Edinburgh Research Explorer

Counterrevolution as international phenomenon

COUNTER-REVOLUTION AS INTERNATIONAL PHENOMENON: THE CASE OF EGYPT

Corresponding author: Jamie Allinson

Lecturer in Politics and International Relations, University of Edinburgh

Chrystal Macmillan Building, George Square, Edinburgh

j.allinson@ed.ac.uk

Abstract

This article argues that the case of the Egyptian 2011 revolution forces us to rethink accounts of counter-revolution in International Relations. The debate over whether the events of 2011-13 in Egypt should be considered a 'revolution' or merely a 'revolt' or 'uprising' reflects an understanding of revolutions as closed and discrete events, and therefore of international counter-revolution as significant only after revolutionary movements have seized sovereign power. Against this account, which maintains the idea of sovereignty as the boundary between domestic/social and international/ geopolitical phenomena, I argue that counter-revolutions can operate across boundaries during revolutionary situations before and to prevent revolutionary transformation and therefore affect whether a revolutionary sovereign power is established at all. Such counter-revolutions draw upon both the ideological inheritance of historical strategies of international 'catch-up', and the cross-border class relations that these different strategies bring into being. In the Egyptian case, the counter-revolution thus relied upon two factors deriving from this strategy: the ideological inheritance of Nasserism as a response to international hierarchy, and the integration of the post-Nasser Egyptian ruling elite with Gulf financial, and US security, networks.

Revolutions, in the sense of mass uprisings that lead to or attempt political change, have been frequent occurrences since the end of the Cold War: yet the degree of transformation they achieve has decreased by comparison with the revolutions of the twentieth century.[1] This apparent paradox has broken the– previously assumed– link between revolution and profound social transformation.[2] The 2011 uprisings in the Arab world marked a high point in this trend. Of the six countries that witnessed the so-called 'Arab Spring', only Tunisia has seen the emergence of even a limited constitutional democracy let alone a fundamental change in social relations. The rest, at the time of writing, remained mired in civil war, state collapse and a revivified authoritarianism bloodier by far than that of the pre-2011 *anciens régimes*.

Of all the Arab uprisings, the Egyptian '25th January revolution' has displayed the starkest reversal. Where once revolutionary crowds demanded 'the fall of the regime', six years after the revolution the deposed dictator Hosni Mubarak walked free from all charges of killing protestors. A few months after Mubarak's release, Egyptian school textbooks were re-written to erase all mention of the uprising against his rule.[3] This *volte-face* has, and the bleak aftermath of the 'Arab Spring' in general, has opened a debate about whether these events can be called 'revolutions' at all. Yet this debate actually exposes a lacuna in our understanding of revolutions: the role of *counter-revolution*.

[1] Mark Beissinger, 'The Changing Face of Revolution 1900-2014' (University of Edinburgh School of Social and Political Science Seminar, 2015).

[2] A transition well-mapped in Colin J Beck, Radicals, Revolutionaries and Terrorists (Cambridge: Polity, 2015); George Lawson, Negotiated Revolutions: The Czech Republic, South Africa and Chile (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005a); Harald Wydra, 'Revolution and Democracy: the European Experience', Revolution in the Making of the Modern World: Social Identities, globalization and modernity (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 27–44.

[3] Amr Mostafa, 'Egypt strikes two revolutions from history textbooks', Al-Monitor, (2017).

In the following article, I argue that the case of the Egyptian revolution of 2011-13 demonstrates that counter-revolution– as well as acting to contain or reverse established revolutionary regimes– can also operate across borders during situations of revolutionary upheaval but before revolutionary movements have established a sovereign power of their own. Participants in 'internationalised social conflict', international counter-revolutionaries are themselves part of the story of why revolutionary situations fail or succeed in bringing forth profound social and political transformations.[4] The comparative lack of attention to international counter-revolution prior to the establishment of a sovereign revolutionary state reflects mutually reinforcing conceptions of revolutions and sovereignty as more fixed entities than they actually are: of sovereignty as a hard boundary between the realms of social/domestic and international/geopolitical forms of explanation[5] and of revolution as the *successful* fundamental transformation of a society's basic features, following a mass revolt from below. By contrast, I argue that the experience of attempts at international 'catch-up' under conditions of uneven and combined development provides resources for counter-revolutionaries to prevent such success. Such experiences give social substance to counter-revolutionary narratives of the nation as embattled historical subject, and the revolution as a threat to its unity. The changing forms of such 'catch-up' projects generate alliances with other states: states that provide the military, diplomatic, or financial support to prevent a successful revolutionary outcome. In the case of the Egyptian revolution, the strong hold of Nasserism represented the former and the policies of the Gulf Co-operation Council States and the US, the latter.

---

[4] Nick Bisley, 'Counter-revolution, Order and International Relations', Review of International Studies, 30:1 (2004), pp. 49–69.
[5] Justin Rosenberg 'Why is There No International Historical Sociology?, European Journal of International Relations, 12:3 (2006), p. 312.

The argument proceeds in four sections. In the first section I demonstrate how despite challenges to the conception of revolutions as fixed entities rather than open processes, especially in accounts of the Egyptian revolution, this view remains prevalent in IR accounts of counter-revolution. Drawing on the work of Charles Tilly and Arno Mayer, I then provide an alternative definition of counter-revolution. Counter-revolutionaries, I argue, draw upon histories of international 'catch-up' for material and ideological support. In the third section I demonstrate how this framework helps understand the Egyptian case of 2011-2013, showing how the ideological inheritance of developmental nationalism– Nasserism– was central to building a popular counter-revolutionary coalition. In the final section I demonstrate how the post-Nasserist iteration of Egyptian 'catch-up' strategy, embodied in the turn to neo-liberal economic policy and US/ Gulf geopolitical alignment, provided the basis for the political, financial and diplomatic interventions that supported the counter-revolutionary coup of July 2013.

What's at Stake? Revolution, Counter-revolution and Egypt

The debate on the nature of the Egyptian revolution–or rather, whether the events of 2011-13 can be considered a revolution–exposes a wider problem in the study of revolutions: in particular the erasure of international counter-revolution from the story of why revolutions succeed or fail. One side of this debate relies upon Theda Skcopol's classic definition of social revolutions as 'rapid, basic transformations of a society's state and class structures… in part carried through by class-based revolts from below'[6]–to claim that Egypt did not witness a revolution, thereby preserving the hard border of sovereignty between 'domestic' and 'geopolitical' phenomena. This view follows the conventional perspective in IR, in seeing international counter-revolution as possible only against a

---

[6] Theda Skocpol, States and Social revolutions: a Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 4.

revolutionary movement that has already seized sovereign power. The international aspects of counter-revolution in a case such as that of Egypt are thus ruled out of discussion. On the other end of the debate, proponents of a more open definition of revolution identify a revolutionary situation in Egypt between 2011 and 2013 but have yet to incorporate the international into their accounts of the counter-revolutionary closure of that situation.

Advocates of the first view, such as Jason Brownlee, Tarek Masud and Nathan Reynolds, explicitly draw on Skocpol to reject the notion of an Egyptian because Egyptian society has not been transformed nor, despite the mass protests, did the protestors take power.[7] In this argument the 'revolution of 25th January' 2011 represented only the opening 'breakdown' phase of an expected transition from authoritarian to democratic rule: a discrete event leading to an eventually failed transition process.[8] The continued predominance of the Egyptian military at the heart of the state before and after 2011 has led political economists such as Robert Springborg to downplay the significance of the 25th of January as a 'brief moment of mobilization' in a 'few urban areas':[9] echoed in the claims of Joel Beinin and Sean McMahon, that an Egyptian revolution has yet to occur– on the Skocpolian grounds that revolution means the building of a new social and political order brought

[7] Jason Brownlee, Tarek Masoud, and Nathan Reynolds, The Arab Spring: Pathways of Repression and Reform (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 5; Jason Brownlee, Democracy Prevention: The Politics of the US-Egyptian Alliance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 152–3; see also Hussein Agha and Robert Malley, 'This is Not a Revolution', New York Review of Books, (2012); Hugh Roberts, 'The Revolution that Wasn't', London Review of Books, 35:17 (2013).
[8] Nathan J. Brown, 'Egypt's Failed Transition', Journal of Democracy, 24:4 (2013), pp. 45–58; Brownlee et al. (2015), p. 23; Alfred Stepan and Juan Linz, 'Democratization Theory and the Arab Spring', Journal of Democracy, 24:2 (2013), pp. 21–2.
[9] Robert Springborg, 'The rewards of failure: persisting military rule in Egypt', British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, 44:4 (2017), p. 483; see also Holger Albrecht, Aurel Croissant, and Fred H. Lawson (eds), 'Military Engagement in Mobilizing Societies: the Research Agenda', Armies and Insurgencies in the Arab Spring (University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia, 2016), pp. 1–4, who avoid the term 'revolution' to describe the Arab Spring in Egypt and elsewhere, preferring 'revolt', 'uprising' or 'insurgencies'.

about by mass mobilization.[10] Jason Brownlee's history of the US-Egyptian alliance extends this

perspective to the international level. Having demonstrated that by 2011 the US had effectively

become part of the Egyptian ruling coalition, Brownlee describes the Egyptian events of 2011 as an

'uprising' rather than revolution, precisely because they did not produce a 'radical overhaul of state

and class structures.'[11] Here again the outcome determines the process: the Egyptian revolution

failed because it did not succeed.

These arguments rely upon, and reinforce a broader structure of understanding about revolutions

in IR. Contrary to an of-repeated claim,[12] there is no shortage of scholarship on the topic of

revolution emanating from the discipline.[13] The core proposition of this literature holds that

international relations and inter-state competition are both vital to understanding the origins of

---

[10] Joel Beinin, 'Was there a 25 January Revolution?', available at:
{http://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/27899/Was-There-A-January-25-Revolution} accessed 9 May 2018; 'On Revolutions and Defeated Revolutionary Movements: A reply to Brecht De Smet', accessed 10 May 2018; Sean McMahon, Crisis and Class War in Egypt: Social Reproduction, Factional Realignments and the Global Political Economy (London: Zed books, 2016), p. 3.

[11] Brownlee (2012), p. 10,123.

[12] For example Alexander Anievas, 'Revolutions and international relations: Rediscovering the classical bourgeois revolutions', European Journal of International Relations, 21:4 (2015), pp. 841–66; Fred Halliday, Revolution and World Politics: the rise and fall of the sixth world power (London: Macmillan, 1999), 'The Great Anomal', Review of International Studies, 27:4 (2001), pp. 693–9; Lawson (2015a); Maryam H. Panah, 'Social Revolution: The Emergence of an Agenda in International Relations', Review of International Studies, 28:2 (2002).

[13] These include David Armstrong, Revolution and World Order: The Revolutionary State in International Society (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); Mlada Bukovasnky 'The Altered State and the State of Nature: The French Revolution and International Politics', Review of International Studies, 25:2 (1999), pp. 197–216, Legitimacy and Power Politics: The American and French Revolutions in International Political Culture (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); earlier examples are to be found in Hedley Bull, The Anarchical Society (London: Macmillan, 1995); Peter Calvert, Revolution and International Politics (London: Bloomsbury, 2016); Robert Jervis, 'Socialization, revolutionary states and domestic politics', International Politics, 52:5 (2015), pp. 609–16; Maximilian Terhalle, 'Revolutionary Power and Socialization: Explaining the Persistence of Revolutionary Zeal in Iran's Foreign Policy', Security Studies, 18:3 (2009), pp. 557–86; Revolution and War (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1996a); Stephen Walt, 'Nothing Revolutionary', Review of International Studies, 27:4 (2001), pp. 687–92; Martin Wight, Power Politics (Leicester: Leicester Univeristy Press, 1978).

revolutions, and that revolutions reshape international order.[14] IR scholars have situated the Arab

uprisings in the broader context of revolutions and IR theory.[15] Yet, notable by its absence, and

particularly pertinent to the paradox of widespread revolutionary uprisings with few

transformative results, is a sustained treatment of counter-revolution.[16] This absence reflects

exactly that model of revolutions as historically closed, transformative events that underpins the

scepticism discussed above about the idea of an Egyptian revolution.

The relevant criteria of revolutionary transformation for IR scholars, at least in the realist and

English School traditions has been the seizure of sovereign state power by revolutionaries. This

approach reflects the 'basic methodological disjuncture' in the discipline separating domestic-social

from external-geopolitical forms of explanation.[17] Mainstream IR accounts of revolution preserve

this boundary, rendering counter-revolution an inevitably secondary, reactive phenomenon. In

these accounts– most significantly that of Stephen Walt but echoed in the work of Martin Wight,

---

[14] Anievas (2015); Colin Beck 'Reflections on the revolutionary wave in 2011', Theory and Society, 43:2 (2014), pp. 192–223; Beck (2015); Neil Davidson, How Revolutionary Were the Bourgeois Revolutions? (New York: Haymarket, 2012); John Foran, Taking Power: On the Origins of Third World Revolutions (Cambridge University Press, 2005); Jack Goldstone, Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); (2001); Jeff Goodwin, No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements 1945-1991 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Halliday (1999); Lawson (2005a); (2015a); 'Revolution, Nonviolence, and the Arab Uprisings', Mobilization, 20:4 (2015b), pp. 453–70; Daniel Ritter, The Iron Cage of Liberalism: International Politics and Unarmed Revolutions in the Middle East (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015);

[15] Jack Goldstone, 'Understanding the Revolutions of 2011', Foreign Affairs 90:3 (2011); Lawson (2015b); George Lawson, 'Within and Beyond the 'Fourth Generation' of revolutionary theory', Sociological Theory, 34:2 (2016), pp. 106–27; Ritter (2015); Stephen Walt, 'ISIS as Revolutionary State: New Twist on an Old Story', Foreign Affairs, November/December (2015).

[16] The beginnings of a research programme are evident in Bisley (2004); Lee Jones, 'Sovereignty, Intervention and Social Order in Revolutionary Times', Review of International Studies (2013); Dan Slater and Nicholas Rush Smith, 'The Power of Counterrevolution: Elitist Origins of Political Order in Postcolonial Asia and Africa', American Journal of Sociology, 121:5 (2016), pp. 1472–516; Kurt Weyland, 'Crafting Counterrevolution: How Reactionaries Learned to Combat Change in 1848', American Political Science Review, 110:2 (2016), pp. 215–31 discussed further below.

[17] Rosenberg (2006), pp. 311.

David Armstrong and Robert Jervis–counter-revolutions represent the response of sovereign states to revolutionaries who have already seized power in another sovereign state. Sovereignty then changes from being a preserver of stability to an undermining factor, as the revolutionaries pose unpredictable threat both to their neighbours and the international system as a whole.[18] Since revolutionaries–being revolutionary–reject the legitimacy not only of their own rulers but that of the surrounding states, 'revolutionary power is morally and psychologically at war with its neighbours all the time.'[19] The dialectic of revolutionary-counter-revolutionary war then permits a calibration of the accurate level of threat, until the revolutionaries are socialised into the existing norms of the international system. [20]

 In the prevailing accounts of counter-revolution in IR, just as in the arguments surveyed on the Egyptian revolution, it is again a requirement of the definition of revolutions that they be *successful,* in that they found a new sovereign order. Counter-revolution then becomes a conceptual impossibility. A counter-revolution can only occur against a revolution – but if a revolution is reversed then it drops from its former revolutionary status and the thing that reversed it can therefore no longer be considered a counter-revolution. The same logic underpins the argument that neither revolutions nor counter-revolution occurred in Egypt–or the wider Arab world–after 2011.[21] In effect, this defines away the very contest and conflict that characterise revolutions, since the object of study becomes only the revolutions that succeed.

[18] Stephen Walt, Revolution and War (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 4–12; Wight (1978), pp. 90–4; David Armstrong (1993), pp. 4–10; Jervis,(2015), pp. 609–11; Terhalle, (2009), pp. 557–61; Jeff D. Colgan, 'Domestic Revolutionary Leaders and International Conflict', World Politics, 65:4 (2013), pp. 656–90.
[19] Wight (1978), pp. 90.
[20] Walt (1996a), pp. 4–6; (2001), pp. 689–90.
[21] For example Agha and Malley (2012); Roberts (2013).

This view of revolutions, rooted in Skocpol's work, has been both theoretically and empirically challenged–the case of the Egyptian revolution providing one such instance of critique. The 'fourth generation' of scholarship on revolution widened Skocpol's definition to study failed, defeated or aborted cases of revolution, albeit without significant attention devoted to counter-revolution. [22] To do so requires some means of distinction of 'revolutionary' from non-revolutionary periods: a distinction offered by Tilly's notion of a 'revolutionary situation'. Such a situation holds with the appearance of 'at least two distinct blocs of contenders [who] make incompatible claims to control the state, and some significant portion of the population subject to the state's jurisdiction [that] acquiesces in the claims of each bloc.'[23]

This perspective informs the work scholars such as Brecht de Smet, Maha Abdelrahman, Neil Ketchley, Mathijs Van De Sande and Mounia Bennani-Chraïbi who argue for the revolutionary nature of the Egyptian uprising.[24] In their understanding, revolution is seen as an open historical

[22] The convention of dividing the historical sociological scholarship on revolutions into 'generations' has become a widely accepted, if roughly hewn, heuristic. The first generation refers to those interwar scholars, such as Crane Brinton, who viewed revolutionary processes through organicist metaphor rather than systematic comparison; the second, its most representative figure being Ted Gurr, saw the phenomenon rather as simply one subset of violent political behaviour, amenable to statistical and psychological analysis. Both took revolution as a case of pathology, either of individuals or societies. The third and fourth generations, from which most of the scholarship on revolutions has sprung, treats revolution rather as a general, or at least generative, condition of capitalist modernity; the difference between the two lying in the structural emphasis of the former criticised by the (proclaimed) multi-causal, conjunctural and agent-centred research agenda of the latter. This typology is contained in the periodic reviews of the field of revolutionary theory that appear at a rate of roughly one per decade. John Foran, 'Theories of Revolution Revisited: Toward a Fourth Generation, Sociological Theory, 11:1 (1993), pp. 1–20; Goldstone, (1980); (2001); Lawson (2016).

[23] Tilly (1996), pp. 9; See also Wickham-Crowley (1992), pp. 155.

[24] Brecht De Smet, 'Theory and Its Consequences: A Reply to Joel Beinin', accessed 9 May, 2018a; 'Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Egypt', Science and Society, 78:1 (2014b), pp. 11–3; Gramsci on Tahrir (London: Pluto, 2016), pp. 70–7; Maha Abdelrahman, Egypt's Long Revolution: Protest Movements and Uprisings (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), pp. 10–3; Neil Ketchley, Egypt in a Time of Revolution: Contentious Politics and the Arab Spring (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 5–6; Mounia

process rather than a closed outcome: a period in which popular mobilization effectively contests the sovereignty of an existing regime, even if that contest is unsuccessful. As de Smet notes, to define revolutions by their endpoints implies a form of 'selection on the dependent variable': for if we only analyse successful revolutions how can we know why revolutions succeed or fail?[25] In this view, the period of 2011-2013 in Egypt represented a revolutionary process, even if the outcome was the return of the military to power.

With this definition in mind, the Egyptian revolution becomes much easier to grasp. Not only did a 'significant portion of the population' acquiesce in a challenge to the control of the state, they mounted it themselves. From the 25th of January 2011, a heterogeneous popular subject–*al-sha'b*, 'the people'– contested the sovereignty of Husni Mubarak's regime.[26] Contrary to many portrayals of the uprising as a non-violent[27] and 'middle class'[28] affair, its hard core consisted of concerted, violent, collective action against the security apparatus and the ruling party particularly by the youth of poor neighbourhoods.[29] This collective violence drew out the security forces' power and permitted much larger marches.[30] A spreading strike wave then precipitated the defenestration of

---

Bennani-Chraïbi, 'Beyond Structure and Contingency: Toward an Interactionist and Sequential Approach to the 2011 Uprisings', Middle East Critique, (2017), pp. 1–23; Mathjis Van De Sande, 'The Prefigurative Politics of Tahrir Square–an Alternative Perspective on the 2011 Revolutions', Res Publica, 19 (2013), pp. 223–6; see also Reem Abou-El-Fadl, 'Introduction: Connecting players and processes in revolutionary Egypt', Revolutionary Egypt: Connecting Domestic and International Struggles (London: Routledge, 2015a), pp. 5–6.

[25] De Smet (2016), p. 74; see also Jeff Goodwin, No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements 1945-1991 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 6.

[26] Ketchley (2017), p. 5.

[27] Lawson (2015b), pp. 457–60; Ritter (2015), pp. 17–8.

[28] Hazem Kandil, 'Why did the Egyptian Middle Class March to Tahrir Square?', Mediterranean Politics, 17:2 (2012a), pp. 197–215.

[29] Salwa Ismail, 'The Egyptian Revolution against the Police', Social Research, 79:2 (2012), pp. 444–5; Ketchley (2017), pp. 29–35.

[30] Zeinab Abul-Magd, 'Occupying Tahrir Square: The Myths and the Realities of the Egyptian Revolution', South Atlantic Quarterly, 111:3 (2012), pp. 566–71.

Mubarak by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) on the 11th of February 2011. [31] In

other words, the '18 day's uprising presents a rather classic example of the Skocpolian 'class-based

revolt from below', which opened a revolutionary situation that lasted for nearly two-and-a half

years.

Understanding the experience of the Egyptian revolution sharpens our understanding of what it is

that counter-revolutionaries counter, and therefore enables us to distinguish counter-revolution

from quotidian repression. Egypt in 2011-2013 saw not just a stumbling process of democratic

transition, but a nationwide–if uneven– revolt against perceived injustice, hierarchy and oppression

of all kinds. This period was distinguished from the era of Mubarak that preceded and that of Sisi

that succeeded it by a retreat of the regime and the achievement, in practice of revolutionary

demands, that permitted the imagination of more fundamental transformation. Revolutionaries

degraded the security apparatus, won the effective exercise rights of democratic assembly and

political and economic organisation, and 'cleansed' public institutions of their old regime

managers.[32] Workers refused the authorities of their bosses, women rejected the domination of

men, and Coptic Christians defied both state-sponsored sectarianism and the acquiescence of their

clergy with it.[33] This experience transformed both the collective and individual outlooks of those

participated in it, infusing them with a new sense of 'connection, solidarity and equality.'[34] From

this perspective, as argued by Van De Sande, revolution becomes not an outcome, but a practice.[35]

---

[31] Abdelrahman (2014), pp. 64; Alexander and Bassiouny (2014), pp. 202–3.
[32] Abou-El-Fadl, (2015a) pp.9-10.
[33] Phil Marfleet, Egypt: Contested Revolution (London: Pluto, 2016), p. xii; Shereen Abouelnaga, 'Reconstituting Gender in Post-revolution Egypt' in Rethinking Gender in Revolutions and Resistance: Lessons from the Arab World (New York: Zed Books, 2014), pp. 41–7.
[34] Vivienne Matthies-Boon and Naomi Head, Trauma as counter-revolutionary colonisation: Narratives from (post)revolutionary Egypt, Journal of International Political Theory 14:3 (2017), p.70.
[35] Van De Sande (2013), p. 223.

The 'republic of Tahrir', as many of its participants referred to the occupied square in central Cairo, in this view should be seen not as a series of demands whose success or failure, victory or defeat can be judged after the fact but rather a 'prefigurative' laboratory of a different kind of social relations.[36]

If the revolution is prefigurative, and historically open, how then to understand its closure and defeat–and the role of the international in that defeat? Advocates of the revolutionary nature of the Egyptian uprising nonetheless repeat the sparse treatment of the subject of counter-revolution in IR as a whole and therefore tend not to address the phenomenon directly. Thus Corinna Mullin notes the thorough integration of the Egyptian regime into global systems of neo-liberalism and security state co-operation: characterising these as 'neo-colonial'[37], however, misses the vital role played in the Egyptian counter-revolution by anti-colonial developmental nationalism in rehabilitating the Egyptian neo-liberal security state in 2013. Reem Abou-El-Fadl, while acknowledging the importance of Nasserist nationalism for the counter-revolution,[38] nonetheless directs our attention towards the Muslim Brotherhood, Gulf states and the US conceived as a unified counter-revolutionary bloc rather than to the counter-revolution of the Egyptian military that eventually succeeded in 2013.[39] De Smet does highlight the important popular underpinning that the Nasserist ideological heritage gave to the 2013 military coup.[40] De Smet considers that

---

[36] Van De Sande (2013); see also Alexander and Bassiouny (2014), p. 2.
[37] Corinna Mullin, 'The geopolitics of revolution: Assessing the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings in the international context', Revolutionary Egypt: Connecting Domestic and International Struggles (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 179–80.
[38] Abou-El-Fadl (2015a), p. 13.
[39] Reem Abou-El-Fadl, 'Between Cairo and Washington: Sectarianism and counter-revolution in post-Mubarak Egypt', Revolutionary Egypt; Connecting Domestic and International Struggles (London: Routledge, 2015b).
[40] De Smet (2014b), p. 35.

coup both a 'counter-revolution' and a 'Caesarist' 'passive revolution.'[41] As Anne Alexander and

Sameh Naguib note, the usage of the latter term to describe the Egyptian military coup of 2013

stretches the concept in unproductive ways.[42] 'Passive revolution' typically refers to the attempt,

both impelled and mediated by geopolitical competition, for ruling classes to neutralise threats to

their domination by re-organising social relations 'from above.'[43] Yet Egypt has witnessed no such

re-organisation, but rather the defeat and repression of the threat: a counter-revolution, albeit one

with a degree of popular support. The conceptual lacuna around counter-revolution reflects not a

weakness of this–otherwise exemplary–scholarship on Egypt but rather an absence of tools to

address counter-revolution in IR. The Egyptian case therefore provokes a rethinking of the place of

counter-revolution IR, which I undertake in this article.

Conceptualising Counter-revolution in IR

Conceiving of revolution as *both* outcome and practice leads to a similar rethinking of counter-

revolution, one that undermines the conventional IR view of the phenomenon as purely the

reaction to revolutionary sovereignty. If revolution involves the prefiguration of different forms of

society and polity, counter-revolution serves precisely to eradicate this experience of prefiguration,

to close the period of experiment, and expunge its memory with brutal violence so as to prevent its

---

[41] De Smet (2014b), p. 38; (2016), pp. 208–20.
[42] Anne Alexander and Sameh Naguib, 'Behind every Caesar a new one? Reflections on revolution and counter-revolution in Egypt in response to Gramsci on Tahrir', Review of African Political Economy, 45:155 (2018), pp. 100–1.
[43] Chris Hesketh, 'Passive revolution: a universal concept with geographical seats', Review of International Studies, 43:3 (2017), p. 399; see also Jamie C Allinson and Alexander Anievas, 'The Uneven and Combined Development of the Meiji Restoration: A Passive Revolutionary Road to Capitalist Modernity?', Capital and Class, 100 (2010), pp. 470–4; Peter Thomas, 'Modernity as "passive revolution": Gramsci and the Fundamental Concepts of Historical Materialism', Journal of the Canadian Historical Association, 17:2 (2006), pp. 71–2; Neil Davidson, 'Scotland: Birthplace of passive revolution?', Capital & Class, 34:3 (2010), pp. 343–6; Adam David Morton, 'The continuum of passive revolution', Capital & Class, 34:3 (2010), pp. 315–42 outlines a continuum of usage of the concept, in which De Smet's account of the Egyptian counter-revolution would fit towards the expansive end.

re-occurrence. As Mohamed Bamyeh notes, counter-revolutions, just like revolutions display both an institutional and an affective aspect.[44] To succeed, the Egyptian counter-revolution had to re-erect that 'barrier of fear' that characterised pre-revolutionary life, by means of violence both supererogatory and indiscriminate.[45] Naomi Head and Vivienne Matthies-Boon demonstrate how counter-revolutionary violence has been used–mostly successfully–to '"break the people"' and their 'social embeddedness.'[46] Seeing counter-revolution in this way, as both outcome and practice, allows us to delineate when a counter-revolution has indeed occurred without falling into the trap of defining a revolution solely by its outcome.

A revolutionary situation, such as prevailed in Egypt between 2011 and 2013, is thus one in which new forms of social life are prefigured, and a wide variety of outcomes are possible. A new social order may be instituted–a social revolution– or the erstwhile power-holders may regain full control, a coalition of old and new rulers may be established, or the confrontation may only be resolved by civil war.[47] Revolutions being radically transformative moments, dependent on the interactions of millions of actors in equal states of ignorance, these outcomes are impossible to predict.[48] They do, however, display a common pre-condition: what John Chalcraft calls 'hegemonic

---

[44] Mohammed Bamyeh, 'Ma hiya al-thawra al-muddada? [What is the counter-revolution?]', available at: {http://www.jadaliyya.com} accessed 30 January 2018.

[45] Khaled Fahmy, 'Al-thawra al-muddada fi Misr: daur al-khauf-wa-taghul al-ajhaz al-amniyya [The Counter-revolution in Egypt: the role of fear and the predominance of the security forces]', Status Audio Journal, (2016).

[46] Matthies-Boon and Head (2017), p.277.

[47] Charles Tilly, European Revolutions 1492-1992 (London: Wiley, 1996), pp. 14–5.

[48] Charles Kurzman, 'Can Understanding Undermine Explanation? The Confused Experience of Revolution', Philosophy of the Social Sciences, 34:3 (2004), pp. 328–30; Lawson (2016), pp. 112–5.

contraction,' in which support for the existing rulers has fatally narrowed.[49] The task of counter-revolutionaries, if they are to succeed, is to reverse this process.

This reversal requires the rebuilding of a political coalition capable of carrying out and supporting coercive repression. Counter-revolution should therefore been seen not merely, as for example in John Foran's survey of defeated cases, as revolutionary failure but as its own form of success.[50] Counter-revolutions represent, in the concise definition of Slater and Smith, 'collective and reactive efforts to defend the status quo and its varied range of dominant elites against a credible threat to overturn them from below'.[51] Fred Halliday offers a similar conception - 'a policy of trying to reverse a revolution, and by extension... to prevent revolutionary movements that have already gained some momentum from coming to power'.[52] Nick Bisely likewise expands the category of counter-revolution to cover both 'efforts to overthrow a revolutionary state' and to attempts to prevent such a state from emerging. [53] Counter-revolutions are one element within the broader revolutionary process, uniting disparate forces to influence the outcome of that process: they involve both consciously pursued policy (from above) and movements (from below) that support such a policy. We can then build on these to offer the following definition of counter-revolution:

---

[49] John Chalcraft, Popular Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 36–8.
[50] John Foran, Taking Power: On the Origins of Third World Revolutions (Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 202–3; see also Goodwin (2001), p. 45; Timothy Wickham-Crowley, Guerillas and Revolution in Latin America (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 322–3.
[51] Slater and Smith (2016), p. 1472
[52] Halliday (1999), pp. 207.
[53] Bisley (2004), pp. 51.

Counter-revolutions consists of a policy, supported by certain movements and alliances, attempting to reverse, contain, or prevent a revolution, and by extension to prevent revolutionary movements that have already fundamentally fractured the polity from coming to power.

How does the international impinge here? The tactical methods of international intervention– divided by Bisely into military, financial, diplomatic and logistical means– are well understood, as is the chronological advantage enjoyed by external counter-revolutionaries who learn from the example of their less fortunate counterparts at the beginning of a revolutionary wave.[54] The need for counter-revolutionaries to reach a mass base of support, and therefore to mobilise social groups, is also well established in the literature.[55] The difficulty comes in uniting the two accounts of counter-revolution, social and international, even in works addressing this problem such as those of Jones and Bisley. This difficulty reflects the place of the international, or what George Lawson calls 'the inter-social' in accounts of revolution: 'the logics through which differentially located, but interactively engaged, social sites affect causal pathways.'[56] Hitherto, even if the international tends to play a short-term counter-revolutionary role, it exerts a secular pressure towards revolutionary outcomes in the sense of profound social transformation. This view derives from the classical period of European, and then anti-colonial revolutions between the 17th and the 20th century, a quite different configuration to that experienced by the Egyptian (and other Arab) revolutions.

---

[54] Bisley (2004), p. 52.; Weyland, (2016), pp. 221–24.

[55] Dan Slater, Ordering power (2010), pp. 12–3; Killian Clarke, 'Social Forces and Regime Change: Beyond Class Analysis', World Politics, 69:3 (2017), pp. 569–602; Killian Clarke, 'Unexpected Brokers of Mobilization: Contingency and Networks in the 2011 Egyptian Uprising', Comparative Politics, 46:4 (2014), pp. 379–97.

[56] George Lawson, 'A Global Historical Sociology of Revolution', Global Historical Sociology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 89.

During this earlier period, revolutionary processes were embedded in the unfolding, uneven and combined development of the interlinked systems of capitalist accumulation and sovereign state competition.[57] This uneven and combined development produced attempts at 'catch-up' by the ruling classes of those polities threatened by states dominated by the new (capitalist) social relations: these attempts produce revolutionary crises due to intra-ruling class conflicts, military defeat or insolvency: the revolutionary victors of the ensuing crisis, even if they face initial external opposition, in the long-run succeed to the extent that they adapt the state to the more successful example of its competitors.[58] In the short-run, the international produces counter-revolutionary intervention, but in the long run, revolutionary transformation. Counter-revolution, in effect remains at the level of tactical geopolitics, revolution at that of long-term social change.

The Egyptian, and other Arab revolutions, present a problem for this account because no such long-run is knowable: even if much (far from all) of the revolutionary impetus derived from an aspiration to the political freedoms and economic prosperity enjoyed by Euro-Atlantic states, these both still remained within the fundamental context of capitalist social relations. Nonetheless, previous studies of counter-revolution provide an initial analytical framework to understand the Egyptian counter-revolution as 'inter-social'[59] phenomenon. Mayer, seeking to explain the rise of

---

[57] A transformation detailed, from differing theoretical perspectives, in Alexander Anievas and Kerem Nisancioglu, How the West Came to Rule: The Geopolitical Origins of Capitalism (London: Pluto Press, 2015); Barry Buzan and George Lawson, The Global Transformation: History, Modernity and the Making of International Relations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) This history of uneven and combined development, which provides the context for revolutionary upheaval, has of course been the subject of a wide literature, now assembled at https://unevenandcombineddevelopment.wordpress.com/writings/.
[58] Anievas, (2015), pp. 845–7; Justin Rosenberg, 'Isaac Deutscher and the lost history of International Relations', New Left Review, I:125 (1996), pp. 3–15; Skocpol (1979), pp. 23–30; Walt (1996), pp. 40–5.
[59] Lawson (2017), p. 89.

European counter-revolution and especially fascism in the early 20th century, presents a central argument about the 'anti-revolutionary triad' of reactionaries, conservatives and counter-revolutionaries. Reactionaries (typically concentrated, for Mayer, in the landed aristocracy and its associated intellectuals) seek a 'retreat back into a [feudal] world both lost and regretted', whereas conservatives seek the preservation or moderate amelioration of the status quo.[60] *Counter*-revolutionaries, by contrast, revolutionise the content of reaction by adopting the methods of revolution: insurrectionary and plebeian, they actively seek a mass base amongst the *déclassé* and declining economic strata.[61] The rise of revolutionary movements, embodied for Mayer in increasing workers' organisation and the spread of socialist and communist ideas, forces these three elements together, giving most initiative to the dynamic counter-revolutionaries.

The basis for this counter-revolutionary coalition was the persistence of European pre-capitalist classes and institutions down to the twentieth century.[62] This claim, leaving aside its validity for European history, does not fit an Egypt in which the power of landed aristocracy (as opposed to financial speculation in real estate) had long passed, and wage-labour formal or informal been long established as the means of reproduction of the majority of the population. What Mayer does offer, however, is the link between the international and the social in counter-revolution. The attempt to 'catch-up' provides the basis on which counter-revolutionaries found a mass base, rooted in a vision of the nation as under threats a threat that could be countered only by the organic unity of an

---

[60] Arno Mayer, Dynamics of Counterrevolution in Europe, 1870-1956: An Analytic Framework (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 44–7.

[61] Mayer (1971), pp. 60–4.

[62] Arno Mayer, The Persistence of the Old Regime: Europe to the Great War (London: Verso, 2010); an argument echoed in Sandra Halperin, War and Social Change in Modern Europe: The Great Transformation Revisited (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

imagined past.[63] This 'inflamed truculent nationalism' in the European context solved the dilemma

of how to rebuild mass support for an order that had collapsed.[64] At the same time, policies of

developmental catch-up incorporate 'external' ruling classes into the social order threatened by

revolution in a particular state–for example, the imbrication of Western, especially French,

investment capital with the pre-1917 Tsarist regime which provided part of the motive for external

intervention in the Russian civil war. Thus social relations provide the basis not just for

revolutionary movements but for counter-revolutionary ones, by incorporating external ruling

classes into the social order threatened by revolution in a particular state and by producing

narratives of national threat that serve to bind the counter-revolution from above and below.

In the remainder of this article I demonstrate how international counter-revolution, as delineated

above, played a central in the outcome of the Egyptian revolution–*contra* the predominant IR

arguments that see counter-revolution as a defensive security measure against revolutionaries who

have already seized sovereign power. I illustrate how this international counter-revolution worked

in the two ways outlined above: the political and ideological inheritance of the Nasserist period of

'catch-up' national development serving to build a popular counter-revolutionary coalition around

the armed forces, and the regionally and internationally integrated ruling class that had developed

in the post-Nasserist period financing and co-ordinating the counter-revolutionary strategy.

Nonetheless, this ruling class was not united in its response to the revolution, with a US-Qatari

fraction favouring counter-revolutionary co-optation by means of the Muslim Brotherhood, and a

Saudi-GCC fraction favouring outright repression. The latter was eventually successful.

---

[63] Arno Mayer, The Furies: Violence and Terror in the French and Russian Revolutions (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 52.
[64] Mayer (1971), p. 80.

Tracing the Egyptian Revolution and Counter-revolution

The Egyptian revolution developed through three broad phases. The first of these was the '18 days uprising' itself: the mass uprising that produced a fundamental fracture in the polity. Encouraged by the success of the revolutionary uprising against Zine Abedine Ben Ali in Tunisia, the '25th January Revolution' built upon a decade of both popular contention and democratic activism in Egypt, albeit infused with a vast, new, and in the end overwhelming constituency.[65] On the 11th of February 2011, following the popular revolt described above, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) sensing that only Mubarak's removal would stem the tide of revolt, and assured of the support of its major foreign backer, the United States, announced the resignation of the president and a plan for constitutional reform and parliamentary and presidential elections under military tutelage.

The removal of Mubarak thus opened a new phase, a revolutionary situation *a* la Tilly, in which the concern of the ruling SCAF was to manage the crisis for fear that a popular 'stampede' might issue forth from the years of poverty and oppression, with unknown consequences.[66] This fear was well-founded, as both mass protests and strike waves continued – in the case of the latter, expanded and deepened to include demands for the 'cleansing' of Mubarak-era managers– in this period.[67] SCAF found an initially willing partner in the Muslim Brotherhood, who had thrown their crucial weight behind the latter stages of the 18 days revolt, but who now stood ready to play the role of moderates in a classic 'transition pact', restraining any remaining revolutionary energies and

---

[65] Abdelrahman, (2014)pp.10-13; Alexander and Bassiouny, (2014) pp.10-12; Chalcraft (2016), pp. 165–9.
[66] Hazem Kandil, Soldiers, Spies and Statesmen; Egypt's Road to Revolt (London: Verso, 2012b) p.233.
[67] Alexander and Bassiouny (2014), pp. 210–1.

directing them into parliamentary form.[68] The result was a fracture in the 'negative revolutionary coalition', as those who sought a continuing revolution, and the overhaul of the Egyptian state including SCAF, regarded the Brotherhood's strategic alignment with SCAF and electoral orientation as both betrayal and power-grab.[69] The Brother's bargain seemed, initially, to have paid off as they won both parliamentary elections in November 2011, and the presidential election of June 2012: in the latter case, supporters of the divided 'revolutionary' candidates who failed to make it through to the second round reluctantly supported the MB candidate Muhammad Morsi against the *feloul* (Mubarak regime remnant), Ahmed Shafiq.

Morsi's – narrow and ill-tempered, but nonetheless, democratic– victory opened the third, and final phase, of the Egyptian revolution which was to culminate in the coup of July 2013 and the reversion to military authoritarianism, *pur et dur.* Rebuffed by those revolutionary figures to whom he offered cabinet seats, appointed as defence minister the man who would come to overthrow him, Abdel Fattah El-Sisi. Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood overplayed a worsening hand. A constitutional declaration in December 2012, assuring the presidency greater legal powers than those enjoyed by Mubarak confirmed the division in the 'negative revolutionary coalition' as pro- and anti-MB protestors clashed at the Presidential Palace, with allegations of MB militias torturing their opponents. The strike waves continued. An opposition 'National Salvation Front', comprising not just the Leftists, Nasserists and liberals of 2011 but also old regime figures such as "Amr Moussa was formed to oppose the declaration. The opposition to Morsi increasingly drew together those who thought the revolution ought to continue – whose demands he would not meet– with those who thought it ought to be reversed–whom he did nothing to disable. This was the terrain on

---

[68] Abdelrahman (2014), pp. 137–9; Ketchley (2017), pp. 92–4.
[69] Ketchley (2017), pp. 97–9.

which an alliance between counter-revolution from above and below, drawing in part of the rhetoric, practice and support of the previous revolutionary coalition, was built. Its main, though far from sole, instrument was 'Tamarrod'[70], a petition to remove Morsi that led to a sizeable demonstration on the 30th of June 2013. Proclaiming obeisance to the popular will, SCAF again seized power on the 3rd of July, installing El-Sisi as effective (and later *de jure)* ruler of the country, supported by an appointed cabinet headed by the economist Hazem Beblawi.

The coup against Morsi, and the initial violence directed against the Muslim Brotherhood, was followed by a more thoroughgoing policy of counter-revolution to close the revolutionary situation. In opposition to the coup, the MB and their supporters organised a sit-in in the months of July and August 2013 at Rab'a al-Adawiya square in Cairo. The renewed military regime under Sisi dispersed this camp with extreme violence on the 14th of August, with human rights organisations documenting approximately almost 1000 deaths among the protestors.[71] The MB itself was outlawed and its leadership–including former president Morsi–arrested or exiled.[72] The regime relied upon a mixture of direct violence, claiming some 754 victims in 2016, juridical repression and incarceration to erase the legacy of the 25th January revolution.[73]

The intent, and the effect of this counter-revolutionary policy were to decapitate and disorient the revolutionary movement, to remove it from the streets and leave its presence only in bitter memory: to end

---

[70] The name means 'rebel' in Arabic.
[71] Rachel Aspden, 'Generation revolution: how Egypt's military state betrayed its youth', The Guardian, (2016).
[72] BBC News, 'What's become of Egypt's Mohammed Morsi?', (2016).
[73] Omar Robert Hamilton, 'Sisi's New Prisons', available at:
{https://www.lrb.co.uk/blog/2016/07/14/omar-hamilton/sisis-new-prisons/} accessed 16 July 2016.

the revolutionary situation and eradicate the hopes it had aroused.[74] Despite two presidential electoral

victories of questionable legitimacy in 2014 and 2018, the Sisi regime continued to rely on exemplary

repression without any policies to address the popular discontent that sparked the initial uprising.[75] Protests

and strikes, most often around economic demands, continued.

Nonetheless, if we take the Egyptian counter-revolution as a specific policy directed against the gains of 25th

January, the exemplary violence and incarceration did produce an effect. Where 2011-13 had seen the de-

fanging of the security apparatus and the effective winning of freedoms of speech, assembly and political

contestation, the Sisi regime codified and made permanent the repressive ordinances of Mubarak's 'state of

emergency.' The 'Protest Law' (law 107/2013) outlawed protests except with the express permission of the

police or interior ministry and, reflecting the importance of mosques as revolutionary assembly points,

banned 'any political gathering in houses of worship.'[76] This ordinance was later augmented by the 'anti-

terrorism law' (law 65/2015), issued directly by Sisi in a presidential decree, and rendering a capacious range

of activities punishable by ten years' hard labour.[77] Between the coup of July 2013 and the passing of the

protest law in November of that year, Egypt witnessed the highest daily level of protests since 2011, 107.5 per

day: after the passing of the law this number decreased by 52%.[78] By 2017 the rate of protest had decreased

tenfold to roughly 4 incidents per day.[79] The re-imposition of a state of emergency in that year brought an

---

[74] Matthies-Boon and Head, (2017) pp.270-8.
[75] Linah Alsaafin, 'Abdel Fattah el-Sisi narrowly misses 100 percent of vote in Egypt', Al Jazeera, (2018) Sisi won approximately 97% of the vote in each election on turnouts of roughly 40% each time.
[76] 'Full English Translation of Egypt's Security Law', Ahram Online available at {http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/87375.aspx}accessed 9 August 2018.
[77] Official Gazette of the Arab Republic of Egypt, No.33, 'Anti-Terrorism Law' (2015).
[78] Amy Austin Holmes and Hussein Baoumi, 'Egypt's Protests by the Numbers', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace available at: {http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/62627} accessed 9 August 2018.
[79] 'Mu'ashir al-dimuquratiyya: 744 ihtijajat "amilyya mundhu mayu 2016 wa hatta abril 2017 [Democracy Index: 744 worker's protests from May 2016 to April 2017]' DemoMeter available at {http://demometer.blogspot.com/2017/04/744-2016-2017.html} accessed 9 August 2018.

even wider dragnet of repression.[80] Whereas strike waves had played a central role in the end of Mubarak, by 2017 a major strike in the labour movement stronghold of Mahalla El-Kubra saw workers' leaders rounded up on 'security and anti-terrorism grounds.'[81] The net result of this repression was the physical removal of politically active Egyptians from the streets. In 2011 Egypt had 43 prisons: in 2016, 62– with only three of the increase having been built before the 2013 coup. In 2011, Egypt held 60,000 inmates: by 2016, 106,000 approximately 60,000 of whom were political prisoners.[82] One Cairene citizen, on the occasion of a rise in metro fares that sparked (swiftly repressed) protests, summed up the situation thus: '[e]ither go to jail or starve to death, either of which will be very soon.'[83]

By the time of his second election victory, then, Abdel Fattah El-Sisi's counter-revolutionary regime may not have been stable but was at least partially successful. The threat of elected politicians exerting any control over the Egyptian state and the military at its core, still less profound social transformation, had been thwarted. The rights of free assembly, speech and the withdrawal of labour that Egyptians won in practice in 2011-13 were again eliminated. The *feloul* (Mubarak era-remnants) were assured control of their factories and investments, their managers no longer at risk of being 'cleansed.' A sizeable proportion of the mass of protestors, who had created the prefigurative experience described above as the 'republic of Tahrir' were incarcerated, exiled, or killed. In short, the revolutionary situation of 2011-13 had been closed. Were a new one to erupt, it would be distinct and different from that of 2011. At first sight, this successful counter-

---

[80] 'Egypt: Intensifying Crackdown Under Counterterrorism Guise: Emergency Courts Used to Prosecute Activists, Journalists, Bloggers' (Human Rights Watch, 2018).

[81] 'Intl trade union groups write to Sisi demanding release of 8 Egyptian union members', Ahram Online available at {http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/277754/Egypt/Politics-/Intl-trade-union-groups-write-to-Sisi-demanding-re.aspx} accessed 9 August 2018.

[82] Arab Network for Human Rights Information, 'There is Room for Everyone in Egypt's Prisons' (Cairo: Arab Network for Human Rights Information, 2016).

[83] Basma Ghoneim and Hadeer El-Mahdawy, 'Metro fare hike prompts protests and arrests, adds to the burdens of Egyptians', Mada Masr, available at {https://www.madamasr.com/en/2018/05/15/feature/politics/metro-fare-hike-prompts-protests-and-arrests-adds-to-the-burdens-of-egyptians/} accessed 9 August 2018.

revolution appears a domestic phenomenon without international origins or consequences, just as the mainstream IR accounts surveyed at the beginning of this piece would lead us to expect. As I demonstrate in the following section, however, the success of the Egyptian counter-revolution was crucially dependent on cross-border social relations in two ways. The first of these was the legacy of developmental nationalism, the inheritance of the Nasserist post-colonial period, which provided the ideological binding between the policy of counter-revolution from above and the movement of counter-revolution from below. Neither movement nor policy could have been successful without a second set of trans-border relations, emerging rather from the post-Nasser period: the incorporation of the Egyptian ruling class into Gulf financial, and US security networks. This incorporation rendered the Egyptian revolution a threat to international as much as domestic interests and led to the financial and diplomatic support for the Egyptian counter-revolution that was vital to its success.

Nasserism and the building of a counter-revolutionary coalition

The revolutionary situation that prevailed in Egypt between 2011 and 2013 was thus closed by a counter-revolution with a dual international aspect. The counter-revolutionary coalition that supported the post-coup Sisi regime had its roots in 'the logics through which differentially located, but interactively engaged, social sites affect causal pathways,'[84] just as much as the revolution itself. More than just direct counter-revolutionary policies of intervention–which were nonetheless crucial, as I demonstrate below– the international played a central role in binding together the strategic policy of counter-revolution from above pursued by SCAF, with a movement from below to support that policy, even incorporating part of the former revolutionary coalition. This link

---

[84] Lawson (2017), p. 89.

between counter-revolution from above and below, as identified by Mayer in the different context of 19th century Europe, was forged from the political inheritance of national development that attempted to 'catch up' with competitor states.[85] Counter-revolution is built partly by portraying revolution as an external threat that could be countered only by the organic unity of an imagined past. In the case of Egypt this political inheritance, central to the counter-revolutionary project, derived from the immediate post-colonial period under Gamal Abdel Nasser.

The origins of Nasser's rule, and the project of national development that evolved over the span of his regime, lay in the 1952 coup by the 'Egyptian Free Officers' that overthrew the sclerotic, pro-British regime of King Farouk. By this point, Egypt had suffered nearly sixty years of British colonial rule. The country, under the rule of a narrow elite of notables formed the centre of a system of Arab states based on an alliance of landowners and merchants severely circumscribed by the persistence of elements of the colonial state: especially the continued British control of the Suez canal. Egypt was embedded in social relations that extended beyond its borders, the most important of which was the position of the country in the world market as a cotton exporter.[86] The lot of most Egyptians was agricultural labour to feed this demand: extra-economic coercion of peasants by landlords and their agents was not uncommon.[87] A growing workers' movement in the first half of the twentieth century nonetheless challenged both colonial rule and local management.[88] In Cairo, a cosmopolitan and often non-Egyptian elite presided over both the wealth of the intermediary trade

[85] Mayer (2000), pp. 52–3.

[86] Mahmoud Hussein, Class Conflict in Egypt, 1945-1970 (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), pp. 16–7.

[87] Routine and violent coercion of labour was still a living memory in the Nile Delta in the 1980s, see Amitav Ghosh, In An Antique Land (London, 2012), pp. 215–6.

[88] Joel Beinin and Zachary Lockman, Workers on the Nile: Nationalism, Communism, Islam and the Egyptian Working Class (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1998), pp. 395–9.

between the Egyptian countryside and the global market and a swelling mass of the poor and disinherited.[89]

At the top of the system, the liberal-nationalist politicians of the *Wafd* party linked together the monarchy, the British, and Egyptian landowners and businessmen. For those excluded from this conclave, the sense of national humiliation was deep and grounded in experience. This was particularly the case for the so-called 'new *effendiyya*' of civil servants, salaried and technical employees who, despite acquiring a 'modern education', found their path to professional advancement blocked.[90] Army officers formed a particularly acute case of this group: at the time of the Palestine war in 1948, two-thirds of Egyptian army officers were (like Nasser) the sons of salaried officials, and the remaining third the sons of upper or middle peasants yet not a single officer hailed from any of the one hundred largest landowning families.[91]

The Free Officers, the secret organisation behind the coup of 1952, welded together this class and national resentment into the political project that eventually became Nasserism. The traction of this form of politics, uniting the an ideology of national dignity with a corporatist view of the nation centred around the military, persisted long after Nasser's death and the adoption of quite different policies: an influence evident in two slogans prevalent in the 2011 revolution, *irfa" rasak fou', inta Masrii*, 'raise up your head, you're an Egyptian' and '*al-gaish wa-l-sh'ab yiid wahid*', 'the people and the army are one hand.' The origins of the Free Officers' regime lay in the generalised political crisis that began with mass revolts against British domination–and landlord exploitation– after the end of

---

[89] Hussein (1973), pp. 38–9.
[90] Michael Eppel, 'Note about the term Effendiyya in the History of the Middle East', International Journal of Middle East Studies, 41:3 (2009), p. 537.
[91] Ellen Kay Trimberger, Revolutions from Above (New Brunswick: Transaction Press, 1978), pp. 152–3.

the Second World War and was then exacerbated by the failure of the Egyptian and allied Arab

forces to prevent the loss of Palestine to the new Israeli state in 1948.[92] The crisis reached a high

point in January 1952 when, following the killing of 50 Egyptian police who refused to surrender to

British authority in the Suez Canal zone,[93] mass violence broke out in Cairo particularly directed

against British and foreign-owned institutions. Six months later, earlier than their original plans,

the Free Officers seized power from a monarchy evidently unable to govern the country.

The initial objectives of the Free Officers, whom the British did not intervene to oppose, were three-

fold: the final evacuation of the British (and therefore Egyptian control of the Suez Canal); building

a strong Egyptian army; agrarian reform to weaken the landowning elite who diverted export

revenues away from the investment needed to achieve a modernised military apparatus.[94] This

linkage between Egypt's military inferiority in relation to both the Western powers and their local

ally Israel and Egyptian dependence on the world market led to a more thoroughgoing 'revolution

from above.'[95] Gamal Abdel Nasser, having pushed out his rival and initial leader of the Free

Officers, Muhammad Naguib in 1954, embarked on what was to become the paradigmatic project of

'populist authoritarianism' in the region.[96] Although displaying a great degree of flexibility

throughout his rule, at the core of Nasser's project lay a single aim: to establish an economically and

militarily independent Egypt, as the hegemonic centre of a pan-Arab order, that would catch up

---

[92] Hussein (1973), pp. 77–80.
[93] This incident, later memorialized as 'Police Day', occurred on the 25th of January. The initial demonstrations *against* the police in 2011 were therefore mounted on this day- hence the '25th of January revolution.'
[94] Hussein (1973), p. 96.
[95] De Smet (2016), pp. 152–4; Trimberger (1978), pp. 154–5.
[96] Raymond Hinnebusch, 'The Middle East Regional System', in Raymond Hinnebusch and Annoushiravan Ehteshami (eds), The Foreign Policies of Middle East States (London: Lynne Reiner, 2002).

with and compete with the former colonial powers and their superpower successors.[97] This strategy entailed–successful– confrontation with the old European powers of Britain, France and Israel in 1956 over control of the Suez Canal, and the-disastrous- war with Israel in 1967. The pan-Arab element of Nasser's strategy, embodied in unity with Syria during the failed experiment of the United Arab Republic of 1958-61 and the draining war against the Yemeni monarchy, foundered but he retained a remarkable degree of popularity within Egypt, the other Arab states and the wider post-colonial world. The basis for Nasser's policy lay in the particular conjuncture of the Cold War: the 'long boom' between 1950 and 1980, and the ability to manoeuvre between the US and Soviet blocs in order to obtain foreign aid.[98]

On the basis of this international configuration, Nasser embarked on a re-composition of Egyptian class structure that–for a time at least–improved the lot of urban waged employees and the rural middle and upper peasantry, producing the basis for later popular identification with the military.[99] Despite the regime's self-characterisation as 'socialist', Adel Rifaat and Bahgat El-Nadi sum up the Nasserist transformation well: between 1952 and 1967 'the ruling coalition of big landowners and their urban capitalist affiliates and Western European imperial capitalists (especially British) was replaced by an indigenous bourgeois coalition dominated by the state bourgeoisie' propped up by Soviet wheat imports and export credits.[100] Two rounds of land reform, in 1952 and 1961 ended

[97] Hussein (1973), pp. 114–7.
[98] Alexander and Bassiouny (2014), p. 45.
[99] Sara Salem, 'Critical interventions in debates on the Arab revolutions: centering class', Review of African Political Economy, 45:155 (2018), pp. 127–8.
[100] Hussein (1973), p. 113'Mahmoud Hussein' was the nom-de-plume adopted by these two authors.

the dominion of the large landowners and redistributed productive land primarily to middle and wealthy peasants.[101]

The 'socialist decrees' of 1961 were also accompanied by social welfare provision for workers, guarantees against dismissal and provision for worker's representation on company boards.[102] Half of the seats in the–largely powerless– National Assembly were reserved for 'workers and peasants', although in practice this came to mean trade union bureaucrats, businessmen and agricultural entrepreneurs.[103] Nasser sought a degree of independence from the military institution to which he belonged, but the military formed the institutional spine of the state itself, occupying an unavoidable place in the everyday life of the country.[104] Nonetheless, the memory of this era served both to condemn the neoliberal regime that followed it and to offer an alternative model. The Nasserist attachment to the state, and especially to the military, therefore provided fertile ground for counter-revolution.[105]

What changed? By the mid-1960s, the Egyptian elite had thus been recomposed around a state bourgeoisie–with the military at its heart– attempting import-substitute-industrialisation and accepting passive popular support, or at least acceptance. The basis of this support was unstable: still reliant upon cotton exports and external aid to cover the import of basic necessities, Egypt faced a chronic balance of payments crisis. The prestige of the regime, if not Nasser himself, as a defender of national and Arab dignity against Israel was shaken by the disastrous defeat of 1967. In

---

[101] Ray Hinnebusch, Egyptian Politics under Sadat: The post-populist development of an authoritarian-modernizing state (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 28.
[102] Hussein (1973), p. 177.
[103] Alexander and Bassiouny (2014), p. 44.
[104] Abdelrahman (2014), pp. 24–5.
[105] Marfleet (2016), pp. 179–82.

response, Nasser had intimated a change of course with a series of austerity measures already in the late 1960s.[106] Only after his death did Nasser's successor Anwar Sadat mount a full *volte-face* in the policy known as '*infitah*', or 'opening'. Sadat reversed the policy of state-led development in favour of privatization and free-market policies in an early instance of what would come to be known as neo-liberalism: concomitant with these domestic policies, Sadat turned towards international alliance with the United States, expelling Soviet advisors and making a separate peace treaty with Israel. The latter led to his assassination by an Islamist militant in 1980. Sadat's successor Mubarak in turn only deepened the policies of US alignment and neoliberal economics, however, producing the combustible social situation that ignited in 2011.

The 25th January revolution was thus in large part directed against the developmental model pursued by Mubarak and Sadat. This model had indeed produced GDP growth but also a marked degree of inequality within the state and foreign policy subordination to the US outside it: the opposite of Nasserist aspirations. The core ruling group, by the middle 2000s, consisted of the Mubarak family–especially the dictator's son and presumed heir, Gamal 'Jimmy' Mubarak–and their business associates such as the steel magnate Ahmed Ezz.[107] The implementation of an IMF/ World Bank Structural Adjustment Plan in 1991 had accelerated the *infitah* process, providing for a wave of privatizations, especially in the mid-2000s.[108] Private, as opposed to state, capital came to predominate in the Egyptian ruling class, albeit with those private businessmen occupying key positions in the state apparatus, concentrated in 'two dozen family conglomerates.'[109] It was largely

---

[106] Alexander and Bassiouny (2014), p. 45.
[107] Kandil (2012), pp. 210–3.
[108] Roberto Roccu, 'David Harvey in Tahrir Square: the dispossessed, the discontented and the Egyptian revolution', Third World Quarterly, 34:3 (2013), p. 430.
[109] Kandil (2012), p. 208.

these Mubarak-era businessmen who would come to be known as *feloul*, 'remnants', after 2011.

The military was not marginalised, however, but rather adapted to the new dispensation, acquiring substantial interests in energy, infrastructure and real estate.[110]

Benefitting from *infitah* economics, but outside the political power structure, lay the Islamist bourgeoisie. Excluded from the patronage of the regime, these pious industrialists developed their own commercial networks attracting the support of small businessmen and professionals.[111] The leading members of the MB (such as Khairat al-Shater, their desired presidential candidate in 2012) were themselves wealthy entrepreneurs and the organization derived its funding from donations and external states.[112] To keep the Muslim Brotherhood out, and the rest of society down, Mubarak greatly expanded and multiplied the internal security agencies, accompanied by an increasingly brutal auxiliary corps of *baltageya* ('thugs') to police the politically and economically dispossessed majority.[113] This apparatus presided over an economic landscape of increasing inequality and unemployment: by 2010, 40% of the population lived at or below the poverty line of $2 per day,[114] and youth unemployment, in an overwhelmingly youthful population, reached 42%.[115]

---

[110] Shana Marshall and Joshua Stacher, 'Egypt's Generals and Transnational Capital', Middle East Report, 262 (2012).
[111] Robert Springborg, Mubarak' Egypt: Fragmentation of the Political Order (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989), pp. 213–4.
[112] Gilbert Achcar, The People want: a radical exploration of the Arab uprising (London: Saqi, 2013), pp. 284–5.
[113] Kandil (2012), pp. 194–8.
[114] Andrea Teti, 'Political and Social Change in Egypt: Preludes to the January Uprising' (Arab Transformations Working Papers, 2017), p. 8.
[115] Andrea Teti and Pamela Abbot, 'Building Decent Societies: Economic and Political Cohesion in Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia' (European Commission, 2016), p. 4.

The revolutionary insurrection of 2011 being a result of these dire conditions, how was a restoration possible? Why would the business elites of the *infitah* period go along with a coup decked out in ostensibly Nasserist colours? The answer lies in the role of Nasserist politics, and the inheritance of his national developmentalist project, in producing the vital bond between counter-revolution from above and below. The revolt against the neo-liberal dispensation of the Sadat-Mubarak era posed the question of which alternative order ought to replace it: the two such alternatives endowed with organisational strength and popular recognition were that of the Muslim Brotherhood's Islamically-inflected neoliberalism on the one hand, and a return to Nasserist national developmentalism on the other.

Popular Nasserist themes were already strongly embedded in the revolutionary movement in 2011. The 'Nasserist language of dignity and social justice… was now reworked to critique what many saw as a neo-colonial dynamic between external support and domestic tyranny.'[116] The 25th January revolution was frequently identified with previous national movements against colonial power, including both genuinely popular revolts such as that of 1919 as well as the Free Officers' coup of 1952.[117] Pictures of Nasser were prominently displayed in the protests and the (post-1979) national anthem sung in Tahrir Square.[118] Keenly attuned to the power of such cultural identification, state radio and TV channels broadcast the patriotic songs of the 1960s throughout the days following the fall of Mubarak.[119]

---

[116] Abou-El-Fadl (2015a), p. 13.
[117] Marfleet (2016), p. 15.
[118] Abou-El-Fadl (2015a), p. 13.
[119] Zeinab Abul-Magd, 'Egypt's Adaptable Officers: Business, Nationalism and Discontent', in *Businessmen in Arms: How the Military and Other Armed Groups Profit in the MENA Region* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), p. 31.

To turn this nationalist inheritance into a support for strategic counter-revolution would require a much more organised form, one that could win over even part of the revolutionary movement itself. In the initial attempts at counter-revolution, the Mubarak regime and then SCAF relied heavily on the despised *baltageya,* such as were deployed in the 'Battle of the Camel' in early February 2011.[120] These forces were too few in number, too associated with the Mubarak period and their violence too obvious to be effective. Only with the coming to power of the Muslim Brotherhood in 2012 did the potential for unity between SCAF, the *feloul* and parts of the former revolutionary coalition emerge. Central to this unity was the enduring influence of the politics of Nasserism, particularly on the leadership of the independent workers' union and youth movements, reflecting thereby the deeply generative effect of the history of attempts at international developmental 'catch-up' on the Egyptian counter-revolution.[121] Two organisations played a crucial role in creating ties between the mass movement and SCAF: the National Salvation Front, and Tamarrod.

Tamarrod was formed after the NSF, but its political composition and relations with the state were both closer and more revealing of the dynamics of counterrevolution than its forerunner. Founded in April 2013, with a young Nasserist activist, Mahmoud Badr as its public face, Tamarrod made no secret of its support for the Egyptian military nor of its reliance on SCAF to remove Morsi.[122] Badr, and the rest of the leadership of Tamarrod, emerged from the 'Kefaya' pro-democracy movement, and the Nasserist current that formed its mainstay.[123] Couched in the language of fealty to the revolution, Tamarrod's campaign nonetheless established close links with both the army and the

---

[120] Ketchley (2017), pp. 66–8.
[121] Lawson (2017), pp. 89–90.
[122] Mike Giglio, 'Mahmoud Badr is the Young Face of the Anti-Morsi Movement', The Daily Beast (2 July 2013), available at {https://www.thedailybeast.com/mahmoud-badr-is-the-young-face-of-the-anti-morsi-movement} accessed 20 January 2018.
[123] Abdelrahman (2014), pp. 110.

Ministry of Interior, which put aside their differences to co-operate against the MB presidency.[124]

Badr's brother, Ahmed, confirmed that 'of course we knew the police were on our side', a

relationship confirmed from the other side through retired state security officials.[125] Leaked

conversations, purportedly of Sisi himself and chiefs of the navy, police and defence ministry, seem

to reveal relationships of direct financial support from the Egyptian state (and the United Arab

Emirates) to Tamarrod.[126] The eagerness with which Tamarrod sought the protection and aid of

the military alienated many activists who shared its opposition to Morsi, but who thought him too

close to, rather than too far from, the security apparatus.[127]

The reaction of that apparatus to the mass demonstrations of 30th June 2013 marked a stark

contrast with the confrontations and collective violence of the '18 days'. [128] Not police stations, but

Brotherhood facilities and governorate offices left unguarded by the police, were destroyed.[129]

Security officers called for citizens to attend the demonstrations, and did so themselves *en masse*,

and in some cases in uniform.[130] The military coup that followed these protests on the 3rd of July led

to the formation of a rival protest camp, insisting on Morsi's legitimacy. After an initial sally on the

8th of July, the newly installed government of Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi called a protest of its own to

'defeat terrorism' on the 26th of July, symbolic anniversary of the Free Officers' coup some sixty-one

---

[124] Ketchley (2017), pp. 112–3.
[125] Ketchley (2017), pp. 112.
[126] Patrick Kingsley, Will #SisiLeaks be Egypt's Watergate for Abdel Fatah al-Sisi?, The Guardian (5 march 2015) available at {https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/05/sisileaks-egypt-watergate-abdel-fatah-al-sisi} accessed 21 January 2018.
[127] Giglio (2013); Ketchley (2017), pp. 113.
[128] Ketchley (2017), pp. 113–27.
[129] Ketchley (2017), pp. 113–6.
[130] Ketchley (2017), pp. 120–1.

years before.[131] Tamarrod and the National Salvation Front supported both this mobilisation, and the attack on the pro-Morsi sit in that followed in on The 14th of August. [132] In a statement on the attack, the NSF saluted the 'police and military forces' and 'firm leadership of the armed forces and the collective will of the people' in 'the dispersal of the sit-in.'[133]

Formed in the autumn of 2012 to oppose Morsi's constitutional reforms, the National Salvation Front brought together most of the non-Islamist pre-2011 opposition together with elements of the old regime *feloul*. More politically heterogeneous than Tamarrod, the NSF did not initially call for the end of Morsi's presidency but only for the rescinding of Morsi's constitutional plans and the calling of a constituent assembly. The constituent parts of the National Salvation Front were embodied in its most prominent personalities: Mohammed El-Baradei, former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency and standard-bearer of Egyptian liberalism; Hamdeen Sabahi, the long-standing firebrand of the Nasserist Left and close contender in the first round of the 2012 presidential election; and 'Amr Moussa, former Mubarak foreign minister, identified with the more liberal end of the old regime.[134] The NSF also embraced a large part of the Egyptian Left, including the Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party. Participation in the Front together with elements of the old regime split the latter organisation: after supporting the coup of July 2013 the NSF itself declined into political incoherence. What had welded these elements together was the shared view, reflecting a common trope of the Nasserist period, of the Muslim Brotherhood as a

---

[131] Rachel Aspden, Generation revolution: how Egypt's military state betrayed its youth, The Guardian (2 June 2016), available at {https://www.theguardian.com/news/2016/jun/02/generation-revolution-egypt-military-state-youth} accessed 20 January 2018.
[132] Aspden (2016).
[133] Abdelrahman (2014), pp. 115.
[134] De Smet (2016), p. 215.

conspiratorial foreign entity threatening the Egyptian state.[135] The participation of former

opposition figures in Tamarrod and the NSF thus reflected a Nasserist politics focused on the state,

and especially the military, as bearer of a project of national development in a hierarchical

international order.[136] It was this experience that thus gave Sisi's counterrevolution popular

traction: an appeal that the participation of such figures helped to spread wide and deep.[137]

This participation endowed the counter-revolutionary regime with an initial degree of legitimacy.

At the core of the post-coup regime lay, of course, the military and their considerable economic

interests, allied with the sprawling state security apparatus and its connections to Mubarak-era

business networks.[138] In a sure sign of counter-revolution, the former dictator Mubarak was

pardoned of his role in the suppression of the uprising and pre-2011 corruption and his sons

released from prison, while the elected president Mohamed Morsi was sentenced to death. Other

ancien regime figures such as were granted similar leniency under a specifically drafted

'reconciliation law.'[139]

The Sisi regime's relationship with the private businessmen who had dominated the late Mubarak

era was contradictory: defending business interests, for example by repressing strikes and

---

[135] Marfleet (2016), pp. 160–1.
[136] Abdelrahman (2014), pp. 24.
[137] Sarah Carr, 'Egypt under the New July Republic', Jadaliyya (2 July 2015) available at:
{http://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/32246/Egypt-under-the-New-July-Republic} accessed 21 January 2018;
Joshua Hammer, Egypt: The New Dictatorship, New York Review of Books (8 June 2017); Amr Khalifa,
'Egypt's Age of Intellectual Fascism', Middle East Eye (15 May 2017) available at:
{http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/egypt-s-age-intellectual-terrorism-940558559} accessed 20 January
2018.
[138] Hazem Kandil, 'Sisi's Egypt', New Left Review, 102 (2016).
[139] 'Mubarak-era steel tycoon Ahmed Ezz to pay EGP 1.7 billion deal with Egyptian govt', Ahram Online
available at {http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/291888/Business/Economy/Mubarakera-
steel-tycoon-Ahmed-Ezz-to-pay-EGP--bill.aspx } accessed 10 August 2018.

encouraging (again in Nasserist language) workers to drop their 'sectional interests' and press hard on the 'wheel of production', Sisi also sought to tap private capital to fund a promised plan of neo-Nasserist national development.[140] Where Nasser had in fact confronted and nationalised private capital and landholdings, however, Sisi pursued no such course. To the extent that this regime differed from the pre-2011 dispensation, it reversed the relationship between the military and the repressive apparatus of the interior ministry, with the former now in a commanding position. This change implied no slackening of internal repression: quite the opposite as noted above. The position of the military did allow, however, for an explosion of popular sentiment in support of the regime drawing upon the image of the army as defender of national unity.[141]

By these means, the post-coup regime relied upon a wider zone of support, in which Nasserism was the dominant identifiable political colouring. The committee charged with drafting a new constitution assembled a cast of such figures, including the head of the Nasserist party, the head of Karama (Hamdeen Sabahi's neo-Nasserist party), and Mahmoud Badr himself. Hossam Eissa, a prominent Nasserist was appointed to the position of deputy prime minister and minister of education; more significant was the designation of Kamal Abu Eita, leading Left Nasserist and perhaps, as one of the founders of the Egyptian Independent Trade Union Federation one of the most famous trade unionists in the country, as minister of Labour.[142] Prominent intellectuals of the Nasserist Left and liberal centre alike declared the necessity of closing the national ranks in the

---

[140] Abul-Magd (2016), p. 34.
[141] This sentiment found expression in an effusion of Sisiana, from cakes baked in the form of the general's face, to the pop song Tislam el-Ayadi, explicitly invoking the spirit of the 1973 war to praise Sisi. Abul-Magd (2016), p. 34.
[142] Alexander and Bassiouny (2014), pp. 246.

fight against the 'fascists'[143] and 'terrorism'[144] of the MB. As the Sisi regime became more

embedded, the circle of repression widened, and the absence of a revived economic plan became

apparent, it increasingly shed these figures.[145]

The Egyptian counter-revolution, then closed a revolutionary situation of contested sovereignty

that resulted from a mass, class-based revolt from below. To succeed, that counter-revolution had to

unite a part of the revolutionary movement together with the ruling cadres of the state, building

popular support for the repressive policy of counter-revolution. At first sight this appears to

confirm the domestic nature of the phenomenon: however, even in this apparently national process,

the 'logics… of differentially located, but interactively engaged, social sites' played a role through

the prominence of Nasserist politics in building this alliance. This heritage of 'catch-up' nationalism,

deriving from the real experience of Egypt in a hierarchical international system, nonetheless

provided a social base for counter-revolution. Yet there was a further way in which cross-border

social relations impinged on the Egyptian revolutionary process before any revolutionary

sovereignty had been established: the direct financial and security intervention emerging from the

Gulf states and the US, which had been incorporated into the Egyptian ruling class in the post-

Nasser period. This regional and global counter-revolutionary alliance funded, and shielded from

diplomatic pressure, the counter-revolutionary regime detailed above.

---

[143] Patrick Kingsley, Alaa al-Aswany on why he had to support Egypt's military crackdown, The Guardian (2013) available at {https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/oct/29/alaa-al-aswany-egypt-muslim-brotherhood} accessed 20 January 2018
[144] Lin Noueihed and Tom Perry, 'With Brotherhood out, old order shapes Egypt's future', available at: {http://uk.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-protests-oldorder-analysis-idUKBRE97S0LF20130829} accessed 9 June 2017.
[145] Marfleet (2016), pp. 200–2.

Neoliberalism and the social relations of cross-border counter-revolution

The creation of an alliance between the strategic core of the old regime and a mass base, based on the politics of national unity in a hierarchical international system, forms a crucial element of counter-revolutionary success. The practices of counter-revolutionary intervention, through financing, diplomatic isolation and alliance and even direct military means, are a more familiar mode of international counter-revolution. As I demonstrate below in the case of Egypt, contrary to the claim that revolutions only become internationally significant once revolutionaries have won sovereign power, counter-revolutionary intervention was both continuous and consequential from the '18 days' onwards. Moreover, this intervention was not simply responses to conditions of international anarchy but reflected cross-border social relations: in particular the deep interlocking of economic and security interests between Egyptian, Gulf and US elites.

The states making the intervention thus comprised the strongest allies of Mubarak's *ancien regime*: the USA, and the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) countries, most of all Qatar, the UAE, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. However, these states were neither united in their approach, nor were their short-term policies towards the Egyptian revolution divorced from the longer-term effects of the neo-liberal era discussed in the previous section. The policies of that era had brought a close integration between the ruling strata of the Gulf states and Egypt, embodied in shared economic interests, secured by military co-operation with the US. The Egyptian revolution then split this conclave over the necessary strategy in response: the UAE, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia favouring a hard-line opposition to any democratic opening, with Qatar – largely a minority investor in Gulf ventures in Egypt– favouring its allies the Muslim Brotherhood as the channel into which revolutionary energies could be safely diverted. The US initially favoured the former approach, backing Mubarak's

picked successor Omar Suleiman as guarantor of an 'orderly transition', then turned to the latter

only to return again to open support of Abdelfattah El- Sisi once a decent interval had elapsed after

the coup that brought him to power.

The closeness of the relationship between Cairo and Washington, and more especially between the

military establishments of both countries, meant that the Egyptian revolution could never have

been treated as a matter of small interest to US policymakers. Egypt's alignment with the US since

Sadat's turn away from the USSR in the early 1970s –the counterpart to domestic *infitah*– was the

lynchpin of American strategy in the Arab world. The Camp David Accords of 1980, and subsequent

Egypt-Israel peace treaty brought the most populous and central Arab state into stable, if cold,

normalisation with Israel and placed Egypt firmly in the US camp. To cement this turn away from

Nasser's *dirigiste* pan-Arabism, the US provided aid in cash, kind, and training, to the Egyptian

military and, increasingly after the end of the Cold War and perceived rise of an Islamist threat, co-

operation with the internal security forces. US aid to Egypt reached an annual average $1.3 billion in

military aid per year between 1987 and 2013 – 'all of which finances the procurement of weapons

systems and services from US defense contractors.'[146] This sum includes funding for 'International

Military Education and Training' of the Egyptian officer corps.[147]

The Egyptian counter-revolution thus reaffirmed Egypt's post-Nasser status as a strategic security

partner of the United States, especially in prosecuting the 'Global War on Terror' of the 2000s, and

in managing Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation. Both the origins and prosecution of the

---

[146] Jeremy M. Sharp, Egypt: Background and U.S. Relations (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2017).
[147] Sharp (2017), pp. 24. The alumni of this programme included the author of a- somewhat perfunctory-essay on 'Democracy in the Middle East', one Abdelfatah el-Sisi.

'War on Terror' were intertwined with Egyptian politics: the local Islamist insurgencies of 1980 (in Asyut in upper Egypt) and the 1990s (mainly in the impoverished Imbaba district of Cairo) produced both the cadres and the leadership of al-Qai'da including Ayman Al-Zawahiri. The consequent Egyptian expertise in repressing Islamists made the Mubarak regime 'the best choice' for outsourcing the practice of torture under 'extraordinary rendition.'[148] The central node of this relationship was Omar Suleiman, Mubarak's intelligence chief, who also managed Egypt's relations with the Palestinian Authority and Israel– a brief that involved the failed attempt to overthrow the Hamas government in Gaza in 2006.[149]

When the '18 Days' began, the US therefore initially expressed a preference for an 'orderly transition' that would maintain these personal and financial bonds through Omar Suleiman as the favoured successor.[150] Once Suleiman had proved unacceptable to the revolutionary street, and the lesser known Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi ascended to the leadership of SCAF, the US nonetheless kept up the accustomed pace of financial support to that unreformed institution: amounting to nearly $1.6 billion in 2011, and the same again in 2012.[151]

While providing aid to the military institution that was engaged in suppressing the on-going revolutionary uprising, the US nonetheless continued to seek interlocutors for an 'orderly

---

[148] Michael Schuer in Mohamed Elmenshawy, 'Is Egypt still part of America's extraordinary rendition programme?', Ahram Online, (2013).
[149] Brownlee (2012), pp. 114–5.
[150] Hilary Rodham Clinton, 'Question and Answer at the Munich Security Conference', February 5, 2011, 2011, US Dept. of State, Former Secretary Clinton's Remarks available at {https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2011/02/156045.htm} accessed 21 January 2018; Jake Sullivan, 'Conference Call to Discuss Egypt', February 9, 2011, 2011, US Dept. of State, Press Releases 2011 available at {https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2011/02/156284.htm} accessed 21 January 2018.
[151] Sharp (2017), pp. 24.

transition.' The electoral success of the Muslim Brotherhood, and their willingness to enter into a compact with SCAF, presented such an interlocutor. If chary about the Brotherhood's Islamism, and potential stance towards Israel–President Obama describing Egypt as neither ally nor enemy[152]– the US was eager to promote bounded transition that threatened neither the underlying economic order in Egypt nor the role the country's regional stance. This position, which was nonetheless to unravel after coup of July 2013, placed the US closer to Qatar than its more familiar allies in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE.

This split in the GCC, pitting the supporters of outright reversion to military authoritarian rule against those who sought to change the revolution into a limited and managed transition, reflected the results of the neoliberal *infitah* period. The Egyptian economy had become both financialised and regionalised, fusing together the upper echelons of the state – including the military and the security apparatus, local business interests and Gulf capital.[153] The predominant players were Kuwaiti, Emirati and Saudi investors, either members of, or closely linked to the ruling families of these monarchies. Gulf investors participated in 37%, by value, of Egyptian privatisations between 2000 and 2008.[154] Gulf interests, mainly Kuwaiti, dominated Egyptian agribusiness, and by 2010 ' Gulf capital groups and sovereign wealth funds were major shareholders or directly controlled nine out of twelve of the largest Egyptian commercial banks.'[155] Gulf private equity, in partnership with Egyptian investors closely linked to the Mubarak regime, took controlling stakes in the

---

[152] 'Obama: Egypt is not US ally nor an enemy' BBC News (13 September 2012), available at: {http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-19584265} accessed 21 January 2018.
[153] Adam Hanieh, 'Rescaling Egypt's Political Economy: Neoliberalism and the transformation of regional space', Revolutionary Egypt: Connecting Domestic and International Struggles (London: Routledge, 2015).
[154] Hanieh (2015), pp. 164.
[155] Hanieh (2015), pp. 166.

management companies responsible for Egypt's privatised infrastructure, and scooped up great swathes of the Egyptian real estate market as hitherto public lands were auctioned off.[156]

The Egyptian revolution not only removed from power the capstone of this lucrative relationship– Hosni Mubarak and his immediate family– it challenged the interests of these investors themselves. This was true both in a general sense, in the threat posed by demands for a maximum wage, an end to temporary contracts, and the widespread labour unrest of 2011-13, and in specific struggles to renationalise enterprises or land sold off to Gulf investors. The struggles of the Egyptian revolution directly reached Saudi policymakers when in 2012 protestors in Cairo forced the temporary closure of the Saudi embassy and the recall of the diplomatic mission.[157] Reversing this process of contention –in other words promoting a counter-revolution in Egypt–therefore became a policy priority for the GCC states, wherein the separation between executive power, inherited wealth and private investment is at most paper-thin.

Where the GCC majority preferred a hard-line of support for SCAF and full rollback of any democratic gains, Qatar sought to cultivate its existing ties with the Muslim Brotherhood: both the likely victor of any democratic election and a force committed to 'ceasing unnecessary protests and strikes.'[158] This policy marked something of a shift: Qatar had in fact been strengthening its ties to the Mubarak regime immediately before the uprising of the 18 days, and initially called for 'stability' in Egypt.[159] The success of the uprising in deposing Mubarak led to a changed Qatari

---

[156] Hanieh (2015), pp. 167–8.
[157] Heba Saleh, 'Saudi Arabia closes Cairo embassy', Financial Times (29 April 2012).
[158] Quotation from MB newspaper 'Justice and Freedom' in Ketchley (2017), pp. 93.
[159] Lina Khatib, 'Qatar's foreign policy: the limits of pragmatism', International Affairs, 89:2 (2013), pp. 417–31.

stance. *Al-Jazeera* network, the Qatari-based news network, opened an Egyptian channel that

provided favourable coverage to the Muslim Brotherhood and, following his election, Mohammed

Morsi.[160] Sheikh Yusuf Qaradawi, the Egyptian-born cleric long a feature on *Al-Jazeera*, reached an

increasing audience to promote the Brotherhood's view of the meaning and opportunities of the

Egyptian–and wider Arab– revolutions.[161] Qatar hosted Muslim Brotherhood leaders, such as

Khairat Al-Shater, and offered free exports of natural gas to ease the economic pressures on Morsi's

presidency.[162] In this vein, the emirate also proffered financial aid to Egypt under Morsi, eventually

pledging a sum of $3 billion: curtly returned after the coup of July 2013.[163]

Qatari courtship of the Brotherhood as beneficiaries of a revolutionary uprising, and with it the

implication that popular sovereignty had some role to play in the affairs of the region, was

anathema to the rest of the GCC. The UAE, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait adopted a hardened counter-

revolutionary response from the outset of the Arab revolutions: the al-Sauds offering asylum to

deposed Tunisian dictator Ben Ali, and advertising their willingness to do the same for Mubarak.[164]

The Saudi *ulema* denounced the revolutions as *fitna* (discord) while state media pursued a Burkean

fascination with the violent disruption associated with the uprisings.[165] The main method of

intervention, however, was a financial one–strengthening and utilising the pre-exiting relationship

between the Egyptian military and SCAF, and the GCC countries. This form of intervention was

[160] Sultan Sooud Al-Qassemi, 'Morsi's win is Al-Jazeera's Loss' Al-Jazeera (2 July 2012), available at: {https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2012/al-monitor/morsys-win-is-al-jazeeras-loss.html} accessed 24 January 2018.
[161] Khatib (2013), pp. 423.
[162] David B. Roberts, 'Qatar and the Brotherhood, Survival', 56:4 (2014), pp. 23–32.
[163] 'Egypt returns $2bln to Qatar', Associated Press 19 September 2013.
[164] Madawi Al-Rasheed, 'Saudi Internal Dilemmas and Regional Responses to the Arab Uprisings', The New Middle East: Protest and Revolution in the Arab World (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 353–79.
[165] Al-Rasheed (2014), pp. 370.

visible in the pattern of Saudi aid to Egypt: 'first starving the Morsi government of funds and then increasing payments to unprecedented levels' after the July 2013 coup.[166] Even before the fall of Mubarak, the Saudi king reportedly offered to replace US funding with Saudi subventions to keep the dictator in place.[167]

The financial contribution of these GCC states to the Egyptian counterrevolution increased sharply after Morsi's overthrow. The same recorded conversations that appear to indicate direct co-ordination between Sisi, the various military chiefs and Tamarrod also appear to reveal UAE funding of that co-ordination. In a remarkable exchange, reportedly recorded between Sisi's Chiefs of Staff, Abbas Kamel and deputy defence minister Sedki Sobhi in June 2013, the former is heard to say 'we will need 200 hundred [thousand Egyptian pounds] tomorrow from Tamarrod's account, you know, the part from the UAE which they transferred.'[168] A later recording, apparently dating from Sisi's presidential campaign in 2014, features Sisi demanding another 'another 10 from the U.A.E., and an additional 2 cents to be put in the Central Bank' and expressing incredulity at the sum of $30 billion as the total received from the GCC to that date.[169] The GCC, the man identified on the tape as 'Sisi' declares, have 'money like rice.'[170]

---

[166] Ruth Hanau Santini, 'Bankrolling Containment: Saudi Linkages with Egypt and Tunisia', Transnational Diffusion and Co-operation in the Middle East (Washington D.C.: George Washington University, 2016), pp. 65–9.

[167] Mehran Kamrava, 'The Arab Spring and the Saudi-led Counterrevolution', Orbis, 56:1 (2012), pp. 96–104.

[168] Kingsley (2015).

[169] David P. Kirkpatrick, 'Leaks gain credibility and potential to embarrass Egypt's leaders', New York Times (12 May 2015) available at {https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/13/world/middleeast/leaks-gain-credibility-and-potential-to-embarrass-egypts-leaders.html} accessed 21 January 2018.

[170] Kirkpatrick (2015).

The public record backs up this blunt assessment. The governor of the Egyptian central bank was

dispatched to Abu Dhabi in July 2013, following the visit of a delegation of senior UAE royals to

Cairo scant days after the coup: an offer of $8 billion in aid from the Emirates and Saudi Arabia was

then made.[171] According to the then minister of investment, between July 2013 and the beginning

of 2015, Egypt received $23 billion from the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.[172] The UAE also funded

the lobbying efforts of the post-coup regime in Washington, providing $2.7 million for the

purpose.[173] The coup had indeed placed the US in a difficult position, having placed hopes in the

Muslim Brotherhood as a partner in 'orderly transition': the Obama administration cancelled

several large weapons orders and cash transfers in the autumn of 2013.[174] However, Obama was

careful to avoid using the word 'coup' to describe the events of July 2013.[175] To do so might have

infringed the 'Leahy Act', which would have required cutting off all aid to Egypt.[176] The partial, and

muted, US response was short-lived, however: the suspended aid and weapons exports were

resumed in March 2015.[177]

This renewed military financing, maintained under the Trump administration, formed part of a

broader counter-revolutionary re-trenchment: by 2015 Egyptian military import spending, on a

---

[171] Michael Peel, Camilla Hall, and Heba Saleh, Saudi Arabia and UAE prop up Egypt regime with offer of $8bn, Financial Times (10 July 2013).
[172] 'Egypt got $23 billion in aid from Gulf in 18 months – minister', Reuters (2 March 2015) available at {https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-egypt-investment-gulf/egypt-got-23-billion-in-aid-from-gulf-in-18-months-minister-idUKKBN0LY0UT20150302} accessed 25 January 2018.
[173] 'UAE covers cost of Egyptian lobbying in DC',Mada Masr (5 October 2017) available at: {https://www.madamasr.com/en/2017/10/05/news/u/uae-covers-cost-of-egyptian-lobbying-in-dc/} accessed 24 January 2018.
[174] Sharp (2017), pp. 6–7.
[175] 'Statement by President Barack Obama on Egypt', The White House, Office of the Press Secretary (3 July 2013) available at {https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/07/03/statement-president-barack-obama-egypt}accessed 25 January 2018.
[176] Sharp (2017), pp. 20–1.
[177] Sharp (2017), pp. 7.

variety of big-ticket items from France, Germany and Russia as well as the US, amounted $2.268 billion.[178] Part of this hardware was directed against the local ISIS insurgency in the Sinai, but also locked the Sisi regime into EU plans to 'police the region and secure Europe's southern border', and into regional counter-revolutionary interventions with UAE and Saudi forces in Yemen and Libya.[179]

The financial support of the majority of the GCC, with the UAE and Saudi Arabia in the vanguard, thus played a vital role in consolidating the counter-revolution of Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and the Egyptian military. Qatar was left side-lined, but the US, after initial response of muted disapproval, soon returned to the fold. These financial interventions–the expectation that they would flow 'like rice'–played a vital role in the calculations of the counter-revolutionaries, demonstrating that counter-revolutionary intervention can successfully play a role before, and to prevent, the establishment of any long-lasting revolutionary regime. However, the success of such immediate policies of intervention was also dependent on an interaction with the emergence of a counter-revolutionary movement with roots in a longer timescale: the consequences of the decades-long era of *infitah* neo-liberalism under Sadat and Mubarak, accommodating Egypt to US predominance and free-market economics, and adopted as a response to the exhaustion of the Nasserist project of state-led development. That era both produced a reaction in the form of neo-Nasserist political forces that saw the Egyptian state and its armed forces as the appropriate vehicle of popular will, and transformed the political economy that that state defended, creating the unity of interests that the GCC countries sought to defend after the revolutionary explosion of 2011.

---

[178] Nael Shama, 'Egypt's Power Game: Why Cairo is Boosting its Military Power', Jadaliyya available at: {http://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/34539/Egypt%E2%80%99s-Power-Game-Why-Cairo-is-Boosting-its-Military-Power} accessed 17 August 2018.
[179] Shama (2017).

Conclusion

The case of the Egyptian directs us to a different way of thinking about revolution and counter-revolution in IR. Revolutions have gone from being a relatively neglected backwater in the field to a central component of research on the birth and maintenance of international orders. Nonetheless, to the extent that counter-revolutions have been examined under this rubric, the discussion has largely been confined to instances of counter-revolutionary intervention, military or otherwise, against relatively well- established revolutionary regimes. As I have sought to demonstrate above, the example of the Egyptian revolution between 2011 and 2013 illustrates the necessity of a re-conception of international counter-revolution. The Egyptian revolution represented an open historical process of contestation begun by a 'basic split in the polity' undermining the view of revolution as a fixed phenomenon defined by its endpoint of successful transformation. Counter-revolutionaries, both domestic and international intervened to end the revolutionary situation and forestall any prospect of such transformation. The international aspects of this intervention were not limited to the financial, diplomatic and security support offered to the counter-revolutionary regime but reached further back, drawing on the experience of policies of 'catch-up' national developmentalism to unite counter-revolution from above and below.

To draw upon a single instance, such as that of Egypt, can only be indicative rather than conclusive. Nonetheless, the case demonstrates that–contrary to the claims of much of the existing literature–that revolutionary situations are important to other states, even before revolutionaries establish a new sovereign order. Important enough, that is, that external seek to intervene in these situations and restore the *status quo ante*.