

The Military, the Media and Public Perceptions in Egypt

Communication and Civil-Military Relations

Egypt Civil-Military Relations Conference Paper Series
Paper 3



Romuald Bolliger
Mohamed Elmenshawy
and Ragnar Weilandt



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the rule of law

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Cover picture: Egyptian armed forces spokesman Col. Ahmed Mohamed Ali talks during a press conference in Cairo, Egypt, Monday, July 8, 2013 (AP Photo/Amr Nabil)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	4
1. Introduction	5
2. The Military and the Media after 2011	6
2.1 The Media and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces: 2011-2012	7
2.2 The Media Under President Morsi	8
2.3 The Media After July 2013	9
3. Media Management by the Armed Forces	12
3.1 Pro-Active Military Communication	12
3.2 Intimidation and Coercion	14
3.3 Legal Restrictions	16
4. Public Perceptions of the Egyptian Armed Forces	18
4.1 Pro-Military Narratives	18
4.2 The Armed Forces and the Shaping of Egypt's Popular Culture	19
4.3 The Armed Forces' Interaction with the People	20
5. Conclusions	22
Annexes	24
I. Military communication tools: a sample quantitative analysis	24
II. Song "Teslam el Ayadi (Bless Your Hands)"	26
Bibliography	28

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following the downfall of President Hosni Mubarak in January 2011, and more markedly after the July 2013 ouster of President Mohamed Morsi, Egypt's military assumed a new role in national politics. In taking on such new responsibilities and control, the military also came to realize the powerful importance of the media, both as a useful political tool and as a significant potential threat. Building upon their traditional, historical role in Egyptian society, the military resolved to adopt strategies aimed at manipulating and severely controlling media organizations and journalists in order to support the military's agenda and shape public opinion.

This paper examines the results of this new military approach to public communication. Specific attention is devoted to the military's communication strategy, its evolution since January 2011, its effects on civil-military relations, as well as the consequences for media freedom.

The paper highlights how the Egyptian military uses a carrot-and-stick approach

in order to keep the media in check. On the one hand, it grants state and state-friendly information outlets support and unrestricted access to the public, while constricting, censoring and prosecuting critical media on the other. Methods employed to control public communication range from gentle 'strategic guidance' to censorship, repression and imprisonment. These efforts to control public opinion are supported by a series of legal tools which are conveniently moulded to suit the needs of the authorities. Additionally, the military embraces public relations tools and new communication technologies in order to talk directly to Egyptian people. The use of such progressively repressive and targeted policies has produced a dramatic degradation of media freedom in the country.

Keywords: Media, New Media, Egyptian Armed Forces (EAF), Communication Tools, Communication Strategies, Perceptions, Narratives, Propaganda, Social Media, Military Control, Freedom of Press, Repression, Public Communication of the Military, Civil-Military Relations.

1. INTRODUCTION

Civil-military relations have always played an essential role in the history of Egypt. In the wake of the 2011 revolution, which introduced new spaces for public debate, the Egyptian Armed Forces realized the importance of public perception and the power of communication. In an attempt to preserve its image as a “people’s army”; reach out to the Egyptian youth; and be perceived as the protagonist, savior and defender of the revolution, the military embraced new communication tools as well as new communication strategies towards media channels.

Public perception of the Egyptian Armed Forces tends to be shaped by narratives idealising them as the creator and protector of the Republic and of the interests of the Egyptian people. Their involvement in politics, according to these narratives, is said to be paramount and beneficial, particularly in times of crisis or transition. Narratives about the military’s historical legacy are held up by official communication and spread through education, the media and references in public spaces and popular culture. Conscription is perceived as creating a bond with the citizens. Experiences with the armed forces’ non-military activities purvey the impression of an organisation more competent than civilian ones.

Since the downfall of President Hosni Mubarak in January 2011, Egypt’s media have had to interact with various rulers.

In general, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) has managed the military’s interactions with the media, showing a tendency to limit media freedom. More specifically, both state and private news outlets are under intense pressure from the military-led regime to respect strict redlines and serve as the government’s mouthpiece. While means and content of the army’s communication strategy have changed, it remains a one-way street. Nevertheless, the army is reflecting on its communication shortcomings and trying out different communication strategies, using a wide range of communication tools for verbal and non-verbal messages. The effect of these messages and the means deployed are not neutral or impartial in nature; rather, a clear political stance is being taken.

The results of this shifted approach to public communication are examined here for the period running from January 2011 to December 2014, more precisely the military’s communication strategy and its effects on civil-military relations. Excessive influence of the military on the Egyptian media landscape, combined with legislation that is restricting freedom of the press and of information, is detrimental to Egypt’s democratic development. Therefore, more balanced civil-military relations are key to Egypt’s future, as they will strengthen democratic dialogue while allowing the military to focus on its core mandate, namely the protection of Egypt against external threats.

2. THE MILITARY AND THE MEDIA AFTER 2011

6

Since the Free Officers' military coup in 1952, the Egyptian Armed Forces have dominated Egyptian politics and large swathes of the country's economy. Until the election of Mohammed Morsi, all post-1952 presidents had a military background. Despite widespread public disenchantment with Egypt's political and economic challenges, the armed forces – which would seem to bear considerable responsibility for the path that, over the last decades, led to those challenges – are rarely blamed.

Before the 2011 uprising, criticism of the Egyptian Armed Forces was an informal red line not just out of fear of consequences, but also because it would have been unpopular. Although the military rule following Hosni Mubarak's ouster temporarily stained its reputation among parts of the population, the damage was limited. A Zogby poll conducted in April and May 2013 found 94% of the population to be confident in the Egyptian Armed Forces. Since Mubarak's ouster in February 2011, and especially since the removal of president Morsi from power in July 3, 2013, the Egyptian Armed Forces' role in politics has been even more prominent. In September 2013, shortly after the violent crackdown on the protest camps in Rabaa Al-Adawiya and Nahda Square, another Zogby poll found that confidence in the Egyptian Armed Forces had fallen to 70%, with the gap mainly caused by the disenchantment

of Muslim Brotherhood supporters'. At the same time a hype around the military and its then commander-in-chief General Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi began to emerge. Following Al-Sisi's election as president of Egypt in June 2014, tens of thousands of people went to Tahrir Square to celebrate the former chief of armed forces once again. And although his 97% landslide victory against his Nasserist contender Hamdeen Sabahi raised some questions, it seems that Al-Sisi did indeed enjoy broad support within the population.

This would seem surprising at first, considering the armed forces' prominent role in the Mubarak system, their brutal crackdowns on liberal protesters during the military rule in 2011 and 2012, or Al-Sisi's justification of these crackdowns. Freedom House's "2013 Freedom of the Press Report" found Egypt to be "not free," ranking 141 out of 197 countries worldwide.⁵ Additionally, a national media survey conducted by Gallup in December 2013 found that 90% of Egypt's adult population believed objective and independent media to be important to the country's future.⁶ The strong importance placed on free media alongside equally strong approval of the military seems rather contradictory. This disparity between perception and reality lies in the military's ability to create a compelling narrative and exert pressure over the domestic press corps, ensuring its narrative and messages are propagated.

1. Gotowicki, Stephen H. (1997) *The Role of the Egyptian Military in Domestic Society*, Washington DC: National Defense University.

2. Springborg, Robert (2013) "Learning from failure: Egypt", p. 94, in Bruneau, Thomas and Matei, Cristiana (ed.) *The Routledge Handbook of Civil-Military Relations*, Abingdon: Routledge.

3. Zogby Research Services (2013) *After Tahrir: Egyptians assess their government, their institutions, and their future*, June, p. 12 <http://static1.squarespace.com/static/52750dd3e4b08c252c723404/t/52928b8de4b070ad8eec181e/1385335693242/Egypt+June+2013+FINAL.pdf> (accessed 18 November 2015).

4. Zogby Research Services (2013) *Attitudes in the Post-Tamarod, Post-Morsi Era*, July, p. 7. <http://static1.squarespace.com/static/52750dd3e4b08c252c723404/t/52928ba2e4b0af26b6395558/1385335714184/Egypt+July+2013+FINAL.pdf> (accessed 18 November 2015).

5. Freedom House (2013) *Freedom of the Press Report 2013*. <http://www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FOTPR%202013%20Booklet%20Final%20Complete%20-%20Web.pdf> (accessed 18 November 2015).

6. Broadcasting Board of Governors (2014) "BBG Research Series: Contemporary Media Use in Egypt", 13 March. <http://www.bbg.gov/blog/2014/02/24/bbg-research-series-contemporary-media-use-in-egypt/> (accessed 23 September 2016).

2.1 THE MEDIA AND THE SUPREME COUNCIL OF THE ARMED FORCES: 2011-2012

The military recognized social media as a crucial component of the 2011 revolution's initial success, and therefore wasted no time creating a strong media and online presence. On the night Mubarak handed his power over to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), images of General Mohsen Fangary saluting the martyrs of the revolution filled every newspaper and television channel, and posters of Fangary's salute were being sold in Tahrir square and elsewhere.⁷ Less than a week after Mubarak was ousted, SCAF created an official Facebook page with its first post stating SCAF's desire to build channels of communication with the youth. SCAF subsequently used its social media presence to issue announcements and counter-revolutionary propaganda, as well as to respond to citizens' questions and comments, allowing it to communicate towards demographics it might otherwise find difficult to reach.

SCAF's initial days of rule seemed to offer a promising chance for a free media environment, especially considering SCAF's abolition of the Information Ministry historically used to exercise control over (state) media and the lack of imposed restrictions.⁸ Egypt's press laws remained in place – including more than 30 articles allowing the prosecution of journalists based on their reporting – but according to a senior government newspaper editor, “criticism of the military's actions and non-actions became a sort of routine.”⁹

However, in March 2011, SCAF warned

editors and journalists against publishing any criticisms of the armed forces without “prior consultation and permission,” and in July the Information Ministry was reestablished.¹⁰ In October, SCAF appointed a military censor over the press, and in December security forces raided 17 Egyptian and international non-governmental organizations working on issues related to media and freedom of expression. Several journalists were summoned by military justice for questioning and possible prosecution for publishing criticisms against the army, and at least one blogger, Mikal Nabil, was imprisoned. ONTV talk show host Rim Maged was questioned after accusing the military police of violating human rights and torturing citizens. Adel Hamouda and Rasha 'Azab, editor and writer respectively for the independent weekly Al-Fagr, were questioned for reporting on a meeting between SCAF and a group of activists protesting the regime's policy of trying civilians in military courts. Dream TV presenter Dina Abu Al-Rahman was fired after confronting her guest, General Abd Al-Munim Kato, during an interview. Finally, On March 15, 2012, al-Hayat published a piece titled “Criticism of the Banning of Any News on Military Personnel”, claiming that Egyptian National Intelligence (ENI) sent a memorandum to all media outlets in Egypt warning against writing or broadcasting any news directly or indirectly involving military forces or individuals, regardless of whether they were currently in service or retired.¹¹ The ENI justified its memo on national security grounds. A military

7. El-Khalili, Sara (2013) “Social Media as Government Propaganda Tool”, First Monday, Vol. 18, No. 3, 4 March, 2013. <http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/4620/3423> (accessed 18 November 2015).

8. Orttung, Robert & Walker, Christopher (2012) “For Egypt's State Media, the Revolution Has Yet to Arrive”, Freedom House, 24 January. <http://www.freedomhouse.org/blog/egypt%E2%80%99s-state-media-revolution-has-yet-arrive#.UyHoCrmYZMs> (accessed 18 November 2015).

9. Interview with one of the authors (Mohamed Elmenshawy), March 2014.

10. Freedom House (2012) *Freedom of the Press Report 2012*. <http://www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FOTP%202012%20Final%20Full%20Report.pdf> (accessed 18 November 2015).

11. Al-Hayat (2012) “Criticism of the Banning of Any News on Military Personnel” (original title: «انتقاد لحظر نشر أخبار عن -العسكريين», 15 March. http://daharchives.alhayat.com/issue_archive/Hayat%20INT/2012/3/15-انتقاد-لحظر-نشر-أخبار-عن-العسكريين-.html (accessed 18 November 2015).

officer told al-Hayat that “the decision (...) is based on Law No. 313 issued in 1956, which prevents dispersing any news about the armed forces, its movement,

equipment, personnel, and anything to do with military and strategic context unless they have a written approval from the Director of the military intelligence.”

2.2 THE MEDIA UNDER PRESIDENT MORSI

Initially, it seemed that the situation of the press would improve under President Mohamed Morsi. In August 2012, a month after coming into office, Morsi ordered the release of journalists detained and jailed on charges of slander. This decision was implemented after Islam Afifi, the editor-in-chief of Al Dostour newspaper, was arrested for “insulting the country’s leader with ‘untruthful’ statements,” and for suggesting “that Egypt would see bloodshed and strife if Morsi and the Muslim brotherhood remained in power.”¹² Since Afifi’s arrest incited anger among the Egyptian public, Morsi issued a law protecting journalists from temporary detentions (the law did, however, not suspend the prosecution of journalists itself).¹³ Another initiative seen as benefiting Egypt’s press was the release of Egyptian journalist Shaimaa Adel from Al Khartoum, Sudan as a result of negotiations between Mohamed Morsi and Sudanese leader Omar Al-Bashir during the African Union Summit in Addis Ababa.¹⁴ Nevertheless, these two promising examples did not herald a willingness of Morsi to promote a free press in Egypt. In fact, Morsi’s government

turned out to be just as intolerant of criticism as his predecessors, and physical assaults on and arrests of journalists increased.¹⁵ Under the penal code, journalists could be arrested for anything considered as defaming or insulting the president. The best-known case of this was the questioning of TV personality and “Al-Bernameg” host Bassem Youssef by a state prosecutor in March 2013 for insulting the president and Islam.¹⁶

Media professionals had hoped that Mohamed Morsi, as the first freely elected president in Egypt’s history, would reform the outdated structure of Egypt’s state media and replace the Ministry of Information with an independent media regulator. However, one of Morsi’s earliest decisions was to retain the Ministry and appoint to it Salah Abdul Maqsood, known for his close connection to the Muslim Brotherhood.¹⁷

The Morsi Administration preserved the tradition of limiting reporting on the military. The chief editor of state-run newspaper Al-Gomhurriya, Gamal Abdel Rahim, was fired based on charges of

12. Tsai, Vivian (2012) “Egypt’s Morsi Orders the Release of Journalist Accused of Slander, but Charges Not Dropped”, International Business Time, 24 August. <http://www.ibtimes.com/egypts-morsi-orders-release-journalist-accused-slander-charges-not-dropped-758721> (accessed 18 November 2015).

13. Associated Press (2012) “Egypt bans detention of journalists”, The Guardian, 24 August. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/aug/24/egypt-bans-detention-journalists> (accessed 18 November 2015).

14. Ahram Online (2012) “Journalist Shaimaa to be released following Morsi’s meeting with Al-Bashir”, 15 July. <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/140/47784/Egypt/First--days/Journalist-Shaimaa--to-be-released--following-Mors.aspx> (accessed 18 November 2015).

15. Freedom House (2014) *Freedom in the World: Egypt 2014*. <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/egypt-0#.Ux3jILmYbIU> (accessed 18 November 2015).

16. Al Jazeera (2013) “Egypt satirist questioned for insulting Morsi”, 31 March. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/03/20133318332892628.html> (accessed 18 November 2015).

17. Abu-Fadil, Magda (2012) “Muslim Brotherhood Info Minister Raises Egyptian Media Hackles”, Huffington Post, 8 June. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/magda-abufadil/muslim-brotherhood-egyptian-media_b_1744233.html (accessed 18 November 2015).

publishing false news on SCAF members. Ahmed Fahmy, speaker of the parliament's upper house and member of the Muslim Brotherhood, moved to suspend Rahim after SCAF members voiced their concerns

regarding Al-Gomhurriya's story, claiming that former SCAF chief Hussein Tantawi and his former deputy chief of staff Sami Anan were banned from travel due to corruption charges levied against them.¹⁸

2.3 THE MEDIA AFTER JULY 2013

On July 3, 2013 when General and Defence Minister Al-Sisi announced Mohamed Morsi's ouster, police raided Media Production City, a compound housing the majority of TV stations in Egypt. Major TV channels affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood – Misr25, Al-Hafez, Al-Nas, and Al-Rahma – were shut down, as was Al Jazeera's office.¹⁹ The day before Morsi's ouster, the military also occupied state TV stations in order to ensure the military's key messages were broadcasted.²⁰

Messages reinforcing the idea that the military is the only source of news about the military appeared repeatedly in the media. Journalist Ahmed Abu Dera'a was given a six-month suspension sentence by a military tribunal in October 2013 for "intentionally spreading false news about the military," and for reporting on the military's challenges with fighting militants in the Sinai.²¹ Although Dera'a was released, he is no longer a reporter, and his case sent a strong message to the media community to only reproduce information on Sinai that are issued by the military.

In a leaked recording of a confidential meeting before Morsi's ouster, Al-Sisi expressed worries that the "redlines" that have always protected the military from media scrutiny – in the name of national security – became blurred after the 2011 revolution.²² In the aftermath of Morsi's ouster, since the Egyptian Armed Forces were essentially running the government, they were granted editorial control over state-run outlets, providing them with the perfect mouthpiece to trumpet their successes and suppress reporting on flaws. Wael Gamal, a former veteran journalist at the independent newspaper al-Shorouk, explains this close relationship between state newspaper editors and the government in an interview with al-Ahram Online: "They are appointed by the state not based on their competence, but on their relationship with the regime."²³ Another journalist, who asked to remain anonymous, concurs, arguing that while the military had no direct involvement in the affairs of state and independent news outlets previously, the military-led government was now "directly involved by influencing the major decision

18. Egypt Independent (2012) "Al-Gomhurriya editor suspended for reporting SCAF travel bans" 17 October. <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/al-gomhurriya-editor-suspended-reporting-scaf-travel-bans> (accessed 18 November 2015).

19. PEN International (2013) "PEN International concerned at crackdown on media by Egyptian authorities", 5 July. <http://www.pen-international.org/newsitems/pen-international-concerned-at-crackdown-on-media-by-egyptian-authorities/> (accessed 18 November 2015).

20. Committee to Protect Journalists (2013) "Egypt's army must exercise restraint with state media", 3 July. <https://cpj.org/2013/07/egyptian-army-must-exercise-restraint-with-state-m.php> (accessed 18 November 2015).

21. Muhammad Taha, Rana (2013) "Abu Deraa gets suspended prison verdict", Daily News Egypt, 5 October. <http://www.dailynewsegyp.com/2013/10/05/abu-deraa-gets-suspended-prison-verdict/> (accessed 18 November 2015).

22. Kirkpatrick, David D. (2013) "In Leaked Video, Egyptian Army Officers Debate How to Sway News Media", New York Times, 3 October. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/04/world/middleeast/in-leaked-video-egyptian-army-officers-debate-how-to-sway-news-media.html> (accessed 18 November 2015). Translation by Mohamed Elmenshawy.

23. Tarek, Sherif (2013) "Media freedom faces wide-ranging challenges in Egypt's transitional period", Ahram Online, 1 November. <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/85183/Egypt/Politics-/Media-freedom-faces-wideranging-challenges-in-Egypt.aspx> (accessed 18 November 2015).

of appointing the editor-in-chief of government and private papers." This source also identified the appearance of SCAF members on live talk shows as a new trend: "They answer questions and try to convince the Egyptian people of their point of view... Before, we never watched the Minister of Defense or any other senior military leader speaking in a live TV interview."²⁴

An expert on Egyptian media, who prefers to remain unnamed, explained that Egypt's major talk shows adopted a survival strategy based on appeasing the military by aggressively promoting all kinds of negative press about the Muslim Brotherhood and Mohamed Morsi, including stories and accusations that are far-fetched or impossible.²⁵ As a part of this strategy, they exaggerated the Brotherhood's hand in aggravating the country's economic problems and hosted anti-Morsi guests and political opponents without providing any opportunity for the Brotherhood to defend their positions. The news coverage of the protest camps in Rabaa Al-Adawiya and Nahda Square was biased and contained various unverified rumors and overstatements, including accusations of the Muslim Brotherhood carrying out "organized assassinations" and operating "torture chambers."²⁶

In his public speech announcing the overthrow of President Mohamed Morsi, General Al-Sisi proposed the establishment of a media "charter of honor" that "ensures media freedom;

observes professional rules, credibility, and neutrality, and advances the homeland's top interests."²⁷ The notion of "advancing the homeland's top interests" can easily be interpreted as silencing any criticism of the government's actions in order to promote "civil peace" and protect "national unity and security". The military stoked fear in citizens to excuse its harsh repressive measures, creating and propagating the notion of the need for a strongman-led, powerful government that ensures the security of the state. In its efforts to bolster its narrative, the military made it clear that all its actions are for the sake of *haybet al-dowlah* (the prestige of the state), making it very difficult for dissidents to disagree with or criticize SCAF without appearing unpatriotic. During his meeting with various editors-in-chief of major news outlets during the elections, Al-Sisi insisted that the Egyptian media should focus their efforts on rallying public support for "the strategic goal" of "preserving the Egyptian state."²⁸ He also added that the bar of political and intellectual knowledge is not set high in Egypt, thus urging all editors-in-chief to act with the "necessary caution" when deciding which information to diffuse – a statement which should have set alarm bells ringing.²⁹

According to Mohamed Younis, a senior analyst at Gallup, Egypt is "having its 'post-9/11 moment' and average Egyptians are now more afraid of terrorism than ever before."³⁰ This fear is reflected by the media's and the public's tolerance of

24. Personal interview conducted by one of the authors (Mohamed Elmenshawy), March 2014.

25. Personal interview conducted by one of the authors (Mohamed Elmenshawy), March 2014.

26. Ibid.

27. BBC (2013) "Egypt army chief General Abdul Fattah al-Sisi statement", 3 July. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-23175529> (accessed 18 November 2015).

28. Al Jazeera & Associated Press (2014) "Egypt's Sisi tells media not to push for democratic reforms", 8 May. <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/5/8/egypt-s-sisi-tellsmedianottopushfreedoms.html> (accessed 18 November 2015).

29. ONTV (2014) *Meeting of the presidential candidate Abdel Fattah Al-sisi with the media* (original title: لقاء المرشح الرئاسي عبد الفتاح السيسي مع الاعلاميين), 4 May. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HRosFXLlnR8> (accessed 18 November 2015).

30. Younis, Mohamed (2013) in Broadcasting Board of Governors (2014) *BBG Research Series: Contemporary Media Use in Egypt*, 13 March. <http://www.bbg.gov/blog/2014/02/24/bbg-research-series-contemporary-media-use-in-egypt/> (accessed 18 November 2015).

editorial censorship implemented in the name of national security. Lack of critical reporting in Egypt means that state violence against peaceful dissenters remains both unpunished and undocumented. Emad Eddin Hussein, editor-in-chief of the newspaper Al-Shorouk, told the Committee to Protect Journalists (an international NGO) that the sharp political polarization has taken its toll on the press and has produced competing narratives on the recent military-backed transition: "It is almost impossible for the media to operate freely and present professional journalism, as both religious and nationalist forces produce polarizing narratives that reject the other side and escalate divisions."³¹

31. Mansour, Sherif (2013) *On the Divide: Press Freedom at Risk in Egypt*, Committee to Protect Journalists, 14 August, p. 4. <https://cpj.org/reports/2013/08/on-divide-egypt-press-freedom-military.php> (accessed 18 November 2015).

3. MEDIA MANAGEMENT BY THE ARMED FORCES

In order to keep the media community in check, the Egyptian military uses a carrot-and-stick approach. On the one hand, it grants state and state-friendly information outlets support and unrestricted access to the public, while constricting, censoring and prosecuting critical media on the other. Methods employed to control public communication range from gentle 'strategic guidance' to censorship,

repression and imprisonment. These efforts to control public opinion are supported by a series of legal tools which are conveniently moulded to suit the needs of the authorities. Additionally, the military embraces public relations tools and new communication technologies in order to talk directly to Egyptian people.

12

3.1 PRO-ACTIVE MILITARY COMMUNICATION

SCAF consistently promoted a nationalistic narrative, referring to itself as the 'guardian' of the revolution. SCAF also used its online presence to vilify and discredit various activist movements and groups who were calling for the release of detained activists and journalists, often resorting to criminalization.³² In communication strategies, it is crucial to delimit "oneself" (the victim/hero/honest) from the "other" (the enemy/liar/traitor). The military singled out various 'security threats' between 2011 and 2014: in early 2011, the revolution was threatened by "thugs and infiltrators"; followed, in 2012, by "spies and foreign hands"; from June 2013 onwards, armed forces expressly identified a "terrorist threat" thereby giving the green light for security forces to crackdown on pro-Morsi sit-ins. Furthermore, the army has repeatedly asked "honest citizens" to stay away from trouble or demonstrate the "People's will", thus labelling Egyptians with a different opinion as "deviant citizens". To convey this fluctuating definition of the "enemy" to the general public, a range of conventional tools including social media were predominantly relied upon

in 2011-2012, while non-conventional tools were widely introduced during mass demonstrations leading to the military coup of July 2013.³³

Prior to Morsi's ouster in July 2013, Al-Sisi and his officers discussed the need for the military's Morale Affairs unit to play a bigger role by reaching out and integrating with the media community.³⁴ In January 2014, The Advanced Military Media Center was established with this in mind. Major General Mohsen Abdel Naby, head of the Department for Military Morale Affairs, specified that the Media Center's mission is to track information and trends in domestic and global media. This 24-hour news center is equipped with a sophisticated network of high-speed, high-storage capacity computers, and is in permanent contact with the Permanent Operation Center of the Armed Forces, the Media Center of the Interior Ministry, the Cabinet's Center for Information and Decision Support, and the General Information Authority. The exact function of the Center regarding press reviews and opinion surveys remains to be clarified.³⁵

32. For example, message #69 (12 April 2011) on the official SCAF Facebook page accuses the April 6 Movement of "plotting to separate the people and the army."

33. For a detailed review of communication tools used by the Egyptian armed forces and their occurrence between January 2011 and March 2014, refer to Annex 1.

34. RASSD (2013) *Al-Sisi: the military spokesperson is very attractive to women...and the army plans to control the media* (original title: المتحدث العسكري عامل جذب مهم للسيدات .. وخطة الجيش للسيطرة علي وسائل الإعلام), 2 October. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WB9MVTRO2YE> (accessed 18 November 2015). Translation by Mohamed Elmenshawly.

35. Tantawy, Mohamed Ahmed (2014) "Armed forces inaugurate Military Media Center", The Cairo Post, 14 January. <http://thecairopost.youm7.com/news/72927/news/armed-forces-inaugurate-military-media-center> (accessed 18 November 2015).

On March 10, 2014, the Egyptian Armed Forces launched a new website containing propagandist slogans and nationalistic imagery.³⁶ Far more organized and user-friendly than previous iterations, this new website includes contact information, geographic divisions of the army, and an emergency phone number. Its media section includes SCAF news, official statements, as well as photographs and videos documenting army achievements. Information on how to enlist in the military, military academies, national projects, social security, and military hospitals is also available.

In a leaked video of a private conversation with his advisors, Al-Sisi talks about “building a statewide alliance” with the news media in Egypt and suggests “a dialogue with those people [media outlets owners] in an unannounced way, individually, to cajole or intimidate those people”.³⁷ One of his advisors replies that only around 25 people are in control of the Egyptian media, and most of them are businessmen motivated by profit.³⁸ He added that it is not difficult to persuade these media moguls to respect the military’s redlines as most of them want to ensure a positive relationship with the military, be it because of fears of arrest or economic ruin, of the economic opportunities that could be provided by military-run companies, or simply because a news organization fears losing access to the military. In 2014, al-Shorouk refused to publish a weekly column by journalist, screenwriter, and

satirist Belal Fadl, because it included information about Al-Sisi and Mohamed Hassanein Heikal, a prominent journalist who is considered the “godfather” of the Egyptian press community. Fadl claims his article was sent to Heikal himself, and that Heikal personally requested it not be published.³⁹ The paper’s reluctance to run the piece might be explained by the fact that one of Heikal’s sons is a major shareholder in al-Shorouk.

The government also has the authority to revoke licenses from certain news outlets it wants to silence. In an interview with Asharq al-Awsat, former Egyptian Minister of Communications Atef Helmy responded to a question regarding why certain news channels were being shut down and blocked by saying: “They do not possess the special licenses required for live broadcast; it is the right of the state to have laws that are respected and abided by.”⁴⁰ This state monopoly makes the establishment of new and independent TV stations a venture almost impossible to execute, as Journalist Belal Fadl failed attempts indicates.⁴¹

As the military possesses a near monopoly on news regarding Egyptian military, political and economic affairs, having access to SCAF as a source of information is a necessity for any Egyptian news outlet. Independent media outlets therefore tolerate a certain level of pressure and censorship from the Egyptian Armed Forces in order to maintain this access. References to *masdar sayadi* (the

36. Available here: <http://www.mod.gov.eg/mod/>

37. Kirkpatrick, David D. (2013) “In Leaked Video, Egyptian Army Officers Debate How to Sway News Media”, New York Times, 3 October. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/04/world/middleeast/in-leaked-video-egyptian-army-officers-debate-how-to-sway-news-media.html> (accessed 18 November 2015).

38. Tarek, Sherif (2013) “Media freedom faces wide-ranging challenges in Egypt’s transitional period”, Ahram Online, 1 November. <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/85183/Egypt/Politics-/Media-freedom-faces-wideranging-challenges-in-Egypt.aspx> (accessed 18 November 2015).

39. Mada Masr (2014) “Belal Fadl leaves Al-Shorouk following censorship of article”, 2 February. <http://www.madamasr.com/content/belal-fadl-leaves-al-shorouk-following-censorship-article> (accessed 18 November 2015).

40. Hatita, Abdul Sattar (2013) “In Conversation with Egypt’s Communications Minister”, Asharq al-Awsat, 10 September. <http://www.aawsat.net/2013/09/article55316376> (accessed 18 November 2015).

41. Shams El-din, Mai (2014) “Finding a free space: Online initiatives challenging mainstream media face limitations”, Mada Masr, 20 February. <http://www.madamasr.com/sections/politics/finding-free-space> (accessed 18 November 2015).

intelligence/security source) are very common citations in Egyptian news and are the ultimate flag of credibility: if the intelligence sources are saying it, it must be true.

The editor-in-chief of a popular Egyptian daily describes how the military spokesperson sends 'suggested' headlines and stories for all news outlets to run: "They have fiery headlines, and are almost absurd. Out of ten I am sent, I would publish two or three." Asked why he didn't believe the stories he knew to be false and

incendiary, the editor-in-chief responded: "I couldn't afford to lose the military connection."⁴² Similarly, the producer of a major talk show claimed that the station receives a handful of propaganda DVDs from the military and the police on an almost daily basis. The military wanted producers to run these videos, knowing that the popular TV show enjoys a wide audience. The producer reported that his station did run a few of these videos regularly to appease the military and police and to avoid any potential issue.⁴³

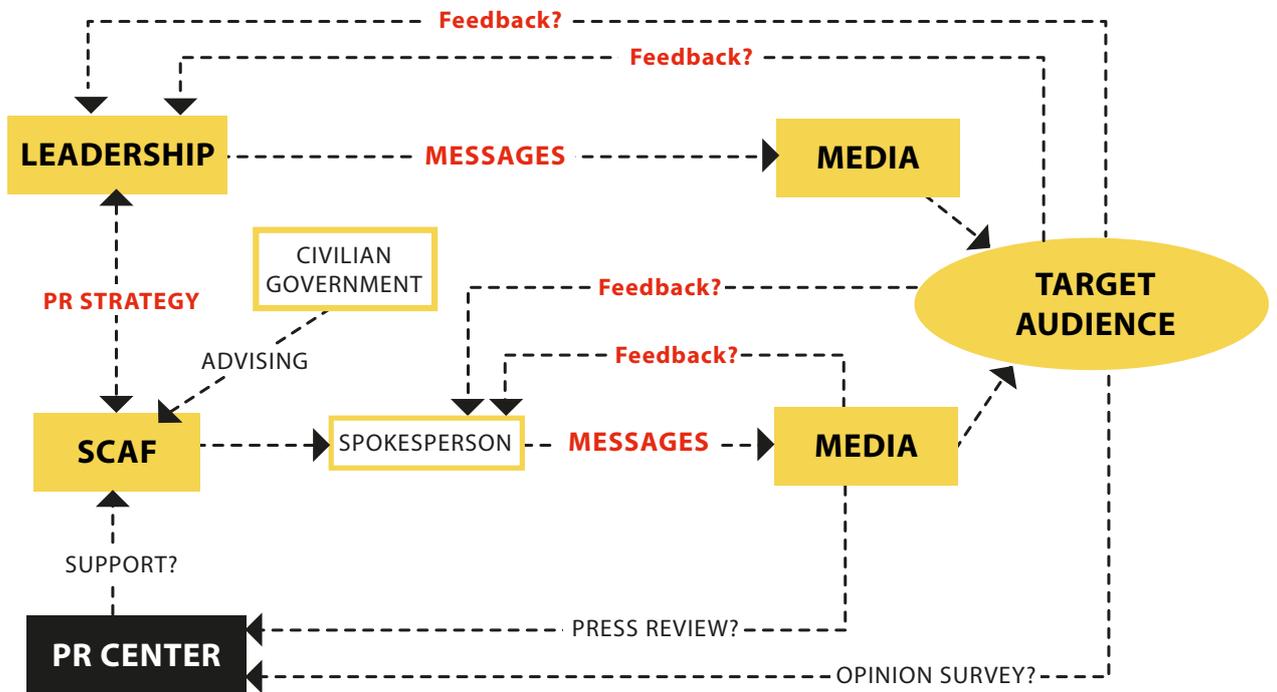


Figure 1: Overview of the Egyptian armed forces' communication flows in 2011-2014. The civilian government merely has an advisory function.

3.2 INTIMIDATION AND COERCION

When economic incentives or other softer measures are insufficient, the military uses pure intimidation and coercion. In a leaked conversation between Al-Sisi and his advisors, there are discussions regarding the use of both blatant and implied intimidation to influence journalists. A special report by the

Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) titled *On the divide: Press Freedom at Risk in Egypt* raised concerns regarding state repression, stating that repression aimed at one segment of the media, in this case pro-Brotherhood outlets, does not bode well for other media outlets that span the political spectrum.⁴⁴ Another CPJ report

42. Interview by Mohamed Elmenshawy with Egyptian editor-in-chief of an independent daily newspaper, February, 2014.
 43. Interview by Mohamed Elmenshawy with Egyptian TV producer, March, 2014.
 44. Mansour, Sherif (2013) *On the Divide: Press Freedom at Risk in Egypt*, Committee to Protect Journalists, 14 August. <https://cpj.org/reports/2013/08/on-divide-egypt-press-freedom-military.php> (accessed 18 November 2015).

cites Egypt as the third most deadly nation for journalists, highlighting six job-related deaths of journalist in 2013.⁴⁵ Moreover, the organization lists Egypt as one of the top ten prosecutors of journalists in 2014.⁴⁶

In 2014, a female journalist who had a car accident received a large bouquet of flowers from the Department of Military Morale Affairs. This seemingly innocuous act of kindness was actually a subtle reminder from the military of their awareness of her activities and movements. In fact, military intelligence services collect information about planned reports even before they are published.⁴⁷

Another method of intimidation employed by the state is the systematic libel of international news outlets that the government has failed to coerce into respecting redlines or to report on pro-military stories only. One of the key examples of this is Al Jazeera, whose journalists were detained or tried in Egypt (in person or in absentia) despite international condemnation. In June 2014, three Al Jazeera journalists were sentenced to seven and ten years in prison in what might be seen as a show trial serving to intimidate independent journalists. Without any relevant evidence being produced by the prosecution, they were convicted for allegedly "aiding a terrorist group, tarnishing Egypt's image abroad, threatening national security,

and creating a terrorist media network".⁴⁸ While president Al-Sisi pardoned them in September 2015, their convictions were not overturned.

The end of Bassem Youssef's popular show "Al-Bernameg" exemplifies the success of the military's intimidation strategy. During the presidency of Mohammad Morsi, the cardiac-surgeon-turned-comedian had become one of the Islamist president's fiercest opponents and a symbol for resistance against the ruling Muslim Brotherhood. However, when he started to rather carefully satirize the hype around Al-Sisi in the aftermath of the 2013 military coup, his then-host channel CBC cancelled the show.⁴⁹ The channels owner, Egyptian businessman Mohamed al-Amin is apparently linked to the military establishment and said to have political ambitions. He also interfered with the reporting of other media ventures he owns, for instance by preventing the publication of the newspaper Al-Watan when it contained a report critical of Al-Sisi.⁵⁰

Youssef managed to continue his show for another eleven episodes on Saudi-owned MBC Egypt. However, in the run-up to the 2014 presidential election the channel suspended the show "so as not to influence voters".⁵¹ A few weeks after Sisi's election, Youssef announced the definitive end of the show, citing pressure on MBC Egypt as well as concerns about his personal safety and that of his family.⁵²

45. Beiser, Elana (2013) "Syria, Iraq, Egypt most deadly nations for journalists", Committee to Protect Journalists, 30 December. <https://cpj.org/reports/2013/12/syria-iraq-egypt-most-deadly-nations-for-journalis.php> (accessed 18 November 2015).

46. Committee to Protect Journalists (2014) *2014 prison census: 221 journalists jailed worldwide*, 1 December. <https://cpj.org/imprisoned/2014.php> (accessed 18 November 2015).

47. International Programme for the Development of Communication (2013) *Assessment of Media Development in Egypt, based on UNESCO's Media Development Indicators*, UNESCO, January, p. 27. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002207/220742e.pdf> (accessed 18 November 2015).

48. Rose, Aaron T. (2014) "Update: Harsh sentences for Al Jazeera journalists", Daily News Egypt, 23 June. <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2014/06/23/harsh-sentences-al-jazeera-journalists> (accessed 18 November 2015).

49. Kingsley, Patrick (2013) "Egyptian TV station suspends satirist Bassem Youssef's show", The Guardian, 2 November. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/02/egyptian-tv-bassem-youssef-cbc-suspends> (accessed 18 November 2015).

50. The Cairo Post (2014) "Al-Watan halted by its CEO for publishing false report about Sisi", 6 February. <http://thecairopost.com/news/85523/news/al-watan-halted-by-its-ceo-for-publishing-false-report-about-sisi>, (accessed 18 November 2015).

51. MENA (2014) "MBC suspends Bassem Youssef's show to avoid 'influencing voters'", Egypt Independent, 19 April. <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/mbc-suspends-bassem-youssef-s-show-avoid-influencing-voters> (accessed 18 November 2015).

He told the CPJ in August 2013 that the highly nationalistic atmosphere of the government and government-supporting press could potentially morph into an

Egyptian version of McCarthyism where conformity is rigidly enforced and differing perspectives are not tolerated.⁵³

3.3 LEGAL RESTRICTIONS

Several laws restrict the freedom of the press and assist the government in its crackdown on the media. The Military Justice Code states that civilians may be tried in a military court if the alleged offense involves military officers or was committed in an area under military jurisdiction. The Committee to Protect Journalists in 2012 provided a bleak description of this code: "In the past year [since March 2012], more than 12,000 civilians have been tried in military courts, where defendants have curtailed rights, the proceedings are opaque, and the prosecution must meet a lower burden of proof."⁵⁴

Media Law No. 313 of 1956, amended by Law No. 14 of 1967, prohibits the "publishing of any news about the Armed Forces" without express authorization from the Director of the Military Intelligence Department. Punishments for breaking this law include imprisonment between six months and five years and/or payment of a fine. According to Gamal Eid, the director of the Arab Network for Human Rights Information, Law No. 313 shields the military from any oversight.⁵⁵

Law No. 100 of 1971 on State Intelligence and Secrecy Services is equally repressive, covering all activities, personnel matters, operations, and functions of the security services. The penalties are similar. Finally, the Penal Code Law No. 58 of 1937 includes some wide-ranging provisions designed to protect secrets in relation to national security.⁵⁶

Maikel Nabil, a well-known blogger and head of the "No to Compulsory Military Service" Facebook movement, was a victim of these wide-ranging laws gagging any commentary on the military or its actions. He was first arrested in February 2011, released 27 hours later, and arrested again in Cairo on March 28, 2011 by the military intelligence unit. Nabil was sentenced to three years in prison by a military court on charges of 'insulting the military' in a blog post titled, "The Army and the People Were Never One Hand."⁵⁷

The new Egyptian constitution, passed in a referendum in January 2014 with 98% voting in favor, contains a number of encouraging improvements, including: freedom of expression and opinion

52. Deutsche Welle (2014) "Egyptian satirist Bassem Youssef stops show, fearing for safety", 3 June. <http://www.dw.de/egyptian-satirist-bassem-youssef-stops-show-fearing-for-safety/a-17678157> (accessed 18 November 2015).

53. Mansour, Sherif (2013) *On the Divide: Press Freedom at Risk in Egypt*, Committee to Protect Journalists, 14 August. <https://cpj.org/reports/2013/08/on-divide-egypt-press-freedom-military.php> (accessed 18 November 2015).

54. Committee to Protect Journalists (2012) "Egyptian journalists accused of 'insulting armed forces'", 9 March. <https://cpj.org/2012/03/egyptian-journalists-accused-of-insulting-armed-fo.php> (accessed 18 November 2015).

55. Al-Hayat (2012) "Criticism of the Banning of Any News on Military Personnel" (original title: "انتقاد لحظر نشر أخبار عن-العسكريين"), 15 March. http://daharchives.alhayat.com/issue_archive/Hayat%20INT/2012/3/15/-انتقاد-لحظر-نشر-أخبار-عن-العسكريين.html (accessed 18 November 2015).

56. International Programme for the Development of Communication (2013) *Assessment of Media Development in Egypt*, based on UNESCO's Media Development Indicators, UNESCO, January, p. 26. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002207/220742e.pdf> (accessed 18 November 2015).

57. Diel, Jackson (2012) "Maikel Nabil Sanad draws back the curtain on Egypt's military", The Washington Post, 1 April. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/maikel-nabil-sanad-draws-back-the-curtain-on-egypts-military/2012/04/01/gIATc1ipS_story.html (accessed 18 November 2015).

(article 65), press freedom (article 70), media independence (article 72), and an article banning censorship and prison sentences for media offences (article 75).⁵⁸ However, state institutions dealings with the media since the passing of the constitution have ignored these newly asserted rights. Some journalists were convinced that censorship measures were taken as a result of extraordinary

circumstances and would be only temporary, especially in regards to the repression of pro-Brotherhood outlets.⁵⁹ These concerns were expressed by Magdy el-Galad, editor-in-chief of Al-Watan, who said: "I believed those actions against religious channels were not justified, but I also believed the army when they said they were temporary measures."⁶⁰

58. Youssef, Nariman (2012) "Egypt draft constitution translated", Egypt Independent, 2 December

<http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/egypt-s-draft-constitution-translated> (accessed 18 November 2015).

59. Shaarawy, Fatima (2013) "Hossam Eissa: the shutdown of religious channels ordered by the Interior Ministry are exceptional measures needed to prevent violence" (original title: حسام عيسى: غلق القنوات الدينية بقرار من وزير الداخلية إجراء استثنائي ضروري), Al-Ahram, 3 July. <http://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/368318.aspx> (accessed 18 November 2015).

60. Mansour, Sherif (2013) *On the Divide: Press Freedom at Risk in Egypt*, Committee to Protect Journalists, 14 August. <https://cpj.org/reports/2013/08/on-divide-egypt-press-freedom-military.php> (accessed 18 November 2015).

4. PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF THE EGYPTIAN ARMED FORCES

The military has devoted significant efforts to shaping its public image as not only saviors of the country, but also as the only force in Egypt that can deliver on the promise of creating a true democracy. In this narrative, members of the Egyptian military are martyrs; they are suffering for the good of the Egyptian people as a whole and making sacrifices in order to set the country on the right path towards democracy. The military has relied on the media to create, maintain, and spread

this narrative, as well as to send key messages to support it. Fears of 'foreign conspiracies' aiming to divide Egypt is one example, highlighting the need for national unity and patriotic obedience. The war on terrorism is another: in the face of a common and omnipresent threat internal divisions seem unimportant and unpatriotic, and human and political rights are overstepped in the name of a greater good.

4.1 PRO-MILITARY NARRATIVES

In order to better understand the military's popularity, it is important to analyse how narratives about the military that are prevalent within the public opinion emerged and how they are sustained. Observation of mainstream public opinion among Egyptians opposing the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood indicates that perceptions of the Egyptian Armed Forces are shaped through five main narratives. While a tiny faction of activists radically opposes both the Muslim Brotherhood and the military, large parts of society across political affiliations, social strata and educational backgrounds are reached by these narratives.

1. The Egyptian Armed Forces created the Egyptian republic and protect it against its internal and external enemies. From within, Egyptian security is threatened by Islamist terrorism, and from the outside its territorial integrity is threatened by Israel and its water supply by Ethiopia. More generally, the armed forces fend off evil Western influences attempting to prevent Egypt from developing her full potential.

2. The Egyptian Armed Forces are on the side of the people. In 1952, the Free Officers freed the people from domination and exploitation by foreign powers, the monarchy and corrupt

elites. They managed to improve the livelihood of average Egyptians. A nonpartisan actor, the army sided with the people in 2011 and 2013, ousting oppressive regimes to enable the peoples' revolutions.

3. The Egyptian Armed Forces are a strong military actor and have the organizational skills and capacities which civilian actors in Egypt lack. After having been humiliated by the colonial powers and neighbouring Israel, the Egyptian Armed Forces gained back Egypt's pride and dignity. The Egyptian forces are the strongest army in the Arab World and the 1973 October War against Israel was a glorious victory for Egypt. Moreover, the armed forces' organisational capacities also make it a highly efficient actor outside the military domain.

4. The Egyptian Armed Forces' non-military activities benefit the state. Military involvement in business ventures, as well as the responsibility of state-like tasks such as building and operating highways, are to the state's and the general public's benefit and should therefore not be curtailed.

5. There is currently no alternative to a significant involvement of the

Egyptian Armed Forces in domestic affairs. Egyptian political elites are corrupt, disunited and incompetent. As the Muslim Brotherhood is the only political actor having sufficient organizational capacity and unity to be a relevant political force, the Egyptian Armed Forces are the only actor able to prevent chaos or 'Islamist fascism'.

The rather limited overlap between these narratives and actual facts raises questions. The military's handling of Egypt's media provides a good explanation of how the narratives are maintained and reinforced. However, in order to understand their origins, it helps looking at two further factors: The historical legacy of the military as well as the Egyptian public's daily experiences with it.

4.2 THE ARMED FORCES AND THE SHAPING OF EGYPT'S POPULAR CULTURE

As in many developing countries, Egypt's military played a prominent role in and is strongly associated with the country's struggle for independence and the establishment of the republic. Colonel Ahmed Urabi, who led the 1879 revolt against Khedive Pasha and the European domination of Egypt, is widely considered to be the first hero of the Egyptian fight for independence.⁶¹ The Free Officer's coup in 1952 is credited with having given Egypt a long overdue wake-up call, shaking off the internal stagnation under the monarchy and negative external influences made responsible for the country's backwardness and the humiliating loss of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War.

In the public perception, the Free Officers' spectacular projects such as the land redistribution policies, the construction of the Aswan dam and the nationalization of the Suez channel symbolize the resurgence of Egypt as a great nation. The alleged "glorious victory" in the 1973 October War consolidated the status of the military. The on-going climate of hostility towards neighbouring Israel continues to keep the perceived importance of the armed

forces for the country's security at a high level. Seen as the creator and guardian of the republic, the Egyptian Armed Forces are conceded to have the "birth right" to influence the country's development – particularly in times of crisis.⁶²

The notion of being a peoples' army was reinvigorated during the 2011 and 2013 demonstrations. When the military sided against the incumbent regimes, its decision to turn against Mubarak is often seen and has been portrayed as principal opposition against Gamal Mubarak, succeeding his father and thus power being passed on hereditarily again.

This historical legacy is upheld through intentional opinion shaping, particularly through education, popular culture and the media. According to Di-Capua, post-1952 Egyptian history writing became "detached from the study of the past and from the value of historical truthfulness" and developed into a tool to foster official ideology.⁶³ While serious historians rarely obtain access to relevant governmental records in order to do objective research, Egyptian students and the public have been

61. Hopwood, Derek (1993) *Egypt 1945-1990: Politics and Society*, London: OUP, p. 11.

62. Koonings, Kees & Krujit, Dirk (2002) *Political Armies: The Military and Nation Building in the Age of Democracy*, London: Zed Books, p. 19.

63. Di-Capua, Yoav cited in Gasper, Michael Ezekiel (2011) "Yoav Di-Capua. Gatekeepers of the Arab Past: Historians and History Writing in Twentieth-Century Egypt. Review article", *The American Political Review*, June 2011, V. 116, N°3 p. 907.

fed with “pseudo-history” created by appointed historians’ committees.⁶⁴

Research on public acceptance of authoritarian regimes indicates that indoctrination by education is a significant factor in creating positive attitudes towards ruling authorities.⁶⁵ As education in Egypt is highly centralised, the Ministry of Education has a tight grip on both curricula and textbooks for schools and universities. Moreover, university heads and faculty deans are directly appointed by the Egyptian president, a Mubarak-era procedure dismissed after the 2011 uprisings but reintroduced by president Al-Sisi.⁶⁶ This enables authorities to ensure that the reading of history taught in Egypt is shaped according to the official narrative.

A private Egyptian university founded in 1996 was even named after the October War: some 14,000 students are taught at *October 6 University*, which is located in a satellite town called *6th of October City* around 30 km outside of Cairo which accommodates about half a million residents. Such references are omnipresent in Egypt. Cairo’s main traffic artery is called *6th October Bridge*; four metro stations in downtown Cairo are named after military heroes. Various memorials and museums glorify the Egyptian Armed

Forces, such as the *Egyptian National Military Museum* prominently located inside Saladin’s Citadel on Mokattam Hill in Cairo, or the 6th of October Panorama in Cairo’s Heliopolis district, dedicated to what is portrayed as “the glorious October Victory”.⁶⁷ Finally, the public is reminded of the armed forces’ role through military parades and pompous celebrations of the 1952 “revolution” and the October War.

This symbolism extends to popular culture. As criticism of the system has been disadvantageous for the careers of Egyptian actors and singers, most mainstream artists are either aligned or neutral. Moreover, Egypt has a tradition of popular music glorifying the Egyptian nation and its military that included its most prominent singers such as Umm Kultumm. Following the ouster of Morsi, these existing traditional nationalist songs were getting played over and over again on radio stations and new ones were created. An example is *Teslam el Ayadi* (see Annex 2), a catchy tune glorifying the army and written by Mustafa Kamal, a popular singer who also leads the Egyptian musicians’ syndicate. Performed along with a range of other Egyptian stars, the video to the song features military parades and exercises as well as the then commander-in-chief General Al-Sisi.

4.3 THE ARMED FORCES’ INTERACTION WITH THE PEOPLE

In addition to the pro-military propaganda, Egyptians’ opinions are also influenced by their own experiences with the Egyptian Armed Forces. The

military has always exercised significant influence on Egyptian politics, however it usually did so behind the scenes, leaving day-to-day governance to

64. Di-Capua, Yoav (2011) “Egypt’s fight for historical memory”, Al Jazeera, 21 February. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/02/2011218142638785949.html> (accessed 18 November 2015).

65. Geddes, Babara & Zaller, John (1989) “Sources of Popular Support for Authoritarian Regimes”, *The American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 33, No. 2, p. 320.

66. Ahram Online (2014) “Egypt’s El-Sisi reintroduces appointment of university heads and deans”, 25 June. <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/104697.aspx> (accessed 18 November 2015).

67. Egyptian State Information Service (2009) “October War Panorama”, 20 July. http://www.sis.gov.eg/En/Templates/Articles/tmpArticles.aspx?ArtID=1388#.Uy46H9xU_wl (accessed 18 November 2015).

civilian politicians. This strategy, described as “ruling but not governing” by Stephen Cook⁶⁸, enabled the military to impose its will on core issues without bearing any responsibility in the eyes of the general public. With the exception of the military rule following the 2011 revolution, the armed forces have thus successfully avoided being associated with the shortcomings and failures of the Egyptian state.

At the same time there is considerable direct interaction between the military and the population. Both through its military and its business activities, the armed forces are the country’s largest employer. As conscription is compulsory, the armed forces are keeping a significant number of young men out of unemployment every year.⁶⁹ In addition to giving these men at least a limited income, it provides them with the opportunity to get basic professional training.

Moreover, the armed forces have a socialisation function for conscripts aimed at instilling a sense of national identity and imbuing loyalty towards the republic and the military. With about 80,000 conscripts joining the Egyptian Armed Forces each year, a significant part of the male Egyptian population has served in the military at

some point. Thus conscripts themselves can spread narratives internalised during their military experience into the broader population. Moreover, most Egyptians are related to or are friends with someone who is currently serving. This creates a stronger bond between people and military than in countries with professional armies.

Finally, daily experiences confirm the notion of the military being a highly competent and considerably more efficient actor than the public administration. For instance, those highways constructed and operated by the armed forces – such as the one connecting Cairo to Ain Sokhna – are widely thought to be superior to those built and run by the state. Moreover, the military is involved in various economic projects relevant to average Egyptians, for instance in the field of construction and housing. Based on this role in the country’s economy, even those strongly opposed to military rule tend to believe that the army has the organizational skills and capacities that civilian actors lack. Particularly in times of crisis, this notion of “civil inadequacy” gives the armed forces additional legitimacy to get involved as it is seen as the only actor who can handle the situation.

68. Cook, Steven A. (2007) *Ruling but not Governing*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

69. Springborg, Robert (2013) “Learning from failure: Egypt”, in Bruneau, Thomas and Matei, Cristiana (ed.) *The Routledge Handbook of Civil-Military Relations*, Abingdon: Routledge.

70. Gotowicki, Stephen (1999) “The Military in Egyptian Society”, in Marr, Phebe (ed.) *Egypt at the Crossroads: Domestic Stability and Regional Role*, Washington DC: National Defense University Press, p. 105.

71. Koonings, Kees & Krujit, Dirk (2002) *Political Armies: The Military and Nation Building in the Age of Democracy*, London: Zed Books, p. 336.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The popularity of the Egyptian Armed Forces is based on glorifying narratives. The military is portrayed as the creator and protector of the republic, a highly competent organisation defending the interests of the Egyptian people. Its military and non-military activities are said to be beneficial for the state and its involvement in politics to be, particularly in times of crisis, without alternative. Official history has been used to glorify the Egyptian Armed Forces, particularly the 1952 “revolution” and the “victory” in the 1973 October War. These events dominate educational curricula and textbooks and are widely referenced in public spaces and entertainment. In addition, the general public’s experiences with the armed forces contribute to positive narratives. Having stayed out of day-to-day governance except for the period of military rule following the 2011 uprising, the Armed Forces avoided being associated with the failures of the Egyptian state. At the same time, conscription seemingly creates a bond between the armed forces and Egyptian citizens, and experiences with its non-military projects create the impression of a highly competent organisation superior to civilian actors.

Since President Mubarak’s removal in February 2011, and gradually more since President Morsi’s ouster in July 2013, the Egyptian Armed Forces have assumed a more dominant role in Egyptian politics. As the military took up this new role, it has realized the power of the media both as a useful tool and as a significant potential threat. This has brought the military to gradually develop an increasingly assertive and ultimately repressive policy towards the media:

- Recognizing the crucial role of the media and social networks in the 2011 revolution, the military stepped in to shape the government media policy, placing the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) in control of it.
- Following President Morsi’s election, despite initial hopes for increased media freedom, the Muslim Brotherhood’s intolerance towards press criticisms allowed the military to preserve their role in limiting media freedom, particularly with regard to reporting on the military.
- Since July 2013 General, now President, Al-Sisi has granted the military extensive control of the government’s media policy, allowing the development of specific methods and tools of control, however steeped in the military’s positive image among the Egyptian population.
- This has produced a carrot-and-stick approach to keep the media in check, firmly implemented by SCAF: on the one hand, the Egyptian military grants support and access to the public to state-owned and government-friendly media outlets; on the other, it implements a strategy of constricting, censoring and prosecuting critical media.
- This two-pronged approach has produced regular informative statements in an effort to keep the public abreast of national affairs, and has instigated outreach policies with the younger generation, upholding the positive narrative of the military as the defender of the Egyptian people and the “guardian” of the revolution.
- At the same time, the Egyptian military has developed a composite scheme, supported by a range of restrictive laws, to control public communication: strategies range from gentle “guidance” to censorship, from economic restrictions to repression and imprisonment. The use of such progressively repressive and targeted policies has produced a dramatic degradation of media freedom in the country.

Figure 2 clusters communication events into conventional and non-conventional tools as well as social media (Facebook) along a timeline.

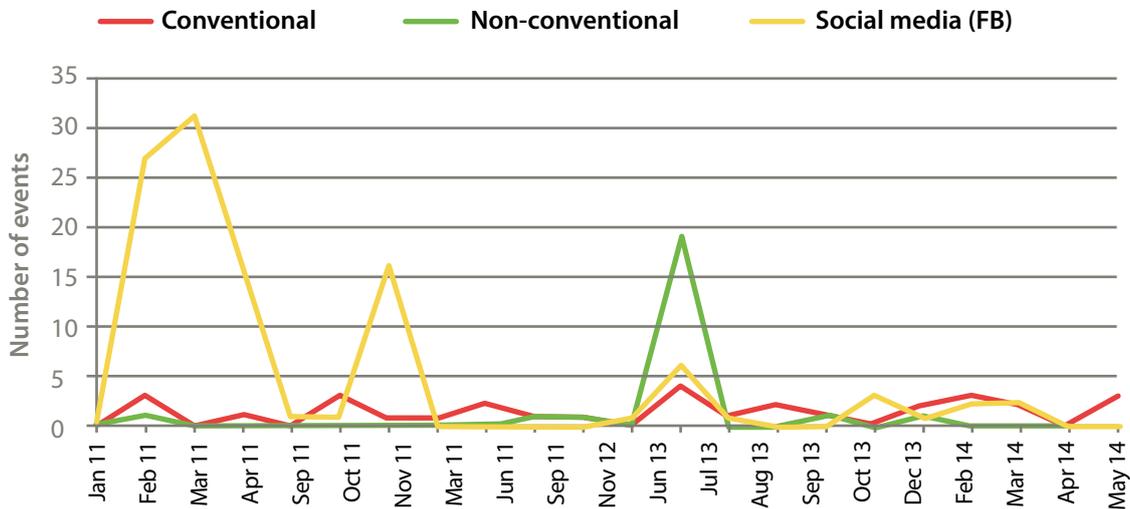


Figure 2: Clustering of communication events from January 2011 to March 2014 into conventional, non-conventional and social media (Facebook).

It appears that Facebook statements were widely used by the Egyptian Armed Forces at the beginning of 2011, i.e. immediately after the Revolution. After November 2011, the military began reducing the number of Facebook statements, with almost no posts after March 2012. The election of a civilian government in June 2012 resulted

in reduced military communication. Mass demonstrations in June 2013 then led to a spike in the use of non-conventional tools, in stark contrast to the social media focus used during the 2011 demonstrations. The amount of non-conventional tools decreased sharply after July 2013 owing to the end of mass demonstrations.

ANNEX 2. Song “Teslam el Ayadi (Bless Your Hands)”

*He is the hero who sacrificed his life
Who for his land, boldly received his foe's knife,
May he be safe he who holds the banner,
May he be safe he who defends the honour,
May he be safe, Egypt's pride, worldwide, her beloved dears,
Blessed and safe is the Egyptian army.
Open our history books, let the world know more and more,
Speak up Imams and popes who they are in peace and war,
God's power helped them restore dignity and calmed down their fears,
Blessed and safe is the Egyptian army.
Oh Sinai sands remember who watered your thirst,
Christian Muslim blood you can't tell the first,
He is a cousin, a kin, a friend all along years,
Blessed and safe is the Egyptian army.
May you be blessed you who vowed to pay her back
To make it all up to her, to be always on the right track
Even if we are to be mere souvenirs.
May you be safe for your and my dears,
Blessed and safe is the Egyptian army.*

*He is he who, amidst depression, went straight for fight,
And dreamt of happiness when holding his weapon tight,
Dead or alive but should drive to end those who shed Egypt's tears,
Blessed and safe is the Egyptian army.
Bewildered we suddenly became, but we heard a strong voice,
Cut off is the hand to hurt our people, was his sole choice,
A real word by a real man who never sheers,
Blessed and safe is the Egyptian army.
May you be safe my fellow, the breed of Egypt's soil,
Who since his birth has learnt to work and toil,
May God bless you all who work up to their ears,
Blessed and safe is the Egyptian army.
Greetings to every mother who gave birth to a great soul,
Of a man who for his homeland sacrificed his whole,
Blessed is the mother whose bold tear is mixed with proud cheers,
Blessed and safe is the Egyptian army.
Egypt, it is my homeland wherever I go, near about or away,
Apart from Egypt, I could feel but astray,
It is my home where I feel warm and see my way,
Don't you ever think of agonies?
They will soon pass away,
Oh you dearest of dears,
For you we are all volunteers,
Blessed and safe is the Egyptian army.*

*Full greetings for all owners of army cap,
Who with the unconquerable will, drew the road map,
Greetings to the bold man who knows no fears,
Blessed and safe is the Egyptian army.*

*It is out of pain and chagrin that a real man is born,
Whose fierce anger warns whoever treads on our corn,
Blessed is he who says and he who sincerely hears,
Blessed and safe is the Egyptian army.*

*May you be safe you who fulfilled the promises,
Who in Heaven are known the best of armies,
May they be safe, your youngsters who are in the prime of life years,
Blessed and safe is the Egyptian army.*

*He is he who said he owes Egypt quite a lot,
To pay her back, he fearlessly will risk all his lot,
A man as such should win all our cheers,
Blessed and safe is the Egyptian army.
Egypt calls on us to join forces in face of all foes,
Oh Egypt with God's Mighty, your loyal breed is never to lose,
Oh Egypt you just call, for you we are all volunteers.
Egypt, the Nile, company, moonlit nights, how distinguishable,
I love her so much, never seen as such, a fact so palpable
Oh Egypt dearest of dears,
For you we are all volunteers,
Blessed and safe is the Egyptian army.
What is he? He is the defender of my borders,
Always on the track, never sure to be back, as all dignity holders,
Remember 1973? not the heaviest artillery could provoke his fears,
Blessed and safe is the Egyptian army.
He screamed: long live Egypt amidst fires and pains,
He vowed he'll never come back but with the best gains,
And he did with youth, experience, the best of spears,
Blessed and safe is the Egyptian army.*

Source: Egyptian State Information Service

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The Military, the Media and Public Perceptions in Egypt

Communication and Civil-Military Relations

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