LEGITIMIZING AUTHORITARIANISM IN EGYPT: THE ROOTS OF SISI’S HEGEMONIC PROJECT AND THE COUNTER-TERRORISM DISCOURSE

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Abstract

Sisi’s rule today is described to be more oppressive than Mubarak’s. Yet, over the past 4 years there has not been any significant subordinate class protesting it. Moreover, following the military coup he led in 2013 that overthrew the Muslim Brotherhood’s government, Sisi changed the military’s discourse to counter-terrorism. Despite Sisi’s bloody crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood, his popular approval ratings remain consistent at above 80%, which attests to his ability to generate consensus. Additionally, all of the previous regimes since Nasser implemented policies limiting the Muslim Brotherhood’s freedom. This enabled the organization to build up considerable support in civil society, which after the 2011 uprising threatened to rejig the hegemonic bloc ruling Egypt since Nasser and to weaken the preeminent role of the military in this bloc. I use a Gramscian analysis to argue that Sisi’s hegemonic project was able to produce popular consensus by channeling very little material benefits offered by the military institution to some subaltern classes and by implementing an ideological leadership based on a culture of counter-terrorism. The Muslim Brotherhood coming to power in 2012 gave the military the opportunity to reinvent themselves, and change their discourse to reconquer state power by overthrowing a democratically elected government, and to receive support for this move not only from the Egyptian population but also from key regional and Western states.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................... i
Dedication ......................................................................................................................... iii
Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 1

**Chapter 1: Methodology, Conceptual Framework and Literature Review** ......................................................................................................................... 6
  Methodology .................................................................................................................. 6
  Conceptual Framework ............................................................................................... 7
  Literature Review ....................................................................................................... 9

**Chapter 2: Building Hegemonies in Egypt’s Post-Colonial History From Nasser to Mubarak** ........................................................... 14
  Nasser and the Military’s Involvement in the Deep State ........................................... 14
  Sadat’s and the Demilitarization of the State ............................................................... 18
  Mubarak’s Neoliberalization of Egypt and Reinstating the Military’s Hegemonic Position ................................................................. 22

**Chapter 3: Struggle of Two Hegemonies - the Military and the Muslim Brotherhood** .............................................................................. 26
  The Military Institution in the Deep State ................................................................ 26
  “The Military and the People are One Hand” The 2011 Uprising .............................. 27
  The Hegemonic Project During the Muslim Brotherhood’s one-year Presidency ...... 30

**Chapter 4: Sisi’s Hegemonic Project and the Military’s Role in its Historic Bloc** ......................................................................................... 36
  The 2013 Coup d’état, the Rabaa Massacre & the Military’s Counter-Terrorism Discourse ................................................................. 36
  Sisi’s Economic Reforms and Strategy of Accumulation ......................................... 40
  Sisi’s Political Reforms and the Build-up of the Repressive State ........................... 45

Conclusion ....................................................................................................................... 50
Bibliography .................................................................................................................... 52
Dedication

To Iman and Mohamed.
Introduction

During his first presidential term (2014-2018) General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi’s (Sisi) has committed unprecedented human rights violations, drove the country into a deeper economic crisis, implemented further austerity measures causing inflation rates to rise, waged a war against terrorism in Northern Sinai (General Operation Sinai 2018) and successfully silenced all political oppositions. Nevertheless, the ex-Minister of Defense and military man was reelected for a second presidential term in March 2018. Sisi’s predecessor, Hosni Mubarak stayed in power for 30 years before being overthrown by a popular uprising in 2011 that replaced him by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) until presidential elections were held in 2012. Mubarak’s hegemonic crisis made it possible for millions of Egyptians to march the streets protesting oppressive regime and successfully oust him.

Additionally, all of the previous regimes since Nasser implemented policies limiting the Muslim Brotherhood’s freedom. This enabled the organization to build up considerable support in civil society that after the 2011 uprising threatened to rejig the hegemonic bloc ruling Egypt since Nasser. It also threatened to weaken the preeminent role of the military in this bloc. A year following the 2011 uprising, presidential elections were held declaring the Muslim Brotherhood member Mohamed Morsi, the first Egyptian president to have never been affiliated with the military institution. Morsi stayed in power for only one year before being overthrown by the Sisi-led bloody military coup of 2013.

Even though Sisi’s rule today is described to be more oppressive than Mubarak’s, yet, there has not been any significant subordinate class protesting it over the past 4 years. Moreover, following the 2013 coup, Sisi changed the main military and state discourse to counter-terrorism. Despite his bloody crackdown on the Brotherhood and his repressive policies, the president’s popular approval ratings remained consistent at above 80%, which attests to his ability to
generate consensus. To solve this puzzle, I use a Gramscian approach based on the concept of hegemony to analyze the strategies of accumulation, historic blocs, and legitimization discourses of Sisi’s preceding regimes and his own. More specifically, this thesis asks two main questions; 1) What explains the significant popular support to the Sisi regime during his first presidential term? 2) How did the Muslim brotherhood emerge as the most substantial threat to the creation and subsistence of Sisi’s hegemonic project?

A successful hegemonic project entails the ruling classes to channel some material benefits to the subordinate classes and the implementation of an ideological leadership. I argue that Sisi’s hegemonic project was able to produce this popular consensus during his first presidential term by changing the military and state discourse to counter-terrorism to reinstate an ideological and discursive leadership. Also, by providing very little material benefits offered by the military to some subordinate classes. Declaring the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization in 2013 and stressing the need for the military to eliminate them before Sisi fixes the state structure and economy presents the military as the nation’s savior against terrorism. Thus, this increases the regime’s popularity while using this discourse to camouflage the causes of public issues. Creating an enemy that threatens national security reinstates the military’s legacy and rhetoric of 1952 until 1967 of conquering enemies and thus masks the issues resulting from the institution’s heavy involvement in the deep state since then. This counter-terrorism rhetoric portrays the Brotherhood as a national enemy in order to legitimize Sisi’s bloody coup against them and his rise to power in 2013.

Furthermore, I argue that the Muslim Brotherhood coming to power in 2012 was an unintended consequence of the SCAF’s liberalizing political policies of 2011. This unintended

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1 Egyptians consistently profess a higher level of trust in their military (over 80%) than any other Arabs according to the Arab Democracy Barometer conducted by the Arab Reform Initiative, http://www.arabbarometer.org/content/online-data-analysis. For more information see: Robert Springborg “The Rewards of Failure: Persisting Military Rule in Egypt”, British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies 44, no.4 (2017), 478-496, DOI: 10.1080/13530194.2017.1363956.

consequence allowed the military to take advantage of the opportunity offered to them by the Muslim brotherhood’s one year in power to reinvent themselves, and change their discourse to reconquer state power by overthrowing a democratically elected government, and to receive support for this move from key regional and Western states. The material benefits provided by the military to the subordinate classes are in the form of cheaper consumer goods produced by the untaxed, unaudited and labor-intensive Military Industrial Complex to compete in the market. These material benefits vary from breads, rice, meats and sugar, to cheap leisure opportunities at their military-run resorts, hotels, and malls, which allow the subordinate classes to live out in their daily lives the ideology of consumerism, upon which neoliberal hegemony depends to a large extent. Both the military’s counter-terrorism discourse and its material benefits demonstrate the military’s ability to readapt to the changing political economy and thus maintain a hegemonic position.

As I highlight in the next chapter, most of the literature concerning Sisi’s regime focuses on the role of the deep state instead of the military in analyzing his authoritarianism. Here, I focus on the military institution as the main actor in Sisi’s historic bloc. Moreover, I discuss a missing link in the literature attributing a role to the Muslim Brotherhood’s one year in power in the construction of Sisi’s hegemonic project. This thesis attempts to fill a gap in the literature by looking at the first presidential term of the Sisi regime as a successful hegemonic project by unpacking its accumulation strategies, class politics and discursive legitimation strategy. I place Sisi’s hegemonic project in historical context in order to show both the continuities that link it to previous hegemonic projects from Nasser to the fall of Mubarak, and in order to bring out clearly what is novel about the Sisi hegemonic project. I also show how the military’s role in the deep state after the overthrow of the Mubarak regime had the unintended consequence of helping to bring the Muslim Brotherhood to power. This, in turn, offered an opportunity for the military to reconquer state power, by changing its rhetoric to counter-terrorism, which was undermined by the overthrow of Mubarak.
Thus, I proceed as follows. The first chapter of this thesis lays out the methodology and the conceptual framework to define the relevance of the Gramscian approach I use as a category of analysis. It also presents a literature review to highlight where this research fits in the scholarship concerning Sisi’s regime and the post-2011 era.

The second chapter looks at the emergence of the military and the Muslim Brotherhood’s in the Egyptian post-colonial context. The chapter thus highlights the economic and political changes during the 1950s-1960s with Nasser, the 1970s with Sadat and the 1980s-2011 with Mubarak under which the military was able to adapt and change its discourse and role in the deep state to maintain the people’s support. This chapter is very important in understanding how the military has been able to provide material benefits to the subordinate classes until today. I also examine the different historic blocs of the ruling classes and their classed politics of maintaining public order, including the mobilization of repression strategies of regime-critical subaltern actors to highlight the conditions under which the Muslim Brotherhood established a position of strength among civil society.

The third chapter first examines the extent to which the military is involved in the deep state to pave the way for understanding the ability of Sisi’s hegemonic project to provide material benefits and promote a certain ideology or cultural discourse. It looks at the two years following the ousting of Mubarak to highlight a moment of intersection between the military under the SCAF and the Muslim Brotherhood under Morsi in the political sphere. This moment is important as it allowed the military under Sisi to readapt to the political and economic changes and change its rhetoric to counter-terrorism to legitimize the coup against the Muslim Brotherhood. This chapter exposes the SCAF and the Muslim Brotherhood rule in 2011 and 2012 regarding their historic blocs, strategies of accumulation, and legitimizing discourses.

The fourth chapter looks into a new phase of the military’s hegemonic position established through Sisi’s rule where the institution was able to assume direct political power for
the first time since Nasser. Here I look into how the military adopted a counter-terrorism discourse to justify its coup in 2013 and the bloody crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood. This chapter highlights the state discourse of counter-terrorism, the economic and political reforms of the first term of Sisi’s presidency before his re-election (2014-2018) as well as Sisi’s historic bloc and class alliances resulting from these reforms. It also demonstrates how these reforms are more repressive than those implemented by all of Sisi’s predecessors; yet, the people are still supportive of him.

Finally, I reach a conclusion about the nature of Sisi’s hegemonic project and how it’s lack of channeling material benefits might render it unsustainable in the future. I also highlight the role of the military in Sisi’s historic bloc and the unintended role of the Muslim Brotherhood’s hegemonic crisis in generating consensus for Sisi’s regime today.
Chapter 1:
Methodology, Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

This chapter lays out the methodology, the Gramscian conceptual framework and the literature review.

Methodology

This thesis relies on both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources used for this research consist of Sisi’s speeches since 2013. Due to my proficiency in Arabic as well as in the Egyptian Arabic dialect I was able to analyze the state and the military discourses and rhetoric since the 2013 coup. A lot of the Egyptian television channels such as El-Nahar and CBC have an online channel on YouTube were they have aired Sisi’s speeches online. Some regional and international news outlets like Al-Watan, CBC, Al-Arabiya and Al-Jazeera Arabic have also archived Sisi’s speeches on their YouTube channels. I was able to look at 15 full-length recorded speeches and media interactions over the past five years and analyze the changes in the state’s discourse and the military rhetoric to promote counter-terrorism. Therefore, I use a structural form of discourse analysis that focuses on the everyday sense-making of individuals. For this reason I use Sisi’s speeches in order to analyze their productive and generative powers as structures. I lay out and analyze these discursive structures in terms of their notably othering argumentative structure because they constitute identities or subject positions of pro-Sisi individuals by othering terrorism and enabling the regime to pursue its repression of opponents with the support of many subaltern classes. Thus, I do not analyze how people exposed to these speeches and discourses interpret them, but rather how they contribute to the subject-positioning of a certain public and the subsequent discourse of empowerment they endow onto the government. I also use third data source government reports and mega-project planning documents to see how they provide material benefits not only to the ruling classes and the
bourgeoisie associated with them but also to select subaltern classes to analyze the purpose behind the regimes’ different accumulation strategies.

I also use the retroduction process as a research method here. The first step in this process is finding a hypothesis by applying abduction, the second step applies deduction, which consists of the derivation of predictions from the hypothesis, and the final step consists of the search for facts that will verify the assumptions, which is induction. This cycle is iteratively repeated as often as necessary until fitting facts are reached through this three-phase discovery procedure of abduction, deduction, and induction. Retroduction is based on critical realist ontology and is not concerned about everyday sense-making as induction and deduction would do on their own. Retroduction allows my research to move from empirical phenomena visible to the naked eye, concerning the changing political and economic life in Egypt since Nasser, to underlying causal powers or mechanisms that can explain them. Retroduction is a form of inference in which it does not claim that the concepts it uses to capture these causal powers are necessarily the only ones that can explain the empirical phenomenon in question. Therefore, I use Gramsci’s concepts of hegemony as a category of analysis. These concepts allow me to tell a coherent and empirically substantiated causal story that offers explanatory depth to empirical events such as the rise of the military in the economic and political spheres, the rise of Muslim Brotherhood, the Sisi-led coup against them, and the legitimacy of his new regime.

Conceptual Framework

The secondary sources, highlighted in detail in the next section about literature review, consist of news stories, academic books and scholarly articles about Sisi’s rule and the military’s historical position in Egypt. However, my analytical approach is based on Gramsci’s concept of

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4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.
hegemony. I believe that applying this concept as a category of analysis permits us to understand the nature of Sisi’s authoritarian rule and its ability to produce consensus in relation to the military’s deep involvement in the deep state and the Muslim Brotherhood coming to power. Writing from prison during the 1920s, the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci’s (1891–1937) compared two Marxist notions of social control: domination and hegemony. Gramsci explains domination as the direct physical coercion of the people by state institutions like the police, army, and law in political society. Hegemony is the ideological control through the production of consent by unions, schools, churches, families, and so on in civil society and the ability of the ruling classes to channel material benefits to the subaltern classes. Gramsci moved from the central Marxist concept of ideology to the concept of hegemony to explain together the mutual constitution of the material factors and the cultural or ideological factors as well as how they work together to produce consensus, or legitimacy of exploitative policies, alienating capitalist class formations. Hegemony thus is a worldview diffused through socialization into every area of daily life that, when internalized, becomes “common sense”. This means that counter-hegemony refers to attempts to dismantle hegemonic power; it represents the opposition to the status quo and its legitimacy. Gramsci believed that revolutionary political transformation was not possible without a crisis of ideological and cultural hegemony leading to changes in civil as well as political society. Therefore, oppositional movements had to create counter-hegemony to break ideological and cultural hegemony by presenting their new ideas and culture to be necessary for human liberation.

Hegemony thus entails the ability of a hegemonic power to generate consensus in maintaining the status quo and therefore the ability of a regime to use violence and coercion

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7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
against some segments in the society with the consent of the many. To make sure this occurs, Gramsci argues that achieving cultural hegemony first is fundamental to attaining power. However, in Gramsci’s view, a class cannot dominate in modern conditions by changing the cultural power alone or by solely advancing its own narrow economic interests dominating purely through force and coercion. Both cultural hegemony and the relations of economic base allowing for a strategy of capital accumulation to exist must be intact to any hegemonic project, if both components are not met it signifies the probability of this hegemonic project to fail. A class must exert intellectual and moral leadership and make alliances and compromises with a variety of political and civil forces; he terms this union a “historic bloc”. This bloc forms the basis of consent to a certain social order, which produces and re-produces the hegemony of the dominant class through the production of consent by means of ideological or discursive leadership and the distribution of material benefits to the subaltern classes. Therefore, Gramsci’s concept of hegemony stresses the importance of the political and ideological superstructure in maintaining or rupturing relations of economic nature.

**Literature Review**

Most of the literature concerning the Sisi regime gives a central role to the deep state in terms of analysis instead of the military. While there is a scholarship focusing on the central role of the military, it only explains their discourses and rhetoric and how they were able to maximize economic profits by adapting to the economic changes. Moreover, most of the literature discusses how Sisi and the military regime under Nasser cracked down on the Muslim Brotherhood. Here, I offer a new angle discussing the importance of the Muslim Brotherhood regime in 2012 on the formation of Sisi’s hegemonic project. Other than the fact that there is no

10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Deep State is used within political science to describe influential decision-making bodies believed to be within government who are relatively permanent and whose policies and long-term plans are unaffected by changing administrations. For more on Deep State See: Marc Ambinder and D.B. Grady, Deep State: Inside the Government Secrecy Industry (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013).
literature covering Sisi’s first presidential term in the context of hegemony, there is no literature linking the rise of both the Muslim Brotherhood and the military institutions since the 1950s to the production of the Sisi regime and its consent. Moreover, most of the literature about Sisi illustrates how his regime might come to an end soon because of how his policies are more oppressive than Mubarak, however, it lacks the analytical tools to demonstrate that. This thesis attempts to fill a gap in the literature by alternatively looking at the first presidential term of the Sisi regime as a successful hegemonic project, since it relies on the military in its historic bloc, by unpacking its accumulation strategies, class politics and discursive legitimation strategy. Also, I place Sisi’s hegemonic project in historical context in order to show both the continuities that link it to previous hegemonic projects from Nasser to the fall of Mubarak, and in order to bring out clearly what is unprecedented about the Sisi hegemonic project. I also look at the rise and fall of the hegemonic project of the Muslim Brotherhood by showing how its rise was in parts the unintended consequence of the hegemonic projects of Sadat and Mubarak. I also show how the military’s role in the deep state after the overthrow of the Mubarak regime had the unintended consequence of helping to bring the Muslim Brotherhood to power. This, in turn, offered an opportunity for the military to reconquer state power, by changing its rhetoric to counter-terrorism, which was undermined by the overthrow of Mubarak.

Brecht De Smet uses a Gramscian approach in analyzing the failure of the counter-hegemony of the Egyptian people leading to a popular uprising in 2011. While *A Dialectical Pedagogy of Revolt: Gramsci, Vygotsky, and the Egyptian Revolution* (2015) mostly focuses on the people’s revolts since Nasser leading to the 2011 uprising, it gives a detailed explanation of the changes in Egypt’s political economy leading to that moment.\textsuperscript{14} I go beyond this work by using the same historical context to analyze how the military and the Muslim Brotherhood reacted to the changing political and economic reforms leading to their direct encounter in the political

sphere in 2011 until the 2013 Sisi-led coup. Here, instead of using De Smet’s analysis in explaining the effects of the previous regimes’ policies on the population’s organized resistance, I use the same analysis to explain how the military and the Muslim Brotherhood were able to build hegemony.

In 2017, De Smet and Koenraad Bogaert published an article titled “Resistance and Passive Revolution in Egypt and Morocco” in the book of essays States of Discipline: Authoritarian Neoliberalism and the Contested Reproduction of Capitalist Order. There, they investigate the emergence of new forms of authoritarianism in ‘revolutionary’ Egypt and ‘reformist’ Morocco during the neoliberal age to demonstrate how pre-existing forms of authoritarianism are transformed in relation to structural shifts in global capitalism. Moreover, it bases the understanding of the failure of the hegemonic projects under Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak on how they implemented similar policies as the previous authoritarian regimes. I add to this by highlighting the similarities of Sisi’s regime with Nasser and Mubarak. However, in terms of looking into the construction of Sisi’s hegemonic project, I go beyond this paper and highlight how the military’s hegemonic project was able to emerge since the 1950s leading to Sisi’s rule.

Robert Springborg is one of the scholars who recently published pieces concerning Sisi’s authoritarianism. In Caudillismo Along the Nile (2016), Springborg looks at Sisi’s regime in comparison to Mubarak’s in terms of “delegative authoritarianism”. This means the decision-making autonomy of the president who perceives himself as the “embodiment of the nation and the main custodian and definer of its interests”. Using this concept of “delegative authoritarianism” Springborg reaches the conclusion that for the predictable future Sisi will continue as Egypt’s delegative dictator but his “one-man band” regime will be unstable and

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16 Ibid.
prone to coups and outright revolutions. I go beyond this argument by explaining that Sisi’s hegemonic project could eventually come to an end due to its reliance on solely implementing an ideological leadership based on counter-terrorism discourse while neglecting giving the subaltern classes significant material benefits.

His other article *The Rewards of Failure: Persisting Military Rule in Egypt* (2017) looks more in depth at the military institution since Nasser as well as the similarities and differences between Nasser’s rule and Sisi’s. The article explores the structural bases for the persistence of the military rule’s power and then assesses its negative consequences. I add to this work by applying the concept of hegemony to better explain the changes of the military institution since Nasser. Springborg does not use a Gramscian approach and he thus lacks the conceptual tools to fully appreciate how the military has maintained its dominant role in the historic bloc ruling Egypt since Nasser. I also go beyond this work by explaining the significance of the hegemonic project under the Muslim Brotherhood in changing the military’s rhetoric in 2013 and thus reach conclusions about how Sisi’s hegemonic project today is constructed.

I also use Zeinab Abul-Magd’s literature concerning the economic role of the military institution, its rhetoric as well as its adaptable nature throughout the past decades to analyze Sisi’s hegemonic project. In *Militarizing the Nation the Army, Business, and Revolution in Egypt*, Zeinab Abul-Magd looks at the economic role of the military institution until 2014. She argues that Egypt’s economic and political transformations since decolonization in the 1950s allowed for the Egyptian military institution to maintain a hegemonic position within the state structure. This is due to their ability to adapt to these changes and survive them. The military was able to legitimate its maximized economic profits and its involvement in the state structure throughout

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these decades by employing nationalistic rhetoric and forging new socioeconomic alliances.20 She argues that the military from 1952 until 1967, embraced rhetoric of fighting national enemies, and the military from 1980s until 2011 had to adapt to the economic and political changes during times of peace and therefore change their rhetoric to promoting economic developments as their national duty.21 I add to this work by explaining the significance of the Muslim Brotherhood’s one year in power to the Sisi regime, and its consequence on changing the military’s rhetoric to counter-terrorism. The significance of the Brotherhood’s one year in power on this adaptation is missing in Abul-Magd’s work.

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20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
Chapter 2:

Building Hegemonies in Egypt’s Post-Colonial History

From Nasser to Mubarak

This chapter looks into how did the military and the Muslim Brotherhood emerge and attain positions of strength in the political and civil society under Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak.

Nasser and the Military’s Involvement in the Deep State

The Egyptian military constructed its image as the guardian of the Egyptian nation by fighting Western enemies during the 1950s. On the 23rd of July 1952, the Free Officers Movement led by Gamal Abdel Nasser organized a military coup d’état that overthrew the Egyptian monarchy and instated Nasser as Egypt’s first military president through a public referendum, leading to a 60 year of military rule in Egypt.22 The succeeding military presidents took off their uniforms and unlike Nasser, established civil rule with a minimal to no involvement of the military in the political scene, mostly in the economic sector. Nasser’s rule allowed for the military to enhance its soft and hard powers, and thus beginning a hegemonic project in which the military is channeling material benefits to the subaltern classes and promoting an ideology of nationalism and Arab Socialism. Prior to the 1952 coup, the Muslim Brotherhood has been rising as an opposition group since its formation in 1928.23 Nasser’s regime cracked down on the organization to make sure that their Islamic ideologies do not spread. Thus the roots of the Brotherhood’s strong position in the civil society that prospered under Sadat and Mubarak can be traced to Nasser’s repressive policies against them. They were seen as a threat to Nasser hegemonic project due to its promotion of an Islamist ideology and not an Arab nationalist one. Historically, the Egyptian military institution has always had the tendency to adapt to the political

and economic changes. Abul-Magd explains that the Egyptian military underwent a rupture over the years between Nasser and Mubarak that permitted the military to change its rhetoric and state functions, which I highlight in this chapter.

Being the promoter of Arab Socialism and nationalism in the region, Nasser’s economic policies were based on keeping the economy closed off from the free market and maintaining state control over the economy, which can be described as Arab Socialism. Arab Socialism is defined as state-sponsored economic development where the state was understood to be the natural vehicle to carry out transformations. Rigid land reforms were introduced, and banking, insurance, national large industries, national mega-projects, and large private and foreign-owned companies are all nationalized. The economic reforms are mostly accompanied by expansion in social, welfare, health, and educational services. De Smet argues that Nasser’s rule is described as state capitalism allowing the allocation of resources into private hands in which the state has control over production and the use of capital. I argue against this by insisting that Nasser’s policies concerning the poor did provide material benefits to the subaltern classes thanks to his non-capitalist economic reforms. Other than nationalizing the Egyptian economy in terms of the Suez Canal, corporates, privately owned banks and commercial businesses, his policies also included ending feudalism by implementing the Agrarian Reform Law of 1952 to even the distribution of agricultural land among the subaltern classes. The fact that Nasser’s social contract relied on providing social services to the population in return for their political support allowed for his historic bloc to start out as a national-popular project including mainly the lower officers, workers and the peasants. Due to the military’s involvement in the deep state, these reforms indicate the ability of the military to channel material benefits to the subaltern classes. Moreover, Nasser opened public schools and made free public education available to all.

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24 Abul-Magd, *Militarizing the Nation*.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 De Smet, *A Dialectical Pedagogy of Revolt*, 120.
29 De Smet, *A Dialectical Pedagogy of Revolt*, 120.
Egyptians to decrease the high rates of illiteracy. He also launched a national radio station “Voice of the Arabs” to be the main medium through which Nasser spread his messages on Pan-Arabism and revolution in the Arab world. These latter efforts indicate the ability of Nasser’s hegemonic project to disseminate an ideology of Arab Socialism and nationalism.

Nasser’s historic bloc incorporated the state apparatuses, the bureaucratic and technocratic middle classes and the lower officers of the army. Following his coup in 1952, Nasser cracked down on all higher ranking officers and the aristocracy due to their alignment with the colonial actors and the overthrown monarchy. However, being a low ranking officer who successfully led a coup, Nasser feared a military coup against his regime. Therefore, Nasser shifted the power from the Ministry of Defense to the Ministry of Interior as the first step in demilitarizing the state pursued later by Sadat, he also gave the low ranking officers positions in the economic sector. To further justify the military’s involvement in the economic sector, Nasser issued a new socialist constitution in 1964 stating that “the people control all means of production” and that army officers were the self-appointed deputies of the people to control these means. Consequently, the military under Nasser (1950s-1967) has adopted this discourse of being the “Vanguard” of the nation by fighting its enemies and therefore, its interference in the economy was justified to the people. This is seen today with the military’s new rhetoric of counter-terrorism declared by Sisi, as it portrays the military to be the vanguard of the nation against terrorism and therefore the institution’s interference in both economic and political spheres are justified. During Nasser’s rule is when the military started to get involved in the economic sector and a formation of a new petty bourgeoisie class of low ranking officers emerged. Eventually, the formation of this class is what paved the road for the military to readapt under Sadat’s economic liberalization policies and change its rhetoric from conquering

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31 De Smet, *A Dialectical Pedagogy of Revolt*, 176.
national enemies to justifying their involvement in the economic sector and their strategy of accumulation as a national duty. This change in discourse was also made possible after the militaristic defeat in the Six-Day War of 1967, which led to the occupation of the Sinai Peninsula by Israel. This incident is still considered a national shame (el-naksa) and it is why the hegemonic project under Nasser collapsed—it compromised Nasser’s ideological leadership revolving around the military’s ability to conquer enemies to protect the regime’s ideologies.

Moreover, in terms of organized political resistance and part of his policies based on his social contract, Nasser banned and outlawed all political parties and radical social groups that did not support him or the government. In 1962, Nasser established the first mass political party within Egypt under the name of the Arab Socialist Union (ASU) and it later became the National Democratic Party (NDP), of which both succeeding presidents Sadat and Mubarak are members. The strategy of a unified party system was also implemented by Sisi when forming the 2016 parliament to eliminate any opposition to him in the political and civil society. Under Nasser, the main social group that was seen as a threat to his ideologies was the Muslim Brotherhood. Nasser did not share their vision of an Islamic Egypt demanding an Islamic constitution, democratic institutions, and freedom of press. Even though, before the 1952 coup d’état the Muslim brotherhood shared the same views and aims as the Free Officers’ Movement of an Egypt independent from the British, Nasser did betray them once he assumed power. In fact, Nasser relied on the Brotherhood to mobilize support for the 1952 coup and defend it on the streets, except that two years later he turned against them by launching and sustaining a brutal crackdown on the organization. He disbanded the organization’s members, and imprisoned and tortured its leaders and member. The military under the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) and Sisi also implemented this same tactic decades later. Following

36 Ibid, 40.
37 Springborg, “The Rewards of Failure: Persisting Military Rule in Egypt”.
38 Ibid.
the 2011 popular uprising, the SCAF allied with people and the political opposition including the Muslim Brotherhood allowing them to form a political party for the first time.\textsuperscript{39} When the Muslim Brotherhood affiliated president Mohamed Morsi won the presidential elections of 2012, they gave military officers prominent roles in the government and in the economic sector.\textsuperscript{40} However, similar to Nasser, the SCAF with the leadership of Sisi organized a coup in 2013 and overthrew the Muslim Brotherhood government paving the way for Sisi to crackdown on the organization and as a result seize power and violently.

\textbf{Sadat’s and the Demilitarization of the State}

Anwar El-Sadat was a senior member of the Free Officers Movement and in 1954 during Nasser’s presidency he was appointed Minister of State. Sadat was also the president of the National Assembly from 1960 until 1968, Vice President and member of the Presidential Council in 1964 and later in 1969 he was reappointed as Vice President. Following Nasser’s death in 1970, Sadat was appointed and served as president until his death by Islamists in 1981.\textsuperscript{41} Unlike Nasser, Sadat believed in an open free market, cutting ties with the Soviet Union to replace it with the US, signing a peace treaty with Israel following the October War of 1973, promoting democracy, embracing the opposition including the Muslim Brotherhood and most importantly demilitarize the state by eliminating the military from the economic and political scenes. After Sadat signed the peace treaty and became a US ally, the military’s doctrine and legitimacy discourse had to shift from relying on an offensive doctrine that viewed the capitalist West as the major enemy under Nasser to a defensive one with an internal rather than an external focus.\textsuperscript{42}

Sadat implemented the \textit{Infitah} 1974 (or open door policies) in 1974. These economic liberalization reforms supporting a market-oriented strategy allowing Sadat to dissolve state

\textsuperscript{39} Ranko, \textit{The Muslim Brotherhood and its Quest for Hegemony in Egypt}, 80.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{41} Lloyd C. Gardner, \textit{The Road to Tahrir Square: Egypt and the United States from the Rise of Nasser to the Fall of Mubarak} (London: Saqi, 2011), 115.
ownership as he privatized a huge number of Nasser’s nationalized programs and the Egyptian
government to begin widespread accumulation by dispossession. Sadat’s Infitah abolished most
of Nasser’s social services and aspects of Arab Socialism consequently resulting in layoffs and
cuts in pensions, subsidies and welfare. This is due to the fact that Sadat’s capitalism was
characterized as a rentier Economy not based on capital accumulation (as seen with Mubarak)
but on rent accumulation and distribution. This rentier capitalism served Sadat’s new historical
bloc as it benefited the public bureaucrats and the private capitalists and businessmen, including
the Muslim Brotherhood and the new military capitalists. Rents were accumulated and
disseminated centrally through the state in the form of “patron-client” relation when private
capital entered the rent distribution process through real estate and the black market. The rest
of the rent accumulation that was not absorbed by the state was absorbed by the Islamic Banks
owned by Islamists and Muslim brotherhood members after Sadat had released them. This
indicates a strategy of accumulation by a rising Islamic business class necessary for the Muslim
Brotherhood’s hegemonic project in 2012-2013.

Sadat also sought to limit the role of the military to purely military matters and
demilitarize the state apparatuses. Following the Six-Day War of 1967, Nasser shifted the power
from the Ministry of Defense to the Ministry of Interior and to make up for the military’s retreat
of power, he created the General Security and Central Security Forces (CSF). Sadat expanded
and developed these civil security apparatuses to become coercive tools in his new historic bloc.
Additionally, fearing military coups, Sadat marginalized the officers from the political scene,
reduced their economic influence and had them focus on war efforts to reinstate its position as the strongest army in the Arab region.\textsuperscript{50} At this conjuncture, it looked like the military’s role in the historic bloc was going to be downgraded. Following the alleged win in the October War 1973, the military reinstated their legacy in the region after the national shame of the 1967 defeat that led to losing Sinai to Israel for almost 10 years.

Moreover, as part of the 1979 peace treaty that was moderated by the US leading to ending the territorial conflict with Israel, the Ministry of Defense created the National Service Products Organization (NSPO). The reinvigorated the military’s prestige after the 1973 war enabling them to reconquer their economic tycoons they were earlier forced to abandon with Sadat. Consequently, the military emerges and adapts to Sadat’s changes by expanding its economic involvement in the state. Thus replacing the military’s old rhetoric of conquering state enemies as its main national duty to a new rhetoric of economic development being their new national duty. The NSPO’s objective was to reorient the energy of the officers who are no longer needed to fight a war into economic development.\textsuperscript{51} Consequently, the US provided Egypt with aid rendering the country the second biggest recipient of US aid until today; it thus replaced the Soviet Union in providing militaristic aid.\textsuperscript{52} While the military’s production under Nasser was merely for militaristic use, the NSPO prospered into a business empire for civilian production and services under Mubarak’s neoliberal reforms, which shows this rupture allowing the military to adapt to the changes in the political economy.

To convey legitimacy for his rule, Sadat created a “democratic façade” for his civil dictatorship in 1971 and 1972 by introducing the “Corrective Revolution”.\textsuperscript{53} This counter-Nasserist policies project was an attempt to correct Nasser’s mistakes and cleanse his state

\textsuperscript{50} Abul-Magd, “Egypt’s Adaptable Officers”.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
apparatuses as well as to replace state capitalism with economic and political liberalization. This discourse promoted the supremacy of law, the state of institutions, the establishment of freedoms and the respect for the constitution. Sadat’s policies included the introduction of a multi-party system; the Arab Socialist Union (ASU) was restructured into different independent parties: The National Progressive Unionist Party (Tagammu), the Egyptian Arab Socialist Party (EASP), and al-Ahrar Party. Moreover, Sadat created the National Democratic Party (NDP) between 1977 and 1978, which eventually merged with the EASP making the NDP the de facto ruling party of Egypt until Mubarak. Additionally, Sadat relied on politicized Islam to convey legitimacy for his hegemonic project to replace Nasser’s Pan-Arabist socialist ideology with an Islamic Egyptian ideology. This change in state discourse was able to generate consensus following the decline of Nasser’s hegemonic project following the 1967 defeat. Sadat began his speeches with “In the name of God” declaring himself to be responsible “first and foremost to god”. This Islamic referential was also a tool for Sadat’s historic bloc to form alliance with the Gulf States (encouraged by the US) as opposed to Nasser’s alliance with the Soviet Union.

Moreover, Sadat saw Nasser’s crackdown on the Brotherhood and oppositional parties as a mistake. Therefore, in 1974 Sadat let the imprisoned members of the Muslim Brotherhood organization out of jail allowing them to operate freely, yet, not allowing them to become a legally recognized political party. However, the Muslim Brotherhood was able to build positions of strength, that is, some support for political Islam in civil society. Yet, not a widespread consensus that could underpin an Islamist counter-hegemonic project, this was possible under Mubarak when the Muslim brotherhood was able to appeal to the lower classes and the impoverished in poor areas around the country. Sadat’s economic liberalization allowed for an Islamic business class to rise within the Muslim Brotherhood, who channeled material benefits to

54 Ibid.
55 De Smet, A Dialectical Pedagogy of Revolt, 178.
57 Ibid.
58 Ranko, The Muslim Brotherhood and its Quest for Hegemony, 55.
the subaltern classes ignored by the state enabling the organization to convey legitimacy among the lower socio-economic classes. Following Sadat’s liberalization of the economy, protests erupted demonstrating the subsidies cuts and wage austerity, the 1977 Bread Riots is the most prominent protest at the time initiated by workers and resulting in strikes. Consequently, Sadat enforced new repressive laws, restricting mass demonstration and political actions by giving life sentences for participation in demonstrations. As a result, Sadat’s hegemonic project failed and led to his assassination by Islamist opposition in 1981.

**Mubarak’s Neoliberalization of Egypt and Reinstating the Military’s Hegemonic Position**

Building on Sadat’s policies, Mohamed Hosni Mubarak was an air force officer during the October War 1973, he was appointed vice president to Sadat in 1975 as well as deputy chairman of the National Democratic Party in 1978. Following the Assassination of Sadat in 1981, Mubarak came to power as the successor of Sadat by receiving 99.9% of the vote in a referendum after the People’s Assembly nominated him. Mubarak’s neoliberal reforms allowed for the military’s business activities to expand under the defense minsters Field Marshall Abdel Halim Abu Ghazala (1981-1989) and Field Marshall Mohammed Tantawi (1991-2012). The military relied on a multitude of conglomerates that remain until this day under the control of the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Military Production and are managed by retired military generals. The military is untaxed, unaudited and enjoys a free labor force consisting of hundred thousand mandatory army conscripts to work in the military enterprise and therefore they offer cheaper civilian consumer goods ranging from pastas and frozen foods to diapers and baby milk formulas. The military was able to expand its product ranges and its international cooperation, especially with the Arab Gulf States who are considered to be the biggest allies of Sisi’s regime.

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59 Ibid.
60 De Smet, *A Dialectical Pedagogy of Revolt*, 190.
61 Ibid.
today. By offering material benefits, the military’s social base expanded and the institution appealed to the lower socio-economic classes. Therefore, the military’s new rhetoric justifies the army’s contribution to economic development and the welfare of the lower classes as a national duty. This rhetoric would shift with Sisi to promote counter-terrorism efforts in order to legitimize his coup of 2013 against the Muslim Brotherhood and his attainment of power.

During the first half of the 1980s under Mubarak, Egypt’s economy and main strategy of accumulation were still based on rent accumulation. However during the second half of the 1980s with the “influx of windfall” rents, the state underwent a neoliberal turn based on capital accumulation by dispossession.\textsuperscript{63} The fall in rental income and unproductive distributive policies in the first half of the 1980s, resulted in the increasing of budgetary deficit to over 20% and the rising of the national debt to more than $38 billion to external states paving the way for Mubarak’s neoliberal turn.\textsuperscript{64} The neoliberal turn of the Egyptian economy came into its fullest realization following the 1991 state acceptance of an Economic Reform and Structural Adjustment Program (ERSAP) signed with the IMF and World Bank.\textsuperscript{65} The program aimed to contain and decrease foreign debt and inflation rates by further cutting state subsidies on consumer goods, further privatization of the public sector, liberalizing markets, freezing wages, commercializing agricultural lands and implementing a flat tax.\textsuperscript{66} Neoliberal reforms did not render the Egyptian state and market “abstract”, but it allowed for redirecting the state towards an increased capital accumulation based on an aggressive policy of dispossession, which only benefited a small segment of Mubarak’s ruling class within its historical bloc.\textsuperscript{67} Class coercions in civil society were restricted, but also coercions within the ruling class of Mubarak’s bloc were restricted. The bureaucratic layers of the NDP, the public sector, the higher Armed Forces

\textsuperscript{63} De Smet and Bogaert, “Resistance and Passive Revolution in Egypt and Morocco”, 217.
\textsuperscript{64} De Smet, A Dialectical Pedagogy of Revolt, 206.
\textsuperscript{65} Tarek Osman, Egypt on the Brink: From the Rise of Nasser to the Fall of Mubarak (US and Europe: Yale University Press, 2011), 144.
\textsuperscript{66} De Smet and Bogaert, “Resistance and Passive Revolution in Egypt and Morocco”, 222.
officials felt resentment from this neoliberal class alliance that was exclusive to rich secular businessmen and cronies around Gamal Mubarak (Hosni Mubarak’s son) who was implicitly introduced in the President’s discourses as his successor.⁶⁸ As a result, these policies worked on narrowing down Mubarak’s historic bloc by further subordinating subaltern forces, which shows a hegemonic crisis of the Mubarak regime.

Mubarak built on Sadat’s liberalizing capitalist legacy relying on his historic bloc. To follow Sadat’s footsteps, Mubarak also released political prisoners after the bread riots 1977 and he restored some civil rights such as freedom of press and of association. Building onto Sadat’s democratic façade Mubarak introduced parliamentary elections in the 1980s to also function as a façade for his authoritarianism, strategy of accumulation and as an attempt to legitimize his hegemonic project.⁶⁹ This allowed for the Muslim Brotherhood to form the second biggest majority in the parliament after the NDP allowing for the organization to expand its hard power.⁷⁰ Furthermore, Mubarak prolonged the emergency law, which resulted in the banning of strikes, demonstrations and critical newspapers and most importantly introducing military courts to deal with the political opposition, something that strengthened the military’s hard power after a political hiatus under Sadat. Moreover, the Political Party Committee, consisting of all registered parties but yet controlled by the regime and the dominant party NDP, blocked the legalization of organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood, which made the Brothers tolerated but not legally recognized.⁷¹ They were repressed and harassed by the security forces and they maintained an illegal status for their organization but they were to survive these policies and strengthen their position in the civil society by promoting Islamism as the main ideology showing the Egyptian people a fundamentalist alternative to Mubarak’s authoritarianism.⁷²

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⁶⁹ Ranko, *The Muslim Brotherhood and its Quest for Hegemony*, 76.
⁷¹ Ranko, *The Muslim Brotherhood and its Quest for Hegemony*, 78.
Mubarak allowed for the military to prosper as a political and for-profit economic institution. The “new” military grew into their own tycoon following the creation of the National Service Products Organization (NSPO) in 1979 that allowed for the military and ex-generals to build factories of common good and compete in the market as they introduced lower prices appealing to the lower classes the regime is not in alliance with. They were also able to build cheaper hotels, beach resorts, and cheaper hospitals across the nation. The military’s economic intervention was justified through the narrative of economic development being a national duty and as a result, the military reinstated its social base and class alliances for their hegemony. 73

Needless to say, Mubarak’s hegemony failed to convey consensus and maintain the status quo. And on the 25th of January 2011, popular uprising erupted in the streets of Egypt leading to the overthrow of the Mubarak government and de facto control of the state by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) during a transitional period until the 2012 presidential elections. This allowed for the “new” military to assume a more hands-on role in the political scene while rising as the “vanguards” of the nation.

73 Abul-Magd, “Egypt’s Adaptable Officers”, 27.
Chapter 3:
Struggle of Two Hegemonies - the Military and the Muslim Brotherhood

This chapter looks at the different branches of the military institution, the SCAF’s one year in power after the 2011 uprising and Morsi’s presidency before the 2013 coup.

The Military Institution in the Deep State

Before jumping to the 2011 uprising leading to the SCAF’s one year in power and the Muslim Brotherhood’s one year in power, I attempt to demonstrate the extent to which the military institution is involved in the state structure to channel material benefits to the population and promote ideologies impacting the common sense. As highlighted above, the military has been a key state actor since the 1950s. The military institution constitutes the Ministry of Defense and Military Production, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), and the military colleges and schools. The institution also includes the Egyptian Military Industry, which I believe to be one of the most important factors in conveying the military’s legitimacy because of its ability to influence the common sense since the 1950s and offer material benefits to its social base sponsored by the military industrial complex.

Abul-Magd characterized the military’s industrial complex and business enterprises that exist today to fall under 8 different conglomerates and organizations: 1) the Ministry of Defense’s National Service projects Organization (NSPO) created in 1979 manufacturing cheaper consumer good than those offered in the market; 2) the Ministry of Military Production, created in 1950s and controls 16 factories today involved in defense conversion; 3) the Arab Organization for Industrialization, created in 1978 and has 9 defense factories converted to civilian production in the 1980s; 4) the Engineering Authority of the Armed Forces, a big contractor for government and military construction projects; 5) the Maritime Industries and Services Organization owning 4 companies of shipbuilding and river transport; 6) the Department of Social Clubs and Hotels managing wedding halls, hotels, restaurants and other
hospitality facilities offering cheaper opportunities than those offered by the lavish Western oriented establishments; 7) the Department of Medical Services of the Armed Forces dedicated to building and managing military hospitals while admitting civilians for affordable fees; and finally 8) the Armed Forces’ Land Projects Organization using the military-owned land in construction projects where the military is the contractor.74

Moreover, for propaganda purposes the military has a public relations body called the Department of Morale Affairs. This body is used by the military to disseminate messages through media outlets for mass mobilization purposes and therefore impact the common sense. Also, it funds the production of popular songs and documentaries that glorify the heroic achievements of the military during times of war and peace. Following the overthrow of Mubarak, the SCAF appointed a member of the Department of Morale Affairs to run state-owned television and radio outlets. Therefore, the military has wide-ranging responsibility for cultural-ideological production and dissemination as well as for institutional and economic governance.75

“The Military and the People are One Hand”

The 2011 Uprising

On January 25th, 2011, Egypt witnessed a new wave of protests influenced by the Tunisian uprising of Dec 8th, 2010 where the Tunisian people protested corruption, poverty, and repression. The Tunisian protestors were able to overthrow the government of then President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali on January 14th, 2011. The Egyptian people chanted “bread, freedom, and social justice” and were successfully able to overthrow the Mubarak government after 18 days of protest. Consequently, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) offered its help to run the country during a transitional phase until democratic presidential elections are held. As seen in previous authoritarian regimes with Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak, they have all

74 Abul-magd, Militarizing the Nation, 14.
75 Ibid, 15.
tried to silence the resistance by relying on the police force and other security apparatuses however, this time it did not succeed as the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) sided with the people and protected them against the brutality of the regime. The SCAF protecting the people during the demonstrations can be seen as a way for the military focused on protecting its interests and pursuing accumulation by dispossession to adapt to the political changes and reinstate its direct political power on hold since Nasser’s rule. The people glorified the military institution as the SCAF presented its direct intervention in the deep state following the uprising as a national duty to protect the people’s revolutionary demands. With this being said, the Egyptian people during the 18 day uprising added a new slogan to “Bread, Freedom, and Social Justice”, it was “The military and the people are one hand”. The SCAF’s discourse of being the guardians and protectors of the Egyptian people paved the way the Sisi regime to legitimize its hegemonic project and produce consent for it as a result of winning the people’s support.

The SCAF also severed ties with many of Mubarak’s cronies and instead they allied themselves with the wealthy Islamists most of which are affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, only to overthrow them in the 2013 coup in order to maintain the people’s support. To further appeal to their social base, the SCAF introduced a new law on political parties more lenient than ever vis-à-vis previous authoritarian regimes. The new law required that the registration of a new political party to gather only five thousand signatures and only the presence of ten of Egypt’s twenty-nine provinces. For the first time in Egypt since Nasser’s overthrow of the Egyptian monarchy in 1952, Egypt’s secular and Islamist affiliated parties and groups were emerging as alternative voices against Egypt’s ruling classes. The most prominent and most organized opposition was the Muslim Brotherhood who formed the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP). The

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76 Ibid.
77 De Smet, *A Dialectical Pedagogy of Revolt*, 358.
78 Abul-Magd, *Militarizing the Nation*, 188.
80 Ibid.
FJP won the majority of the parliamentary elections held by the SCAF in the end of 2011. However, The SCAF dissolved this parliament in early 2012 fearing that the Muslim Brotherhood would win the presidential elections of 2012; regardless of these efforts, the Muslim Brotherhood and FJP member Mohamed Morsi won the presidency. I argue that this is an unintended consequence of the SCAF’s policies. However, the Muslim Brotherhood’s one year in power gave the military and Sisi the opportunity to adopt a counter-terrorism discourse in order to implement an ideological leadership essential to Sisi’s hegemonic project.

Moreover, in June 2011, the SCAF refused a loan offer from the IMF and relied on funding from the Gulf countries instead. The military is not against the neoliberal offensive in general, however, they thought that it might affect the political destabilization of the country even more, which would cost them the popular support. Regardless of refusing the loan in June 2011, some groups grew skeptical of the SCAF’s control over the political sphere under the leadership of Field Marshall Mohammed Tantawi. Some Coptic Christian protestors grew skeptical of the SCAF’s control over the state and protested various times their legitimacy during the Maspero protest. In October 2011, the Maspero protest began due to an attack on a Coptic Christian church in Merinab village in Aswan the month before. The governor of Aswan at the time, Mustafa ElSayed, justified the attack by saying that the church was built without having the proper permit. The protest was violently suppressed by both the Egyptian police force and the military police; which led to the killing of 36 protestors and the wounding of 272 others. The police and the military’s vehicles ran over the protestors and fired extensive rounds of tear gas. This Maspero incident is significant as it means the weakening of the SCAF’s hegemonic project in 2011. For the first time, during the protest the people started demanding the

81 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
I believe that Sisi acknowledged this and accordingly changed the military’s rhetoric to counter-terrorism discourse in order to convey legitimacy and generate consensus under the excuse of protecting national security. Regardless of the Maspero event, Coptic Christians are considered to be big supporters of Sisi’s regime today, which highlights the military’s strong ability to adapt to the political changes to maintain its hegemonic position and the support of the people. During the Muslim Brotherhood’s rule (2012-2013), the SCAF sided with the liberal intelligentsia and non-Muslim Brotherhood affiliated media outlets to influence the common sense portraying the Muslim Brotherhood as terrorists. The liberal intelligentsia promoted a discourse about the Brotherhood’s intentions in limiting the freedom of religious practice. By creating an Islamist enemy, Sisi’s discourse about the Brotherhood being terrorists and “forces of evil” the Coptic Christian minority had no choice but to support his hegemonic project as he promised their protection and their freedom in practicing their religion. Once again the military institution will rise as the guardian of the nation across all social classes.

**The Hegemonic Project**

**During the Muslim Brotherhood’s one-year Presidency**

In 2012, presidential elections were finally held leading to the winning of the Muslim Brotherhood member Mohamed Morsi as the first president of Egypt to never have been affiliated with the military institution. The Muslim Brotherhood was the only opposition group to successfully organize and maintain a position of strength in the civil society based on promoting conservative Islamist ideology and by channeling material benefits to the lower classes in impoverished areas neglected by Sadat and Mubarak’s regimes. Since the 1970s, the Brotherhood has been building Islamic schools focused on the teachings of the Quran, as well as hospitals, investment

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companies and Islamic banks allowing the Egyptian people to take interest free loans. By doing so, the Muslim Brotherhood gained the support of the Egyptian population within both the middle and lower classes allowing Morsi to rely on the organization’s legitimacy to address the lower and working classes and win the elections. Needless to say, these efforts constitute the basis of the hegemonic project under Morsi. In the 2012 presidential elections, Morsi won 51.7% of the votes against Mubarak’s final Prime Minister Ahmed Shafiq taking 48.2% of the votes.

I still find it unclear that the SCAF allowed for the Muslim Brotherhood to win the elections only to overthrow their government one year later. Some sources suggest that the SCAF was rooting for Ahmed Shafiq, which would explain why they dissolved the Muslim brotherhood dominated parliament fearing their win in the presidential elections. In that case, Morsi’s win in 2012 appears to be an unintended consequence that ended up reinstating the military’s hegemonic position. I argue that this consequence allowed for the SCAF to strengthen their hegemonic power and convey legitimacy in the following year as the military shifted its rhetoric to counter-terrorism. If the SCAF had stopped Morsi from winning, it would have shaken their legitimacy among the masses, to which they promised absolutely no military intervention in the political sphere. The military took advantage of the Muslim Brotherhood’s failing hegemony, workers and independent union strikes, along with the discontent of the people due to Morsi’s government’s incompetence in fixing most institutional problems to legitimize their intervention in 2013. Regardless of who would have won the elections of 2012, the military needed to maintain its hard power privileges. Thus, in December 2012, the SCAF issued a constitution that grants the military a semi-autonomous status, which kept the military’s budget above state oversight and public scrutiny. Moreover, during the Muslim Brotherhood

87 Ranko, *The Muslim Brotherhood and its Quest for Hegemony*, 110.
90 Abul-Magd, “Egypt’s Adaptable Officers”.

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presidency, Morsi maintained the privileged status of the military in the country’s bureaucracy by hiring retired officers and generals as ministers and governors while granting them other top administrative positions and raising the military pensions by fifteen percent.\footnote{Adham Youssef, “Presidential Decree Appoints Board of Trustees for ‘Long Live Egypt’ Fund”, \textit{Daily New Egypt online}, last modified, December 23, 2014, https://dailynewseg.com/2014/12/23/presidential-decree-appoints-board-trustees-long-live-egypt-fund/}. However, he removed Field Marshall Mohammed Tantawi the SCAF’s leader from 1991 until 2012 and replaced him by Sisi whom Tantawi was relying on to protect his position. This move can be seen as way for the Brotherhood government to rescind the military order curbing Morsi’s presidential powers. Needless to say, appointing Sisi as the leader of the SCAF permitted him to overthrow the Brotherhood government from the inside and violently crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood supporters by massacring them at a peaceful protest in the summer of 2013.

Historically, the Muslim Brotherhood’s position in the civil society strengthened after the 1970s. As mentioned before, part of Sadat’s changes in terms of reversing Nasser’s political structure included the promotion of a new state discourse based on moderate political and nationalist Islam, he saw Nasser’s crackdown on the Brotherhood and oppositional parties as a mistake. Therefore, in 1974, he let the imprisoned members of the Muslim Brotherhood organization out of jail allowing them to operate freely, yet, not allowing them to become a legally recognized political party.\footnote{Ranko, \textit{The Muslim Brotherhood and its Quest for Hegemony}, 60.} Nonetheless, similar to the military institution, the Muslim Brotherhood took advantage of Sadat’s economic liberalization policies, which allowed them to operate a parallel economy that provided the social services to the poor the state no longer provided.\footnote{De Smet, \textit{A Dialectical Pedagogy of Revolt}, 180.} These material benefits included health care, education and charities providing food, water, clothing and money to the population gravely affected by the removal of subsidies. The Brotherhood built schools, mosques, hospitals, investment companies and Islamic banks allowing the Egyptian population to take interest free loans.\footnote{Ibid.} By doing so, the Muslim Brotherhood was guaranteed a class base necessary for the organization’s hegemonic project in
2012 consisting mostly of lower middle classes, workers and peasants living in impoverished areas neglected by the state apparatuse.

Furthermore, Sadat’s liberalizing reforms and alliance with the Gulf States also allowed for many Muslim Brotherhood affiliated Egyptians to migrate to the Gulf countries in the 1970s and work in their oil rich economy. Under Mubarak these migrants returned to Egypt in the 1980s and the 1990s following the Gulf Wars bringing with them not only capital wealth due to the Gulf’s oil rich economy but also social-conservative values.\(^9_5\) This allowed for the emergence of a new Islamic bourgeoisie class and the further reinstating of the Muslim Brotherhood’s position in the civil society. Under Mubarak, the Muslim Brotherhood promoted Islamism as their culture and channeled material benefits to the subalteran classes allowing them to establish a class base.

De Smet emphasizes that in the 1970s and the early 1980s, only 18 families controlled the rising private sector of Egypt, of which 8 families had ties to the Brotherhood making them control 40% of all private economic projects and enterprises in the country.\(^9_6\) The Muslim Brotherhood continued with their services under Mubarak as well, resulting in expanding their class base and coercions.

Following his election in 2012, Morsi’s historic bloc also followed previous authoritarian regimes’ bloc structures; this demonstrates that Morsi’s strategy of accumulation is relying on previous regime’s neoliberal offensive. Morsi incorporated into his historic bloc the neoliberal figures of the Mubarak era to ensure a successful strategy of accumulation by dispossession. He also incorporated the Muslim Brotherhood affiliated businessmen who emerged under Sadat and Mubarak to his bloc. The Muslim Brotherhood’s economic stance of free enterprise free of state interference is more closely in agreement with a neoliberal doctrine dominant under Mubarak.\(^9_7\) The people showed discontent to these neoliberal policies they protested in 2011. The Egyptian

\(^9_5\) Ranko, *The Muslim Brotherhood and its Quest for Hegemony*, 78.
\(^9_6\) De Smet, *A Dialectical Pedagogy of Revolt*, 181.
Centre for Economic and Social Rights (ECESR) issued a report in April 2013 (two months before the military coup) showing the doubling of protest movements and workers’ strikes since Morsi’s inauguration in July 2013.\textsuperscript{98} In order for a neoliberal regime to operate successfully to guarantee restoration of the ruling class’ power resulting from strategies of accumulation of dispossession, the state needs to provide a good business climate free of political and economic instability for foreign investments.\textsuperscript{99} Since Morsi did not implement policies with regard to “Islamization” of the country, I believe that protests and labor strikes are one of the reasons Sisi and the military felt threatened by Morsi’s regime. For the military to keep maximizing its economic profits, foreign investors and alliances need not to be discouraged by political turmoil in the state of target. This offers an explanation to Sisi’s eagerness to lure back foreign investments following his election in 2014 and his crackdown on civil society resulting in silencing these protests and strikes to a noteworthy extent. In 2015, the Supreme Administrative Court under Sisi outlawed the worker’s right to strike forcing many labor officials to retire by accusing them of taking part in protests.\textsuperscript{100} As a result, the IMF gave a US$12 billion loan to Egypt in 2016 and consequently foreign investment rates increased than the preceding year.

If one looks at Morsi’s relations with the Gulf countries it becomes clear that he was following Mubarak’s neoliberal economic structure and not an Islamist one as seen in post the Islamic revolution of 1979 in Iran. The only difference is that Morsi relied on Qatar to replace Saudi Arabia as the regime and bloc’s main source of funding. Qatar has granted Egypt a loan of $2 billion dollars and promised to invest another $18 billion in industrial and petrochemical projects over the following five years.\textsuperscript{101} Furthermore, Morsi’s government has applied for a $4.8 billion dollar loan from the IMF, which did not go through as he was toppled within a year. However, these loan talks only show that Morsi’s government is entirely disposed to comply


\textsuperscript{99} Harvey, The New Imperialism.


\textsuperscript{101} Achcar, “Slogan ‘Islam is the Solution’”.
with the IMF’s conditions as far as budgetary austerity and other neoliberal reforms go, as well as the non-implementation of a full Islamist ideology in state institutions.\textsuperscript{102} Most of Morsi’s reforms and policies were not completed due to his short term in office as exactly a year following his election he was ousted by the Sisi-led military coup d’état of June 30\textsuperscript{th} 2013, and his bloody crackdown on the organization and its supporters in the Rabaa massacre. As a result, Morsi was convicted of a series of offences including endangering national security by leaking documents to Qatar and inciting violence by the Muslim Brotherhood and he is still in Prison even though Sisi acquitted Mubarak in 2017 after a six-year detention.\textsuperscript{103} This coup allowed for the military institution under Sisi to finally rise as a ruling class carrying a neoliberal agenda and to reinstate direct involvement in the deep state and thus maintain a hegemonic position.

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid.

Chapter 4:  

Sisi’s Hegemonic Project and the Military’s Role in its Historic Bloc

This chapter looks at Sisi’s hegemonic project in terms of its economic and political reforms, and its ideological leadership based on counter-terrorism.

The 2013 Coup d’état, the Rabaa Massacre

& the Military’s Counter-Terrorism Discourse

On June 30th 2013, millions marched the streets of Cairo and other cities demanding the overthrow of Morsi’s Muslim Brotherhood government. These demonstrations were led by a campaign launched earlier that year collecting signatures from the Egyptian population agreeing to the stepping down of Morsi and allowing for fresh presidential elections to be held. The Tamarod (rebellion) campaign that initiated this revolt collected over 22 million signatures giving the president an ultimatum to resign by July 1st 2013. The SCAF under the leadership of the Egyptian Army Chief General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi sided with the popular will and state institutions such as the army, the police and the judiciary to represent the masses. Sisi also sided with the liberal intelligentsia, Coptic and Muslim leaders against the Brotherhood. On July 3rd 2013, Sisi announced on state television the overthrow of the Morsi government, along with the suspension of the constitution and the installment of an interim government declaring the Chief Justice of the Supreme Constitutional Court Adly Mansour the interim president of Egypt. The SCAF and national media outlets until today never refer to the Coup as a coup but a popular revolution. Sisi legitimized the coup by stressing the Tamarod campaign’s goals being the popular demands and that it is the military’s national duty to achieve these demands. During his speech announcing the overthrow of Morsi, Sisi stated to his audience that this

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105 Ibid.
106 Ibid.
intervention is a result of the Brotherhood’s failure to bring national reconciliation to stabilize the country, and promised the Egyptian people that the military would stay away from the political scene.\textsuperscript{108}

Sisi’s popularity rose among the masses as being the guardian of the 2011 revolution’s demands that was “stolen” by the Muslim Brotherhood — In US Secretary of State John Kerry’s words.\textsuperscript{109} In his speeches Sisi assured the masses that he is protecting the people’s demands while portraying and officially declaring the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization.\textsuperscript{110} Right following the overthrow of Morsi, the people marched the streets of Egypt playing patriotic songs financed by the military while holding pictures of both Nasser and Sisi, this indicates the ability of the military to affect the common sense. This comparison between Nasser and Sisi is very important to acknowledge in understanding the social base of Sisi’s hegemonic project. This comparison between Sisi and Nasser is also significant in understanding how the military under Sisi is basing its legitimacy on the heroic legacy of Nasser’s military being the vanguard of the nation. Moreover, Sisi’s speeches following the coup and his election as president insist on saving the nation from enemies and “evil forces” to ensure the progression of the state into, well, “a state”.\textsuperscript{111} He believes that the progression of the state into a state is possible by establishing strong functioning state institutions has stopped following the defeat of 1967 insinuating that only his leadership against terrorism will allow for this progression to occur.\textsuperscript{112} Additionally, Sisi also refers to the 1967 defeat in some of his speeches, which is considered to be the biggest stigma of Nasser’s military. This falsely indicates that Sisi is here to reinstate the heroic

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{109} In 2013, the US Secretary of State John Kerry stated that the Brotherhood stole the revolution of 2011, see: “Muslim Brotherhood ’stole’ Egypt’s Revolution: Kerry”, \textit{Al-Ahram Online}, November 21, 2013, http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/87099/Egypt/Politics-/Muslim-Brotherhood-stole-Egypts-revolution-Kerry.aspx.
\textsuperscript{111} Abdel Fatah El-Sisi, “Hekayet Watan – kalemat al-ra’éis el-Sisi khelal al-galssa al-khetameya el’Ian tarashboho lere’a’asa fatra thaneya” (speech, Cairo, January 9, 2018), DMC’s channel on YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ASgFU5qm4MM.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid.
militaristic legacy of the military institution that the defeat in 1967 had erased. Therefore, Sisi tries to appeal to the masses as a Nasser figure minus the national shame of 1967 that had to do with the following years of corruption in state institutions.

However, a few months following the coup the role of the military and the Ministry of Interior in organizing this coup became slightly clearer. It was revealed by leaked audio recordings that the Tamarod campaign’s main bank account was receiving financial support mainly from Egypt’s Generals that was replenished by the United Arab Emirates. Moreover, in television interviews with Tamarod members and officials from the Ministry of Interior reviled that the state security apparatus stimulated street protests against Morsi, which discredited Tamarod as a popular campaign following the coup, but not necessarily affecting the military’s strong position in the political society. It was later reviled that the Military Intelligence was behind the entire Tamarod campaign. The Military Intelligence was also central to Nasser’s regime as it mobilized pro-regime demonstrations and spied on the nation, Nasser appointed a close ally, Zakariya Muhyi al Din, to lead it as a tactic ensuring the loyalty of military institution. The Military Intelligence is also central to Sisi’s regime today with similar functions under Nasser, which highlights how Sisi’s historic bloc is mostly relying on the military to build his hegemonic project.

Now the military is perceived as the patriotic savior of the nation twice in the course of three years. On July 24th 2013, Sisi attended the graduation ceremony of two military colleges; the Egyptian Naval Academy and the Egyptian Air Defense Academy where he gave a speech calling for millions of the masses to march the streets on July 28th 2013 to give him a mandate to fight terrorism. This highlights Sisi’s ability to implement an ideological leadership for his

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113 Ibid.
114 Ketchley, “How Egypt’s Generals Used Street Protests to Stage a Coup”.
115 Ibid.
116 Springborg, “The Rewards of Failure: Persisting Military Rule in Egypt”.
hegemonic project. It was then when the military led by Sisi readapted to the political changes and shifted its main discourse to counter-terrorism. The masses marched the streets that Friday showing their fulfillment of Sisi’s request giving him a mandate to protect the nation against terrorism. On August 14th 2013, upon Sisi’s command, Egyptian security forces raided two camps of Pro-Morsi protests in Cairo, Al-Nahda Sq. and Rabaa al-Adaweya Mosque. The Rabaa mosque area held the largest site with the largest turn out of the six week long peaceful sit-in that ended within hours resulting in the killing of more than 800 civilians and injuring thousand others.118 Regardless of this massacre being perceived to be unprecedented in Egyptian post-colonial history, it was accepted by the non pro-Morsi masses following Sisi’s campaign against terror. Which, declared the Brotherhood to have ties with terrorist organizations in the region including the Islamic State.119

Moreover, in the year preceding the coup, the secular intelligentsia consisting of a list of Egyptian liberal intellectuals and media representatives sided with the SCAF and promoted the claim that the Islamists were brought to power by the US to implement an American agenda and referred to Morsi as a puppet and the Brotherhood as a pawn for American interests in the region.120 This discourse is not new in the region; it has been used since Nasser to delegitimize the Muslim Brotherhood by portraying them as puppets to foreign interests.121 Sisi had no choice but to adopt a moderate Islam discourse in which he refers to the Brotherhood as terrorists or “evil forces” trying to teach the Islamic nation and the Egyptian people the wrong teachings of Islam.122 By the end of 2013, the government issued a law officially declaring the Muslim

119 Ibid.
120 Ibid.
121 Ibid.
122 Abdel Fatah El-Sisi, “khetab al-ra’ieis Abdel Fatah el-Sisi fi hafl al-tanseeb.kamelan” (speech, Cairo, June 8, 2014), Rotana Masriya channel on YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vK8Rh_8FTrU.
Brotherhood a “terrorist organization” and therefore legitimizing Sisi’s crackdown on them.\textsuperscript{123} To maintain the military’s social base and technically stay true to his promise that the military will not get involved in the political scene, Sisi resigned from his military post in March 2014 and announced that he would run as a candidate in the May 2014 presidential elections that he won. Implementing an ideological leadership is essential to the success of any hegemonic project however, it needs to be accompanied by the ruling classes’ ability to channel material benefits to the subaltern classes. Granted, Sisi’s regime does not provide significant material benefits, however, having the military on his historic bloc serves this purpose. As mentioned earlier, the material benefits provided by the military to the subordinate classes are in the form of cheaper consumer goods produced by the Military Industrial Complex. These material benefits vary from breads, rice, meats and sugar, to cheap leisure opportunities at their military-run resorts, hotels, and malls, which allow the subordinate classes to live out in their daily lives the ideology of consumerism, on which hegemony in neoliberal regimes depends on to a large extent. However, as the following sections demonstrate how repressive Sisi’s economic reforms are, it becomes clear that the state needs to provide more material benefits in order for Sisi’s hegemonic project to be sustainable.

\textbf{Sisi’s Economic Reforms and Strategy of Accumulation}

Since his election in 2014, Sisi has asked the people for “shared sacrifice of freedoms in the name of progress” as the government tries to revive the economy. Sisi has informed the nation that the economy has been depleted due to a fall in foreign investment and tourism since the uprising of 2011 and due to the presence of terrorists in the country.\textsuperscript{124} Sisi has clearly been against the 2011 uprising ever since he appeared in the political scene in 2013. In his speeches about economic reforms he insists on delivering to the people the negative notion of the


\textsuperscript{124} El-Sisi, “Hekayet Watan”. 
economic recession being caused by the popular uprising in 2011 and the terrorists in Egypt.\textsuperscript{125} In reference to the 25 January 2011 revolution Sisi said in his speech at the inauguration ceremony of a new natural gas field el-Zohr on January 31\textsuperscript{st}, 2018 that “what happened seven or eight years ago, will never happen again in Egypt…What failed at the time, will not succeed now”\textsuperscript{126}. He also threatened his listeners across the country to revolt by saying “No, it seems you don’t know me well enough”, which is an Egyptian expression signifying a darker and strict side of one’s personality.\textsuperscript{127} It is something a middle school teacher would yell at a misbehaving student to warn them from the harsh measures they could take to discipline them. And as a result, Sisi insists that the Egyptian people’s duty in the time of war against terrorism is to “endure”, “be patient”, “sacrifice freedoms” while the government pulls itself and the country out of the economic recession.\textsuperscript{128} This is an important step in Sisi’s hegemonic project in terms of preserving the status quo to be free of demonstrations against his policies by impacting people’s ideology to remain passive.

Sisi’s ultimate challenge during his first year in office was to lure back foreign investors who doubted Egypt’s economic stability because of the rising inflation (35%), repressive bureaucracy, electricity shortages and the artificially strong currency.\textsuperscript{129} Therefore, he started his first month in office by lashing costly fuel subsidies, raising taxes and planning megaprojects claiming that his actions are necessary to secure long-term revenues and employment opportunities.\textsuperscript{130} Sisi’s government raised prices of heavily subsidized energy products by up to

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{127} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.
78 percent and implemented new taxes on capital gains and high-income earners.\footnote{Ibid.} This is an important element of Sisi’s hegemonic project as it goes beyond the state discourse. It is a material policy that wants to demonstrate that the regime is on the side of the people. This is one important way in which hegemony is constructed. It also suggests that the social base the regime targets as its supporters is sections of the middle class, including petty bourgeoisie, small shop keepers and owners of small enterprises, rather than the big bourgeoisie and the top 20% of income earners.

Additionally, Sisi has received US$12 billion in financial aid from some Gulf States, mostly from Saudi Arabia, ever since the 2013 coup.\footnote{Stephen Kalin, “Sisi’s Bold Start on Economic Reforms Buys Egypt Some Time”, \textit{Reuters online}, last modified July 23, 2014, \url{https://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-economy/sisis-bold-start-on-economic-reforms-buys-egypt-some-time-idUSKBN0FS1AH20140723}.} Sisi created a national funding project under the name of his presidential campaign slogan \textit{Tahya Masr} or ‘Long Live Egypt’ as an attempt to encourage national funding and financing of the canal from within.\footnote{Youssef, “Presidential Decree Appoints Board of Trustees for ‘Long Live Egypt’ Fund”}. In 2014 Sisi issued a presidential decree appointing a board of trustees for this fund to include business tycoons from the Mubarak era such as Naguib Sawiris and Basil El-Baz as well as some armed forces generals. This move indicates the significance of Mubarak’s business tycoons in Sisi’s historic bloc. However, this fund was merely financed and supported by the Central Bank of Egypt (CBE) and the military.\footnote{Ibid.} Sisi also declared that he donated half of his monthly salary and half of his wealth and property to the \textit{Tahya Masr} fund as a way to appeal more to the people. Even though the project was introduced to be a merely Egyptian project funded by only Egyptians, Sisi was still hoping to attract foreign investors to sustain it. Before the inauguration, Egypt signed contracts with six international firms from the United Arab Emirates, the Netherlands, Belgium and the US to carry out dredging of the New Suez Canal.\footnote{Stephen Kalin, “Egypt Signs with Six International Firms to Dredge New Suez Canal”, \textit{Reuters}, October 8, 2014, \url{https://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-suezcanal/egypt-signs-with-six-international-firms-to-dredge-new-suez-canal-idUSKCN0I701C20141018}.} However,
three months after the inauguration of the project, the government blocked any official reports about the revenues. A few months later, the government published two reports for August 2015 and September 2015 showing decreases in the total Suez Canal revenues (the New Canal included) by 10% or US$150 million. The state identified the decrease in revenues of the Canal as a result of a general decrease of the level of global trade.

By the end of 2015, Egypt had finally held parliamentary elections that were put on hold since the ousting of Morsi. A functioning parliament is a prerequisite for any IMF deal, and upon its formation Egypt was qualified to sign a loan with the IMF in November 2016 for US$12 billion. This loan led to implementing further austerity measures signifying the continuation of the neoliberal core of the Egyptian economy that Mubarak had developed. The state was obliged to float the Egyptian Pound in order to accommodate the reform program required by the IMF. As a result, the currency lost half its value, eroding spending power and pushing inflation to an unprecedented record of 35 percent in the summer of 2017. In the course of a few months under the reform program of the IMF, the government agreed to introducing Value Added Tax, and cutting electricity and other subsidies. Consequently, the value of the Egyptian Pound dropped sharply which resulted in increasing the foreign currency rates as well as the price of imports. Floating the currency as a requirement to meet the IMF reform program affected the importers, but most importantly they affected the ordinary Egyptians from all social

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137 Ibid.
140 Ibid.
classes especially the lower and middle classes because prices hijacked while salaries stagnated.\textsuperscript{142} The Sisi administration hoped that floating the currency would further encourage foreign investments, however, foreign direct investment dropped to 16 percent or by US$1.6 billion.\textsuperscript{143}

Moreover, part of Sisi’s economic reforms included the inauguration of mega projects to further attract foreign investments, one of which is the Suez Canal Area Development Project (or the New Suez Canal). Building on the legacy of the Nasser’s military in nationalizing the Canal, Sisi launched this mega-project in August 2014 aiming to increase the role of the Suez Canal region in international trade to develop the three canal cities; Suez, Port Said and Ismailia.\textsuperscript{144} The New Suez Canal project is designed and implemented by the Egyptian Armed Forces, they dug a new canal parallel to the Suez Canal to increase its capacity in allowing ships to sail in the both directions at the same time.\textsuperscript{145} And in early 2015, Sisi introduced another mega-project, the New Cairo Capital City. This project can be seen as a continuation of Mubarak’s neoliberal urban strategies targeting the rich and the upper middle class. The New Cairo Capital City (NCCC) adopts strategies outlined in Mubarak’s Cairo 2050 unfinished masterplan first introduced by the Ministry of Housing in 2008.\textsuperscript{146} Moreover, Sisi is building on Mubarak’s discourse of “conquering the desert” in order to encourage the elites and the rich to leave “polluted” Cairo and go live in a more calm, modern and clean environment in gated communities.\textsuperscript{147} This step can be seen as a way for Sisi to win the support of not only the middle and lower social classes but also the elites and the rich who prospered financially during Mubarak’s thirty year in power. Thus, it appears that Sisi’s hegemonic project is an unstable comprise between partially incompatible visions; through its economic policies it seeks to appeal

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{142} “Egypt’s Middle Class Feels the Squeeze of Sisi’s Economic Reforms”.
\item \textsuperscript{143} “Egypt’s $20bn New Capital City Plan Enters a Critical Juncture”, \textit{The National online}, last modified, March 22, 2018, \url{https://www.thenational.ae/business/economy/egypt-s-20bn-new-capital-city-plan-enters-a-critical-juncture-1.715128}.
\item \textsuperscript{144} “Egypt Launches Suez Canal Expansion”, \textit{BBC online}, August 6, 2015, \url{http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-33800076}.
\item \textsuperscript{145} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{146} See the report posted by the government on Cairo 2050 vision: \url{https://cairofrombelow.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/cairo-2050-vision-v-2009-gopp-12-mb.pdf}
\end{itemize}
to both the middle and lower classes and to the upper classes. This results in contradictions and contributes to making the hegemony project brittle. The main glue that holds the nation together is the counter-terrorism discourse, which unites the upper classes and many from middle and lower classes. But a hegemonic project whose vision of the national interest is limited to discourse or ideology alone without material benefits is unlikely to be sustainable.

**Sisi’s Political Reforms and the Build-up of the Repressive State**

In terms of political changes, Sisi made it clear since the moment he rose in the political scene that he is not tolerating any political opposition. In 2013, following the coup, the Interim President Adly Mansour, issued a vague law supported by Sisi that bans any protests and allows the police officers to forcibly disperse any protest even if “a protestor throws a stone” and it also offers prison sentence to those “who influence the course of justice”. The law also gives the Ministry of Interior the right to ban any meetings in public that consist of more than ten people in one public space. The Protest and Peaceful Assembly Law, along with the dominant pro-Sisi media are ensuring that Egypt’s political opposition was unable to gain ground. The Protest and Peaceful Assembly law led to the jailing of many political activists, including those involved in the revolution that ousted longstanding President Hosni Mubarak in 2011. Consequently, there is an estimated number of 60 thousand political prisoners in Egypt since 2013, most of which are Muslim Brotherhood supporters.

Previously fearing domination by the Muslim Brotherhood before the 2012 elections, the SCAF dissolved the Muslim Brotherhood dominated parliament in 2012 and reinstated the emergency law that has been lifted after Mubarak’s ousting. The first parliament to be formed

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149 Ibid.
151 Fahmy, “Egypt’s Structural Illiberalism”, 49.
since the ousting of Mubarak was not until January 2016. Sisi legally neutered the political potentials of the new parliament. In January 2014 before forming the parliament, Sisi’s new constitution ensures that no single political party would have a parliamentary majority.\textsuperscript{152} The parliament now allows for 75\% of the seats to be occupied by independent candidates, 20\% would be assigned to party lists and the president assigns the remaining 5\%.\textsuperscript{153} The constitution allows the president to dissolve the parliament at any time if it rejects those 5\% of the seats that he has the right to assign.\textsuperscript{154} Moreover, rather than backing one political party or ideology, Sisi called for the creation of a unified electoral list that he could endorse to occupy 20\% of the seats in the parliament (that is 120 seats). The list is a coalition of different political parties allied under one bloc to represent 120 seats and was created by the Military Intelligence.\textsuperscript{155} The current bloc occupying 120 seats is the “For the Love of Egypt” is pro-Sisi, it consists mostly of former NDP members as well as Mubarak era retired policemen and businessmen.\textsuperscript{156} This electoral list system undermines the competitive nature of the electoral process; consequently, any political opposition to the regime has completely disappeared from today’s Egyptian Parliament. Sisi only saw the parliamentary elections as a way to convey legitimacy by demonstrating the regime’s commitment to democracy and state institution building. Having a functioning parliament is not only a pre-requisite for receiving any IMF funding project, to which Sisi made sure to form prior to signing the US$12 billion deal with the international financial institution, but it also helps Egypt convince foreign investors that the country’s transition is stable enough for long-term business cooperation. However, given the fact that the parliament is mostly pro-Sisi with no oppositions, the state can use the parliament as a form of “elite management” to contain and guarantee that businessmen, politicians and elites will remain in Sisi’s bloc and thus maintain stability. This can be seen as a hegemonic strategy to create the illusion that the regime—and its

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid, 51.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{155} Springborg, “The Rewards of Failure: Persisting Military Rule in Egypt”.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid.
parliament— as representative of ordinary people (non-professional politicians) largely united behind the regime.

One of the first laws the newly formed parliament had passed was a new law prohibiting independent Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) from effectively working in Egypt by subjecting their work and funding to control by government authorities.\(^\text{157}\) This law affected 47 thousand local registered NGOs and one hundred foreign ones most of which are working on human rights documentation and advocacy.\(^\text{158}\) Egyptian authorities have investigated dozens of independent human rights groups on allegations that they illegally receive foreign funding to harm Egyptian national security.\(^\text{159}\) A conviction may carry a twenty-five year sentence.\(^\text{160}\) Based on the law as well as the allegations of receiving illegal foreign funding, hundreds of NGOs working in the civil sphere as well as prominent foreign and local NGOs were forced to shut down for the first time. As a result, hundreds of these NGO staff members have been summoned by investigative judges, they have also been victims of death threats, imprisonment, enforced disappearances, travel bans and assets freeze.\(^\text{161}\) Moreover, in 2017, Sisi approved a Judicial Bodies Law granting him the authority to appoint the heads of judicial bodies, including the Court of Cassation and the State Council, two courts that had previously been regarded as the most independent judicial bodies in holding the executive to account.\(^\text{162}\) Sisi had also been cracking down on television channels and media productions that might stir objections to the regime and intimidated any presidential candidates to run against him in the 2018 elections forcing them to pull out of the race. Consequently, Sisi ran against an ex-military man who was part of the Sisi presidential campaign. Needless to say, Sisi won a second presidential term by


\(^{158}\) Ibid.

\(^{159}\) Ibid.


\(^{161}\) Ibid.

\(^{162}\) Ibid.
97% of the votes. In conclusion, Sisi made sure to also silence any liberal non-Muslim Brotherhood affiliated opposition by maintaining the support of the judiciary and security apparatuses in his bloc. The state-institutional dimension of Sisi’s hegemonic project has been far-reaching, with a clear focus being on repression.

As previously mentioned, in 2013 the military changed its discourse from stressing their national duty in contributing to the national economic developments and the welfare of the lower classes to adopting counter-terrorism rhetoric. The Egyptian military has never adopted such discourse even following the assassination of Sadat by Islamists in 1981, and even with US pressure to adopt such rhetoric after the September 11, 2001 attack. Following the 2013 coup, the US suspended some aid shipments to the military for a short period of time because current US policy mandates the suspension of aid in the event of a coup. Still, the US decided to grant Egypt back its military aid to be mainly used in “counterterrorism, border security, Sinai security, and maritime security. Furthermore, a couple of months prior to the 2018 presidential elections, Sisi further promoted the state’s counter-terrorism discourse by starting a war against terrorism in Northern Sinai. According to different Military Intelligence reports, extremist groups were planning to carry out attacks across Egypt during the presidential elections, “in order to erode citizens’ trust in the state’s ability to guarantee security in the country”. In the light of these reports, Sisi authorized a comprehensive military operation in Northern Sinai “Operation Sinai 2018” to fight “terrorists” in an attempt to save the country, his reputation and credibility. Moreover, to convey legitimacy for this war, Sisi sought the approval of leaders of religious institutions such as al-Azhar and the Coptic Orthodox Church, liberal political parties and the

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Egyptian parliament.\textsuperscript{166} Under the discourse of counter-terrorism, I view “Operation Sinai 2018” as another way for the Sisi regime to legitimate a second presidential term before the 2018 elections.

Sisi intimidated and threatened his opponents prior to the 2018 presidential elections forcing them to pull out of the race. Needless to say, Sisi won a second presidential term by 97 percent of the vote maintaining a popular support rate of 80\%.\textsuperscript{167} It is important to point out that the incompleteness of and contradictions in Sisi’s hegemonic project is rendering it unstable. This is because it lacks channeling significant material benefits to the subaltern classes and relying only on implementing an ideological leadership against terrorism. Thus Sisi’s hegemonic project is most probably unsustainable in the future, not least because the regime pursues the same failed accumulation strategy as Mubarak, which contributed to his downfall, but because it was unable to offer significant material benefits to its social base among the middle and lower classes. While Sisi has found a new recipe to maintain military hegemony for the time being, namely through his counter-terrorism discourse and a build-up of the repressive state and ideological (state media) apparatuses, these pillars of his hegemonic strategy do not anchor it deeply in the population and whose demands for improved economic conditions and basic freedoms are likely to reemerge in the foreseeable future and threaten the Sisi regime.

\textsuperscript{166} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{167} Davison and Tolba, “Egypt’s Sisi Wins 97 Percent in Election with no Real Opposition”.
Conclusion

This thesis looks into how Sisi’s military regime is able to maintain popular support regardless of its policies being more oppressive than Mubarak’s regime. It also looks into a link between the Muslim Brotherhood coming to power in 2012 and the production of this consensus. Moreover, it provides an explanation for the constraining policies the previous regimes had implemented to crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood leading to the bloody military coup led by Sisi in 2013.

In order to do so, I use Gramsci’s concept of hegemony as a category of analysis to analyze the historic blocs, strategies of accumulation and legitimization discourses of the previous regimes as well as Sisi’s. This approach allows us to understand how the military institution had historically been able to maintain a strong position in political society and still get the support of the people, as well as how the Muslim Brotherhood had been able to attain a position of strength in civil society leading to Morsi’s one-year presidency.

A successful hegemonic project entails the ruling classes to allocate some material benefits to the subordinate classes and to implement an ideological leadership. I argue that Sisi’s hegemonic project was able to produce this popular consensus during the president’s first term by changing the military and state discourse to counter-terrorism in 2013. Thus reinstating an ideological and discursive leadership. Also, by providing very little material benefits offered by the military to some subordinate classes. Declaring the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization in 2013 and stressing the need for the military to eliminate them before Sisi fixes the state structure and economy presents the military led by Sisi as the nation’s savior and thus increases the regime’s popularity while using this discourse to camouflage the causes of public issues. This counter-terrorism discourse portrays the Brotherhood as a national enemy threatening the national security in order to legitimize Sisi’s bloody coup against them and his rise to power in 2013. Furthermore, I argue that the Muslim Brotherhood coming to power in 2012 was an unintended consequence of the SCAF’s liberalizing political policies of 2011. This
unintended consequence allowed the military to take advantage of the opportunity offered to them by the Muslim brotherhood’s one year in power to reinvent themselves, and change their discourse to reconquer state power by overthrowing a democratically elected government, and to receive support for this move from the people and from key regional and Western states. Additionally, the material benefits provided by the military to the subordinate classes are in the form of cheaper consumer goods produced by the untaxed, unaudited and labor-intensive Military Industrial Complex to compete in the market. These material benefits vary from breads, rice, meats and sugar, to cheap leisure opportunities at their military-run resorts, hotels, and malls, which allow the subordinate classes to live out in their daily lives the ideology of consumerism, on which hegemony in neoliberal regimes depends on to a large extent.

Both the military’s counter-terrorism discourse and its allocation of some material benefits demonstrate the military’s ability to readapt to and survive the changing political economy and thus maintain a hegemonic position in political society. But a hegemonic project whose vision of the national interest is limited to discourse or ideology alone without significant material benefits is unlikely to be sustainable. Therefore, in order for Sisi’s hegemonic project to also survive the changing political economy and still generate consensus, the regime needs to provide more material benefits to the subaltern classes. The military’s hegemonic position is still intact but lacking a strategy of accumulation enabling the state to provide material benefits to the regime’s social base is an indicator that the hegemonic project under Sisi could easily collapse.
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