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CAN EGYPT LEAD THE ARAB WORLD AGAIN? ASSESSING OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR U.S. POLICY

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FOREWORD

Egypt has long been a leader of the Arab world or at least aspired to be one at various times in its modern history. This leadership quest stems from its position as the most populous Arab country centered in the heart of the region, its geography nestled between the Mediterranean and Red Seas with the vital Suez Canal connecting them, its closeness (literally and figuratively) to the Israeli-Palestinian scene, and its relative proximity to the Gulf region. Moreover, Egypt boasts longstanding intellectual centers (religious and secular), has an educated strata of respected professionals, as well as a highly competent diplomatic corps and military establishment.

Since 2011, however, Egypt has generally focused inward as it had to cope with turbulent political and economic developments arising in large part because of the fallout from the Arab Spring. It is currently facing a number of challenges, such as a stubborn terrorism problem that is chiefly based in the Sinai region, and economic austerity measures. Nevertheless, Egypt has faced similar problems before, and there is a good chance it will overcome these hurdles. If and when Egypt does so, it is likely to resume its quest for Arab leadership once again.

Gregory Aftandilian, an expert on the Middle East with extensive academic and government experience, examines Egypt's chances to rebound from its current difficulties and take on the Arab leadership mantle. He argues that such a leadership role will be generally beneficial for U.S. policy, because Egypt can be a reassuring presence for Gulf Arab states and can come to their aid in times of crisis, help to dampen sectarian conflicts in the region, and work to discredit the

extremist ideologies of groups like the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), al-Qaeda, and their affiliates.

Mr. Aftandilian also suggests ways that U.S. civilian and military officials can assist Egypt to overcome its present difficulties and play a leadership role in the region that would be mutually beneficial.

The Strategic Studies Institute hopes the findings in this monograph will be of assistance to U.S. policymakers and U.S. Army officers as they envision the strategic outlook of the Middle East region in several years' time and seek ways to bolster the important relationship between the United States and Egypt.

DOUGLAS C. LOVELACE, JR.
Director
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

GREGORY AFTANDILIAN is an independent consultant, writer, and lecturer, having spent over 21 years in U.S. Government service, most recently on Capitol Hill. He was a foreign policy advisor to Congressman Chris Van Hollen (2007-08), professional staff member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and foreign policy adviser to Senator Paul Sarbanes (2000-04), and foreign policy fellow to Senator Edward Kennedy (1999). Prior to these positions, Mr. Aftandilian worked for 13 years as a Middle East analyst at the U.S. Department of State where he was a recipient of the Department's Superior Honor Award for his analyses on Egypt. His other government experiences include analytical work for the U.S. Department of Defense and the Library of Congress. He was also a research fellow at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University (2006-07) and an international affairs fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York (1991-92). In addition, Mr. Aftandilian has worked as a consultant on Egyptian affairs for the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs and is an adjunct faculty member at Boston University and American University. Mr. Aftandilian is the author of *Egypt's Bid for Arab Leadership: Implications for U.S. Policy* (1993); *Looking Forward: An Integrated Strategy for Supporting Democracy and Human Rights in Egypt* (2009), and several monographs published by the Strategic Studies Institute. Mr. Aftandilian holds a B.A. in history from Dartmouth College, an M.A. in Middle Eastern studies from the University of Chicago, and an M.S. in international relations from the London School of Economics.

SUMMARY

This monograph's research, completed in August 2016, analyzes the potential for Egypt to resume an Arab leadership role that has been in abeyance for several years because of its turbulent domestic scene. The monograph also assesses whether or not such a role would be beneficial for U.S. policy. Although there has been a change in U.S. leadership since then, the situation in Egypt has remained the same.

The monograph first explores why Egypt has long pursued a leadership role in its modern history and the benefits—political, economic, and strategic—that have accrued from it. Although, by the late era of the Hosni Mubarak presidency, Egypt was no longer playing such a role, and the subsequent years of the so-called Arab Spring and the turmoil that followed compelled Egypt to look inward, Egyptian officials have not given up hope that their country will once again take up the Arab leadership mantle.

Egypt's large population, geographical position, intellectual institutions and traditions, and diplomatic and military capabilities have convinced its officials and segments of the intelligentsia that it is only a matter of time until Egypt will bounce back from its current domestic challenges and seek regional leadership again. However, these challenges are formidable. Egypt's government has pursued authoritarian policies that have restricted the avenues of dissent; the economy is going through a major reform process that has resulted in austerity measures, which have led to price rises for food and fuel; and terrorists have continued to be active in the Sinai Peninsula and—to a lesser extent—in mainland Egypt, curtailing tourism and foreign investment.

Egypt has received a windfall of economic aid from Saudi Arabia and some other Gulf Arab countries since the summer of 2013, when the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohammad Morsi was overthrown by the military with substantial public backing. However, this assistance has diminished due to economic constraints in these countries as well as some political tensions that have arisen between Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

Hence, Egypt, even though it continues to be supported by the United States, the European Union (EU), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and other international financial institutions, will have to rely chiefly on its own capabilities to emerge from its present difficulties. The good news for Egypt is that it has faced similar difficulties in the past and has bounced back from them. If Egypt sticks to its economic reform efforts, defeats the terrorists in the Sinai, and becomes less repressive—a democratic government is not likely anytime soon—it indeed has the potential to stabilize politically, economically, and strategically and again turn its attention to the region, more so than it has been doing in recent years.

This monograph argues that an Egyptian regional leadership role can help to dampen many of the crises facing the Arab world. One of the most serious of such crises is the Sunni-Shia conflict that has been exacerbated by the Iran-Saudi Arabia rivalry. As a state that does not place religion at the forefront of its foreign policy, Egypt, while a mostly Sunni Muslim country, is not interested in pursuing a sectarian agenda. Although it is part of the Saudi-led coalition that came to the aid of the Yemeni Government against the Houthi rebels, who have been backed to some degree by Iran, Egypt is weary about being bogged down in what has become a nasty sectarian war. And while it sees Iran as

a potentially long-term threat, Egypt is not as fixated on Iran as is Saudi Arabia, and Egypt could even use its diplomatic capabilities to ease tensions between the two major countries facing off in the Gulf, as well as between various Sunni and Shia groups. At the same time, Egypt, as an Arab leader, could offer to put its military at the ready in case Saudi Arabia feels threatened. There is precedence for such a role (the first Gulf war of 1990-1991) and, in the meantime, Egypt could also offer to undertake more joint military training exercises with Saudi Arabia.

As a moderate Sunni Muslim state, Egypt could also play a role, which it has done to some extent already, in leading an ideological campaign against the extremist ideologies of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), al-Qaeda, and like-minded groups. Saudi Arabia, by contrast, because it is wedded to the more fundamentalist Wahhabi interpretations of Islam, cannot play this role. Egypt's famous Al-Azhar University has begun the process of presenting a counter-narrative to extremist ideologies, and much of the Arab world could benefit from its policies that would be further enhanced if and when Egypt returns to a regional leadership role. Some senior U.S. officials understand that defeating groups like ISIS is not just a military matter, but involves a long-term ideological struggle that only moderate Sunni Muslim governments and their institutions can play.

While the United States should welcome a regional leadership role for Egypt, there may be cases where the two countries do not see eye-to-eye. Differences over Libya, for example, have already come to the fore, with Cairo supporting Libyan strongman General Khalifa Haftar in the eastern part of the country, while the United States and many members of the

international community see Haftar as a divisive figure and instead support the concept of a unity government that would bring together Libya's two main rival camps.

As Egypt overcomes its domestic challenges and moves toward a regional leadership role, this monograph argues for keeping, not cutting, U.S. military assistance, which will show the Egyptian leadership and the Egyptian people that the United States stands with them against terrorism. Such a policy of maintaining military aid levels of $1.3 billion a year also provides the United States with some leverage that it can use to persuade Egypt to adopt more effective counterterrorism techniques and perhaps pursue less repressive policies against political dissidents.

This monograph argues the case for more economic assistance to Egypt than the current, relatively low amount (about $150 million annually) that is provided now. Even though the current climate in Washington may not be conducive to an increase in aid, a compelling case can be made to Congress that such assistance, especially as Egypt pursues difficult economic reform measures, would be in the strategic interest of the United States, given Egypt's pivotal role in the region. Positive conditionality—giving more aid for progress on democratic norms—as opposed to punitive measures, such as cutting aid, is likely to be more effective when dealing with an ancient and proud country like Egypt.

To enhance this partnership, this monograph also argues for the resumption of the Bright Star military exercises that have been suspended for many years and for more interactions between the officer corps of both countries (to include expanded exercises with the Gulf Arab countries); while Egypt tries to diminish

and ultimately defeat terrorists on its soil and seeks to assure its allies in the region that it can come to their defense when needed.

CAN EGYPT LEAD THE ARAB WORLD AGAIN? ASSESSING OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR U.S. POLICY

Egypt, the most populous and arguably the most influential country in the region, has long sought a leadership role in the Arab world. Although it has not always succeeded in this quest, and at times had quite a few detractors who challenged this bid for leadership, it has been keen to exert its influence beyond its borders.[1]

Since 2011, which marked the so-called Arab Spring revolution in Egypt that led to the resignation of its longtime president, Hosni Mubarak, Egypt has been gripped with domestic problems and upheavals, involving the political, economic, and security spheres. This attention to domestic matters has necessarily compelled Egypt to look inward to deal with these problems, leaving the Arab world leadership-role to others, namely Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Under President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, Egypt nonetheless has tried to exert a more prominent role in Arab affairs both to heighten Egypt's prestige in the region and to accrue some benefits from that role for its people and economy. This quest has had mixed results.

For example, at the Arab League summit hosted by Egypt in March of 2015, el-Sisi proposed a joint Arab defense force that would presumably be deployed to go after the so-called Islamic State and its affiliates as well as like-minded terrorist groups.[2] Although this proposal was well-received when it was first announced, nothing has come of it, probably because of the difficulties involved in setting up such a force,

rivalries within the Arab world about who should lead such a force, and some distrust among Arab Shia that the force might become a Sunni force that would be used in sectarian warfare.

In addition, Egypt has tried to play a prominent role in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, given that the United States, after some strenuous attempts during the course of the previous Obama administration, has largely retreated from the scene. Cairo has been trying to reach out to the Israeli Government of Prime Minister Netanyahu in order to restart a process with the leadership of Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority,[3] but given the right-wing structure of the current Israeli Government and its reticence to make territorial compromises, along with ongoing divisions among the Palestinians between Fatah (Mahmoud Abbas's party) and Hamas (the Islamist group in charge of the Gaza Strip), it is far from certain anything will come from this outreach except for more Egyptian-Israeli cooperation in combating terrorist groups in the Sinai.[4]

Hence, at least for the moment (2016), Egypt does not seem to be a leader in the Arab world, or at least one that can achieve tangible benefits. For the time being, then, Egypt will be concentrating on domestic issues, such as efforts to defeat terrorists in the Sinai and in other parts of Egypt, trying to shore up its moribund economy (negotiations are underway for a $12 billion International Monetary Fund [IMF] loan), and trying to manage a political scene in which there is increasing criticism of President el-Sisi and his policies.

Nonetheless, Egypt has the potential to turn these problems around (helped by its own economic reforms, international support, and new gas discoveries off its Mediterranean coast) even if it remains an

authoritarian state, as is likely. If it actually succeeds in doing so, there is a very good possibility that it will resume its quest for Arab leadership. Hence, U.S. policymakers need to be prepared for the day when Egypt makes a concerted effort to regain the Arab leadership mantle.

WHY IS ARAB LEADERSHIP IMPORTANT FOR EGYPT?

The question arises as to why Egypt cares so much about being a leader in the Arab world. After all, such a position carries with it challenges and responsibilities that are not always beneficial for the country.

Part of its desire stems from Egypt's history as one of the world's oldest nation-states. Egyptians are very comfortable as to who they are, and they have a strong sense of their national identity. This identity, however, runs up against a larger Arab and Muslim identity, as the population speaks Arabic and is roughly 90 percent Muslim. Moreover, Egypt has and continues to play a prominent role in Islamic history and hosts Al-Azhar, the longest standing and leading religious university in the Sunni Muslim world, as well as other Islamic institutions. Moreover, with the notable exception of the immediate years after the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty in 1979, when Egypt was ostracized in the Arab world, Cairo has long hosted the Arab League and, by tradition, the Secretary General of this institution has usually been an Egyptian.[5]

Perhaps more important than these identities are Egypt's rich intellectual traditions. Although the country suffers from high poverty and illiteracy rates—about 25 percent of the population is considered poor, and around the same percentage cannot

read or write—its intellectuals, academic institutions, think tanks, and professional associations are widely admired throughout much of the Arab world. Moreover, what happens in Egypt—politically and socially—is followed closely by intellectuals and political activists throughout the Arab region.

As a former Egyptian diplomat put it:

> Egypt needs to regain its self-confidence and remember that its leadership in the Arab world was, for decades, predicated on intellectual capital and the dominance of Egyptian scholars and experts in fields ranging from political through to economic policy to culture and education.[6]

Egyptians are prideful that the Arab world's first parliament, first modern army, first national secular universities, and first professional organization were all founded in their country. The Egyptian Bar Association, for example, was established in 1913. In addition, Egypt's nationalist undertakings against colonialism—such as the Urabi revolt of the early 1880s, the 1919 revolution against the British, which led to nominal independence in 1922, and the nationalization of the British and French owned Suez Canal Company in 1956—were a source of inspiration and emulation for other nationalist movements in the Arab world. This storied history and standing has given Egypt a special place in the region.[7]

Outside of this intellectual and political weight is Egypt's geographic location and size (about 90 million people). For example, Egypt straddles the African and Asian continents, and its Suez Canal remains an important international transit way from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean not only for oil tankers from the Persian Gulf headed to Europe but for other worldwide maritime trade.[8]

Also geographically important is Egypt's position as being on the same latitude as the Persian Gulf, which means in times of crisis, it is a bridge for outside powers, chiefly the United States, to use Egypt as an overflight route and refueling stop on the way to the Gulf. This was especially the case in the Gulf war of 1990-1991.[9]

Geography is a mixed blessing for Egypt, however, as it borders both Israel and the Palestinian territory of the Gaza Strip. This means that Egypt has been directly involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict (in both wars and in various incarnations of the peace process) since the conflict erupted as a regional issue in the late 1940s.

Up through the 1973 war, Egypt's position next to Israel meant that the Arab world saw Egypt as the primary military power that would confront Israel. After the Camp David Accords of 1978 and the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty of 1979, Egypt used its location next to Israel, with the help of the United States, to retrieve its Sinai territory from the Israelis and pursue a diplomatic offensive, as opposed to a military one, on behalf of the Palestinians.[10]

Although, as mentioned earlier, Egypt was ostracized in the Arab world for these peace deals with Israel, over time the Arab world accepted Egypt back to the fold, helped in part by the realization that diplomacy, not war, would be the only realistic route to achieve an Arab-Israeli peace settlement and some type of justice for the Palestinians.

This process has not been smooth, however, as several small wars between Israel and Arab parties have taken place since 1973, including ones involving Lebanon (first by Israel against the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), then Israel against Hezbol-

lah) and later involving Israeli versus Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip.

Throughout these engagements, Egypt has had to maneuver between keeping its peace treaty with Israel intact while exhibiting sympathy for the Arab cause, particularly with the Palestinians. During various flare-ups, Egypt has recalled its ambassador from Tel Aviv but has not broken diplomatic relations with Israel.

More positively, when the peace process seemed to pick up momentum, Egypt portrayed itself as a depository of knowledge for the Arabs as to how to negotiate with the Israelis, and was a conduit to convey Arab concerns to both the United States and Israel. Hence, during various attempts at peace, Cairo was often the stop not only for U.S. diplomats working the peace process but also for various Arab parties, and particularly the Palestinians, who sought Egypt's support and advice.[11]

In this way, Egypt often furthered its leadership quest in the Arab world by becoming an indispensable player in the peace process.

Nonetheless, Egypt during the Mubarak era never matched the prominence it had during the Nasser era, particularly from 1956 to 1967, when the country was the undisputed leader of the Arab world. Much of the latter was based on the charisma of Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser and the appeal of pan-Arab nationalism that he espoused. Moreover, Nasser's defiance of Britain and France during the Suez crisis of 1956 and later against the United States, along with his militancy against Israel, proved widely popular among the Arab masses.[12]

After the humiliating Arab defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, during which the Egyptian military

suffered heavy losses and Israel occupied the Sinai Peninsula, Nasserism lost its luster and Egypt's position in the region declined accordingly. Egypt, under Nasser's successor, Anwar Sadat, regained its leadership role again to some degree immediately after the 1973 Arab-Israeli war when offensive military actions by Egypt and Syria took the Israelis by surprise and inflicted substantial losses on them. Although the Israelis were able to launch successful counterattacks during the last phases of the war before a ceasefire was declared, the war, and the subsequent Arab oil embargo on the United States and much of Europe, proved to be a great psychological boost to the Arabs and enhanced Egypt's prestige and leadership role in the Arab world.[13] Egypt also benefitted by an infusion of Saudi and other Gulf Arab financial aid in the aftermath of the 1973 war.

This leadership role under Sadat was short-lived, however, because of Sadat's peace overtures to the Israelis that ultimately culminated in the Camp David Accords of 1978 and the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty of 1979. Most countries of the Arab League, seeing that Egypt had opted out of the military equation against Israel, broke diplomatic relations with it as a result, and Egypt was ostracized in the region for a time. Sadat appeared dismissive of these actions by the Arab states, and increasingly relied on the United States as Egypt's military and economic benefactor.

Sadat's successor, Hosni Mubarak, pursued a two-track policy—maintaining close relations with the United States (and adhering to the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty) while slowly improving relations with the Arab world. A series of events—regionally and internationally—helped Egypt achieve these goals. First, the Iranian revolution and the Iran-Iraq war took

Arab attention away from the Arab-Israeli dispute for a time and allowed Egypt to come to Iraq's aid with military equipment, supplies, and Egyptian workers, showing that it was an important power in support of the Arab world. Second, the realization in the Arab world that the Arab-Israeli dispute was not going to be solved militarily, and that, with the end of the Cold War, the Soviet Union (and subsequently Russia) was not going to be the arms supplier of the Arabs that it once was. And third, the second Gulf war that began with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 brought Egypt to prominence as the dominant Arab country in the anti-Iraq coalition, leading the Arab League to condemn the invasion of Kuwait and contributing the largest number of Arab forces (30,000 troops) to the defense of Saudi Arabia, which was immediately threatened by that invasion.[14]

At the end of this war, with Iraq under Saddam Hussein considerably weaker and under international sanctions, Egypt attempted to restore its leadership role in the Arab world. The Egypt-Syria-Saudi Arabia strategic triangle that was in place during the 1973 Arab-Israeli war re-emerged with the war against Iraq in 1990-1991, with Egypt playing a strong role in it. Once again, Egypt received substantial Saudi and Gulf Arab aid, and more Egyptian workers were able to obtain employment in the Gulf Arab countries.

As a consequence, Egypt attempted to distance itself from some U.S. policies in the area to shore up its Arab nationalist credentials, namely coming to the aid (at least rhetorically) of Libya against Western sanctions, championing the Palestinian cause against the Israelis, and criticizing strikes on Iraq as an example of excessive Western punishment, which it claimed were hurting the Iraqi people as opposed to the regime.[15]

These policies and positions did bring Egypt some benefits in the Arab world, such as Libya taking in about 1 million Egyptian workers, helping to alleviate the excess labor problem in Egypt, and making Cairo the indisputable capital for Arab-Israeli peace process meetings and consultations.

However, Mubarak never had the charisma of Nasser, nor the daring of Sadat, who once said he preferred "action to reaction."[16] During the mid-1990s, moreover, Egypt also had to deal with a serious internal terrorism problem from the Islamic Group and the Egyptian Islamic Jihad that targeted regime officials, police officers, and foreign tourists, which occupied much of the government's attention.[17]

Hence, while Egypt under Mubarak tried to seize the Arab leadership mantle and was successful to some degree, he never achieved (or came close to) the level that Nasser achieved in the years of 1956-1967.

EGYPT'S ARAB LEADERSHIP QUEST UNDER ABDEL FATTAH EL-SISI

As mentioned earlier, the Egyptian revolution and the ouster of Mubarak compelled the first two successor regimes to look inward for the most part. After Mubarak resigned in February 2011, power passed to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF). As novices in politics (the Egyptian military had not really played a role in domestic politics since the 1960s), they had to contend with contentious politics, numerous demonstrations, and an economy that had been battered because of the revolutionary turmoil in the country. The SCAF employed military tribunals against supposed violators of the law that contributed to their loss of popularity over time. The

next phase was the Muslim Brotherhood era, which started in early 2012 with the organization winning control of parliament through elections (though this parliament was disbanded by the courts in mid-2012) and the emergence of Muhammad Morsi from the Brotherhood as Egypt's new president in the summer of 2012. Although Morsi attempted to change Egypt's foreign policy to some degree—by warming relations with Iran, expressing solidarity with the Syrian rebels fighting the Assad government, and showing solidarity with Hamas—the basic contours of Egyptian foreign policy were not really altered. For example, Egypt brokered a truce between Israel and Hamas in November 2012 in the wake of another in their series of small wars, and maintained close relations with the United States.[18]

Like the SCAF, Morsi had to deal with mounting domestic troubles in Egypt, some of which were of his own making, such as his late-November 2012 decree declaring that his presidential decisions would no longer be subject to judicial review (setting himself above the law) and his efforts to push through a new constitution that was written primarily by his fellow Muslim Brothers.

These decisions provoked a secular backlash in Egypt that led to street battles between Morsi's supporters and opponents, and a genuine popular revolt against him that was supported by the Egyptian military, led by then-Defense Minister el-Sisi, who ousted Morsi in early July 2013.[19]

Although el-Sisi put the head of the Supreme Constitutional Court, Adly Mansour, nominally in charge of the country, he and the military hierarchy were the real powers in charge of Egypt from that point on. This situation has continued to the present day, though

el-Sisi, who retired from the military, ran successfully for president as a civilian in 2014.

Initially, el-Sisi had to deal with the threat from the Muslim Brothers, which called for Morsi to be restored to power and pledged they would not relinquish their protest encampments in the Cairo area until that was achieved. El-Sisi answered this demand by using force against the Brotherhood and its allies. Nearly 1,000 people died in the month of August 2013 alone when he ordered troops and police to crush these encampments, and he imprisoned hundreds of Brotherhood leaders and activists. In December 2013, the government declared the Brotherhood a terrorist organization, cracked down on their non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and businesses, and ensured it would not come back to power through the ballot box. El-Sisi also had to deal with a terrorist insurgency in the Sinai that broke out in earnest after Morsi was overthrown as well as terrorist attacks in mainland Egypt.[20]

Despite these domestic problems and the fracturing of the anti-Morsi coalition as the new regime began to go after secular detractors, el-Sisi, at least initially, fashioned himself as a new Nasser. This meant that he would not only embark on big projects domestically (like building an extension of the Suez Canal), but would play a prominent role in Arab affairs.

Such leadership attempts have been problematic. El-Sisi, for example, proposed the idea of a joint Arab defense force at the Arab League summit he hosted in March 2015. He said that the Arab nation was facing unprecedented challenges (a reference to the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria [ISIS] and like-minded terrorist groups) and that Arab problems should be handled by Arabs themselves. Although the idea for such a force was endorsed at that summit and there

were subsequent meetings of Arab military chiefs in subsequent months to explore the idea, nothing came of it. Indeed, at the most recent Arab League summit in Mauritania in July 2016, there was no mention of such a force.[21]

At the same time, there was some coordinated Arab military action led by Saudi Arabia against the Houthi rebels in Yemen who adhere to the Zaidi branch of Shia Islam and had ousted the Yemeni Government from the capital city of Sana. A number of Arab countries contributed military assets to supporting this Saudi-led effort (in large part to stay in the good graces of the Saudis), but it soon became apparent that the Saudis and the Emirates were taking the lead in this military effort and were conducting the brunt of the air strikes. Egypt did deploy some naval ships to the strategic Bab el-Mandeb Strait off the coast of Yemen (the important sea lane that links the Red and Arabian Seas) and reportedly conducted some air strikes in probable coordination with the Egyptian navy, but it was clearly not the dominant military player in this conflict.

Egypt lent its military assets to this effort in large part to stay in the good graces of the Saudis who came to the Egyptian Government's aid with billions of dollars after Morsi was overthrown. (Although Saudi Arabia had given sanctuary over the years to the Muslim Brotherhood during periodic crackdowns in Egypt, it had come to see the organization as not only a threat to Egypt but to their own country as well. Hence, there was a convergence of interests between Egypt and Saudi Arabia.) Egypt also had a strategic interest in the Yemeni conflict because it did not want the war to interfere with the free passage of ships through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, as that would adversely affect

shipping (and toll revenues) through its Suez Canal. However, Egypt, with an unhappy history of military intervention in Yemen in the 1960s, during which it suffered many casualties, was especially careful not to send ground troops to Yemen in order not to be bogged down in that country again.[22]

The Egyptian-Saudi relationship also had some differences over Syria that has not disappeared. Although many Egyptian officials do not have a high regard for Bashar Assad, the president of Syria, believing he is not the sharp and shrewd leader that his father, Hafez, was, they believe the alternative to his rule could be radical Islamist groups like the al-Qaeda linked Jabhat al-Nusra (now called Jabhat Fateh al-Sham) and ISIS. Cairo is fearful that if such groups come out on top of the Syrian civil war and rule the Syrian state, that scenario would be a disaster for both the region and for Egypt, because an Islamist victory in Syria would work to destabilize the region, give hope to the repressed Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood organization, and give even more impetus to Egypt's own Islamist terrorists in the Sinai and elsewhere in the country.

Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, sees Bashar Assad and his regime as the real problem in Syria and believes he should step down immediately. Moreover, the Saudis have been aiding Islamist groups within the Syrian rebel camp that the Egyptians see as extremist. In addition, even though Egypt and Saudi Arabia are both opposed to ISIS, Egypt seems to be concerned about Saudi Arabia's plans for Syria if Saudi Arabia continues to aid such Islamist groups. Egypt seems to believe the Saudis are overly optimistic that they can control and tame these Islamist groups.[23]

Concerning Iran, Egypt sees that country as a long-term strategic threat, but it is not as paranoid about

Iran as is Saudi Arabia.[24] Relations between Egypt and Iran were poor during the Mubarak era (not helped by the fact that Iran named a street in Tehran after one of Sadat's assassins), but occasionally Mubarak would send signals to Iran of a warming of ties when he felt that he wanted to tweak the United States over policy disagreements. Under Morsi, ties with Iran improved somewhat, marked by presidential visits to each other's capitals, but there was some tension in the relationship over Syria because Morsi disapproved of Tehran's assistance to the Assad government and even seemed to encourage Egyptians to volunteer to fight against Assad.[25]

On Libya, Egypt also appears to have differences with a number of Arab countries. After Muammar Qadhafi's regime was overthrown and Qadhafi was killed, Libya descended into a long period of chaos with militias proliferating and two rival governments being established—one in Tripoli under Islamists somewhat akin to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and one in Tobruk under secular elements. In this chaos, ISIS was able to establish a foothold in some central coastal cities of the country, like Sirte. Much of the Arab world and the international community have now come to support a national unity government—essentially a merger of the Tripoli and Tobruk factions—and a new national army, but Egypt (and the UAE) have strongly supported the Tobruk faction and the commander of forces loyal to this faction, General Khalifa Haftar, who remains deeply distrustful of the Tripoli faction.[26]

Egypt sees Libya, its western neighbor, as a national security problem because of the smuggling of weapons and terrorists across the border into Egypt, and believes only a strongman like Haftar, with Egyp-

tian help, can control and stabilize the situation. This support for Haftar, however, is prolonging the process (and may indeed scuttle it) of achieving a national unity government, destroying ISIS's strongholds in the country, and reining in the militias. As of late August 2016, the Tobruk faction has refused to endorse the unity government, putting the unity concept—and Libya's future—in jeopardy.[27]

Finally, Egypt has tried to revive the Israeli-Palestinian peace process track by maintaining good relations with both the Israeli government under Prime Minister Netanyahu and the Palestinian Authority under Mahmoud Abbas. In July 2016, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry traveled to Israel and the West Bank to meet both leaders. El-Sisi reportedly has a good relationship with Netanyahu in large part because they have cooperated on security issues in the Sinai, which has involved the sharing of intelligence on the terrorists, and maintaining a tough position against Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip. Moreover, Egypt has destroyed numerous tunnels between the Sinai and Gaza that were used to smuggle arms and terrorists back and forth.[28]

Egypt believes the Israeli-Palestinian track is its strong suit because of its longstanding ties to the Palestinians and its peace treaty with the Israelis. Showing that it is concerned about the Palestinians—the core issue in the Middle East despite the proxy wars between Saudi Arabia and Iran that have arisen in the past few years—gives it a certain amount of prestige in the Arab world. However, pursuing this track under the present circumstances has risks because it is doubtful that Israel's right-wing government will be able to meet Palestinian demands, namely relinquishing the West Bank and East Jerusalem to allow them to

create a viable state. Moreover, given the split in territory and ideology between Fatah (the political force of the Palestinian Authority) and Hamas (considered a terrorist group by Israel, the United States, and the European Union [EU]), it is unrealistic to expect that Hamas would sit idly by and not scuttle a deal between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.[29]

On the issue of counter radicalization, Egypt under el-Sisi has tried to use Egypt's religious institutions to counter the narrative of ISIS, al-Qaeda, and like-minded groups. In a major speech in January 2015, el-Sisi called on Egyptian religious leaders in Al-Azhar and the Ministry of Religious Affairs to provide guidance that supports a moderate interpretation of Islamic texts while refuting the extremists who have cited certain texts as justifications for their violence and intolerant behavior.[30]

EGYPT'S DOMESTIC PROBLEMS AND POTENTIAL TO IMPROVE

Egypt under el-Sisi has become an authoritarian state, assisted in part by a state-run media campaign that is hypernationalistic and questions the patriotism of anyone who disagrees with the president.[31] Part of this strategy is to rally the population around the leader; the other part is to blame foreigners or foreign conspiracies for Egypt's ills. El-Sisi was initially widely popular with a large majority of Egyptians after he removed Morsi from power and cracked down on the Brotherhood organization. Non-Brotherhood Egyptians—probably three-fourths of the population according to some estimates—came to see the Brotherhood as a threat to not only Egypt's semi-democratic traditions but also to its mostly socially tolerant society.[32]

Politically, however, el-Sisi has been more interested in consolidating power (by keeping his enemies, real and imagined, either imprisoned or off-balanced) and dealing with a serious terrorist insurgency in the North Sinai and terrorist attacks in mainland Egypt.[33] He fulfilled the so-called democratic roadmap that he promised the Egyptian people and the international community after he removed Morsi from power—drafting and passing a new constitution, and holding presidential and parliamentary elections—but toleration of dissent has been very problematic.[34]

It is not just Brotherhood leaders and activists who are in jail, but some secular journalists, bloggers, human rights activists, and protestors. El-Sisi's critics are often tarnished with the label of "traitor" by regime supporters, and some civil society activists are accused of conspiring with foreigners aiming to bring down the Egyptian state.[35]

Parliament, meanwhile, has essentially become a rubber stamp institution, with members outdoing each other in espousing pro-el-Sisi sentiments. Although el-Sisi has not created a regime political party like his predecessors, a broad, pro-el-Sisi coalition has formed in parliament that ensures the passage of regime-directed legislation.

El-Sisi, like his predecessors, also has little tolerance for personal criticism. In a televised speech in 2016, he told Egyptian citizens: "Do not listen to anyone but me."[36] He seems to hold the view that his critics are out to harm Egypt.

There are, however, some glimmers of hope that Egypt could become less authoritarian and less repressive. Despite large-scale arrests, some civil society and human rights activists along with independent journalists have continued to speak up and have

put the spotlight on regime repression. In addition, there have been a handful of parliamentarians who refuse to be in lockstep with el-Sisi and have voiced opposition to his policies. Perhaps in response to this pressure, el-Sisi stated in August 2016 that he would soon pardon 300 detainees.[37]

Part of the problem is that the state institutions that supported the Mubarak presidency were never really purged of abusive officials who supported state authoritarianism. These institutions include the military, the interior ministry (which controls the police and the internal security services), and the judiciary. All of these institutions are playing a role in the crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood and are helping to maintain el-Sisi in power.[38] They also have some deep grudges against the Brotherhood and operate as their own fiefdoms. Hence, el-Sisi seems beholden to them and, therefore, may believe that any major reform effort would jeopardize his own hold on power.

For example, Morsi, while he was in power, saw the judiciary as a thorn in his side (the Supreme Constitutional Court, for instance, disbanded the Brotherhood-dominated parliament in June 2012 over a technicality) and a holdover from the Mubarak regime. He tried to lower the retirement age for judges that would have removed about 20 percent of them. Presumably, he would then fill the vacancies with Brotherhood supporters. Hence, when Morsi was overthrown, some judges issued death sentence verdicts not only against Morsi and other Brotherhood leaders but also against numerous Brotherhood rank-and-file activists. When Western journalists questioned el-Sisi about these harsh verdicts after very quick trials, his response was that he could not interfere in the workings of the judiciary—a comment that might not be

too far from the truth because he feared upsetting this important branch of the government and a key ally in his anti-Brotherhood campaign.[39]

Similarly, the case of a murdered Italian graduate student, Giulio Regeni, who was doing research in Egypt on labor issues, might be illustrative of the theory that el-Sisi does not fully control the government and needs to cater to the interior ministry. Although this case is still not solved, the student's body, found on a roadside in February 2016, reportedly had markings of torture.[40] So far, no one has been held accountable. It is highly doubtful that el-Sisi himself would have ordered the student's arrest or death, as it has become a crisis in Egypt's relations with Italy, a major trading partner. Instead, it is quite possible that some official in the interior ministry deemed Regeni a threat to national security because he was researching a supposedly sensitive subject and ordered his arrest and torture without checking with the president's office. El-Sisi, while worried about the bad atmospherics of this incident, seems reluctant to "clean house" in the interior ministry. The most he has done is to compel his interior minister to apologize to the Egyptian people for police abuses in general, but only a few police officers have been prosecuted by the government for abuses against citizens.[41] Indeed, in the anti-terrorism law that was decreed by President el-Sisi in August 2015, and passed by the Egyptian parliament in January 2016, police are shielded from penalties for "proportionate use of force," and journalists can be prosecuted for writing articles on terrorism incidents that differ from the government's version of events.[42]

There have even been reports of coup plotting in the military and the arrests of some officers.[43] These reports, written by Egyptian journalists not tied to the

regime, are not possible to verify, but if they are indeed true, then el-Sisi's grip on power may not be as strong as some have suggested. He may feel that he needs to indulge the military to keep it content. This means that he will not take any steps to curb the military's substantial stake in the Egyptian economy, a role that many economists believe has led to distortions in the economy, and is hurting competition in some industries. Hence, it is doubtful that the authoritarian nature of the Egyptian state will change anytime soon.

The economy has also been a problem occupying much of the government's time and effort. Government projections of fairly high economic growth rates of 5 to 6 percent have not borne out (the current rate is between 3 to 4 percent) because of several factors.[44] Ongoing terrorist incidents not only in the Sinai but also in mainland Egypt have adversely affected foreign direct investment as well as Egyptian nationals bringing capital back home. More directly, tourism has taken a large hit because of terrorism. For example, the downing of a Russian Metrojet over the Sinai in late October 2015 that killed all 224 people on board—attributed by el-Sisi to an act of terrorism—has severely hurt the popular southern Sinai resort industry. Not only have the number of Russian tourists dried up, but tourists from Britain and elsewhere in Europe have also stopped traveling to Egypt in large numbers. This decline in tourism—at least 50 percent fewer foreign tourists in 2016 than in 2015—has not only adversely affected gross domestic product (GDP) growth, but has also exacerbated unemployment, particularly for university graduates, some of whom were able to get jobs in this industry because of their facility with foreign languages.[45]

Official unemployment in Egypt stands at 13 percent, but some economists believe this figure hides the true jobless rate. Among university graduates, the figure is at least two to three times that rate, according to some estimates.[46]

El-Sisi's economic plan initially involved megaprojects. He used the military to create an expansion of the Suez Canal (actually a byway that would facilitate ship transits in the canal) and completed this project in a year's time at a cost of about $8 billion. But the government's projection of a huge boost in canal tolls (from $5 billion in 2015, to double that in a decade) that would result from this expansion has failed to register even modest growth in 2016 because of the global economic downturn and subsequent drop in maritime trade. Egypt would be lucky to even maintain the $5 billion level in 2016, because of those exogenous factors.[47]

El-Sisi had planned to create a new capital city east of Cairo that would have been a huge, $45 billion project, but that seems to have been shelved for the time being. Egypt still plans to create a new economic zone near the Suez Canal aimed at attracting foreign and domestic businesses, but it is unclear when this project will move forward.

The other part of his economic plan involved cutting government spending, particularly on subsidies and civil service benefits. Subsidies currently account for a whopping 8.5 percent of GDP. El-Sisi achieved some success by reducing energy subsidies in his first year as president, but then halted the effort when it appeared other subsidy cuts would be too politically dangerous. He has proposed a new civil service law aimed at cutting waste and redundancy, but that bill has encountered some resistance from members of

parliament who are worried about the impact of such cuts on their constituents who have seen their real purchasing power decline amidst a relatively high inflation of 14 percent.[48]

What has kept the economy afloat has been generous infusions of Gulf Arab aid since the summer of 2013, particularly from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait, along with a high demand for consumer goods. Some observers believe Gulf Arab aid has amounted to between $20 to $30 billion since 2013, helping to shore up Egypt's dwindling foreign currency reserves and mitigate the effects of its budget deficits of about 10 percent of GDP. Still, because of the large fiscal deficits and burgeoning trade deficits (currently 7 percent of GDP), Egypt's foreign exchange reserves have dropped to less than $17 billion, about half of what they were in 2010.[49]

CAN EGYPT TURN ITS PROBLEMATIC DOMESTIC SITUATION AROUND AND BECOME A REGIONAL LEADER AGAIN?

The answer to this question is yes, with caveats. It is unlikely that Egypt, with its military-backed government and its unreformed government ministries, will become a democracy anytime soon, but that situation has been the case for quite some time. The Nasser years showed that authoritarianism is not an impediment to regional leadership and in some respects can facilitate this stance as long as the domestic situation remains under control. Like el-Sisi, Nasser cracked down hard on the Muslim Brotherhood and had little toleration for dissent. His secret police were active throughout the country.[50] In contrast to the present era, Nasser was very popular with the Egyptian intelligentsia and the masses, and his prominence in

regional affairs was a mark of pride for most Egyptians. El-Sisi was initially popular with the Egyptian secular intelligentsia and the masses, but this popularity has slipped because of the political and economic problems mentioned earlier.

The question arises as to whether Egypt can stabilize its domestic situation, politically and economically, to the point where it can then devote more time and energy to pursue an Arab leadership role.

Politically, while Egypt does not have to become a democracy to achieve this aim, it needs to be less repressive so that its citizens can air their grievances without fear of arrest. This policy has sometimes been called a safety-valve approach—letting the opposition blow off steam without fundamentally changing the politics of the country—and was in operation throughout much of the Mubarak era, which helped the latter survive in power for almost 30 years. Nasser did not need to use this political mechanism because much of Egyptian society, as some scholars have pointed out, was willing to sacrifice political freedoms for the larger goal of the "national modernization project" that he championed.[51] After the humiliating defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, there was an increase in agitation from some segments of Egyptian society; but for the time when Egypt under Nasser was the undisputed leader of the Arab world (1956-1967), Egypt's domestic political situation was largely under control.[52]

This means that el-Sisi, if he remains president for some time, has to find a way to appease the secular opposition and activists without repression, while retaining a semblance of popular support. Given that his regime sees the Muslim Brotherhood as an existential threat, it is unlikely that he will reverse his stance on this organization, but many, if not most, Egyptian

secularists share his antipathy toward the Brotherhood in any case. What the secular opposition and activists want is tolerance of moderate voices critical of the government, less repression, an end to terrorism, and an improvement in the economy.[53]

Although el-Sisi has exhibited little tolerance of criticism, that may change given some internal and external circumstances. Internally, el-Sisi is likely to receive continued criticism from elements of the intelligentsia as long as his government arrests protestors, journalists, civil society activists, and bloggers. An interesting development was when protests broke out in the wake of the Saudi king's visit to Egypt in June 2016, when el-Sisi's government announced that two islands in the Straits of Tiran (between the Sinai and the northwestern coast of Saudi Arabia) that the Saudis had given to Egypt in 1950, would be returned to Saudi control. The protestors seized on this issue as a matter of principle by claiming they were trying to protect Egypt's sovereignty.[54] Many of the protestors undoubtedly saw an opportunity to use el-Sisi's hypernationalism against him as a way to embarrass the government. In response, the government arrested scores of protestors for violating the so-called protest law that prohibits street demonstrations without approval from the interior ministry. However, in August 2016, el-Sisi signaled in an interview that he would soon release those detained for these protests.[55]

El-Sisi might come to the realization, if he has not already done so, that to preserve his government's long-term stability he may have to ease up on his intolerance of dissent, particularly if does not involve the Brotherhood. Making Egypt less repressive would dampen the potential for a more violent outbreak. Even the Mubarak regime was less repressive than the situation in Egypt today. The toleration of dissent

would also go a long way toward stopping the erosion of el-Sisi's popularity.

There are foreign policy reasons for el-Sisi to become less repressive as well. Despite his flirtations with Russia, el-Sisi keenly wants a White House visit as a way of giving his regime a stamp of approval from Washington.[56] Former President Obama seems to have resisted offering such an invitation because of ongoing concerns over Egypt's poor human rights record, even though he restored full U.S. military assistance to Egypt in March 2015, after having suspended much of it in October 2013. By embarking on less repressive policies, el-Sisi would also improve his standing within the EU countries, which have also voiced concerns about human rights, especially after the mysterious death of the Italian graduate student Giulio Regeni, as mentioned earlier.

This desire to be in the good graces of the United States was evident in an August 2016 interview that el-Sisi gave in which he said: "Egyptian-American relations are strategic and they have been improving." He then added: "During the past [3] years, facts about the situation in Egypt were clarified to them, and our policies are characterized with balance, prudence, and keenness on such relationships."[57]

Although high ranking U.S. civilian and military leaders have come to Cairo to speak with their Egyptian interlocutors, this desire to engage with Egypt and continue U.S. military and economic assistance stems in large part from not wanting Egypt to fail and succumb to instability and terrorism, not because they see an improvement in Egypt's human rights situation.

For example, at the time of the renewal of the U.S. strategic dialogue with Egypt in the summer of 2015, then-U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry stated publicly in Cairo:

> Now, we all know that defeating terrorism requires a long-term strategy. Border security and law enforcement actions are a significant part of the equation, but the even larger imperative is to persuade and prevent young people from turning to terror in the first place. Otherwise, no matter how many terrorists we bring to justice, those groups will replenish their ranks and we will not be safer. We will be involved in a round robin, circular, repetitive process.
>
> This means that our comprehensive strategy has to earn the support of religious authorities, educators, and citizens who discredit hateful doctrines and who are ready and willing to build stronger and more resilient communities. The success will depend on building trust between the authorities and the public, and enabling those who are critical of official policies to find a means of voicing their dissent peacefully, through participation in a political process. The more united and proud of their institutions the citizens of a country are, the more effective those institutions will be in resisting and fighting back against the agents of terror. This is, we have found inevitably through history, the imperative nexus between human rights and security. And this, too, will be a major focus of our discussions today.[58]

Kerry and other U.S. officials have underscored that while support for Egypt is important strategically, long-term success in Egypt's fight against terrorism and in bringing about stability means finding a "means of voicing dissent peacefully." In other words, the U.S. message is that repression of dissent is not only morally wrong but also counterproductive.

On the economic front, Egypt (as of the completion of this monograph's research in August 2016) has tentatively agreed to an IMF loan of some $12 billion as a way of shoring up its troubled economy and its dwindling foreign exchange reserves. This loan is contingent on Egypt obtaining about $9 billion in additional loans (from development banks and from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states), subsidy cuts on electricity, water, and food (for the non-poor), plus the introduction of a value-added tax to improve the government's revenue collection and a devaluation of the Egyptian currency to boost exports.[59]

Although many of these measures are controversial, Egyptian officials believe they have no choice but to pursue them in the face of persistent budget and trade deficits and lackluster economic growth.[60] If Egypt's tourism industry recovers, foreign investment increases, budget deficits improve, inflation is reduced, foreign exchange reserves improve, and the new gas find off the Mediterranean coast proves to be as big as has been reported, Egypt has the potential to have a stable economy, fairly high growth rates, lower inflation, and a reduction in unemployment. A prominent economist and former IMF official who has followed Egypt closely has stated that although Egypt's economy is in poor shape, it is "not one that is in full blown crisis,"[61] meaning that it can turn things around. Moreover, if the terrorism problem in the Sinai diminishes, and the regime becomes less repressive, Egypt's political situation can also stabilize.

If this scenario happens, Egypt will be able to turn its attention more toward regional matters and make a bid to resume an Arab leadership role. What is in Egypt's favor is that it has dealt with political, terrorism, and economic crises before and has recovered

from such problems. Although it is highly unlikely that Egypt will ever become an economic powerhouse like Dubai, it has the potential to resume the fairly high growth rates (around 7 percent) that it achieved in 2007-2008, if it sticks with its new economic reform plan.

WHAT POLICIES WOULD EGYPT LIKELY PURSUE AS AN ARAB REGIONAL LEADER?

The Arab world today is facing a number of crises; one of the most serious is the sectarian divide and strife between Sunni and Shia. There are a number of reasons for the emergence of this strife that go back many centuries, but it is safe to say that Saudi-Iranian rivalry and hostility is driving much of it. Part of the problem is that each of these protagonists has placed religion in the center of their regime's ideology. Saudi Arabia's state ideology is the Wahhabi brand of Sunni Islam that is an extreme interpretation of Islamic religious texts, which leaves little room for tolerance of those not following its precepts.[62] In addition, some Wahhabi clerics have even considered the Shia to be heretics and, therefore, not worthy of being considered as true Muslims. On the Iranian side, although the regime, since Ayatollah Khomeini took power in 1979, espouses a type of pan-Islamic nationalism, it is a Shia state and much of its policies in the region are geared toward supporting Shia groups in a mostly Sunni Arab world.[63]

The fact that about 10 percent of the Saudi population is Shia and have been largely relegated to second-class status in the kingdom merely adds fuel to the fire. The Iranians see the Saudi leadership as oppressors of the Shia (both in the kingdom and in neighbor-

ing Bahrain), whereas the Saudi officials (and much of Saudi society) see Iran's hand in "stirring up" the Shia of Saudi Arabia who live mostly in the strategically important (because of oil) Eastern Province.[64]

This Saudi-Iran Sunni-Shia rivalry is not just being played out in the Gulf region (for example in Bahrain, where a Sunni kingdom presides over, and Iran would say oppresses, its 70 percent Shia majority population), but in Yemen, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon.[65]

The absence of Egypt in the regional arena has made this sectarian situation worse because religion is not a driving force behind its foreign policy. Conversely, a more engaged Egypt is likely to dampen such sectarian strife for the following reasons:

- Having only a miniscule Shia population, Egypt has never felt threatened by Shia militancy fed by Iran, real or imagined. Its sectarian problem has chiefly involved occasional Muslim-Christian clashes, particularly in Upper Egypt (Coptic Christians are about 10 percent of the population of Egypt as a whole), but not inter-Muslim clashes. Although Egypt is proud to be a majority Sunni Muslim state that houses the prestigious Al-Azhar University (which has trained Sunni Muslim clerics from all over the Muslim world), it does not see the world through sectarian Muslim lenses.
- Egypt's problems with Iran are historical but not religious. In modern times, Egypt and Iran have been two regional powers in the Middle East, and relations were not good between them during the Nasser period when Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was ruler of Iran, as they were generally on opposite sides in the Cold War. Relations improved during the Sadat era

as both leaders were pro-West and opposed to the Soviet Union. Sadat even offered the Shah temporary sanctuary when he left Iran during the height of the Iranian revolution in early 1979. Relations then deteriorated under Ayatollah Khomeini's regime, especially as Iran's revolutionary leaders seem to inspire Islamists in the Arab world, denigrate states like Egypt that had relations with Israel, and named a street in Tehran after one of Sadat's assassins.[66] However, the acrimony between Egypt and Iran was not because of the Sunni-Shia issue.

- Moreover, in part because of its distance from Iran (in contrast to the Saudis who live just across the Gulf from Iran), Egypt does not see Iran as an immediate strategic military threat and believes that the nuclear deal that was signed by Iran and the United Nations (UN) Security Council's five permanent members (China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, United States, plus Germany [P5+1])—despite misgivings by Gulf Arab states—was a positive development.[67] That is not to say that Egypt is not concerned about Iran's threats against the Gulf Arab states (who are, after all, Egypt's benefactors) in the long term, but that the threat is not immediate or geographically close.
- However, a more prominent role by Egypt as a bulwark of Arab security would not only lessen the sectarian issue but would help to allay Saudi worries about a resurgent Iran. Egypt has one of the most powerful and capable militaries in the Arab world. Although Egypt's estimated defense budget of $4.4 billion is lower than that of Saudi Arabia and the UAE, Egypt's military

equipment of 4,800 tanks and over 1,100 aircraft and 470,000 military personnel, including a highly trained and competent officer corps, makes it a formidable military force.[68]

- Such a force can be a check on Iran's regional ambitions, reassuring Egypt's Gulf Arab allies who are worried about Tehran's ambitions. Indeed, Egypt has already taken part in military exercises with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and such exercises are likely to continue and expand in the future.
- At the same time, Egypt can deal with Iran in a way that Saudi Arabia cannot. Because Egypt deals with states in a non-sectarian way, it can also maintain relations with Iran and convey Arab concerns even while being in a military alliance with Saudi Arabia. During the time of the Iran nuclear negotiations in the spring of 2015, when the Saudis were very concerned about a deal that would leave some of Iran's nuclear capability intact, the Egyptian and Iranian foreign ministers had a rather friendly meeting on the sidelines of the Non-Aligned Movement ministerial.[69] Moreover, by avoiding inflammatory sectarian actions or language, Egypt can avoid the pitfalls that have occurred between Saudi Arabia and Iran in recent months. For example, when the Saudis executed a Shia cleric, Nimr al-Nimr, in early 2016, this incident led to street demonstrations in Tehran and the torching of the Saudi Embassy in that city. As a consequence, Saudi Arabia broke off diplomatic relations with Iran.[70] Egypt, on the other hand, was not affected by this crisis.

- At the same time, Egypt, as a mostly Sunni Muslim state, can be a bulwark as a leader disputing the extremist propaganda of ISIS, al-Qaeda, and like-minded groups. As mentioned earlier, el-Sisi in January 2015 called on Egypt's leading Muslim leaders and clerics to go and reexamine the Islamic texts and rid them of interpretations that are opposed to tolerance and the modern world. He stated:

> we are in need of a religious revolution. You imams [Muslim clerics] are responsible before Allah. . . . The entire world is waiting for your word . . . because the Islamic world is being torn, it is being destroyed, it is being lost . . . by our own hands.[71]

El-Sisi also stated:

> religious discourse is the greatest battle and challenge facing the Egyptian people. There is an urgent need for a new vision and a modern, comprehensive understanding of the religion of Islam, rather than relying on a discourse that has not changed for 800 years.[72]

In other words, el-Sisi was calling for a sort of reformation in Islam in contrast to the traditionalists who say that the "doors to *ijtihad* (interpretation)" were closed in the 9th century.

Although there is currently some tension between Egypt's Ministry of Religious Endowments and the Al-Azhar University as to how to fulfill el-Sisi's message—the former is trying to unify Friday sermons around the country by giving imams an actual text to recite, whereas Al-Azhar says that such a policy "freezes" religious discourse and believes it is more beneficial to train imams to help them avoid radical

ideas—el-Sisi sees this effort to revitalize Islam as probably the most important component of an effective counterterrorism campaign region-wide.[73]

Egypt in an Arab leadership role can lead this effort in a way that the Saudis, wedded to Wahhabi tradition, cannot. Even though the Saudis have created a modern state with the latest Western technology, they would be loath to talk about a reformation in Islam for fear of unsettling their long association with the Wahhabi clerics, which has given them legitimacy for many decades. The alliance between the Saudi family and the descendants of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the founder of the Wahhabi movement, go back to the late-18th century, long before the founding of the Saudi state in the 1920s.

Some in the Arab world may question whether someone like el-Sisi, who has cracked down violently on the Muslim Brotherhood, can assume this role of religious reformer. However, el-Sisi has said that he is personally devout and that he believes organizations like the Brotherhood want to politicize Islam with extremist ideas for their own purposes. He addressed this issue head-on in his January 2015 speech in which he said it is not the religion, but the "thinking" in this religion that needs to be changed:

> It's inconceivable that the thinking that we hold most sacred should cause the entire Islamic world to be a source of anxiety, danger, killing and destruction for the rest of the world. Impossible that this thinking—and I am not saying the religion—I am saying this thinking. . . . This is antagonizing the entire world. It's antagonizing the entire world! Does this mean that 1.6 billion people (Muslims) should want to kill the rest of the world's inhabitants—that is 7 billion—so that they themselves may live? Impossible![74]

Because the battle against ISIS is not only one of territory but of an idea, it is important that Egypt play this role. Although polls show that a majority of Egyptians are religious and believe Islam should play an important role in society, a majority also believes that neither the government, nor a political organization like the Brotherhood, should tell them how to practice their faith or abide by various precepts. Most Egyptians believe that the level of one's religiosity is a personal or family matter, and should remain so.[75] In this stance they are supported by millions of other Muslims in the Middle East. Moreover, seeing the brutality of ISIS's so-called caliphate, and the way it has treated women, minorities, and children has helped to bring this moderate notion of faith forward in many Arab circles.

The fact that Al-Azhar is considered mainstream Sunni Islam, as opposed to the more extreme Wahhabi brand that is practiced in Saudi Arabia, means that it can play a more constructive role in combating the extremist ideologies of ISIS and al-Qaeda and their affiliates. Not only can Al-Azhar be used to train Muslim clerics from countries in the region, but it can also strategize with them about how best to weaken the arguments of the extremists. One particularly effective tactic has been Al-Azhar-trained clerics traveling to villages in the countryside and explaining that ISIS ideology not only goes against mainstream Islamic teachings, but that it also goes against the traditions of the village that have been practiced for hundreds of years.[76]

Another way that Egypt might extend its influence is by bringing more cadets and military officers from other Arab countries to study in its military academies and professional military educational institutions that are considered the most advanced in the Arab region.

In these academies and institutions, Arab officers can receive pilot training, and courses in combat arms and tank warfare, for example. Such programs would not only familiarize these cadets and officers with Egyptian military doctrine and practices, but they would create a pool of pro-Egyptian military officers in the region that would not only have a favorable attitude toward Egypt, but also facilitate joint military actions when the need arises.

HOW WOULD THIS EGYPTIAN LEADERSHIP BID IMPACT U.S. POLICIES IN THE REGION?

In most respects, having Egypt become a leader of the Arab world again would be beneficial for U.S. policy, particularly at this juncture when the region is in turmoil, and U.S.-Egyptian relations have improved. As mentioned earlier, a more prominent role for Egypt (as a friend and military protector of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Arab states) would lessen the sectarian conflict between Sunni and Shia, something that would be in the U.S. interest as well.

For example, the United States not only has close relations with Sunni regimes, but also with the Shia-dominated regime of Iraq, where much U.S. blood and treasure has been spent since 2003. An exacerbation of the Sunni-Shia divide places the United States in a difficult position because to take sides in such a religious dispute pits U.S. allies against one another and is a lose-lose situation for Washington. By contrast, a lessening of the sectarian situation between Sunni and Shia that could come with Egypt playing a more prominent role in Arab affairs would dampen this divide and allow for more opportunities for sectarian reconciliation.

Egypt's traditional emphasis on state-to-state relations as opposed to nonstate actors would also work to the U.S. benefit. On the Syrian question, for example, it seeks to keep the Syrian state intact, also a U.S. goal, when there are many calls for Syria to be divided up, Balkan-style.[77] It clearly wants ISIS defeated, but also wants to ensure that the state survives and that moderate forces come out on top.

On Yemen, Egypt is worried that Saudi Arabia is supporting Sunni Islamist parties, such as al-Islah, that are affiliated with the Yemeni Muslim Brotherhood. One analyst has noted that despite Saudi largesse to Egypt:

> Sisi has not been a strong supporter of the Saudi war in Yemen, although Egypt remains formally part of the Arab coalition. So far, the Egyptian president has not publicly criticized the Saudis for working with the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated al-Islah Party. However, the authoritative Egyptian *Al-Ahram Weekly* reported in early June that this was one of the 'bones of contention' between Cairo and Riyadh that also included Egypt's opposition to a ground offensive. Sisi himself has made clear indirectly his preference for a political solution [italics in original].[78]

Although Sisi is not opposed in general to a ground offensive in Yemen against the Houthi rebels, he does not want Egyptian ground troops involved in that country because of Egypt's very troubled military intervention there in the 1960s, during which it suffered thousands of casualties.

The Yemeni conflict has also brought into question the efficacy of the United States relying on Saudi Arabia to take the lead in Arab affairs. Saudi air strikes in Yemen have led to numerous civilian casualties

and widespread condemnation from human rights groups and the UN Secretary General himself. Of the 6,600 deaths in the Yemeni conflict from early 2015 to August 2016, at least half have been civilians.[79] After peace talks between the Houthi rebels and the Yemeni Government, held under Kuwaiti auspices, collapsed in the summer of 2016, the Saudis again resumed air strikes that again resulted in civilian casualties.

For example, in August 2016, Saudi warplanes hit a hospital in Yemen that killed 19 people and injured 24. In response to such strikes, the United States has withdrawn from Saudi Arabia a planning team that was coordinating the Saudi and UAE air campaign in Yemen and has moved it to Bahrain. A Pentagon spokesperson said:

> The cooperation we've extended to Saudi Arabia since the conflict escalated again is modest and it is not a blank check . . . at no point did US military personnel provide direct or implicit approval of target selection or prosecution.[80]

U.S. officials are worried that such strikes on civilian targets, even if unintentional, are sullying the reputation of the United States in Yemen because of close U.S.-Saudi ties. These U.S. officials also believe that these strikes are hurting the fight against al-Qaeda and ISIS because these organizations have taken advantage of the chaos in Yemen to make territorial gains. This criticism has also come from Congress. Senator Chris Murphy of Connecticut, for example, has stated:

> As I read the conflict in Yemen, I have a hard time figuring out what the U.S. national security interests are. . . . the result of the coalition campaign has been

> to kill a lot of civilians, has been to sow the seeds of a humanitarian crisis, and to create space for these groups—these extremists that we claim to be our priority in the region—to grow.[81]

Secretary of State Kerry responded to his remarks by saying the United States had lent its support (reportedly logistics, intelligence, and refueling) to Saudi Arabia because it was threatened by the Houthi rebels in neighboring Yemen, but Kerry added that the United States would not reflexively support all of Saudi Arabia's proxy wars against Iran.[82]

Having Egypt play a more prominent defense role in the Arab world could not only avoid some of the pitfalls that Saudis have made in Yemen, but could reassure other Arab states about their security, especially at a time when there is concern that the United States is lessening its role in the region as it pivots to Asia. Egypt is unlikely to be the "policeman" of the Gulf, like the Shah of Iran was in the 1970s, and, for political reasons, would not want to be seen doing the U.S. bidding, but its longstanding ties to the Gulf Arab states might mean they will rely more on Egypt for their security than they have in the past. This does not mean that the Gulf Arab states like Saudi Arabia would want Egyptian troops stationed on their soil—after the Gulf war of 1990-1991, the Saudis initially agreed to have Egyptian and Syrian troops remain in the kingdom as part of the so-called Damascus Declaration, but then had second thoughts about the idea and ultimately reneged on it.[83] However, in the present circumstances, the Saudis and other Gulf Arab states might be amenable to more joint military exercises with the Egyptians as a way of enhancing their security and preparing for the day when they might call on Egypt to come to their defense again.

On the other side of this ledger, there could be downsides for the United States in the Arab leadership quest by Egypt. When Egypt feels that its national security interests trumps the broader Arab consensus, as in the case of Libya, it will pursue its own policies, like supporting General Haftar even when most of the Arab world, the United States, and the international community want to support the Libyan national unity government.[84]

Egypt is also likely to remain at odds with a few Arab countries like Qatar and non-Arab countries like Turkey who support Islamist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood. Although the United States does not see eye-to-eye with many of the positions of the Brotherhood, it has not agreed to Egypt's designation of the Brotherhood as a terrorist organization, and it has criticized the draconian sentences issued against Brotherhood activists in Egypt after quick trials. For the time being, the United States and Egypt have "agreed to disagree" on the Brotherhood's designation, but lingering tensions remain about U.S. support for, or at least willingness to work with, what the United States believes are non-violent Islamists. The longstanding U.S. position, first articulated in 1992, is that it will work with any non-violent political parties, secular or religious, in the Middle East that come to power through free and fair elections.[85] For example, the United States worked with the moderate Tunisian Islamist party, Ennahda, when it emerged as the dominant party in Tunisia post-2011; and with the secular-Ennahda alliance that emerged post-2013. The United States also worked with then-president Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood in 2012-2013 because he was seen in Washington as a freely elected Egyptian president.

Nevertheless, the relationship between the United States and Morsi was seen by many secular factions in Egypt as some type of nefarious plot to weaken Egypt. This opinion was held not only by high-ranking Egyptian officials and intellectuals, but also by ordinary citizens. As outlandish as this opinion sounds to U.S. ears, it was firmly and widely believed by large segments of the Egyptian polity.[86]

As mentioned earlier, it is highly doubtful that Egypt under el-Sisi is going to change its position toward the Brotherhood, and Egypt has many allies in the region that share similar views, like secularists in North Africa and some leaders of the Gulf Arab states like the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait who also see the Brotherhood as a threat. Therefore, from Egypt's perspective, there is little to gain and much to lose if it changes its position on the Brotherhood, especially since it sees the Brotherhood wanting to come back to power someday and taking revenge on the military establishment and other security forces.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY

Given the ongoing chaos in the region, longstanding ties between the United States and Egypt (despite the distrust over the last few years) and Egypt's moderate religious role, measured state policies, and military professionalism, it is in the U.S. interest for Egypt to again aspire to an Arab leadership role, even though there will be some circumstances when Egypt and the United States will not see eye-to-eye on issues.

However, in order to help Egypt play this leadership role, U.S. policy must change in some ways, employing both the carrot and the stick. First, unless there is concrete evidence that Egyptian military units

are involved in human rights abuses, U.S. military assistance should not be suspended in the future. Such punitive action does not change Egyptian behavior (in terms of human rights) for the better, as was seen during 2013-2015, and merely contributes to the exacerbation of bilateral tensions that feed conspiracy theories. Moreover, it is in the U.S. interest for the terrorist insurgency in the Sinai to be reduced and hopefully eliminated, and withholding military assistance does neither of these things.

As for U.S. economic aid to Egypt, this figure has dropped from about $800 million in the 1980s and 1990s to about $150 million today on an annual basis. Because of Egyptian government prohibitions, there is now a backlog of unspent U.S. economic aid amounting to $500 to $700 million, because much of it was slated for programs like democracy promotion and support for Egyptian NGOs, which Egyptian officials held up because they claimed it was interfering in their country's internal affairs.[87]

U.S. policymakers should re-think the make-up of U.S. economic assistance to Egypt and consider substantially boosting this amount, possibly to the original amount of $800 million a year.

Such funds should be spent on badly needed infrastructure projects that would have a three-fold benefit. It would improve the image of the United States in Egypt by demonstrating to the people that U.S. assistance is being spent on something tangible, such as roads, bridges, schools, etc. (as opposed to the current U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) practice of supporting development assistance for training programs that have political implications and are not seen by the average citizen), would avoid the charge that U.S. aid is being spent on superfluous

things or being pocketed by government officials, and would bring jobs to Egypt, at least over the short-term, as infrastructure projects need construction workers, architects, and engineers. U.S. and Egyptian officials should work together to identity infrastructure needs. When Egyptian Government officials and ordinary citizens see U.S. tax dollars being used in this way it will likely have the added benefit of making U.S.-Egyptian cooperation on regional issues more acceptable.

In addition, because of the socio-economic problems facing the Bedouin in the North Sinai, which feeds the terrorist insurgency there, a concerted effort should be made to develop projects that would improve the lives of the people living in the region. In 2016, Saudi King Salman announced that he would be giving $1.5 billion for such Sinai projects.[88] Hence, this is an opportunity for Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United States to all work together to see what projects would be most beneficial in helping to reduce poor socio-economic conditions adversely affecting the Bedouin population and give Bedouin youth alternatives to joining terrorist groups such as Wilayat Sinai, which is affiliated with ISIS.

Although some observers may believe that in this time of U.S. budgetary retrenchment, a significant boost in U.S. economic aid to Egypt from $150 million to $800 million annually is not realistic, a compelling case can be made to the U.S. Congress that such assistance would be in the national security interests of the United States for the reasons mentioned earlier. In fact, there is indeed growing support in Congress for Egypt. El-Sisi's comments about an Islamic reform effort were well received on Capitol Hill, and many members are sympathetic to Egypt's ongoing struggle against terrorism.

The impediment to boost aid for Egypt in Congress has been Egypt's poor human rights record. As U.S. Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina stated candidly after a trip to Egypt in 2016: "We need to think broadly as a nation about some kind of Marshall Plan for front-line states," like Egypt. Graham added that if el-Sisi "did something that would be seen by me and others as a real serious move on the [human] rights front, it makes it easier for a guy like me to help."[89]

This situation presents an opportunity for U.S. officials to pursue a policy of promising to offer positive incentives. U.S. policymakers can present the case to el-Sisi and other Egyptian officials that if they ease up on repression and make improvements on human rights, Congress will be more willing to come to Egypt's aid with substantial economic assistance. Moreover, the U.S. administration, including President Trump, can say if such improvements were indeed carried through, el-Sisi would then be able to receive a White House invitation and also hold meetings in Congress.

Although el-Sisi and other Egyptian officials may bristle about any conditionality on aid, positive conditionality with a very prideful country like Egypt has a much better chance of working than negative conditionality (which has been tried and failed when the United States suspended most military assistance to Egypt in October 2013). In addition, el-Sisi understands that his arrest campaign against dissidents and journalists has not only had negative ramifications for Egypt's image abroad but also at home. In a wide-ranging interview that he gave in August 2016, el-Sisi stated that he planned to pardon about 300 detainees, including those arrested for protesting as well as journalists.[90] The 300-figure is only a small fraction of all those incarcerated in Egypt for political offensives,

but would be a good first step if indeed it were carried through.

Having a less repressive Egypt would make it easier for the United States to help encourage Egypt to play a regional leadership role that could lead to more cooperation between the two countries on regional security issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE U.S. ARMY

An Egyptian leadership role in the region would necessitate the Egyptian military being more active outside its borders than it has been in recent years. This does not mean that it will become engaged in regional conflicts militarily, though that is a possibility, but it does mean that Egypt will be more active in assessing strategic threats to the Arab world and devising plans with Arab partners on how best it can mitigate such threats.

In the past, when Egypt was the leader or aspired to be the leader of the Arab world, it did deploy troops outside its borders when those of its allies were threatened. For example, in 1961, Egypt, which had bad relations with Iraq at the time, along with Syria, Saudi Arabia, and a few other Arab countries, as part of an Arab League contingent, sent troops to Kuwait (which had just received independence from Britain) in response to Iraqi threats to take over that country. Similarly, Egypt and several other Arab countries also sent troops to Saudi Arabia in 1990, when Iraq invaded Kuwait as part of Operation DESERT SHIELD and took part in the liberation of Kuwait in Operation DESERT STORM in 1991. The Egyptian force of 30,000 soldiers was the largest of the Arab expeditionary armies in Saudi Arabia.

The 1990-1991 operations were coordinated closely with the U.S. Army, which had provided the bulk of troops to defend Saudi Arabia and eventually liberate Kuwait.

Although it is difficult to speculate on what possible contingencies are likely to arise where Egypt might deploy troops again, Egypt is likely to engage in more military exercises with Arab allies if it succeeds in its leadership quest. Although, as mentioned earlier, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Arab states will probably remain skittish about any permanent stationing of Egyptian troops on their soil. However, they may be amenable to more joint military exercises with Egypt as a warning to Iran not to mount any actions against Saudi Arabia and as a way to bolster the interoperability of forces in case a military threat does indeed materialize.[91]

The U.S. Army can play a role in these endeavors by reinstituting the Bright Star military exercises on Egyptian territory that were held on a biennial basis before political issues between Egypt and the United States made these exercises problematic. Although the decision to restart Bright Star will likely have to be made by the U.S. President, the U.S. Army will be the leading component of the armed services planning and executing such exercises. Arab countries friendly with Egypt, as in the past, should be invited to participate in Bright Star; and similar exercises, with an Egyptian leading component, and should be held in other Arab countries.

Given the close relations between the Egyptian and U.S. Armies, not only can U.S. Army officers play a role in discussing contingencies with their Egyptian counterparts, but they can also shape military exercises to deal with such contingencies. Such cooperation

will likely lead to even closer contacts between these armies, and U.S. Army officers should do what they can, given the nature of restrictions imposed by the Egyptian military, in maintaining contacts with their Egyptian army counterparts in case a regional crisis breaks out, necessitating joint U.S.-Egyptian coordination like what occurred in the Gulf war of 1990-1991.

On the other hand, U.S. Army officers should be wary of Egyptian requests for assistance when dealing with issues that buck the consensus of the international community and the Arab world. For example, even though Egyptian officials have stated publicly that they support the concept of a unified Libyan government, the Egyptian military, as mentioned earlier, is reportedly providing some assistance to Libyan strongman General Khalifa Haftar who is opposed to unity between the Tobruk faction in Libya, that he supports, and the Tripoli faction, which he opposes.

Although it would be important for U.S. Army officers to ascertain the Egyptian army's motives and plans for assisting Haftar in eastern Libya, it would not be prudent of them to pass along information that would somehow enable Haftar to succeed as the strongman of eastern Libya, as that would prolong Libya's factionalism and perhaps delay the fight against remaining ISIS elements in the country.

In other matters, if Egypt is successful in ending the terrorist insurgency in the Sinai, then its counterterrorism units, with help from U.S. Special Operations Forces, can jointly advise other Arab countries about similar terrorist problems. Although the Egyptian military was initially reluctant to take U.S. counterterrorism advice, this reticence seems to be changing, making such joint briefings possible.[92]

Recent battlefield successes against ISIS in both Syria and Iraq has emboldened the model of current U.S. counterterrorism strategy of deploying U.S. Special Operations Forces to assist indigenous forces fighting against a terrorist insurgency, backed by U.S. air power. If U.S.-Egyptian relations continue to improve and Egypt wants to exert leadership in the region, Egypt might want to send its own special operations forces to help other Arab countries in this way, as that would boost its reputation as a reliable partner. Such a scenario would enable U.S. Army Special Forces to work closely with their Egyptian counterparts to advise them on particular tactics that have proved successful in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

Although Egypt is likely to stay away from the Iraqi and Syrian situations for both political and historical reasons, it may consider deploying some of its own special forces, on a limited basis, to other Arab countries if asked, and U.S. Special Forces should be ready to assist. For example, if the two main Libyan factions do indeed unite and Egypt comes around and supports a unity government, it could send, with Libya's acquiescence, its special forces to Libya to assist U.S. efforts in that country to degrade and ultimately defeat ISIS. Having an Arab partner in this or similar endeavors would also make the U.S. role less controversial.

Finally, if Egypt does expand the number of cadets from other Arab countries in its military academies as part of its Arab leadership role, such a policy would be beneficial to the U.S.-Egyptian partnership because much of the Egyptian officer corps is U.S.-trained (having attended specialized military colleges and professional military education (PME) institutions in the United States). U.S. Army officers might be able

to give guest lectures at Egyptian military academies on tactics and best practices against terrorist groups. Moreover, some of the Arab cadets, having attended Egyptian military academies, could then come to the United States for their post-graduate or mid-career training, and this would further their understanding of U.S. military doctrine and tactics, which would enhance cooperation in future military contingencies.

A low-key U.S.-Egyptian military partnership that might arise from an Egyptian regional leadership role, involving primarily army components—particularly Special Forces—from both countries would benefit both the United States and Egypt. It could help stabilize the Middle East region, bring Egypt gratitude and financial assistance from its wealthier neighbors, and eventually lessen the U.S. military footprint in the region, which would be advantageous to the United States for both political and economic reasons. But if a major crisis again arises in the Persian Gulf region, requiring substantial U.S. and Egyptian troops, then such cooperation would make the defense of the region all the more manageable.

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EgyptPolicy-report1.pdf. Katulis and Awad perceptively note on page 14 of their study:

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> The passage of thousands of Egyptians through U.S. training institutions—ranging from flying schools to veterinary schools to bomb disposal programs—has benefited both countries . . . . ongoing training aids interoperability and builds patterns of cooperation and relationships that can be drawn upon in times of crisis. From an American perspective, working closely over time with Egyptians helps promote global standards that make it easier for the United States to interface with Egypt and other allied countries.

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