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Political Strategies and Regime Survival in Egypt

by Curtis R. Ryan

ABSTRACT

The article explores the durability of Egypt's republican executive leadership and examines the strategies of survival employed by the three presidential regimes of the country from 1954 to 2000. The presidential regimes of Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser, Anwar al-Sadat and Husni Mubarak were compared. Strategic patterns of each president were identified under the concepts of containment, repression and external diversion. The article further shed light on the strategies of political survival which are common in other developing countries. It gave a view on the effect of these survival strategies on plans for change and development.

ARTICLE

Given the chronic instability that characterizes much of the Middle East and the "Third World", it is puzzling that Egypt has seen few changes of government since the 1952 overthrow of the monarchy of King Farouk. Egypt has maintained and developed essentially the same state structure since 1952, with only two changes of chief executive- and these transfers of power came about not as a result of a coup or revolution, but only upon the death of the incumbent president.¹ In a country whose economic indicators seem constantly to point to imminent crises or even collapse, Egypt's apparent stability in government appears just as constantly to defy the odds.²

This paper explores the unusual durability of republican Egypt's executive leadership by examining the strategies of survival employed by its three presidential regimes, that of Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser (1954-1970), Anwar al-Sadat (1970-1981), and Husni Mubarak (for the period 1981 to 2000).³ The paper compares the survival strategies of each of these three Egyptian governments over time, and identifies consistent strategic patterns, grouped here under the concepts of containment, repression, and external diversion.⁴ In

examining these strategic and tactical patterns of behavior, the purpose of the study is not only to shed light on politics and development in Egypt, but also to investigate strategies of government survival which may be generalizable to other developing states.⁵

It is worth noting, however, that these three strategies do not exhaust the list of variables explaining regime survival. Other key issues include, for example, the question of the regime's performance in office. But a truly comprehensive study is beyond the scope of this or any single article, and I will therefore focus not on the more positive issue of regime performance, but on what amounts to the darker and more cynical side of politics—not because it provides the only explanation, but simply because it is an under explored yet critical issue in Egyptian and Third World politics.

As this study will demonstrate, stability and government survival in Egypt have been achieved more through short term survival strategies than through success in long term development planning. The implications of this are important not only for understanding government stability and survival in Egypt and elsewhere in the Third World, but also for understanding the limiting effect survival strategies have on otherwise ambitious plans for development and change. Lacking well-developed institutions with which to effect their plans for economic and social change, leaders in the Third World often focus on strategies aimed at a more immediate concern: their own political survival. Yet the very "success" of these survival strategies may undermine any efforts to establish institutions capable of building for the future, and just as importantly, may sow the seeds for the growth and perpetuation of security-states, with correspondingly limited potential for political liberalization or democratization in developing countries.

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP AND POLITICAL SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

Studies of political development have devoted considerable attention to the role of the state as an autonomous force in its own right.⁶ However, this concept often obscures the tremendous amount of political activity and maneuvering taking place within the state. This paper shall focus, therefore, on the more specific institution of the presidency itself, that is, the executive leadership of the state. "The state", however, includes not only this executive but also inter alia bureaucracies, legislatures, judiciaries, public sector industries, and the military. As this paper will make clear, strategies of political survival involve not only maneuvers in relation to key groups in society, but also in relation to these other state institutions.

The focus on presidential leadership is necessitated by the nature of the executive-centered Egyptian political system and will facilitate generalization to other developing nations whose political systems are similarly characterized by centralized and virtually autocratic rule—including both military regimes and single-party dominant systems. In the Egyptian context, the durability and survivability of the Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak regimes benefitted from the uninterrupted historical development of a centralized bureaucratic system.⁷ Each regime, therefore, was able to build upon what Hudson has referred to as a "historical pattern of autocracy and bureaucratic control."⁸ And although many variables may help to explain the longevity of an executive's tenure, in Egypt or

elsewhere, this study will focus on some of the variables that can be deliberately manipulated by political leaders. These strategies of survival can therefore be seen as independent variables affecting the dependent variable of government survival. The three major strategies explored in this paper can be defined as follows:

(1) Containment:

Actions aimed at controlling, absorbing, or deflecting pressures and demands made on the executive. These actions include coopting key figures and social groups, preempting the maneuvers of political opponents, balancing key power centers against one another, and creating institutions to control-if not mobilize-the population.

(2) Repression:

Actions involving coercion and the use of force against opponents of the government. Specific tactics may include intimidation through surveillance of opponents, job dismissals and control of future hirings, arbitrary arrest, and overt physical violence.

(3) External Diversion:

Actions that aim to turn public attention away from unresolved problems in the economy and society. These often involve dramatic maneuvers in international affairs intended to restore legitimacy or to buy time, and include both those maneuvers in preemption of, and in response to, popular dissatisfaction.

In the sections that follow, I will examine each of these strategies in detail by comparing each regime's use of them and its specific tactical variations upon them. Of the three survival strategies discussed here, containment subsumes by far the broadest variety of maneuvers, and it will therefore be necessary to devote relatively more attention to it than to the other two.

CONTAINMENT

Containment Under Nasser

The essence of Nasser's strategy involved the paradoxical goals of preempting potential opponents and containing social groups, while simultaneously emphasizing political mobilization. Nasser emerged as the clear central ruler in Egypt following the 1952 overthrow of King Farouk and the later successful showdown with the titular head of the new republic, Muhammad Naguib. By 1954 Naguib was ousted, the monarchy abolished, all political parties dissolved, and most political institutions of the pre-1952 era either destroyed or in disrepute. Nasser understood that lasting social change in Egypt, however, required not only the eradication of these pre-1952 institutions, but also their replacement with some new forms of mobilization and legitimacy.

Nasser made three attempts at building a nationwide institution for both preempting popular demands for participation and mobilizing the masses behind the regime, culminating in the essentially corporatist Arab Socialist Union (ASU).⁹ Before the emergence of the ASU, the two earlier attempts at institution-building included the Liberation Rally (1953-1958) and the National Union (1958-1961). In the case of both organizations, the goals of preemption and containment appeared to have been more important than those of mobilization and participation. Nasser attempted to move beyond the relative weakness of the Liberation Rally and the National Union with the construction of the ASU. The new structure's mission was indeed daunting: to thwart class conflict, to act as a counterweight to the military, and to mobilize the previously disenfranchised elements of society.¹⁰ Unlike its predecessors, the ASU was organized more strictly in the corporatist vein by dividing society into general occupational categories roughly paralleling Nasser's rhetoric of a national alliance of working forces.¹¹ This alliance included workers, peasants, intellectuals, and the bourgeoisie. The only sector that remained outside the ASU domain was the military.

The problem of dealing with the military led Nasser beyond this corporatist containment strategy toward the technique of balancing key centers of power against one another. For although Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak all ruled as civilians, each had a military background and was acutely aware that the ultimate power center in Egyptian politics remained that of the military. But while the army had helped make the 1952 coup possible, Nasser wasted little time in curbing any future threats from this, his own institutional base. He forced retirements of suspect officers and used the power of appointments and patronage. Nasser then entrusted the armed forces, the most powerful institution in society, to his closest friend, Abd al-Hakim Amir. This attempt at containing the potential threat of the military proved eventually to have the exact opposite effect.

Amir enthusiastically pursued his military tasks, building the loyalty of the armed forces through extensive investments in arms and equipment. Further, Amir retained control of the promotion lists, using his power to place loyal followers in all top positions. The president soon came to fear that his most trusted lieutenant was too thorough in his efforts. Rather than helping to curtail the power of the military, Amir had ensured that both he and the armed forces would constitute the greatest threat to Nasser's rule. No longer able to deflate the military itself, Nasser opted instead for the strategy of balancing institutional threats within the state against one another, a technique which came to characterize his dealings with all top state institutions. The only institution with the potential to play this balancing role was the ASU, whose strength Nasser bolstered in order to make it "a civilian counter to the military."¹²

Ironically, the success of this survival strategy also in turn produced a new threat-necessitating yet another survival maneuver. The ASU came to be dominated by a new powerful figure in the person of the regime's top socialist ideologue, Ali Sabri. As head of the ASU, Sabri began asserting direct control over the labor unions and truly mobilizing the workers. In short, the ASU under Sabri was soon not merely containing, but also mobilizing, social forces which Nasser felt might pose threats to his regime. By

its very success, the ASU more than balanced off the military, and became a center of power in its own right. A more pluralist system might have prevented such preponderances of power, but in Nasser's Egypt, state power was concentrated in the military, the ASU, and the presidency itself. With the discrediting of the military following the disastrous 1967 war with Israel, the ASU alone rivaled the chief executive, leading Nasser systematically to curtail and undermine the ASU's power from that point until his own death in 1970.

Containment Under Sadat

While Nasser's style of containing opponents involved corporatism and balancing centers of power, Sadat's use of the same general strategy—containment—was characterized more by preemption, appeals to public legitimation, and an attempt at "controlled" political liberalization.¹³ The first of these maneuvers marked the style of Sadat's rule and emerged soon after he assumed power, when he already faced numerous threats.

Unlike Ali Sabri or Abd al-Hakim Amir, Sadat had never been a "power center". He remained unobtrusive even when playing a public role, and thus never appeared to be a threat to Nasser.¹⁴ Yet now he faced challenges from a variety of powerful figures, each with an institutional base within the state. These power centers consisted of the personal fiefdoms of several key Nasserites: Ali Sabri, who had returned to the ASU; General Muhammad Fawzi in the armed forces; Sami Sharaf as Minister of State for Presidential Affairs; and Sha'rawi Gum'ah, Minister of the Interior and thus head of the intelligence services.¹⁵ At first, the various power centers allowed Sadat the presidency, presumably as little more than a figurehead, but they soon began to maneuver for the real reigns of power.

Sadat's strategy for dealing with this plethora of threats—each of which appeared to have more power than he—proved to be a cornerstone of his policies for the next decade: the use of a dramatic and sudden preemptive move. In what became known as the "Corrective Revolution" of 1971, Sadat purged each of these key figures and hundreds of their associates from every significant organization within the state. Having removed the leadership of the military, the ASU, and the police and security services, Sadat was free to install his own loyal clients in each organization. Before making his decisive move, however, Sadat had quietly reached understandings with pivotal leaders in the armed forces to stay out of the way until the purge was complete.

While still consolidating his power, Sadat initially continued the use of corporatist structures to contain social groups; but he liberalized these to some degree by allowing debate within the organizations. At the same time he moved to erode the power of the overarching ASU as a command center once and for all, and thus the interest groups previously subsumed under the ASU umbrella achieved a greater degree of autonomy than they had under Nasser.¹⁶ By 1977, Sadat had developed enough support to abolish all ASU organizations, to tolerate the emergence of political "platforms", and eventually to permit the legal formation of political parties.

Although Sadat proved adept at the politics of containment through preemption, he also made frequent recourse to sources of public legitimation for his policies. This included reliance on an obedient parliament to endorse his measures, as well as continual use of referendums.¹⁷ In addition, he cultivated an image of being the "believer president", and had the (government appointed) Sheikh of al-Azhar issue fatwas (religious rulings) endorsing his various policies as being in accordance with the Shari'a (Islamic law). Most frequent, however, was Sadat's use of referendums and plebiscites, either for his own reelection or to approve a specific government policy. In each case the result was an inevitable 99% rate of approval which Sadat declared to be a popular mandate for his actions. Eventually, however, the referendum-strategy lost credibility by being used far too often.¹⁸

Before turning to political liberalization, Sadat made one major attempt at balancing his opponents against one another, an attempt that had drastic consequences in promoting Islamist militancy.¹⁹ Student demonstrations in 1972 and 1973, which were Marxist and Nasserist in flavor, prompted Sadat to balance the power of these left-leaning elements that dominated the university campuses. In a typically dramatic gesture, he released virtually all members of the Muslim Brotherhood (al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun) who had been imprisoned under Nasser and encouraged them to resume their propaganda as a counterforce to the leftists. But when Sadat eventually banned all Marxist and Nasserist organizations, he had left the Ikhwan and other Islamist groups as the only available vehicles for opposition. With the Marxists and Nasserists out of the way, the Islamists came to dominate almost all student associations in Egypt's universities, and soon set their sights on the Sadat regime.²⁰

But with the dismantling of central Nasserist organizations such as the ASU, there remained no real institutional vehicles either for opposition to, or support for, the government. Sadat attempted to address this institutional vacuum by initiating a multi-party system in Egypt. As with Nasser's reliance on corporatist containment of social forces, Sadat's multi-partyism appeared to be intended more as an instrument for control of domestic pressures than as an authentic form of popular participation. Hence, while political parties besides Sadat's own National Democratic Party (NDP) were allowed to form, they were sharply curtailed in their efforts to voice real opposition to regime policies.²¹ Just as the preeminent concern with regime survival had prevented Nasser from ever permitting true popular mobilization in his socialist program, so Sadat too preferred the maintenance of an authoritarian structure with some democratic trappings over tolerance of genuine participation and opposition. Under both administrations, the great majority of Egyptians remained as "contained" bystanders to the dramatic political and economic overhauls of their society.

Containment Under Mubarak

It is against this dual heritage of Nasser and Sadat that Mubarak succeeded to the presidency following Sadat's 1981 assassination. Eschewing dramatic and risky gestures, Mubarak instead attempted to establish his legitimacy and ensure his administration's survival by turning to containment of political pressures through greater political

liberalization, economic reform, and strengthening the military as the key supporter and guarantor of the regime. Although Mubarak's Egypt could not be seen as a democracy in the western sense, the flow of political ideas was more open than it had been under Nasser or Sadat. Egypt was once again home to the most prolific array of newspapers and magazines in the Arab world, including publications from many political opposition groups—even the Islamists.

Egyptians still had no real control over the choice of a chief executive, but they were able to vote in a series of parliamentary elections. The record here has been mixed: the elections were neither an outright farce nor were they completely unmanipulated. Egyptian elections serve as an outlet for political pressures and a forum for opponents to vent their frustrations, but are not permitted to threaten the government's tenure. In this way, Mubarak has allowed many potential opponents to work within the system rather than against it. The strategy achieved several goals: (1) it forced opponents to address real policy issues rather than simply condemning the government; (2) it brought many opponents out into the open where they could be clearly identified by the government; and (3) it gave the Mubarak administration a greater veneer of legitimacy. In sum, limited democratization allowed the government to contain political forces, and to divide opponents between moderate reformist and militant revolutionary tendencies. In dealing with the latter group, in particular, the regime made full use of its coercive and repressive capabilities.

Prior to the 1984 elections, Mubarak's administration passed what one observer described as "a rather curious new election law," which established a system of proportional representation. In the Egyptian electoral system, a party needed 8 per cent of the national vote to qualify for representation in the Assembly. The 1984 law, however, added the unique twist that if a party failed to get eight per cent, all its votes were automatically added to those of the winning party—inevitably the ruling National Democratic Party.²² The electoral law was later changed, and the eight per cent rule abandoned, following a 1990 supreme court decision overturning the results of the 1987 balloting. While the 1984 law had worked in favor of the NDP, it may not have been in its larger interest since these electoral procedures peripheralized and alienated most opposition parties, prompting alliances between groups that might otherwise have countered each other.²³ This was illustrated in the successful alliance of the New Wafd and the Muslim Brotherhood in 1984, and the later alliance of the Socialist Labor Party (SLP), Liberal Socialist Party (LSP) and the Muslim Brotherhood in 1987.²⁴ While it is admirable that the Mubarak regime posted the 1984 turnout at its accurate 43%, rather than a Sadat era "100%", voter enthusiasm remained low.²⁵ The opposition newspaper *Al-Ahali* even put the 1987 figure at as low as 14% (official estimates put it at 25%).²⁶ Similarly grim voter turnouts persisted throughout the Nineties.

Beyond attempts at greater political liberalization, and in contrast to Nasser and Sadat, Mubarak's efforts to ensure his own survival also involved bringing the military back in. While Sadat made conscious efforts to subordinate the army and demilitarize the state, Mubarak restored its privileged position in Egyptian society and welcomed it as a full partner to his regime.²⁷ The military became more deeply engaged in infrastructural

development and other economic projects, allowing Mubarak to sidestep both the Nasserist public sector bureaucracy and the often-corrupt Sadatist private sector entrepreneurs who had most benefitted from Sadat's Infitah policy.²⁸ The army had, in effect, once again become the sole guarantor of the regime's survival. This became clear with the 1986 riots of police conscripts in the Central Security Forces (CSF), which required the regime to call on the army to intervene. When order had finally been restored, 107 people had been killed and 715 wounded.²⁹ The riots made clear that Egypt's painful socio-economic troubles lay barely below the surface. They also made clear that the Interior Ministry was unreliable in protecting the administration-as the CSF fell under its jurisdiction, and thus its own forces were the source of unrest. In this context the preeminent position of the Egyptian army and Ministry of Defense was made manifest.³⁰

Mubarak attempted to cultivate the military as the most powerful constituency in Egypt, garnering its loyalty through extensive military spending, pay raises, and benefits. In addition, the military's role in development projects was aimed not only at economic growth itself, but also at keeping the almost half a million man force preoccupied.³¹ Mubarak's policies thus had the paradoxical effect of liberalizing civilian domestic politics while also revitalizing the domestic role of the military.³²

REPRESSION

In addition to containment strategies, Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak have all turned to repression in varying degrees throughout their presidencies. Of the three regimes, the Nasserist state most frequently resorted to repression of political dissent, justifying these actions in terms of protecting the gains of the revolution. The latter goal, as in many developing societies, was often sacrificed in favor of the first. Nasser demanded the power to have complete flexibility and room for maneuver-a goal that runs counter to the development of any real popular participation or of effective mass institutions.³³ As a result, the Nasserist strategy in practice tended to be "anti-motivational", relying to a large extent on fear as a preemptive device to contain threats, and exercising outright coercion when this failed as a deterrent.³⁴

Under Nasser, the interior ministry and its associated intelligence and security apparatus played a continually decisive role in the maintenance of the government. As early as 1954, the regime cracked down violently on the Muslim Brotherhood after one of its members attempted to assassinate Nasser. Arbitrary arrest remained a standard practice in Nasser's Egypt, in particular against members of the Ikhwan.³⁵ Among the more dramatic episodes in this darkest side of politics, was the repression of a 1965 plot against the regime led by Islamist philosopher Sayyid Qutb.³⁶ The police roundup resulted in the arrest of more than 18,000 Islamists with further arrests to follow. One estimate held that 27,000 people had been arrested in a single day.³⁷

Police surveillance and arbitrary arrest were pervasive features of the repressive apparatus of the Nasserist state—features which became more prevalent as the president's paranoia grew. This is not to suggest that no real challenges to Nasser's rule existed. To the contrary, these were quite real from both secular leftist and Islamic rightist quarters. Yet it is equally true that the increasing reliance on the intelligence-security apparatus began to feed on itself, as Nasser came to be surrounded only by "yes-men" whose importance to the president (and consequently their personal power) appeared to be predicated on their efficiency in continually uncovering plots against Nasser.

When Sadat succeeded Nasser to the presidency, he pledged to destroy the power networks within the Nasserist state and to bring to an end the most notorious practices of the Nasserist intelligence apparatus: phone-tapping, torture, and arbitrary arrests.³⁸ Yet although Sadat had purged the leadership of both the armed forces and the intelligence services (al-Mukhabarat), these institutions of coercion remained intact. Yet Sadat had pursued a policy of "relative demilitarization" compared to the Nasser years, in the hope that a weaker military would have a correspondingly reduced power potential within Egyptian politics.³⁹ Despite these efforts to temper the role of the army, a series of riots in 1977 (against an IMF-sponsored austerity program) provided evidence to the Sadat government that it still needed a strong military. The armed forces had proven their loyalty and indispensability twice in the same year: by protecting the regime and restoring order after the food riots, and through their successful engagements in a four-day border war with Qadhafi's Libya.⁴⁰ Still, with the exceptions of such overt threats to national and government security, the principal instrument of coercion for Sadat was not the military, but the police and intelligence apparatus. The shadow of arbitrary arrest did not hover so constantly in Sadat's Egypt as it had under Nasser, but there were notable exceptions such as the periods of great civil unrest in 1977 and 1980-81. In these periods—when the government was fighting for its survival—Sadat's administration could be as ruthless as Nasser's.⁴¹

This became graphically apparent in the last year of Sadat's life, when he increasingly lost touch with his own people. The president's minimal tolerance for opposition had clearly reached its limit. Secular opponents were calling for more than cosmetic democratization, others were criticizing the separate peace with Israel, and militant Islamists were denying the very legitimacy of the Sadatist regime. In a context of increasing instability and sectarian violence in Egypt,⁴² Sadat instituted a series of measures to ensure his regime's survival. Sadat proclaimed himself prime minister as well as president, and used a referendum to permit himself to run for an unlimited number of presidential terms. To steal the wind from the sails of the Islamists, he also had the Shari'a legally adopted as the sole source of legislation.⁴³ Finally, Sadat promulgated his infamous "law of shame", an elastic code that could be used against anyone who offended "national values".⁴⁴

In 1981 Sadat made the last of his dramatic attempts to sweep up all his enemies before they could act against him. This involved moving simultaneously against both Muslim and Coptic militants and activists. Shenouda III, patriarch of the Coptic church, was removed from his office. Sheikh Kishk, a populist Islamist preacher of national stature,

and Umar Tilmisani, spiritual leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, were both arrested.⁴⁵ Several thousand secular and religious opponents of the Sadat government were also arrested. In the context of Sadat's rhetoric about political liberalization these mass arrests were stunning, and were made even more so when they were followed by a lengthy televised "diatribe" during which Sadat announced that he had "a list of a further 15,000 names."⁴⁶ Its very existence on the line, the Sadat regime employed all the survival tactics in its arsenal, from preemptive maneuvers to outright repression and further intimidation. Within less than one month, Khalid Islambuli, the brother of one of those arrested, led the group that assassinated Sadat at a Cairo military parade.

Having sat directly beside President Sadat when he was assassinated, Husni Mubarak (himself wounded in the attack) was well aware of the potential threat to his rule posed by revolutionary Islamism. Lacking both the charisma and nationalist credentials of his predecessors, however, Mubarak's position and survival appeared to be even more in question than that of Nasser or Sadat had been. Yet generally speaking, repression under the Mubarak regime was not as wholesale or indiscriminate as that of its predecessors, but the emergency laws, introduced in 1981 in response to Sadat's assassination, remained in place into the later 1990s.⁴⁷ These measures were used to justify the Interior Ministry's continued coercion and repression against alleged Islamist militants.

Government repression, in fact, increased in the 1990s, including raids on mosques alleged to be the loci of militant activities, resulting often in pitched street battles and the infrequent application of legal due process to the "militants". By 1992, the government and militant Islamists were waging virtually an all out war with each other. By the late 1990s, the Mubarak regime appeared to believe that it had won the battle with the Islamists, yet major acts of terrorism continued especially against tourists and tourist sites throughout Egypt. With this conflict as a pretext, the state began to curtail more and more civil liberties. But as Eberhard Kienle has convincingly argued, the increasing use of both containment and repressive measures may have had as much to do with countering opposition to economic reform as it does with defeating the Islamist movement.⁴⁸

EXTERNAL DIVERSION

In addition to attempts to contain or repress political pressures, each president of republican Egypt has also turned to external affairs in pursuit of legitimacy and, most importantly, to divert attention from domestic problems. Foreign policy, in short, has been of paramount importance in Egyptian domestic politics. Such linkages between domestic and international political realms are natural for governments that equate their own survival with national security.⁴⁹ Domestic political pressures can thus easily be treated as national security crises, and the global stage offers an arena to which governments may divert domestic attention.

Nasser set the precedent for Egypt's activist foreign policy and extensive involvement in international affairs. While the external focus was in fact in accordance with Nasser's professed view of Egypt's destiny in world politics-as the center of the Arab, Islamic, and African worlds-it also served as a diversionary tactic from domestic socio-economic

ills.⁵⁰ Michael Cooper has suggested that the combination of weak state institutions and external political and economic pressures resulted in a "repeated configuration" in Egyptian politics requiring such diversions. Cooper identifies a cycle in which containment and even repression are insufficient to quell popular dissatisfaction when they remain unlinked to evidence of prosperity, and hence the regime turns to international affairs for diversions and perhaps even solutions to domestic problems.⁵¹

Nasser's emphasis on pan-Arabism made this an obvious tactic. His flamboyant international style and adventurism elevated Egypt to the dominant role in the Arab regional system, and this unleashed a wellspring of national pride on the part of a nation which for centuries had been under foreign colonial domination.⁵² Nasser's foreign policy maneuvers imbued him with a remarkable amount of domestic popular support. In particular, his emergence as a leader of the Non-Aligned Movement after the 1955 Bandung Conference, his refusal to join the Western-oriented Baghdad Pact in favor of "positive neutralism," and his nationalization of the Suez Canal all marked a distinctive and sovereign road for Egypt's future, uniting Egyptians behind their president. These early successes may have helped Nasser to weather later debacles such as the destruction of Egyptian forces in the 1967 Six Day War. Indeed, few national leaders could have carried on after such a devastating defeat.

It was, in fact, through the prominence of international affairs that Nasser developed his lasting legitimacy among Egyptians and Arabs in general—a legitimacy so strong that it has long outlived Nasser himself and can be seen in the numerous "Nasserist" groups in the Arab world today.⁵³ Nasser's linkage of domestic and international affairs may have given his regime a certain strategic flexibility in which the government could attempt to shift public focus from one arena to another, depending on the political fortunes in each.

In contrast, when Sadat assumed the presidency he lacked the personal power base and popular legitimacy of Nasser, and the Egyptian state was increasingly incapable of keeping up with the welfare commitments of Nasser's socialism. Furthermore, Sadat's effort to tone down the rhetoric of pan-Arabism initially reduced some of the initial legitimacy he may have enjoyed as an original member of the Free Officers Movement. Nevertheless, he remained undaunted and chose to pursue a deliberately different strategy toward political and economic policy, and toward building his own government's legitimacy. The Corrective Revolution helped distance Sadat from the unpopular repressive excesses of Nasserism, while the October 1973 Arab-Israeli War gave Sadat, in the words of one observer, a "legitimacy bonanza."⁵⁴ Due largely to this foreign policy maneuver, Sadat established for the first time his own legitimacy, in which he emerged from Nasser's shadow to be hailed as the hero of the crossing of the Suez canal.

In his emphasis on economic liberalization and development, Sadat expanded the use of diversion as a strategy to include not only grand gestures on the world stage, but also manipulation of the unique nature of the Middle East regional political economy. He made great efforts to improve relations with Saudi Arabia in order to develop the symbiotic economic link between the two countries: oil-rich. Saudi Arabia exchanged its capital for abundant Egyptian labor. As a result, Sadat was able to ease the burden of

Egypt's increasing population and decreasing welfare resources by "defusing political unrest through emigration of labor."⁵⁵

While this officially-encouraged movement of a restive labor force to foreign oil fields helped reduce social pressures, the realities of Sadat's Infitah policies continued to generate further pressures at home. Although some segments of society had acquired great wealth under Infitah, many others failed to reap its rewards. Employees of Egypt's huge public sector, which continued to employ more Egyptians than any other area, were hard hit by spiraling inflation, given their fixed incomes. Inequalities increased and class gaps became more apparent with the conspicuous consumption of the new Infitah capitalists.⁵⁶ As noted in the discussion of repression, popular discontent with the government exploded in 1977 following the implementation of an IMF austerity program. Rioting and vandalism swept Alexandria and Cairo, prompting Sadat to call in the army for the first time against Egyptian demonstrators since 1952. After the army had quelled the unrest with considerable force, Sadat quickly reinstated subsidies on staple foods and, predictably, held a new referendum to endorse his continued rule.⁵⁷ In this crisis, however, neither containment nor repression tactics appeared to thwart domestic economic dissatisfaction or political dissent. Drawing on the Nasserist precedent of turning attention outward, and on his own flair for dramatic preemptive moves, Sadat announced to a stunned People's Assembly that he would go to Jerusalem.⁵⁹

While this and other such international political moves temporarily diverted popular attention, domestic social and economic problems remained unresolved. Like Nasser before him, Sadat tended to rely on international affairs to revive domestic support, and in this realm he did enjoy several successes. But the waves of popularity which followed the 1973 war, the journey to Jerusalem, and the 1979 peace treaty were all short-lived. In each case raised expectations were unmet, resulting in deep frustration. This was particularly serious after the formula linking peace with prosperity failed to produce the latter. The already noted social and economic problems simply became that much more glaring in the context of dashed hopes. By 1980, Egypt's domestic crisis and public disillusionment steadily eroded Sadat's legitimacy, a process which was completed with his resort to mass arrests and repression.

Turning to Mubarak, we find that he has relied on the politics of containment and, when necessary, coercion in order to maintain his government. Unlike Nasser and Sadat, however, he is less inclined toward dramatic moves on the international stage. The absence of such gestures generated little enthusiasm for Mubarak's rule and allowed festering domestic issues to assume their real importance. Yet Mubarak did have a strategy: in both domestic and international affairs, Mubarak emphasized reconciliation.⁵⁹ On the domestic front, this entailed direct meetings with opposition figures, including pardoning and receiving at the presidential palace many who were imprisoned under Sadat. In foreign affairs, Mubarak's slow and methodical diplomacy has had none of the dramatic successes of Nasser or Sadat; but neither has it resulted in any grand failures. Under Mubarak, Egypt maintained its relatively cold peace with Israel while also ending its period of ostracism in Arab regional politics. Almost immediately upon assuming the presidency, Mubarak set to work mending fences with the same Arab

and Islamic leaders whom Sadat had publicly called "dwarfs". Largely as a result of Mubarak's quiet diplomatic efforts, Egypt was readmitted to the Organization of the Islamic Conference in 1987, and in 1989 attended its first Arab League summit since its expulsion ten years earlier. By the 1990s, the headquarters of the Arab League had returned to Cairo. In sum, Mubarak's diplomacy restored Egypt to its place in the Arab, African, and Islamic worlds, and deepened its military and economic relationship with the United States. 60

Mubarak's presidency therefore marked a departure from Nasser's and Sadat's proclivities for dramatic actions in international affairs. As a result, his foreign policy maneuvers have not had the same diversionary effects as those of his predecessors. The consequence of this has been even more critical scrutiny of his domestic policies and of Egypt's many socio-economic problems. Mubarak's low-key forays into international affairs may reveal a declining utility for this diversionary tactic in contemporary Egypt. Nonetheless, his dull-but-consistent successes may have built for the regime a reputation for competence, if not charisma, in foreign affairs.

COMPARING SURVIVAL STRATEGIES ACROSS THE THREE REGIMES

Containment Compared

In sum, each of the presidencies examined here shows a consistent pattern in attempting to contain pressures to its rule, with significant variations in tactics. The overuse of a tactic has, in fact, often limited its utility for the successor government. In Nasserist Egypt, containment strategies involved establishing corporatist structures designed to encompass virtually the entire society. Where centers of power were too great to be contained in this manner, Nasser turned instead to containment through balancing such centers as the military and the ASU against one another. For Sadat, the purging of Nasserist elements in the state involved the dismantling of corporatist structures whose utility may have already eroded along with their legitimacy in the public eye.

To recapture public support and contain burgeoning pressures for pluralism in post-Nasserist Egypt, Sadat turned instead toward political and economic liberalization. Yet the effort to contain pressures through political liberalization under Sadat and later Mubarak as well, met with considerable public cynicism (largely as a result of unfulfilled expectations regarding the scope of "democratization"). That cynicism was well-founded, as both Sadat and Mubarak appeared to see democratization less as a means of extending the base of political participation, and more as a way of containing opposition to their rule.⁶¹

Repression Compared

Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak all turned to repression of dissent, when various maneuvers intended to contain social and political pressures had proven ineffective. The case of Nasser's Egypt, however, illustrates the unfortunate tendency for the resort to violent coercion and repression to build on itself, to the point that it may develop into a strategy of the first instance rather than one of last resort. While the development of the Nasserist repressive apparatus appears to fit this model, the Sadat administration first broke with this pattern, only to return to it in the late 1970s and early 1980s when the regime was most besieged. Under Mubarak, Egypt opened up considerably, with a much shorter shadow of repression than before, although the use of coercion against dissidents by no means disappeared. In essence, the Mubarak strategy toward its most vocal opposition—the Islamists—amounted to one of "divide and rule" by containing moderate oppositionists (including the mainstream Ikhwan) while violently repressing more militant Islamists.

By the late 1990's, however, the regime was decidedly on the defensive, and by continuing to concentrate on the perceived Islamist threat to the regime's survival, the image of the Mubarak presidency remained for many Egyptians one of a besieged government whose policies on social and economic development amounted to running in place and little more. Yet Egyptians themselves were also divided in their attitudes toward the continued battles between the military-backed secular state and its Islamist opponents. For some, the previously unthinkable idea of an Islamic Republic of Egypt seemed a worthwhile experiment after almost half a century of rule by the Free Officers

and their descendants. For others, however, the spectacle of chaos and civil war in Algeria in the 1990's served to rally otherwise liberal elements behind the semi-authoritarian state in its efforts against Islamism.

External Diversion Compared

Nasser and Sadat diverted domestic attention toward dramatic Egyptian involvement in regional and global affairs. Mubarak, by contrast, eschewed such maneuvers in terms of his tactics (and diversionary power), but he by no means rejected Egypt's activist role in international affairs. The regime, for example, played a key role in assembling the Arab component of the U.S.-led coalition against Iraq in 1990-91. And in terms of the Arab-Israeli peace process, the Mubarak regime had carved out its place in the process as virtually the only participant whom all the antagonists could talk to. But this type of foreign policy involvement never quite approached the drama of the Nasser or Sadat eras, and hence never amounted to a real diversionary tactic for the regime.

Diversion through manipulating the international involvement of one's government is a maneuver found in many countries in addition to Egypt. This may be an even more feasible route for governments in developing countries which, like Egypt, are considered to be of high geopolitical importance by various "great powers". It is important to note, however, that while useful in a short term sense, this domestic-international linkage is at best highly precarious in the long term, as domestic social and economic problems remain even after the dust has settled from the latest international crisis.

CONCLUSIONS

By examining strategies of survival, this paper has explored the durability of governments in republican Egypt since 1952. It has emphasized the utility of three general strategies, all of which exploit options that are subject to manipulation by political leaders, and all of which have implications for understanding four decades of relative political stability and regime durability in Egypt, as well as understanding similar phenomena in other executive-centered countries throughout the "Third World". Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak have been quite consistent in their attempts to contain, repress, and divert political pressures.

Thus each Egyptian president succeeded in consolidating his own power and developing the presidency as an institution, yet none succeeded in developing state institutions beyond the presidency. Each has reshuffled the make-up of organizations and agencies, but none has institutionalized major organizations and agencies in the strict sense of the term. As Migdal has argued, "keeping state leaders afloat may paradoxically have involved the systemic weakening of the state's agencies, a kind of de-institutionalization."⁶² This is well-illustrated in the experience of Nasser's ASU, and in the later failures of both Sadat and Mubarak to follow through with true democratization and meaningful participatory politics.

Mubarak's great contribution to the development of Egypt might have been in breaking with this cynical pattern and pursuing a more genuine process of democratization. After the first ten years of his presidency, Mubarak had indeed pursued relatively more democratization than his predecessors, and relatively less repression. Yet his battle with Islamist militancy ran against the overall trend toward greater political liberalization, so that the survival strategies discussed above continued to dominate Egyptian political life. The danger is that the lack of development of state institutions, of political legitimacy, and of stable and effective means for real political participation help to perpetuate the basic insecurity of the regime and to limit its overall policy effectiveness. Most Third World countries are already confronted by a host of economic, social, demographic, and even environmental problems and obstacles to development. These hurdles, combined with weak state institutions and insecure leadership, encourage executives to pursue short term survival strategies to a greater extent than long term development strategies. The result is a vicious cycle of short term survival strategies perpetuating the conditions for still more of the same.

Excessive reliance on the types of survival strategies discussed here bodes ill for the development prospects of many countries in the Third World. As this paper has demonstrated, a leader such as Nasser or Sadat may have a great vision, agenda, or ideological view aimed at change and development of the nation, yet the focus on government survival can easily become an obsession, tempering even the most ambitious plans for a better future. Political concentration on the short term and the immediate future all too easily loses sight of lasting development, with the result that executives may survive but the ultimate losers continue to be the people.

NOTES

1. President Sadat was assassinated, but no coup or national political upheaval took place, and the transition to the presidency of Husni Mubarak proceeded on the basis of the constitution and without any power struggle.

2. For a recent and cogently argued assessment of Egypt's dim prospects, see the article under the pseudonym Cassandra, "The Impending Crisis in Egypt," *Middle East Journal* 49 (Winter 1995): pp. 9-28. The present article focuses instead on how the Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak regimes manipulated politics to survive despite the odds.

3. In transliterating Arabic words and names I have attempted to keep the spellings as accurate as possible while omitting diacritical marks except for the initial and medial hamza and ayn. For some names, however, I have used the more well-known spelling; thus "Nasser" rather than "Nasir".

6. The core work in this literature is Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, (eds.), *Bringing the State Back In* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985); but very little of this literature addresses Middle Eastern states. For a state-

centered approach to political development in the Middle East, see Lisa Anderson, "The State in the Middle East and North Africa," *Comparative Politics* 20 (1) October 1987:1-18.

7. See Anderson, "The State in the Middle East and North Africa," p. 5.

8. Michael C. Hudson, *Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 243.

Corporatism in Egypt under Nasser more closely fits Schmitter's model of "state" rather than "societal" corporatism. Schmitter has defined corporatism as "a system of interest representation in which the constituent units are organized in a limited number of singular, compulsory, non-competitive, hierarchically ordered and functionally differentiated categories, recognized or licensed (if not created) by the state and granted a deliberate monopoly within their respective categories in exchange for observing certain controls on their selection of leaders and articulation of demands and supports." See Philippe C. Schmitter, "Still the Century of Corporatism?" *Review of Politics* 36 (1) January 1974: 85-131. See also Robert Bianchi, "The Corporatization of the Egyptian Labor Movement:' *The Middle East Journal* 40 (3) Summer 1986: 429-444 and Bianchi, *Unruly Corporatism: Associational Life in Twentieth Century Egypt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). For an early discussion emphasizing the "unincorporated" nature of Egyptian society see Clement Henry Moore, "Authoritarian Politics in Unincorporated Society: The Case of Nasser's Egypt:' *Comparative Politics* 6 (2) January 1974: 193-218.

10. Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat*, pp. 311-322. 11. Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat*, p. 310. 12. Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat*, p.316. 13. On the political opening (and later closing) under Sadat, see Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat*, pp. 354-388.

14. Arthur Goldschmidt Jr., *Modern Egypt: The Formation of a Nation-State* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988), p. 138.

15. Goldschmidt, *Modern Egypt*, pp. 133-134.

16. Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat*, pp. 354, 381-383. 17. Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat*, p. 369.

18. Nazih H. Ayubi, "Domestic Politics," in Lillian Craig Harris, ed., *Egypt. Internal Challenges and Regional Stability* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul,

1988), p. 54.

19. On the varieties of Islamism in Egypt, revolutionary and otherwise, see Hamied Ansari, "The Islamic Militants in Egyptian Politics:' *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16 (1984): 123-144; Fouad Ajami, "The Sorrows of Egypt:' *Foreign Affairs* September/October 1995: 72-95; Saad Eddin Ibrahim, "Egypt's Islamic Activism in the

1980s;' *Third World Quarterly* 10 (2) April 1988: 632-657; Asef Bayat, "Revolution without Movement, Movement without Revolution: Comparing Islamic Activism in Iran and Egypt;' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 40 (1) January 1998: 136-169; John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, *Islam and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 173-191; Joel Gordon, "Political Opposition in Egypt;' *Current History* February 1990: 65-80; Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and Pharaoh* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985); and Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

20. Goldschmidt, *Modern Egypt*, pp. 158-159.

21. Afaf Lutfi Al-Sayyid Marsot, *A Short History of Modern Egypt* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 137.

22. Ayubi, "Domestic Politics:' p. 63. 23. Ayubi, "Domestic Politics," p. 64.

24. Richard U. Moench, "Oil, Ideology, and State Autonomy in Egypt," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 10 (2) Spring 1988. p. 183.

25. Anthony McDermott, *Egypt From Nasser to Mubarak: A Flawed Revolution* (London: Croom Helm, 1988), p. 77.

26. Moench, "Oil, Ideology, and State Autonomy in Egypt:'p. 183.

27. Robert Staloff, *Army and Politics in Mubarak's Egypt* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1988), pp. 5-10. For an alternative discussion of the political role of the military, see Robert Springborg, "Me President and the Field Marshal: Civil-Military Relations in Egypt Today," *MERIP Middle East Report* 17(4) July-August 1987, pp. 5-16.

28. Sadat attempted to revive the Egyptian economy by initiating his policy of *al-Infatih al-Iqtisadi*, "the economic opening" or, as it is sometimes known, "The open door policy." The initiatives subsumed under *Infatih* moved away from the stagnated state socialist policies of Nasser toward liberalization and the encouragement of foreign investment and joint ventures between foreign and Egyptian firms. Mubarak for the most part followed *Infatih* as well, while attempting to curb its excesses. For insightful analyses of *Infatih*, reform, and the Egyptian political economy see John Waterbury, "The 'Soft State' and the Open Door: Egypt's Experience with Economic Liberalization, 1974-1984:' *Comparative Politics* 18 (1) 1985:65-83; Denis J. Sullivan, "The Political Economy of Reform in Egypt:' *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 22 (3): 317-334; and chapters two through five, by various authors, in Iliya Harik and Denis J. Sullivan, *Privatization and Liberalization in the Middle East* (Bloomington, IL: Indiana University Press, 1992).

29. McDermott, *Egypt from Nasser to Mubarak*, p. 79.

30. Satloff, *Army and Politics in Mubarak's Egypt*, p. 16.
31. Ayubi, "Domestic Politics:" p. 68. By the late 1990's Egypt's total armed forces were estimated to number at least 436,000 (including some 222,000 conscripts). International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *The Military Balance, 1995-1996* (London: IISS, 1995), pp. 130-132.
32. Staloff, *Army and Politics in Mubarak's Egypt*, pp. 22-27. 33. Baker, *Egypt's Uncertain Revolution*, p. 238.
34. Baker, *Egypt's Uncertain Revolution*, pp. 238-239. 35. Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat*, p. 339.
36. Sayyid Qutb was later hanged, and remains a martyr and inspiration to many Muslim militants today. His writings are still published and find a receptive audience among many Islamists in Egypt and elsewhere. Among his most influential writings is *Ma'alim fi al-Tariq* ("Signposts" or "Signs in the Road"). 37. Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat*, pp. 340-341.
38. Goldschmidt, *Modern Egypt*, p. 135.
39. While one-fifth of Nasser's average cabinet had consisted of military officers, only one-twentieth of Sadat's average cabinet were military men. See Satloff, *Army and Politics in Mubarak's Egypt*, pp. 3-6.
40. Satloff, *Army and Politics in Mubarak's Egypt*, p. 6. 41. Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat*, p. 375.
42. For a discussion of sectarian infighting as well as its potential "Sectarian Conflict in Egypt and the Political Expediency of Religion," *The Middle East Journal* 38 (3) Summer 1984: 397-418.
43. While few militant Islamists believed in the authenticity of this move, it also produced considerable anger from Egypt's large Coptic Christian community—approximately 10% of the population.
44. Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat*, pp. 372-374. 45. Waterbury, *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat*, p. 363.
46. Al-Sayyid Marsot, *A Short History of Modern Egypt*, p. 138.
47. For reports on government repression and human rights in Egypt toward the end of the Sadat era and during the transition to Mubarak's rule, see U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, and Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, 96th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1980*, pp. 732-737; *97th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1980*, pp. 732-737; *97th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1982*, pp.956-965; *98th*

Cong., 2nd Sess., 1984, pp. 1227-1241; 99th Cong., 1st Sess., 1985, pp. 1202-1218; 99th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1986, pp. 1206-1220.

48. Eberhard Kienle, "More than a Response to Islamism: The Political Deliberation of Egypt in the 1990s;" *Middle East Journal* 52 (2) Spring 1998: 219-235.

49. Satloff, *Army and Politics in Mubarak's Egypt*, p. 49.

so. Nasser described Egypt as linked to overlapping Arab, Islamic, and African circles. He used this foil to discuss Egypt's role in regional and world affairs. Gamal Abd al-Nasser, *The Philosophy of the Revolution* (Buffalo, NY: Smith, Keynes & Marshall, 1959), pp. 57-66.

51. To put it in Cooper's words, "With no recourse to the interior, there was only the exterior. It was back to the well of foreign affairs; one more effort to pull off the international miracle that will solve the domestic problems and ensure the legitimacy of the regime." Cooper, *The Transformation of Egypt*, p. 251.

52. Nasser's foreign policy and the intricacies of inter-Arab politics during his presidency have been well documented in Malcolm Kerr, *The Arab Cold War: Gamal Abd al-Nasser and His Rivals, 1958-1970*, 3rd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

53. Hudson, *Arab Politics*, pp. 240-242. 54. Hudson, *Arab Politics*, p. 248.

55. Moench, "Oil, Ideology, and State Autonomy in Egypt;" p. 176.

56. In Arabic, the main beneficiaries of Infitah were sometimes known collectively as *Munfatihun*.

57. The IMF measures eliminated subsidies on beer, flour and sugar, while reducing those on bread, cooking oil, beans, and lentils. In the course of the rioting the specific targets of mob violence and arson were instructive, particularly the setting on fire of the headquarters of the Arab Socialist Union. See Goldschmidt, *Modern Egypt*, p. 151.

58. This is not to suggest, however, that diversion alone was Sadat's sole or even main motivation. But the various motivations for peace with Israel included easing both domestic political and economic pressures on the regime. For an excellent reevaluation of Egyptian policy, see Ibrahim A. Karawan, "Sadat and the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Revisited;" *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26 (2) May 1994: 249-266.

59. Satloff, *Army and Politics in Mubarak's Egypt*, p. 1.

60. United States aid played no small role in the regime's survival. For the historic development of United States aid to Egypt, see William J. Bums, *Economic Aid and American Policy Toward Egypt, 1955-1981* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1985); Marvin G. Weinbaum, *Egypt and the Politics of U.S. Economic Aid*

(Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1986); and William B. Quandt, *The United States and Egypt: An Essay on Policy for the 1990s* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1990).

61. President Mubarak made clear on countless occasions his belief that democratization, while greater under his regime than under those of his predecessors, still had to be limited and incremental for fear of creating greater domestic instability. For a critique of the limitations of meaningful democratic opposition in Egypt, and an eloquent argument in favor of opening the system more in order to achieve greater stability (effectively countering the government party line) see Mona Makram-Ebeid, "Political Opposition in Egypt: Democratic Myth or Reality?" *The Middle East Journal* 43 (3) 1989: 423-436.

62. Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States*, p. 226.

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