

Containing the Contradictions of the Egyptian Uprising Through the New Administrative  
Capital: A Postcolonial Critique of the Egyptian Armed Forces' Transformation

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## **ABSTRACT**

Despite the political and economic demands made by protesters during the 2011 Egyptian uprising, authoritarianism and austerity have only augmented since. This thesis explains the Egyptian uprising's unfinished political and economic missions by tracing the transformation of the political and economic role of the Egyptian Armed Forces (EAF) domestically and internationally, particularly its involvement in megaprojects. It shows how neoliberalism and Arab–Israeli conflict normalization fundamentally reshaped the role of the EAF from a decolonizing, military-driven developmentalist force to a for-profit, domestically-focused, and self-preserving body. They also radically altered earlier megaprojects from an assertion of a self-determined national sovereignty—conducive to supplanting patterns of colonial economic domination—to an assertion of a securocratic, megamilitarist, and parapopulist (Amar) sovereignty imperative for sustaining the highly unstable regime and international financial interests. Drawing from scholarly and gray literature, this thesis conducts a case study of the New Administrative Capital megaproject and applies a postcolonial critique to reveal the current contradictions of sovereignty. The New Administrative Capital signifies the waning sovereignty of the military regime, alongside processes of de-democratization, force, investment, and dispossession. Neocolonial economic patterns of domination have disenfranchised people in postcolonial states, and resultantly the regime's sovereignty is constantly being contested by the people. This thesis synthesizes critiques of neoliberalism and postcolonial critiques to highlight the inextricable link between political and economic justice and show the significance of recalling the New International Economic Order, particularly its notion that political sovereignty cannot be realized without a restructuring of the global economic order.

*Keywords:* Sovereignty, Egyptian Armed Forces, Egyptian Uprising, Postcolonialism, New Administrative Capital, Statist Neoliberalism, New International Economic Order

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## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

- I. Introduction
- II. Literature Review
  - A. The Postcolonial Notion of Sovereignty
  - B. New International Economic Order and the Non-Aligned Movement
  - C. The Transformation of the Military's Economic Role
  - D. Impetuses and Types of Megaprojects
- III. Tracing the Political and Economic Role of the Egyptian Armed Forces
  - A. Gamal Abdul Nasser and the Third Worldist Era: 1956 - 1970
    - 1. The Impetus for Megaprojects: Breaking Patterns of Colonial Domination
    - 2. Promoting Pan-Arabism through Wars Abroad
    - 3. Socioeconomic and Political Outcomes for the Egyptian Populace
  - B. Anwar al-Sadat and the Beginning of the Neoliberal Era: 1970 - 1981
    - 1. The Emergence of Arab-Israeli Conflict Normalization
    - 2. The Impetus for Megaprojects: Sites of Investments
    - 3. Socioeconomic and Political Outcomes for the Egyptian Populace
  - C. Hosni Mubarak Era and the Deepening of Neoliberalization: 1981 - 2011
    - 1. The Return to the Military's Role in Government
    - 2. Socioeconomic and Political Outcomes for the Egyptian Populace
- IV. The 2011 Egyptian Uprising
  - A. The Rise of Authoritarian Neoliberalism
  - B. 'Accumulation by Dispossession'
  - C. The Consolidation and Contradictions of Military Power Post-Uprising
- V. Case Study: the New Administrative Capital
  - A. The Impetus for Megaprojects: Waning Sovereignty
  - B. Parapopulist Sovereignty
  - C. securocratic Sovereignty
  - D. Statist Neoliberalism and the Military's Role in Megaprojects
  - E. De-Democratization
  - F. Recalling the New International Economic Order
- VI. Conclusion



## **FIGURES**

Figure 1: Diagram of Economic Activity Involving Military Agencies	P. 37
Figure 2: Timeline of Evolution of the Military Economy Since the 1950s	P. 43-45
Figure 3: Architect Design of New Administrative Capital	P. 58
Figure 4: Map of the New Administrative Capital's Location	P. 59
Figure 5: Photo of Residential billboard advertisement, in Cairo, Egypt	P. 62
Figure 6: Blueprint of New Administrative Capital	P. 64
Figure 7: Photo of billboards promoting a new residential housing compound overlook a crowded run-down neighborhood, on the ring road, in Cairo, Egypt	P. 66

## Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2011, a wave of vitality began to flow across Egypt as thousands of Egyptians gathered in Tahrir Square in Cairo to demand the resignation of former President Hosni Mubarak. Lower and middle classes combined their goals to coalesce into a unified movement that demanded both political and economic change—both justice and bread. The surge of uprisings across the Arab world stunned both Egyptian political elites and the West. Some observers denominated these events as the “Arab Awakening”, as though the Arab people had just been awoken and not been rioting for years.

Although these events conveyed to the rest of the World that the Arab world’s democratic breakthrough may have culminated, authoritarian governments preserve their grip on the Arab people over a decade later. In Egypt, current President El-Sisi has declared state of emergency laws, utilized counterterrorism policies, and pursued efforts to modify Egypt’s constitution to crush dissent, jail thousands of political prisoners, and hold quasi-free and fair elections (Elmasry 2018). Along with growing authoritarian measures, El-Sisi’s regime is waging a war on the poor. While visiting Egypt last summer, the distressing number of homeless Egyptians, children selling goods, and struggling families rarely escaped my eyes. While on a balcony in Marsa Matrouh, I pivoted my eyes from the pellucid blue sky to a homeless man poking trash. I reflected on how the 100 Egyptian pounds stored in my wallet translated to a cup of coffee for me in the U.S. as opposed to weeks of bread for him.

Throughout my trip, military personnel also rarely escaped my eyes. The economy, politics, and society have been hegemonized by the Egyptian military. Urban landscapes have been transformed into ever-expanding military camps that enable the Egyptian Armed Forces (EAF) to constantly surveil everyday life. These concomitant processes of authoritarianism,

militarization, and austerity have prompted me to explore why the political and economic demands made during the 2011 Egyptian uprising and shortly enacted after have seemingly come to an end.

This thesis traces the transformation of the political and economic role of the EAF domestically and internationally, particularly its role in managing megaproject building. It conducts a case study of the New Administrative Capital through a postcolonial lens to reveal the current contradictions of sovereignty. Responsible for instilling social, political, and economic order once Egypt was liberated from British colonial rule, the EAF operated as a decolonizing force that engaged in wars abroad to promote Pan-Arabism while pursuing earlier versions of megaprojects to disrupt patterns of colonial economic domination. It espoused a self-determined national sovereignty that was sensitive to the needs of the Egyptian populace and aversive to neocolonialism and all forms of foreign aggression and domination. However, processes of neoliberalism and Arab-Israeli conflict normalization beginning roughly in the 1970s induced the EAF to shift its focus to the preservation of its power and the pursuit of for-profit domestic business and domestic activities. Megaprojects no longer aimed for postcolonial states to delink from colonial powers but steered toward entrepreneurialism and investment-return maximization.

This era also saw the expansion of policing and security services. Given the compatibility between neoliberalism and authoritarianism, as the former expanded the latter, the coercive apparatus of the state quelled riots and demonstrations that were triggered by economic disenfranchisement. Growing political repression gave rise to authoritarian neoliberalism. As the concomitant processes of force, dispossession, and repression impacted all walks of life, the new global economic order resulted in what David Harvey termed ‘accumulation by dispossession’. The working and middle class combined forces to demand both political and economic change.

Recalling the role the EAF played in the post-independence movement, Egyptians expressed their nostalgia for the EAF's heroism and pan-Arab populism. The EAF did not simply become another faction of the ruling class but also retained high esteem from its previous nationalist role. It took advantage of this contradiction to assume political and economic dominance and entrench itself further in the domestic and international economy. The military also transformed its scope and sale through its takeover in 2013 and the subsequent rise of President Abdel Fattah. It morphed into an autonomous actor that can dictate markets and influence government policies and investment strategies (Sayigh 2019). However, the military regime resumed the same interdependent schemes of investment, self-preservation, force, political repression, and dispossession that catalyzed the 2011 uprising in the first place. I refer to the military regime's instability aggravated by these processes as 'contradictions', as the incompatibility of neoliberalism and democratization has only located the regime in a highly contentious and unstable position. Relying on authoritarian measures to safeguard its financial ties, the military regime has been confronted by a declining reputation.

This thesis aims to show how the military aspires for national hegemony and reinstate its legitimacy through the New Administrative Capital while illustrating the trade-off between Egyptian sovereignty and the advancement of neocolonial economic patterns of domination that is reflected in its myriad of public-private partnerships. Using scholarly articles and gray literature, I conduct a case study of the New Administrative Capital to illustrate the following argument: The EAF and the megaprojects that it manages have veered away from decolonizing missions to for-profit agendas, which have unfolded a whirlwind of contradictions and eroded the sovereignty of the state. As a result, the military regime resorts to megaprojects to reassert its sovereignty, which is no longer characterized by a self-determined or decolonized sovereignty

but has transformed into a megamilitarist, parapopulist, and securocratic sovereignty that strives to insulate the regime from the very contradictions that its rule ensues. Moreover, the regime's waning sovereignty shows the significance of the New International Economic Order, as a bonafide self-determined political sovereignty cannot be realized without the postcolonial state's economic sovereignty. As the military regime serves international financial institutions, private companies, and Western states, it jeopardizes its own legitimacy and hence its political rule.

The following chapter reviews literature regarding the postcolonial notion of sovereignty, the EAF's economic role, and the aspirations of megaprojects to illuminate the interdependence of decolonization, the military, and megaprojects. It draws on scholars of Third World approaches to international law (TWAIL) to show how colonialism molded the quasi-neutral doctrine of sovereignty. Despite gaining political sovereignty, postcolonial states remained economically subordinate, which undermined their won political sovereignty. This dilemma created the need for the New International Economic Order, which was proposed by postcolonial states to challenge patterns of neocolonial occupation, domination, and aggression. I then link the conversation among TWAIL scholars to the critical role that the military had played in postcolonial societies. I show how decolonization was not realized without the military in postcolonial states, which is exemplified through the impetus for megaprojects.

The third chapter traces the EAF's political and economic role domestically and internationally, including their involvement in megaprojects, from the Nasser to the Mubarak Era. It shows how neoliberalism and Arab-Israeli conflict normalization radically transformed the EAF and the impetus for megaprojects, both of which steered from agendas of decolonization and social equality to profit-making and investment maximization. Moreover, this era saw the

rise of authoritarian neoliberalism, as an expansion of policing and the security apparatus was warranted to quell riots that were triggered by economic disenfranchisement.

The fourth chapter describes the events leading up to the Egyptian uprising, the demands of the revolution, and its aftermath, including the rise and fall of former President Mohammad Morsi. It describes how authoritarian neoliberalism led to both political and economic disenfranchisement and hence the formation of the Egyptian uprising's broad-based coalition, a process that David Harvey refers to as 'accumulation by dispossession'. Critiques of neoliberalism highlight the way in which political and economic struggles are mutually constitutive, which I use to substantiate the merits of the New International Economic Order. This chapter also discusses the way in which the Egyptian uprising intensified contradictions that continue to haunt and delegitimize the military regime despite its aspirations to hegemonize through a statist neoliberal strategy.

The fifth chapter conducts a case study of the New Administrative Capital. It demonstrates the way in which the megaproject operationalizes an assertion of a megamilitarist, parapopulist, and securocratic sovereignty by the military regime in the face of waning sovereignty. The New Administrative Capital disguises the need for true popular sovereignty and encapsulates the significance of recalling the New International Economic Order, specifically its notion that political sovereignty must be attached to material implications that allow a postcolonial state to dictate its own political and economic decisions.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **A. The Postcolonial Notion of Sovereignty**

Whereas Western approaches to international law conceive colonialism as a peripheral subject, Antony Anghie (2006) and other Third World approaches to international law (TWAIL) scholars argue that colonialism is central to the formation of international law's founding concept, sovereignty. The Treaty of Westphalia of 1648 stipulated that sovereign states are all equal and have absolute power over their own territory. Although non-European states historically lacked this sovereignty, it is thought that Westphalian sovereignty was extended to include all societies, which is referred to as the "Expansion of International Society." As non-European states ultimately won their sovereignty, Westphalian expansion was fully realized through decolonization. This signifies that colonialism has been overcome by the way in which international law has promoted decolonization.

Conversely, Anghie contends that the end of formal colonialism did not absolve colonial relations. Colonialism did not only profoundly shape doctrines of international law but also the very foundations of international law, such as the quasi-neutral doctrine of sovereignty. Given their economic dependence on the West, postcolonial states continued to assume a subordinate role in the international system. Postcolonial states' economic dependence on the West was ensured through the rules of international economic law. By adopting the notion of sovereignty, postcolonial states had concomitantly adopted models of development, progress, and the nation-state that had first been produced in the Mandate System and that had later been refined by development theories such as modernization theory.

Development literature also overlooks the difficulties of implementing efficient and effective state apparatuses in postcolonial societies. It assumes competent state institutions

although the postcolonial state carries a heavier burden to meet democratic measures in a vastly unequal global order (Getachew 2019). Koelble and Lipuma (2008) note that development models assume state capacities, domestic savings rates, and taxable resources that exceed the capacities and resources of the postcolonial state and economy. For example, since many developing countries do not have an adequate domestic savings rate to drive economic development, foreign direct investment is the only avenue for their domestic economy to grow. As a result, postcolonial states must depend on international financial institutions, private corporations, and wealthy individual investors to sustain their domestic economy. Postcolonial states avoid utilizing their scarce economic resources on social policy, which would adversely impact international financial markets.

Koelble and Lipuma bring attention to this tradeoff to illustrate that the postcolonial state has not only been restricted by domestic constraints but also by the international economic system, in what they characterize as “economic desovereignization.” Although democracy is undergirded by the notion of the popular sovereignty of the citizenry, which should decide on their leadership and policy preferences especially after being freed of colonial rule, capitalist forces undermine this notion of sovereignty due to the ability of such forces to “veto” the policy preferences of citizens and punish their leadership selection. Postcolonial states rapidly came to know about this issue once gaining their independence. The issue of economic desovereignization galvanized postcolonial leaders to convene to contrive a vision for the global economy that enshrined the political sovereignty of postcolonial states.

## **B. New International Economic Order and the Non-Aligned Movement**

Anti-colonial thinkers called out the contradictions between the newly won political sovereignty of postcolonial states and the global economy in which they were immersed. Former



President of Tanzania and prominent anti-colonial thinker Julius Nyerere contested that formal sovereign equality did not fully challenge the dependence of postcolonial states on the West. Sovereign equality would be a substantive element of the international order if the contradictions between formal equality and substantive inequality were resolved (Getachew 2019, p. 163). As a result, newly independent states, which became a majority in the United Nations system, used international law and sovereignty doctrines to protect their recently gained sovereignty and combat the ongoing effects of colonialism. They passed several resolutions that endeavored to create a 'New International Economic Order' (NIEO). Beginning in 1964 and formulated through a charter and declaration a decade later, the NIEO embodied a welfare world that aimed to democratize economic policy decision-making, augment the bargaining power of postcolonial states, and internationally redistribute resources to achieve substantive equality (Getachew 2019). Postcolonial states also sought to reclaim control over their natural resources by nationalizing foreign entities that had gained rights over these resources during the colonial era (Anghie 2006). Sovereign equality was redefined as a demand for an equitable share of the world's wealth. Having conceived this radically redefined account of sovereign equality as the economic component of international non-domination, the New International Economic Order diverged from the postwar international legal order in that it viewed sovereign equality as eliciting material implications.

The neoliberal counter-revolution of the 1970s quickly displaced the visions emanating from the NIEO. More developing states were ensnared in the debt crisis and began to default on their loans. Consequently, structural adjustment programs became attached to postcolonial politics in the 1980s often welcomed by the postcolonial elites. Anghie (2006) refers to this process as neocolonialism. Economically dependent on the West, postcolonial states continued to

play a subordinate role in the international system. Similar to how human rights law is utilized to vindicate Western intervention, international financial institutions assumed an intrusive role in the economies of postcolonial states under the brand of ‘good governance’, a project that emulated the strategy of international human rights law.

While NIEO was the imagining of the global order, its vision of non-domination resonated with the newly independent Egyptian state through Arab nationalism and the Non-Aligned Movement. Coming to existence in 1961, the Non-Aligned Movement represented newly independent states that aimed to delink themselves from colonialism, apartheid, racism, and Zionism. It signified the rejection of superpowers of the time and the promotion of foreign policy embodying solidarity with Third World interests (Strydom 2007, p. 2). As the founding countries—Egypt, Yugoslavia, and India—convened in 1960, they stipulated four—out of five—principles that were militaristic in nature. Documents from the convening set forth that membership was contingent on support for national liberation movements and the refusal to join a multilateral military alliance ‘concluded in the context of Great Power conflicts’ (Amar 2012, p. 183). Members should also not influence bilateral military agreements or military base concessions in the interest of Great Power conflicts. These military-oriented principles worked to ensure the EAF operated as the central mouthpiece for anti-colonial struggles. This is through this framework in which the inseparability of militarization and decolonization processes becomes conspicuous.

### **C. The Transformation of the Military’s Economic Role**

Resisting Zionism and Western powers, the EAF was also in charge of instilling the political, social, and economic order of the Egyptian state. The EAF pursued an economic model of import industrialization substitution to prevent its economic decision-making from being

infringed by superpowers. However, the regime's adherence to the 1970s neoliberal agenda quashed the vision of Pan-Arabism and non-domination, typifying the way in which the military evolves in accordance with regional and global economic changes (Joya 2018). When analyzing the role that militaries play in the politics of the Middle East, a vast majority of political scientists and sociologists emphasize regime type, the longevity of autocratic governments, and repression of domestic opposition. They have focused on such domestic factors to explain the responses of militaries to Arab uprisings and their decision on whether to continue support for incumbent governments.

Most approaches to studying militaries in the Global South are also characterized by modernization theory. It was thought that the internal nature of the state and competition between political groups would shape the developmental trajectory of the state. Modernization theorists of the 1950s and 1960s conjectured that cadres of professionally educated military officers would mobilize to overcome domestic political obstacles, such as entrepreneurial capitalism and reactionary large landlords who hindered rural development initiatives. They regarded large armies as “progressive elements” in postcolonial societies because they were hostile toward parochial enclaves and acquired technical skills that were conducive to economic development (Marshall 2021, p. 87). In contrast to these predictions, current militaries in the Arab world have dismantled public enterprises and exploited liberalization policies for their own benefit (Marshall 2021, p. 92).

The scholarship's proclivity to strictly focus on domestic factors has failed to factor in structural phenomena that have fundamentally altered the interests and role of the military, which in turn has shaped their domestic economic performance and policy-making (Jadaliyya 2021).

More specifically, dominant approaches do not contextualize militaries in processes of neocolonialism or the contemporary stage of capitalist development.

Shana Marshall, Zeinab Abul-Magd, Hazem Kandil, and Yazid Sayigh have all analyzed the evolving contemporary economic roles of the EAF, highlighting the institutional component of understanding instability and authoritarianism in Egypt. Zeinab Abul-Magd highlights the fundamental shift in the role of the military and juxtaposes the “old” military with a “new” one. A “fundamental rupture” transpired in the military institution in the 1980s after Egypt fought its last war with its traditional enemy and signed a peace treaty. The shift from Arab nationalism—embodied by socialist policies—to economic liberalization crystallized the new role of the military. Whereas the military constituted lower- to middle-class soldiers who became an affluent ruling elite and militarized society through wars and socialism before the neoliberal era, the new military is characterized by a class of managers of military business enterprises, militarizing society through its economic dominance and leverage in domestic politics (Abdul-Magd 2018). Angela Joya (2018) notes that since the advent of economic liberalization, the EAF acquired private linkages, technology, skills, and knowledge that enabled its pursuit of capital accumulation seen today.

According to Joya, who combines the approaches of class analysis and international political economy with an institutional analysis, the military must be studied as “an important class actor with evolving material interests vis-à-vis other socioeconomic groups and classes in society in different historical contexts” (Joya 2018). It has assumed a leading role in managing capital accumulation on behalf of the ruling class in its entirety, which is possible through its augmented role in the domestic economy. Yezid Sayigh (2019) argues that the military takeover in 2013 and the subsequent rise of President Abdel Fattah have expanded the EAF’s scope and

scale, which is captured through its panoply of economic activities: managing massive infrastructure projects, producing consumer goods such as food and household appliances, manufacturing industrial chemicals, transporting equipment, and importing basic commodities for civilian markets. It has also entered a diverse array of economic sectors, such as gold prospecting, steel production, and managing religious endowments and pilgrimage. Sayigh notes that the military views itself as a development spearhead and boasts of its exceptional managerial skills and technological advances, but its role has imposed high costs on the Egyptian state. The military has managed a massive surge of megaprojects in public infrastructure and housing since 2013, which has engendered substantial amounts of dead capital and abandoned assets and veering investment and resources away from productive economic sectors. Sustaining public-private linkages that reinforce the military's role in the domestic economy, megaprojects constitute one facet of the military regime's economic strategy that comprises its political aspirations and is geared toward international economic interests.

#### **D. The Aspirations and Types of Megaprojects**

Paul Amar (2018) expands on the work of the scholars who have analyzed the evolving contemporary economic role of the EAF through the symbolism of megaprojects. Amar identifies a transregional trend of militarized state institutions and security agencies assuming new or recently expanded roles as investors, contractors, and corporate profiteers. Militarized state institutions and security agencies are embedding themselves in areas that have traditionally been associated with private sector business and non-military aspects of the public sector. Military-capitalist relations in the Global South are also cemented by state-linked investment initiatives, and rivalries between Chinese companies and Persian Gulf sovereign-fund investors are capitalized by the military. While extracting loans and leveraging Egyptian public funds to

attract Emirati, Chinese, Russian, Kuwaiti, European, and Egyptian contractors for megaprojects, military businesses impose enormous debt, coupled with austerity measures, on its citizens.

Moreover, scholars recognize the increasing need for coercive capacities and/or the centralization of the state in the making of megaprojects, a process referred to as “authoritarian neoliberalism” (Tansel 2019). Examining urban governance in Turkey, Tansel argues that popular struggles against the erosion of economic and democratic rights in the Middle East have revealed the co-constitutive character of neoliberal reforms and authoritarian state practices. The Justice and Development Party-ruled government in Turkey facilitated a high degree of political re-centralization that designated the executive as the sole arbiter of social and economic policy at various levels of governance and inhibited democratic avenues for political rivals. In view of the processes of de-democratization that megaprojects have begotten, Amar refers to economic militarization as ‘parapopulist’ political economies. Classic populist projects revolved around public safety and/or national patrimony, and populist regimes in the 20th century were oriented toward state development and public industries. On the contrary, contemporary mega-scale security logics are tailored to the interests of investors and private sector actors. Although Parapopulist projects claim to be for the people and the nation, reflections of popular sovereignty are not captured by these national development projects. Even if they manage to stimulate a boom in construction jobs, they do not offer any long-term opportunities for the vast majority of people nor do they target production sectors that would be most beneficial to the general public.

Although the rationale behind megaprojects is opaquely articulated by governments and details are non-transparent, scholars have conjectured the impetus for such massive endeavors that drain a diverse array of state resources and capabilities. Amar states that the EAF “asserted itself as a champion of national capital” through megaproject building in response to the shift

from being regarded as the heroic body of popular revolution against dictatorship to the main culprit of counterrevolutionary demobilization and dissident repression. As the military's scope and scale dramatically enlarged with the rise of President El-Sisi, the EAF was held directly responsible for all state affairs, ranging from social policy to counterterrorism operations, and thus was inculpated for the economic crisis that ensued post-Egyptian uprising. Similarly, Oryeta and Fainstein (2008) argue that megaprojects do not have many mass functions as they used to, such as housing and employment opportunities and remain central to managing neoliberal crises. Since the beginning, neoliberalism has been confronted with low demand and unpredictable busts. It was thought that increased government spending on megaprojects would assist private businesses, yet the government would not tend to assume a developer role (Brenner 2004; Brenner and Theodore 2004).

Whereas Amar characterizes these projects as 'military capitalism' given the newly expanded role of militaries as investors and contractors, other scholars contend that they embody 'statist neoliberalism' (Khalil and Dill 2019; Tuğal 2022). Khalil and Dill (2019) argue that the EAF have pursued a strategic, seemingly contradictory economic hybrid called 'statist neoliberalism'. The strategic support from the state and its coordination with private actors has not necessarily disrupted the neoliberal paradigm (Oryeta and Fainstein 2008, p. 765). As the EAF have become both a private actor and state actor over time, its dual role has fostered an economic model that adopts neoliberal reforms while ensuring state centralization, indicating that neoliberal statist megaprojects do not fit in the binary of depoliticizing neoliberal megaprojects or state capitalist megaprojects. According to Tarazona Vento (2017), neoliberal megaprojects are necessary for "the emergence of a consensus democracy in which the status quo is not fundamentally questioned." Whereas neoliberal megaprojects 'depoliticize' urban

decisions and are sustained through public-private partnerships, Wang and Wu (2019) characterize state capitalist megaprojects as being led by governmental and quasi-governmental state organizations. The latter is dominated by project-oriented state corporations that carry out the political goals of the state. Meanwhile, neoliberal statist megaprojects embody both characterizations. They simultaneously are invested in public-private partnerships, boost the productive role of the state, and re-politicize through a means that is distinct from state capitalist projects by steering toward national hegemony and hence marked by political contestation (Tuğal 2022).

Since the EAF in the post-revolutionary era have reworked Egypt's political economy through a statist neoliberal strategy that is typified by megaprojects, tracing the EAF's economic role and political aspirations over time provides insight into the way in which vast military projects are concomitantly reshaped over time. In the following chapter, I trace the transformation of the political and economic role of the military domestically and internationally, particularly its role in managing megaprojects, from the Nasser era and the Mubarak era. This exercise illustrates the way in which the military has shifted its aspirations from construing a decolonized global order to fixating on its self-preservation and profit-making opportunities. A similar shift is subsequently seen in the aspirations of megaprojects as well and begets radical consequences for the notion of sovereignty.



### **Chapter 3: Tracing the Political and Economic Role of the Egyptian Armed Forces**

This chapter traces the transformation of the EAF's political and economic role. It shows how the EAF was a decolonizing force that assumed total economic and political control before the 1970s. The New International Economic Order took form as the Non-Aligned Movement in Egypt, and the EAF pursued a model of import substitution industrialization to ensure that Egypt was not economically dependent on the West. Once becoming president in 1970, Anwar Sadat began to liberalize capital and ameliorate relations with Israel. The EAF subsequently became another factor of the capitalist class, engaging in commercial business to ensure its own prosperity in the neoliberal era. Moreover, Arab-Israeli conflict normalization induced the EAF to focus on domestic profit-oriented development and business. Overall, economic liberalization and Arab-Israeli conflict normalization allowed the EAF to further embed itself into the domestic economy and augment its power.

#### **A. Gamal Abdul Nasser and the Third Worldist Era: 1956 - 1970**

To enforce colonial rule and later organize colonized societies in support of the Allied war effort in World War II, the colonial authorities built the extensive military, police, and intelligence structures that were deployed by the postcolonial states in the Arab region. While having obstructed many social and political structures of colonized states, colonial authorities preserved the army (Marshall 2020, pp. 87). When colonized states gained their independence, the military was responsible for reconstructing the social, economic, and political order (Joya 2018, pp. 6). 'Third World' armies considered themselves to be vanguards of modernization and the vehicles of progress for their developing countries (Abul-Magd 2016, pp. 155). The British colonial regime was uprooted without mass mobilization by the Egyptian Free Officers (Abul-Magd 2017, pp. 39). Their coup exemplified a trend of military coups d'état in the Arab

region that sought to topple European colonial or conservative postcolonial regimes through their own republics, such as Assad's in Syria and Qadhafi's in Libya (Abdul-Magd 2017, pp. 37-38). Due to these nationalist revolts, military interventions in political affairs were commonplace in many Arab states, with a much higher frequency in most developing countries during the 1950s and 1960s.

Military institutions comprised the organizational, educational, and technological capacities that were necessary for the development of postcolonial societies. The modern technology of military officers and the army's capacity to reinforce cohesion at the national level contributed to their public image. Military coups were also highly regarded due to their disciplined and hierarchical character, which instilled an authority in countries where the state was "embryonic" and public services were undeveloped (Joya 2018, pp. 6). Moreover, armed forces were viewed as an agent for social change and "renouncement of tradition" because the new generation of officers who pioneered the coup came from rural, less privileged backgrounds unlike their elders (Picard 1990, pp. 190). The leadership of young Arab officers mostly constituted those from either lower-middle- to middle- class backgrounds or the petite bourgeoisie (Abul-Magd 2017, pp. 39). Although Nasser was a socialist, Egyptian nationalists who were affiliated with and joined the EAF were not unified by an explicit anti-capitalist ideology. Ideological orientations varied among the young Arab officers, yet they reached a consensus to adopt the rhetoric of social justice on issues such as agrarian reform and promote secular nationalism. Throughout the Cold War, most Arab military regimes pursued modernization through socialism (Abdul-Magh 2017, pp. 38-39). Coupled with a socialist ideology, the EAF espoused anti-West rhetoric and promoted Arab nationalism.

The process of militarizing Egypt necessitated aligning military priorities with those of the country's political and social needs. As an emblem of a collective identity, the EAF garnered respect and admiration from the masses (Zeinab Abul-Magd 2017, 43). Resultantly, the military was never separated from civilian affairs but rather conceived as an integral force for advancing civilian affairs and penetrating social and state networks. The EAF established a state-controlled economy and steered the process of intensive industrialization to supplant imported products with nationally-made products, an integral process for postcolonial development known as import industrialization substitution. Economic growth was contingent on the public sector, whose enterprises were managed by the EAF. Alongside civilian technocrats, military administrators populated many state-owned industries, national conglomerates, and quasi-public enterprises. Engineers and contractors from the military spearheaded land reclamation projects, public infrastructure, the provision of basic commodities, the domestic manufacturing of consumer appliances and electronics, and the production of industrial and agricultural inputs like steel and fertilizer. Civilian factory managers were also replaced by high-ranking members of the officer corps (Marshall 2015, pp. 4). Overall, the model of import industrialization substitution followed by the EAF served to sever colonial economic patterns that dispossessed Egyptians at the expense of British people and undermined Egypt's newly won political sovereignty. By constructing a self-sufficient economy, Nasser's regime could dictate the way in which its resources were deployed and attend to the vast social inequalities produced in the colonial era. These anti-colonial aims are also denoted by the state's impetus for reclaiming megaprojects.

### **1. The Impetus for Megaprojects: Breaking Patterns of Colonial Domination**

Once having colonized Egypt in 1882, Britain asserted its control over colonized people through the construction and modification of their built environment, particularly city building. It

introduced various policies that were designed to advance Britain's imperial project and export Egypt's wealth back to Britain (Home 1990). Britain designed and built several new master-planned cities in colonies across the empire, not just in Egypt. As a result of a near century of occupation, the British constructed sundry neighborhoods, towns, and cities that betokened British planning norms, including racial segregation and zoning (Home 1990).

Anti-British sentiment compounded among Egyptians, particularly regarding Britain's control over Egypt's most pivotal asset: the Suez Canal. Egyptian nationalists viewed the Suez Canal as a symbol of the deceit and injustice of colonial-capitalist globalization. European merchants and investors reaped from the forced, conscript labor that built the canal. The Egyptian treasury handled the expenses, and thousands of Egyptian workers died during construction. Meanwhile, French engineer Ferdinand de Lesseps received all the credit for building the canal. Moreover, Britain used Egypt's default on the debt payments imposed by European Suez Canal shareholders as vindication for invading Egypt in 1882 and asserting political and financial control. In the 1950s, the Suez Canal continued to enable Britain and France to assert colonial and postcolonial domination over South and Southeast Asia and East Africa. The canal enabled large-scale oil shipments that were critical for military and industrial operations during World War II. Britain was also able to support its allies in the Baghdad Pact of 1955 and the Manila Pact of 1954 through the canal's naval advantage and troop-transport routes.

During a speech during July of 1956, Nasser carefully pronounced the name 'Ferdinand de Lesseps', which cryptically signaled to his troops to occupy the Suez Canal. Enraged, Britain invaded Egypt to recapture the canal and overthrow Nasser (Goodman 2006). France helped Britain due to its outrage over the EAF supporting freedom fighters in Algeria, and Israel also

joined Britain's plan to squash the Egyptian Revolution and seize control of the Red Sea. Despite this tripartite effort that commenced during October of 1956, the EAF successfully fended against these forces for the most part.

Egyptian nationalists may have toppled colonial power in the 1952 revolution, but Egypt's pursuit of colonial independence was not exemplified then. The Revolutionary Command Council of the Egyptian military was responsible for domestic oppression in the years following the revolution. Rather, the nationalization of the Suez Canal on 26 July 1956 and other infranationalist projects set the stage for Third Worldism, and the EAF acted as the central technical-organizational force of the Third Worldist notion of sovereignty (Amar 2012). Although not unified by an explicit anti-capitalist ideology, Nasser and the EAF began to focus on megaprojects, including the Aswan Dam, Lake Nasser, the Suez Canal, roads, airports, oil wells, and military bases (Amar 2012).

In his speeches, Nasser described these nationalistic infrastructure projects as a means to supplant colonial patterns of commercial dependence and military submission and construct a new world system of independence for decolonized peoples. Amar refers to these projects as "infranationalist forms of decolonizing developmentalism", given Nasser's aim to foster a self-sufficient domestic economy that was insulated from the influence of major superpowers. As self-subsistent economy served a broader goal of severing colonial economic patterns of domination, the regime's way with megaprojects reflected the postcolonial political aspirations of the Nasser regime that considered the Egyptian populace's needs. At least twelve new cities were planned and constructed that were part and parcel of the strategy to address grave inequalities and urban challenges (Libchaber 2019, p. 2). The state envisioned creating strictly structured environments that targeted social classes, engendering a division between the working

class and the technocratic civil class. This vision is exemplified through Nasr City, the first state-sponsored megaproject that offered housing capacity for a growing middle class and employment centers in Cairo (Gehan 2014, p. 71).

Under British colonialism, spatial order was linked to Western planning ideal that enshrined the symbolic model of “the new modern man” (Gehan 2014, p. 70). Although British colonialism had officially ended, European culture, beliefs, ideology, and socio-political thought processes that were constitutive of colonial planning practices continued to shape the postcolonial version of planning. The postcolonial megaproject embodied a contradiction: the simultaneous intent to divorce colonial ruling and the preservation of colonial planning norms. Colonial planning norms may have been evident in postcolonial Egypt’s urban planning, yet the Nasser regime rejected planning schemes that would serve colonial aspirations. It attempted to ensure that newly built cities would be accessible by connecting them with the commercial and administrative heart of Cairo and assessed the needs of the Egyptian populace who were expected to relocate to new cities. Overall, the regime asserted a version of sovereignty through a series of postcolonial megaprojects, evincing its determination to control its own resources, which would contribute to realizing the NIEO’s vision of global political and economic equity. As Arab nationalism and the Non-Aligned Movement gained momentum to realize popular sovereignty, the U.S. turned itself against these movements and assembled allies to demolish them.

## **2. Promoting Pan-Arabism through Wars Abroad**

In 1958, the Free Officers in Iraq led a Nasser-like revolution against the U.S./British ally King Faisal II. The majority of Lebanese people began to support Nasser’s United Arab Republic (Cleveland, 2000). The union of Egypt and Syria through the United Arab Republic (UAR), that

lasted from 1958 until 1971, represented the first stage of an anticipated Pan-Arab political and economic union. Although the UN Security Council investigation found no evidence of UAR or EAF interference in Lebanon, U.S. President Eisenhower executed 'Operation Blue Bat'. 40,000 U.S. troops were deployed in Beirut to back Maronite Christians and anti-Nasserists in the country, halting Lebanon's direction toward Third Worldism and Arabism.

Operation Blue Bat gave rise to the following decades of civil war (Amar 2012). These decades denoted the beginning of the Eisenhower Doctrine, which allowed any Middle Eastern country that was being threatened by armed aggression to request American economic aid from U.S. military forces. Eisenhower targeted the Soviet threat through his doctrine by authorizing the commitment of U.S. forces "to secure and protect the territorial integrity and political independence of such nations, requesting such aid against overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by international communism" (Office of the Historian). Most Arabs regarded the doctrine as a ruse that cloaked the true intention of asserting Western domination in the Middle East. Following the 1958 crisis in Lebanon and accusations by U.S. Senators of exaggerating the threat of communism to the region, Eisenhower admitted in private that the actual goal was disrupting Arab nationalism (Little 1996).

From 1962 to 1970, the EAF invested a third of its manpower and much of its technology and leadership in the North Yemen Civil War, a proxy war between the project of Third Worldist emancipation and Great Power imperialism. Whereas the EAF supported Arab socialist rebels and Yemeni pro-democracy social movements, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Britain, and the U.S. supported right-wing tribal and Yemeni religious leaders (Dawisha 1975). The EAF succeeded in supporting the Yemeni Revolution and holding back Saudi Arabia and its allies (although this outcome was gradually reversed over the next 20 years as Egypt's conflicts with Israel shifted

attention from Yemen and enabled royalists and tribalists to trickle back into North Yemen leadership). The EAF's devotion of its capabilities to engaging in wars abroad demonstrated the way in which it drove the Non-Alignment movement, pan-arabism, and the broader goals of the NIEO.

### **3. Socioeconomic and Political Outcomes for the Egyptian Populace**

While engaging in wars abroad, the EAF yielded promising socioeconomic outcomes for the Egyptian people through its developmentalist model. Not only did the presence of military administrators in the public sector ensure a constituency for the military, but the EAF was regarded very highly by the general population for carrying out redistribution policies and nationalizations that combated poverty and inequality. To secure political support, the Nasser regime guaranteed a robust welfare state that targeted the most vulnerable groups in Egyptian society. The regime provided Egyptians with free public healthcare and education, subsidized state resources like food and fuel, social services targeting lower income groups, a minimum wage and other labor reforms, national social insurance, and employment for university graduates. The Land Reform Law in 1952 and its amendments also widely redistributed land from rich landlords to the poor (Mohamed 2014, pp. 8). Egyptians also procured social services through state employment. As a result of these several policies, poverty and inequality were low during this era. By the mid 1960s, the national income share of the wealthiest Egyptians decreased by 10 percent to increase the income of the lower 60 percent (Badreldin 2018, pp. 67). Nasser's socialist policies ultimately created a new middle class that served as his political base.

Nasser's motive behind enacting socialist policies was to prevent incumbent elitist interest groups—who had been powerful prior during the colonial period—from maintaining power. He realized political gains through the support of a broad coalition comprising



marginalized Egyptians from both lower and middle classes. Since the general population was cognizant of how these incumbent groups benefited from the former colonial structure, it was effective for Nasser's pursuit of power to mobilize "populist" opposition by explicitly identifying against those groups while identifying with the majority of Egyptians (Ayeb and Bush, 2014). Although Nasser contrived his own model of "Arab socialism" under a single ruling party that he sought to implement, it is contended that his regime was state capitalist (Zeinab Abul-Magd 2017, pp. 69).

Although these policies improved the living conditions for much of the Arab region's population, they were also characterized by repressive forms of rule geared towards independent political action (Hanieh 2021, pp. 3). Despite being highly esteemed by the general population and ensuring economic equity and social welfare, Nasser's regime was highly authoritarian. While many Marxists throughout the era of decolonization categorized Nasser's Egypt and similar regimes in the global South as progressive or even socialist, the domestic infrastructure of anti-imperialist regimes were overlooked as a means to consolidate the decolonization bloc.

### **B. Anwar al-Sadat and the Beginning of the Neoliberal Era: 1970 - 1981**

At the advent of neoliberalism, beginning roughly in 1973, the decolonization and military-driven developmentalism that had united during the Third Worldist period were split apart (Amar 2012). Promoting Arab nationalism and regional consciousness was integral to resisting Western powers, which is why Western governments—led by the U.S.—sought to combat Arab nationalist struggles by fortifying relations with three key regional allies: Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Israel. Israel's defeat of the Egyptian and Syrian air forces in 1967, reinforced by Nasser's death, eroded Arab unity and resistance that embodied Nasser's Egypt (Hanieh 2021, 3-4).

Contrary to Nasser's military doctrine that vilified the capitalist West and called for regional unity, his successor Anwar Sadat signed a peace treaty with Israel and became an ally to the U.S., adopting a defensive military doctrine with an internal focus and supplanting the previous internationalist foci (Abul-Magd 2018, pp. 32-33). This was a part of Sadat's 'Egypt First' policy. Despite being one of the Free Officers alongside Nasser leading the revolution and commanding forces in Yemen, Sadat was not as devoted to the socialist and Third Worldist visions as Nasser was (Saliba 1975). Rather, he was more inclined towards remobilizing forms of moralism and Islamism as a means to counter the left and pro-democracy movements (Harb 2003, p. 288).

Whereas Nasser aimed to unite the Arab World, Sadat isolated the Egyptian state from the region. This isolationism enabled particular alliances, such as with the U.S. and Israel, that made up the political component of Sadat's Infitah (open door) policy (Aulas 1976, p. 84). With respect to the Infitah's economic implications, capital began to liberalize. The domestic market was no longer the target of production and consumption, and the public sector was no longer the cardinal instrument of economic growth (Hanieh 2021, pp. 4). Prioritizing corporate interests, Sadat's Intifah economic policies were designed to expand exports and coordinate with foreign companies, neglecting labor-intensive developmental industries and agricultural projects. Egypt also became a rentier state through revenues from natural resources, the Suez Canal, tourism, and the construction sector.

Whereas Sadat's policies diminished the political influence of the military, the economic interests of the National Democratic Party (NDP) and other organizations within the security apparatus gained traction. Sadat barred military officers from assuming top political offices, which they had done under Nasser. He also shuffled military officers in and out of key positions

to thwart them from augmenting institutional power and jeopardizing his power (Joya 2018, pp. 7). Despite the military's political disengagement, the Sadat era marked the beginning of the EAF's commercial activities. Public-private joint ventures spurred from slashes in taxes as well as eased restrictions on profit repatriation, import and export licenses, and certain labor obligations (Badreldin 2018, pp. 87). Along with coordinating with the private sector, the EAF also took advantage of infrastructure projects, environmental protection and transportation (Joya 2018, 10).

In addition to Sadat's Infitah economic policies, the 1973 October war and the increase in oil prices stimulated Egypt to expand its military industry (Stork 1987). Partially because the U.S. sourced more robust military equipment, technology, and training, Sadat shifted Egypt's diplomatic focus from the Soviet Union to the U.S. (Marshall 2015, pp. 4-5). In 1975, Sadat established the Arab Organization for Industrialization (AOI) to manufacture military aircraft in coordination with Arab capital and Western technical assistance. Military-run businesses like the AOI benefited from exemptions from tax and business restrictions and privileged access to state resources (Joya 2018, pp. 10). Whereas Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states supplied capital, Washington, London and Paris supplied the technology and capital equipment. Meanwhile, Egypt supplied its four existing arms factories—the aircraft and engine factories in Helwan, the Sakr munitions factory in Heliopolis and the Kader factory (aircraft and armor)—and around 15,000 trained workers (Stork 1987).

### **1. The Emergence of Arab-Israeli Conflict Normalization**

Following the Camp David Accords of 1978, Sadat signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1979, which enabled Israel to exercise its military hegemony in the region (Green 1984, p. 156). The mechanisms embedded in the Camp David Peace Accords, shaped the role of the military.

Along with encouraging them to turn their attentions inward, neoliberal mechanisms induced the EAF to steer away from the aims of decolonization, delinking, or reifying trade and defense patterns that favored the Third World (Amar 2012). Military-associated developmentalism turned toward entrepreneurialism and investment-return maximization.

The treaty also redirected the EAF's capabilities toward domestic infrastructure, tourism development, and land development businesses (Springborg, 1989, p. 107; Gotowicki, 1997, p. 3). The heart of the accords encompassed a bargain (Quandt, 1988; Telhami, 1992) in which the EAF traded wars abroad for business and development activities at home (Albrecht and Bishara, 2011; Safty 1991). The Ministry of Defense created the National Service Products Organization (NSPO), an economic arm that pursued public infrastructure projects and produced cheap civil goods for the middle and lower classes (Abul-Magd 2013, p. 1). Along with the AOI and the NSPO, the military also established other branches to permeate itself in all aspects of the economy, including the Ministry of Defense and Military Production (MOD), the Armed Forces Land Projects Agency (AFLPA), and the Holding Company for Maritime and Land Transport (Joya 2018, pp. 10-11). As a result of its shifted focus, the EAF was redefined as a technocratic and entrepreneurial body of contractors.

Furthermore, Arab-Israeli conflict normalization enabled the continuation of Egypt's success in the arms manufacturing industry. Because of its size and strategic location, Egypt had played an influential leadership role in the Arab world. During the pan-Arab movement, the Egyptian military saw itself as a counterweight to the Israeli military. As part of the 1979 Egypt-Israel peace treaty that followed the Camp David Accords, the EAF became a recipient of U.S. aid, including the training of Egyptian officers in U.S. war colleges and the sales of weapons to Egypt, such as F-16 fighter jets, Apache helicopters, and M1A1 Abraham tanks

(Abul-Magd 2013, p. 2). Egyptian generals and their counterparts in the Pentagon began to forge close relationships through the aid (Ibid.). In 1979, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states halted funding to the AOI due to the peace treaty. However, there were reports of renewed Saudi funding since 1984 (Stork 1987). The expansion of Egypt's military-industrial complex and its cultivated close U.S. alliances reveals the way in which Arab-Israeli negotiations constituted U.S. economic objectives that sought to deepen the Arab region's integration into global trade and financial flows (Hanieh 2021, p. 7).

## **2. The Impetus for Megaprojects: Sites of Investment**

Although the mechanisms embedded in the International Monetary Fund (IMF) agreement and the Camp David Accords did not end the “infrationalist” proclivities of the military, they did radically reshape megaprojects. The EAF avoided war (with the exception for its involvement in covert rendition operations, U.S.-partners intelligence mission, and counterterrorism efforts) and focused on its projects. Abdul-Halim Abu Ghazala constructed numerous major military owned and managed cities. For example, Nasr City provided lavish flats to military personnel at subsidized prices (Springborg 1989), high-end shopping malls boasting a globalizing consumer lifestyle (Abaza 2006, pp. 203-204) and “nurseries, schools, and military consumer ‘cooperatives’ which sell a range of domestic and imported products [to military men] at discount prices” (Gotowicki, 1997, p. 10). Many retired generals controlled parts of the commercial transportation system. The position of the head of the Suez Canal was always reserved for the retired military chief of staff. Retired generals also served as the heads of the Red Sea port and the managers of the maritime and land transport public sector companies (Abul-Maged 2012). Overall, military leadership became increasingly invested in for-profit tourism and canal, infrastructure, and settlement projects (Harb 2003, p. 285).

Due to the fact that the Egyptian populace only inhabits four percent of the country's territory—either in the Delta or along the narrow strip of the Nile Valley—and high fertility rates that strain limited resources, leaders since Nasser have dreamt of settling the desert and pursued building various cities and towns time after time despite them all failing to be economically viable or ameliorating social conditions (Sweet 2019, pp. 18). Whereas Nasser only expressed his ambition to take advantage of this hinterland, Sadat (and later Mubarak) began to direct resources towards building these alternative centers of growth that were dissociated from existing urban centers and relocating state institutions in the deserts west and east of Cairo. These efforts failed due to a lack of funds, the resistance of state employees, and political circumstances (Loewert and Steiner 2019, pp. 67).

Although all these past Egyptian leaders shared a similar vision, the approach of megaprojects shifted in the 10 years between the mid-1970s and the mid-1980s. In an interview, Yahia Shawkat, former head of the Housing Unit at the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, explains that the original goal of megaprojects was to hold new population concentrations in small satellite cities to counter the increase in population. This cluster of new neighborhoods surrounding greater Cairo would be connected with the commercial and administrative core of Cairo. The approach then altered to the accumulation of these neighborhoods that formed independent cities. For example, the 6th of October City and the neighboring Sheikh Zayed city were merged into one mega-city instead of a collection of small districts. Shawkat also explains that Nasser attempted to re-distribute the population outside the old valley through desert reclamation projects. On the contrary, Sadat's approach to population redistribution focused on the development of new cities and relied on people relocating (Mohie 2015). While the mechanisms embedded within the IMF restructuring agreement and Camp David Accords recast

the megaproject as an investment-oriented endeavor, the transfigured impetus for megaprojects was divorced from the Egyptian populace's needs, providing insight into the larger socioeconomic and political outcomes characterizing the neoliberal era.

### **3. Socioeconomic and Political Outcomes for the Egyptian Populace**

Sadat's Infitah policy immediately marginalized the traditional social base of the Egyptian postcolonial regime, the lower and middle classes, since the policy was contingent on cheap labor and investor-centric labor laws (Shafick 2020, pp. 2). Instead of politically relying on the general population for loyalty like Nasser, Sadat aimed to create a capitalist business class to replace the wide traditional middle class that was created by socialist policies (Badreldin 2018, pp. 88). Because Egypt became a corporate-oriented rentier state, the state bureaucracy was unable to provide productive employment or adequate wages, despite the former political base being reliant on public employment to secure social welfare. Private sector favoritism also exacerbated income inequality and unemployment, inducing Egyptians to find refuge in informal social safety nets such as remittances and religious groups and charities.

Gutting subsidies precipitated collective action, known as the "bread riots" in 1977, where police forces repressed protestors (Mohamed 2014, pp. 8). Since the masses were adversely impacted by neoliberal reforms, repressive tactics were critical for maintaining neoliberalism. Due to recurrent waves of civil unrest, Sadat—and his successor Mubarak—responded with a mixture of coercion and subsidy-based concessions. The Infitah policy required the militarization of the police to repress social resistance on the domestic front (Harb 2003, p. 288). Under Sadat, the state began to outsource a broad swath of military and coercive practices to the 1.4 million officers of the Interior Ministry (police) and security services (Sayigh 2011, p. 403).

### **C. Hosni Mubarak Era and the Deepening of Neoliberalization: 1981 - 2011**

By the end of the 1980s, Egypt was experiencing an economic crisis after a long period of economic growth that was contingent on a rentier economy model with rents from aid, migrant worker remittances, oil, and Suez Canal revenue. The Gulf War of 1990-1991 precipitated a decline in state revenues, impacting tourism, emigrant remittances, and Suez Canal services. As global oil prices collapsed in the 1980s, Egypt was confronted with a major external debt problem, high inflation, a large budget deficit, and an unsustainable balance of payments (El-Said and Jane Harrigan 2014, pp. 105). Egypt received a substantial debt forgiveness package due to its support for the Allies in the First Gulf War. The economic crisis also induced Mubarak to aggressively apply a full-fledged economic liberalization plan in accordance with the IMF and World Bank's requirements. As neoliberal reforms were undertaken, policies of fiscal austerity warranted drastic cuts in public expenditures. The exchange rate structure was also simplified, resulting in a more competitive pound that cheapened the cost of exports and increased interest rates for the financial class (Rocco 2013, pp. 429-430). State institutions were also gradually privatized. Meanwhile, the U.S. and European Union continued to normalize Israel's place in the region, supporting the Oslo Peace Process through the 1990s and deepening Israel's relations with Jordan, Egypt and the Gulf states. The EAF continued to behave as a domestic supplier and subcontractor in infrastructure projects that were financed by foreign donors through the 1990s (Amar 2012).

The EAF's leading role in modernization began to diminish. A decline in public investment impacted military funding for its manufacturing base and military jobs, and the economic return on financial and economic privileges for the military decreased due to the rising market power of private investors and international lenders (Marshall 2015, pp. 5). The Washington Consensus of the IMF and other international financial institutions framed a large



public sector as antithetical to economic growth, rendering a large army presence in public workers as incompatible with the neoliberal doctrine. As a hindrance to the Washington Consensus program, military officer corps became occupied with preserving its vulnerable privileges and maintaining its role in regime stability.

Military enterprises increasingly became the means to guarantee privileges to regime loyalists and retired high-ranking officers, catalyzing a shift in its fundamental role. The military was no longer a tool for state-building, a means of social mobility, nor an effective fighting force (Marshall 2021, pp. 89). The policies touted by international financial institutions aimed to depoliticize the military and squander its role in the economy through institutional “professionalization.” U.S. policy called for joint training, international exchanges for officers, and equipment upgrades. Extensive and sophisticated security assistance programs such as the International Military Education and Training, Excess Defense Articles, and Foreign Military Financing programs became new channels for networking and strengthening military power.

However, divesting the military from the economy was politically unrealistic since influential officers and extensive patron-client networks were contingent on the military’s role in construction, contracting, manufacturing, and service provision. Therefore, influential officers continued to control many enterprises (Marshall 2020, pp. 89-90). Consequently, a “symbiotic relationship” between the military and the private sector was realized by the end of the 1980s. Joya (2018) characterizes this decade—when the Egyptian economy was integrated into the global economy—as the most important aspect in the development of the military’s paramount economic role. To sustain its power throughout structural adjustment, the EAF leashed itself onto the private sector. It formed new companies, built new factories, cultivated untaxed large-scale

farms, and unaudited special autonomous status in competition with an expanding private sector and privatized public sector (Abul-Magd 2013, p. 2).

Although remaining politically insubordinate under Mubarak, the EAF diversified its economic portfolio with financing and technology provided by foreign and domestic private sources and joint partnerships with various non-military businessmen and foreign interests (Marshall 2015, pp. 5). It also produced sophisticated machinery and weapons with the help of foreign firms (Joya 2018, 13). This way, the EAF accumulated great leverage in politics by maintaining a close relationship with the U.S. and its military-industrial complex. As the Defense Minister from 1981 to 1989, Abdel Halim Abu Ghazala secured resources for the military through his ties with the U.S. military and corporate world, furthering its role in the civilian economy and its self-sufficiency in military production capabilities. While negotiating deals for arms and airplane contracts with Russia, China, and the U.S., the EAF produced artillery forces to regional armies, jets for China, helicopters for Britain, etc. (Sayigh, 1992, pp. 45–46; Vayrynen and Ohlson, 1986).

The expansion of military activities into diversified foreign partnerships enabled individual officers to control significant productive assets and maintain and augment their patron-client networks, which has deepened their existing silos of influence. It also allowed the EAF to expand its production of civil goods and services through the NSPO, the AOI, and the Ministry of Military Production (MOMP). 40 percent of NSPO production and 70 percent of AOI production target civilian markets. Among these three economic arms, the EAF manufactured a plethora of goods: steel, cement, chemicals, luxury jeeps, butane gas cylinders, kitchen stoves, home appliances, gas pipelines, infant incubators, mineral water, pasta, olive oil and other foodstuffs. It also owns a vast number of gas stations, hotels, wedding halls,

supermarkets, parking lots, domestic cleaning offices, transportation and shipping companies across Egypt (Abul-Magd 2012; Blumberg 2011). The EAF's international commercial activity enabled itself to further embed itself into the domestic economy. The massive private investment in Egypt's port sector spurred growth in complementary industries that involved the EAF, such as inland rail and the network of river barges that provided transport along the Nile. Whereas the Egyptian state was liable for potential financial losses because many of these joint ventures were organized in holding companies under the authority of the Ministry of Investment, the EAF had *de facto* control over revenues (Marshall 2015, pp. 5-6).

### Sectors of Economic Activity Involving Military Agencies

MOD, NSPO, EAF, MOMP, AOI				
Administrative and Regulatory	Shares and Acquisitions	Public Sector	Supply	Production of Civilian Goods
<b>FORMAL</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning and licensing use of state land</li> <li>• Telecommunications</li> <li>• Mineral extraction</li> <li>• Residency permits in military and select strategic zones</li> </ul> <b>INFORMAL</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New cities</li> <li>• Water and sanitation</li> <li>• Official statistics</li> <li>• Religious endowments</li> <li>• Audit</li> <li>• Development funds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investments in civilian companies (minority shares)</li> <li>• Transfer of publicly owned companies to military ownership</li> <li>• Acquisition of civilian companies or majority shares</li> <li>• Establishment of joint ventures with Egyptian and foreign companies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing</li> <li>• New cities</li> <li>• Roads, bridges, and tunnels</li> <li>• Water and sanitation</li> <li>• Agricultural irrigation and storage</li> <li>• Land reclamation</li> <li>• Industrial zones</li> <li>• Ports (sea, air, and dry)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meat</li> <li>• Poultry</li> <li>• Medical equipment and pharmaceuticals</li> <li>• Consumer commodities (non-perishables, retail)</li> <li>• Basic and processed food commodities</li> <li>• General procurement for government agencies and services ministries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Household appliances</li> <li>• Electrical appliances and electronics</li> <li>• Industrial and agricultural machinery, components, and tools</li> <li>• Construction materials and building supplies</li> <li>• Industrial chemicals</li> <li>• Fertilizer</li> <li>• Food</li> <li>• Minerals</li> <li>• Marble and granite</li> <li>• Steel</li> <li>• Cement</li> <li>• Transport vehicles and equipment</li> </ul>

Source: Sayigh 2019

## 1. The Return to the Military's Role in Government

Whereas Sadat politically sidelined the EAF, military influence on Egyptian society re-emerged under Mubarak, as military leadership occupied high-level administrative positions in the government (Springborg 1989). Mubarak empowered military personnel through employment in bureaucracy, postretirement careers, and pecuniary rewards, reinforcing a patronage system that sought the loyalty of senior officers. Senior officers were appointed to positions in the state bureaucracy that offered profitable opportunities. Meanwhile, mid-ranking and junior officers did not fare as well. For example, although the military provided a health care system and housing facilities, a junior officer would typically have to wait a few years before securing a modest apartment and spend a part of their salary on monthly payments. However, if younger officers remained loyal to the political establishment, they could ultimately enter the sphere of elite senior officers (Nassif 2013, 516). Mubarak also distributed a portion of Egypt's cash direct payment program—designed for disaster management, emergency response, and other security-related purposes—to the military and police leaders through direct cash installments. Mubarak allowed military administrative and economic influence to persuade them to accept the planned succession of his son, Gamal Mubarak, who did not possess a military background (Abul-Magd 2012).

A distinct class of military administrators and managers grew in the bureaucracy, the public sector, and the military enterprises. They also received their pensions from military sources as well as high salaries from the government (Abul-Magd 2012, p. 2). Retired army generals and colonels assumed governmental positions in the north and south of Egypt but favored roles where opportunities of authority and opportunities of capital intersected. In 2011,

18 out of 27 provincial governors were retired army generals. They governed in key locations, such as tourist-oriented provinces in Upper Egypt, all three provinces of the Suez Canal, the two Sinai provinces, sometimes Alexandria, and major Delta areas. Retired generals oversaw numerous natural gas and oil companies, militarizing the state-owned oil sector.

## **2. Social, Economic, and Political Outcomes for the Egyptian Populace**

Regime-working-class relations grew more tense following Mubarak's acceptance of neoliberal reforms, as the Mubarak era saw further "financialization" of the regime's social base. The IMF package and the Economic Reform and Structural Adjustment Programme (ERSAP) constituted a shift in the structure of the Egyptian economy through unprecedented activity in the fiscal market. Fiscal activation, coupled with the removal of the state from the fiscal market, spurred the availability of financial capital on the market. Since the economy was still too insecure to endure debt risks, the growing capital market could only target a tiny segment of loan seekers: established capitalists who held sufficient assets to counteract the risks of financial insolvency. Interest rates were driven down by a small number of potential borrowers taking advantage of a large money supply, which encouraged them to borrow more loans. Loans were highly accessible to these borrowers given their abundance of financial assets, and as a result, they bought more assets by acquiring more loans. They did not create productive businesses, whose dividends would necessitate more time to mature and restrict the exploitation of cheap capital on the market.

Caused by the combination of low interest rates and rapid growth in nominal GDP, inflation in asset prices in lieu of any real added value generated profits (Shafick 2020, pp. 3). As the economy was now contingent on the model of investment banks in which borrowing, buying, and reselling led to wealth creation, a new class was formed that replaced the former social base

of the Egyptian regime. Salem (2020) contends that wealth accumulation through low-risk, highly rewarding, and mostly rent-based processes gradually formed a powerful class of capital owners that he refers to as the ‘financial class.’ The wealth accumulation and power expansion of the financial class corresponded with its political role in the Egyptian regime. In July 2004, Mubarak appointed a cabinet of ministers recruited predominantly from financial capitalists rather than the traditional option of bureaucratic or military technocrats, for the first time in the country’s history. The influence of the financial class also provided financial reassurance to international lenders and regional and global investors, which sustained financial flows inwards and financial flows outward (Shafick 2020, p. 4).

There was barely any concern for poverty and social welfare during the pursuit of stabilization in the first half of the 1990s. As a result, the number of people in poverty and the rate of child malnutrition rose. In the second half of the 1990s, economic growth increased unemployment and induced a decline in the poverty rate for all the population besides those residing in upper Egypt. However, this growth was unsustainable, with poverty and unemployment beginning to rise in 2000 (El-Said and Harrigan 2014, pp. 108). Neoliberal policies did not lead to any private investments that created jobs, increased incomes, or enhanced market competitiveness. The state, Egypt’s main employer, was driven out of the market by rapid privatization, while private investments for the most part were geared towards non-productive assets that employed a very small workforce. By the late 2000s, the Egyptian economy was controlled by 20 to 25 financial dynasties that each constituted roughly 3000 employees. As a result, neoliberal reforms generated grave outcomes for employment rates, employment conditions, contracted hours, job quality, job security and real income. Moreover, rapid inflation

in prices, caused by the linkage between assets and loans and decreased interest rates, made it less affordable for Egyptians to afford their basic necessities (Shafik 2020, pg. 4).

The Egyptian welfare state still comprised the following components: food subsidies, fuel subsidies, state pensions, free health services, and free public education (Mohamed 2014, pp. 10). However, since the majority of workers were pushed into the informal sector as the government was no longer employing them, they were excluded from social welfare. For example, the social security pension system is contingent on employment, previous contributions, and age and health conditions. Although it should theoretically benefit the majority of workers, the state pension program has excluded almost half of the total employment in the economy, almost half of female employment, and most poor workers (Mohamed 2014, pp. 14). 75 percent of the new labor market entrants from 2000 to 2005 joined the informal sector, up from only one-fifth in the early 1970s (Hanieh 2021, pp. 8).

As the liberal conception of democracy was synonymous with the free market, the Mubarak regime was able to delay democratic reforms through economic liberalization, which only helped to fortify the regime (Badawi 2021). The period of neoliberalism also reinforced the coercive apparatus of the state against democratization and resulted in the rise of political authoritarian structures. Market-based development policies were unpopular in the Arab World, sparking strikes, demonstrations, and violent clashes between citizens and security forces. One survey reported 25 outbreaks of major protests between 1977 and 1992 against structural adjustment in nine countries—Algeria, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, Iran, Sudan, Tunisia, and Turkey. Highly political structures were constitutive of market-led development models implemented from the 1980s onwards (Hanieh 2021, p. 7). To quell prevalent resistance to the neoliberal agenda, Arab regimes adopted authoritarian practices through the 1980s and 1990s.

Mubarak suspended the constitution, imposed Emergency Law, restricted the press, introduced military courts to try political opponents, and detained people without charge (Heina 2021, pp. 4-5). During the 1990s, when Mubarak accepted the structural adjustment program from the World Bank and IMF, security forces—the army’s rivals—were strengthened to maintain law and order and repress labor strikes and mass demonstrations against austerity measures (Joya 2018, pp. 14).

By showcasing high growth rates, international financial institutions sought to frame the neoliberal model as the solution to development—while supporting authoritarian regimes—to justify expanding these reforms internationally. While the Egyptian government was being internationally celebrated for its economic performance (2006-2008), social hostility towards the regime grew, and the largest industrial strike wave before the 2011 uprisings transpired during the same period as this international recognition. This strike was spearheaded by female workers from Misr Spinning and Weaving Company (MSWC), a state-owned company that was privatized and employed roughly one-third of the total workforce of all of the 20-25 dynasties combined, in 2006. Workers from across Egypt’s main industrial city, El Mahalla, mobilized in response to cuts in employment benefits. Consequently, El Mahalla was brought to a total halt in April 2008. Moreover, the global financial crisis later in the same year also impacted segments of the middle class, which considerably expanded the activist networks formed in these industrial actions. Such networks were at the heart of the uprisings in 2011 (Shafik 2020, p. 4). They also accepted the military takeover during the Egyptian uprising because the lower and middle classes viewed the EAF as their patron.



## Timeline of the Evolution of the Military Economy Since the 1950s

Source: Sayigh 2019

- **1952**  
The Free Officers Movement overthrows the monarchy, establishes the republic in 1953
- **1954**  
The Ministry of Military Production is established
- **1956**  
Gamal Abdel Nasser's presidency begins
- **1961**  
*July* So-called socialist decrees issued, nationalizing private companies and assets  
Then defense minister Abdel Hakim Amer appointed to head the Higher Council for Public Enterprises of an Economic Character
- **1963**  
Egyptian military intervenes in Yemen's civil war (which ends in 1967)
- **1964**  
The Administrative Monitoring Authority is established
- **1965**  
An EAF officer is appointed to head all major land reclamation schemes
- **1967**  
Six-Day War
- **1970**  
Anwar Sadat's presidency begins
- **1973**  
*October* Yom Kippur War
- **1974**  
Start of *infitah* policy (economic "opening up")
- **1975**  
The Arab Organization for Industrialization is established

- **1978**  
Camp David Accords signed with Israel; the EAF takes a lead role in reconstruction and rehabilitation of urban centers and infrastructure in the Suez Canal zone
- **1979**  
Peace treaty signed with Israel; annual U.S. economic and military assistance starts  
  
The National Service Projects Organization is established
- **1981**  
Lieutenant General Abdul-Halim Abu-Ghazalah appointed minister of defense, plays a major role expanding the military economy in the 1980s  
  
The General Services Agency is established  
  
The EAF's Land Projects Agency is established  
  
Hosni Mubarak's presidency begins
- **1983**  
MOMP subsidiaries reclassified as public sector companies
- **1984**  
The National Authority for Military Production is established
- **1985**  
Creation of "civilian construction brigades" under the MOD (comprising EAF conscripts)
- **1991**  
Launch of privatization under the Economic Reform and Structural Transformation Program; military-owned defense companies and factories become public businesses governed by commercial rules and regulations  
  
Lieutenant General Mohamed Hussein Tantawi appointed minister of defense, oversees the expansion of the officers' republic
- **1994**  
Founding Arab partners relinquish their shares in AOI, leaving it wholly owned by Egypt
- **2003**  
The Maritime Industries and Services Agency (under the MOD) is established; the agency receives control of Egyptian Ship Building and Repair Company and Alexandria Shipyard

- **2004**  
Privatization program relaunched under government of then prime minister Ahmed Nazif
- **2011**  
Amid a general uprising, Mubarak is ousted, and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces assumes the president's powers
- **2012**  
*June* Mohamed Morsi's presidency begins
- **2013**  
*March-May* The MOD and Morsi clash over economic development of Suez Canal zone  
*July* The EAF overthrows Morsi, and Adly Mansour named interim president  
*September* Start of massive increase in major public works and procurement contracts managed by military agencies
- **2014**  
*May* Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's presidency begins  
*August* The MOD launches Suez Canal expansion
- **2015**  
*March* The MOD launches new administrative capital project  
*November* Inauguration of Suez Economic Development Corridor program  
*November* The EAF's Land Projects Agency authorized to form joint ventures with Egyptian and foreign companies, and to use military-designated land as equity
- **2016**  
*February* The Administrative Capital Urban Development Company is made a public limited company (owned by the Land Projects Agency, NUCA, and NSPO)
- **2017**  
Administrative Monitoring Authority's jurisdiction is explicitly limited to civilian individuals and bodies, effectively excluding the military
- **2018**  
*December* Egypt Defense Expo held for the first time

## Chapter 4: The 2011 Egyptian Uprising

Although the main focus of mobilization for the 2011 uprising was the increased violence, torture, and intensive policing practices, which all served to maintain the pace of neoliberal reforms and the interests of the financial class (Abdelrahman 2017), the uprising also rejected torture, poverty, corruption and unemployment. Mubarak was forced to resign after ruling Egypt for 30 years, as millions of people from all walks of life went to the streets to make political, economic, and social demands (Joya 2011, p. 367). Similar to how postcolonial states simultaneously called for political sovereignty and economic sovereignty, Egyptian protesters during the 2011 Egyptian uprising simultaneously called for political justice and economic justice, as decades of neoliberalism revealed the way in which political struggles and economic struggles are intertwined. Moreover, both the movement of the New International Economic Order and the Egyptian Uprising were undermined by the strategic separation of political and economic affairs.

As the state continuously inflicted more repressive harm onto its citizens, “new sites of solidarity” began to emerge (Huke, Clua-Losada, and Bailey, 2015). The political and economic crises of the Mubarak regime, or more specifically the high levels of inequality and poverty that led to the rise of ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’, engendered an alliance between the ‘discontented’ and the ‘dispossessed’ that culminated in the 2011 Egyptian uprising. I demonstrate how authoritarian neoliberalism gave cause for a broad-based coalition calling for political and economic justice, which illustrates neoliberalism’s incompatibility with democracy. I also draw on these critiques of neoliberalism to corroborate the genius of postcolonial thinkers’ demands and the New International Economic Order.

### **A. The Rise of Authoritarian Neoliberalism**

As newly independent states called for a reformulation of sovereign equality that was oriented toward wealth redistribution and for the United Nations General Assembly to serve as the site for international economic decision-making, critics of the New International Economic Order countered that majoritarianism and politicization would interfere with economic policies and questions. Meanwhile, international financial institutions were thought to be insulated from such flaws and able to properly address the debt crisis (Getachew 2019). As a result, economic decision-making was depoliticized, warranting technical and legal expertise. Structural adjustment programs were forced onto poorer countries. Given the inherent structure of U.S. democracy promotion that was undergirded by economic liberalization in lieu of political reforms that would foster popular democracy, the liberal conception of development delinked political rights and social and economic ones. Neoliberalism has produced radical “de-politicization” of structural inequality, combined with an increased tolerance for disparities. Social inequalities are not seen as structural products of policy decisions but instead result from poor choices made by individuals (Brawley 2009). This ideology contrasts the postcolonial view that underdevelopment is caused and perpetuated by neo-colonial economic patterns.

Separating economic and political questions has concealed detrimental effects of neoliberalism, as certain macroeconomic targets such as improvements in GDP growth rates are met (Tansel 2018a). In the case of Egypt, short-term macroeconomic achievements permitted a popular narrative of success stories, which served to legitimize neoliberal policies and divert attention away from the socio-economic, political, and environmental costs of growth. Despite the widespread social degradation and repression throughout the 1990s and 2000s, international financial institutions characterized neoliberal policies in Egypt as successful. In its first four years, Mubarak’s ‘cabinet of businessmen’ tripled the real value of foreign direct investments,

ballooned state revenues from privatization (70 percent of total revenues from privatization since 1991 were received in the four years), and sustained a steady rate of GDP growth of over 7 percent per annum. The World Bank ranked Egypt as the “world’s top reformer” in its 2008 “Doing Business” report and maintained its ranking within the top 10 global reformers until the 2011 Egyptian uprising (Hanieh 2021, pp. 9). This international recognition reinforced the power of the new financial class, occasioning a robust network that supported the successive rule of Gamal Mubarak (Shafick 2020, pp. 4).

By adopting an internalist focus, dominant approaches to explaining authoritarian resilience and democratization have sundered economic and political questions. They instead have treated them as separate variables, prioritizing political questions to explain barriers to democratization (Abdelrahman 2012; Teti 2012; Adam Hanieh 2011). Mubarak’s aggressive neoliberal reforms necessitated police and security forces to suppress dissent as a means to attract foreign investors with the mirage of regime stability. Critical scholars characterize such a process as ‘authoritarian neoliberalism’, which denotes the growing urgency of coercive capacities and/or the centralization of the state (Bruff, 2014, 2016; Bruff and Wöhl, 2016; Gonzales, 2016; Smith, 2018; Tansel, 2017b, 2018; Wigger and Buch-Hansen, 2015; Yeşil, 2016). Arguing that neoliberalism warrants suppressing dissent and movements, Maha Abdelrahman (2017) conceives state coercion and police repression as an “integral part of the capitalist state irrespective of the prevailing political system.” Tansel (2019) specifically describes authoritarian neoliberalism as “a crisis-ridden, contradictory set of practices which enhance the capacities and potentials for resistance as well as for domination” (p. 2). Successful implementation of structural adjustment programs in Egypt necessitated banning protests, restricting associations, and closely monitoring and controlling unions (Joya 2011).

Although authoritarianism was not only birthed at the advent of neoliberalism since Egypt's political structures were highly authoritarian throughout the Nasser era, neoliberal policies did not sublate political authoritarian measures but rather exacerbated them. These concomitant processes, including the rise of autocratic rulers in the 1980s, were backed by Western governments. Western governments and international financial institutions disguised the rise of authoritarian neoliberalism through a benevolent discourse, espousing their support for the transition to democracy and willingness to provide technocratic expertise to assist struggling markets (Hanieh 2021, p. 2). However, the crises and contradictions of neoliberalism intensified as time progressed, engendering a broad-based alliance that unified political and economic justice.

### **B. 'Accumulation by Dispossession'**

Since the Egyptian uprising, dominant literature has sought to explain authoritarian resilience by primarily focusing on domestic variables, such as domestic elite alliances and contestations, cultural attitudes, and institutional weaknesses to address the question of democracy (Tansel 2019). In response, various scholars have contextualized state authoritarian practices within the processes of neoliberalism, framing the Egyptian uprising as a crisis of neoliberalism (Bogaert 2013; Joya 2011; Kaboub 2014). To explain why developing countries were plagued by an economic crisis by the end of the 1980s, David Harvey illuminates how neoliberalism was the response to the capitalist crisis of overaccumulation. International financial institutions compelled developing countries into adopting structural adjustment programs that slashed public expenditures and social safety nets. Harvey characterizes capitalism by its penchant for overaccumulation, which results in uneven geographical development. Capitalists seek to "lever profits out of unequal exchange and to place surplus capitals wherever

the rate of profit is highest” (p. 417). In chapter seven of his *Limits to Capital*, Harvey contends that crises of capitalism can be understood as phases of destruction and/or devaluation of surplus capital that no longer generate profits for capitalists. These crises are countered through a *temporal fix*, the displacement of surplus capital in time, which manifests itself through the credit system and long-term debt-financed investments. Secondly, crises are addressed through a *spatial fix*, the geographical expansion of capitalism. These two components coalesce into a spatio-temporal fix. Whereas the temporal fix is seen through the unfettered growth of the financial sector of industrialized states, the spatial fix is seen through neoliberal agenda imposed on developing countries.

Furthermore, Harvey propounds that the inherent tension between geographically mobile capital and fixed forms of capital appears through different kinds of territorial organization and governance that become sites of instability and competition. The logic of capital is expressed through a territorial logic that is irreducible to the former. Moreover, in his 2010 book *The Enigma of Capital*, David Harvey states that three decades of neoliberalism and its ensuing global crisis fomented the conditions for broad oppositional coalition constituting the “discontented, the alienated, the deprived, and the dispossessed” (Harvey 2010, p. 240). The uneven geographical dynamics are similar to those of Marx’s primitive accumulation. Harvey calls them “accumulation by dispossession,” which takes form through the privatization of state assets, financialization of the economy, management and manipulation of crises, and state redistributions in favor of the upper classes. These myriad forms of dispossession create the conditions for a broader alliance that consists of various social groups.

Robert Roccu (2013) applies Harvey’s framework to the conditions that sparked the Egyptian uprising. Neoliberal reforms enabled the military to become an international economic



competitor and further embed itself into the domestic economy to exploit for personal profit, which captures the “territorial logic” that arose in Egypt in response to neoliberal reforms. Whereas the old military was at the center of political and economic affairs domestically, military officers became concerned with protecting their privileges under the neoliberal global order and were enabled to expand their economic portfolio. Meanwhile, slashes in public expenditures and rampant authoritarianism induced a broad alliance of middle and lower classes. By applying Harvey’s framework, it is seen that the Egyptian uprising revealed a contradiction in the neoliberal global order that was specifically expressed through Egypt’s territorial logic. As economic liberalization led to many forms of dispossession, this led to the rise of authoritarian neoliberalism. The concoction of force, dispossession, and repression concretized the conditions for the middle class who demanded political reforms (the ‘discontented’) and the working class who demanded economic reforms (the ‘dispossessed’) to unite as a broad-based alliance seen in the Egyptian uprising. The inseparability of political and economic struggles has illuminated the symbiotic relationship between authoritarian mechanisms and neoliberal policies.

### **C. The Consolidation and Contradictions of Military Power Post-Uprising**

Along with the contradiction between democratization and neoliberalism that gave rise to authoritarianism neoliberalism, the neoliberal era, coupled with Arab-Israeli conflict normalization, deepened the contradictions within the military and between factions of the ruling class. Despite their substantial commercial activity, the EAF did not simply become just another group of private sector business interests. Staffed by universally conscripted male soldiers who came from different classes and regions across Egypt, the EAF retained its historically patriotic disposition (Amar 2012). They were influenced by the revolutionary, anti-colonial discourse of the 1950s and were taught to regard their role as the protector of the masses and the nation.

Therefore, the economic activities of the 1980s and 1990s situated the EAF into a highly contradictory position. While becoming a private economic actor whose for-profit projects, including but not limited to tourism, villages, elite housing settlements, oil gas extraction facilities, and free trade zone developments, embraced the neoliberal development model, the EAF maintained its former image as a public-sector sovereign that relied on the national-security designation of such economic projects.

Neoliberalism and Arab-Israeli conflict normalization may have recast the EAF as one of privatization's beneficiaries, but the EAF's image as a public-sector sovereign rendered its relationship with business elites highly contentious. Because neoliberal reforms adopted by Mubarak sidelined the EAF politically and slashed their budget, the EAF was threatened by the rise of security forces and neoliberal elites. Despite his attempts to co-opt the EAF by offering privileges to retired officers, Mubarak was unsuccessful in persuading military generals to abide by Gamal Mubarak's economic "Washington Consensus" reforms that slashed public spending, cut taxes for business elites, maintained a competitive exchange rate, liberalized trade, and so forth. Field Marshal Tantawi, the former Minister of Defense, and the EAF were averse to Mubarak's agenda of privatization in view of the jeopardization of state control. These sentiments were revealed through two Wikileaks cables in 2008. Margaret Scobey, a former U.S. ambassador to Egypt, remarked, "The military views the privatization efforts as a threat to its economic position, and therefore generally opposes economic reforms. We see the military's role in the economy as a force that generally stifles free market reform by increasing direct government involvement in the markets" (Abul-Magd 2013, p. 2).

As the Egyptian uprising simultaneously represented a crisis of neoliberalism and an opportunity to remove Mubarak from power, the EAF emerged as the winner from the contesting

elitist factions. Their historically highly-esteemed image—emanating from the Third Worldist era—allowed the EAF to assume a role that was reminiscent of this revolutionary decolonization era and present itself as the patron of the working and middle classes to protesters. When the EAF offered to govern the nation for a short six month transitional period, the Egyptian masses chanted: “The army and the people are one hand.” State-owned media played the 1960s national songs of Nasser’s era (Abul-Magd 2013, p. 2). Despite being a critical faction of the ruling class, the EAF was not at the forefront of post-1991 repression. Dissent had instead been cracked down by the security apparatus represented by the Ministry of Interior (MOI). Since the EAF did not sour its historically highly-esteemed reputation by performing this dirty work, Egyptians allowed the institution to fill the leadership vacuum. Between 2011 and 2013, mass popular mobilizations sometimes reached out to the EAF as a more preferable alternative to the nefarious police or political party establishment (Amar 2012, p. 85). The EAF’s internally contentious features—stemming from the clash between its nationalist and entrepreneurial identities—are overlooked by simply defining the EAF as a faction of the ruling class with the leading role in capital accumulation.

Shana Marshall, Angela Joya, and other critical scholars’ approach of contextualizing the EAF within the global economy reveals the way in which the neoliberal era shaped competing class interests that informed the EAF’s political aspirations and hence its rationale for validating the uprisings and forcing Mubarak to resign. These critical approaches also reveal the limitations of dominant approaches arguing that the EAF’s degree of professionalism or institutionalization impelled their seemingly politically neutral position (Lutterbeck 2011, p. 9; Lutterbeck 2013). On the contrary, the EAF utilized the takeover to augment their financialization project as they returned to the heart of domestic and international financial networks (Shafik 2020, pp. 5-6). As

a result, the scope and scale of the military's economic activity has transformed since 2011 (Sayigh 2019, p. 2).

The EAF's takeover of the country's affairs increased the military's perceived value as an investment partner because the military could secure continued immunity from government oversight for their enterprises and business partners, and investing alongside the coercive arm of the state provided added security for costly assets during periods of volatility (Marshall 2015, p. 6). The potential prosecution of Mubarak's business associates was also seen as an investment opportunity and paved the way for reselling previously privatized state assets such as land. Many international firms and investors were receptive to these signals in the waning years of the Mubarak era. For example, contracts that would rapidly expand weapon co-production were officialized in the final days of Mubarak's rule and during the EAF's early tenure.

To boost the confidence of investment partners, the EAF vilified, threatened, and violently repressed labor activists and demonstrators (Marshall 2015, p. 7). It also deployed troops to secure the assets of its corporate partners. During the Egyptian uprising, the EAF provided the Egyptian subsidiary of the Kuwait-based Kharafi Group with an armored guard to facilitate equipment delivery to its al Shabab power plant. Although the Egyptian uprising was catalyzed by police brutality and state violence, the EAF continued to use its coercive capacity against Egyptians post-uprising. Authoritarian neoliberalism may have galvanized all walks of life to join the 2011 protests, yet was only reproduced as part and parcel of the EAF's hegemony.

Although the multi-headed opposition that partnered with the EAF to control the state after Mubarak was characterized by contention and diverse ideologies, the partners were united by their interest in restricting industrial concessions to the working class. To separate workers from the revolution itself, the ruling elite framed the industrial movements as committing selfish,

sporadic acts that were anti-revolutionary (Abdelrahman 2012). Despite the Egyptian uprising uniting the working and middle classes, the ruling elite sundered the industrial movement from the political democratization project, allowing the middle class to expand their political turf through procedural democracy without the financial system being contested. Whereas the middle class benefited from democratic concessions, working-class demands were repressed (Shafik 2020, p. 7). Similar to how the New International Economic Order was undermined by the notion of economics as a depoliticized and technical field that should not be interfered with decision making in the UN General Assembly, the Egyptian Uprising were undermined by the strategic separation of political and economic struggles.

Although the regime originally succumbed to democratic concessions as part of the strategy to divide the working and middle classes, the rule of law and human rights have only eroded since the EAF's ousting of President Mohammed Morsi in 2013 and the rise of current President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. Furthermore, el-Sisi has put the EAF in absolute control over the economy as well as major economic projects through a statist neoliberal strategy that is typified by megaprojects. The EAF have thus found themselves in a more deepened contradictory position between its nationalist and entrepreneurial identities. As the EAF identify themselves with major economic projects such as the New Administrative Capital that promote wealth inequality and dispossession, they have damaged their historically highly esteemed image that enabled their deep integration into the economy in the first place.

## Chapter 5: The New Administrative Capital

As masses of Egyptians reasserted their sovereignty over the state in 2011, this triggered what Paul Amar denotes as ‘megamilitarism’. The military regime sought to reassert sovereignty through mega-scale restructuring of the linkages between political militarization and economic development (Amar 2018, p. 89). A partnership was forged between Egypt’s military establishment and the Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which ultimately contributed to the EAF’s takeover in July 2013 and reviving old nationalist impulses and a cursory plan to construct Egypt’s largest desert city.

As the Gulf states were happy with the successful coup in 2013, their funds went on to fund the New Administrative Capital. El-Sisi sought to undertake a bold development program that promised national transformation. Influenced by the recent global surge of new city projects, the regime has introduced several new city projects. The New Administrative Capital, an idea contrived in 2014, immediately joined among the top priority projects of the national development strategy Egypt 2030 (Loewert and Steiner 2019, pp. 68). When the regime announced the megaproject in 2015, Dubai’s most eminent developer, Emaar Properties’ founder Mohamed Alabbar, led the effort. To build the capital, the Ministry of Housing would work with Alabbar’s investment vehicle, Capital City Partners Ltd, a private fund of global investors (Sweet 2019, p. 19). President El-Sisi hosted a conference at Sharm el Sheikh in 2015 to attract international investors for the New Administrative Capital. The “country-branding” public relations firm, Richard Attias & Associates (RAA), organized and branded the conference as “Egypt the future.” One of its press releases stated that it sought to “tell Egypt’s new story: that the country is on a new track, with abundant opportunities for foreign investors.” It was

showcased that the New Administrative Capital would be built from scratch in the desert 45 kilometers east of the Cairo agglomeration and cover 700 square kilometers in total.



Architectural Design of New Administrative Capital  
Source: Cube Consultants

A U.S. global architectural, urban planning and engineering firm, Skidmore, Owings and Merrill (SOM), contrived a miniature model that entailed a central business district comprising towers. It also produced a short animated fly-through that showcased the capital's contents, including modern conference halls, eight-labeled boulevards, swaths of forested parkland, waterways, and an opera house. Media reports from the conference summarized the vision imagined at the conference: the capital would be the size of Singapore and comprise more than 10,000 km (6,200 miles) of boulevards, avenues and streets, an airport bigger than Heathrow, and a skyscraper taller than the Eiffel tower. An amusement park four times the size of

Disneyland was also one of the 30 subprojects. Five to seven million people would inhabit its residential areas, and a new government quarter including the parliament, ministries, the supreme council, diplomatic missions, and a new president's palace would be located in the capital (Loewert and Steiner 2019, p. 66).

Whereas the regime deploys parapopulist rhetoric to claim that the capital is for the Egyptian people and the nation while shrouding project details, the New Administrative Capital is being designed for a population that does not exist and will not improve socioeconomic conditions. The military regime is most likely executing a futile strategy that has failed historically several times because it is pursuing its larger goal of reasserting its sovereignty and containing the contradictions unraveled by the 2011 Egyptian uprising.



Map of The New Administrative Capital's Location  
Source: Egypt Today



### **A. The Impetus for Megaprojects: Waning Sovereignty**

Confronted by several sources of instability, El-Sisi's regime aspired to hegemonize as quickly as possible. El-Sisi was cognizant that mass revolts had overthrown the past two presidents. Tourism and foreign investment, which encompassed a substantial portion of state revenues, were also suffering since the 2013 military coup (Sweet 2019, p. 20). The military regime had halted the reforms demanded during and initiated following the 2011 uprising and resumed the same policies that catalyzed the revolution in the first place (Khalil and Dill 2019, p. 2). As the state's foreign reserves decreased by more than half, the Egyptian pound was devalued at an unprecedented rate (Al-Jazeera 2016). Given the growing political dissent enkindled by plummeting socioeconomic conditions, the Egyptian masses experienced another wave of authoritarian neoliberalism. El-Sisi has resorted to unprecedented levels of state violence due to the absence of a broad political base that would legitimize the regime.

As a result of their expanded role, the EAF found themselves being explicitly responsible for the country's entire governance portfolio, including economic development, anti-terrorism efforts, and social policy. Due to the economic and political crises post-uprising, the public image of the military thus eroded, shifting from the hero of a popular revolution against dictatorship to the primary agent of counterrevolutionary demobilization and dissident repression (Amar 2018). As a response, the military regime began accumulating massive debt. From 2013 to 2014, the New Administrative Capital and other megaprojects received massive investments from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates (Amar 2021, p. 86).

Most interlocutors concur that the reasoning behind the recurring ambition to settle the desert is the exigency for a bold vision to legitimize presidential rule (Loewert and Steiner 2019,

p. 68). Wendy Brown (2011) argues that in a neoliberal/globalized world, there is an assumption that nation states become weaker. However, Brown notes that wall-making theatrically exhibits nation-state sovereignty while signifying the waning sovereign state power, including new political legitimacy deficits, and new citizen anxieties. In Egypt, the military regime has found itself in a fragile and politically-contested position. Given the ensued economic crisis since the 2013 military coup, the regime slashed subsidies and devalued Egyptian currency to attract international capital and secure external loans that finance government operations and mega infrastructure projects. Meanwhile, current devaluation leads to a rise in inflation that bars Egyptians from accessing basic necessities and services. Whereas earlier megaprojects were designed to rectify socio-economic equalities, megaprojects became investment-oriented spectacles beginning in the mid-1970s when capital liberalized. The New International Economic Order that was imagined during decolonization viewed sovereign equality eliciting material implications because colonial patterns of economic domination, that continue after independence, contradicted nationalist and popular interests. The contemporary global economic order has denied postcolonial states such as Egypt from enacting economic decisions geared toward the needs of the Egyptian populace. At the expense of its legitimacy, the military regime enacted mechanisms of force, dispossession, and repression to maintain international economic interests.

It is conspicuous that the general public will not be the capital's beneficiaries, as illuminated by the regime's past failures to settle the desert. Rather than centers of production or settlements of high population density, megaprojects operate as sites of global investor speculation, leisure, and office administration (Amar 2018, pp. 86-87). Regardless, El-Sisi frames the New Administrative Capital as a project designed for the general public. The regime

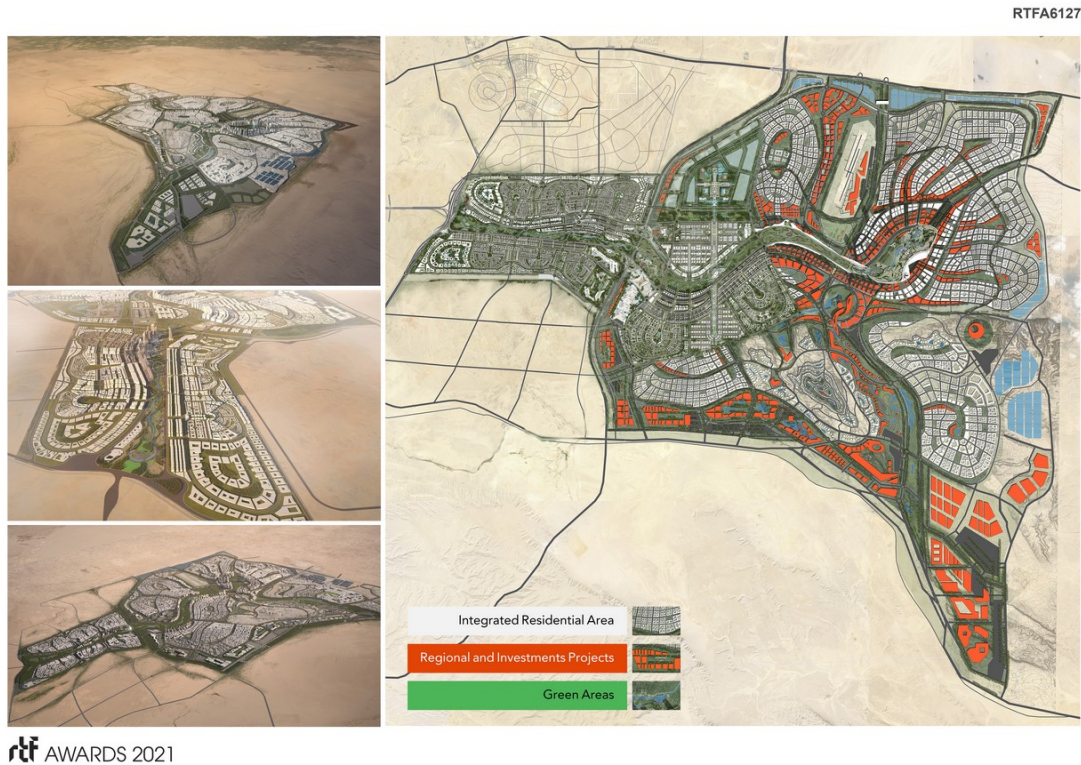
promoted the discourse that the New Administrative Capital purported to alleviate congestion in Cairo, as the city's population was projected to double by 2050. Display boards have depicted the New Administrative Capital as “Madinat al-Jamia” (A City for Everyone) and have also been sponsored by corporations. At the Sharm El-Sheikh conference, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait and Oman already pledged to invest \$12.5 billion in Egyptian development, but Sisi urged, “Egypt needs no less than \$200bn to \$300bn to have real hope for the 90 million Egyptians to really live, really work and really be happy” (Sweet 2019, p. 22). Since coming to power, El-Sisi's regime has sought to reinstate legitimacy through its promise of regaining Egypt's leadership position in the region and rhetoric that Amar denotes as ‘parapopulist.’



Photo of Residential billboard advertisement, in Cairo, Egypt  
Source: AP Photo/Nariman El-Mofty

## **B. Parapopulist Sovereignty**

Paul Amar (2018) refers to megaprojects as “parapopulist” political economies that are antithetical to the populist regimes in the 20th century that geared national resources towards state development and public industries. Unlike the prior populist project seen in the Nasser era, mega-scale security logics are geared towards infrastructures and projects that prioritize the interests of investors rather than public safety or national patrimony (Sweet 2019, p. 18). Urban projects like the New Administrative Capital function as speculative real estate schemes. They are a means for the ‘financial class’ to purchase significantly discounted government land to ultimately sell and accumulate profit (Sweet 2020, p. 20). While funding for productive enterprises such as in commerce, agriculture and suitable housing are ignored, speculators’ investments will most likely turn into dead capital in ghost towns, among other capital expenditures incurred in implementing road, sewerage, and power infrastructure in these sites (Sweet 2019, p. 21). Nonetheless, the Egyptian regime continues to claim the New Administrative Capital for the public’s good. The President and ministers also repeatedly insisted that the New Administrative Capital will encourage foreign investments and strengthen international collaborations (Loewert and Steiner 2019, p. 70).



Blueprint of New Administrative Capital  
Source: Cube Consultants

Cairo-based American economist and urban planner David Sims attributes the failure of these cities to excluding ordinary Egyptians from their residency. Their form and composition neglect how cities organically grow and how Egyptians organize their lives since central planners subscribe to notions of what an ideal Egypt should resemble, which is often a suburban America. In his book *Egypt's Desert Dreams: Development or Disaster?*, Sims critiques central planners for demonstrating an 'imperial ignorance' that neglects the struggles of the common Egyptian family, "State planners and their design consultants have produced ... such sterile, expensive, and inappropriate designs that they only fit the aspirations of the car-owning middle classes and the rich. New-town promoters simply cannot or will not accept that the mass of Egyptians are of

modest means, struggle to make ends meet, haven't a hope of ever owning a car, and require coping strategies that are anathema to what the designers would like to see." (p. 284)

These new cities are designed for a car-owning middle class, yet only nine percent of Egyptian families in urban areas own any type of vehicle. Moreover, ordinary Egyptians cannot afford the price tag of homes that are built by private sector companies. These houses also do not align with the needs of an average Egyptian family in terms of size and excess space. On top of these reasons, the New Administrative Capital will not bring jobs (Sweet 2019, p. 21). These projects do not target the production sector, and the general population is ultimately not substantive beneficiaries of these developments even though they may trigger a brief boom in construction jobs (Amar 2018, p. 84). After construction is completed, ordinary Egyptians will be ushered over these luxury spaces. Overall, these types of cities remain deserted because they are intended for a population that does not exist. As Egyptians have recognized the New Administrative Capital for the mirage that it is, which has fomented political dissent, the military regime must reassert its sovereignty through a securocratic strategy.





Photo of billboards promoting a new residential housing compound overlook a crowded run-down neighborhood, on the ring road, in Cairo, Egypt

Source: AP Photo/Nariman El-Mofty

### C. Securocratic Sovereignty

As the logic of authoritarian neoliberalism has illuminated the way in which economic dispossession triggers political upheaval, the military regime seeks to reverse its waning sovereignty through an unprecedented securocratic that enables the silencing of political opposition, the maintenance of parapopulist discourse, and the insulation of the general public, journalists, and other stakeholders from the New Administrative Capital. Beginning in the 1970s, megaprojects were attached with a national-security designation that allowed the EAF to shield

itself from public scrutiny. As the EAF avoided wars and exercised its labor, management, and engineering capabilities domestically as a result of Camp David stipulations, it spearheaded development projects in formerly underpopulated areas that were designated as zones of incursion, insurgency, or “national security risk”, such as desert areas, coastal and border zones, and the Sinai Peninsula. Currently the pretense of ‘national security’ is leveraged to justify the EAF’s extensive business and developmentalist roles, allowing them to maintain their profits generated from shopping malls, beach resorts, and gated cities such as the New Administrative Capital (Amar 2018, p. 85). The megaproject as a site of global investor speculation is realized through the mega scale and militarized security of these projects.

Although Egypt faces legitimate security concerns given the upsurge in terrorist attacks since Morsi’s ousting (Agarwal 2018, p. 257), the pretext of national security has been deployed to suppress political dissent and is part and parcel of the rise of what Maha Abdelrahman (2016) refers to as the ‘securocratic’ state. This term does not only capture the increasing power of the security bureaucracy but also draws attention to the surveillance mechanisms for managing society. Whereas Abdelrahman conceptualizes the securocratic state in the policing context, the concept can be extended to the New Administrative Capital and its security apparatus as well. The public spaces and streets of the New Administrative Capital are planned to be outfitted with a network of 6,000 surveillance cameras. The U.S. firm Honeywell has been contracted to provide this city-wide surveillance system (Elsayed 2019). There will also be numerous forms of authorization through facial recognition and AI (European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity 2022). Moreover, under the guise of slum development and upgrading of unsafe housing, the military regime is upgrading slum areas into investment and residential hubs, relocating people to other slums. In the case of the Masspero triangle, a slum by the Nile, the residents were given



the options to either remain in the neighborhood by renting or buying housing at an increased cost or receive financial compensation by relocating to the outskirts of Cairo. Most people chose the latter option, not only allowing upper-middle class elites to move into their former neighborhoods but also moving themselves away from centers and symbols of political power such as the Foreign Ministry and the Radio and Television headquarters. Meanwhile, security forces have penetrated the slums that residents were allowed to return after reconstruction in an unprecedented manner. Since residents returned as tenants rather than homeowners as they previously were, they now live under the threat of eviction (Mandour 2021). With mass surveillance and expanded security forces, the military regime is able to identify and silence dissent more efficiently and deter people from engaging in dissent, thus creating a ‘disciplinary society.’

Reinforcing the regime’s parapopulist rhetoric, the Egyptian media do not challenge any of the regime’s pronouncements on the capital’s progress. In late 2017, a part of Egypt’s General Intelligence Service purchased the country’s largest private-sector television stations. Buying capital becomes a form of reinforcing a securocracy. In July 2018, the parliament extended state power to penalizing journalists who publish “fake news.” Award-winning economist Abdel-Khaleq Farouq in October 2018 was targeted for publishing a book that criticized the regime’s economic policies. Police seized 185 copies of the initial 200-copy book before any could be sold. The publisher was also arrested (Sweet 2019, p. 25). While the regime has augmented policing and the security apparatus to silence political dissent, the degree of the EAF’s economic activity is kept concealed under the pretense of national security. Consequently, it is not disclosed how much of the national economy is EAF-controlled, with estimates ranging from five to 40 percent of the national output (Sayigh 2019). Similarly, the EAF exploited its

historically privileged position throughout the neoliberal era to protect its monopolistic practices, revenues, and overall budget from any external scrutiny, in the name of national security (Abdelrahman 2016, p. 2). Under the subterfuge of national security, the EAF does not disclose the degree to which it has infiltrated the domestic economy and hence the amount of subsidies that it has acquired from projects like the New Administrative Capital (Harding 2016). Running out of ways to reinstate its sovereignty, the military regime must exaggerate the discourse of national security to not only suppress political opposition but to also conceal the extent to which it has exploited the domestic economy.

#### **D. Statist Neoliberalism and the Military's Role in Megaprojects**

As military institutions have assumed newly expanded roles as investors, contractors, and corporate profiteers, the New Administrative Capital indicates that something other than neoliberalism is being restored. 'Statist neoliberalism' best captures the project. It is a 'strategic wedding of seemingly contradictory state types' that partly enacts neoliberal reforms while reinforcing the state's centralized control over the economy (Khalil and Dill 2019, p. 15). The New Administrative Capital, like neoliberal megaprojects, contains public-private partnerships. The EAF entered negotiations about the capital's development through Presidential Decree No. 446, which was passed in December 2015 and allowed the Armed Forces Land Projects Agency to form for-profit corporations either on its own or jointly with national and international capital sources (Sawaf 2016). The EAF's control over the New Administrative Capital has continued to expand as EAF representatives attract foreign investors and developers by joining international delegations. Overall, the New Administrative Capital represents the sustained symbiotic relationship between private investors and military generals. Whereas international creditors are relied on for external loans to finance megaprojects and ultimately make a profit for themselves,

military generals who spearhead these developments appropriate the public funds they acquire from investors rather than spending funds on the general population.

Although the New Administrative Capital rests on public-private partnerships, the megaproject is not fully neoliberal. Whereas strictly neoliberal megaprojects aim to ‘depoliticize’ urban decisions (Vento 2017), the New Administrative Capital aims to establish a political hegemony. The making of the Presidential Palace within the New Administrative Capital represents the absolute power of the head of state, similar to the idea of absolutistic cities in Europe in the 17th century (Loewert and Steiner 2019, pp. 72-73). The New Administrative Capital cannot be described as ‘state capitalism’ either because state capitalist projects are fully geared toward the political objectives of the state (Tuğal 2022). Instead, the New Administrative Capital embodies a statist neoliberal model in that way it sustains public-private partnerships, enhances the productive role of the state, and politicizes hegemony. While the New Administrative Capital is geared towards foreign and private investors, the EAF also serves itself and maintains systems of patronage and patrimonialism by permeating state-owned companies and government entities engaged in the megaproject (Sayigh 2019, p. 4) and as seen in the way it competes with other state institutions.

In December 2015, El-Sisi issued a decree to amend Law 53/1981, which stipulated the governing framework of the Armed Forces Project Agency (AFLPA). The agency was enabled by the amendment to expand its commercial activities and form for-profit corporations (Agarwal 2018, p. 263). The AFLPA became able to conduct commercial endeavors on its own and jointly with national and international capital sources. In February 2016, El-Sisi issued another decree to designate the AFLPA in overseeing the construction of two mega-projects, including the New Administrative Capital.

The tug of war between the EAF and Ministry of Housing over control of the New Administrative Capital once again reinforces the commanding role the former plays. Although the megaproject was unveiled on 2015, the Ministry of Housing began negotiations with then lead developer Dubai-based business-man Muhammad al-Abbar in summer 2014 (Loewert and Steiner 2019, p. 69). The former Minister of Housing and now Prime Minister, Mostafa Madbouly, insulated project development and management from other ministries and project stakeholders. Although the Minister of Housing attempted to sideline the EAF, it gradually reasserted control. The military cited its legal right to control all desert land to assert control of the project again. In April 2016, a company called Administrative Capital Urban Development (ACUD) was founded to oversee the development of various sub-projects in the New Administrative Capital. This diminished the Ministry of Housing's control over the new capital since most of the company's board members had connections to the EAF (Hasan, "Majlis").

Moreover, the military regime and national companies invested additional money to fund the project. From its inception in 1979, the New Urban Communities Authority (NUCA), a sub-authority of the Ministry of Housing that was founded to supervise the development of new towns, was subsidizing the New Administrative Capital, particularly indirectly via the ACUD. The ACUD, which the military mostly controls, was financed through the budgets of the NUCA and the EAF. It is likely that the military and ACUD exploit this arrangement by appropriating returns from land sales and transferring other valuable assets from the NUCA to the ACUD and the military. By April 2018, at least 15 billion Egyptian pounds were injected into the megaproject, which will become revenues for the ACUD and military (Loewert and Steiner 2019, p. 71). Therefore, what is supposed to be a completely foreign investment translates into a national priority, despite the fact that these revenues will not fulfill the needs of the Egyptian

populace. Overall, the New Administrative Capital has not only enabled the EAF to purloin revenues. Because the financial burden on the New Administrative Capital has been shifted onto the NUCA, officials have referred to this point to vindicate the exclusion of citizen participation and decision making in the capital.

### **E. De-Democratization**

By evading democratic processes in the construction of the New Administrative Capital, the military regime does not have to score its legitimacy from the Egyptian people. Many planners of the New Administrative Capital have negative attitudes toward allowing citizen participation into planning, thinking that citizens do not hold the right to ask for participation according to a planner's argumentation if they do not contribute to any costs. A sub-authority of the Ministry of Housing, called the New Urban Communities Authority, bears the financial brunt because this justifies excluding citizens from the New Administrative Capital (Loewert and Steiner 2019, p. 71). However, this viewpoint overlooks that the regime disproportionately uses tax revenues for loans and interest payments, which makes financing megaprojects possible (Mandour 2020b). Although the regime extracts wealth from the lower and middle classes by borrowing money, borrowing shields the regime from public scrutiny and allows for more autocratic decision making.

The military regime seeks to safeguard political institutions from Egyptians by situating them in an inaccessible city, as the New Administrative Capital is haunted by the specter of the 2011 Egyptian uprising. In the following months after the 2011 uprising, David D. Kirkpatrick recounts that whenever military generals were non-receptive to the mass demands for democratic transition, Egyptians would call for another "million-man march," inducing the generals to accept their demands (Kirkpatrick 2018, p. 69). Protesters regularly fought with security forces

for physical control of Cairo, and the military thus sealed streets around the Interior Ministry with concrete barriers for its protection (Kirkpartick 2018, p. 13). The military's experience with such a driven populace is still fresh, so "it is little wonder that a rejuvenated military regime dreams of a pristine, orderly new capital, far from the streets of Cairo, comprehensively covered by CCTV cameras, where only the satisfied wealthy can live" (Sweet 2019, p. 26). As Sweet summarizes, "Perhaps the new capital is not intended for the Egyptian people to escape the country's geographical constraints so much as for the Egyptian government to escape its people" (p.26).

To further justify the insulation of citizen participation and decision making from the New Administrative Capital, the advisor of the Ministry of Housing promulgated the idea that 'people' and 'government' should be seen as separate entities, "In the case of the new capital, we don't even need to think about asking the people, because it's a national project" (p. 71). Despite claiming that the New Administrative Capital will cater to the general public's needs, Egyptian elites have juxtaposed parapopulist discourse by stating that the needs of the state overpowers the needs of the people. This insinuates that endeavors made in the name for the nation does not necessarily mean made in the name for the general public. Although the public perception of a de-legitimized state galvanized the construction of the New Administrative Capital, the megaproject serves the function of discovering other sources of legitimacy as a means for the military regime to reassert its sovereignty rather than earning back the legitimacy from its people. The separation of 'government' and 'people' is a strategy that the military regime attempts to escape its own people.

## **F. Recalling the New International Economic Order**

As the New Administrative Capital project de-democratizes and dispossesses the nation to abide by conditions of an unjust global economy, the case of the capital illuminates the way in which neocolonial economic patterns of domination undermine the sovereignty of the postcolonial state. Examining the financing situation of the New Administrative Capital shows the need for a new international economic order that democratizes economic policy decision-making, augments the bargaining power of postcolonial states, and internationally redistributes resources to achieve substantive equality.

Early on, the military regime claimed that the megaproject would not incur any costs to the country and instead rely on foreign investors. Prime Minister, Minister of Housing at the time, Madbuli advanced the discourse that the capital would not cost the state even “a single cent” and would generate profit for the Egyptian treasury. However, gulf investors bailed on the capital due to low expectations for an adequate return of investment. Two of Abbar’s companies, Capital City Partners and Eagle Hills, signed a Memorandum of Understanding to assume a large share of project development. However, their involvement ended in June 2015 because Abbar refused for his UAE-based company Emaar to be a guarantor of loans. Since the desert area designated for the new capital project was not cleared of military units, legal regulations restricted Abbar’s scope for maneuver. As a result, construction had to be delayed (Loewert and Steiner 2019, p. 70). As Egypt lost its critical sources for funding, Sisi secured a \$12 billion bailout from the IMF in November 2016, which devalued the Egyptian pound and increased inflation due to the IMF’s conditional strings (Sweet 2019, p. 23).

Egypt’s resort to the IMF exemplifies an unjust global economy that renders postcolonial states’ economic survival contingent on predatory international financial institutions, regional

allies, and the international market. In times of crises, as seen at the end of the 1980s, the postcolonial state has no other choice but to seek refuge in international financial institutions, which has signified a trade-off between international financial interests and the economic livelihood of postcolonial people. IMF restructuring agreements have burdened the general public through enormous debt and austerity measures. Similar to what has induced past crises of overaccumulation (when lack of demand leads to surpluses of devalued capital), the regime is fixated on investment maximization that often results in dead capital and wasted resources, diverting its resources away from productive sectors, social welfare, and other investments that target socio-economic inequality.

The structure of the global economy deters postcolonial states to directly invest in social welfare. Despite the detrimental impact on the COVID-19 pandemic on Egyptian households, the regime drastically cut subsidies and social spending. In August of 2020, it reduced the size of subsidized bread by 20 grams despite bread, which is the food staple for approximately 60 million Egyptians. In the same month, Sisi issued Law 170, which reduced the salary of all workers by one percent and monthly pensions by 0.5 percent for a year. As the funds will proceed towards counteracting the impact of pandemics and natural disasters, shifting the burden of the pandemic onto the lower and middle classes (Mandour 2020b).

Borrowing money for financing megaprojects is made possible through the extraction of wealth from lower and middle classes because the regime disproportionately utilizes tax revenues for loans and interest payments. From this viewpoint, it is the money from the pockets of lower- and middle-class Egyptians that is being lent to the military regime, the IMF, and other international creditors. The large amount of money that the military regime has borrowed also



has drastically strained the state budget, which means that funds disproportionately veer towards interest and loan repayment instead of public sector wages and social welfare payments.

Moreover, the regime's ability to pay interest and loans for the New Administrative Capital and other endeavors is contingent on its stability, consequently resorting to oppression. Recurrent civil unrest in Egypt directly diminishes the regime's ability to collect taxes, impacting government revenue. It also decreases the regime's chances to roll-over its debt, increasing the chances of default (Mandour 2020a). Consequently, the EAF and other coercive actors must suppress uprisings, as authoritarian neoliberalism functions to ensure regime stability to attract international investors. As international financial flows lead the security apparatus to tighten its grip on the state, international stakeholders become complicit in political repression and anti-democratization.

The mega-scale and militarized security of these developments symbolically substitute real efforts to address the immediate needs and productive potential of the Egyptian population and evade the need for real popular sovereignty (Amar 2018). They allow the regime to sidestep securing a political base at home by instead relying on a financial class to score its legitimacy. Like the past projects, the new capital will ultimately result in a blow to state resources that the regime cannot bear the brunt of, along with new crises given a newly politicized population that recognizes the emptiness in the regime's promises (Sweet 2019, p. 19). As the military regime carries out processes of force, dispossession, investment, and de-democratization to adhere to the mechanisms of the global economy, its political sovereignty is constantly being contested. Although its sovereignty has waned as a result of these degrading processes, the regime attempts to reassert its sovereignty by forging strategies, such as the New Administrative Capital, that only emulate these processes that led to its de-legitimization in the first place. Under neocolonial

economic patterns of domination, popular sovereignty cannot be realized while postcolonial leaders constantly face waning sovereignty. The New International Economic Order was founded on the dilemma that *de jure* political colonization has morphed into *de facto* economic colonization. The framework of the New International Economic Order provides insight into resolving the systemic causes of waning sovereignty, as its principles envision an economic order that shrinks vast wealth inequalities while realizing sovereignty equality and self-determination among all states.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion and Further Research

With the notion of sovereignty espoused by postcolonial states in the Third Worldist era in mind, this thesis traces the metamorphosis of the characterizations of sovereignty by examining the way in which neoliberalism and Arab-Israeli conflict normalization have fundamentally changed the EAF's role from a decolonizing, developmentalist force to a for-profit, self-preserving, and domestically-focused institution. Neoliberalism and Arab-Israeli conflict normalization also radically shifted megaprojects from exemplifying an assertion of a self-determined national sovereignty that worked to sever mechanisms of colonial economic domination to an assertion of a parapopulist, securocratic, and megamilitarist sovereignty critical for sustaining international financial interests and suppressing highly contentious features of the military regime.

This thesis also traces how the EAF's dual role of private investor and public-sector sovereign has contributed to the military regime's highly unstable nature, as its former role overpowered the latter role that was conducive to its public image and hence regime stability. The EAF's historically esteemed role has enabled their usage of parapopulist rhetoric and national-security designations to cater to international investors. However, it is unsustainable in the long-term for the EAF to identify with projects that augur severe wealth inequality and radical disenfranchisement. This contrasts the claim that they are contributing to national development when building basic infrastructure, providing civilian commodities at discounted rates, and distributing food packages to the poor during Ramadan. By appeasing international creditors, the military regime only further exacerbates the regime's highly fragile character. Dissenting voices within the EAF have also revealed the internally contradictory character of the regime.

Considering the broad-based alliance constituting the 2011 Egyptian uprising, this thesis synthesizes neoliberal and postcolonial critiques, illustrating how the concept of ‘authoritarian resilience’ made by critics of neoliberalism and the notion that *de jure* political colonization was supplanted by a *de facto* economic colonization made by postcolonial thinkers converge to emphasize the inextricable link between political and economic rights and struggles.

Moreover, this thesis operationalizes the New Administrative Capital megaproject to demonstrate that the absence of a self-determined economic sovereignty undermines the postcolonial state’s political sovereignty. The statist neoliberal project that serves both corporate interests and state centralization represents the waning sovereignty of Egypt, as growing political dissent revolves around unprecedented political disenfranchisement and economic dispossession that is part and parcel of the mechanics of the global financial system. Rather than addressing the neocolonial economic patterns of domination squarely as was done during the Nasser phase of megaprojects, the current phase is not meant for the welfare of the Egyptian populace. This megaproject rather represents the myriad of public-private partnerships and repoliticizes in a way that bolsters national hegemony without being responsive to the needs of the Egyptian people.

Both the New International Economic Order and the Egyptian uprising were undermined by the strategic separation of political and economic affairs and thus emphasize the link between political and economic justice. In view of an inequitable global order that relatively imposed the heaviest burdens onto postcolonial states, this thesis recalls the significance of the New International Economic Order to realize an equal conception of sovereignty that emancipates the most burdened states to make economic decisions that prioritize political, economic, social, and cultural rights. Applying the framework of the New International Economic Order begins to address the systemic causes of waning sovereignty and broader neocolonial structures by

proposing measures to close global wealth inequality gaps and realizing sovereignty equality and self-determination among all states.

The mechanisms of the international economic regime have operated circularly. Despite its sovereignty waning as a result of adhering to international financial mechanisms that warrant processes of force, dispossession, and de-democratization, the Egyptian military regime attempts to reassert its sovereignty by forging bold strategies, such as the New Administrative Capital, that only emulate the processes of that led to its de-legitimization in the first place. The same failed economic policies, starting in the 1970s under Sadat, have been repackaged. This thesis calls for NIEO principle-based economic policies that do not reinvent the wheel and ensure a fair redistribution of wealth. Otherwise, it may be just time for another Egyptian uprising.

This thesis comprises various implications that can be explored for future research. First, by situating the megaprojects within the context of neocolonial patterns of domination, military political economies can be conceptualized in a way that transcends notions of ‘deep states’ and strict definitions of authoritarianism. Rather, military political economies are understood through larger processes of neoliberalism and neocolonial economic patterns of dominance. This rethinking of conventional political terms avoids strictly focusing on domestic political and military elites and denotes anti-democratization as an internationally-maintained process as well.

Secondly, by describing how borrowing mechanisms enable the transfer of wealth from lower- and middle-class Egyptians to domestic elites and international creditors, this thesis emphasizes the significance of discussing international relations in terms of individuals over states. The binary between postcolonial states and more developed states, specifically the notion that postcolonial states are harmed at the expense of more developed states, conceals the reality that domestic political and military elites benefit from the neocolonial economic arrangements

through rent-seeking and profit maximization. It is the state itself that is complicit in the international economic regime, while it is the people who suffer at its expense.

Lastly, tracing neocolonial patterns of domination in Egypt can provide insight into why the Arab region is suffering an identity crisis. As the U.S., Israel, and other Western powers successfully inhibited Arab nationalism, Egypt and other Arab states have become complicit in Israeli settler-colonialism that is contingent on ethnic cleansing and apartheid. Neoliberalism and Arab-Israeli conflict normalization necessitated disrupting Arab unity and erasing collective identity to integrate Arab states into global trade and financial flows.

Along with contemporary Egypt-Israeli relations, the era of neoliberalism and Arab-Israeli conflict normalization also shed light on other phenomena such as the large number of arms imports. Egypt recently ranked as the third-largest arms importer globally (Al-Anani 2022). Similar to the cost of megaprojects, tracing the way in which neoliberal reforms and “peace” treaties have expanded the EAF’s engagement in the global military-industrial complex can reveal the amount of dead capital that the defense industry produces. Overall, the frameworks of neoliberalism and postcolonialism offer a way to reconceptualize regressive taxation systems, foreign direct investment, international loans, increased state violence, militarization, national security, and other developments as a means to scrutinize the way in which they are operationalized to sustain and assert neocolonial patterns of domination.

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