coup found no civil forces as allies. In Egypt, however, when society split between the supporters of a specific political party (like the Muslim Brotherhood) and its opponents (and not between democracy and its supporters), the military were successful. Because of this division, the coup forces found many allies who backed them for different motives.

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