

Comparing the failed coup attempt in Turkey with the coup in Egypt

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Abstract: Different patterns of military hegemony and different strategies adopted by elected governments in resistance to this hegemony may be the main factors that explain the different outcomes between the successful military coup in Egypt 2013 and the failed coup attempt in Turkey 2016.

While the Turkish military attempted to establish political hegemony over the state through guardianship from outside, the Egyptian military managed to establish it via infiltration and colonization of the state from inside. While the AK Party government in Turkey adopted a strategy which included both co-optation and confrontation to encounter the military's political powers, the appeasement strategy adopted by successive Egyptian rulers, even after the 2011 revolution, ended up transferring even more political influence to the military over the state.

Therefore, in contrast to Turkish civilians who responded to the coup attempt in an undivided and in a decisive way, civilian political powers in Egypt were too divided and hesitant to stand together in the face of the military.

DEFINING A COUP IS NOT AS EASY AS IT MAY SEEM. ON one hand, it is important to differentiate it from various violent ways in which a regime may be overthrown, such as revolutions, military rebellions, civil wars, and etc. On the other hand, it should be differentiated also from mere political plots or pressures that might be exerted on an elected government to alter its policies or even to induce changes in its leadership. Jonathan Powell & Clayton Thyne suggest a specific, practical definition. They define the coup as “illegal and overt attempts by the military or other elites within the state apparatus to unseat the sitting executive.”¹

This definition specifies four main criteria for any regime change endeavor to be described as a coup d'état:

- a. to be an actual and overt attempt, not only a plot or a threat,
- b. to use illegal means,
- c. to be committed by an organized faction within the state apparatus (whether military institutions or not), rather than foreign invaders nor popular militia.
- d. and to target the state's primary leader or the chief executive, not any lower incumbent.

This conceptual clarification is an important initial step in avoiding politically manipulated terms and intentionally false framing that may label a brutal military coup in Egypt a “popular revolution” or a coup attempt in Turkey as “Turkish uprisings.”²

Officer-Guarded Republic vs. Officer-Colonized Republic

Statistical data indicates that MENA region is a breeding-ground for military coups. Out of 457 coup attempts between 1950 and 2010, 72—or 15.8% of the total worldwide—occurred in the Middle East (Figs. 1-3).³

Moreover, since the 2011 Arab Spring, the whole region has been in political turmoil. In that time, further military coups have been attempted in a number of countries, most importantly the coup against Mohammed Morsi, the first freely-elected civilian president of the Egyptian Republic in 2013 and the recent coup attempt in Turkey in July 2016.

Both Turkey and Egypt are considered coup-vulnerable states. They share many features regarding the nature of the military institution and its relationship with the state, which could explain this vulnerability.

First, in both countries, the army played a pivotal role in the establishment of the republic, whether during and after a war of independence, as in the case of Turkey in the 1920s, or after ending British occupation and overthrowing a monarchy, as the Free Officers' movement did in Egypt in the 1950s.⁴ This fact has led the military in both countries to feel a kind of "ownership" of the state; as General Cevik Bir, a deputy Turkish commander-in-chief in the 1990s, once stated "we founded this republic and we are going to protect it."⁵

Also, since the foundation of both republics, their threat perceptions from neighbor countries have rendered them "a warfare states", which are the states "so preoccupied with military preparation that it permeates all levels of the economy, society, and culture."⁶

Accordingly, both countries have a complicated relationship between their military institutions, and the state apparatuses and elected governments from the other side. However, these relationships have followed two very different paths in the two countries.

In Turkey, for a long time the army, by and large, used to practice a supervisory role over civilian government. Whenever the military felt that the current government threatened the Turkish Republic's Kemalist principles, which were sometimes very broad and fuzzy, they organized a coup. These coup attempts succeeded on four different occasions: in 1960, against the Democratic Party led by Adnan Menderes; in 1971, to regain 'stability' after political chaos and violence committed by leftist groups; in 1980, when ideological and political violence once again

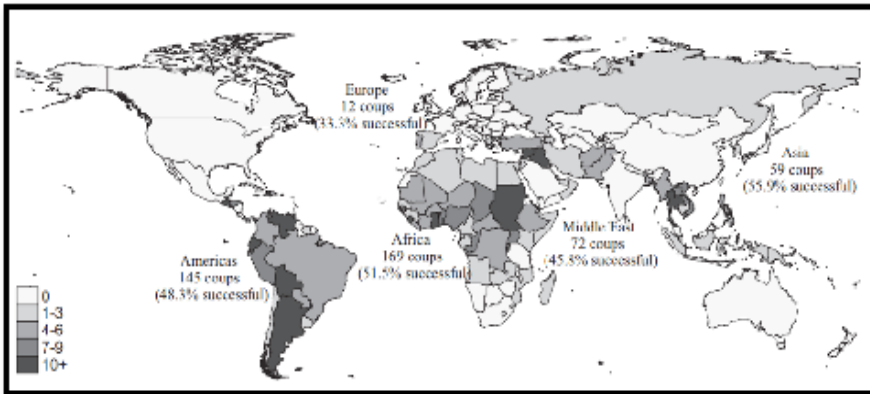


Fig.1 Incidences and Distribution of the Global Military Coups (1950 – 2010)

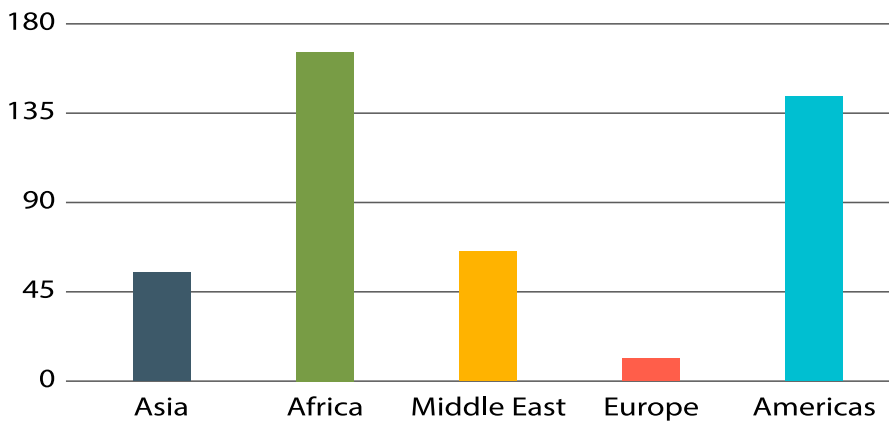


Fig.2 Number of the Global Military Coups (1950 – 2010)

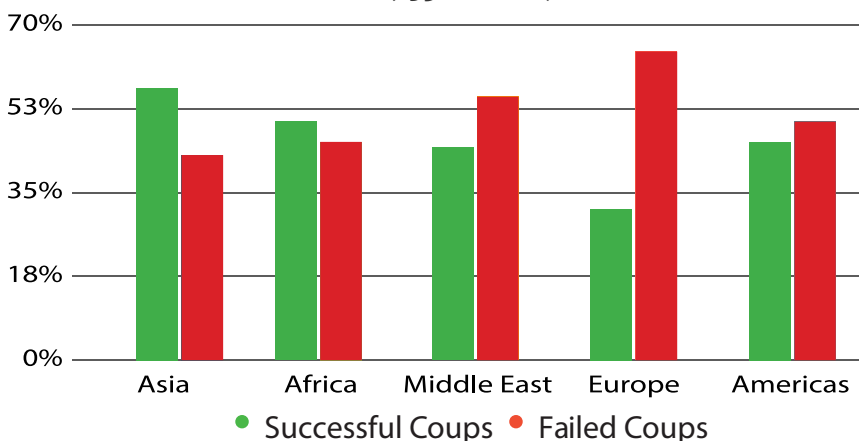


Fig.3 Incidences of Global Military Coups Success (1950 – 2010)



reached a dangerous level; and in 1997, when a “silent coup” was organized against the pro-Islamic prime minister Necmettin Erbakan, through claims that the Welfare Party-led (Refah Party) government was endangering the ‘laic’ character of the republic by its deeds, discourse and policies.⁷

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These kinds of military coups can be categorized, according to Samuel Huntington’s typology, as “Guardian Coups”, which means that the army becomes “a conservative guardian of the existing order”⁸ both against more traditional “reactionary” forces and more radical “progressive” groups as well.

In case of Egypt, the situation was totally different. The military coup organized by the Free Officers’ movement in 1952, which laid down the foundations of the Egyptian Republic, is classified by Huntington as a “Breakthrough Coup”. In this type, the army, which represented at that time the vanguard of nationalism and the most cohesive and disciplined element in “the new” middle class, organized a coup against the oligarchic traditional government of the Egyptian Monarchy and created a new regime.⁹ However, after regime consolidation through another minor “palace” coup against General Mohammad Naguib, the first president of the Egyptian Republic, the military did not feel the need to carry out any further coups until the 2011 uprisings (table 1).

Country	Date of the Coup	Fate of the Coup
Egypt	23 – 7 – 1952	Success
Egypt	14 – 11 – 1954	Success
Turkey	27 – 5 – 1960	Success
Turkey	22 – 2 – 1962	Failure
Turkey	20 – 5 – 1963	Failure
Turkey	12 – 3 – 1971	Success
Turkey	10 – 9 – 1980	Success
Turkey	28 – 2 – 1997	Success
Egypt	11 – 2 – 2011	Success
Egypt	3 – 7 – 2013	Success
Turkey	15 – 7 – 2016	Failure

Table 1: Military Coups in Egypt and Turkey

The Egyptian military followed a different strategy to its Turkish counterparts. In contrast to the in-and-out strategy adopted by the Turkish army, the Egyptian army established political hegemony through infiltrating and colonizing state structures. Accordingly, all successive presidents of the Egyptian Republic: Mohammed Naguib (1953 – 1954), Gamal Abdel Nasser (1956 – 1970), Anwar Sadat (1970 – 1981), and Hosni Mubarak (1981 – 2011) came from the military. Also, the top-ranked military officers enjoyed access to many top positions in the Egyptian civilian bureaucracy after their retirement (especially in local government, the security services, administrative monitoring institutions, and state-owned public utilities).¹⁰ Therefore, one of the directors of the Military Academy once stated that their students were the leaders of the future; the ministers, governors, ambassadors, heads of the republic, and the managers.¹¹

In addition, the Egyptian military is allowed to exercise exclusive control over its own budget, including U.S. military assistance and a huge network of military and non-military businesses, and it enjoys a de facto autonomy and immunity from parliamentary monitoring and accountability.¹²



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Interestingly, the Egyptian military, after being taken by surprise in 2011, started to consider the Turkish guardianship model of political hegemony. Massive popular uprisings, which swept the whole country for more than two weeks, forced the military to conduct what appeared at that time as a “democratic coup d’état” against Mubarak.¹³ Fears of disorder, rising violence, and military defections were not the only reasons behind the decision of the military to side with the protesters. The military dissatisfaction with the possibility of Mubarak’s succession by his son Gamal, the rise of the political influence of the police and other security forces, and economic malaise and stagnation were other important factors.¹⁴

After the Egyptian uprisings, when it seemed that the Egyptian Republic would inevitably go through massive changes and that the military “colonies” in the state structure were not safe from these changes, the Egyptian military decided to shift into the “guardian” model of political hegemony. Accordingly, the army demonstrated its acceptance of civilian rule, but in return, it demanded a special status in the constitution guaranteeing its au-

tonomy vis-à-vis the elected government and guardianship on major political issues such as national security and state identity.¹⁵ However, events later made it easy for them to return to the colonization model.

Taming the Army: Through Carrots or Sticks?

The second factor that determined the outcome of the recent civil-military confrontation in both Egypt and Turkey was different strategies adopted to respond to the political hegemony of the army. In such coup-vulnerable states, taming the military is one of the hardest tasks of the elected government.

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In case of Egypt, a variety of “coup-proofing”¹⁶ measures were followed. During Nasser’s era, he reached a shaky agreement with the Field-Marshal Abd al-Hakim Amer, according to which he gave him a free hand to manage military affairs in return for his political support. However, this arrangement rapidly collapsed after the country’s 1967 defeat by Israel. Nasser’s successor Sadat took the opportunity of his military achievement in the 1973 war to establish a healthier relationship between the military and the state. He attempted to make the army more professional through better education, training, and equipment. He also established a paramilitary force (the Central Security Police) to balance the power of the regular army. In addition, he encouraged regular changes of minister of defence and chief of staff to avoid any personal control developing over the armed forces. From his side, to ensure its loyalty, Mubarak allowed the military to increase its economic activities to include military and



non-military products and to develop “a military industrial complex” outside the control of the government’s general accounting organization. Also, the military was allowed to establish its own network of welfare services (housing, hospitals, social clubs, etc.).¹⁷

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On the other hand, since the early 2000s, the Turkish government, headed by the Justice and Development Party (AK Party), began a series of unprecedented steps restricting the political powers of the military. The EU membership process provided a convenient means for the government to undertake reforms in civil-military relations. These steps included constitutional amendments and legal changes that increased the number of civilian members on the National Security Council (MGK) and later reduced the role of the MGK to that of an advisory body, allowed the oversight of military and defense expenditures, eliminated the State Security Courts, allowed civilian courts to try military officials accused of crimes against the constitutional order and state security, prevented the military courts from prosecuting civilians in peacetime, and denied the National Security Council its former unlimited access to public agencies.¹⁸

These substantial changes were preceded by or coupled with the government’s overt

confrontation with the military starting from 2007 and lasting until 2011-12. For instance, this period saw civilian control being extended over military promotions and appointments. Additionally, since 2007, civilian courts have detained and tried hundreds of active-duty and retired military officers accused of being involved in coup plots against the government. More significantly, the surviving leaders of the 1980 coup were put on trial in January 2012. These developments explain why when the Turkish army issued an e-memorandum in 2007 to veto the AK Party’s nomination of Abdullah Gul for the presidency: it no longer had the same level of impact on civilian politics as it would have in previous times, which was more clearly demonstrated during the February 28, 1997 coup.¹⁹

However, events later made it easy for them to return to the colonization model.

In short, from early on in the millennium, the AK Party government, empowered by strong internal legitimacy and a favorable international environment, decided to rein in the untamed and unruly army through legal and institutional restraints. On the other hand, successive Egyptian governments, especially during Mubarak era, preferred to please the military by extending it a package of economic and political privileges in order to guarantee its loyalty.

Notably, Mohammad Morsi, the first civilian president in Egypt after 2011 revolution, after a few attempts at confrontation, decided to pursue the same “temptation “and “appeasement’ strategy with the military. In addition to keeping the military’s economic privileges and the military industrial complex intact and unaccountable, the 2012 constitution created a new establishment that institutionalized the political role of the military.



The National Defense Council, formed of 14 members, 8 of them officers, was constitutionally responsible for ensuring the safety and security of the country, endorsing the budget of the Armed Forces, and being consulted about draft laws related to the Armed Forces. This constitution also legalized the immunity of military officers from prosecution in civilian courts while at the same time allowing civilians to be prosecuted in military courts.²⁰

One could argue that President Morsi was in

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a much weaker position to risk confrontation with the military in comparison to the AK Party in Turkey. On the other hand, others may blame him for failing to utilize the momentum of the Egyptian Revolution to de-militarize the Egyptian Republic.

Conclusion

Looking back at the scenes in July 2013 in Egypt and July 2016 in Turkey, when men on horseback returned back to confront the civilian governments in both countries, we can see how the aforementioned factors led to different outcomes in these confrontations.

In case of Egypt, the military coup was organized by an undivided military, under the ordinary chain of command, and supported by the whole state apparatus, thanks to the deep military infiltration and heavy colonization of the Egyptian Republic. In contrast, the Turkish military's political influence was greatly reduced by legal and institutional restraints, and its tools for exerting guardianship over the Turkish Republic had successfully been limited by the civilian government over the past decade.

Therefore, the July 2016 coup was attempted outside the chain of command and the putschists represented only a faction of the military. Though it included a significant proportion of the military's top brass, it still was not supported by the whole military, let alone the whole state apparatus.

In addition, the in-and-out strategy of the Turkish military allowed for the establishment of a more developed civilian politics (i.e., more legitimate political parties, more coherent political stratum, more mature political awareness, etc.) in the intervening democratic periods. In the case of Egypt, enduring military-hegemonic authoritarianism resulted in a fragile political class, fake party politics, and ill-developed political awareness. Therefore, in contrast to Turkish civilians who responded to the coup attempt in an undivided and in a decisive way, civilian political powers in Egypt were too divided and hesitant to stand together in the face of the military.

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Endnotes:

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ABOUT ALSHARQ FORUM

The Sharq Forum is an independent international network whose mission is to undertake impartial research and develop long-term strategies to ensure the political development, social justice and economic prosperity of the people of Al-Sharq. It will do this through public-spirited research, promoting the ideals of democratic participation, an informed citizenry, multi-stakeholder dialogue and social justice.

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