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Militarization of local administration: Authoritarian imperative?

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There are hardly any policy papers that have addressed the way military regimes directly manage living conditions on the local scale. Since 2013, Egypt has experienced the direct practice of government by the army, where it has been viewed as a political party that remains loyal to the president who comes from the top of its leadership pyramid.

In the context of justification of this reality, some claim that there is no alternative to extensively using the military to achieve development and good management of resources and people, under the pretext that the military are better able to perform tasks with discipline, efficiency and speed compared to civilians - an idea that the Mubarak regime's propaganda succeeded in instilling in the minds of Egyptians.

Therefore, this paper attempts to find out the reality of military penetration of Egypt's local administration; how far this pattern of administration is effective, to society or to regime, as well as its viability and likely survival. The paper also attempts to explore whether this military domination of local government is due to existence of a (fundamental) authoritarian need, or to an (objective) need for a strong local authority after a revolution that led to loosening grip of the central government?

Situation before 2013

There has been military presence in the administration of governorates, neighborhoods, and cities, or even holding companies with local branches, such as water and sewage companies, and others, since the sixties, but this presence has become more entrenched since the expansion of the army's economic role after the Camp David Accords, where it reached its peak in the aftermath of 2013.

To explore the situation prior to the 3 July coup (2013), in this regard, this paper will be contented with monitoring the reshuffle of governors through the electronic portals of governorates, in addition to tracking news about governors' assistants and deputies, heads of neighborhoods, and military leaders in local activity via companies and others.

Reviewing research papers and news stories disseminated by newspapers, it can be said that throughout the Mubarak era, the local administration remained a tool to appease the military to a

great extent, whether as governors, deputy governors, or heads of neighborhoods, cities, and centers. The last governors reshuffle that took place in January 2006, was not different from past reshuffles, as it included [21 military and policemen](#) (14 for the army and 7 for the police) compared to only six civilians, including 3 lawyers, 2 engineers, and a vet.

Various studies indicate that throughout Mubarak's reign, there were a large number of former officers at different levels of the local administration structure, which, in addition to providing them with job security after retirement, their presence helped extend the influence of the presidential authority across the country. It is worth noting that 50% to 80% of governors have been former military officers since the 1990s, while [20% came from the police](#).

After the fall of the Mubarak regime, PM Dr. Essam Sharaf, on 16 August 2011, conducted a reshuffle of governors after formation of government, where 27 governors, including 20 major generals, were sworn in in front of Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi, President of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), who was managing the country affairs during the [transitional period](#) after the January Revolution, when the military retained their previous advantages, and even more.

During the era of the Ganzouri government, the number of governors from the army and police reached 18 out of 27 governors.

During the government of Hisham Qandil, the number of military governors was 13 out of 27, less than 50%, for the first time since the eighties. In this context, it can be said that this step was a revolutionary measure at the time.

In August 2012, a study by the [Carnegie Middle East Center](#) indicated that former President Hosni Mubarak, the fourth military head of state since 1952, adopted a policy of containment in dealing with the military institution over 30 years, where he allowed them to control the state's economic and vital institutions, whether during service them or after retirement to ensure their loyalty.

Several Egyptian experts had expected that Morsi would be able to reduce the "generals' deep state" after his sudden decisions to change senior army commanders, and after adoption of the new constitution (in September 2012). Despite the importance of these decisions in limiting the domination

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of the military, yet they did not seek to confront the "generals' republic" or stop penetration of the army commanders into the state's civilian and executive institutions.

The Carnegie study emphasized that "without dismantling the military empire, neither President Morsi nor anyone else would be able to control the economic and bureaucratic "enclaves" that restrict the work of civil institutions and even stop them completely in case of conflicting with the interests of the army state. The study highlighted the generals' penetration into state institutions, indicating that the Egyptian administrative structure is divided into 27 governorates that are internally divided into four parts, three of which belong to former military officers. Former military officers control a huge number of the positions of governors, deputy governors, governors' assistants, and general managers within local councils in hundreds of villages and centers across the country, raising the number of retired soldiers in local administration to nearly 2,000 positions.

However, this paper does not argue about the success or failure of the military, taking into account that civilian leaders chosen on the basis of loyalty to the political system are not in a better condition.

It is worth noting that the position of governor in [North Sinai governorate](#) has never been held by a civilian, at least since 1974, according to the governorate's official electronic website, where the same situation applies to the New Valley governorate (since 1993), as governors with a military background in these two governorates have powers that are not available to other civilian, or even military governors in other governorates across the country. However, the state of development there is deplorable, and the governors have not succeeded in getting rid of terrorism, as policies to confront it never worked.

If the government justifies that the military taking over the reins of affairs in these governorates for being border governorates, where the security factor is the basis of their management, then a question arises, why this is almost the case in most governorates of Upper Egypt with a high population density that need good civil planning mentalities, not direct military rule? In fact, the New Valley Governorate itself, despite being the largest border governorate, was not taken over by the military from 1968 until 1993, that is during war it, and therefore the claim that the former military officers deserved to take over local administration there does not make any sense.

We are talking about some governorates that returned to intensive military rule since 2013, where the governorates led by the military have turned into an open arena for terrorism and the war against it. While there had been no talk about terrorist attacks in Egypt's western desert before 2014, it has now become a hotbed for French forces participating in strikes against civilians, where Egyptians have no right to criticize this while the French press holds their military officials accountable for such clandestine missions as Operation Sirli in the Egyptian western desert.

Based on the report published by [Disclose](#), a French investigative website, on 21 November 2021, handing over local administration to these military personnel under the pretext of maintaining [sovereignty](#) over the border areas, has only led to more violations of Egyptian sovereignty, whether in North Sinai, in favor of Israel, or in the western desert, in favor of France.

Current manifestations of militarization:

In fact, President Morsi's only year in power represented a short break in the military's control of local administration positions, in light of the decline in numbers of military personnel occupying these positions for the first time since the sixties, which led to direct clashing with Morsi, the Muslim Brotherhood and the entire revolutionary forces.

Since the 2013 coup, Egypt has witnessed direct military rule, with the army playing the role of the political party that introduces a candidate in presidential elections. Also, 20 ex-military and police officers were appointed as governors out of 27 governors, immediately after the coup, which infuriated even the [opposition parties](#) that remained in operation after 2013.

Despite the great celebration of the amended version of the [constitution](#) in 2014 as the first constitution to stipulate that the choice of governors be by election or appointment, referring the matter to the law, thus it primarily put the choice in the hands of the president, not the Egyptian people.

In August 2018, Sisi appointed 19 generals as governors out of 27 governors, according to [Youm7](#) newspaper. Also, more military and police officers were appointed as assistants to other governors.

Following is a table of the distribution of military and civilian governors in 11 governorates, where there was clear data available:

Governorate	Military	Civilians	Total	Source	From
El Minya	19	7	26	https://bit.ly/3rVHpcT	1960
Suhag	18	6	24	https://bit.ly/3EWkBxi	1960
Aswan	7	0	7	https://bit.ly/3GsWXsK	1990
New Valley	12	6	18	https://bit.ly/3IQGZkw	1961
Port Said	17	1	18	https://bit.ly/3dFFpso	1960
Ismailia	17	2	19	https://bit.ly/3oKHH4I	1951
Suez	23	2	25	https://bit.ly/3rR3TMI	1952
Qalyubia	8	12	20	https://bit.ly/3EFXeYS	1968
Menoufia	11	11	22	https://bit.ly/3rWbb1u	1960
Gharbia	4	3	7	https://bit.ly/3oGvqOz	2011
Alexandria	11	14	25	https://bit.ly/3ELUsBw	1960

We can say that there is an unprecedented acceleration in the pace of militarization of local administration in Egypt. For example, although the position of military advisor to the governor has existed since the sixties of the last century, the role that he used to play was extremely limited, but the new competencies of military advisor now include supervising projects, communicating with citizens and following up on the provision of services, etc., where these matters are among the core competencies of governors, their assistants, and local councils.

In this context, it was not surprising that Sisi, during a celebration to mark the eighth anniversary of the coup against legitimacy, demanded the appointment of an army officer in each village in order to implement the so-called Hayah Karima (Decent Life) project, which sparked widespread [controversy](#) among Egyptians at the time.

Conclusion

There has been almost absolute control by the military over local administration for decades since the establishment of the local system in the early sixties of the twentieth century. However, many of those military generals exercise powers beyond their legal competence, relying on their personal influence as well as their favor with the political leadership.

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The problem does not only lie in the fact that these governors, deputies, assistants, as well as heads of neighborhoods and branches of holding companies are military, but rather is related to lack of political will to create a successful model of decentralized local governance to improve the daily lives of citizens and reduce political pressure on the regime and the central government.

In addition to the fact that the control over the current model of local government by the military is disastrous, it also boosts the idea of the head of state's right to choose all officials down to the lowest possible local level, which actually makes him directly responsible for local politics.

