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The Iranian Legacy in the 2011 Egyptian Revolution: Military Endurance and U.S. Foreign Policy Priorities

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Introduction

In the latter half of the twentieth century, militaries have been a major source for change in the Middle East. In 1952, radical nationalist military officers staged the overthrow of the Egyptian monarchy and proclaimed a republic. A year later, the Iranian military, in collusion with the American CIA and the British MI-6, toppled Iran's democratically-elected government. In the same decade, Iraqi military officers, following on the heels of their Egyptian counterparts, ousted the monarchy in Iraq and, likewise, established a republic. Militaries were indeed a force for radical change and often became the final arbiters of power. However, they also frequently served as stalwart defenders of the status quo. During the 14-month protest movement that evolved into the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the military tried desperately to fend off the protest movement, to the extent that it established a military government two months before the revolution's triumph and fought until the military's virtual collapse on 11 February 1979. The Turkish military has, perhaps, the longest track record of intervening in bids to maintain the prevailing order; it has staged four coups in the last half of the twentieth century (1960, 1971, 1980, 1997).[1] The Algerian military, by far the most dominant institution in the country, feared an imminent Islamist victory and canceled the second round of parliamentary elections in early 1992. Afterward, it proceeded to consolidate its power by appointing its own presidents. It is the Egyptian military, however, that deserves special attention for its ability to overcome challenges—challenges that could have threatened the military's cohesion and longevity.

The Egyptian military came to prominence with the Free Officers coup in 1952. Its power and autonomy fluctuated largely at the behest of its president's

policies. In the wake of Anwar Sadat's assassination in 1981, Hosni Mubarak assumed the presidency and, consequently, the Egyptian military's political and economic clout has grown consistently ever since.[2] The matter of the military's power in Egypt highlights the core issue dominating Egypt in 2011. How did an 18-day mass movement succeed in ousting the political leadership of the country, while the military—a main power center and guardian of the *ancien régime*—continued to exist as a cohesive force? The military history of the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and major American foreign policy priorities in 2011 explain why the Egyptian military has endured such enormous political crises.

Iran is a crucial starting point in understanding why the Egyptian military continues to constitute a major power center in post-revolution Egypt. The role of the Iranian military in the Islamic Revolution of 1979 is vital to comprehending the context in which the radical Islamist regime was born: a colossal foreign policy disaster for the United States and one that was brought into consideration when contemplating the role of the Egyptian military during and after the Egyptian Revolution of 2011. It is important, however, to posit a disclaimer. Throughout the 2011 protest movement in Egypt, leaders, pundits, and analysts tirelessly referenced Iran's 1979 revolution, fearing that if Mubarak fell, a radical Islamist government mirroring Tehran's would seize power. For example, Israeli Premier Benyamin Netanyahu stated, "Our real fear is of a situation that could develop . . . and which has already developed in several countries, including Iran itself: repressive regimes of radical Islam."[3] Similar to the framework set by the Vietnam War, where modern wars are often referenced in comparison to it, Iran's revolution has likewise become a much-referenced standard, i.e., "Egypt is the next Iran." Such a generalization and simplification minimizes the social, political, cultural, geographical, and historical factors that distinguish these two countries and their historical trajectories. In brief, the blurring of history conveniently overlooks many significant variances that encompass economic factors, the fundamental differences between Iranian Shi'ism and Egyptian Sunnism, the subtle but important variations in these countries' Islamist movements, the Cold War context that was important to Iran in 1979, compared to the contemporary political nuances relevant to Egypt, cultural differences between predominantly Persian Iran and Arab Egypt, and the geographical locations of an Iran bordering the Soviet Union in 1979 and an Egypt bordering Israel and a Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip in 2011. All are overlooked to draw needless and dubious parallels.[4] Yet, institutions like the military and its specific role in a historical event constitute strong units for comparison because they are concrete, classified entities, not "analytic abstractions."[5] Thus, the possibility of whether Egypt will be the "next Iran" is not the focus of this study; rather, this article examines the different roles that the militaries played during the two revolutions and how this difference is crucial to understanding the collapse of one military and the survival of the other. In other words, this study addresses the role of the Egyptian military in the context of the Iranian Revolution and compares specific lessons in military history

to shed light onto the reasons that the Egyptian military continued to be a major player in post-revolution Egypt and why it will likely remain a force for the foreseeable future. Lastly, this article considers the U.S. foreign policy establishment as necessary to understanding why the Egyptian military still constituted an organized, albeit non-monolithic, force that the revolution did not devastate. First under Sadat and then under Mubarak, Egypt and its strategic importance have long rendered it a major pillar of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. For this reason, the Egyptian military's survival is monumental in ensuring that the U.S. is not left without a voice in post-Mubarak Egypt.

As a result of the seemingly endless studies on the Iranian Revolution, secondary sources provide an adequate history in underscoring the lessons gleaned from the role of the Iranian military during the revolution. The WikiLeaks diplomatic cables illustrate the centrality of the Egyptian military to power in Egypt and its proximity to the United States' intelligence and military establishments, which highlights how and why the U.S. came to see the Egyptian military as an insurance policy in the midst of a revolution that swept away a close American ally. As a starting point, this study begins with the fundamental military lesson learned from the Iranian Revolution, which serves as an instructive point of reference with which to explain the Egyptian military's resilience in 2011.

Military Lessons Learned from the Iranian Revolution

Militaries play a determining role in a revolutionary movement's victory or demise. Mark Katz argues, "If the armed forces protect the ancien régime, then the revolutionary opposition is unable to seize power. If, however, the armed forces do not protect the ancien régime, then the revolutionaries usually do come to power."[6] Protecting the regime in the face of a mass movement, however, can ultimately lead to the military's unraveling, thereby rendering it unable to protect the *ancien régime* and fend off the revolution's final push towards victory. Throughout the 14-month protest movement in 1978 to 1979, the Iranian military, at the behest of the monarchy, fought at the forefront against the revolution. The military's campaign to suppress the movement backfired, as it created deep fissures within the armed forces, which ultimately led to its unraveling and consequent inability to resist the revolution. A brief history of the Iranian military's role in the Iranian Revolution gives credence to this theory.

As the protests grew and civilian casualties mounted, military cohesion and morale dissipated. Unable to bring the demonstrations to an end, Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi sacked his civilian prime minister and installed a military government in November 1978. Armed forces "flooded Tehran with armored vehicles and deterred street protests around the country."[7] The cessation of protests was only temporary, as protest organizers reprogrammed and politicized cultural holidays in order to bring people onto the streets. The protests continued, and the military, which constituted the government in Tehran and elsewhere,

became the new target of the revolutionaries' slogans. Thus, the fate of the regime was tied to that of the military, and vice versa.

With the establishment of the military government came a corresponding spike in civilian casualties. The number of deaths jumped from 45 in Aban (October–November) to 85 in Azar (November–December), then to 137 in Dey (December–January) and 179 in Bahman (January–February).[8] These figures differ greatly with those before the military government came into effect: "35 demonstrators died in the first eight months of 1978, 33 in Shahrivar (August–September) and 18 in Mehr (September–October).[9] The significance of increased civilian casualties is illustrated by the greater degree of guilt felt by soldiers for killing their fellow countrymen and women, even more so as the revolution enjoyed popular support and reached its zenith by December 1978. These revolutionaries were neither an external threat to the country, nor were they an internal military threat, i.e. a band of guerrillas fighting the regime. Rather, they were unarmed civilians, numbering in the millions, who marched against the regime while using powerfully emotive slogans that appealed to the "hearts and minds" of the soldiers.

As the revolution continued into the final weeks of 1978, defections gravely affected the military's cohesion and capacity. Chief of Staff Abbas Gharabaghi "estimated that the armed forces were only at 55 percent of their strength," and added that it was a downward spiral when "small incidents of mutiny began to multiply, as did evidence of disaffection among the troops."[10] The U.S. embassy acknowledged the bleak situation: "Base security has been tightened on more than one base or unit area, apparently because of indications of decreasing loyalty among junior personnel as well as concern that deserters may attempt to return in uniform to seize arms."[11] The more the army was called out onto the streets to deal with the protesters, the more soldiers defected. Indeed, soldiers who interacted with protesters often joined the revolution.[12] Soldiers defected in front of other soldiers, further weakening army discipline and morale, and prompting commanders to frequently order their units back to their barracks in order to isolate them from the protesters' attempts to recruit more defectors. Not only was the military unraveling from within but, as the regime refused to step down, the movement consequently evolved into an armed insurrection in the final days of the revolution. The belief was that, for the revolution to succeed, the Shah's military had to be liquidated.

On 16 January 1978, the Shah of Iran fled the country, leaving his army's command structure intact. Obtaining refuge in Egypt, he sought to stay close enough to Iran to return quickly in the event of a military coup that could change the situation in his favor. As the movement continued, the army's unity eventually suffered a catastrophic blow when air force cadets and technicians mutinied and distributed arms. To suppress the mutiny, the Shah's vaunted Imperial Guard laid siege on the military base. As soon as news of the attack reached armed revolutionaries, "they mobilized their members, distributed guns among their

sympathizers, and rushed in full force to help the besieged cadets and technicians. Successfully beating off the Imperial Guards, the guerrillas spent the next three days opening up prisons, police stations, armories, and the five major military bases in Tehran."[13] By 11 February 1979, the Shah's military was devastated; one of the first acts of the revolutionary government was to arrest the remaining generals and execute them.

The guerrillas targeted the Shah's military personnel because they blamed them for the deaths of hundreds of civilians during the course of the revolution. Furthermore, the new Islamist government's first priority was to preserve the revolution and they doubted the loyalty of the Shah's remaining generals. In other words, through its conduct during the prolonged protest movement, it was impossible for the military to survive the Shah's removal and the revolution's victory. Through the civilian death toll and its legacy of fighting the revolution, the military garnered the wrath of the people and the new revolutionary order, thereby ensuring that whatever remained of the armed forces early in 1979 would be dealt with harshly. This is a crucial history lesson that must be considered in discussing the Egyptian military's endurance in 2011, as the country underwent its own popular revolution.

Militaries who open fire on their fellow countrymen and women who peacefully protest risk disintegration. In 2011, the Libyan government and the Yemeni government ordered their armed forces to shoot demonstrators, leading to mass defections and, ultimately, an armed rebellion in Libya.[14] The Egyptian military, however, stayed on the sidelines throughout most of the 18-day protest movement. On 31 January 2011, six days after the first protests, the Egyptian military declared that it would not stop the protesters from converging in Tahrir Square, the focal point of the revolution.[15]

Unlike the military, it was the feared and hated State Security Investigation Services (hereafter, the Security Forces) that spearheaded the campaign against the protesters. Headed by the Interior Ministry, the Security Forces were blamed for much of the violence against the demonstrators. The Battle of Tahrir Square serves as the best and bloodiest example of the carnage wrought by the Security Forces. On 2 February 2011, Security Forces organized pro-Mubarak supporters and clashed with demonstrators throughout the country. Tahrir Square was the main battle scene, with one eyewitness account effectively capturing the intensity of the day: "The demonstrations started off peacefully. Then, suddenly, there were rumors that the government was sending in horses and camels, and sure enough, riders charged the crowd but were forced back by protesters forming a human chain. I've seen at least 50 severely injured or dead people."[16] The Security Forces' violence early in the protest movement and the mounting civilian death toll meant that, like the case of the Iranian military, the Security Forces' survival was impossible if the revolution triumphed. Indeed, one day before the revolution's victory, the demonstrators compiled a list of demands; chief among them were Mubarak's removal and the dissolution of the Security

Forces.[17] Protesters perceived the Security Forces and the Mubarak regime as one, while they saw the military as relatively neutral. Opposition leader and former top United Nations Nuclear Arms Inspector, Mohamed ElBaradei, illustrated this view when he stated that the army was "part of the Egyptian people."[18] One week after the protests began, the military declared, "The presence of the army in the streets is for your sake and to ensure your safety and wellbeing. The armed forces will not resort to use of force against our great people," and referred to the grievances of the protesters as "legitimate demands of honourable citizens."[19] Not only did the military avoid confrontation with the protesters but the army also promised to protect the crowds after the Security Forces' failed attempts to crush the movement led to widespread casualties. Subsequently, the military kept the regime loyalists and revolutionaries separate from one another in order to prevent further bloodshed.

The fact that conscripts provided the bulk of the armed forces' manpower must have factored into military leaders' strategies of how to deal with the movement. If military leaders had made the decision to order conscripted soldiers to fire upon citizens—people with whom they identified—then they could have jeopardized the armed forces' unity and cohesion, a fate that befell the Iranian military as it used the force of arms to oppose its revolution. In other words, the decision to not protect the regime resulted from an "overwhelming desire to prevent conflict within the military."[20]

The military's conduct throughout the 18-day protest movement ensured its survival, even if there was a change of guard at the executive level. The Security Forces, however, dissolved, satisfying a key demand of the protest movement.[21] The complete absence of demands against the military demonstrates the effectiveness of its strategy of non-confrontation. Indeed, the Egyptian military remained intact, and its autonomy and significant business interests were, thereby, secured from the fate that its Iranian counterpart faced in 1979. Whereas, in Iran, the military fought the revolution, compromising its internal unity and post-revolution existence, the Egyptian military endured because of its decision not to resist the revolution. In the context of Iran's revolution, in which the Iranian military's proactive role ultimately proved deleterious to its survival, the Egyptian military acted in favor of its long-term interests. By employing a cautious approach, the Egyptian military "hedged its bets" and weathered the revolutionary storm.

However, the Egyptian military was not the only party that displayed interest its continued existence. The United States government learned important lessons from the Iranian Revolution; the longer the Carter administration supported the monarchy, the more the comprehensive system of rule, which included the military, became the target of the protest movement. The Obama administration, in contrast, sought a "transition" that did not create a complete power vacuum like that which followed the Iranian Revolution; the Egyptian military proved to be key to preventing such a vacuum.

Egypt and the Egyptian Military as a Pillar of U.S. Foreign Policy

The United States has vital strategic interests at stake in Egypt, and American support for the Egyptian military was perceived as a means to safeguard those interests. This perspective is crucial with respect to this article's consideration of the military's longevity in the wake of the 2011 revolution. Indeed, Egypt played a critical role in the context of the aggregation of U.S.-Egyptian strategic military and regional interests. This strategic role illuminates why it became imperative for Egypt—and the United States—to ward off any change that drastically altered the status quo, and how the military served as the buffer to radical change.

First, Egypt provided the U.S. with critical access to the Suez Canal, along with "over-flight access for U.S. military operations."[22] The more the U.S. military presence grows in the Middle East, the more important over-flight and canal access becomes. Second, the American-Egyptian "partnership guarantees there can be no resumption of overt Arab-Israeli war."[23] Since the Six Day War of 1967, when Israeli forces routed three Arab armies that were aligned with the Soviet Union, consecutive American administrations have perceived Israeli security and its military strength as corresponding with vital American interests in the region. Third, the Egyptian military served as a source of important intelligence regarding al-Qaeda and other militant organizations.[24] The issue of intelligence is especially important in the post-9/11 context, in which the attacks were considered consequences of a major intelligence failure. Fourth, the U.S. was actively working to make the Egyptian military "interoperable with U.S. forces capable of fighting side by side as they did in 1991 First Gulf War."[25] The integration and cooperation of U.S.-Egyptian forces is seen as a chief strategic objective because of the legitimacy Egyptian armed forces bestowed upon the American war effort against Iraqi forces in Kuwait in 1991. The Iraqi President, Saddam Hussein, had a difficult time arguing that the war against his occupation of Kuwait was a war against Arabs or Muslims, especially when Arab forces from a predominantly Muslim country like Egypt joined the coalition against him. Furthermore, with an indefinite American military presence in the region that rendered the Egyptian military interoperable, U.S. forces had long-term, strategic benefits in future regional conflicts.

Finally, Egyptian and American regional interests coalesced around common interests. For instance, both the U.S. and Egypt supported the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in Somalia and "Egypt agreed to send 10,000 uniforms for TFG security forces and stood ready to train Somali forces at Egyptian military and police academies."[26] The U.S. was nervous that it would be perceived as having propped the TFG, but Egyptian training could affect the same result without the negative stigma associated with U.S. support, especially since U.S. standing in Somalia was low. Egypt was the "fifth-largest peace keeping contributor in the world," with the majority of its troops deployed to conflict zones where U.S.-Egyptian interests converge, such as in Darfur or in southern Sudan.[27]

No single regional issue united the U.S. and Egypt more than Iran, its nuclear program, and its support for armed Islamist groups like Hamas and Hezbollah. Mubarak posited to U.S. diplomats that, as a result of Saddam Hussein's over-throw, he saw "Tehran's hand moving with ease throughout the region, 'from the Gulf to Morocco.'"[28] Although both governments were concerned about Iran's nuclear program, Mubarak was even more worried about that which he considered Iranian surrogates. Mubarak saw Hamas' election victory in 2006 and its subsequent takeover of the Gaza Strip in 2007 as bringing "Iran to his doorstep."[29] With the discovery of the Hezbollah cell in the Sinai in April 2009, Mubarak felt that Iran was now inside his house; therefore, he was "more willing to confront the Iranian surrogates and to work closely with Israel."[30] The fact that the Egyptian government was so emphatically against the Iranian government—the biggest challenger to U.S. influence and power in the region— increased the strategic value of the Egyptian regime and military to the U.S. foreign policy establishment.

The Egyptian regime actively worked against Iranian influence in the region. With Israel controlling the Gaza Strip's airspace, borders, and coastline, the porous Gaza-Egypt and its extensive underground tunnel system was considered Egypt's frontline in the battle against Iranian influence and weapons smuggling into Gaza. In 2009, the commander of U.S. Central Command, General David Petraeus, met with the Egyptian Defense Minister, Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, informing him that "the U.S. tracked arms shipments from Iran, through Yemen, across the Red Sea, into Sudan, and up through mainland Egypt, across the Sinai Peninsula, and into Gaza."[31] Six months later, the U.S. Chief of Staff of the Army, General George Casey, met with his counterpart in Cairo, Chief of Staff Sami Hafez Enan, to further discuss Egypt's efforts to combat smuggling operations. At the meeting, Enan highlighted efforts to prevent smuggling to Gaza as part of the wider struggle against Iran:

> Enan highlighted Egyptian efforts to counter arms smuggling to Gaza, including installing FMF-funded counter tunneling equipment and con-structing a 19 meter-deep subterranean steel wall along the Gaza-Egypt border. He said that Hamas, with support from Iran and Hizbollah, was trying to provoke public hostility against the wall ... Egypt discovered 663 tunnel entrances in 2009, Enan said, adding that some tunnels were large enough to handle cars.[32]

The fact that Egypt borders the Gaza Strip, a territory ruled by an alleged Iranian-sponsored regime, and that it serves as a land route for Iranian arms to Hamas, both underscored Egypt's important role in the wider cold war against Iran. Even if the policy of reinforcing the Israeli blockade on Gaza angered the Egyptian people, it was a necessary sacrifice in the regime's calculations of rolling back Iran's influence in the region, a shared U.S. foreign policy priority. Egypt's utility,

however, went beyond its geo-strategic importance as it supported U.N. sanctions against Iran and worked "with Saudi Arabia and other Arab states to support Lebanese political and territorial sovereignty," a euphemism for supplanting Iran's extensive influence in Lebanon through efforts aimed at weakening Hizbullah's political and military power.[33]

American and Egyptian interests converged so deeply that it was often difficult to recognize which partner led the policy and which followed it. For example, in his meeting with General Petraeus, Chief of Staff Enan lobbied against improving U.S.-Iran relations, fearing that it would "grant Iran a greater role in regional affairs."[34] In another meeting, Enan advocated a tougher American approach to Iran, arguing that negotiations allowed the Islamist government "to buy time while they [Iranian authorities] continue to pursue their nuclear program" and doubted that economic sanctions would be effective.[35] In relation to Iraq—a U.S. foreign policy priority since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion—the Egyptian Assistant Minister for Arab Affairs, Abdel Rahman Saleh, agreed with the American opposition to Iran's role. He advocated for a united, regional response and bemoaned some Gulf states' reluctance. Consequently, Saleh pressured the U.S. "to work on 'diluting' their opposition," urging that Iran must be prevented from "wielding 'veto power' over the Iraqi government."[36]

Iraq was a key battlefield in rolling back Iranian influence, and it was a prime example of the convergence of American and Egyptian interests and Egypt's utility in this effort. The U.S. saw Egypt's regional, political, and cultural clout as a means through which to facilitate Iraq's return to the Arab fold. The longer that Iraq stayed politically disconnected from the Arab world, the further it fell under the Iranian orbit of influence. Acknowledging Egypt's role in the endeavor to break Iran's hold in Iraq, General Casey "thanked Egypt for its efforts to rebuild ties with the Iraqi government and bring the country back into the Arab world, which was essential to combating Iranian influence in the region."[37]

In sum, there was an aggregation of interests between the U.S. and Egypt. Additionally, Egypt fulfilled valuable military and strategic objectives for the U.S., such as maintaining peace with Israel, allowing over-flight access and quick crossings through the Suez Canal, sharing critical intelligence, and improving military interoperability with U.S. forces. Having experienced the 1979 unraveling of an equally important strategic ally, Iran, the U.S. viewed the Egyptian military's survival of the 2011 revolution as a means by which to possibly stave off a power vacuum that could bring about a radical regime and threaten vital U.S. interests.

The Egyptian Military as an Insurance Policy

In 1979, the United States watched helplessly as a key U.S. foreign policy asset, the Shah of Iran, collapsed in the face of a protracted revolutionary movement. With the Iranian military's leadership effectively decapitated and its rank-and-file dismembered, a new, militant, Islamist revolutionary order filled the void.

According to Ali Ansari, "The dramatic collapse of the Pahlavi monarchy and the enormity of the social revolt that had coalesced under the leadership of Khomeini were matters of deep reflection for U.S. officials who agonized over how America 'lost' Iran."[38] In the context of the political trauma experienced by American leaders and policy-makers, it is understandable that the U.S. fostered close relations with Egypt at the same time that the Iranian Revolution was unfolding. Indeed, the U.S. saw the Egyptian military as a means through which to solidify this burgeoning relationship and to guarantee that radical change did not overtake Egypt as it had in Iran.

Since the 1979 peace treaty with Israel, the U.S. has given Egypt more than $35 billion in military aid, which was used not only to buy some of the most advanced American-made weaponry, but also to expand a military-led business empire in Egypt.[39] From the "acquisition of a fleet of luxury Gulfstream jets to a company making Jeeps for commercial sale as well as for the army," the military's for-profit arm—a conglomerate that runs factories, farms and high-tech corporations—used the aid for private military business ventures.[40] The aid, however, went beyond business interests and was also used to cement strategic personal relationships with the top brass of the Egyptian military. Major General Michael A. Collings, a retired Air Force officer who served as the U.S. military's representative in Egypt from 2006 to 2008, attested that the regime used the American aid "in a systematic process by which money was given and distributed through the top ranks of the regime."[41] The aid created good will between U.S. military officials and their Egyptian counterparts, the effects of which came to bear during the revolution.

American and Egyptian officials perceived the Egyptian military as being "the real center of power in Egypt."[42] Every Egyptian president since 1952 emerged from within its ranks and the "military has historically been the ultimate guarantor of the president's rule."[43] For that reason, U.S. military authorities worked tirelessly to enhance the Egyptian military and, by default, military relations, even lobbying the U.S. Congress on its behalf. For example, in 2009, Egyptian Defense Minister Tantawi "thanked General Petraeus for opposing Congressional conditioning of U.S. assistance to Egypt."[44]

American leaders saw these intimate financial, personal, and strategic ties as an insurance policy; if change was to come to Egypt, it would not be radical like that of the Iranian Revolution. The Iranian Revolution deposed a staunch American ally in the Persian Gulf that previously ensured the stability of the Gulf and the corridor of most of the world's oil commerce, and sent soldiers to fight Marxist insurgencies throughout the region, which was a crucial U.S. foreign policy concern in the context of the post-Vietnam Cold War. America did not sever relations with Iran until nearly a year after the overthrow of the Shah, "seeking instead to carefully manage the transition."[45] Yet, with the collapse of the Iranian military and the seizure of the U.S. Embassy, the Carter administration was left with no voice in this post-revolutionary vacuum. In other

words, there were no viable means with which the U.S. could "manage the transition." Consequently, a radical Islamist government was erected that not only refused to safeguard American interests as the Shah had done; it also actively challenged American influence in the region and beyond. However false the analogy between 1979 Iran and 2011 Egypt, U.S. officials still could not risk the emergence of a radical Islamist order that not only repudiated longstanding U.S. interests in Egypt and the region, but actively fought against them.

It should be noted that, if this was the paranoia of American officials, the Egyptian authorities bore some responsibility for reinforcing such sentiment. For years, Mubarak resisted calls from the U.S. to allow more political dissent in Egypt by invoking the Iran spectre:

> We have heard him lament the results of earlier U.S. efforts to encourage reform in the Islamic world. He can harken back to the Shah of Iran: the U.S. encouraged him to accept reforms, only to watch the country fall into the hands of revolutionary religious extremists. Wherever he has seen these U.S. efforts, he can point to the chaos and loss of stability that ensued.[46]

WikiLeaks also revealed that American officials believed "that any efforts to open up will result in empowering the Muslim Brotherhood."[47]

The United States has vital strategic interests at stake in Egypt, and American support for the Egyptian military was perceived as means to safeguard those interests. Thus, when the revolutionary movement unfolded on the streets of the Egypt, American authorities saw the Egyptian military and its unity as a way to continue to protect those interests, especially considering the Iranian experience of 1979. Perhaps the most explicit reference to this line of thought appeared in Republican Senator Mark Kirk's letter to President Obama, which stated, "We have seen this movie before—in Iran, in Lebanon and in Gaza. To prevent a strategic reversal on the scale of what happened in Iran [in 1979], the United States and her allies should do all it can to support Egypt's army and secular leaders, ensuring no future for the Muslim Brotherhood."[48]

Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, highlighted the military ties between the U.S. and Egypt and emphasized that these longstanding relationships had an impact on the direction of the revolution:

> [W]e're looking at—we've got a 30-year relationship with the people of Egypt and certainly a very strong relationship from our military to theirs that has proven to be very strong also in this crisis that they're in . . . They have, actually, by the hundreds if not thousands [of officers trained at our war colleges] over the course of that 30 years. So we've got an awful lot of contacts, we've got relationships; they've lived with us, their families have lived with us. Well, I think—I think we do have to balance that, and probably 'balance' right now is a terrific way to look at this. It's

a very volatile situation. It's evolving; there's an awful lot that we don't
know, we haven't known, since it started. And in many crises like that,
there's just an awful lot of unknowns. So certainty with outcomes and
certainty with what's going to happen tomorrow, it's just not there. But
in that uncertainty, certainly I have an expectation and a relationship with
the Egyptian military.[49]

Still, this is not to say that America will be able to determine the outcome of the
post-Mubarak period or that the Egyptian military does not have its own interests
at stake. However, it does affirm that the longstanding personal and, more impor-
tantly, financial relationship effectively means that the U.S. will have a voice,
unlike in 1979 in Iran. Furthermore, the fact that Mubarak's Defense Minister,
Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, headed the five-member Supreme Council of the
Armed Forces (SCAF)—the body that was vested with power after Mubarak
stepped down and in which the Chief of Staff Sami Hafez Enan, a close American
military contact, also had a position—is telling. In fact, Enan was meeting with
the most senior American commanders in Washington when the protest move-
ment erupted in Egypt. Indeed, relations between Enan and American military
commanders were so intimate that they customarily "scheduled a day of shopping
for him and his wife" when he made his annual trips to Washington.[50] American
insiders considered Enan to be the main power broker for the future, since the
defense minister, now age 75, was nearing the end of his political and military
career.[51] While the SCAF pledged not to field its candidates in upcoming elec-
tions, "no one disputes . . . that General Enan will play a central role in Egypt's
future government, more likely from behind the scenes, where the country's
powerful and traditionally secretive armed forces are still most comfortable."[52]

The Egyptian military and its leadership are key assets that America hopes
will ensure Egypt will not be "the next Iran." When the issue was raised of
whether U.S. military aid to Egypt would continue in spite of the revolution, a
State Department spokesman stated that "the aid assists Egypt in maintaining
a strong and disciplined defense force, which is imperative at this time, and
critical to ensuring Egypt's continued role as a regional leader able to act as a
moderating influence."[53] In other words, U.S. aid guarantees continued American
relations with the military, the main power center in the country, thereby ensuring
that the United States will be able to have some say in the direction of the coun-
try's future, unlike in 1979 Iran.

The continued existence, unity, and power of the Egyptian military had an
early and profound impact on the course of the Egyptian Revolution. One Egypt
specialist argued that the Egyptian military, through backroom dealings, co-opted
the Muslim Brotherhood to a certain extent, "aligning many of their political
interests with the United States."[54] At the same time, Egypt passed legislation that
prohibited the establishment of more radical, immutable, and unyielding Islamist

parties that were hostile to U.S. interests.[55] More to the point, in April 2011, the SCAF declared, "Egypt will not be governed by another Khomeini."[56]

Conclusion

Militaries have played an important role in the latter half of the twentieth century in the Middle East. At times, they served as the main impetus of change while, at other times, they frequently defended the status quo. In 1952, the Egyptian military was the catalyst for revolutionary change. In 1979, however, the Iranian military fought its country's revolution until its own unity and command structure came crashing down at the movement's zenith. The revolution of 1979 was a lesson in military history that provides an illuminating framework by which to approach militaries' conduct in the midst of revolutionary crises, especially in the Middle East. In Libya, Syria, and Yemen in 2011, like in Iran 1979, harsh military crackdowns led to unravelings that, in the case of Libya and Syria, ultimately produced armed rebellions. In Egypt, however, the military implemented a wait-and-see approach early in the movement, in order to preserve military unity and cohesion. In doing so, it safeguarded its own political and economic interests, both of which were tied to the domestic and international spheres.

The fact that the U.S. gave the Egyptian military billions of dollars in U.S. aid fostered personal, political, and economic relationships that intertwined U.S. strategic interests with the status quo in Egypt. The military—the ultimate power in Egypt—was strengthened as a defender of that status quo. Thus, when the revolution erupted in 2011, the military's unity and its relationship with the U.S. were of utmost importance, in order to prevent the creation of a vacuum in the revolution's aftermath, whereby radical factions could have emerged to commandeer Egypt onto a course inimical to vital U.S. interests. Supporting the military during and after the revolution can be seen as part of the U.S.' larger strategy of ensuring its voice in Egypt and safeguarding against the most populated and most influential Arab country becoming "the next Iran."

NOTES

[1] The 1997 coup was not a direct military intervention; rather, it was a "soft coup."

[2] Robert Springborg suggests that Sadat's assassination is still a controversial matter; some believe that a disgruntled military masterminded the assassination, in order to remove the man that it saw as weakening the military's political and economic clout. See Springborg, *Mubarak's Egypt: Fragmentation of the Political Order* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989), 97.

[3] Ian Black, "Egypt set for mass protest as army rules out force," *The Guardian*, January 31, 2011, accessed March 25, 2011, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jan/31/egyptian-army-pledges-no-force.

[4] Several analyses countered such simplifications, most notably Juan Cole, "Why Egypt 2011 is not Iran 1979," personal website, February 2, 2011, http://www.juancole.com/2011/02/why-egypt-2011-is-not-iran-1979.html. See also Geneive Abdo, "Cario 2011 is not Tehran of 1979," *Foreign Policy*, February 1, 2011, http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/02/01/cairo_is_not_tehran_of_1979.

⁵ Raymond Grew, "The Case for Comparing Histories," *The American Historical Review* 8, no. 4 (Oct. 1980):763–778.

⁶ Mark N. Katz, "Democratic Revolutions: Why Some Succeed, Why Others Fail," *World Affairs* 166, no. 3 (Winter 2004):163.

⁷ Charles Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 105.

⁸ Ibid., 110.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 115.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Nikki Keddie, *Roots of Revolution: An Interpretive History of Modern Iran* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 255.

¹³ Ervand Abrahamian, "The Guerilla Movement in Iran, 1963–1977," in *Iran: A Revolution in Turmoil*, ed. Haleh Afshar (Hampshire and London: MacMillan Press, 1985), 169. For more on the insurrection in the final days of the revolution, see Abrahamian, *Radical Islam: The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

¹⁴ It is important to note that other factors such as national cohesion, and kinship and sectarian ties affect military unity in the face of a popular uprising. For instance, national divides between North and South Yemen, as well as between East and West Libya, were integral to the militaries' unravelings. Further, the sectarian make-up of Syria's officer corps is an important factor in considering the Syrian armed forces relative cohesion, though defections plagued the rank and file.

¹⁵ "Egypt gears up for gigantic protest," *Al Jazeera English*, February 1, 2011, accessed March 24, 2011, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/01/20111311965695371.html.

¹⁶ Vivienne Walt, "Supporters Clash with Cairo Protesters," *Time*, February 2, 2011, accessed March 24, 2011, http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2045328_2045333_20 45720,00.html.

¹⁷ "Egypt: A List of Demands from Tahrir Square," *Global Voices*, February 10, 2011, accessed March 24, 2011, http://globalvoicesonline.org/2011/02/10/egypt-a-list-of-demands-from-tahrir-square/.

¹⁸ Jack Shenker, "Egypt protests: change is coming, says Mohammed ElBaradei," *The Guardian*, January 30, 2011, accessed March 25, 2011, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jan/30/egypt-protests-mohammed-elbaradei.

¹⁹ Ian Black, "Egypt set for mass protest as army rules out force," *The Guardian*, January 31, 2011, accessed March 25, 2011, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jan/31/egyptian-army-pledges-no-force.

²⁰ Katz, "Democratic Revolutions," 163.

²¹ "Egypt dissolves notorious internal security agency," *BBC News*, March 15, 2011, accessed March 24, 2011, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12751234.

²² Margaret Scobey, *Scenesetter for General Schwartz*, WikiLeaks, WikiLeaks cable:09CAIRO549, 31 March 2009, http://wikileaks.ch/cable/2009/03/09CAIRO549.html.

²³ Scobey, *Scenesetter for General Petraeus' Visit to Egypt*, WikiLeaks, WikiLeaks cable:08CAIRO2543, 21 December 2008, http://wikileaks.ch/cable/2008/12/08CAIRO2543.html.

²⁴ Scobey, *DNI Meets with Defense Minister Tantawi*, WikiLeaks, WikiLeaks cable:09CAIRO2331, 21 December 2009, http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/12/09CAIRO2331.html.

²⁵ Scobey, *Scenesetter for General Petraeus' Visit to Egypt*, Wikileaks.

²⁶ *U.S.-Egypt Strategic Dialogue of June 7*, WikiLeaks, WikiLeaks cable:09CAIRO1220, 30 June 2009, http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/06/09CAIRO1220.html.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Scobey, *Scenesetter for Admiral Mullen*, WikiLeaks, WikiLeaks cable:10CAIRO181, 9 February 2010, http://wikileaks.org/cable/2010/02/10CAIRO181.html.

²⁹ Scobey, *Scenesetter: President Mubarak's Visit to Washington*, WikiLeaks, WikiLeaks cable:09CAIRO874, 19 May 2009, http://www.wikileaks.ch/cable/2009/05/09CAIRO874.html.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Scobey, *General Petraeus Meeting with Defense Minister Tantawi*, WikiLeaks, WikiLeaks cable:09CAIRO1350, 14 July 2009, http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/07/09CAIRO1350.html.

[32] Scobey, *Egypt: General Casey Meets with Chief of Staff Enan*, WikiLeaks, WikiLeaks cable:10CAIRO143, 1 January 2010, http://wikileaks.org/cable/2010/01/10CAIRO143.html.

[33] Scobey, *Scenesetter for General Schwartz*, WikiLeaks.

[34] Scobey, *General Petraeus Meeting with Defense Minister Tantawi*, WikiLeaks.

[35] Scobey, *General Casey Meets with Chief of Staff Enan*, WikiLeaks.

[36] *U.S.-Egypt Strategic Dialogue of June 7*, WikiLeaks.

[37] Scobey, *General Casey Meets with Chief of Staff Enan*, WikiLeaks.

[38] Ali Ansari, *Confronting Iran: The Failure of American Foreign Policy and the Next Great Conflict in the Middle East* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 81.

[39] Scobey, *Scenesetter for General Petraeus' visit to Egypt*, WikiLeaks.

[40] Aram Roston, "Egyptian Army's Business Side Blurs Lines of U.S. Military Aid," *New York Times*, March 5, 2011, accessed March 24, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/06/world/middleeast/06military.html.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Donald A. Blome, *NDP Insider: Military Will Ensure Transfer of Power*, WikiLeaks, WikiLeaks cable:09CAIRO1468, 30 July 2009, http://wikileaks.ch/cable/2009/07/09CAIRO1468.html.

[43] Francis J. Ricciardone, *Presidential Succession in Egypt*, WikiLeaks, WikiLeaks cable:07CAIRO1417, 14 May 2007, http://wikileaks.ch/cable/2007/05/07CAIRO1417.html.

[44] Scobey, *General Petraeus Meeting with Defense Minister Tantawi*, WikiLeaks.

[45] Ansari, *Confronting Iran*, p. 72.

[46] Scobey, *Scenesetter President Mubarak's visit to Washington*, WikiLeaks.

[47] Scobey, *Scenesetter for General Petraeus' visit to Egypt*, WikiLeaks.

[48] Mark Kirk, "Press Release of Senator Kirk: Senator Kirk Statement on Muslim Brotherhood," February 2, 2011, accessed March 25, 2011, personal website, http://kirk.senate.gov/record.cfm?id=330818.

[49] Mike Mullen, "'The Daily Show' Interview with Admiral Michael Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS)," New York, NY, February 3, 2011, accessed March 25, 2011, http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/thu-february-3-2011/mike-mullen.

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[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Aram Roston, "Egyptian Army's Business Side Blurs Lines of U.S. Military Aid," *New York Times*, March 5, 2011, accessed March 24, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/06/world/middleeast/06military.html.

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[56] "Army says no to 'Khomeini rule' in Egypt," *Associated Foreign Press*, April 4, 2011, accessed April 4, 2011, http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticleNew.asp?xfile=/data/middleeast/2011/April/middleeast_April68.xml&section=middleeast.