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Thus They Move – Egypt's Military bet. 2 Coups

Mahmoud Gamal

Some define the military coup as "the military's removal of a country's existing government; overthrowing the ruler, civilian or military, and seizing power". Arab and African countries are known for military coups; where the military take over power after removing existing regimes.

It is also remarkable that there have been no successful coup attempts that aimed at restoring democratic life and removing the military from power.

Since 1952, Egypt has witnessed two military coups which succeeded in achieving their goals, where putschists took control of the country. However, the circumstances and contexts of both coups were different:

First: the July 23, 1952 coup

The [July 23, 1952 coup](#) is known as the "Free Officers Movement" and called by some as "July 23, 1952 Revolution". The Free Officers Movement that was behind the coup was an executive intellectual change movement that later took the form of a military coup under leadership of a group of army officers with different military ranks. The Free Officers organization began its activity in 1949 under the leadership of Gamal Abdel Nasser, according to former President Anwar Sadat in his book (Secrets of Egyptian Revolution).

One of the most important reasons that aroused the army's anger against the leaders of the military institution at the time was the army defeat in the 1948 war that resulted in the loss of Palestine due to the scandal of corrupt weapons, the widespread corruption within the military institution, and the tyranny practiced on the Egyptian people by the ruling class at the time – according to the memoirs of Major General [Mohamed Naguib](#), statements of Gamal Abdel Nasser, and memoirs of the Free Officers that were written after the success of the army move in 1952.

Former President Mohamed Naguib, in his memoirs, first published in 1984, "I was President of Egypt", described the contents of the circulars that were written by the Free Officers and distributed among army officers and civilians to urge them to move against the regime for change, saying: "The

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circulars written and distributed by the Free Officers prevailed the army units and sometimes reached civilians. They addressed the corruption of the government and exposed its flaws, demanded reform and change, and were as a cry in the face of the deviations of army leaders ... The first circular of the Free Officers was issued in October 1950, titled, (Appeal and Warning), which stated that: "The Free Officers Movement is from the people; and if the people are ruled by tyranny, the army is also subject to the same conditions".

Some believe that the most important factor that helped the Free Officers to start their movement and carry out a military coup against King Farouk is the popular anger that was prevailing in the Egyptian street at the time, which was translated by masses of the Egyptian people in demonstrations in schools, universities, factories, squares and streets.

Although others argue that the Free Officers were behind fabrication of some events that took place at that time with the aim of creating a state of boredom and anger against the monarchy, however, the fact is that the Free Officers clearly believed that street demonstrations and presence of citizens in squares was a key factor for the success of their movement.

Second: the July 3, 2013 coup

On 25 January 2011, Egypt witnessed one of the most important waves of popular revolutions that have taken place in its modern and contemporary history, where masses of the Egyptian people took to the streets and squares in large numbers in most governorates. However, the Egyptian army used these demonstrations to overthrow former President Mohamed Hosni Mubarak and achieve objectives of the military institution, specifically faltering Mubarak's quest to bequeath Egypt's rule to his son, Gamal Mubarak.

The military institution, from the early moments of the outbreak of the Egyptian revolution on January 25, 2011, moved according to a deliberate robust plan to achieve repositioning and taking control of the country in the end.

First, the army exerted pressure on Mubarak to relinquish power – thwarting the transfer of power to his son Gamal. Then, they worked to break up the revolutionary forces immediately after the military junta headed by Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, took over on February 11, 2011 – starting from holding a referendum on constitutional amendments in March 2011, through the

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parliamentary elections of the People's Assembly and the Shura Council at the end of 2011, up to the presidential election in May-June 2012.

According to some observers, there are some important points that had a clear impact on determining the army's attitude towards the Egyptian January revolution, most notably:

- The army realized that the protests were not directed against the military in the first place, especially as it had not been one of the Mubarak regime's tools for suppressing the people or the opposition, despite being the protector of the regime,
- The army did not support the transfer of power to Gamal Mubarak because such step would remove the military from power and threaten the army's privileges in the country.

After head of the election committee Farouk Sultan announced the presidential election results in June 2012, and the victory of President Mohamed Morsi, the military institution again worked according to a deliberate robust plan to get rid of President Morsi through:

- Creating economic, security and societal crises to form a state of public boredom against President Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood;
- The military Intelligence established a rebellion movement, "Tamarod", to agitate public anger against the president and increase the number of demonstrators in the streets and squares, demanding the departure of the regime of President Morsi, and portraying this situation as a new revolutionary wave, naming it the "June 30 revolution".

Conclusion

- Military coups that took place in Egypt and succeeded in achieving their goals had enjoyed a popular backing even if it was artificial, unlike coups that failed to achieve their objectives, which took place without a popular backing like the failed [coup attempts](#) of 1953 and 1954.
- In the July 3, 2013 coup, the army fabricated a popular backing to enable its forces to move and overthrow President Mohamed Morsi, despite its control of the entire joints of the state at the time. The popular backing is necessary for any military movement so that putschists can carry out their plan on the ground.

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- There have been some failed attempts to change the situation in Egypt correct the course of the military after the July 3, 2013 coup; perhaps the most prominent of these attempts were in 2015, which was revealed during trial of 26 army officers on charges of attempting a military coup.
- Those who want the military to move for overthrowing Sisi must start work for reviving the revolution in the streets and squares again. As one of the military said, "The army does not move unless the people themselves start to move".

However, the people will only move with the presence of a serious and effective revolutionary elite that best expresses the people; their hopes and their aspirations.

