The Military in Egypt

Peacemaker with Expiration Date?

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With the ousting of Egyptian president Mohamed Morsi on 3 July 2013, the events that led to President Hosni Mubarak's resignation two years earlier seemed to recur. Resting upon very different political backgrounds, the two presidents had faced similar adversaries prior to their fall: both a growing popular movement on the streets and military leadership that would eventually side with the opposition. Policy makers, scholars, and media alike have critically discussed the latter's role during the removal of the two presidents.[1] In particular, Gen Abdul Fattah al-Sisi, commander in chief of the Egyptian armed forces and Egypt's de facto current leader, has given reason for distrust for two reasons. First, the military overthrew the formally elected Morsi and took power. Second, since then the army has taken action against Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood, making use of violent force.[2]

To some observers, it seems that al-Sisi and the military have thus consolidated their power status quo, which had been seriously questioned by the Morsi government during the last year. Apparently, the army would not stop using violent force against the brotherhood in the name of the demonstrating people.[3] Recent statements by Ahmed Shafik, Mubarak's last prime minister, or Amr Moussa, former foreign minister, substantiate suspicions about the military's striving for political power. Shafik and Moussa have publicly made their candidacy for the presidential elections of 2014 dependent upon al-Sisi's own plans. For instance, Shafik stated that he would not run if al-Sisi stood in the election:

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"May God give him good fortune. We would all support him and I am the first one to support him."[4]

Against this backdrop, this article analyzes the military's role from the period leading to Mubarak's resignation in February 2011 to the aftermath of Morsi's ousting in July 2013. It seeks to understand to what extent the military contributed to the escalation and de-escalation of violent clashes in Egypt throughout that time. The analysis focuses less on political motivations than on actual decisions and official statements. In other words, the authors are interested in *what* the army did to escalate or de-escalate the onset of civil conflict rather than *why* the military acted that way. The overarching question is to what extent the military refrained from violent repression against the opposition forces and thus became a de-escalating force from the beginning of the Arab Spring in 2011.

The article includes three sections. A brief review of the literature presents major findings on the military's repressive and supposedly stabilizing function in authoritarian regimes, revealing a research gap concerning the nonrepressive and stabilizing responses by the armed forces. Next, drawing on empirical analysis of five escalation episodes in Egypt since the ousting of Mubarak in early 2011, the article traces the military's specific role by investigating how much the armed forces actively contributed to de-escalation—if they did so at all. Last, it summarizes the findings and outlines the implications for future research. For the most part, the empirical results are based on field research in Cairo between 2011 and 2013.

Stability by Repression

The role of armed forces facing the onset of civil conflict has been dealt with in the context of the paradoxical "stabilizing" function of state suppression in autocratic systems. In particular, prominent work by the Political Instability Task Force has established the conventional belief that under pure autocracy or dictatorship, opportunities for insurgents to organize are too restricted. Thus, the probability of successful collective action is too low.[5] Although pure democracies allow for the organization of peaceful collective action and pure autocracies suppress any form of such efforts, so-called semidemocracies have proved particularly conflict prone. Facing a volatile transition phase, former political and military elites are fearful of changes in the status quo as new (popular) factions emerge. Consequently, belligerent rhetoric and politics lead to fragmentation and radicalization processes that in turn are likely to spread violence cycles.[6] Indeed, the threat of repression or even moderate repression has been seldom questioned as a stabilizing factor in a domestic setting.[7] More recent studies identify the armed forces as

pivotal actors for the success of peace-building efforts as far as the "local" and the "everyday" are concerned.[8] Although the armed forces have been implicitly discussed as part of the autocratic regime in most of these studies, in particular the Arab Spring uprisings have shown that ruling powers eventually rely on the military's repressive capacities on the ground.[9]

The state forces' repressive capacities are thus used as the major argument rather than the actual decisions made by the stakeholders. This article questions such a linear understanding of the police and armed forces as actors primarily characterized by their repressive means. Empirically based on how the military has responded to the volatile situation in Egypt since 2011, it maintains that the army's decision not to partake in the clashes de-escalated the beginning of the conflict. In contrast to the academic community's conventional belief in the power of deterrence, a qualitative analysis addresses the active role of the armed forces in inhibiting further violence. The article argues that by not intervening militarily and thus de facto allowing the masses to openly articulate their demands to the ruling power, the armed forces contributed to the low intensity of clashes. This position is challenged the moment that military leadership decides to make use of violence against parts of those masses. The following section highlights to what extent the Egyptian military refrained from violent repression of the opposition forces and thus became a de-escalating force from the onset of the Arab Spring in 2011.

Case Study Egypt, 2011–13

Three features justify the selection of Egypt during 2011–13 as a crucial case study. First, a heterogeneously composed and unarmed protest movement was capable of ousting the Mubarak regime, which had been in power for more than three decades. Second, unlike the civil wars in Libya (2011) or Syria (2011–ongoing), no large-scale escalation erupted despite violent clashes between supporters of the regime and opposition forces. With a death toll of 846 during the uprising in February 2011, another 150 or so in the aftermath, and several thousand during the ousting of Morsi in early July 2013, Egypt's Arab Spring drew a different picture compared to 30,000 battle-related deaths in Libya and well over 100,000 fatalities in Syria. Third, during the interim phase prior to parliamentary and presidential elections, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) assumed the responsibilities of the president. Despite ongoing tensions, the SCAF maintained relative peace within the institutional architecture of the post-Mubarak state. However, as implied above, the military became the driving stakeholder behind the ousting of Morsi in July 2013—violent force included. This

behavioral change is useful for the present analytical purpose since it sheds light on the military's temporal role as peacemaker in Egypt.

The case of Egypt is relevant because of its low intensity of violence on the one hand and fundamental changes regarding the status quo of political power on the other. Its moderate attitude during the initial transitional phase struck both scholars and political observers. This article's overarching goal is to shed light on this interdependent puzzle (i.e., low-intensity violence and a moderate military). Why and to what extent did the armed forces contribute to the de-escalation of violent tensions in Egypt since early 2011? The authors examine path-dependency dynamics that allow for the identification of variances between the causal factors that either fueled or inhibited the commencement of conflict. Conflict-fueling (escalatory) factors are understood as those that increase the intensity of the fray and the severity of tactics used in pursuing it. Conflict-inhibiting (de-escalatory) factors are understood as those that decrease the severity of coercive means used in the wake of strife.[10]

The article focuses on measures taken by the armed forces in inhibiting violence throughout the country, taking a look at both the physical operations of the armed forces (e.g., breaking down protest masses) and their official statements (e.g., renouncing the use of force). Given the recent nature of the transition in Egypt, the analysis is applied to a short period of around 33 months covering the time between Mubarak's resignation in February 2011 and the time of this writing (October 2013). Altogether, the article considers five escalation episodes: the uprising leading to Mubarak's ousting in February 2011 (approximately 846 fatalities), the violent clashes related to the parliamentary elections in November 2011 (approximately 41 fatalities), the soccer riots of Port Said in February 2012 (approximately 86 fatalities), the reignited soccer-related clashes of Port Said one year later (approximately 66 fatalities), and the violent clashes in the context of Morsi's overthrow in early July 2013 (approximately 1,200–1,500 fatalities).[11]

Beyond the high number of people killed (see the figure below), these five episodes have been selected as intracases because of two specific features. First, since both the SCAF (February 2011 to June 2012) and the Morsi government (July 2012–July 2013) administered the transition phase, a look into escalation episodes during the rule of each of these protagonists will help identify changes in the way the military responded to crises. Second, in addition to this top-level institutional layer, these episodes are useful for examining the different conflict actor constellations on the ground. For instance, while the former anti-Mubarak forces clashed with supporters of the SCAF in the wake of the parliamentary elections of November 2011, the Port Said incident in February 2013 occurred in the context of Morsi's presidency. As such, one expects the different actor constel-

lations of these episodes to better reveal the military's responses with regard to de-escalation. Beyond these selection criteria, it is important to further consider that each episode per se is set against the backdrop of benefits that must be "distributed" after the fall of the Mubarak regime. Naturally, the old and emerging forces will compete for political, economic, and cultural "pieces of the cake." It is not surprising, for instance, that the Port Said riots in February 2012 and 2013 coincided with the anniversary of President Mubarak's fall in February 2011. As the figure shows, the 846 people killed during the January–February 2011 popular uprising and the fatalities in the wake of Morsi's deposal in July 2013 seem exceptional. Indeed, before and after the removal of Mubarak, minor violent incidents occurred, yet none evolved to the extent seen in February 2011 or July/August 2013. Not surprisingly, the three-decade-long presidency of Mubarak was reckoned among the aforementioned stable autocratic systems.[12]
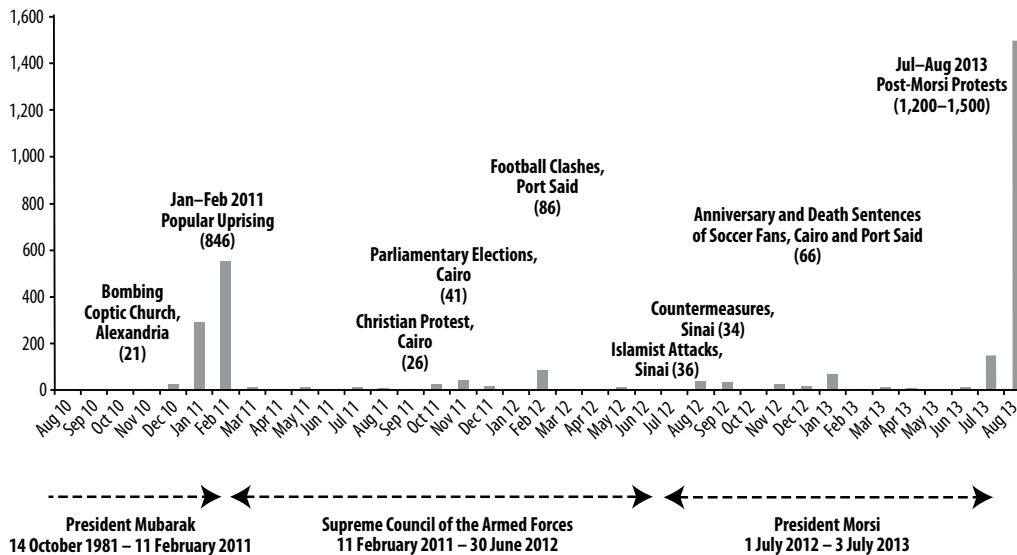
Figure. People killed in Egypt, August 2010–August 2013. (Data from "CrisisWatch Database," International Crisis Group, 2013, http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/publication-type/crisiswatch/crisiswatch-database.aspx?CountryIDs={B915F536-D27C -4FAC-A808-06B2551C8ADB}#results; "Egypt," Amnesty International, 2013, http://www.amnesty.org/en/middle-east-and-north -africa/north-africa/egypt; and "Timeline of Turmoil in Egypt after Mubarak and Morsi," *New York Times*, 2 July 2013, http://www .nytimes.com/interactive/2013/07/02/world/middleeast/03egypt-timeline-morsi.html?_r=0#/#time259_7834.)

Mubarak's Fall, February 2011

During Mubarak's last days in office in early February 2011, the military leadership clearly contributed to calming the growing protest masses throughout the country. On 28 January 2011, the so-called Friday of Rage, when Egyptian internal security forces failed to end the protests and the police disappeared from the streets, the military began to play a vital role in ending violence in Cairo and other

cities. The army guaranteed it would not open fire under any circumstances, thus preventing any identification of the military with the Mubarak regime. Furthermore, the demonstrators greeted the army as a protector against the regime's security apparatus.[13] Very likely, repressive behavior of the military would have furthered activist considerations to arm themselves to defend their cause.[14] Yet, the army leaders' support of the "legitimate demands" of the people and approval of "peaceful" demonstrations signaled their break with the Mubarak regime.[15] Despite their initial cooperation with the opposition, military forces still confronted demonstrators several times after the SCAF took power and ruled the country following Mubarak's ousting.

Parliamentary Elections, November 2011

Following Mubarak's departure in February 2011, the SCAF assumed the responsibilities of the president. However, by October 2011, the Egyptian people had become increasingly dissatisfied, and all political parties and activists accused the military of not handing over power to a civilian government. This demand grew after the SCAF's declaration of the supraconstitutional principles in November 2011.[16] In late September 2011, it was time for the SCAF to announce that elections for the People's Assembly would start on 28 November 2011. The SCAF advised the High Election Commission to plan the elections in three stages due to security issues and the geographical size of the country.[17] The first stage began on 28 to 29 November, with a runoff on 5 to 6 December, including the nine governorates of Cairo, Fayoum, Port Said, Damietta, Alexandria, Kafr El-Sheikh, Assiut, Luxor, and the Red Sea. The second stage took place on 14 to 15 December, with a runoff on 21 to 22 December in the nine governorates of Giza, Beni Suef, Menoufiya, Sharqiya, Ismailiya, Suez, Beheira, Sohag, and Aswan.[18] The third stage began on 3 to 4 January 2012, with a runoff on 10 to 11 January in the nine governorates of Minya, Qalioubiya, Gharbiya, Daqahliya, North Sinai, South Sinai, Marsa Matrouh, Qena, and New Valley.[19] The parliamentary elections for the Upper House (Shura Council) and Lower House (People's Assembly) lasted for approximately three and a half months.[20]

Before and during the parliamentary elections, two violent confrontations between the military and protesters took place close to Tahrir Square, Parliament, and the Ministry of the Interior. Clashes in Mohamed Mahmoud Street erupted in November, followed by the Qasr al-Aini Street fighting in December 2011. The Mohamed Mahmoud clashes started 10 days before the elections in Cairo. On 18 November—"Friday of One Demand"—prominent political figures of all parties and activists demonstrated against the SCAF's supraconstitutional principles. On this day, everything went peacefully. The next day, 19 November 2011, security

forces attacked a sit-in in Cairo's Tahrir Square where they used intensive tear gas and live ammunition against the protesters. The level of violence exercised by the security forces shocked many Egyptians before the elections, and their distrust in the ruling SCAF mounted. The conflict lasted four days, resulting in 45 deaths and hundreds of injuries.[21] Surprised by the protesters' response, the military started to build huge walls that blocked the streets leading to the Ministry of the Interior.[22]

On 16 December, after the second round of the parliamentary elections, clashes erupted again on Qasr al-Aini Street, close to Parliament. Street fights between the army and civilian protesters resulted in numerous injuries. The strife continued, with protesters and military forces hurling stones at each other.[23] Young military officers and security forces were even throwing rocks, sheets of glass, and fire extinguishers at protesters. A group of activists was detained and held inside the People's Assembly building by military and security forces. The SCAF denied any use of violence, claiming that third parties sought to destabilize Egypt.[24]

Similar to the setting during the 18 days before the ousting of Mubarak, the police forces failed to end the protests in Tahrir, and the army had to intervene once more. This time, in November and December 2011, the army was the aggressor and not the rescuer of the so-called 25 January Revolution.[25] During the fray on Mohamed Mahmoud and Qasr al-Aini streets, security forces received their orders directly from the SCAF to clear Tahrir Square of protests. The generals did not want to risk anything and feared losing control of the security situation in Cairo. The only solution for the generals was to stop the demonstrations by any means, even violence. The SCAF tolerated Friday demonstrations but did not accept other days of the week for sit-ins.[26]

The Mohamed Mahmoud clashes severely affected public perception of the SCAF and the Muslim Brotherhood.[27] The Freedom and Justice Party, the political wing of the brotherhood, received countless criticisms from the opposition and liberal forces for the strategic decision not to take part in either conflict. Members of the party were concentrating mainly on the parliamentary elections and avoiding any confrontations with the SCAF.[28]

During the election process, the SCAF intensified efforts to protect the polling stations and provide a secure environment for the voters, especially after the incidents on Mohamed Mahmoud Street.[29] Thus, the SCAF played the role of protecting the revolution and leading Egypt to democracy. However, at the same time, international media presented the SCAF as the aggressor in the street clashes, refusing to fulfill the demands of the revolutionaries.[30]

The Ultras—football fans of the famous Premier League Al-Ahly team in Cairo—were yet another violent force involved in the street fighting during the parliamentary elections. When the Ultras, well known and highly respected among the protesters, entered the battlefield in large groups, armed with Molotov cocktails and pyrotechnics, the demonstrators celebrated them as heroes. This street popularity began to cause the military serious security issues. Members of the SCAF lost their image as icons of the 25 January Revolution, and the Ultras became more attractive to the young population.[31] Violent confrontations between the Ultras and the military took place in the Mohamed Mahmoud and Qasr al-Aini clashes.[32] The Ultras played a crucial role in the 25 January Revolution and have continued to do so in Egyptian street politics since the overthrow of Mubarak.[33]

In summary, the army's biggest mistake was to intervene in the clashes on Mohamed Mahmoud Street. Despite the eruption of fighting on Mohamed Mahmoud and Qasr al-Aini, the armed forces managed to continue the election process since the SCAF considered it a top priority.

Soccer Riots in Port Said, February 2012

On 1 February 2012, at least 74 people were killed and many injured after a soccer game in the city of Port Said, 200 kilometers from Cairo at the Suez Canal.[34] The Al-Ahly soccer team from Cairo was playing against the local Al-Masry team from Port Said. Directly after the game ended, the lights in the stadium were suddenly turned off, and armed thugs started to attack the soccer fans. Most of the victims in Port Said were Ultras (Al-Ahly fans). The military responded immediately to the riots by sending helicopters to Port Said to evacuate injured players and fans.[35]

News of the Port Said massacre spread quickly throughout the country, and many Egyptians believed that the SCAF had planned the violence in advance.[36] Various opposition groups, including liberal forces and representatives of the Islamic political parties, accused the SCAF of having ordered the "mass murder" in Port Said. They claimed that the generals were part of the old Mubarak regime and that their main objective was to spoil the democratization process in Egypt by spreading violence and fear in society.[37]

In the following days, the Ultras began to avenge their slain comrades in Cairo. Everywhere in the country, mass demonstrations were organized by the Ultras, who had one main objective—to attack the Ministry of the Interior in Cairo. Although the street fights lasted for days in front of the ministry, the generals ordered an official investigation of the soccer riots in Port Said and promised to hold those responsible for the massacre accountable for their actions.[38] Again,

youth movements and the police were involved in continued violence after the Port Said riots. The tragedy of Port Said reflected very well the critical security situation in Egypt, which worsened drastically.[39]

The SCAF realized that it was time to hand power over to a civilian authority after the planned presidential elections; failing this, the security situation in the country would escalate.[40] Eventually in June 2012, Mohamed Morsi, the candidate of the Muslim Brotherhood, won the majority of votes in the second round of presidential elections against his opponent Ahmed Shafik, the SCAF representative.[41] In August 2012, President Morsi dismissed Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, the country's defense minister, and Sami Annan, his chief of staff, after the Sinai crisis. Both had been the leading personalities of the SCAF, which had ruled the country after the overthrow of President Mubarak. A drastic shift in power took place.[42]

In sum, the riots of Port Said mainly involved police forces and the youth movements—the army did not intervene. This time the army tried to play the role of supporter by sending helicopters to Port Said to evacuate injured fans and soccer players. Even though the army had shown solidarity with the families of the victims of Port Said, the people no longer trusted the generals because they had failed to provide security and did not admit responsibility for the massacres. The SCAF realized that its role as a ruling institution had come to an end and that the army had to hand over power to newly elected President Morsi to defuse the violence in Egypt.

Death Sentences, Port Said, February 2013

On 26 January and 9 March 2013, almost one year after the soccer riots in Port Said, a court sentenced 21 fans from the local Port Said soccer team to death and acquitted seven police officers.[43] Two high-ranking police officers, one of them the former Port Said security director, were sentenced to 15 years in prison. After the judge announced the sentence, 15,000 Al-Ahly fans began celebrating in front of the court.[44]

Yet, not everyone accepted the controversial verdict, especially the people of Port Said. Friends and family members of those convicted started to take revenge on the police.[45] In the following days, deadly violence erupted in Cairo, Alexandria, the Suez Canal City, Ismailia, Port Said, and other industrial cities as the protestors targeted President Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood.[46] The security situation spiraled out of control, and at least 30 people were killed and many injured.[47]

The date of the court case of the Port Said riot, 26 January 2013, was significant because it was scheduled one day after the second anniversary of the so-

called 25 January 2011 Revolution. Yet, in 2013 the young people of Tahrir who toppled President Mubarak were not ready to celebrate this special day; instead, the protesters decided to continue their violence against Morsi's regime. The security situation had already become critical before the Port Said verdict; afterward, protests at Tahrir Square continued to intensify.[48]

During the second anniversary of the revolution, the military did not intervene in the fighting since the violence was directed against the Muslim Brotherhood. Clashes erupted between the police forces deployed by the brotherhood and the youth groups.[49] In Port Said, protesters tried to block the Suez Canal, controlled by the Egyptian military.[50] In view of the critical security situation, President Morsi declared a curfew in Port Said, Ismailia, and Suez Canal City in an attempt to control the strife.[51] Residents of the cities along the Suez Canal, however, ignored the curfew and began challenging the presidential order.[52]

This time the army cooperated with the protesters. For instance, military officers organized soccer tournaments with the residents during the curfew to defuse the situation in Ismailia.[53] This tactic again distanced the military from the Morsi regime—the same strategy the armed forces used during the 18 days in 2011. Once more, it was the military's turn to play a crucial role in providing security and stability in Egypt. The public changed its opinion about the military, again celebrating army officers as heroes in the streets of Port Said.[54]

Yet another factor contributed to the change of attitude towards the military. The referendum on the new constitution in December 2012 divided Egyptian society into two rival blocks—those against the Muslim Brotherhood and those supporting it. As of December 2012, the focus remained on the government of President Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood, not on the role of the army. The military took advantage of the political struggle between the political Islam parties and the liberal forces.

Morsi's Fall, July 2013

The polarization between Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood and the opposition further intensified in March as fuel shortages sent food prices soaring and electricity blackouts occurred frequently.[55] Part of the fuel problem was the government's inability to pay the debts Egypt owed to foreign oil companies.[56] Against this socioeconomic backdrop, the International Monetary Fund's reluctance to increase its loan to Egypt further complicated matters for the Morsi administration. After failed negotiations in April, the fund's stakeholders postponed talks until October 2013.[57]

With the economy in severe crisis and tensions growing between Morsi's supporters and adversaries, the military again seemed to assume a mediating role.

One week before Morsi's anniversary as president, General al-Sisi publicly warned the political camps that the military was prepared to act decisively to prevent chaos and violence.[58] Avoiding partiality, the military cast itself responsible for holding the country together by cautioning against "a split in society whose continuation is a danger to the Egyptian state."[59] Al-Sisi underlined the military's responsibility against the backdrop of heightened tensions by reminding the camps of the army's "patriotic and moral responsibility toward its people [which] compels it to intervene to keep Egypt from sliding into a dark tunnel of conflict, internal fighting, criminality, accusations of treason, sectarian discord and the collapse of state institutions."[60] Moreover, given the polarized setting, al-Sisi "'[called] on all sides to reach a formula of real understanding, agreement and reconciliation to protect Egypt and its people' . . . [within] one week, 'during which much can be achieved.'"[61]

Notwithstanding the military's warning, on 30 June millions of Egyptians took to the streets of major cities and demanded the resignation of President Morsi. The protesters' agenda was primarily driven by the refusal of the growing Islamist influence on political, social, and cultural spheres.[62] At least seven people were killed in battles between opponents and supporters of Morsi in Cairo.[63] The military reacted one day later by publicly issuing an ultimatum to the Morsi administration.[64] If the president did not take steps to address the protesters' demands for a more inclusive government within 48 hours, the military "would impose [its] . . . own 'road map'" for the future.[65]

After Morsi's refusal of the ultimatum in an angry speech insisting on his legitimate, constitutional right to leadership, on 3 July General al-Sisi announced Morsi's removal. By further suspending the Constitution and installing an interim government under Adly Mansour, the armed forces justified the intervention as a response to the millions of Egyptians who supposedly opposed the Islamist agenda of the Muslim Brotherhood.[66] After the arrest of Morsi and Muslim Brotherhood leaders during the following days, the situation escalated on 8 July when at least 54 of Morsi's supporters were killed and more than 300 wounded in Cairo.[67] The protesters had been demonstrating outside the facility where they believed that Morsi was detained.[68]

Doubts about the military's real motivations in ousting Morsi received new impetus after the energy shortages suddenly ended and the police reemerged in the streets on 10 July.[69] At the same time, the military-led government started a public campaign accusing the Muslim Brotherhood of having incited the violent clashes before and after Morsi's withdrawal from office.[70] Accordingly, Mansour's new government would not include the Muslim Brotherhood or any other Islamist political party.[71]

On 24–25 July, tensions between Morsi's supporters and adversaries intensified when two important announcements coincided. On 24 July, the Obama administration declared that it could not definitely say whether Egypt's military had engineered a coup d'état against Morsi. Thus, Egypt would continue getting $1.5 billion in American Official Development Assistance each year.[72] Further, on 25 July allegations came to light that Morsi had supposedly conspired with Hamas to escape from prison in 2011.[73] In the following two days, demonstrations resulted in more than a dozen people dead. Eventually on 27 July, in an attempt to stop the clashes, Egyptian authorities this time ordered security forces to attack the Islamist protesters, killing at least 72. Gunshot wounds to the head or chest indicated that those forces were not bound by orders to use nonlethal means only.[74]

The violence peaked on 14 August when the security services violently cracked down on two massive pro-Morsi sit-ins that included protesters who refused to disperse, setting off riots and confrontations in Cairo and throughout the country.[75] Reacting to the killing of more than 600 people, mostly Islamists, and the injuring of at least 3,700, the Muslim Brotherhood mobilized its followers to take to the streets the very next day.[76] Shortly thereafter, General al-Sisi declared a one-month state of emergency while Mohamed El Baradei, the interim vice president, resigned in protest of the disproportionate use of violence by state forces.[77] Yet another 1,000 people died in fighting involving supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood who were marching in Cairo to protest the use of indiscriminate violence by the authorities.[78]

The escalations did not abate until 20 August. Although state forces eventually refrained from lethal violence, the police systematically tracked down and arrested the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood, including prominent spiritual leader Mohammed Badie. With the leadership gone and Western states unwilling to cut the flow of aid, the brotherhood found itself isolated, and the mass protests came to an end.[79]

Conclusion

Despite the brief transition phase since Mubarak's fall in February 2011, at first glance, the analysis of conflict episodes affirms the preliminary hypothesis. Indeed, the military was able to de-escalate the flare-up of violence during the November 2011 elections and in the wake of the soccer-related riots of Port Said in February 2012 and 2013. However, a differentiated look into the military leadership's decisions similarly revealed an ambivalent record in that respect. Although the army's stance clearly favored the protest movement during Mubarak's last

days in early February 2011 (i.e., support for people's "legitimate demands"), its involvement with politics constrained the military's autonomy significantly.

After the police forces failed to disperse the rising social unrest throughout the country in the run-up to the November 2011 elections, the SCAF sent armed forces to contain the direct confrontations. Given its interim ruling function, the military was quickly perceived as a stakeholder responsible for the clashes in the first place, contrasting the heroic image it had acquired in the wake of Mubarak's ousting a couple of months earlier. Regardless of such ambiguity during this escalation episode, the SCAF managed to hold parliamentary elections. Consequently, the armed forces' ambivalent record is best explained by political inexperience rather than the deliberate decision to suppress the electorate. In the Mubarak era, the army was not involved in the political arena; that role belonged to the former National Democratic Party.

The Port Said soccer riots in February 2012 drew a similar picture. Again, direct confrontations occurred between local police forces and protest groups while the army sent helicopters to the soccer stadium in an attempt to rescue the injured. However, after the SCAF was accused by large segments of society of having planned the violence in advance, the interim government announced formal investigations. Eventually during this phase, the military leadership decided to step down from formal rule and pave the way for a civilian government. After the presidential elections of 2012, the SCAF handed power over to Mohamed Morsi, the Freedom and Justice Party's victorious candidate. Nevertheless, two days before the second round of presidential elections, Egypt's highest court dissolved the Muslim Brotherhood–dominated Parliament and announced that Shafik, the favorite candidate of the SCAF, could stay in the race. Just before President Morsi was to assume power, these two direct provocations shocked the brotherhood. Though designed by the military to test the reaction of the brotherhood and the masses, the latter perceived the announcement as a provocation. Faced with an aggravated security situation, the army stepped back, defused the strained situation, and the civilian government under Morsi assumed power in June 2012.

Although the SCAF's role in the context of the Port Said incident of February 2012 remains unclear, it seems that the opposition movement would have criticized any action initiated by the interim administration. Thus, one can only partly identify the sending of helicopters to the stadium and the formal call for investigations as conflict-inhibiting factors. In contrast to the November 2011 elections and the Port Said incident of February 2012, the military leadership benefited from the power transition to the Morsi administration in summer 2012. The fact that Morsi increasingly faced opposition from huge parts of the former

anti-Mubarak forces and that the police still could not provide security made the military once again emerge as guarantors of domestic stability. The verdict on the Port Said soccer killings in January 2013 reflected this setting. The armed forces were perceived as mediators between the incapable police apparatus on the one hand and the frustrated protesters on the other.

Notwithstanding the military's stabilizing function as mediator on the political level as well as on the ground, the way Morsi was overthrown in July 2013 demonstrated the temporality of that role. Two aspects in particular challenged the military's function as peacemaker. First, the military leadership ordered the removal of the country's first democratically elected president, thereby hazarding the consequences of the onset of polarized conflict. This is striking, given that General al-Sisi himself had warned the political camps about the explosive setting prior to Morsi's anniversary as president. Second, the armed forces escalated the violence by authorizing the security services to take action against the protesters of the Muslim Brotherhood—witness the disproportionately high number of people killed by gunshot wounds.

In light of the qualitative change in the military's use of violent force since Mubarak's fall in February 2011, Egypt's armed forces have proved a temporal peacemaker at best. Going beyond the official statements and military operations on the ground, one finds that the military's involvement in the national economy is worth looking into. Some scholars argue that one of the principal motives of the armed forces' support of the protest movement against Mubarak in early 2011 leads back to their strong position in the national economy.[80] The military as an institution remains strongly involved in the private economy. The armed forces run various businesses, including hospitals, banks, companies, and farms.[81] Historically, President Mubarak rewarded retired military generals with leading positions as cabinet ministers, governors, chairpersons of top state-owned companies, and managers in the private economy to keep them out of politics.[82] Against this backdrop, it is important to take into account the fact that since the toppling of the monarchy in a 1952 coup, all four Egyptian presidents have come from the military, which is still seen as a respected institution that provides stability and security. It is far from surprising that, despite its handing power over to President Morsi in June 2012, the military had secured its position in the new Constitution.[83] Given this historically rooted leverage, neither the ouster of Morsi nor the subsequent arrest of prominent leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood came as a surprise.

With the military reconsolidating its power according to the Mubarak era, Morsi awaiting trial, and the Muslim Brotherhood having lost its leaders, political stability seems to have arrived in Egypt. However, as the analysis above has shown,

the military's excelling as peacemaker did not produce this relative peace. Quite the contrary, it seems that the armed forces took back political power by violent means and thereafter reestablished the state's monopoly of violence for its own sake—that is to say, to maintain their material benefits provided by the decade-long involvement with the national economy. Clearly, then, the military would indeed act as "peacemaker" as long as this role served its political and economic interests.

It is probably impossible to trace decision-making processes within the "closed-shop" circle of the military leadership by using scholarly tools alone (e.g., access to expert interviews). However, this article holds three relevant implications for future research and policy making. First, the "stability by repression" argument proves double-edged. The provision of a state monopoly of violence on the ground may inhibit direct clashes between popular adversaries, but one-sided, indiscriminate measures will likely fuel grievances in the long run. Second, domestic stability and security depend upon the capability and willingness of the armed forces to provide the necessaries. However, military repression alone is unlikely to guarantee that road in the long run. For instance, supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood continue to protest against the al-Sisi regime despite the detention of major leaders and violent means used by the security forces. Against this polarized backdrop, the Muslim Brotherhood should be included in the national reconciliation process. Otherwise, the historically rooted grievances felt by large segments of society during the Mubarak era will eventually surface and materialize into social unrest. Third, initiation of such a national dialogue is contingent upon the inclusion of a third party capable of bringing the adversaries to the table. Because neither Washington nor Brussels dared to label Morsi's ousting a coup staged by the military, the credibility of the West has been seriously affected. Given that fact, the United States and the European Union should at least try to act on the respective allies to make both the Muslim Brotherhood (via Turkey and Qatar) and the armed forces (via Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) walk down their maximalist demands.[84]

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