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EGYPT JULY 2013: MILITARY COUP OR REVOLUTION? AN INTERDISCIPLINARY  
ANALYSIS

By

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## EGYPT JULY 2013: MILITARY COUP OR REVOLUTION? An Interdisciplinary Analysis

### ABSTRACT

Since Egyptian president Mohamed Morsi was removed from office in July 2013, debates centring on whether the event was a military coup or a revolution have intensified. It has left Egypt at risk of civil war. Members of the Muslim Brotherhood believe the July 2013 events were a military coup and as a result are fighting to get back in power. Meanwhile, Egyptians are struggling to prepare for elections in May 2014. The attempt to name the event has deep implications for our assessment of Egypt's democratic future. This paper argues that the removal of Morsi from office was neither a coup nor a revolution, but a step in the revolutionary process that began in 2011. Using an interdisciplinary approach, definitions of revolution and coup are analyzed across the various disciplines, and then redefined. The new definitions reveal criteria for revolution and coup that are then utilized in a comparative analysis of the removal of both Hosni Mubarak and Mohammed Morsi.

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## Introduction

On June 30 2013, hundreds of thousands of Egyptian people gathered once again in Tahrir Square, in the hope of removing their elected president Mohamed Morsi. Despite the fact that many were angered by Morsi's policies, the headstrong president vowed to remain in office until the end of his term. The following day, in attempts to stabilize the situation, Egyptian Minister of Defence and Commander-in-Chief Abdel Fattah El-Sisi issued an ultimatum giving the government 48 hours to respond to the people's demands. During the waiting period, the number of people on the streets steadily increased, discontent escalated and emotions ran high. Demonstrators, using laser pointers, began asking for military intervention. On July 3<sup>rd</sup>, El-Sisi removed Morsi from office and suspended the constitution (Pioppi, 2013). A committee consisting of Egypt's prominent religious and political figures appointed Adly Mansour, head of the supreme constitutional court, as interim President until May 2014 elections. Amongst those on the committee were Grand Imam of AlAzhar Ahmed el Tayeb, Coptic Pope Tawadros II and Nobel Peace Prize winner and well-known opposition Mohammed El-Baradei (Pioppi, 65). This day has left many Egyptians families, my own included, divided on the topic. My family's disagreement on how to label the event parallels popular debates among scholars and commentators in the media. There are three groups which define the discussions. The first group compromise those who were born and raised in Egypt. They argue that removing Morsi was a revolution. In fact, they speak with adamant pride about their revolution. To them the removal was the will of the people. "You can't ignore the millions of people that took to the streets" they say. The second group, compromise those born and raised as Canadians who are connected to Egypt by marriage or ancestral roots. Their rebuttals often reflect western

views on the coup. They use statistics such as “if you remove the children and elderly from the group of protesters, you are left with only a small number in the streets.” The third group listens attentively, trying to understand the events. Why did people take to the streets and demand Morsi’s removal? Was Morsi really as bad as they say he was? Was Morsi driving Egypt back to the days of authoritative rule? Would Morsi’s continuation in office have been beneficial to the Egyptians revolution, hence to democratization? Is there hope for a democratized Egypt or is Egypt’s only reverting back to its authoritarian ways?

In short, was the event of July 3 a military coup or a revolution? Many are keen to answer this question because of the implications it has for Egypt’s democratic future. This paper will not try to explain Egypt’s current situation or predict the outcome of Egypt’s democratic process. Instead, this paper will attempt to understand Morsi’s removal from office using interdisciplinary method of research to answer key questions and put some sense into the common debates, summarized above, which erupted immediately following the event. It will attempt to show that the ouster of Morsi was neither a revolution nor a coup, but only part of the revolutionary process that began when Hosni Mubarak stepped down from office, back in 2011. In order to begin doing so, an interdisciplinary definition of both revolution and military coup must be established. Across the disciplines, many definitions of revolution and military coup exist, but the various definitions only opens doors for further debates. Integrating the disciplinary insights and refining the definitions will provide an effective foundation for an analysis of the event. Second, using the refined definitions, the paper will make a comparison of Mubarak’s and Morsi’s removals. Military intervention played a large role

in both events, yet Mubarak's removal from office was not as controversial as Morsi's. Overturning his regime and electing a new president was a revolutionary step. But were Egyptians revolutionary demands met thereafter? Morsi's removal, on the other hand, has posed many unanswered questions, as it shows both revolutionary and coup d'état characteristics.

### **Integrating Definitions of 'Revolution'**

An interdisciplinary approach is the best one with which to approach such a complex and debatable topic. Interdisciplinarity allows the researcher to "explore *any* theory or method or phenomenon that the researcher(s) think appropriate to the question being asked" (Szostak, 4). Evidently, revolutions and military coups have numerous definitions. Each definition is a reflection of a particular discipline's ideologies and insights. Each discipline examines revolution and military coup from a particular angle, yet not one of them explains the concept in its entirety. To better understand the debates, a fruitful approach is to integrate the definitions.

Political Scientist, Samuel Huntington writes that revolutions are about "a rapid, fundamental, and violent domestic change in the dominant values and myths of a society, in its political institutions, social structure, leadership and government activity and policies" (Huntington, p. 264). Huntington's definition offers a political analysis on the possible changes brought about by revolutions. His definitions centres on revolutionary outcomes, but only implicitly explores their cause.

Like Huntington, sociologist, Theda Skocpol describes revolutions as rapid, violent and radical. She writes that revolutions are "rapid, basic transformations of a

society's state and class structures; and they are accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below" (Skocpol, 4). Skocpol's argument touches on spontaneous revolts based on class discontent, such as those seen in France, Russia and China. However, it fails to explain "the contribution of urban forces, or of coalitions" (Foran, 1993), as well as the contribution of cultural influences in revolutions (Kroeber, 1996). By contrast, sociologist, John Foran defines revolution from a cultural point of view. He believes that "collectively shared values to explicit ideologies" play a large role in causes and outcomes of revolutions (Kroeber, 23).

Some scholars such as historian Crane Brinton and sociologists Diana Russell and Timothy Wickham-Crowley included military involvement in their definitions. Brinton believes the military plays a strong and fundamental role in the success of revolutions. He sees that "no revolutionists have ever succeeded until they have got a predominance of effective armed forces on their side" (Brinton, 111). This definition opens doors for discussion about flexible revolutionary processes.

In spite of the fact that all the above positions reveal aspects important to our understanding of revolutions, they do not act independently from one another. In attempts to effectively conceptualize the event, it is imperative to find a definition that unites all these disciplinary insights. All disciplines "accept only a minority of the theories and methods they might embrace" (Szostak, 6). Conceptually integrating the above definitions will offer a more useful analogy. Conceptual integration involves "finding those that have similar meanings in different theories and merging them into a common language" (Henry and Bracy, 263).

The common ground between these theorists' definitions is that that they offer a cause, an outcome and a process. Although Huntington and Skocpol do not offer explicit causes to revolutions, their definitions provide assumptions of some kind of societal deterioration. The use of adjectives like, "rapid", "violent" and "transformation" implies some sort of popular discontent. The term 'violent' does not necessarily mean the physical sense, but certainly implies aggressiveness or insistence. Huntington, Foran and Skocpol's definitions introduce the idea of commonality. Demands based on "dominant values", "class" and "shared values" are integral to the popular discontent. Hence, revolutions are caused by a discontented popular movement with aggressively shared demands against an unstable regime. They involve a flexible process that ends once the movement's demands are met and the regime collapses.

### **Integrating Definitions of 'Military Coup'**

The second part of this interdisciplinary approach involves defining the term 'military coup'. However, defining military coup is a much more complex process than defining 'revolution'. Many of the existing definitions stem from theorists' study of revolution. Sociologist Charles Tilly, for example, places his definition of coups, amidst his discussion of revolutionary outcomes (Tilly, 1977). Tilly holds that "Military coups almost never produce any significant structural change" (Tilly, 7-51). By contrast, political scientist, Mark N. Katz makes the coup/revolution connection more explicit when he states military coups are a result of failed revolutions (Katz, 2004).

Law professor, Ozan Varol defines military coups as expressing the "military desires to preserve and promote its privileged status in society" (Varol, 312). Unlike the rest, Varol introduces the term 'democratic coup,' which he defines as appropriate to a



situation where the “military responds to popular opposition against an authoritarian or totalitarian regime, overthrows that regime, and facilitates fair and free elections within a short span of time.” (Varol, 294).

Sociologist Samuel Finer argues, “where public attachments to civilian institutions is strong, military intervention in politics will be weak” (Finer, 21). He also adds that coups are a “violent overthrow of a government” (Finer, 4) and lead to “overt military rule” (Finer, 4). Similarly, Toramod Lunde defines coups as “outcomes of elite political instability” (Lunde, 14).

The theorists identify similar causes, outcomes and reasons for military coups. Finer, and Tilly show that coups, unlike revolutions, ignore popular demands. What could have been a revolution gets intercepted by military interests. Even though, Varol’s democratic coup concept attempts to describe a coup which meets popular demands, he still believes that the “military behaves as a self-interested actor” (Varol, 295).

Lunde, Varol and Finer explicitly blame coups for state instability, while Tilly and Katz implicitly do so. Arguing that revolutions are failed coups, as Katz does, implies that both coups and revolutions have the same causes. So, what starts or could have started as a revolution evolves into an opportunity for military gain. All the theorists agree that the outcome of a coup is that military becomes the only acting governing body of the state.

From these definitions we are left with a common belief that state instability creates opportunity for military gains. The same instability that instigates revolutions

can cause military coups. However, the difference lies in the outcome. Coups, unlike revolutions, end when the military acts as the governing body for the state. Therefore, a coup d'état is a sudden and rapid self-interested military operation that takes advantage of State instability and leaves the military with complete governmental power.

### **Examining the ouster of Morsi as a 'Revolution'**

The ouster of Morsi demonstrated many characteristics of a revolution, as well as some signs of a military coup. However, theories of revolution cannot account for the military role played in ousting Morsi, while the military coup theories fail to take into consideration the mass protests against Morsi. A redefinition of revolution shows that four criteria must be present before an event can be classified as a revolution: a discontented popular movement, shared demands against the regime, a process that ends when demands are met, and the collapse of the old regime.

The demands against Morsi emerged two years prior during the protest which ousted Hosni Mubarak. On January 25, 2011 a discontented Egyptian population gathered in Tahrir square demanding bread, freedom and social justice (Morsy's speech 2013, 06, 26). These three demands became the revolution's motto and fulfilling them meant success for their revolution. Bread, their first demand, indicated a need for economic improvement. The Egyptian economy at the end of Mubarak's rule was on the brink of crisis, with scarce jobs, horrible wages and high price inflation. There was an 11% unemployment rate of which 90% were young people under 29 years of age (Baizhi, 120). About 20% of the population was earning less than the \$2 a day median poverty line (McGrath, 2010). Since 1984, Egypt's minimum monthly wage was 35

pounds (\$US 7). With bonuses, incentives and annual increase, the minimum monthly wage could reach about 300 pounds a month (Yehia, 2011). These income figures are quite low in comparison to the prices of household essentials.

Following Morsi's win, people anticipated economic improvement. Changes to the economy, even if minimal, would have made a huge difference with the people. Of course, with the severity of the economic crisis, any noticeable change to the economy would require more than just one year in office. However, Morsi's policies showed no signs of leading to economic improvement. By contrast, the economic situation only got worse. The unemployment rate increased to 20%, bread prices escalated, the deficit rose to 12% of GDP and the Egyptian currency fell in value measured against the US dollar (Gerbaudo, 107).

In addition, there was a shortage of gas and electricity supply in the country (Callinicos, 2013). As a solution to the electricity problem, Morsi instituted a rotation of electrical power. Each district would shut off power for two hours a day. Frequently however, poor districts had no power for more than two hours, while areas where leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and government officials lived never saw a power outage. In his final speeches Morsi blamed this on hydro employees, but Egyptians had already sensed a return to Mubarak-like governance (Morsy's speech 2013, 6, 26).

The second revolutionary demand was freedom. Prior to the revolution that ousted Mubarak, those who criticised the president had been tortured, humiliated, imprisoned and sometimes forced into hiding (Osman, 2010). One particular name that strikes a chord in this area is journalist Abdel-Halim Qandil, known for his vocal

discontent with the Egyptian government. For opposing Mubarak and his government, he was abducted, beaten, stripped and left alone in the desert (Shehab, 2004). He became an example for other journalists. At the risk of following in his footsteps, other journalists often refrained from criticizing Mubarak and his corrupt policies.

Much the same was seen under Morsi's rule. In the new constitution, insulting the president was a crime. Amongst those affected by the new law was political satirist Bassem Youssef. He was arrested after insulting Morsi on his TV show *albarnameg* (Gerbaudo, 106).

Social injustice, another revolutionary demand, instigated the initial demonstrations against Mubarak as well as the demonstrations against Morsi. Since 1981, Egypt has been in a state of emergency. This gave police unlimited power to arrest and detain citizens without charges (Baizhi, 122). In more than one case, those in police custody were subjected to extreme police brutality (Bradley, 125).

Inequality was also very common under Mubarak's rule. Friends and family of the ousted president controlled 55% of the country's total wealth (Baizhi, 121). Businessmen, military personnel's and politicians close to Mubarak were given untaxed land, bids on business deals and high-ranking positions (Abul-Magd, 2013). This increased the already large gap between the rich and the poor (Osman, 2010).

Under Morsi's rule, Egyptians felt even more threatened. Like Mubarak, Morsi declared a 30 day state of emergency in three governorates after clashes at a soccer game left 47 dead (Egypt Independent, 2013). However, it wasn't the state of emergency law that worried the people, but the new constitution drafted by his

government. The constitutional council chosen to write the constitution consisted mainly of Islamists and allied social groups. Over the months, the non-Islamists withdrew from the assembly, claiming that the constitution failed to reflect the revolution's demands (Mannheimer, Rasinovic-Lukic, 18). The constitution demonstrated little respect for rights of minority groups, women and youth. Favouritism towards the MB was starting to show in much of Morsi's policies. For example, in June 2013 Morsi appointed 10 MB as governors out of the 27 appointed to the governorates (Pioppi 63).

Finally, it was his constitutional decree that heightened Egyptians discontent, the decree granting him absolute power over judiciary and legislature (Mannheimer and Rasinovic-Lukic, 19). It exempted Morsi from any type of judicial review, putting him above the law (Pioppi, 63).

It's important to note that Mubarak's corruption was 30 years in the making, whereas Morsi had little time to make drastic changes. Working against him was Egypt's unstable conditions, an opposition which had no faith in his abilities to govern and an old regime that fought its way back to power. Nevertheless, his policies focused on securing the Muslim Brotherhoods place in politics, rather than answering to the demands of the revolution. In such a short time, the Egyptian people began accusing Morsi of 'Brotherhoodization' of the state (Gerbaudo, 105).

Considering the MB ideology, this term accurately depicted Egypt's situation under Morsi's rule. The organization, founded by a school teacher Hassan Al-Banna in 1928 envisioned a social system that would "evolve into political position and eventually 'Islamicize'f2013

the country from both the top down and the bottom up” (Worman, 150). His method involved “building the Muslim individual, the Muslim family, the Muslim society, the Islamic government, the global Islamic state and reaching status of Ustathiya (eminence among nations) with the state” (Shater 130).

The second criteria for understanding the revolutionary process is overthrowing the old regime. At first, Egyptians celebrated Morsi’s win back in 2013. The MB organization, of which Morsi was a member, had been Mubarak’s biggest opposition. It was believed that electing its member would symbolized the end of the old regime. However, that was not the case. The Muslim Brotherhood were a part of that old regime. Egypt has two established political organizations, the military and the Muslim Brotherhood. Mubarak, once a militant himself, established a militarization of the state, by protecting and securing the army’s structure. Under his rule, the military “established companies, built factories and cultivated farms that were untaxed” (Abu-Magd, 2013). Much of their production went to the civilian markets. The military industry made up 5-15% of the Egypt's economy (Varol, 346).

In addition, Mubarak, hired retired military officials in high-ranking jobs such as governors, ambassadors, advisors to the president, heads of natural gas and oil companies, the transportation system or in management of public sector companies (Abu-Magd, 2013). The military acted free from the rest of the country, like a state within the state (Mannheimer, Rasinovic-Lukic, 2013)

## **Examining the ouster of Morsi as a 'Military Coup'**

For years both the military and MB had been struggling for power, yet amidst their struggle a clandestine agreement existed. As Mubarak's opposition group, the MB provided a credible political atmosphere, while he returned the favour by allowing them to build their secret society and wealth within the confinements of society. Like the military, the MB is a deeply-rooted organization. A significant part of the old regime, they are known for establishing a social system outside of the control of any government apparatus. Their welfare system provides social services, such as jobs and financial support to the needy.

During the transition period after Mubarak's removal, once again, the military and the MB established a secret deal. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) ignored MB electoral violations such as buying votes in the rural and urban areas by distributing food and money. In return, Morsi created articles 197 and 195 in order to protect the military's autonomous status (State Information Service, 2012).

In this deep state complexity lies the revolution-coup debate. Military coups have four conditions: in a situation of state instability, the military-driven by self-interest-overthrows the old regime and governs in its place. Two of these criteria set military coups apart from revolutions. First, military intervention is exclusively driven by the military's self-interests. In Mubarak's situation, military intervention occurred for two reasons, for the people's best interests as well as for the military's best interest. The military refused orders to stop protests, claiming they could not be held responsible for the death of an innocent civilian. At the same time, they were not pleased with Mubarak's plan to make his son Gamal President (Abu-Magd, 2013).

In Morsi's case, military intervention was also for best interest of people as well as the military. Prior to military intervention, Tamarod, a youth coalition, began a petition campaign against Morsi. They succeeded in collecting 15 million signatures from Egyptians who wanted the president to step down (Gerbaudo, 107). On June 30, 2013 people mobilized in the streets. The numbers were increasing daily. A day after Morsi was removed from office, El-Sisi confirmed in his speech that the military intervention was a necessary action for state security (CNN Breaking News).

The other reason behind the military intervention was Morsi's constitutional decree, which put the military at risk of exposure. For years, the military has exercised economic and political privileges separate from the state's governmental institutions (Varol, 346). By maintaining the status quo and securing the respect of the people (Mannheimer, Radinovic-Lukic, 13), the military was able to preserve these privileges and avoid governmental or civilian probes into their administrative and legislative practices. Both examples above show that military intervention were not driven solely by military self-interest, as is the condition for a military coup, but also by interests of state.

The second condition for a military coup is naming the military as the governing body for the state. When Mubarak stepped down as president, he designated the Security Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) as acting government until a new president was sworn into office. This transitional period lasted 6 months. Shortly after Morsi became president, SCAF, reluctant to give up their governing power, introduced a declaration that minimized the new presidential powers (Mannheimer and Radinovic-Lukic, 2013). Their attempt to remain in power failed when Morsi removed the top



leaders of the SCAF. Ironically enough, Morsi replaced Field Marshal Tantawi with Abdel Fatah El-Sisi (Beck, 2013).

A year later, El-Sisi removed Morsi from office. Immediately after, El-Sisi announced Egypt's roadmap to democratization. The roadmap, formed by Egypt's prominent politicians, religious figures and socialist, designated Adly Mansour as the interim president that would lead the country through a transitional period. The roadmap also relieved the military from actively participating in governmental decisions. As soon as Mansour, was sworn into office, he appointed a ministry cabinet to act as the new governing body. The interim president also appointed a 50 member constitutional assembly to amend the constitution of 2012 (CNN, Breaking News). On January 14-15 2014, Egypt held a referendum which approved the new constitution. To follow are the parliamentary and presidential elections before the transitional period is complete (CNN, Breaking News).

From the Interdisciplinary redefinition of both the term revolution and the term military coup, it is clear that Morsi's ouster is neither a revolution nor a coup. Although removing Morsi from office resembled a revolution, revolutionary demands of bread, freedom and social injustice were not met and the old regime was not overthrown. Yet, the event did not resemble a coup either. Military intervention was for both its own institutional as well as national interests and the military did not take over as the ruling government. Instead, the event is a continuation of the revolution that began in 2011. The event is part of a long and flexible revolutionary process. Will that process succeed? It is too soon to tell.

In May of 2014, another phase in the process will take place. This presidential election is critical to Egypt's revolutionary process. Military Field Marshal Abdel Fatah El-Sisi, the man behind Morsi's ouster, is one of the candidates running for president. If he wins, the question still stands; will he steer the country back to military rule? Or will he answer the demands of the people? If you ask the Egyptians in my family, they will reply, "it doesn't matter, Tahrir Square is always there. We will keep going down until someone gets it right."

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