

Observation no: 88 (Arab Israeli War)

Country-year: Egypt - 1947

1. Did the current regime come to power in a military coup?

No.

King Faruk had been ruling in Egypt since 1936, succeeding to his father King Fuad I. In 1947, shortly after the end of WWII, Egypt was still partially occupied by British troops. Indeed, Great Britain had formally militarily occupied Egypt from 1882 until the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty that established the presence of British troops only in the Suez canal zone. However during wartimes, the British used Egypt as a base to fight the Axis in the region and British troops were stationed elsewhere in the country, increasing the population's discontent of the British occupation, including the one of King Faruk.¹

2. Has the country ever experienced a military coup?

No.

However, it exists two precedents for military intervention in politics: the first one with Muhammad Ali (1805-1848) seizing power and importantly reforming the military and the second one with Major General Ahmed Urabi trying to take power from the hands of the Ottomans with the abortive revolts of 1879.²

At the beginning of WWII, opposition to the government started to grow among the ranks of the army. A group of anti-British and nationalist military officers was formed by the army chief of staff Aziz al-Misri Pasha and known as "The Ring of Iron". One of the group's dissident officers, the future president Anwar Sadat, pushed al-Misri to mount a rebellion against the British. Although the group did not formally attempt a coup, some connections were made with pro-Axis officers in Iraq and the Egyptian authorities eventually detained al-Misri in 1942.³ At the outbreak of war with the newly formed state of Israel in 1947, the Egyptian armed forces, greatly weakened after 1945 due to their refusal to collaborate militarily with the British Military Mission for nationalist motives, opposed King Faruk's will to engage in a popular war in Palestine.⁴

¹ McGregor, Andrew. *A Military History of Modern Egypt: From the Ottoman Conquest to the Ramadan War*. Westport & London: Praeger Security International, 2006, p. 236.

² Beattie, Kirk J. *Egypt During the Nasser Years*. Boulder & San Francisco & Oxford: Westview Press, 1994, p. 36.

³ McGregor, Andrew, p. 233.

⁴ McGregor, Andrew, p. 242.

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

No.

King Faruk was the descendent of the Muhammad Ali dynasty that had reigned over Egypt since 1805.

4. Are ethnic, sectarian, or racial criteria used to exclude segments of the population from the officer corps?

Yes.

From before the 1882 British invasion and control of the army by the British, there was a tradition of racial discrimination among the recruits, the Egyptian Arabs being the most discriminated.⁵ At the beginning of WWII, the army ranks were mainly composed of Nubians from Upper Egypt because the majority of Arab peasant either considered military service degrading or were discriminated.⁶ Turko-Circassians were also strongly represented in the officer corps, a result of the army composition under the rule of Muhammad Ali in the early nineteenth century.⁷

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

No.

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

The access to high command positions in the army reflected more the officer's family and political connections than personal or nationalistic ideological views.⁸ In the years following 1948 and before the 1952 coup by the Free Officers, an increasingly political officer corps grew that was, however, ideologically divided.⁹

6. Is party membership required for entry into the senior officer corps?

No.

I cannot find evidence of this in the major histories already cited. See answer to question 5.

⁵ Hashim, Ahmed S. The Egyptian Military, Part One: From the Ottomans through Sadat. *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XVIII, No. 3, Fall 2011, p. 65.

⁶ McGregor, Andrew, p. 232.

⁷ Hashim, Ahmed S, p. 64.

⁸ Baker, Raymond W. *Egypt's Uncertain Revolution Under Nasser and Sadat*. Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1978, pp. 19-20.

⁹ Hashim, Ahmed S, pp. 66-67.

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

Yes.

Although Egypt regained control of the army from the British with the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty, the British were still in charge of the training and recruited among the anti-nationalist youth in an effort to make the army apolitical and remain loyal to the king.¹⁰ The strong British influence and the discriminatory recruitment process of the military academy toward officers with ties to civilian organizations and political parties resulted in many cadets to be nonpartisan. However, the officers' exposure to nationalist views in the Egyptian society and in the universities before and after entering the military academy, and the use of Egypt by the British as an Allied base during WWII resulted in political activism to grow among the officers.¹¹ In the air force for instance, several pilots had been recruited by the dissident Muslim Brotherhood and others had been involved in anti-British activities along Anwar Sadat.¹²

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

No.

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

For fear of the Egyptian militaries to turn against them, the British did not even mobilize the Egyptian armed forces during WWII for offensive purposes.¹³

9. Has the military been used to govern the country in the last five years?

No.

See answer to question 1.

10. Is there a paramilitary organization separate from the regular military, used to provide regime or leader security?

No.

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

¹⁰ Hashim, Ahmed S, pp. 65-66.

¹¹ Beattie, Kirk J, pp. 40-43.

¹² McGregor, Andrew, pp. 238-239.

¹³ McGregor, Andrew, p. 239.

11. Is there an internal intelligence apparatus dedicated to watching the regular military?

No.

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

12. Has a purge of the officer corps occurred in the last five years?

No.

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

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

No.

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

Historically, the Egyptian military had been weak and shaped by corrupted senior officers from privileged families. In 1936, the opening of the Royal Military Academy, brought to the officer corps recruits with middle or lower-middle classes backgrounds that had been exposed to a variety of competing ideological views such as the liberal constitutionalist, the leftist, Marxist, Islamist, and fascist. Most of them saw the monarchy as serving the British and increasingly opposed it.¹⁴

¹⁴ Hashim, Ahmed S, p. 66.