Egypt’s Long Road to Democracy?

An Analysis of the Approaches on Modern Egyptian History Between Two Revolutions

Bachelorarbeit

vorgelegt von
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an der

Universität Konstanz

Geisteswissenschaftliche Sektion

Fachbereich Geschichte und Soziologie

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Konstanz, 2012
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Introduction

By 2pm [January 25, 2011] small groups of protesters had taken to the streets of Cairo, Suez, Ismailia and other governorates. Their numbers soon swelled to the hundreds, the hundreds became thousands and then tens of thousands. Some protesters raised the Egyptian flag and sang the national anthem while others chanted anti-government slogans and demanded political and economic reform.

(Al-Ahram Weekly)¹

The Egyptian Government declared martial law in the flaming city of Cairo and throughout Egypt last night after day-long arson and rioting, and the Premier said that “organized revolution” had “almost threatened the nation’s existence.”

(The Washington Post)²

Recent developments in Egypt have produced headline news familiar to a global audience since the popular uprising against President Hosni Mubarak’s regime in early 2011. For weeks, there were reports of violent clashes between the protestors and the regime’s security forces, highlighted by images of the main squares of Egypt’s major cities filled with angry crowds demanding the president to step down. On Friday February 11, 2011, President Mubarak yielded to the popular pressure and resigned. By then, the images of the crowds at Cairo’s Tahrir Square had become the imprint of the popular uprisings throughout the Arab world, which journalists titled the ‘Arab Spring’.³

This landmark of modern Egyptian history dominated the news in the Arab world and around the globe. Only the first of the accounts above, however, reports on the downfall of Egypt’s ‘notorious old regime’ in Spring 2011. The second holds reference to the events of 1952 that triggered the revolutionary beginnings of the government, which the popular uprising then demanded to step down almost sixty years later.

The Cairo Fire of January 26, 1952, known as Black Saturday, and the popular uprising in early 2011 both, mark the downfall of an old establishment and the creation of a new order. The transitions were acted out relatively peacefully, taking into consideration what has historically been termed a ‘revolution’; yet the two cornerstones of modern Egyptian history hardly share common features, especially when it comes to the degree of popular participation and the forces involved.

The military conspirators around Gamal Abdel Nasser, known as the Free Officers, ended Egypt’s formal constitutional monarchy in the swift 23 July Revolution in 1952. This highly elitist and secretive political force left their imprint on the country’s political and social development for the six decades to come.

The 2011 Revolution, in many ways, countered the established pattern of the old regime. First, the authorities found themselves challenged by the popular forces that they had been able to manipulate and use in the name of national independence and modernization for over half a century. Second, Western policy makers, which had relied on the support of this seemingly stable regime for a favorable status quo in Egypt, found their allies ousted by a popular political current that was widely identified as a tendency toward backwardness within the radical periphery of the political spectrum. Finally, the view on the political reality of Islam has been challenged as – counter to general expectations – an underestimated moderate version of political Islam won majority support under democratic premises.

As the recent developments of Egyptian history have barely past the state of mere journalistic coverage, a historical account of these events therefore cannot be given complete closure in this study. However, various approaches on Egypt’s modern history have been made within a diverse scholarly community, concerned with the subject on different scales of focus, thus making it possible to put the most recent events of Egypt’s political development in an appropriate setting.

Egypt, in the course of the twentieth century, has undergone major political, economic and social changes. It emerged from an agrarian, semi-independent monarchy in its beginning, into what appears to be a state with a government based on multiparty elections and tourism as a main source of income towards its end. Outlining these edges of Egypt’s transition, of course, is far from providing an accurate account of its history, these paremeters, however, appear useful to understand the diverse historical approaches that have been made of the social, political and economic

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4 A wide range of journalists, commentators, and political experts and advisors have sought to summarize and evaluate the media coverage on the Arab Spring and put the events into a historical context. Among others:

transformations when looking at the crucial period in-between. In order to put the recent landmark of Egyptian history in context, the three most relevant approaches will be analyzed in this study.6

A first approach puts Egypt in the context of a mainly ‘Northern Atlantic viewpoint’, observing the country moving out of the colonial grip, which is being gradually replaced by the dichotomy of the Cold War. It appears that from this Western point of view, the twentieth-century history of Egypt (and most of the Arab world) is seen as a history of ‘issues’ in the Near and Middle Eastern region accompanying the transitions noted above. In the context of decolonization, the Suez Crisis of 1956 not only represents a landmark for Egypt, but for the whole region adjusting to a new geopolitical reality defined by the US and Soviet supremacy. As the Arab-Israeli conflict took shape, this issue then not only took precedent in actual policy making, but also absorbed a large part of the historical research on the region. For the history of Egypt as the self-proclaimed (yet not unchallenged) leader of the Arab side of the conflict, this is especially true.

In addition to more general works that served to establish a historical background (see below), this first approach largely draws from the results Kylie Baxter and Shahram Akbarzadeh’s recent study, US Foreign Policy in the Middle East,7 which analyses the role of Egypt as a major player in the region, and its interactions with the West, mainly the United States and Israel. Furthermore Rashid Khalidi’s study Resurrecting Empire has been used to give reference to the broader context of Western interference in the Middle East.8

Utilizing a second historical approach on the same developments while taking a viewpoint from within the Arab context, the resulting picture is quite a different one. The concept of decolonization transforms into a nationalist struggle for independence, while the history of ‘issues’ becomes a development of positioning the Arab states and the region as a whole into a global context. This then refocuses this thesis on the history of a country and its role as the self-proclaimed leader of the Arab world, acting as a spearhead in confronting Israel as well as a vanguard in political experiments from Arab nationalism under Nasser to the policy of moderation and opening (infitah) to the West during the Sadat and Mubarak years. Even more important is then to look at Egypt’s

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internal developments, especially with regard to the government’s relation to the Egyptian people, that has undergone a major shift in the last decades and once again became the center of attention with the recent popular demands for democracy.

The main work to concern here is Raymond W. Baker’s *Egypt’s Uncertain Revolution under Nasser and Sadat*, not only useful to contextualize the 1952 revolution and the nationalist movement, but especially important because it is outlined among the central thesis of the success and failure of the transition of power to the Egyptian people and their participation in the political sphere. Furthermore, the chapter draws from studies with different focuses on Egyptian society under the Free Officer rulers.

While the first two approaches justify themselves in their geographical antagonism, a third focus on the political potential of Islam requires further explanation. Observing Egypt’s political course from 1952 onwards, one might conclude that it has been a secular one. The modernization effort made by the Free Officers stood in sharp contrast to the supposedly reactive religious currents, resulting in the marginalization of religious groups, both in the day-to-day politics and in historical research. Political Islam under the new regime was either reluctantly tolerated, or suppressed in the early republican period. Despite the overall exclusion of the official policy making process, scholars have noticed a widespread resurgence of political Islam towards the last quarter of the century, both radical and moderate. The developments that will be a major focus in the third part of this thesis, are the changes the Islamic component underwent from its role as political underdog, marginalized by the centers of power, to its own rise in popular and political prominence that has cumulated in victory of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt’s first free presidential elections in 2012.

This section largely draws from John L. Esposito’s Work *The Islamic Threat*, on of the most profound analysis of the Islamic revival to date. Further studies of the author also in cooperation with John O. Voll, as well as a summary of the scholarly research concerning the relation between Islam and politics by controversial but influential author Bernard Lewis have served to widen the

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10 Among others:

scope of this thesis. Furthermore, references to Richard P. Mitchell’s *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* have served to cover the early history of the Muslim Brotherhood as the main character in the third chapter.

The goal of this study, however, is neither to explain Egypt’s popular revolution that started in 2011, nor to ask for a readjustment of Egyptian history under a teleological viewpoint. The outcome of the recent events are yet to take shape and are re-examined daily. The tools which are gained through the analysis of the different scholarly approaches, however, are useful to put the most recent developments of Egyptian history in an appropriate context, which will be attempted in the form of a final outlook. This includes not only the 2011 popular revolution, where many of the general assumptions that guided the three discourses have been put into question, but also the general issues that gravitate around the relation between the Egyptian (or Arab) people, the political role of Islam, and this society’s interaction with the secular West. After all, the predominance of the first two discourses has been considerably challenged with the turn of the century, as they fail to explain the prominence of political Islam in the Middle East.

As this study evaluates the three historical approaches rather than attempt to provide a new one by reprocessing different sources on Egyptian history, the established literary canon of every discourse (outlined above) will serve as a starting point; As the discourses, however, are not secluded in themselves but rather reflect a particular emphasis, the overlapping of literature in the following chapters is inevitable. For general information and historical facts, it has then been relied on the comprehensive works on modern Egyptian history that have been widely accepted in the scholarly community. As far as primary sources, other than news on contemporary events are concerned, translations of Arabic originals into other literary documents (predominantly in English and German) as well as historical sourcebooks have been used.

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13 Among others:
Less comprehensive but a reasonable resources that summarizes the scholarship in the specific topics/periods of Egyptian history:
1. The Western Perspective: Decolonization and Cold War Policy

Egypt has received considerable amount of attention in scholarly research when it is analyzed as a part of the broader Middle Eastern context. The Palestinian question and the conflict between Israel and the Arab states that emerged after World War II, secured Egypt’s position in Western politics as well as in historical analysis, given the country’s role as the strongest geopolitical force on the Arab side. At the same time, the global rules of power changed from a postcolonial European hegemony to the Cold War dichotomy between the United States and the Soviet Union. Egypt was a major Western concern during both periods, first, as the key site of British influence and military power in the region until the 1950s, and second, as Egypt reclaimed its position of cultural and political leadership in the Arab world after the military coup in 1952. As the strongest geopolitical force in the region, it consequently was courted by the East and West when the Middle East became an ideological hunting ground during the Cold War. The discovery of oil in various Arab countries and in Iran accelerated this process. Although little oil was found in Egypt, the densely populated cultural and educational center at the bridge-point between Asia and Africa served its elaborate historic position of influence in the late Ottoman empire and translated into the role of a vanguard of the twentieth century Arab world. This process correlated neatly with the rhetorical claims the nationalist government repeated from 1952 onwards.

The geopolitical facts that still define Egypt’s position in the region have forced themselves into the approach of analyzing modern Egyptian history as part of the Middle Eastern conflict, mainly from an outside (Western) point of view. The main goal of the first part of the thesis will be to analyze the shift Egypt underwent from a postcolonial British influence to its position in relation to the two superpowers during the Cold War. This analysis focuses heavily on Egypt’s political stand vis-à-vis Israel, not only because it dominates the new nationalist regime’s foreign policy, but also because it is the main focus of Western political and scholarly attention. This chosen perspective compels inquiries into the Arab and global developments that accompany the processes within Egypt; which serve as basis for analysis in this and the following chapters.

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1.1. Egypt’s Cultural Heritage: Postcolonial Rule and the Veiled Protectorate

As indicated above, Egypt derives its elaborate position in the Arab world from its cultural heritage. While it has always been a center of learning (the al-Azhar University in Cairo is the oldest seat of Islamic learning and religious authority), its position was enhanced by the country’s extensive autonomy within the Ottoman Empire in the early nineteenth century.\(^{16}\)

However, the heavy handed process of modernization and industrialization of the Muhammad Ali dynasty was curtailed by the growing economic and geopolitical interest of the British Empire, resulting in the formal occupation of the province in 1882. With the aftermath of the First World War and the participation of many Arab countries in Allied efforts, a wave of hope was raised for self determination. A formally independent constitutional monarchy was established in Egypt in 1922.\(^ {17}\) The country then engaged in what al-Sayyid Marsot called the ‘liberal experiment’.\(^ {18}\) Doomed to failure from the beginning, but a crucial period in which to understand the rise of Egyptian/Arab nationalism that defined the country from 1952 onwards, as well as to understand the country’s future relationship with the West.

Three major forces that controlled Egyptian politics can be defined during this period: The royal house, the British position in Egypt, and the nationalist party (the \textit{Wafd}).\(^ {19}\) As the British sided with the king, this triangle of power was reduced to a struggle between the popular Wafd on the one side and the elaborate powers of the king and the British representatives on the other side, thus outlining a reoccurring pattern, frequently found in the process of decolonization in the Arab world.\(^ {20}\)

The Wafd had its roots in the call for independence that echoed through the colonial (Arab) world at the end of the First World War.\(^ {21}\) However the hope to emerge as an independent nation out of the British sphere of influence after the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire was only partially met by the unilateral declaration of independence from the British side in 1922. The centers of power remained in British hands, although ‘veiled’ by the executive power of the king. The political

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\(^{16}\) For Egypt’s autonomous ambitions during the early Muhammad Ali dynasty, see Marsot 1996: 55-64.

\(^{17}\) See Marsot 1996: 72-74 and 80-81.

\(^{18}\) See Marsot 1996: 82. The failure of the liberal experiment and thus the rise of Egyptian nationalism will be closely analyzed in the second chapter.

\(^{19}\) The royal house is represented by King Fuad (1868-1936) and his son and successor Farouk (1920-1965), heirs of the Muhammad Ali dynasty (1805-1952), the British senior official in Cairo was the High Commissioner, and the Wafd was first headed by co-founder Saad Zaghlul (1859-1927). See Marsot 1996: 82-83.

\(^{20}\) For the British and French practice of collaboration with local elites during the postcolonial era, as well as the popular reaction and resistance, see Khalidi 2004: 25-30.

\(^{21}\) Although the broader nationalist movement drew from the opposition to the British occupation after the suppression of the Urabi Revolt in 1882, see Marsot 1996: 72 and 76-77.
agenda of the Wafd was primarily dedicated to achieve full independence for Egypt by negotiating the four limitations of the 1922 agreement with the British.\textsuperscript{22}

British policy in Egypt was very much defined to suppress such popular movements by supporting a seemingly stable royal dynasty. As political developments in Egypt during the second quarter of the twentieth century have shown, national independence did not necessarily equal a sovereign state, yet the veiled British influence continued to define Egyptian policy up to 1956. Taking into consideration that, even though, Egypt was the main British power base due to geopolitical and economic factors, the Empire was also present in various other Arab countries and Iran on different scales. The focus on a policy that promised maximum stability with minimal engagement, then seemed to be an essential and pragmatic one.\textsuperscript{23}

This internal constellation of power also meant that a redefinition of Egypt’s status was only possible with British consent. A clear case for this was established in 1936 when the fear of the emerging war drew the equally concerned Egyptian and British parties to the negotiation table.\textsuperscript{24} The new treaty that was negotiated, however, offered little substantial gains in terms of the continued presence of the British, especially in the Suez Canal Zone. It did, however, end foreign occupation in a legal sense, and was therefore seen as a major gain by the Egyptian public.\textsuperscript{25}

The British, however, would not hesitate to reassert total physical control over the country if their own interest were at stake. The predominant clause of the Treaty of 1936 consisted of an agreement of mutual assistance in case of war and revealed that the Empire was not ready to gamble on its gateway to India.\textsuperscript{26} At the height of the war in Northern Africa in 1942, the British immediately showed force and had troops surround the royal palace when the king’s suspected contacts to the Axis powers were seen as a threat to their own interests. As a result, the king’s power was curtailed and a Wafdist popular government was installed upon British orders.\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{22} The four limitations were: the British right to defend Egypt against aggression, the security of imperial communication lines (especially the Suez Canal), protection of foreign interests and minorities, and the British administration of the Sudan. See Botman in Daly 1998: 285; and Marsot 1996: 82.

\textsuperscript{23} For Great Britain’s costly involvement in Transjordan, Iraq, Palestine and the Persian Gulf (and the French in Syria, Lebanon and North Africa) during the inter-war period, see Khalidi 2004: 20-25.

\textsuperscript{24} The fear that Egypt could be drawn into a conflict between the European powers had become imminent with the Italian involvement in Ethiopia and Cyrenaica, see Botman in Daly 1998: 294; and Marsot 1996: 96.

\textsuperscript{25} See Marsot 1996: 96-97. Legal independence resulted into Egyptian membership in the League of Nations in 1937, thus allowing the country to establish embassies and take foreign policy into its own hand for the first time. See Botman in Daly 1998: 292-295.

\textsuperscript{26} Mutual assistance in case of war mainly meant the continued British military presence in the canal zone and the improvement of the country’s communication and transportation infrastructure by Egyptian labour, see Marsot 1996: 96-97.

\textsuperscript{27} The political maneuver and the heavy British military presence during World War II had lasting effects on Egyptian society, both under political and Islamic premises, as will be analyzed in following two chapters. See Botman in Daly 1998: 299-301 and Marsot 1996: 100.
At the end of the war, Egypt’s admission to the United Nations in October 1945 raised new hopes for a renegotiation of the 1936 Treaty and the final evacuation of British forces. The process, however, was overshadowed by the intensifying conflict in Palestine, shifting international and Arab attention to the Levant and further postponing the settlement of the British presence in Egypt. The country’s position vis-à-vis Israel was to define its political agenda for the rest of the century.

1.2. Global Shift of Power: The Israeli Component and the New World Order

With the Israeli declaration of independence on May 14, 1948, Egypt again received international attention as the main force of the Arab invasion that followed the day after. The crushing Arab defeat, as much as it can be based on the unbalanced military potential between the Arab and Israeli forces, was also a political one. The conflict for the first time applied the new bipolar world order to the region. The immediate recognition of Israeli independence by the United States and the Soviet Union had already set a pretext that was hostile to an Arab victory, even if military forces had been more balanced.28

At the same time, there was a sharp decline of British influence that accompanied Egypt’s internal transition in 1952. Although the nationalist revolution was not hostile to British and American interests, Nasser and the Free Officers, who had largely fed on the anti-imperialist and nationalist rhetorics, moved to renegotiate the 1936 Treaty, once their power was consolidated.29

The evacuation of the British forces and therefore the loss of its main power base in the region, also meant that, under the Cold War logic, Great Britain had lost its legitimacy to act as the representative to defend Western interest in the area.30 British political and military influence had already vanished in the aftermath of the revolution. Nasser, consequently, refused to join the British dominated Baghdad Pact, as he had his own ambitions for a genuine Arab alliance.31 The tripartite invasion that followed the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company can therefore be seen as an attempt to have saved at least the economic interests that Great Britain had in Egypt. Thus, Nasser’s


29 The Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of October 19, 1954 held that British troops would be evacuated form Suez within twenty months. However, the two countries would be allies in case of foreign aggression, which was seen as a penetration of Egypt’s sovereignty by hard line nationalists. See Baker 1978: 25. A more profound analysis of nationalist revolution will be given in chapter 2.

30 For the Anglo-American cooperation in the Middle East during the early phase of the Cold War (most significant in the 1953 coup against Mohammad Mosaddeq in Iran), see Khalidi 2004: 34-35.

31 Furthermore Nasser saw his desired position as leader of the Arab states challenged by the emergence of the Iraqi rival. He frequently resorted to rhetoric attacks against the Baghdad Pact and denounced it a ‘imperialist instrument of power’, thus jeopardizing his relations with the United States. See Baker 1978: 37-38.
move and the following political victory caused the eradication of the last grip Great Britain had on Egypt.\textsuperscript{32}

Regarding the global shift of power, the line of events that had initially triggered Nasser’s decision to nationalize the Suez Canal are far more important. With the reactionary royal and British forces gone, the new revolutionary government under Nasser had engaged in a line of ambitious modernization projects with a heavy focus on state-owned industry. In order to finance these projects, Nasser attempted to exploit the political climate and borrow heavily from the United States and the Soviet Union, trying to compensate for the country’s own scarce resources.\textsuperscript{33} The new government’s most prestigious industrialization plan in the early years was the construction of the Aswan High Dam, for which the United States and the Word Bank had offered a massive loan. Due to Nasser’s political provocations, and his continued courtship of the East, however, Washington canceled the offer, thus humiliating Nasser on the international stage.\textsuperscript{34}

In order to compensate for the loss of funds, Nasser moved to nationalize the Suez Canal, triggering the Anglo-Franco-Israeli invasion. The secret ‘Operation Musketeer’ was a quick military success; however, superpower intervention from both sides made it a political disaster. Washington was not content with the involvement to begin with and shortly put enormous political and economic pressure on its Cold War allies when the threat of Soviet retaliation became imminent. The debacle ended the with withdrawal of the tripartite force and made Nasser a regional power-broker on the international stage and a hero in the Arab world.\textsuperscript{35}

1.3. The Cold War Context: Rhetoric of Nonalignment and Turn to the Eastern Bloc

If the 1956 Suez Crisis had added the Cold War component to the Arab-Israeli conflict,\textsuperscript{36} the following events, accumulating in the eruption of the Six-Day War in 1967, can be seen as a further clarification of these patterns. After the Suez crisis, when Arab hopes of a US-policy favorable to

\textsuperscript{32}A French and British shareholder majority had dominated the Suez Canal Company ever since the project’s inauguration in 1869. The accompanying military presence in the Canal Zone since the British occupation of Egypt in 1982 had been an ongoing issue in nationalist politics. The occupation of the Canal Zone then was both, the last British stronghold in the country and the spark that triggered the nationalist revolution 1952. See Marsot 1996: 66-69, 74 and 104.

\textsuperscript{33}See Baker 1978: 45. Nasser attempted to secure financial support form both blocs, thus creating a ‘positive equilibrium’. The following political events proved this a short lived experiment, see Baker 1978: 40.

\textsuperscript{34}Nasser’s courtship of the Eastern bloc is seen as the main reason. He had indeed been successful in concluding an arms deal with Czechoslovakia in 1955 that was seen vital for his ambitions of modernizing the army. Furthermore the US administration under the lead of Secretary of State John Foster Dallas was angered by the Nasser’s repeated attacks against the Baghdad Pact, his support for the overthrow of the pro-Western regime in Jordan and his recognition of communist China, see Baker 1978: 39-41. For the US and World Bank loan, see Baxter/Akbarzadeh 2008: 47.


\textsuperscript{36}For the official and de facto alignments of the Arab countries with either bloc in the course of the Cold War, see Khalidi 2004: 46.
their interests proved futile, Nasser became disillusioned with the lack of economic support that came from Washington and instead turned to the Eastern bloc for arms and funds. Although he upheld the nonalignment rhetoric, both the economic ties and the socialist flavor of his Arab nationalism effectively made Egypt a Soviet ‘client state’.37 This pattern becomes clear when looking at the USSR’s highly controversial role in the Six-Day War, which reflects the ideologically-sponsored policy making process of the Cold War era.

Nasser, at the height of his power, was heavily pressured by his Arab neighbors to re-engage in the support of the Palestinian cause, and embarked into a series of political and military bearings against Israel, including the removal of the United Nations Emergency Forces that had been stationed on the Sinai since 1956, coordinated troop movements with Syria, and the closure of the Straits of Tiran for Israeli shipping.38 Although analysts have seen Nasser’s actions and rhetoric as targeting an Arab and domestic audience, rather than as a military threat against its Northern neighbor, Israel considered the closure of the Straits of Tiran as an act of war and launched a preemptive strike on June 5, 1967.39 After the decisive victory six days later, Israel had defeated the combined military forces of Egypt, Syria and Jordan, occupied the Sinai peninsula, the Golan Heights, the Gaza strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem; which in turn increased its territory six times over.

The crushing Arab defeat and the unbearable status quo that was to follow the conflict, not only was a decisive blow for Nasser and the nationalist movement, as well as cause for a reorientation of the Arab (Muslim) community,40 but also questioned the degree of Soviet involvement in the escalation of the conflict. Partial accounts testify to the claim that false information about Israeli troop concentration at the Syrian border was given to the Egyptian military intelligence by the Soviets, thus prompting Nasser to move his own troops to the Sinai to counter Israeli ambitions. Furthermore, had the Soviet Union consequently denied to arm Egypt adequately for a military first strike. While a serious Egyptian intention to attack Israel therefore is questionable, a Soviet interest in a conflict that would destabilize the region in a political sense, but further enhance the ideological lines of the Cold War seems highly plausible.41 This strategy was successful insofar as –

37 However, large-scale financial aid and food subsidies from the United States persisted. For an evaluation of the balance of US and Soviet civil and military aid for Egypt, see Roussillon in Daly 1998: 355; and Waterbury 1984: 391-405.

38 For synopsis of the Six-Day War, see Baxter/Akbarzadeh 2008: 49-56.

39 Nasser, during the early 1960s, had indeed built on a moderate policy towards Israel, well aware of its military potential and the possible impact of a war on Egypt’s economy, see Baker 1978: 118-119; and Roussillon in Daly 1998: 356-357.

40 The defeat of 1967 became to be a major trauma of the Arab world and was both, a turning point for Arab nationalism (chapter 2), the beginning of the religious revivalism (chapter 3). See Baxter/Akbarzadeh 2008: 55.

while Israel was continuously backed by the United States – the Arab countries, and especially Egypt, closed their ties with the Eastern bloc and consequently relied on Soviet arms support during the next phase of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The response of the UN Security Council to the Six-Day War (Resolution 242)\textsuperscript{42} was of very limited efficiency from an Arab perspective, since Israel could not be moved to return its wartime acquisitions and furthermore consolidated its hold on the new territories by enhanced settlement movements. The defeated Arab states, worried that the result of the war would become a new geopolitical fact, embarked on a ‘war of attrition’ under Egyptian lead, thus trying to keep the international debate on the issue open.\textsuperscript{43} Armed with Soviet equipment, combined Egyptian and Syrian forces finally launched a large scale attack on Israel on October 6, 1973.\textsuperscript{44}

Caught by surprise, Israel managed to repel the Arab armies through a heavy US airlift to score at least a military victory in the conflict. The political outcome of the conflict, however, was far more complex. What Henry Kissinger called an Israeli ‘strategic defeat’, was indeed a major gain for the Arab parties, since the conflict was successful in re-igniting the international debate regarding the outcome of the Six-Day War.\textsuperscript{45}

Meanwhile, the events of 1973 also marked a final climax of superpower intervention in the region. The United States, not ready to see its closest ally be overrun by a Soviet sponsored assault, strengthened its ties with Israel, while Egypt still heavily relied on arms and funds from the Eastern bloc.\textsuperscript{46}

The aftermath of the war saw Egypt gradually distancing itself from the Soviet Union and the implementation of a more Western oriented policy with mixed consequences for Egypt’s regional and international status. While Egypt was initially seen as responsible for the restoration of the Arab pride, which had been suffering since the 1967 defeat, Cairo’s separate peace with Israel that followed the Camp David accords in 1978 was seen as betrayal by most Arab nations. Camp David did not trigger the expected series of peace treaties with other Arab nations and Egypt was the only country to regain its territories occupied by Israel.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{42} The resolution basically stated that active fighting was to cease and stressed the right to life in peace for all the parties involved. The status of the occupied territories and the Palestinian question, however, was only vaguely addressed and no imperative was raised. See U.N Resolution 242, November 22, 1967; cited in Lorenz 1990: 131-132.

\textsuperscript{43} See Baker 1978: 121; and Baxter/Akbarzadeh 2008: 56.

\textsuperscript{44} Sadat had concluded a major arms deal with the Soviet Union in February that year, which equipped the Egyptian army adequately to counter the Israeli air force. See Baker 1978: 128. For a pan-Arab perspective on the October War, see Lorenz 1990: 46-54.


\textsuperscript{46} Counter international perception, Baker noted that not only the US-Israeli relation showed stains, but also Egypt slowly started to cut its ties with the Soviet Union even before the war, as a result of the change in the top leadership. See Baker 1978: 134 and 139.

\textsuperscript{47} See Baxter/Akbarzadeh 2008: 59. For the consequences of Camp David in inter-Arab relations, see Lorenz 1990: 92-101.
1.4. Turn to the West: New Discourses on Egypt and the Middle East

Although the Arab-Israeli conflict would continue up to the present day, Sadat’s trip to Jerusalem in 1977 and the peace treaty that followed the Camp David Accords in 1978, effectively cut Egypt out of the conflict. The effects of this move were felt on different levels. On the one hand, Sadat was free to implement his economic reforms which meant closer ties to the West with the risk of being isolated from Egypt’s Arab neighbors. On the other hand, in the political and historical perception, Egypt was not a primary focus of attention once its relations with Israel were stabilized.48

While Washington’s policy of securing Israel’s status as the most reliable Middle Eastern ally persisted, the severe impact on the Western economies of the OPEC oil embargo as a weapon in the 1973 war had caused a shift in US foreign policy towards a support of pro-Western authoritarian regimes all over the Middle East to secure stability in the oil-rich countries.49 Egypt, scarce on fossil resources, but nevertheless a strong regional power, was brought in line with other Middle Eastern countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Iran (until 1979), as its internal political stagnation was seen favorable to Western interests.50

Washington would occasionally draw support from this relationship for its own policies in the region. Egypt’s political backup was particularly valuable, especially when the country regained its status as a regional power-broker after it was readmitted to the Arab League in 1989. The Gulf War in 1991 was the first of such partnerships, with a heavy physical involvement of Egyptian troops which traded for the cancelation of over 14 billion dollars of national debt to the West. This reflects the high value the United States placed on Egypt’s ability to rally support for the war.51 The second call for political backup came in 1993, after the United States, declaring itself the main supporter of the ill-fated Oslo Accords to address the Palestinian question, again, looked for regional allies.52

Egypt’s moderate position in Middle Eastern politics served not only its Western supporters but also its own self interests, be it economically or politically by stabilizing Mubarak’s regime. While

48 Hinnebusch observation of the “Egyptian withdrawal from its Arab-Islamic environment” as the country enters a period of passivity in international politics, however, is only partially valid. However, it is true that the core of the Arab Israeli conflict moves north during the following years and with the two Israeli wars in Lebanon in 1982 and 2006. See Hinnebusch 1986. 302.
49 This change in US policy is indicated by the shift of attention towards the Persian Gulf and was accelerated by the Iranian Revolution of 1979 that caused the United States to look for replacements of their strongest ally in the Middle East, mainly Baathist Iraq (until 1990) and long term ally Saudi Arabia, see Baxter/Akbarzadeh 2008: 59; and Khalidi 2004: 40-41.
50 Washington relied on the Egyptian regime to secure its regional interests at the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa and counter Soviet interests in Ethiopia, as well as the radical anti-Western Libyan regime. See Roussillon in Daly 1998: 364-365.
51 For Egypt’s foreign debt management, see Waterbury 1984: 404-421; and Roussillon in Daly 1998: 274. Others contemplate that the 1991 Gulf War was a missed chance, as Egypt could have reclaimed its predominant position in the Arab world by decisively taking on its Iraqi rival, rather than supporting US policy by providing auxiliary forces. See Osman, Tarek. Egypt on the Brink: From Nasser to Mubarak: New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2010: 171-172.
52 For general account on the Oslo Accords, see Cleveland 1994: 483-499; on the US involvement, see Khalidi 2004, 137-150.
the position of popular and religious currents will be analyzed more closely in the following two chapters, it is important to note that the basic outlines of the historical approach under the Western perception were questioned and again debated when Egypt reappeared in the international spotlight in 2011.

While Western research on the Middle East had undergone a major reorientation in the 1980s with the influence of Edward Said, who had questioned the very basis of the methodology of historical research on the ‘Orient’, the dynamics of the Arab Spring have drawn many observers on both side of the debate to rearrange the patterns that have been established in this controversy.\(^{53}\) In recent events, the focus on the ‘cultural other’ when studying the political and social dynamics of the region has been overshadowed by popular demands for values that – although modern Western societies had declared them universal – have long be seen as incompatible with Muslim societies. This rather bold presumption, enjoyed a boost, especially within the political and media strata after Huntington’s hypothesis of the *Clash of Civilizations* and Lewis’ *Roots of Muslim Rage* were feeding on the popular fear of Islamic terrorism in the wake September 11, 2001,\(^{54}\) but was seriously challenged when the world watched people from Libya to Bahrain stand up against the authoritarian regimes and ask for political liberalization, personal freedom, the rule of law, human rights and democracy. Egypt was not the only Middle Eastern country, in which sociopolitical transitions gained momentum under Islamic prefixes.

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53 Edward Said’s work *Orientalism* (1978), basically sums up and popularizes earlier debate and critique on Western studies on what is to be called the ‘Orient’ (Freitag in Bentley 1997: 628-629). This criticism includes methodical issues (the lack of Eastern language knowledge, Eurocentrism) and ideological bias (civilization mission, Western cultural superiority/racism). Said, who was in turn criticized for the exclusion of German and Russian Orientalist studies, as well as historical inaccuracy, tried to prove these misconceptions by analyzing a large literally canon (mainly French and English) of works concerned with the Orient and caused a spread of the debate to other fields of the humanities (Freitag in Bentley 1997: 633-634). Although Said focuses on the late nineteenth and early twentieth century literature, the discourse enjoys ongoing attention because of contemporary conflicts of the West with the Muslim world. Scholars have attempted to explain failing Western politics in the region in accordance with Said’s criticism of the monolithic view on the Orient or Islam, which he traces back to the biased Orientalist scholarly tradition of the colonial age (Esposito 1999: 261). Said’s thesis has therefore found its ways into current works on the Arab (Muslim) world and Egypt in particular, be it by embracing the approach or breaking it down; John L. Esposito, John O. Voll as well as Rashid Khalidi on the one side, and Albert Hourani and Bernard Lewis as the most prominent critics, as far as references in this study are concerned. See among others, Freitag, Ulrike. “The Critique of Orientalism.” In: Michael Bentley (ed.) *Companion to Historiography*. London/New York: Routlege, 1997: 620-638.

54 Samuel P. Huntington’s argument builds up on the different levels of compatibility of the seven or eight major civilizations he defines on the globe (Huntington 1993: 25). Following this line of argument, he concludes that the Western and Islamic civilizations are currently at odds due to fundamental (incompatible) cultural differences, which bear a dangerous potential of violent conflict between the two. Bernhard Lewis contemplates that the United States of America – fourteen centuries of warfare between Islam and the West – have become the incarnation of evil and archenemy of the Muslim world (Lewis 1990: 3-4). Both of these rather monolithic views on the Muslim world and political Islam have been widely rejected in the scholarly community. See among others, Esposito 1999: 219-232; Said, Edward W. “The Clash of Ignorance.” *Nation* Vol. 273 No. 12 (2001): 11-13; Keppel, Gilles. “Beyond the Clash of Civilizations.” *New York Times*. March 11, 2011. For empirical nullification of Lewis and Huntington’s hypothesis, see the evaluation of the *Gallup Poll* on the issue (Esposito/Mogahed 2007: xi and 142-149). Editions used in this study: Huntington, Samuel P. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. 2nd ed. London: The Free Press, 2002; Lewis, Bernard. “The Roots of Muslim Rage.” *Atlantic Monthly*. September 1990.
The redefinition of the Western perception is now taking shape with the ongoing events in the Arab world. Egypt, a long term and strong ally of the West, has recently addressed the international community that it has no intentions to discontinue the established relations with United States and Europe.\(^{55}\) Presidents Muhammad Morsi’s initiatives in regional and international politics, however, suggest that Egypt does not seek to continue a unipolar alliance and is eager to regain its regional status under the new domestic conditions.

2. The Arab Perspective: Between National and Popular Independence

In al-Sayyid Marsot’s introductory work, *A Short History of Modern Egypt*, the author outlines his study on the basic observation that, since pharaonic times, Egypt was under alien rule until the 1952 *coup d’état*. While this is certainly true given the historical facts, the statement, however, implies that Egypt has been under domestic rule from that point forward. This is also valid, as far as nationality is concerned, but it misses the concept of ‘alienation between ruler and the ruled’, the basic issue raised by Marsot.\(^{56}\) To conclude that after 1952 Egypt is ruled by Egyptians is as problematic as to say that the pretext of alien rule continued.

The analysis of the relation between the rulers and the ruled, predominantly concerning the political currents that struggled for national independence in the second quarter of the twentieth century and the degree of interaction between the Free Officer government and the Egyptian people in the aftermath of the revolution will be the main focus of this chapter. This not only asks for a change of viewpoint to an Egyptian/Arab nationalist one, but also allows to put into context the most recent developments of Egyptian history, during which the relation of the rulers and the ruled again have changed dramatically. In the previous, chapter the central question was the shift from British-colonial to Cold War influence. The main shift to be analyzed here is the one from political struggle for national independence, in the first half of the twentieth century, to the popular struggle for political participation during recent events.

2.1. The Constitutional Experiment: Liberal and Nationalist Policy Making

A common perception in reading Egypt’s struggle for national independence is to assume that the revolution of July 1952 was a logical conclusion of the political pressure built up during the previous three decades and that it found its political expression in the army conspiracy of the Free Officers and the *coup d’état*. While this definitely served the new regime's self-justifying rhetoric,

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\(^{56}\) See Marsot 1996: vii-viii.
which tried to trace its roots back to the nationalist struggle that had been going on since the
suppression of the Urabi Revolt in 1882, Egypt’s revolutionary potential during the constitutional
experiment clearly laid elsewhere.57 A confident of Nasser concluded that the success of the military
conspirators was merely a “historical accident” and the “army was […] the last place where
revolution should have broken out.”58

Three political currents which had revolutionary potential are worth analyzing in regard to their
political agendas and their eventual failures: The Wafd, the Liberal Constitutionalists, and an
introduction to the Muslim Brotherhood, which will gain a closer analysis in the final chapter.

The nationalist Wafd, as the oldest and strongest of these political currents, indeed had its roots
in the struggle for national independence that resurfaced during the First World War.59 Although
trying to present their case at the Paris Peace Conference was a political failure, the Egyptian
delegation (in Arabic a wafd), under the lead of Saad Zaghlul managed to stir up an elaborate
expression of popular discontent which finally caused the unilateral British decision to abolish the
protectorate and declare Egypt’s independence in 1922.60

The Wafd, which translated into the most powerful popular force within the constitutional
government that was established in the aftermath, drew its political support from its anti-British
stand. As already seen, British influence remained strong in Egypt, as they backed the king who still
enjoyed disproportional powers. The main target of the Wafd therefore was to renegotiate the four
limitations of the declaration of independence. A partial success came in 1936, when a Wafdist
government re-negotiated the initial treaty. However, the political gains were very limited, even if it
was seen as a moral victory.61

The eventual failure of the Wafd was rooted in the political environment that defined the early
constitutional period. Although it enjoyed a vast popular support, the Wafd had little political power
with its antagonistic position to the alliance of the king and the old colonial power. The political
party that enjoyed vast support by the king and therefore the British, was the Liberal
Constitutionalist Party. The party was formed from an offshoot of the Wafd and mainly consisted of
a loose coalition of wealthy landlords who were dissatisfied with Zaghlul’s authoritarian party

59 Egypt had been under British occupation since the suppression of the Urabi revolt in 1882, which translated into a formal protectorate during the First World War. See Marsot 1996: 72 and 78.
60 See Marsot 1996: 79-81.
61 Only one of the four points, the extraterritorially of foreign residents and minorities, was abolished. The questions of the Sudan, the Suez Canal and Egypt’s military dependence remained. The treaty only ended British occupation in a legal sense, not in a physical one. See Marsot 1996: 96.
rule. Used by the king to counter the popular Wafd, as he frequently disbanded the elected Wafdist parliament and installed a liberal government, the Liberal Constitutionalist Party soon degenerated into a rubber stamp parliament doing the biddings of the king. It remained a political minority that had a moderate nationalist agenda, but never tired to rally popular support; however, the party could rely on the support from the king.

This political stalemate, which had the corrupting byproduct of luring politicians into the parties for personal, rather then national interests, was hardly an appropriate setting for the Wafd to address Egypt’s social and economic problems; even if a popular election would allow them to form a government. The failure of dealing with social and economic problems, such as widespread illiteracy, the rapid rise of population, failed industrialization, agrarian monoculture and land distribution, had cost the party much of its initial momentum, especially after the charismatic leader Zaghlul died in 1927.

The final blow for the Wafd came during the Second World War, with the enhanced British military presence and the rising popular resentment against this presence. The Wafd’s acceptance to form a British backed government to counter the pro-Axis tendency of the king and the liberal government (a sentiment largely shared by the people as an alternative to British occupation), then was largely seen as a sellout of their cause. The Wafd had been brought to existence by its antagonistic stand against the British influence. The opportunistic collaboration in order to rise to power cost the party vast popular support.

In the meantime, the Wafd's hegemony over the masses had been seriously challenged by the emerging Society of the Muslim Brotherhood, which had been founded in 1928 and henceforth had provided the Egyptian people with the much needed social welfare institutions during the economic depression of the 1930s. It is not surprising that the society gained political power during a period of general hardship when people turned to their Islamic roots as a last resort of hope.

While the Muslim Brotherhood gained further popularity during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War by sending guerrilla fighters to Palestine, the Arab defeat essentially ruined the political capital of both, the king and the Wafdist government. The moral end for the old regime was highlighted in 1952.

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62 Other so-called minority parties were: the Sa’dist Party, the People’s Party and the Unity Party, see Botman in Daly 1998: 286-287.
63 See Marsot 1996: 83. For the Political agenda of the Liberal Constitutionalist Party, see Botman in Daly 1998: 289.
64 See Baker 1978: 6; and Marsot 1996: 93.
65 The resentments of the British occupation during the war, the public burden of providing war infrastructure, and the cultural clash of the common soldiers with the urban population caused many Egyptians to prefer a German alternative (at that point highly successful in Northern Africa) as an opportunity to drive out the British once and for all. See Marsot 1996: 100-101.
66 As Khalidi observes, the gradual discrediting of indigenous proto-democratic movements in face of the French and British postcolonial influence is a reoccurring pattern in throughout the Middle East, see Khalidi 2004: 58-59.
with the Cairo Fire of January 26, which gave a lasting image of the failure of Egypt’s liberal experiment – the political *coup de grâce* came six months later.\(^67\)

2.2. National Independence: The 1952 *coup d’état* and Nasser’s Consolidation of Power

At the eve of the revolution, both major political parties had failed to meet their goals, the king had been involved in a series of personal scandals, and the Muslim Brotherhood, the only movement that was still able to rally popular support, had been outlawed in 1948. When the Free Officers made their move in July 1952, there were few left who would fight for the old order. As Baker notes, “the dynasty founded by Muhammad Aly simply collapsed.”\(^68\)

Although the Free Officers movement itself had its roots in the Royal Military Academy, the military neither served as a vehicle to political power, nor for the formulation of nationalist ideas.\(^69\) As Nasser concluded later, the military “appeared to be confined to the poorest of the poor [the soldiers] and the most ignorant of the ignorants [the high command], not as a national honor.”\(^70\) On the other hand, the officers’ nationalist ideology had already formed before they joined the military, as the example of Nasser’s early political activities during his school years demonstrates.\(^71\)

Considering that the army had always been a loyal backbone of the royal house, the king barely paid attention to rumors about a military conspiracy. The armed forces, however, had undergone a radical change with the experience on the fields of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, putting into question the position of both, the king and army’s the high command after the Arab defeat. While the high command was still loyal to the king, the group of conspirators made sure to keep their cells secret and at a low and personal level.\(^72\)

It is an interesting observation, that although the popular riots in Cairo of January 26, 1952 have been seen as the immediate trigger, the Free Officers came to power without any popular assistance. With no opposition and their plans secured once they knew the British would not intervene on behalf of the crown, the Free Officers came to power without the help of any of the civilian groups outlined above, even though the whole political spectrum was kept satisfied with promises to their

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\(^67\) See Marsot 1996: 103.

\(^68\) Baker 1978: 27.

\(^69\) The Royal Military Academy opened as a byproduct of the 1936 Treaty and henceforth allowed a military officer career also for Egyptians who were not members of landowning aristocracy. Baker sets the dates for the beginnings of the Free Officers movement for 1942, with first regular meetings in 1944 and serious organization in 1949, see Baker 1978: 20 and 25.


\(^71\) See Baker 1978: 21.

\(^72\) For the elitist beginnings of the conspirators and the careful guarding of the secret cells are seen as a defining long term effect on the Free Officer rule, see Baker 1978: 25-26.
causes and a very vague ideological outline. At least until the Free Officers had consolidated their position.

The ultimate power base of the new regime was undoubtedly the military, which was among the first institutions to receive a boost in prestige and budget from the new government. While this internal nonalignment generated a very independent government with a free hand in domestic and international politics, civilian alliances were sought when the Free Officer leadership was split internally. This is well represented by Nasser’s power struggle with General Muhammad Naguib (1901-1984), Egypt’s first president. While Naguib looked for civilian alliances and aimed to restore rule to the political life before 1952, Nasser sought the exclusion of these civilian elements that had proven inefficient. Nasser then managed to outmaneuver Naguib when he gained control over the military and the security apparatus; the nucleus of the new regime’s power.

2.3. Free Officer Rule: From Arab-Socialism to Sadat’s Infitah

Nasser’s consolidation of power, despite the involvement of various civilian groups on both sides, clearly showed that real power was within the control of the security apparatus and the military. The result was a regime that did not have to rely on any civilian interests and therefore was highly independent in domestic and foreign policy making. However, this form of Free Officer rule was of mixed success. No participation of civilian groups in the policy making process did not mean that the new regime could be ignorant of popular currents. The government’s attempt to stay in line with the country’s popular base can mainly be divided into three phases:

The Charismatic Leader

The early year’s of Nasser’s rule was marked by two distinct features of governance. First, there was the use of political capital in the Cold War context as the country’s main resource, as detailed in the previous chapter, and second, the period is marked by Nasser’s personal charisma as the main driving force of the popular support in domestic and foreign policy making. This political capital

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Ties to the Marxist left and the Muslim Brotherhood, the two most powerful civilian groups that could have provided an ideological outline, were cut and the groups repressed after the initial internal power struggle was over. See Roussillon in Daly 1998: 338-342.


75 General Naguib was a member of the military high command who sided with the Free Officers and thus was most representative for the cause. The Free Officers mainly chose him as a figurehead because of his popularity and prestige among the common soldiers and the general public. See Baker 1978: 32-33.

76 For the application of internal and external dependency theories on Republican Egypt, see Waterbury 1984: 11-17 and 20-32.

77 This thematic partition is roughly taken from Baker’s Egypt’s Uncertain Revolution (Baker 1978). For chronological account on the Free Officer Ruler Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak, see McDermott 1988.

78 See Baker 1978: 34-35.
was mainly based on Nasser’s bearings on the international stage. Initially, his determination to drive the British out of Egypt that cumulated in the Suez Crisis in 1956 made him the hero of the Arab people, because he had stood up against the old colonial powers. Second, his stance vis-à-vis Israel not only gave him domestic support, but also made him the charismatic leader of the Arab cause. This external factors supplied Nasser with a relative flexibility in domestic politics, allowing him to rule through a series of personal ties, disregarding civilian groups. This exclusive mandate system rule, however, did not allow genuine political currents to participate in the decision making process of the new government and further alienated the regime from the masses and the intellectual political community of the constitutional period.

*The Political Experiment*

This mandate system, which relied on popular support without civilian input in policy, was bound only to the successes on the international stage. In the beginning of the 1960s Nasser’s foreign policy suffered a series of setbacks. Furthermore, the Cold War climate had changed in an unfavorable way to Nasser’s policy of ‘positive neutralism’ to draw foreign aid. By the mid-1960s the momentum that was given to Nasser’s rule by his initial successes had worn off, marking the beginning of a second phase of the government’s relationship with the people. Nasser’s realization that, despite the political success of the revolution, a social revolution had not taken place, prompted him to engage on what Baker has defined as the ‘political solution’, thus trying to rally popular support and gaining political capital by the establishment of a mass party to promote a yet to be defined ideology. This double attempt was made by the creation of the Arab Socialist Union (ASU), founded in 1962, and the outline of the Charter of National Action in the same year.

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79 Nasser indeed could appeal to the Arab masses as he frequently held speeches in the neighboring Arab countries. The official government reactions, however, were mixed as the exploited popular dynamics could easily turn into a dangerous momentum for the ruling regime. See Baker 1978: 40-42.


81 Most notably the union with Syria which collapsed in 1961, the emergence of revolutionary Iraq as a rival Arab power center and the ruinous Egyptian involvement in the Yemen War, see Baker 1978: 88.

82 A relative detente of the Cold War climate in the beginning of the 1960s meant that Egypt could less rely on its previous policy of exploiting superpower rivalry in the region and turn the political capital into financial aid. See Baker 1978: 89.

83 The socialist measures – mainly some nationalization of private property and the enhancement of the public sector – that had taken place during Nasser’s early years are predominantly seen as a government strategy to gain control over Egypt’s main resources of income, rather than applying a genuine revolutionary ideology. See Roussillon in Daly 1998: 339-340. As far as land reform is concerned, Ansari effectively points out that the landed notables where nevertheless able to retain their position, see Ansari, Hamied. *Egypt: The Stalled Society*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1986: 97-140.

84 See Baker 1978: 93-96.

85 The ASU was yet another single party but with the intentions of superseding it predecessors of the National Union (1956) and the National Assembly (1957), which where merely seen as another extension of the government’s autocratic power. See Baker 1978: 89-90.
The attempt was half-hearted. Even if the new party had the potential to rally popular mass support by promoting the vague ideology of neutralism, pan-Arabism and socialism outlined in the National Charter, the ‘political solution’ never enjoyed Nasser’s full support. Nasser’s distrust of the mass dynamics and his fear of the potential creation of rival power centers within the leadership of the party, was one reason that the ASU was never handed over real political power. The new party’s end came quickly when the secretary general of the Arab Socialist Union booked a political success (the Kamchiche affair) that gave the party a dangerous momentum.\(^86\) Nasser moved quickly to play the military card against the ASU, making sure the old power-center got credited. The party, without Nasser’s support and deprived of its credibility, then received its final blow with the Arab defeat in the Six-Day War. The domestic and international reorientation that followed the war made the ‘political solution’ a short-lived experiment.\(^87\) The regime once again relied on administrative means to counter civilian political power.

**The Economic Solution**

The third phase was marked by the economic alternative to the political solution, which would eventually be implemented under Nasser’s successor Anwar as-Sadat. The core of this policy was Egypt’s opening (*infitah*) to Western investments. This ‘turn to the right’,\(^88\) however, faced a series of obstacles towards the end of the 1960s, as well as it bore the dangerous risk of sacrificing Egypt’s position in the Arab world.

As far as the obstacles are concerned, foreign investment could only be triggered within a relatively peaceful environment, thus asking for a redefinition of Egypt’s relations with Israel. However, Nasser’s political flexibility in this matter was locked by the pressure of its Arab neighbors who demanded Egypt’s re-engagement with Israel in support of the Palestinian people. In this regard, the Six-Day War in 1967 was a turning point in Egyptian domestic and international policy, as the government regained a flexible position to bargain on the Israeli matter.\(^89\) Although defeat was a serious setback for the broader Arab cause and the prestige that Nasser enjoyed among the Arab people,\(^90\) the openly defeated Nasser enjoyed widespread international support of different

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86 For the role of the village of Kamchiche as a ‘revolutionary model of change’, see Ansari 1986: 19-56.
87 See Baker 1978: 103 and 112-113.
88 Sadat’s turn to the right here essentially means Egypt’s opening to Western capital as an implementation of the economic solution, in contrast to leftist tendency of Nasser’s Arab socialism in the two decades before. See Baker 1978: 35-37.
89 Other sources, however, stress that Nasser’s internal and external room for maneuver was considerably reduced by the defeat in 1967, mainly due to the economic burden of re-arming the military and the heavy reliance on the Soviet Union for this task. See Roussillon in Daly 1998: 357-358.
90 Nasser’s domestic standing, however, was greatly enhanced by the episode of his resignation as president after the defeat, which triggered a popular outburst asking him to stay in office. See Baker 1978: 119.
sources. With the domestic and international means in hand, Nasser re-engaged on his moderate policy towards Israel, launching the costly ‘war of attrition’ in order to keep the international debate on the occupied territories open and eventually be able to play the token of peace in negotiations with Tel Aviv.

It was up to Nasser’s successor Anwar as-Sadat to play this card. The October War in 1973 gave the ‘hero of the crossing’ the initiative and the political capital to redefine Egypt’s relation with Israel and thus to engage on his own domestic course. Sadat’s ambitions resulted in the Camp David Accords, signed in September 1978, and the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty that was signed the following year; effectively dealing with the political instability in the region as the main obstacle to the economic solution.

As far as the risks of the ‘turn to the right’ are concerned, the Egyptian government faced a series of challenges, both internal and external. First, the opening to the West was seen as a sellout of the Arab cause by its neighbors and was about to endanger the flow from the oil rich countries that had just taken up after the war. Collective action came in 1979 when Egypt was expelled for the Arab League, after Sadat’s visit to Jerusalem and the Camp David accords proved to be a separate peace between Egypt and Israel rather than a negotiation for all involved parties and the PLO. This was not a far reaching consequence, however, considering that Egypt was readmitted to the Arab League in 1989, with most of the Arab countries never having cut their ties with Egypt completely.

Second, the opening to Western markets and the involvement of the United States in the dialogue with Israel meant that Egypt had to distance itself from the Soviet Union, which had already started before the 1973 war. Sadat was careful, however, to not cut ties completely as it was highly unlikely that the United States would become Egypt’s primary arms supplier even if financial help would flow stronger with the enhanced relations.

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91 First, he could unite the governments of his Arab neighbors behind him, and Egypt received financial support form the Gulf states. Second, a concerned Soviet Union was eager to counter the US-backed Israeli regional ambitions by restocking the arsenal of the Egyptian army. Last and probably most influential in the long run, was the financial subsidies Egypt received from Great Britain and the United States, prompted by Egypt’s unfavorable political and economic standing after the defeat. See Baker 1978: 120.

92 As Roussillon has noted, ‘the October war made infitah possible by rupturing the main Nasserist options: alliance with the Soviet bloc; primacy of the public sector; one-party government. See Roussillon in Daly 1998: 361.

93 See Baker 1978: 141-142 and Roussillon in Daly 1998: 364. Other accounts stress that the Arab League in turn was weakened with the expulsion of Egypt, see McDermott 1988: 268.

94 Counter to Arab propaganda, Lorenz points to evidence that Sadat was not seeking a bilateral peace treaty with Israel from the beginning and that he did not foresee the potential of his initiative, see Lorenz 1990: 77-78.

95 While it is true that Egypt had antagonized the so-called radical bloc among the Arab nations (mainly Libya, Iraq and Algeria), Egypt’s moderate position seemed to bear fruits and a moderate Arab bloc around Saudi Arabia, Syria, Jordan and parts of the PLO soon reproached Egypt. See Baker 1978: 142-143.

96 See Baker 1978: 140.
Domestic developments, however, proved to be the most serious risks of the new policy. Even though Sadat had quickly removed the doubts about his presidential stature when moved decisively against the conspiracy that was plotted against him after he assumed office in 1970, he lacked both, the initial momentum of the revolution and Nasser’s status as a hero of the Arab cause, which had secured the popular support of the regime.97

His new economic policy had put Sadat in a difficult position. On one hand, he had removed most of Nasser’s socialist welfare measures, and on the other hand, the economic benefits of the \textit{infitah} offered no instant relief. Large scale foreign investments stayed out of Egypt because of the recent hostilities with Israel.98 The price of what Mark N. Cooper called an ‘utter disaster’ was paid by the lower classes, for whom a decline in economic standing meant that they could no longer afford the basic necessities.99 The social stains of the economic solution then manifested themselves in series of popular protests throughout the 1970s and cumulated in the widespread riots in January 1977, when Sadat’s government, under heavy economic pressure, decided to cut food subsides which had kept a large popular strata alive.100

The regime’s response to the protests was heavy handed, with the arrest and jailing of hundreds of protestors. The initially political liberalization that had accompanied the economic reforms was soon limited after the new forum was used to criticize the government. The freedom of the press was restricted, the security apparatus strengthened, and the experiment of multiparty elections was brought back under the control of the state.101

2.4. Egypt in Transition: Mubarak and the Transformation of Popular Power

Sadat pushed his international reorientation and his economic reforms, but relied on the power mechanisms that had been established under Nasser, which remained true for the rule of Hosni Mubarak who succeeded as Egypt’s fourth president after Sadat’s assassination in October 1981.102

The authoritarian exercise of power through a series of personal ties in key positions (the ‘mandate

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97 A handful of senior officers in the government around AlySabry tried to topple Sadat when they saw their old positions of power at stake. The plot, however, was quickly crushed when Sadat could rely on the support by old power centers of the military and the secret police. The ‘Corrective Revolution’ ended with the arrest of the conspirators in May 1971. See Baker 1978: 124-126.

98 As Roussillon contemplates, the \textit{infitah} did not work in the way it was desired by the government. Although investors were protected by a series of laws (most important Law 43, which ended the state’s banking monopoly) the opening only attracted few foreign investors, notably in the tourism, banking and investment sectors. See Roussillon in Daly 1998: 361-362.


100 See Baker 1978: 165-166; and Ansari 1986: 185-194.

101 See Baker 1978: 242-244; and Roussillon in Daly 1998: 368-270. Among the parties was the president’s National Democratic Party (NDP) that dominated parliament until 2011, the New Wafd Party (disbanded again in 1981) and the Socialist Labor Party.

102 For a deeper analysis of the governmental power mechanisms under the late Sadat, see Hinnebusch 1986. 78-91. Other accounts, however, claim that the state’s means of coercion under Sadat had been loosened since Nasser, see McDermott 1988: 44.
system’), the tight control over the military and security forces, and the de facto political independence from civilian components gave Egypt’s ruler the necessary flexibility in international and domestic politics. While this was certainly an effective form of rule to guide Egypt out of its colonial dependency to its powerful position in the Arab context, the secluded Free Officer rule had crushed the vivid pre-1952 political life and failed to recreate genuine political community in support of the new regime. Even though attempts to create a pseudo-political participation of the Egyptian people was made under the late Mubarak, Egyptians were reduced to ‘passive spectators’ watching the revolutionary government leading Egypt towards its desired position for better or for worse.

This alienation of the new government from both, the Egyptian masses and political intelligentsia, which scholars trace back to the early constitutional period, supports Marsot’s initial thesis. Although Egypt was brought under Egyptian rule in 1952, over six decades of Free Officer rule did not involve the transfer of this new freedom to the Egyptian people. It remained in the hands of a secluded and secretive élite. As the momentum of the regime’s early success wore off, dissatisfaction with the government began to surface but rarely translated into a real political challenge. Spontaneous eruptions of popular discontent with the government’s ills had been kept at a low level by the regime’s repressive means of coercion.

It is probably not satisfactory to conclude, that a popular uprising was bound to topple this restrictive government, as soon as it would lose the support of the armed forces, as was the case during the revolution in 2011. However, it is interesting that once the regime was gone, the popular organizations that had been deprived of their political potential for over half a century, enjoyed the most widespread support. During the research of this work, Mohamed Morsi was elected president in Egypt’s first free elections, thus bringing the Muslim Brotherhood to power after over seven decades of suppression. Furthermore, the military, which had formed a temporary government since Mubarak’s ousting, has just yielded a remarkable amount of power to the civilian government, thus putting in relation the widespread perception that real power still remains within the armed forces.

103 Although opposition parties were allowed consequently under Mubarak’s rule, they never bore the potential of challenging the regime with the means of the political system (rule by emergency law was the common practice). This well-known setting is reflected in what Springborg described as the “fragmentation of the opposition” and Roussillon called the “parties’ isolation from the masses”, as voter turnouts remained low and political parties resorted to the building of economic and social power bases, rather than providing alternatives to the ruling regime. See Springborg 1989: 198-210; and Roussillon in Daly 1998: 380-382.

104 See Baker 1978: 239-240. Still in line with this argument, the Baker in a later work tries to analyze this assumed passivity form the subject’s point of view. In a number of case studies he focuses on “what people do with and through systems, rather than what systems do with them,” and criticizes the reduction of “Egyptian politics to the study of and underling social or economic system” by earlier authors (here Binder 1978; Davis 1983; and Waterbury 1984). See Baker 1990: 278.
forces. A reaction, however, has yet to occur, leaving the future relation between the old military guard and the civilian government under the Muslim Brotherhood open to further speculation.

3. **The Islamic Perspective: Resurgence between Terrorism and Parliamentary Politics**

Egypt’s recent internal developments and the issues regarding the formation of a new government under Mohammad Morsi, who was elected on June 24, 2012, have put into question the country’s established political patterns, both domestically and internationally. First, there are indications of a civilian challenge of the old military center, as noted above. While Egypt’s president had his roots in the military for the last six decades, this new relation has yet to be defined. Second, the ascendance to power of the Muslim Brotherhood, even if through popular election, has been viewed with mixed feelings by outside observers, especially in the political and media strata. As reports on terrorist acts from radical Islamist groups have dominated the media coverage on Islamic organizations over the last two decades, the rise to power of a supposedly moderate Islamic party is viewed with skepticism. Morsi’s planned trip to Teheran and his announcement to re-establish diplomatic relations with the notorious anti-Western Islamic Republic, has not contributed to ease international suspicion, especially from Israel and the United States.

As the previous two approaches, the Western and Nationalist perspectives, are only partially sufficient to put the most recent political developments into an adequate context, the resurgence of the Muslim Brotherhood, from bemused tolerance and active suppression to highest political power, asks for an analysis of the currents of political Islam that have been circulating in Egypt’s society for almost a century. This section then will aim to put in context the resurgence of political Islam in the last quarter of the twentieth century, both radical and moderate. With Egypt at the focus, this means a high emphasis on the Society of the Muslim Brotherhood as one of the oldest and most influential organization. The major shift to be analyzed here is the role of political Islam from clandestine organizations providing welfare and alternative guidelines for the poor to the ruling political party in Egypt – all with regard to the radical offshoots that have dominated the media attention. This development involves roughly three phases: the emergence of political Islam in the 1930s and its suppression that followed, the re-emergence in the 1960s and 1970s, and finally the solidification of its position as a main political factor in Egypt.

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3.1. Presumption of Unbelief: Islam as a Political Alternative

While the idea of political Islam was neither new to Egypt or the broader Muslim world, it gained prominence and actual political power in the 1930s, at least as far Egypt is concerned. The general disillusionment with stalled nationalist agenda in the early constitutional period, also combined with the economic hardship and the unaddressed social problems, indeed favored religious organizations as they provided physical and emotional relief. The early Muslim Brotherhood was one among them, enjoying widespread popular support as people tended to turn to the basis of their cultural and personal identity: Islam.

In 1928, the Society of the Muslim Brotherhood was founded by Hassan al-Banna (1906-1949), a schoolteacher and pious man who was highly influenced by the early theorists of modernist Islam at the time. The ideological outline, which the Muslim Brotherhood shared with its counterpart on the Indian subcontinent (the Jamaat-i-Islami), would become the ideological foundation of many Islamic organizations established during the course of the century, although the interpretation varied widely. For the Muslim Brotherhood this is especially true after it widened its activity of providing welfare institutions for the poor. During the Second World War, their goals correlated with the nationalist agenda of ending British military presence in Egypt, despite having different motives. The ‘Western penetration’ of Islam’s basic cultural values is a long narrative and seemed to be confirmed when the greatly enhanced number of British soldiers visiting the bars and brothels that mushroomed in the cities shocked a rather conservative Muslim society. The Muslim

107 Political Islam dates into nineteenth century with the gradual acceptance that religion should be involved in politics. Islamic modernism and pan-Islamism were notably a reaction to colonial penetration of Islamic culture. See Aslan 2008: 251-253; and Esposito 1999: 45-59.


109 Jamaat-i-Islami was an Islamic organization founded by Mawlana Abul Ala Mawdudi in India in 1941 and was the second Islamic organization to provide a basic ideological outline that is shared largely with the Muslim Brotherhood, see Esposito 1999: 129-133.

110 The ideological concept for the Brotherhood (and eventually most Muslim societies) included the following basic outlines: Islamic belief is the foundation of every aspect of life, be it public or private; the basis of this belief are the holy scriptures of Islam; Islamic law (Sharia) serves as blueprint for Muslim life; the well-being of a Muslim society relies upon the implementation of these principles; the current decline of the Muslim community is caused by deviation from the God’s divinely revealed path; restoration of Muslim power and independence requires a return to a true Islamic society; modern ideas and values must be understood under Islamic premises to avoid a Westernization and secularization of Muslim society. See Esposito 1999: 131-132.; and Esposito 2002: 51-56. For a more detailed study of the Muslim Brotherhood’s ideology, see Mitchell 1993: 209-294.

111 See John O. Voll in Mitchell 1993: xii.
Brotherhood was to draw largely from this popular resentment. The popular political capital, which the Muslim Brotherhood gained from the experience of British occupation, was then further enhanced by the participation of the organization’s radical arm in the First Arab-Israeli War in 1948. While the king and his government were mainly concerned with improving Egypt’s position in face of regional Arab rivals (mainly Jordan and Iraq), they were then further discredited by the crushing defeat; as the Muslim Brotherhood enjoyed an increasing popularity for its radical stand against Israel and its support for Palestinian people. On the eve of the revolution, the Muslim Brotherhood had accumulated an unequaled popular power base, even if it was deprived of both, the opportunity to transfer the popular support into official political capital after the organization was disbanded in late 1948, and its leader Hasan al-Banna, who was murdered by the political police in February 1949.

Initially, the Muslim Brotherhood, as many other political groups, was used and appeased by the Free Officers. As the Brotherhood shared the new regime’s anti-Western stand, it was seen as a powerful and popular ally, which the Free Officers ensured to exploit. However, once the new regime had consolidated its power, the Islamic society did not fit into Egypt’s dynamics of modernization. Secularization, in a traditional Western point of view, was seen as an essential condition for a society to embrace modern ideas and embark on political, social and economic development. This ideological context pushed the Society of the Muslim Brotherhood to the edge of the political dissent and marginalized its historical standing in scholarly research.

The further history of the Islamic organization supports this view. Failed attempts on Nasser’s life resulted in violent clashes with the state and large scale repressions in 1954 and again in 1965, when Nasser’s socialist ideology was criticized as ‘un-Islamic and secular’ by religious authorities, resulting in the arrest and jailing of thousands of members and executions of key leaders. Although criticism of the regime (most notably Sayyid Qutb) continued, the Brotherhood had been marginalized as a radical organization promoting anti-Western and anti-secular ideas.

115 The society’s popular ties, for example, were used to prevent popular outburst during the revolution that could have triggered foreign intervention, see Baker 1978: 26; and Mitchell 1993: 103-104.
117 See Esposito 1999: 71; and Roussillon in Daly 1998: 343-349.
118 Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), among with founder Hassan al-Banna, the most influential writer of the Muslim Brotherhood. He joined the society in 1951 after a visit to the United States, which had largely influenced views. Imprisoned for his activities in the organization in 1954, he radicalized his views and turned Banna’s concept of an Islamic society into a rejectionist revolutionary call to arms, which influenced many of the radical groups to come. He was executed in 1966. See Esposito 1999: 135-138.
3.2. Islamic Resurgence: Muslim Reaction to the Failure of Alien Ideologies

Nasser’s popular support was mainly based on two factors: the early successes of his international policy and his firm, anti-Western position. While these two factors were quite efficient in appeasing mainstream religious currents, even if they were not allowed to participate in the policy making process, both sources of support were disintegrating by the early 1970s.

As previously discussed, the first of these two factors vanished as the momentum of Nasser’s success on the international stage had worn off by the mid-1960s. The crushing defeat in the 1967 war, which was fought under the banner of Arab Nationalism, gave a final blow to the cause.

The Muslim reaction to these developments bore two components. On the one hand, there was an inward reaction, contemplating that somehow the (Egyptian) Muslim society had departed from the ‘right path’. As John L. Esposito notes, the “heart of the revivalist movement is the belief that the Muslim world is in a state of decline” and the only cure would be “a return to Islam in personal and public life.”

On the other hand, this advocated return to the Islamic path (revivalism), was seen as a reaction to the failure of imported ideologies. Nationalism, socialism and capitalism were seen as incompatible with Islam and the cultural penetration which accompanied these alien ideologies felt as a threat to the basis of the Islamic sociocultural values.

Modernization, in a Western sense, was based on the secularization of society and was therefore incompatible with Islamic culture, as were Western ideologies. Equally condemned was the ‘Westernization of Islam’ in order to fit into modern ideological contexts. In the view of the leading theorists of the Islamic revivalist movement, Islam itself offered a self-sufficient alternative and was therefore seen as a legitimate third way to Eastern and Western ideologies. This, however, did not mean a categorical rejection of modern developments in social, political, scientific and economic spheres, but rather an adequate reaction to them under genuine Islamic premises.

The government’s firm anti-Western stance – as the second factor that secured the regime the general support from religious currents – was at stake with Sadat’s succession to power. Sadat had initially resorted to the support of Islamic groups, releasing members of the Muslim Brotherhood from jail and justifying his rule with religious rhetorics. His polices, however, run counter to

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119 Esposito 1999: 16-17.
121 Aslan contemplates that values like tolerance and pluralism (as opposed to Western ideas of freedom and democracy), as well as human rights, are compatible with the moral and theological mindset of Islam, as long as the remain in the boundaries of the religious guidelines. See Aslan 2008: 284-287. For specific information on Egypt in the context of democracy theory, see Esposito and Voll’s case study on Egypt in their compatibility-defending study Islam and Democracy (Esposito/Voll 1996: 173-191).
122 Sadat, who often had his prayers covered by the media, had named himself the ‘Believer President’ and sought the support of religious groups by symbolic actions like fighting the 1973 war against Israel under the banner of Islam. He had also released the members of the Muslim Brotherhood which were jailed under Nasser. See Esposito 1999: 139; and Roussillon in Daly 1998: 371.
Islamic interests. The ongoing secularization of Egyptian law, the support of the Shah of Iran and condemnation of the Iranian Revolution,\textsuperscript{123} along with the peace process with Israel and the radical opening to the West, soon gained the criticism from Islamic organizations which condemned the president’s use of Islamic language as ‘hypocritical manipulation’.\textsuperscript{124} By the mid-1970s, the Islamic powers that Sadat had supported to counter Nasserist and leftist elements had turned against him. By then he had unwillingly become one of the main architects of the resurgence of political Islam.

Sadat’s rather unpopular policy, accompanied by the political liberation of the early years, which provided a growing platform for anti-government criticism that was extensively used by Islamic groups, soon proved a dangerous threat to the government. The regime answered by enhancing the repressive means of the security apparatus. The suppression accumulated in the arrest of over 1500 Islamic activists in 1981, only months before president Sadat was assassinated by a member of one of the radical groups (Jamaat al-Jihad/Holy War) on October 6.\textsuperscript{125}

3.3. The Political Setting: Radical and Moderate Islamic Movements

Although President Sadat had moved against the Islamic organizations with a heavy hand after their growing criticism on his regime, he had allowed the Islamic current to re-establish within the state system, even if not allowed to participate in parliamentary politics officially.\textsuperscript{126} His successor Hosni Mubarak would enhance this policy by further liberating the political arena, but at the same time make extensive use of the state’s security apparatus to move against violent Islamic opposition.\textsuperscript{127} This distinction of the currents within political Islam between moderate groups (mainly the Society of the Muslim Brotherhood), which worked within the state system, and the radical ones,\textsuperscript{128} which sought a violent replacement of the system, would define the relation between Islamic organizations and the government under Mubarak. The distinction, however, was not always clear and largely depended on the perspective it was looked upon.

The moderate branch, which was dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt’s oldest and most powerful Islamic organization, was widened by numerous political and apolitical institutions

\textsuperscript{123} The biggest fear of the Egyptian government and the ones of most Arab states was that the Iranian Revolution would inspire and radicalize their own Islamic opposition, be it Sunni or Shia. See Baxter/Akbarzadeh 2008: 79-84; and Lorenz 1990: 103-104.

\textsuperscript{124} See Esposito 1999: 94; and Esposito 2002: 87.

\textsuperscript{125} See Esposito 1999: 95.

\textsuperscript{126} The May 1977 law that institutionalized the formation of political parties, “forbade the creation of any party on religious, ethnic, or class bases, which could threaten the principle of national unity.” See Roussillon 1998: 367. This restriction remains throughout the Sadat and Mubarak era until the 2012 elections. The Muslim Brotherhood usually tried to avoid exclusion from parliamentary by forming alliances with secular parties and having its candidates running as independents.

\textsuperscript{127} See Esposito 1999: 96-97; and Springborg 1989: 240-244.

\textsuperscript{128} Most prominent the Jamaat al-Jihad (Holy War Society) for the assassination of Anwar as-Sadat, but also radical groups like the Islamic Liberation Organization, Jamaat al Muslimin (Society of Muslims) and Salvation from Hell, see Esposito 1999: 142.
as well as professional syndicates. This groups widely accepted the reality of the state and advocated a transformation of Muslim society from within the system. On the one hand, this was to be achieved by a social transformation, which included religious assistance and preaching as well as a variety of social support, including the set up of educational and medical institutions, in addition to professional support in the syndicates (lawyers, engineers, journalist, doctors). Here, Islamic organizations competed with government institution, which often lacked the devotion, organization and professionalism of the Islamic counterparts and therefore earned their criticism. On the other hand, the transformation of society from within was to be achieved through political participation within Egypt’s limited but existent parliamentary life. In recent years, moderate Islamic organizations resorted to advocating more popular participation in politics, a pluralist political system, democratization, human rights and economic reforms. By the mid-1990s, the Muslim Brotherhood, although formally excluded from running in parliamentary elections as a religious group, had become the government’s most powerful opposition by forming alliances with secular parties or running as independent candidates.

While the majority of the Islamic movements condemned the use of violence, other groups that formed in the early 1970s resorted to a more radical interpretation of the Islamist ideology. Like the moderate groups, they advocated sociopolitical change and eventually an Islamic revolution in order to implement the religion’s values and laws into society. In contrast to their moderate counterparts, they did not view Islam as a potential alternative, but rather as a cultural imperative for Muslim societies, and change was not to be achieved by gradual social transformation within the existing system, but by violent political action to replace the system.

Like the early Muslim Brotherhood in the 1930s, this radical offshoots grew as a response to the political climate of their time. Most important was the Arab defeat in 1967, but also the growing social and economic problems of the years to come, as well as the country’s continued dependence on the West. In the view of the radical groups, not only the (secular) nationalist government had failed to meet the contemporary challenges, but also the old guard of the Muslim Brotherhood had failed in their critical opposition to the government and had degenerated during the time in Nasser’s

129 See Esposito 1999: 140-141. For an account on Egypt’s sociopolitical situation from the side of the members of the Muslim Brotherhood, see Baker 1990: 243-270.

130 See Esposito 1999: 141 and 210. Other accounts describe the political potential of the Islamic opposition during the Mubarak era as rather limited, due to their internal disunity, see Springborg 1989: 231-240.

131 The Muslim Brotherhood had joined the New Wafd Party in 1984 and subsequently formed the ‘Islamic Alliance’ with the Labor Party in 1987. The won 17 percent of the votes in the parliamentary elections in the same year, ‘emerging as the chief political opposition of Mubarak’s regime.’ See Esposito 1999: 141-142; and Roussillon in Daly 1998: 382.

132 Most influential here again Sayyid Qutb, whose radical interpretation of the forming of an Islamic society and the implementation of the Sharia served as base and inspiration for radical groups. For his ideology, see Esposito 2002: 56-61.
Indeed, many of the leaders and members of radical groups like the Islamic Liberation Organization and the Jamaat al Muslimin were former members of the Muslim Brotherhood, jailed under Nasser and again released after Sadat’s succession to power. Reluctant to act within the system, however, they advocated interpretations of an Islamic society that had radicalized during the repressions of the 1950s and 1960s. While these groups only represented a small margin of Islamic activists and organizations, they received disproportional media attention. Strategic acts of violence, including repeated attempts on the lives of state officials up to the president, destruction of symbols of Western influence (shops, nightclubs, cinemas, etc.), street demonstrations, bombing, kidnapping and hijackings dominated Egypt’s media scene throughout the 1990s.

While the moderate and radical expressions of Islamic resurgence differed fundamentally in their interpretation of the basic ideological premises, they never distanced from each other completely in day-to-day politics. This was especially seen in the form the government reacted to these currents. While Mubarak had initially sought the give moderate Islamic currents leeway for expression by liberalizing the political setting, continued violence from radical groups soon provoked heavy handed governmental reaction. As noted above, moderate Islamic groups had become a powerful political opposition in the meantime. Terrorist attacks by militant groups, therefore, were often used to justify indiscriminate repression against Islamic organizations, resulting in the arrest and jailing of thousands of activists.

The result of the enhanced means of state security was double-edged, however. Although observers contemplated that by the mid-1990s the government had won the upper hand against terrorist groups, the heavy handed and indiscriminate move against radicals as well as moderate and apolitical groups had an unwelcome side effect. As the Human Rights Watch on the Middle East stated in 1993, the government’s own “poor human rights record” had proven “a fertile ground for the growth of extremist alternatives.”

The twenty-first century, in regard to the role of political Islam, witnessed a change of perception to both extremes, rather than an actual redefinition of the position of Islamic organizations in Egypt. Most important, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, brought the issue of political Islam to

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133 See Esposito 1999: 144.

134 See Esposito 1999: 97; and Roussillon in Daly 1998: 388.

135 The Muslim Brotherhood indeed remained sympathetic to the causes of radical groups and occasionally defended their actions, See Esposito 1999: 97-98 and 141; and Roussillon in Daly 1998: 388-389.

The state-opposition relation and nature of Islamic reaction is brought to a broader Muslim context in Esposito/Voll 1996: 8-10.
predominate global attention, both in the political and media sphere. This not only resulted in the ‘war on terrorism’ by the United States and its allies, and the two military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq, but also allowed pro-Western (and secular) Arab rulers to move decisively against their Islamic oppositions, relying on the new rhetoric of the global agenda. For Mubarak’s Egypt this meant a heavy handed response to violent attacks, but also a justification to keep moderate organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood at a low profile. Limitations to democratic reforms could be justified internationally and domestically by the reference to the threat of an Islamic alternative, which would become reality once the political platform was given. In Egypt, it would either be Mubarak or the Islamists.

As already seen, the social platform for moderate Islamic currents had been present for over three decades. An ‘Islamic revolution’, however, under the premises noted above, seemed highly unlikely, due to the political Islamophobia of both, the ruling regime and its Western supporters. It is thus important to note, that the revolutionary movement of 2011 was not an Islamic, but a popular Egyptian one. Even if involvement of the Muslim Brotherhood in the organization of protests cannot be denied, the society largely avoided the limelight during the uprisings, well aware of the potential political reaction it would cause.

The ambiguity between the Brotherhood’s political and social acceptance was mirrored quite clearly in the legal process that accompanied Mohammed Morsi’s candidacy for presidency. Once the obstacles of the old regime were overcome – namely the exclusion of members of Islamic parties from a political career – he became Egypt’s first freely elected president, based on the support of an organization that had been suppressed for over 80 years.

Two important factors, however, speak against the widespread assumption that the victory of the Muslim Brotherhood was long overdue and just transformed the organization's social power into political power, once the setting would allow it.

First, it was not only the Muslim Brotherhood as a political current, but also other political opposition parties that were kept at a low profile under the Mubarak regime. Lacking the social establishment of their Islamic counterparts, most secular opposition parties could not compete with

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137 The terrorist attacks of September 9, 2011, have caused a ‘surge’ in the interest of Islam. For a contextualization of the events from within the scholarly community, see John L. Esposito’s Unholy War (Esposito 2002).


139 As Esposito and Mogahed have put it, “the religion of Islam and the mainstream Muslim majority have been conflated with the beliefs and actions of an extremist minority,” see Esposito/Mogahed 2007: x.


the degree of organization and the popular support of the Muslim Brotherhood. The rather close victory in the presidential elections, with 48.3 percent voting for Ahmed Shafiq, Mubarak’s last prime minister and member of the old guard, only supports this view.¹⁴²

Second, most recent popular protests have demanded Morsi to distance himself from the political agenda of the Muslim Brotherhood as the president of Egypt. Apparently, the increasing control of the Muslim Brotherhood over the country’s politics have raised concern among many Egyptians, clearly showing that the process of redefinition between the state and the Islamic organization is far from completed.¹⁴³

**Conclusion**

Each of the three historical perspectives have been analyzed under the focus on the main historical shift within these perspectives. The 1952 revolution has served as the main driving force of the respective shifts. As far as the Western perspective is concerned, the nationalist revolution had effectively ended British postcolonial influence and made Egypt a geopolitical factor in the Cold War. Upon the second perspective, the successful nationalist struggle for independence called for a redefinition of the relation between the state and the people, which became the main challenge for the new revolutionary government. Finally, upon implementing a perspective based on Islamic premises, the religious organizations, which had formed as a reaction to Western influence and economic hardship, faced the challenge of redefining their relation to a secular nationalist state from a clandestine social marginality to the main political opposition force.

Scholars have extensively used the Cairo Fire of 1952 and the July Revolution six months later to indicate a landmark in modern Egyptian history, no matter what historical approach they have based their studies on. These approaches, which have interacted to a certain degree and thus shown more or less flexible to altering conditions, however, have each been challenged again by the most recent developments in Egypt.

First, the ousting of a strong pro-Western authoritarian regime by a popular uprising has put into question the traditional Western view on Middle Eastern societies. One of the most modern Arab regimes has been replaced by a supposedly ‘reactive’ Islamic government by popular vote.¹⁴⁴ Second, the popular forces that have been suppressed and guided under the nationalist government


for six decades, have translated into political power that has yet to be shaped, especially with regard to the role of the military in this new context.\textsuperscript{145} Third, the rise to power came from of a moderate Islamic party through a relatively peaceful transition and eventually under democratic premises, and this is itself a novelty to the Arab world. Charged with the common violent perception that had formed during the last three decades, the new position of Islamic organizations in the Middle East and in Egyptian society has yet to be defined.\textsuperscript{146}

The predominant discourses of these three historical approaches give insight into the basic assumptions that historians will use to respond to the challenges that have arisen during the last 18 months. The developments within this research during the last decade, however, have already questioned the distinction between the three traditions, as each of them failed to provide the historical (or political) parameters to adequately analyze the of turn-of-the-century Middle Eastern societies. Interactions between the three discourses have been indicated through references in the specific chapters; however, a change of discourse in the form of a synthesis seems an inevitable condition to explain the historical relevance of the Arab Revolutions.

Several attempts to summarize the Arab Spring and to provide historical background information to the different countries have been made. As far as the journalist field is concerned, the public has been provided with roughly a dozen overviews on the Arab Spring that are worth reading.\textsuperscript{147} They offer a different degree of background analysis, although a majority of them are not rooted in the traditions of the respective scholarly community and instead provide a synopsis of the country or region’s history.\textsuperscript{148} The other factor that limits the use of such works, is the contemporary character of their subjects. As the conclusive parts of each chapter in this study have shown, the pretext of the societies in question changes as we speak.

The subject’s contemporary nature is also the main reason why, to the present, no comprehensive study on Egypt’s transition or the Arab Revolutions in general has been issued from within any of

\textsuperscript{145} For the role of the military in its relation to the regime and during the transition, see Springborg, Robert/Henry, Clement M. “Army Guys” The American Interest Vol. 6 No. 5 (May/June 2011): 14-21. See furthermore Springborg/Henry in Rose 2011: 132-136; and Goldberg in Rose 2011: 110-114.


\textsuperscript{147} Of the works cited in the beginning, Michael Lüders’ Tage des Zorns (Lüders 2011) and Volker Perthes’ Der Aufstand (Perthes 2011) have been especially useful in this study.

\textsuperscript{148} However, Jean-Pierre Filiu’s The Arab Revolution (Filiu 2011) has been regarded as the first more elaborate take on the Arab Spring from within academic circles. For spotlights on specific issues of the immediate revolutions, the essay collection The New Arab Revolt (Rose: 2011) has served as compromise here between the still awaited comprehensive work from within academic traditions and the already mentioned journalistic overviews.
the three historical traditions. However, the academic discourse of the first decade of the twenty-first century indicates that the recent developments in the Arab world did not surprise the scholarly community as it did its counterparts in the political and media strata.

Studies on the of twenty-first-century Muslim world and the Middle East before the Arab Spring have been issued with a variety of undertones, ranging from rather provocative views, emphasizing the dangers of the development gravitating around the question of political Islam, to studies based on the imperative of overcoming the common ignorance and misinformation about the relation of the world’s over one billion Muslims with their faith. Wherever current research on the topic might be positioned within this spectrum, they all include the Western world as an integral part of the challenges that Muslims in the Middle East face at the moment; whether these forces are to be defined as antagonistic or cooperative. A profound understanding of the Arab world in its internal dynamics, in its relation with the West, and especially in regard to the Islamic component, is thus advocated in all of them.

The Arab Revolutions of 2011 have caught the attention of the world. They have fixed the public eye, as well as academic attention on the Middle East, as the events are yet unfolding to their full scale. The developments in the heartlands of the Islamic world have raised concerns and hopes at the same time, and pose one of the biggest sociopolitical challenges of the twenty-first century. This challenge, under whatever prefixes they want to be seen, require an inclusive historical approach, as the case of Egypt has demonstrated in a process where the country is once again claiming its role as a vanguard of the Arab world.

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149 Most prominent here Bernard Lewis’ recent works *Faith and Power* (Lewis 2010) and *The End of Modern History in the Middle East* (Lewis 2011), which do not fail to provoke political and academic circles likewise, even if the works do not offer substantial new insights within the broader context of Lewis’ work.

150 Among others, John L. Esposito’s most recent study *The Future of Islam* (Esposito 2011), which offers an insight into the opportunities and challenges the (Western) world faces in its relation with the Muslim community, even if predictions on the future path of Islam remain careful. Interesting in its combination is *Who Speaks for Islam?* (Esposito/Mogahed 2007), Esposito’s and Mogahed’s evaluation of *Gallup’s World Poll*, which represents the opinion of 90 percent of the world’s 1.3 billion Muslims as the largest of its kind. Furthermore Gudrun Krämer, who in her recent work *Demokratie im Islam* (Krämer 2011) reacted to the recent developments in the Arab world by providing a comprehensive account on Islam in order to contextualize the Islamic nature of the movements.
Literature

Primary Sources:


Secondary Literature:


Egypt’s Long Road to Democracy?


