U.S.-Egyptian Relations Since the 2011 Revolution: The Limits of Leverage

An Honors Thesis Submitted to the Department of Politics in partial fulfillment of the Honors Program

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April 29, 2015
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Introduction

Over the past several decades, the United States and Egypt have had a special relationship built around military cooperation and the pursuit of mutual interests in the Middle East. At one point, Egypt was the primary nemesis of American interests in the region as it sought to spread its own form of Arab socialism in cooperation with the Soviet Union. However, since President Anwar Sadat’s decision to sign the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty in 1979, Egypt has proven a bulwark of the United States interests it once opposed. Specifically, those interests are peace with Israel, the continued flow of oil, American control of the region, and stability within the Middle East. In addition to ensuring these interests, the special friendship has given the United States privileges with Egypt, including the use of Egyptian airspace, expedited transit through the Suez Canal for American warships, and the basing of an extraordinary rendition program on Egyptian territory. Noticeably, the United States has developed its relationship with Egypt on military grounds, concentrating on national security rather than issues such as the economy or human rights.

Yet in spite of its duration and effectiveness, the relationship was rarely smooth and has had its share of issues. Chiefly, whereas Egypt wants the assistance to be an investment into protecting the two countries’ mutual interests, the United States has seen it as a tool for enhancing its own interests and gaining leverage over Egypt’s domestic situation. The U.S.-Egyptian relationship became uncertain with the onset of the 2011 Egyptian revolution, which saw the removal of Hosni Mubarak, Egypt’s president of twenty-nine years. The revolution gave rise to instability for the U.S.-Egyptian relationship and in Egypt as a whole.

This thesis aims to answer two questions. First, has there been a drastic change in U.S.-Egyptian relations between the 2011 revolution and the end of 2014, and why or why not has this
occurred? Second, how has the United States attempted to use its assistance as leverage to influence the various Egyptian governments’ decisions, and why has it been successful or failed in leveraging the relationship?

The first part of the initial question, of *if* there has been significant change, is crucial to ask because it has not always been perceptible whether changes in the relationship are temporary or permanent, and whether they are meaningful or superficial. This is because the relationship has encountered frequent ups and downs during the four years in question, many more than during the relationship’s first three decades. While “drastic” can be interpreted in multiple ways, in this case I am referring to a permanent shift in the relationship that is clearly separate from the path that those relations have been on since at least 1979. However, it is also necessary to ask the second part of the question, of *why* there was or was not a shift of the relationship, to make sense of the reasons behind the relationship’s trajectory. Asking *why* also helps make the relevancy of the findings clear, since the answer to this question is only useful if it can be applied to understanding how the relationship will look in the future and what factors drive the United States’ relationships across the region.

The second question seeks to understand the ways in which the United States has tried to affect the actions of the various Egyptian governments. The basis for the relationship is leverage: the United States began giving Egypt aid to ensure that it keeps its peace with Israel. But the United States has always wanted to exert more leverage than the minimum, especially to safeguard its various perceived interests in Egypt and the region as a whole. This became particularly important following the revolution because Egypt’s positive stance towards the United States and its interests was no longer guaranteed; the United States now had to play a more active role in assuring its interests. It is important to identify *how* the United States has
tried to do this, especially because Egypt’s perception of the leverage and response to it can affect the integrity of the relationship, reflecting back on the first question. Asking why is needed to make the conclusions valuable and to get into the United States’ and Egypt’s mindsets; otherwise the answer does not provide any lessons.

Answering the “whys” is vital for a number of reasons. One pertains to Egypt’s relevance in American foreign policy. Since the 1979 treaty, Egypt has been a keystone of United States strategy in the Middle East, and a highly rewarded one at that. Since 1948, the United States has supplied over $74 billion, unadjusted for inflation, in bilateral aid to Egypt, including more than $17 billion between 1982 and 1997 just in military grants. By all accounts, Egypt has been one of the largest historical recipients of American aid, behind only Israel. As such, any modification to the U.S.-Egyptian relationship would mean a significant reshaping of American strategy in the Middle East. No change at all would demonstrate the staying power of the relationship, but could still mean a shift in the United States’ regional policy. In the latter case, it is important to ask why Egypt has retained its centrality over several decades despite the erosion of the original reasoning behind the relationship, which was to protect Israel and remove Egypt from the Soviet Union’s sphere of influence. Egypt is no longer a threat to Israel because its capability for fighting a conventional war has deteriorated over decades of inactivity, and the Soviet Union disintegrated long ago.

It is also a timely question. The events that the thesis is studying have recently happened or, for the latest period, are still developing. Consequently, it is necessary to comprehend the dynamics behind the U.S-Egyptian relationship and the United States’ attempts at leverage because they will affect how the relationship evolves. It is difficult to predict how the relationship might look in a year, let alone ten years, if it is not clear what the state of the
relationship was a year ago. Asking these questions will help shape an understanding of the direction of the relationship. To my knowledge, stemming from its recentness, there have been no scholarly studies in the past several years specifically examining how the relationship has changed or how the United States has tried to affect Egypt’s decisions. While there are a few that address changes in the U.S.-Egyptian relationship, its significance, and its future prospects, they do not conduct a deep analysis of the relationship’s trends since the 2011 revolution. As such, this thesis aims to fill the gap in scholarship on Egypt.

These questions also speak not just to Egypt but to the broader pattern of United States foreign policy. The close analysis of Egypt serves as a case study for how the United States pursues its interests, adjusts its relationships, and attempts to use leverage in those relationships. It serves as a window into the process of formulating and implementing foreign policy. Moreover, while the specific events are between the United States and Egypt, the lessons learned from them can be applied to the United States’ relations with other countries. Admittedly no two relationships are the same; caution must be taken in extrapolating the lessons of the U.S.-Egyptian relationship. Nonetheless, general conclusions can still be drawn about the motivation for sustaining relationships and how effective leverage might be in those relationships. As such, this thesis will also contribute to the considerable literature surrounding American foreign policy, its relationships, and its strategy in the Middle East.

This thesis is divided into five chapters. The first two chapters provide a foundation for understanding the relationship, while the remaining three chapters offer an analysis of the events reaching from January 2011 through December 2014. The first chapter addresses relations between the United States and Egypt from 1952 up to 2010, ending shortly before the revolution. The chapter begins with a historical narrative of how the relationship has evolved over time. It
then provides an overview of the United States’ vital interests in the region and an analysis of the narrative, along with the power dynamics that have driven the relationship and its problems.

The second chapter consists of a theoretical framework for the United States’ foreign policy decision making to provide a basis for understanding American foreign policy in the later chapters. Drawing from scholarly literature, it focuses on four aspects that characterize policy. First, foreign policy is multi-faceted with numerous players, each trying to insert his or her own priorities over those of others. Second, shared images—or ideas and values held by a wide spectrum of decision makers that guides their thinking— Influence foreign policy and present a unified structure for achieving consensus. Third, although foreign policy occupies a separate sphere from domestic politics, it still incorporates domestic considerations into its decisions and is affected by domestic pressure groups. Fourth, crises, such as the 2011 revolution, offer the best opportunity to reformulate foreign policy; otherwise, interest groups tend to be too entrenched and inertia makes it difficult to regularly change policy for less pressing reasons.

The subsequent three chapters cover January 2011 to December 2014 and are a close analysis of how the U.S.-Egyptian relationship developed over a period of four regimes and why the relationship progressed as it did. The third chapter starts with the Egyptian revolution on January 25, 2011, and extends through the new interim government controlled by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), ending in June 2012. The fourth chapter picks up on June 30, 2012, with the election of a new president, Mohammed Morsi, and covers his troubled year in office, which ended abruptly on July 3, 2013, when he was ousted by the military and mass protests. The fifth chapter, from July 3, 2013, up to December 2014, examines the fallout and subsequent revival between the United States and Egypt as the new government crushed the supporters of the old government and established a new president drawn from the military.
These chapters seek to understand the dynamics of the relationship: the motivations behind decisions, the maneuvering within and between governments, the guiding interests, and the ways in which the United States has sought to use the special relationship and its aid as leverage over Egyptian domestic behavior. By the end of these chapters, the reader will understand not only the reasons behind the trajectory of the post-Mubarak U.S.-Egyptian relationship, but also how successful the United States has been in influencing domestic Egyptian politics. The conclusion answers the questions posed in this introduction, predicts where the relationship is headed, and follows up with lessons learned from the U.S.-Egyptian relationship that can be applied to the relationship itself and to American foreign policy at large.
Chapter 1: A History of U.S.-Egyptian Relations

Introduction

In order to understand how the U.S.-Egyptian relationship has developed since the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, we must first make sense of the relationship’s historical context. The first half of this chapter provides a narrative of events by pulling together relevant strands from the relationship’s history. In this way, readers with limited background knowledge can comprehend the basic developments that occurred between 1952 and 2010 and all readers can observe the continuities and discontinuities highlighted within. The second half of this chapter is devoted to the fundamental dynamics of the relationship and is broken into three parts. The first addresses the four predominant interests of the United States in relation to the Middle East—which can be summarized as Israel, oil, American dominance, and stability—and provides a framework for why the United States acts as it does. The second part offers a rationale for the narrative by exploring the motives behind the development the relationship and the methods used to exert leverage over the other side. The third part evaluates the state of relations shortly before the 2011 revolution and notes potential flaws in the relationship. By the end of the chapter the reader should have a good understanding of how the relationship developed, as well as its underlying motivations and concerns.

Turbulent Beginnings (1952-1970)

Modern U.S.-Egyptian relations began shortly before the July 1952 coup when the Free Officers Movement sought out American support against King Farouk. The officers wanted to initiate a new period free of colonial powers. The United States saw in them a force that could be beneficial to its interests. In Washington’s mind, these officers could act as its enforcers in the region, especially because they controlled the strategic Suez Canal and occupied a prime geographic position between the Middle East, Africa, and Europe. Secretary of State John Dulles
approached Egypt in 1953 with the proposition of joining an American military alliance. Egypt turned down the suggestion because it went counter to Egypt’s intentions. Egypt was trying to remove Britain, its current Western power. It did not intend to gain independence only to immediately become re-entrenched with Western military bases and policies.  

However, the rejection was not meant to be a complete snub, for in August 1954—around the time that Gamal Abdel Nasser was stepping openly into power—the Egyptian regime asked for $100 million in military and economic aid from the United States.  

Egypt was willing to ask the United States for aid while rejecting its request for a military alliance because Egypt sought to become self-reliant, capable of defending itself by its own efforts against outside aggressors, namely Israel. Egypt figured that if only it could get the necessary weapons, it could handle its own affairs without becoming dependent on another Western country. Ultimately the aid request was rejected because of Britain’s intervention. The British sought to preserve their remaining influence in the region by keeping the United States away from Britain’s deteriorating relationship with Egypt. As a consequence, the United States lost this opportunity to begin a limited military relationship with Egypt. Instead Egypt proclaimed a policy of “positive neutralism,” where it might retain connections to the West while also exploring relations with other countries.  

And explore it did. Unable to achieve its goal of military self-sufficiency through the West, Egypt turned to the Eastern Bloc. On September 27, 1955, Egypt concluded an arms deal with Czechoslovakia for a large amount of military equipment.  

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3. Aly et. al., *Arabs and Israelis*, 91. Specifically, that deal included: “230 tanks, 200 armored personnel carriers, 530 other armored vehicles, 100 self-propelled artillery, 500 other artillery pieces, 200 aircraft fighters, and a maritime group composed of destroyers, minesweepers, and three submarines.”
Soviet Union as its primary ally, a relationship solidified a year later with the Suez Crisis in the fall of 1956. The crisis was precipitated by a secret decision among Britain, France, and Israel—without the knowledge of the United States—to pre-empt the coming British withdrawal from Egypt by invading Egypt and seizing the Suez Canal to ensure the canal’s continued operation in Western hands. Israel attacked Egypt; Britain and France then invaded Egypt under the pretense of protecting the Canal and producing an armistice. While Egypt was soundly routed, the invasion played out poorly in the international arena and Egypt received a resounding moral victory. This crisis reordered alignments in the Middle East. After 1956, Israel was solidly in the Western camp and Egypt increasingly in the Soviet camp.

Egypt became the cornerstone of Soviet policy in the Middle East and provided it a valuable foothold in the region. In the 1960s, Egypt received 49.1% of all Soviet military aid and 30.9% of all Soviet economic aid to the Middle East and North Africa.\(^4\) In return for its backing, the Soviet Union received critical bases in Egypt and a position from which to threaten American interests in the Middle East and the Mediterranean. At its highest point, the Soviet Union had three naval bases, seven air fields, and multiple communications facilities operating autonomously on Egyptian territory.\(^5\) Nevertheless, the United States refused to completely abandon relations with Egypt, which professed to be non-aligned, because both countries still believed that benefits could potentially be gained from the other country. The Kennedy administration dispensed economic aid to Egypt to keep it from falling completely into the Soviet orbit. The aid, under PL 480, consisted of allowing Egypt to purchase American wheat with Egyptian pounds. This helped Egypt feed its population without depleting its limited foreign reserves. The Johnson administration tried with no success to leverage aid to get Egypt to leave

\(^4\) *Ibid.*, 120.
Yemen, where it was conducting a proxy war against the Saudi-backed Yemeni monarchy. A new low was marked by the severing of U.S.-Egyptian relations at the beginning of the 1967 war.


The relationship between the United States and Egypt began to heal with Muhammad Anwar El Sadat’s arrival to the presidency in 1970. Sadat offered a ceasefire to Israel to end the so-called War of Attrition, expelled 7,752 Soviet advisors, and ejected the Soviet Union from several military bases. Although Sadat began secretly reaching out to President Richard Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in 1972, Egypt needed to restore its sense of legitimacy and self-worth before it was willing to restart full diplomatic relations. To this end, Egypt led the October 1973 Arab-Israeli War. Despite tactical blunders on the Arab side, it resulted in a psychological victory for Egypt and its allies. With its position reaffirmed, Egypt started on the path of improving its relations with the United States and Israel. Negotiations began with Israel on November 6, 1973. The negotiations resulted in the First Egyptian-Israeli Disengagement Agreement, concluded in January 1974, which was followed by a resumption of U.S.-Egyptian relations in February. At the same time, the Soviet Union retained its naval base in Alexandria and a communications facility. Soviet arms shipments were actually increased to Egypt despite the Soviet Union’s ejection from the country.

Sadat continued to mend relations with Israel and the United States. The first agreement in 1974 was followed by the Second Egyptian-Israeli Disengagement Agreement in September 1975 in which Egypt pledged to pursue its goals through solely peaceful methods. In November 1977, Sadat conducted a groundbreaking visit to Jerusalem. Israeli Prime Minister Menachem

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6 Cook, *Struggle for Egypt*, 218.
7 Aly et. al., *Arabs and Israelis*, 160.
8 *Ibid.*, 162; 177; 181.
Begin reciprocated with a visit to Ismailiyya a month later. Despite fallout with erstwhile radical Arab allies that severed relations with Egypt, Sadat continued to move forward with his rapprochement. The Camp David Accords were finalized in 1978 between Sadat and Begin to formalize guidelines for peace.

The Camp David Accords were a precursor to the signing of the Egypt-Israel peace treaty in March 1979, consecrating an era of new relations. While the United States has been allied with Israel, the treaty marked the beginning of a long-term beneficial relationship between United States and Egypt. Yet Egypt’s relationship with the United States is just that: a relationship. It does not have the same benefits as an alliance does. For example, the United States is unlikely to come to the defense of Egypt if it is attacked, even though it has come to the defense of regional allies, including Israel and Saudi Arabia. It also means, as will be evident later, that Egypt receives poorer terms and treatment on military and economic assistance than allies do.

On the eve of the treaty, Egypt had been receiving more economic aid from the United States that all of the rest of Africa and Latin America. With the treaty came the informal understanding that Israel and Egypt would receive economic and military aid from the United States to support their tough decisions. Israel had to return the Sinai Peninsula, which it had taken from Egypt in 1967. For its part, the Egyptian regime became a pariah in the Arab and non-aligned worlds. It was expelled from the League of Arab States, which relocated its headquarters from Cairo to Tunis. It was suspended by the Organization of Islamic States and was threatened with expulsion from the Non-Aligned Movement. There was a large domestic

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backlash against Sadat for his making peace with the enemy. This domestic upheaval would result in Sadat’s assassination in 1981.

Israel and Egypt proceeded to purchase large amounts of arms from the United States, although not at entirely favorable rates: they were charged commercial interest rates that were sometimes as high as 14%. Egypt initially received military aid in the form of loans worth $4.55 billion between 1979 and 1984, all at commercial rates. In an indication of the strengthening military relationship, the United States began to give Egypt military grants with $200 million in 1982, $424 million in 1983, and $465 million in 1984. Since 1985, Egypt has received military aid solely in the form of grants at a consistent $1.3 billion each year. Yet Egypt was still left with its old loans that quickly proved to be too much for Egypt to handle. By 1989, Egypt had fallen a full year behind in its payments and risked enforcement of the Brooke amendment, which would have made Egypt ineligible for any new aid until it paid its arrears. It was saved by the George H.W. Bush administration, which supposedly discovered money intended for Egypt sitting in the U.S. Treasury and used it to cover Egypt’s shortfall.

Unfortunately for Egypt, this contradiction was allowed to persist. Egypt was still receiving $1.3 billion a year in military aid in addition to economic aid, with the United States actively preventing Egypt from defaulting on its debt. Meanwhile, the United States refused to relieve Egypt of its debt.

This problem was soon resolved with the First Gulf War in 1990. Proving its strategic and symbolic use to the United States, Egypt was among the first Arab states to fall in step behind the U.S.-Saudi initiative. It sent 5,000 troops at the outset and followed up with 15,000

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10 Aly et. al., *Arabs and Israelis*, 200.
more. Egypt’s reward for its cooperation was significant: $6.7 billion in debt relief. Before Congress, Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger argued that the debt relief was a one-time event unique to Egypt because of its great importance to, and sacrifices, for the United States. In comparing the significance of Egypt’s support to the signing of the 1979 peace treaty, Eagleburger stated that:

Egypt’s current efforts to turn back Iraqi aggression should be viewed against the backdrop of more than a decade of constancy and cooperation with the United States on the Middle East peace process. ... Between 1984 and 1990, the burden of servicing Egyptian FMS [Foreign Military Sales] debt became the largest political irritant in US-Egyptian relations. ... [W]e were not prepared to seek cancellation of Egypt’s FMS debt on the basis of these factors. Our decision to do so now is solely related to the unique circumstances and, in particular, to the urgent political and military challenges Egypt is facing as a consequence of the ongoing crisis in the gulf.\textsuperscript{14}

In other words, the United States was not prepared to forgive Egypt’s debt simply for the sake of their relationship, but when Egypt was putting itself on the line in the name of an American interest, the United States was prepared to immediately resolve the issue to preserve the stability of its ally.

Egypt has also become a main American ally in trying to find a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Egypt came to see its role as a mediator between the Israelis and Palestinians. It helped organize the 1991 Madrid Conference which, although largely symbolic, helped pave the way to the Oslo Accords.\textsuperscript{15} But all cannot be said to have been smooth during this new era. Egypt froze relations with Israel over its 1982 invasion of Lebanon. Of greater significance to the United States, Egypt restrained its action to moral disproval; consequently, there was no change in military aid as a result of this hurdle. Cairo was slow to approve the Camp David Summit between the Israelis and Palestinians because it argued that Palestinians

\textsuperscript{14} Proposal to Forgive Egypt’s Foreign Military Sales Debt: Statement Before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Relations, United States House, 101st Cong. (1990) (statement of Lawrence Eagleburger, Deputy Secretary, Department of State, Washington D.C.).

\textsuperscript{15} Aly et. al., Arabs and Israelis, 249.
had no right to determine the fate of Jerusalem, which belonged to all citizens of the Middle East. Egypt eventually came around and saw Camp David as a vindication of all of the sacrifices that it had made since the 1970s.16

**A Challenge to the Status Quo? (2000-2010)**

Egypt remained a key partner for the United States into the first decade of the twentieth century. Following 9/11, Egypt played a central role in the War on Terror by supporting the Central Intelligence Agency in its extraordinary rendition program. It objected to the invasion of Iraq but permitted the United States to use its facilities and assisted in building a new security apparatus in post-Saddam Iraq.17 It continued to fight terrorism in the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza Strip, which both Israel and the United States saw as a threat to stability. Egypt even tacitly supported Israel’s 2006 war against Hezbollah, an about-face after Egypt had strongly objected to Israel’s role in Lebanon in the 1980s.18 However, Egypt has seen its overall position with the United States deteriorate even as military relations have remained strong. Following 9/11, the United States increased its pressure on Egypt to institute democracy and good governance. Egypt resisted making any consequential changes, insisting that domestic politics were its own concern.

The U.S.-Egyptian relationship has also been stagnant. In 1998, the United States concluded the Glide Path Agreement with Israel to reduce Israel’s economic aid to zero over a decade. By nature of their informal link, Egypt was going to see its economic aid decrease 5% a year until it reached $400 million.19 In 2008, the United States and Israel reached a Memorandum of Understanding to address increases in military aid for the next decade. But despite the linkage which decreased its economic aid, Egypt did not reach any Memorandum of Understanding with the United States at the end of the Glide Path Agreement and so has seen no

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16 Ibid., 347.
19 Ibid., 221.
respective increase in military aid.\textsuperscript{20} Egypt’s economic aid fell from $911 million in 2003 to only $250 million in 2009, lower than projected by the U.S.-Israeli agreement.\textsuperscript{21} This in turn has reduced the amount of its domestic budget that Egypt can safely direct towards military expenditures because it now needs to cover the loss of the economic assistance.

Traditionally Congress has been a strong supporter of aid to Egypt in order to retain its adherence to the 1979 peace treaty. Since approximately 2005, there has been a new trend. In 2005, Representative Tom Lantos (D-CA) proposed an amendment to transfer $325 million of Egypt’s military aid to economic aid.\textsuperscript{22} He reasoned that if Egypt has no military threats, it would be better served by using the aid for economic development. The amendment was defeated but 131 Representatives voted for it, an amendment that was going to alter Egypt’s previously sacrosanct military assistance. This was followed up with a 2007 amendment by Representative David Obey (D-WI), ranking minority member of the House Appropriations Committee and a long time friend of Egypt. The amendment would have held back $200 million in military aid usually used for buying new military equipment. The aid was still to be Egypt’s money but only with Congress’ approval.\textsuperscript{23} Obey justified the move through Egypt’s “backsliding on municipal elections, and extension of emergency laws, repression of judicial

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 228. At the end of the Glide Path Agreement, Egypt requested an increase in economic aid to make up for inflation. Congress rejected the request. Eventually the United States and Egypt agreed that Egypt should “graduate” from receiving aid to having an endowed U.S.-Egyptian foundation. The foundation was to receive seed funds from the United States and then be governed by a board of Americans and Egyptians who were to appropriate the funds. Traditional economic aid was to be phased out over a decade. However, the foundation never had a chance to be instituted before the 2011 revolution.
\textsuperscript{22} H.R. 4818, 108\textsuperscript{th} Cong., H. Amdt. 694 (2004).
\textsuperscript{23} “Deep Cuts in Foreign Aid Planned” in CQ Almanac 2006, 62nd ed., ed. Jan Austin (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 2007), http://library.cqpress.com/cqalmanac/cqal06-1421410. Obey’s proposal was voted down by a voice-vote in committee. His opponents argued that the aid had to be preserved to guarantee the continuance of the Egypt-Israel peace treaty and ensure Egyptian cooperation with the United States’ operations in the region. Egypt was allowing American warplanes to use Egyptian airspace and American warships to sail through the Suez Canal. The importance of the relationship was demonstrated by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice sending the House Appropriations Chairman a letter insisting that, despite minimal reform on the part of Egypt, the aid was necessary for America’s strategic interests.
freedoms and a crackdown on demonstrations and rallies."\(^{24}\) Part of the discontent was over Egypt’s inability or inaction in controlling the Egypt-Gaza border following Hamas’ electoral victory in 2006. Part of it also appeared to be over Egypt’s failure to reform after decades of half-hearted pressure from the United States.

The Congressional challenge continued the next year when a House bill proposed holding $200 million in Egypt’s aid unless the Secretary of State could verify that Egypt was preserving the independence of its judiciary, training its police to avoid abuse, and destroying Gaza’s smuggling tunnels.\(^{25}\) The Bush administration negotiated the penalty down to only $100 million. The bill subsequently passed and, despite the administration’s earlier emphasis on the very things that the bill was attempting to enforce, immediately used a national security waiver in the spirit of protecting American interests.\(^{26}\) In 2009, Representative Anthony Weiner (D-NY) proposed a resolution in the House Committee on Foreign Affairs to prohibit military assistance to Egypt and transfer its military funding for that year over to its economic assistance.\(^{27}\) The resolution failed to make it out of committee but its simple existence provides evidence to Egypt’s seemingly deteriorating position in Congress.

**Exercise Bright Star**

Before moving on to the analysis, I feel that it is beneficial to separately treat a recurring event in U.S.-Egyptian relations, an occasion that acts as a relative bellwether of the two countries’ military relations. An offspring of the 1979 peace treaty, Exercise Bright Star began in 1980 as small-scale side-by-side training meant to foster connections between the two countries’ armies. It was quickly formalized, becoming a biannual exercise in 1983 and growing in size and the depth of exercises. Bright Star 1999 drills were the most significant so far: 70,000 troops

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\(^{24}\) Cook, *Struggle for Egypt*, 224.


\(^{26}\) Cook, *Struggle for Egypt*, 227.

participated, among them 18,000 Americans. Participants included the Netherlands, Italy, Greece, Jordan, and eleven other countries. A further thirty-three countries were involved as observers. The 2007 exercises, which involved thirteen other countries, including Jordan and Kuwait, began to incorporate counterinsurgency practices, modeling them on the modern need for counterinsurgency in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Philippines, and the Horn of Africa, among other locations.28

Up to 2011, Bright Star was only cancelled twice. The first occasion was Bright Star 1991 for the Gulf War; the exercise resumed in 1993. The second time that it was cancelled was for the 2003 invasion. When cancelling it, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld said:

Given our current worldwide commitments, it seemed best to take a temporary break from this exercise, as we did after Operation Desert Storm. Bright Star is one of our most important exercises and reflects the value we attach to our strong relationship with Egypt.29

This statement portrays the value that the exercise is accorded by top ranking defense officials. The 2003 invasion had affected approximately a quarter of the United States’ exercises planned at the time through either cancellations or delays.

Since Bright Star has existed nearly as long as renewed U.S.-Egyptian military relations have, it is a key part of those relations. It acts as an gauge of those relations, with its strength and relevance helping to demonstrate the vitality of U.S.-Egyptian relations. It also helps build bonds and understanding. According to the army newspaper Stand-To, the exercises are intended to “increase[e] awareness and appreciation for Egyptian and coalition forces’ cultures, customs and their professional military” while developing overall relations.30 Further, Bright Star brings prestige to both sides. For the United States, Bright Star is the largest recurring military exercise

that it holds, which in itself conveys the importance of the exercise. For Egypt, the fact that it is the site of this exercise and draws dozens of other countries’ militaries must also be of consideration. As such, Bright Star should act as a valuable indicator of the state of U.S.-Egyptian military relations.

The United States’ Interests in the Middle East

In order to comprehend the actions of the United States in the Middle East, it is important to define American interests in the region, specifically those which are vital rather than secondary. The scholar Samuel Huntington wrote that “A national interest is a public good of concern to all or most Americans; a vital national interest is one which they are willing to expend blood and treasure to defend.”31 He gives the example of the United States’ action against Iraq in the 1990s as being a vital national interest: American citizens considered it important to maintain cheap and reliable oil supplies from the Persian Gulf region and were willing to intervene to safeguard this goal. In essence, Huntington is saying that a vital interest is one which the United States is willing to take action on, up to and through waging war or expending aid, in order to protect what it holds necessary to ensure its continued existence and prosperity.

With this definition in mind, I argue that there have been four overriding American interests in the Middle East since at least the 1950s. The first is the well-being of Israel. Israel is a central ally in the region whose integrity is a proxy for the strength of the United States in the region; if Israel were to fall, it would likely destroy the United States’ reputation and would prove to other United States allies that the country cannot guarantee their safety. Israel is also an important factor in United States domestic politics because of the power behind the Jewish lobby. The second interest is the continued flow of energy resources from the region, specifically oil and natural gas. These resources play an important role in the health of both the American

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and international economies. Even though the United States is trying to become self-sufficient in energy, it is not isolated from the law of supply and demand. A worldwide oil shortage might prove beneficial to American oil producers but could risk crippling the American economy. Oil revenue also maintains the health of the United States’ Gulf allies who in turn can represent America in the region and buy large amounts of armaments from the American defense industry.

The third interest is the prevention of the emergence of any regional hegemon except for the United States. This is critical to the United States being able to carry out the above two interests. Up to 1992, this threat was in the form of the Soviet Union. Now, the threat comes from several weaker countries working towards gaining potency: Iran, Russia, and China. The fourth interest is the stability of the region as a whole. This interest affects the ease with which the United States can carry out its other interests. It limits the menace of non-state actors, such as terrorist organizations, and the rise of rogue states which affect American interests spanning beyond the immediate Middle East.

The above interests are from my personal analysis, but scholars are in general agreement over them. Steven Cook wrote that the United States has had three overarching interests since the 1950s: “ensuring the free flow of energy resources from the region, helping to protect the security of the state of Israel, and preventing any power—other than the United States—from dominating the Middle East.”\(^{32}\) Likewise, William Habeeb considered the United States’ historical interests in the region to have been “the prevention of Soviet penetration of the region (now, of course, no longer an issue), the advancement of the Arab-Israeli peace process, and the protection of Western access to Middle Eastern oil.”\(^{33}\) The two statements specify the same three interests—Israel, oil, and prevention of other outside powers—with different wording. These

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\(^{32}\) Cook, *Struggle for Egypt*, 249.

\(^{33}\) Habeeb, “US-Egyptian Aid,” 89.
compose the first three of what I believe are the United States’ vital interests. The fourth interest, stability, addresses issues which may not be covered directly by the other interests but which are still decisive to America’s strategy in the region. Without stability, it is difficult to guarantee proper protection of Israel, a steady flow of oil, or the moderation of other states’ power.

**Analysis of the Historical Military Relationship**

In this section, I delve deeper into the specific episodes of the U.S.-Egyptian relations covered in the previous narrative. The following sections will elucidate America’s and Egypt’s intentions in shaping the relationship by providing the strategic rationale behind the history. Further, the sections will explain the forms of leverage each side has on the other and shortfalls in the relationship.

*Initial Courtship (1952-1956)*

The years between the overthrow of the Egyptian monarchy in 1952 and the Suez Canal Crisis in 1956 were a hopeful beginning for establishing a new U.S.-Egyptian relationship. The American ambassador to Egypt at the time, James Caffery, thought that the new regime would be a good partner for pursuing American interests in the region. Because of this, Washington sought stability in the new regime by assisting in the formation of an intelligence service and offering Egypt entrance into a security alliance. In the eyes of Washington, Egypt would be important in keeping the region stable, accepting the newly created state of Israel, and acting as a bastion of capitalism against the feared encroachment of communism in the region—the Truman Doctrine had already been issued in 1947 calling for the prevention of Soviet advances.

Egypt had very different concerns. The Soviet Union did not pose a significant threat to Egypt. In actuality, it was a possible form of leverage in negotiating with the West. Similarly, the safety of Israel was not a high concern for Egypt. It had recently lost a war to Israel—one which

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34 Cook, *Struggle for Egypt*, 65.
a young Gamal Abdel Nasser had participated in—and so was in no mood to protect it. Instead the new regime wanted to become fully independent, remove Western military bases from its sovereign territory, and be able to defend itself without relying on any foreign power. Egypt’s aid request of $100 million was seen as being in both countries’ interests. Egypt would gain cash flow for its military and economy while the United States would keep Egypt in a positive or neutral position. Britain’s intervention, squashing the aid, led Egypt to pursue its interests by turning to the Eastern Bloc.

This decision would lead to the end of U.S.-Egyptian military relations for the next two decades. It was a rational choice for Egypt. The United States was not prepared to fulfill Egyptian interests; the Soviet Union was eager to provide armaments and developmental aid. However, in doing so, Egypt made itself into the bane of the West by contravening the central American interests in the region. It engaged in two wars with Israel in addition to numerous border conflicts. It became the nemesis of the conservative, oil-producing Gulf monarchies and conducted a proxy war with Saudi Arabia in Yemen. It encouraged the spread of leftist, pan-Arabist regimes which would resist American influence while accepting Soviet patronage. Egypt encouraged a rupture of the status quo in the region and a turn from the West, the historical power in the region.

Frigid Relations (1956-1970)

The years 1956-1970 were the nadir of U.S.-Egyptian military relations. Egypt relied upon the Soviet Union to defend its interests. The Soviet Union provided Egypt with large amounts of military equipment and helped protect Egypt from its primary opponent, Israel, through modern military supplies and the stationing of Soviet experts. In the climate of the Cold War, Israel could not threaten Egypt too much without causing their great power patrons to intervene. Yet even as Egypt was taking actions at odd with the interests of the United States in
the region, the United States did not want Egypt to fall permanently into the Soviet orbit for Egypt was still attempting to maintain its position of neutralism. Throughout the entire period, the military relationship was non-existent, and the already weak economic relationship was severed in 1967. The United States was not about to support Egypt when it was attacking America’s regional allies.

Reversal of Position (post-1970)

Perhaps the most critical deviation thus far in U.S.-Egyptian relations was the Egyptian decision to change sides. Through its own efforts, Egypt transitioned in the span of a decade from being a champion of the Third World to being a close American friend and Israel’s only associate in the region. Multiple factors precipitated this change but it can be summarized by four reasons. First, Vice President Sadat assumed the presidency upon Nasser’s death in September 1970. Sadat wanted to make his own reputation. To do this, he would have to beat a different path than his larger-than-life predecessor. He intended to do this by changing the focus of Egypt from pan-Arab nationalism to an Egypt-first approach.\(^\text{35}\) This had the effect of removing Egypt’s incentive to be combative with the West as Egypt’s focus shifted from reshaping the region to merely reforming itself. Second, the Soviet Union had begun to overstep boundaries in Egypt. Its bases were functioning as sovereign Soviet territory with Egyptians prohibited from entering them. By ignoring Egypt’s discontent over its domineering behavior, the Soviet Union allowed Egypt’s resentment to fester. The Egyptian government considered itself a sovereign nation, proxy to no country. The same dynamic was at work when it turned down the American offer for a military alliance in the 1950s.\(^\text{36}\)

Third, Egypt’s goals vis-à-vis Israel came down to one issue by the mid-1970s: the return of the Sinai Peninsula. The Sinai acted as a barrier by forming space between the heavily-

\(^{35}\) Aly et. al., *Arabs and Israelis*, 182.

populated region of Greater Cairo and the Israeli military. With the Sinai Peninsula in hand, Israel was pressed strategically and threateningly against the Suez Canal. Finally, the 1970s marked the period of détente between the United States and the Soviet Union. This lessened the Soviet Union’s interest in supporting Egypt’s goal of retrieving the Sinai Peninsula because the Soviet Union did not want to inflame tensions with the United States. In other words, the Soviet Union had become a constraint that was inhibiting Egypt’s maneuverability in addressing the issue. Conversely, the United States was gaining power and could pressure Israel to return the Sinai Peninsula.

In taking the initiative, Egypt had to calculate the risks and rewards. On the one hand, it could get military assistance from the United States, achieve peace with Israel, and retrieve the Sinai Peninsula. On the other hand, Egypt would encounter grave consequences for its decision. Domestically, Egypt’s conversion was seen as a betrayal of everything it represented. Heba A. Handoussa, an Egyptian scholar, saw Egypt’s new alliance as an increasing form of dependence on the United States despite a lack of overall unifying interests. She believed that the relationship required significant concessions from Egypt, all so that it could represent another country’s objectives. The switch also confirmed the end of Egypt’s leadership of the Arab World, a position that it has arguably never returned to. In spite of these downsides, President Sadat perceived that there were more advantages to an alignment with the United States than with the Soviet Union or as an independent state.

Dynamics of the New Relationship

A new dynamic was established with the relationship. In his essay on U.S.-Egyptian economic negotiations, William Habeeb divides control over the relationship into two parts:

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37 Aly et. al., *Arabs and Israelis*, 171.
38 Habeeb, “US-Egyptian Aid,” 84.
aggregate structural power and issue-specific structural power.\(^{39}\) Aggregate structural power is composed of national resources and capabilities; in this case, it is predominately aid from the United States. Issue-specific structural power is the position of a country on particular issues, such as permitting access to the Suez Canal and playing a role in American military coalitions in the Middle East. The relationship is defined by its asymmetry: the United States holds all of the aggregate structural power while Egypt has only issue-specific power through its provision of support, territory, and inaction (e.g. inaction surrounding Israeli attacks against Lebanon in 2006). Egypt relies on these smaller bargaining offerings but its failure to follow through on one issue—such as peace with Israel or control of terrorism in the Gaza Strip—can risk affecting its entire aid package.

Habeeb further differentiates between “aid for strategic consensus” and “aid for economic reform,” although political reform can also be attached to the latter. Aid for consensus is money meant to keep Egypt in line with American interests or from acting against them. This aid comprises all of the United States’ military aid to Egypt as well as some of its economic aid, which has traditionally been more to maintain the stability of Egypt than to fix it. Aid for reform is intended to structurally change the Egyptian regime in line with Western values such as democratization, human rights, and economic liberalization. Due to American interests being concentrated on security rather than morals, aid for consensus has always won out over aid for reform. The Reagan administration attempted to impose economic liberalization on Egypt. When Egypt failed to reach the set goals, the administration continued to supply aid regardless.\(^{40}\)

Likewise, in the 1980s Egypt was nearly allowed to default on its $6.7 billion in loans. But as soon as Egypt proved its strategic worth by supporting the American alliance in the First Gulf

\(^{39}\) Ibid., 83.

\(^{40}\) Ibid., 92-3.
War, Egypt was relieved of the entire burden. This fact is further demonstrated by a 1989 U.S. Governmental Accounting Office report to Congress, which stated that “if aid to Egypt were considered purely on economic or developmental grounds, Egypt would have received annual obligations of not more than US$100-200 million.” In that same year, Egypt received approximately $2.3 billion in aid with $1.3 billion in military grants and the remainder in economic assistance. Egypt’s strategic importance was valued at several times its developmental need.

Because of these dynamics, Egypt came to rely on two bargaining chips. The first is that it could contribute to United States interests in the region by achieving peace with Israel, protecting the Suez Canal, and contributing symbolic Arab participation in American missions in the Middle East. However, this was only useful in securing aid when the United States needed Egyptian cooperation, such as during the 1990 Gulf War. When there were no pressing issues, Egypt has relied upon its second bargaining chip, what Thomas Schelling termed “coercive deficiency,” by threatening that economic and political vulnerability could endanger the United States’ interests if Egypt is not consistently supported.

According to the scholar Marvin Weinbaum, “A Cairo government that complains strongly enough and implies that its stability to succeed (and survive) is at stake has during the history of the US aid program received most of what it sought.” By the 1980s, the Egyptian government employed 10% of the country’s population and 35% of its labor force. If the government failed to sustain that part of the population, it would initiate a chain reaction of events which could lead to the overthrow of the government. The existing regime could argue that a new regime might not be as friendly to the

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41 Osman, *Egypt*, 126.
43 Habeeb, “US-Egyptian Aid,” 86.
United States as the current regime was. This would have ramifications against the United States’ interests, including the charting a new military course and severance of the 1979 treaty.

However, even with a strong military relationship, there was a growing resentment on the Egyptian side. Because the United States dominated the relationship, Egypt became a reactionary player in Middle Eastern politics. It rarely led any significant initiatives and often achieved small tactical gains through its actions with the United States receiving greater benefits from Egypt’s action or inaction. Egypt further felt that it was getting the short end of the trilateral relationship between itself, the United States, and Israel. The 1979 treaty’s informal agreement was that Egypt was to be limited to two-thirds of the military aid that Israel received.\textsuperscript{46} Whereas Egypt’s military aid was $1.3 billion, Israel received $1.8 billion a year in military grants between 1986 and 1999.\textsuperscript{47} Israel also received better terms on the aid that it was receiving. Aid to Israel was deposited directly into the Israeli central bank for it to use as it wished. Egyptian aid was held by the United States and was either injected indirectly into Egypt through USAID programs or transferred directly from the U.S. Federal Reserve to defense contractors for armaments.\textsuperscript{48} Israel also received the updated, formal agreement to expand its military aid in 2008 while Egypt’s aid remained stagnant, still attached to the informal agreement. Egypt’s annual military aid, unadjusted for inflation, has been stuck at $1.3 billion since 1985, meaning that Egypt cannot buy the same quality or quantity of equipment it once could. In contrast, between 2000 and 2010, Israel’s new military grants averaged $2.44 billion a year—over a billion dollars more each year than Egypt and an increase of $600 million from Israel’s original assistance.\textsuperscript{49}

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\textsuperscript{46}Cook, \textit{Struggle for Egypt}, 223.


\textsuperscript{48}Cook, \textit{Struggle for Egypt}, 220.

\textsuperscript{49}Sharp, “U.S. Foreign Aid to Israel,” 26.
A New Era?

Starting in 2005, it appeared as if the United States was going to begin a new approach towards Egypt. Before, military aid to Egypt was sacrosanct as a largely unchallenged informality left over from the Egypt-Israel peace treaty. Since 2005, Congress started attempting to add strings to the aid. Noticeably the strings were for political and economic reform rather than for strategic consensus. Egypt saw these changes as a betrayal of the original agreement but there was little it could do; it no longer had the allies in Congress it once had, best demonstrated by its one-time friend David Obey sponsoring an amendment to restrict Egypt’s military aid. In reality, though, there has been little change to the actual status quo of relations. Despite Congressional efforts to attach restrictions to aid, the amendments have either failed to pass or, in the case of a 2008 amendment, been blocked by the administration on a national security waiver. Bright Star continued to visibly operate biannually.

Although the status quo continues, the strategic value of the relationship has arguably lessened since its 1979 conception. This is evident from a re-examination of the United States’ four overriding interests in the Middle East. The safety of Israel is still clearly a concern. Congressional efforts to reduce Egypt’s aid subsided slightly after 2008 when Egypt finally cordoned off the Gaza Strip. As such, this interest is still of importance to Congress. But the original reason for aid was to provide incentive and recompense for Egypt’s peace with Israel. In this day and age, it is highly unlikely Egypt would ever resume war with Israel because it is not in any military or economic shape to do so. Egypt’s military has not faced a significant external challenge in decades while Israel’s military is regularly tested. The second interest of maintaining the flow of oil and gas is also still of definite importance to the United States. However, the main security problems lie not with Egypt but elsewhere, such as the Strait of

50 Cook, Struggle for Egypt, 233.
Hormuz and the Horn of Africa. Egypt would also be unlikely to repeat what it did during the Suez Canal Crisis when it blocked the canal by sinking ships; Egypt needs the revenue from the canal as much as states want the oil coming through the canal.51

Ensuring American regional dominance undoubtedly continues to be in the interest of the United States. But Egypt is no longer needed to counter the influence of the Soviet Union and is of little use against the current vying hegemon of Iran. And while the stability of the region is significant for United States interests, Egypt cannot play a central role here either. It has barely been able to control its own backyard in the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip, let alone dealing with rogue actors such as Muammar al-Gaddafi’s Libya or Hezbollah in Lebanon. Egypt has been unwilling to take on the role desired by the United States, which would mean updating its armed forces and playing a greater part in the region.52

Beyond the basic interests, two other changes go counter to preserving the full significance of Egypt’s special relationship. The first, as Osman Tarek asserts, is that with the end of the Cold War, the Middle East has slipped from being an international arena to a regional one, reducing the importance of the region relative to the United States’ larger international interests.53 While this is not entirely true, for the United States still has deep concern over issues such as Israel’s security and Iran’s nuclear proliferation, Egypt has been forced to take more of a backseat because it is no longer of use against the Soviet Union and has largely failed to play its expected role in bringing peace between the Israelis and Palestinians. In the end, it gives Egypt less pull because its missions, while still important, are not as essential as they once were. The

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51 “Brief Yearly Statistical Report,” Suez Canal Authority, accessed December 26, 2014, http://www.suezcanal.gov.eg/TRstat.aspx?reportId=4. According to the Suez Canal Authority, the canal collected approximately $2 billion in tolls in 2000. This had risen to nearly $5 billion by 2010 and above $5 billion from 2011 onward. According to the CIA World Factbook, Egypt’s revenue in 2013 was $45.57 billion and its expenditures were $80.42 billion. In the same year, it received $5.11 billion in receipts from the canal, or approximately 11% of revenue and 6% of expenditures. Loss of this income would be a significant detriment to the health of the state.
52 Cook, Struggle for Egypt, 227.
53 Osman, Egypt, 177.
second adjustment is an alteration in American domestic politics. The United States has entered an age of budget cutting and reduction in foreign intervention. These feelings necessitate a reevaluation of existing relationships and funding, which results in calls for slashing all expenses deemed non-essential or seen as vulnerable.

On the Eve of the Arab Spring

By 2010, the memory of the 1979 peace treaty was no longer proving an airtight guarantee for the steady continuance of military aid to Egypt. Congress was concerned over Egypt’s democratic and human rights practices and Egypt’s ultimate strategic value could well have been debated. Nevertheless, Egypt still provided the United States with strategic benefits. It allowed easy access for American forces to the Suez Canal. It worked with the United States on counterterrorism and intelligence matters, although not as much as the United States might have wished. And even if it did not completely control terrorism in the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip, its limited efforts were better than none at all—or an Egypt covertly supporting them—and it did occasionally step up its efforts. In popular terms, Egypt continued to be a bellwether for the region as the largest Arab country and the center of Arab culture. Even if it never regained the status it had during Nasser’s regime, it still had some symbolic might left and is strategically located between Asia, Africa, and Europe.

The best indicator for Egypt’s position on the eve of the Arab Spring was the actions of the Obama administration’s first two years. Simply put, it did not change the relationship. As administrations before it had, it asked for $1.3 billion in military aid. While it only asked for $250 million in economic aid, this was part of an earlier effort to reduce economic aid as Egypt’s economy improved. Displaying the dual approaches of the administrations and of Congress, in FY2008 Congress forced the Obama administration to re-apportion economic aid for democracy
and governance from $20 million to $25 million.\textsuperscript{54} Yet this increased amount was still less than half of the Bush administration’s aid for political reform in Egypt, demonstrating the realist approach of the new administration.

By January 2011, there was great potential for an adjustment to the U.S.-Egyptian relationship but there had been no drastic or meaningful change up to that point. Congress had begun to pressure for political and economic reform but still placed aid for strategic consensus as being more important when it came to Egypt’s, and Israel’s, safety. The Obama administration, as with all of its predecessors, continued emphasize strategic consensus while making aid for reform secondary. Additionally, even though there were potentially significant reasons for the modification of the relationship due to fundamental strategic changes between 1979 and 2010, Egypt continued to serve American interests. It maintained peace with Israel, allowed oil shipments to traverse the Suez Canal, exercised some control of the otherwise chaotic Sinai Peninsula and Gaza Strip, and provided Arab support for American initiatives in the region. Thus, it had retained its overall justification for aid up to January 2011.

**Conclusion**

Although it is brief, I hope that the history and analysis presented in this chapter provides an informative background for the events in the coming chapters. If there are four points that the reader should take away from this chapter, it is these:

First, the U.S.-Egyptian relationship is just that: a relationship; a quid pro quo. It arose out of an informal and largely unspoken agreement at the time of the 1979 Egypt-Israel peace treaty and never developed into the form of an alliance. Rather, the United States funds Egypt’s security apparatus to preserve American interests in the region through passivity or support. In return Egypt surrenders some independence to have a sustained income and access to modern

\textsuperscript{54} Cook, *Struggle for Egypt*, 229.
weaponry. It is not based on the same dynamics or objectives as an alliance, such as between the United States and Israel or Saudi Arabia.

Second, the relationship is based on strategic consensus above all else. As the history shows, the United States’ frequent attempts to reform the Egyptian state have come to naught because the United States is unwilling to place reform as a higher priority than security. Consequently, the United States has continued funding Egypt despite frequently criticizing the very things that it is enabling.

Third, despite the longevity of the relationship, it has been largely unsatisfactory and imperfect. The United States has always tried to reshape Egypt into its image, wishing that Egypt would represent its interests better. At best, Egypt has been a reluctant partner. It has always sought to remain independent in its decisions and has carried the burden for the relationship: Egypt has constantly suffered from internal and external dissension from its various decisions. Egypt has also struggled against being the third-wheel of the U.S.-Israeli-Egyptian partnership in which it receives less in tangible aid and assistance than Israel.

Fourth, on the eve of the Arab Spring, the relationship was in need of redefining. Business continued as usual between the two countries but the relationship was at risk of decaying from neglect. Egypt faced declining importance because it could no longer deliver as much as it once could for American interests. Although Egypt continued to give preferential treatment to American forces and still ensured overall peace with Israel, it was struggling to control its border with Israel and was no longer of use in combating non-American influence in the region. Additionally, although Israel renegotiated its aid in 2008, Egypt was stuck with the decades-old status quo. The inability of Congress—pushing for reform—and the
administration—preferring security—to resolve their differences should have given Egypt little confidence about the continuing sacrosanct position of its aid.
Chapter 2: Foreign Policy Framework

Introduction
Creating and implementing a foreign policy decision is a long and complex process involving many different players and organizational interests. To appreciate how and why the United States has developed its relationship with Egypt, it is necessary to understand the factors that guide foreign policy. American foreign policy is too complicated to sufficiently cover in one chapter, and many in-depth books have already been written on the subject. This chapter focuses on four main ideas useful for the subsequent chapters. The first idea emphasizes that foreign policy-making is a multifaceted process with a multitude of players. The second and third analyze two inputs that characterize foreign policy: shared images and domestic pressure. The fourth idea argues that new foreign policy on a given issue is often introduced during crises or similarly intense situations. At the end of this chapter, the reader should have a better understanding of how foreign policy is made in the United States.

The Foreign Policy Process
The most important point of this chapter is that foreign policy-making is a fluid process subject to great amounts of uncertainty. Currently there are twelve departments, twenty-five agencies, approximately sixty offices, and several Congressional committees that are involved to some degree in international activities. A variety of executive, legislative, and bureaucratic officials are concerned with the arduous process of formulating, agreeing upon, and implementing policy. For organizational purposes, this section is split into two parts. The first part analyzes the main players in foreign policy and how they interact with one another. There are a considerable number of players, each with his or her own objectives, so comprehending foreign policy means perceiving it for what it is: a melee of competing opinions. The second part

of this section covers two problems of foreign policy implementation: slippage and Congressional control over foreign aid.

The Players
The President

The executive branch, and more specifically the president, is at the center of foreign policy decisions. The president is the pivotal figure in foreign policy who determines the nation’s policy goals and is the final authority on a decision. He guides the direction of policy and signals his preferences to other players. At the same time, due to the nature of his position at the top with a wide range of responsibilities, the president often encounters an issue as an ‘uncommitted thinker,’ i.e. having little experience with or knowledge of the matter. He is forced to deal with most problems in a generalized form far removed from specific decisions and tactical information. Instead he concentrates on overarching decisions and particularly pressing issues while leaving subordinates and other players to hash out the intricate aspects.

Information usually comes to him through formal channels such as the National Security Council or the Intelligence Community’s Presidential Daily Brief. However, it is unnecessary for him to have access to all of the raw information that an analyst might since he does not possess the time or knowledge to conduct complex analysis. It is a fact of the government that the higher in position one is, the more distilled the information is that one receives. Because the president receives information after it has been processed by the bureaucracy, interested players have already had an opportunity to discuss how to handle the issue in question before bringing it to him. At times this can leave the president with limited room to maneuver, particularly if the other major players present him with a fait accompli. However, this rarely occurs. As Graham Allison puts it, most players exist in “semi-feudal” organizations and “[e]ach player is forced to

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fix upon his issues for that day, fight them on their own terms, and rush on to the next.” The president often has room to play opponents against one another and reach a preferred solution.

The president has three main ways to influence foreign policy. The first and primary presidential method is persuasion. If he is able to convince other players that his approach is in the best interest of the nation, they will often feel obligated to support him. Since he has the widest area of responsibility of any player in addition to an electoral mandate from the people, he is in the best position to understand the complete issue rather than viewing it from only one perspective. If persuasion does not work, he can negotiate. Because the president sits at the center of the government, all organizations want something from him. Thus he can trade his support on one of their issues for their support on the current issue. At the very least, officials rarely want to be out of the president’s favor because it devalues their position in the Washington power game and means that they lose future leverage with the president. If the president feels stronger on the issue than the other player does, that player might support the president to gain—or prevent the loss of—favor.

When all else fails, or if the president feels that it is necessary, he can seize control of an issue and weigh in on every decision. One of the best known examples of this is John F. Kennedy’s Executive Committee (ExComm) during the Cuban Missile Crisis. With his full attention, President Kennedy was able to direct the crisis as closely as possible, although he still was not able to control the situation completely. However, there are serious pitfalls on taking control and, as such, the president rarely does so. The president has limited time in the day and a full slate of other issues requiring his attention, so all of the time that he devotes to one issue means delaying or passing the ball on a number of other ones. He also does not have access to all

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5 Halperin et. al., Bureaucratic Politics, 295.
of the information and knowledge that other players or subordinates have, so he is not necessarily the most qualified to be in direct control of matters. Hence the president has the ability to achieve impressive policy control with a wide mandate but must weigh his role in a particular issue carefully or risk over-investing his political capital. He generally prefers to retain loose policy oversight over every day issues so that he can concentrate on a few more critical ones.

Congress

Congress is often criticized for being either impotent or imperial. It is blamed for never passing anything of consequence or for having a stranglehold over policy. In reality, as Eileen Burgin asserts, it is “influential but not dictatorial.” Congress’ most visible method for influencing foreign policy is through its legislative powers. It can pass issue-specific legislation to direct executive actions and can mandate reporting requirements to ensure that activities are in line with Congress’ standards. Congress also controls appropriations, which allows it to prevent a policy by refusing to fund it.

Congress also wields a variety of non-legislative tools for influencing foreign policy. It can pass nonbinding legislation, which exerts pressure by threatening future binding legislation. Informal advice and consultations—a more formal version of advice—are both opportunities to influence the president’s decisions. Interactions with foreign governments by Congressmen are a way for them to play the role of diplomat, taking the lead on an issue. Hearings bring issues to the fore and raise awareness while at the same time playing Congress’ oversight role and pressuring bureaucrats. Floor statements are another way to draw attention to an issue, and letters

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7 Ibid., 336-7.
to the president are a means for promising a vote or threatening to withhold it in return for support on a particular issue. In the words of Roger Hilsman:

Congress—subtly and indirectly, but, nevertheless, effectively—sets the tone of many policies and limits on many others. ... It seems obvious that Executive proposals are shaped by estimates of how Congress and individual congressmen will react, the mood of Congress, and the probability, circumstances, and possible means they may use in reprisal.

While legislation openly forces an issue, the variety of non-legislative tools and accompanying perceptions of future legislation shape the debate before legislation comes to the floor or afterwards, during its implementation. The phenomenon that Hilsman describes is the law of anticipated reaction, whereby the executive branch is calculating its actions based on what it thinks will be acceptable to Congress.

Congress is an unruly place for foreign policy. There are 535 Congressmen and Congresswomen, each with his or her own set of motives and issues of relevance. While legislative success requires constructing majorities, non-legislative tools allow for unilateral action. The possibility of unilateral action is the strongest in the Senate because debates are unlimited and filibustering can make a bill too costly to consider. A semblance of organization arises in the form of the six committees responsible for foreign policy-related issues, which are split into two groups. On the foreign relations side are the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC), House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC), and the House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs. On the defense side are the Senate Armed Service Committee (SASC), House Armed Service Committee (HASC), and the House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on Defense.

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8 Ibid., 339-41.
There are traditionally large gaps between the two groups. Up until recently the defense budget has been treated as sacrosanct and has been lavished with funding, sometimes to the point of having to fend off undesired funding. Relations between Congress and the Department of Defense have been defined by deference towards Defense’s views. Conversely, the foreign affairs committees have not overhauled the Foreign Assistance Act since 1985 and have only sporadically attempted to guide Department of State activities since 2000. Its budget is miniscule compared to the Department of Defense’s budget. As a result of this, the defense committees are politically desirable to be a member of because there are bountiful opportunities to give back to constituents through military bases, the defense industry, and other defense-related projects. The foreign affairs committees are much less sought-after because there are fewer opportunities to control largesse. Most benefits go abroad, to diasporas in the United States, or to the highest ranking members who are able to use it as a step toward higher office. Congressional committees provide organization, but they concurrently create a divide between groups that should share interests but instead become legislative opponents.

The Bureaucracy

Within the bureaucracy, two departments in particular are most relevant to foreign policy and military relations: the Department of State and the Department of Defense. While they are often treated as unified organizations, in reality each of them is characterized by subdivisions. Each office within the department has its own responsibilities, interests, and supervisors. Both have divides between career officers who predominate in the field—Foreign Service

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10 “Percentage Distribution of Outlays by Agency: 1962-2019,” Office of Management and Budget, last accessed January 20, 2015. In FY2010, Department of Defense-related programs accounted for 19.3% of the federal budget. The Department of State’s programs comprised 0.7% of the budget. In FY2013, the Department of Defense’s budget fell to 17.6% while the Department of State’s budget rose to 0.8%—hardly a closing of the gap.

Officers (FSOs) and military officers—and political appointees in Washington. The Department of Defense has added competition between the Army, Navy, and Air Force.

Despite these subdivisions, or perhaps because of them, both organizations try to form internal consensus to provide a unified front when dealing with issues.\textsuperscript{12} By compromising amongst themselves and then with other organizations before engaging with the president, they can attempt to present him with an already agreed upon solution.\textsuperscript{13} One way to do this is to reach a preferred solution and then present it alongside two unacceptable solutions, thus giving the pretense of choice when in reality the real deal-making was conducted beforehand. Naturally this does not always succeed and incontrovertible fissures are sometimes exposed between the players, but in this way each individual office hopes to know who it is dealing with and what it is getting. For example, each military service knows its own interests and those of the other services. One service will not challenge the interests of the others for fear that in return, the others will no longer allow autonomy over its own interests. If the bureaucracy takes its rivalries openly to the president, it risks loss of control over how an issue will be decided. Thus when possible, the bureaucracy solves disagreements first between the opposing organizations, then in a consensus among the bureaucracy, and only as a final solution do they turn to the president as an adjudicator of organizational interests.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{12} Halperin et. al., \textit{Bureaucratic Politics}, 143.
\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibid.}, 204.
\textsuperscript{14} Allison, “Conceptual Models,” 705. One instance of this process was evident during the lead-up to the Cuban Missile Crisis. A dispute arose over whether the Central Intelligence Agency or the Air Force had the responsibility to conduct U-2 spy plane flights over western Cuba. Traditionally the CIA was in charge of the flights, but the Air Force argued that because there was an increased risk of being shot down, the pilot should be in uniform—i.e., be an Air Force pilot. Unable to solve the spat themselves, the issue was brought before the United States Intelligence Board’s Committee of Oversight Reconnaissance (COMOR), a joint committee between the bureaucratic organizations involved in reconnaissance duties. COMOR ruled that given the circumstances, the Air Force should conduct the flights. The issue was resolved without reaching the president. The CIA may have been able to appeal to the president if it had insisted, but the president might have upheld COMOR’s decision.
While FSOs and military officers are both career officials, they have differing levels of influence. Military officers can have significant influence over policy decisions because they have ready-made supporters in Congress who view it as Congress’ duty to listen to, and protect, America’s service members.\textsuperscript{15} Their specialized military training and obligation to put their lives on the line give them a resonant voice: as experts, they presumably know more about military matters than politicians do, and their willingness to sacrifice themselves for their country means that they are responsible for making the best choice possible. This gives them an autonomous voice from the executive branch, which they can use to speak out in opposition to policies without the risk of damaging their careers. Yet while they are able to speak relatively freely to the media—something that the oft-quoted senior officials of other departments are rarely afforded—and are encouraged by Congress to express their true opinions, such a privilege goes only so far. This was evident with General Stanley McChrystal’s dismissal in 2010 after his staff was quoted by the \textit{Rolling Stones} mocking civilians within the administration. The position of service members is further strengthened by the lobbying from the defense industries, who exert pressure on Congress to fund Departmental initiatives.

FSOs rarely have any control of policy. Because of its size, the Department of State does not wield much power in Congress. In fact, Congress is responsible for appointing ambassadors, thus indirectly steering policy through the threat of delaying or denying future appointments. There is no large industry reliant on foreign assistance that would lobby for the FSOs either; diasporas lobby for their own interests, not those of the Department of State. And while ambassadors can sometimes control policy from their embassy, it takes a high level of coordination in getting the entire embassy to communicate the same message back to

\textsuperscript{15} Halperin et. al., \textit{Bureaucratic Politics}, 268.
Since the diplomatic staff lack the same hierarchy as the military and often have to share the embassy with military and intelligence officials, control of the message becomes even more difficult, leaving FSOs with little sway over policy.

Complications within the Decision-Making Process

There are two further aspects of foreign policy that must be taken into account. The first is that there is a slippage between the formulation and implementation of policy. There is no guarantee that implementation will not deviate from the intended results even with the president’s interest in the issue. There are many reasons for policy drift. Sometimes Congress requires a change after the president has already signed off on something. Real life events can also overtake the paperwork, forcing bureaucrats to improvise. As former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger has observed, sometimes the deviations are purposeful: “Inevitably, in the nature of bureaucracy, departments become pressure groups for a point of view. If the President decides against them, they are convinced some evil influence worked on the President: if only he knew all the facts, he would have decided their way.” They change policy under the assumption that their actions are in the best national interest. Only so much slippage can occur if the president or other top policymakers are heavily invested in a given major policy. Nevertheless, slippage is an inevitable part of the policy process and must be accounted for.

The second complication is the struggle between foreign affairs and defense committees for control over aid to foreign governments. When it comes to funding foreign military forces, the foreign affairs committees claim that funding them is a foreign affairs function and so it should be from their Congressional account. The armed service committees riposte that since the funding is for defense, it should be from theirs. Egypt’s military aid comes through the Foreign

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16 Ibid., 278.
17 Ibid., 254.
Operations and Related Programs Appropriation Act associated with the foreign affairs committees even though it is categorized as international security assistance. The difference is not merely which authorizing committee and appropriations subcommittee is responsible for the funding. He who controls funding determines the aid’s goals and restrictions. The armed service committees prioritizes the defense needs of other states while the foreign affairs committees devote more attention to other foreign policy issues such as human rights.¹⁹

Funding for the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program is another example of the conflict. IMET consists of American forces training foreign militaries, sometimes at facilities within the United States, but includes transferring resources to a foreign government. In a compromise, the foreign affairs committee transfers funds to the armed service committee. It then operates the program based on restrictions set by the foreign affairs committee, such as ensuring a human rights record or compliance with American foreign policy initiatives. As a consequence, the funding is a lot smaller than it could be because the foreign affairs’ account is a fraction of defense’s account, meaning that programs are competing for a smaller amount of funding.²⁰ This system is clearly far from optimal but it is an indication of the problems surrounding funding.

Shared Images
Shared images are big ideas that create frameworks through which decision makers and bureaucrats see the world. In the words of Halperin et. al., shared images are “a set of global images [that] decisively shape the stand they take on particular issues.”²¹ They are overarching concepts rather than specific ideas. Two notable sets of shared images occurred during the Cold War and in the post-9/11 war on terrorism. During the Cold War, some precepts of the United

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¹⁹ Halperin et. al., Bureaucratic Politics, 329-30.
²⁰ Ibid., 330-1.
²¹ Ibid., 9.
States’ policy was that the Soviet Union was an expansionary power, that it had to combat Soviet expansionism, and that each country which entered the Soviet sphere was increasing the threat of Soviet domination. This is not to say that every single foreign policy player shared these images, but a majority did subscribe to them and viewed them as comprising the nation’s interests.

Shared images are important because they serve as a unifying vision. They create a foundation from which to base American interests. In the stretch of time between the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the war on terrorism, the foreign policy elite did not know what was the central purpose of America’s foreign policy. They stumbled from crisis to crisis due to a lack of shared images. With shared images, there is something to connect the disparate interests of the individual players and institutions. As Hilsman wrote, “The test of policy is not that it will most effectively accomplish an agreed-upon value but that a wider number of people decide to endorse it.”\(^{22}\) Shared images help policy reach this level of support through “boilerplate” arguments, or standard arguments which exploit the images by stating that whatever is being proposed, such as fighting communism or terrorism, is in the national interest.\(^{23}\) While boilerplate arguments are not perfect, they allow for a greater number of players to accept a proposal. Adhering to shared images also allows for faster responses. Few issues are completely new; most have already been determined in terms of interests, so shared images offer a way to quickly address the issue without having to debate it anew each time it arises.\(^{24}\)

Despite the fundamental role that shared images play, there are also several flaws. Shared images encourage stale thinking. Standard arguments on issues are already favored so there is no reason to think up provocative or innovative points. This means that the president and other top policy makers rarely encounter new or updated points of view. Shared images are also often a

\(^{22}\) Art, “Bureaucratic Politics,” 469.
\(^{23}\) Halperin et. al., *Bureaucratic Politics*, 141.
\(^{24}\) *Ibid.*, 120.
subterfuge for organizational interests. By using shared images, a wider number of people will accept an argument than if it is expressed according to organizational interests. Throughout the Cold War, each military branch emphasized the necessity of its own nuclear delivery method—airplanes, submarines, or ballistic missiles—with justification made through the idea that the United States could not risk a gap between its own capabilities and those of the Soviets. Shared images can lead to the retention of policies even when they do not work or bring any benefit. The Cold War happened as it did because both sides stuck with shared images that held the other side as being an enemy that had to be confronted with all means possible. Despite knowing that it was a losing battle, the United States fought in Vietnam for such a long time because it did not want to appear as being soft on communism or reluctant to assume world responsibility for its allies.

Shared images are not perfect. This should not discredit them because they continue to guide decision making and form a basis for reasoning. The Cold War demonstrates just how powerful shared images can be. Even if decisions merely used anti-communism as a justification for deeper motives, those images defined the boundaries of policy debate for four decades. To properly analyze shared images, one needs to understand both shared images and the motivations of the organization supporting the policy.

**Domestic Pressure**

Foreign policy is often treated as if it is an entirely different entity from domestic politics. Whereas domestic politics is meant to be partisan, foreign policy is expected to be removed from that in the common imagination of both American citizens and politicians. Yet whether acknowledged or not, all foreign policy decisions inherently take domestic pressures into account. Voters are the most obvious form of domestic pressure because politicians depend on their opinion to be reelected. But pressure also arises from interest groups, which lobby decision makers, attempt to guide votes to preferred candidates, and contribute campaign donations. It can
also come from people in key positions outside of the federal government. Governors have
weighed in when their interests are perceived to be at stake, such as with issues pertaining to the
Mexican border and important diasporas or industries. Reporters can affect decision makers
through their audiences, whether by publicizing an issue, offering advice, or exerting pressure on
a politician for a particular decision to be made. For example commentators during the Cold War
like Walter Lippman were able to influence the policy debate in Washington though their
columns. Even when the foreign policy is being developed outside of the purview of the public,
decision makers are still taking into account how particular groups will react to policy
decisions.25 Halperin et. al. go so far as to state: “Most [foreign policy] decisions are responses to
domestic pressures, and the actions of other nations often figure merely as devices for
argument.”26 This argument goes too far in stressing domestic motivations over international
ones but it is important to keep in mind that domestic pressures have an important impact on
foreign decisions. The president and Congress must, at a minimum, be able to rationalize their
decisions through domestic explanations.

As the sole official elected by the entire nation, the president is in a unique position. On
the one hand, he has the strongest mandate for determining the national interests. Any other
elected policymaker represents only a small percentage of the population, while bureaucrats
serve at his pleasure.27 He also has the widest area of responsibility of any official, elected or
non-elected, meaning that he has the best idea of how different issues fit into that mandate. On
the other hand, he is answerable to the American people and not merely to a state, Congressional
district, or superior. This means that he has to consider, and appeal to, the greatest number of
people.

26 Halperin et. al., Bureaucratic Politics, 102.
27 Ibid., 295.
Domestic politics matters to the president for three reasons. First, the president depends on domestic opinion—not international opinion—to be reelected and to keep his party in power in Congress. Domestic issues tend to dominate elections but foreign policy can still play a critical role. Ronald Reagan defeated Jimmy Carter in the 1980 presidential election in part because Carter was seen as being weak internationally whereas Reagan was promising to take a tough stance. Other presidents have been helped in their election by promising to remove the United States from international quagmires, most notably Richard Nixon with Vietnam and Barack Obama with Iraq and Afghanistan. Second, the president has his legacy on his mind. Decisions or events can make a reputation, but they can also haunt a president for the rest of his term—not to mention life—including crises like the 1979 taking of the American embassy in Tehran during Carter’s presidency and the Iran-Contra affair during Reagan’s.

Third, his stance on foreign policy affects his ability to carry out other policy initiatives, domestic and foreign. Unpopular policy can make it difficult to get bills and bureaucratic appointments passed in Congress. Popular policy has the potential to ease criticism on other measures. Policy can also appeal to or anger specific interests groups, which can concentrate their lobbying pressure for or against a specific measure. For example, the Jewish lobby has traditionally been a strong supporter of aid to both Israel and Egypt—in Egypt’s case, to ensure that it maintains peace with Israel and polices its border. There are also domestic financial consequences of foreign policy decisions. Changes in military aid affect not only the defense industry but also entire local economies. Any president who ignores domestic opinion on foreign policy is unlikely to have an easy, or long, time in office.

Similar to the president, Congressmen and Congresswomen are answerable to their constituencies, except the constituencies are much narrower. In general, members of Congress
are even more concerned with domestic issues than the president because it is through domestic assistance that they can most benefit their constituents and get reelected. However, foreign policy still matters. Going against mass support for a foreign policy decision, such as starting or ending a war, is going against the will of the constituency and can cost a future election. Likewise, just as bringing business or federal funds to a district can bolster a Representative’s position, losing that money can make the next election more difficult. Large immigrant diasporas can lobby for or against decisions related to their homeland. By voting one way on a particular issue, a Congressman is able to curry the favor of a small but important voting bloc; voting against it means losing a bloc of support in the future elections. Certain foreign policy initiatives even have the potential to give back to a Congressman’s constituency, including those involving defense contracts and military bases. If a Congressman or Congresswoman has a goal of reaching higher officer, a seat on the SFRC or HFAC can be used to develop foreign relations skills and serves as a podium to advance an ideological position. Congressional shifts in foreign policy are often the result of shifting public opinion, which Congress is better able to discern than the president because of its more frequent elections and closer connection to its constituency.

While bureaucracy is not elected, it is answerable to the president and Congress, both of which are. Additionally, an organization’s importance is determined by public opinion and the size of its base. The Department of Defense’s members—which include active, reserve, and retired military members as well as civilian employees—exist in just about every state, meaning

28 Fred Hiatt, “Special interests blocking Bryza’s appointment,” *The Washington Post*, December 18, 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/special-interests-blocking-bryzas-appointment/2011/12/16/gIQAmT0fzO_story.html. For example, President Obama’s nomination for the Ambassador to Azerbaijan, Matthew Bryza, had a “hold” placed on his nomination and was ultimately dropped as a nominee after he was opposed by two senators with large Armenian constituencies. Armenian American organizations accused him of failing to take appropriate policy stances towards Armenia and of favoring Azerbaijan.

29 King, “Congress,” 19.
that supporting it is highly appealing to lawmakers who want to gather votes and create or retain jobs. The defense industry is another large and important source of jobs, and lobbies for the Department of Defense’s “interests.” The effect of endorsing military action—or conversely in stopping or blocking it, as the case sometimes is—has a strong show of results; there is a decisive action with a visible outcome which the president or Congressman can use in the next election.

Conversely, the Department of State lacks many of these things, and so, while it may not be as beholden to public opinion as the Department of Defense is, it also does not get the public support to bolster its position in policy struggles. Compared to the large numbers of people who work for the Department of Defense, the Department of State is quite small, and most personnel are concentrated around the District of Columbia or abroad, meaning that they are not a constituency worth catering to. It has a much smaller support industry invested in its funding, so it lacks the high-powered outside lobbyists that the Department of Defense has. Compared to the military’s hard power, the soft power of diplomacy is much harder to measure: it takes place outside of the public view and the outcome is rarely as clear as a military victory. The result is that whereas some bureaucratic organizations are favored by domestic pressures, many others are at a disadvantage.

Public opinion on foreign policy is based on what Americans perceive as being in their and the nation’s interests based on available information. An example of how public opinion works is demonstrated through the variation in the popularity of arms shipments to Israel and Egypt. When the United States was trying to work with Egypt in the mid-1950s, the support of Americans for arms shipments to Israel declined. Popularity dropped even further after the Suez

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Canal Crisis in 1956 when the United States and most of the world saw Israel, Britain, and France as the aggressors against Egypt. The trend reversed after the 1967 war. Following the 1979 peace treaty, support for arms shipments to Israel and Egypt increased, from 47% to 58% and from 30% to 56% respectively. Public opinion readily changes in response to international events. Actions by the United States and foreign states, such as the 1956 crisis and the signing of the peace treaty, influence how the population identifies with foreign policy. In return, this shapes how policymakers believe that the public wants them to act and how they present their actions.

**Change in Foreign Policy**

Foreign policy tends to suffer from inertia: once made, it is difficult to modify. This difficulty arises because the process of drafting, passing, funding, and implementing a policy is drawn-out. Once a decision has been made, there are already organizations vested in the outcome, and they will be on guard for future decisions affecting their domain. Any challenger has to calculate not only the cost of changing the existing policy but also the possibility that the defending organizations will subsequently attack the aggressor’s own areas of interest. As a result, decisions tend to stick around even when the situation on the ground and public opinion are different. The Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq wars were all fought long after public opinion had turned against them. It took a long time to reconcile with Communist China in part because the China lobby in Congress attacked any effort that reached out to the People’s Republic of China. The U.S.-Egyptian relationship has remained largely unchanged for its thirty-one year existence even as everything else changed.

Significant foreign policy changes tend to occur during a crisis or period of considerable change. During a crisis, the initial calculus for a decision often no longer makes sense because

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the fundamental reasoning for the original policy has been voided. This requires the approach to be rethought. During periods of more gradual change, standard operating procedures suit organizational inertia and are often carried past the point of offering any returns since modifying policy for every incremental adjustment requires too much time and effort. By following a standard operating procedure, organizations may not take the most suitable actions, but it facilitates responding to regular occurrences rapidly while reserving efforts for more pressing concerns.  

Organizations know that they can expand their mission during a crisis or may need to defend it if they are already the dominant player on an issue. One effect of crises is that they can disrupt shared images and create a policy shift. The sudden end of the Cold War destroyed all of the existing shared images, which left the following decade with a lack of guiding principles until a new set of images was created in the wake of 9/11. The faster an organization can act, the better it can take advantage of the new circumstances. According to some, this is a noteworthy shortcoming of Congress: since it was created as a deliberative body, it was not built to deal with the constant stream of problems that it is now expected to handle. A crisis or large shift is also an opportunity to alter how a policy is analyzed and interpreted in terms of interests. Thus there were numerous occurrences during the Cold War in which shared images were redrawn to justify a new action which had previously been excluded by the same principles.

**Conclusion**

Foreign policy is a complex endeavor. By utilizing the four points addressed in this chapter, it is possible to recognize how and why a decision has been made. Foreign policy has

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33 Halperin et. al., *Bureaucratic Politics*, 49.
34 King, “Congress,” 7. Congress is often left scrambling to react to and influence decisions by the executive branch during crises. At the same time, it still has a role to play in defining the post-crisis environment because it controls the levers to funding and can utilize legislation and hearings.
become increasingly centralized under the White House since the Nixon administration but numerous players are still involved and seek to steer it in their interest. The president has several methods for controlling the direction of policy; however, his limited time and political capital leaves space for Congress and the bureaucracy to play a role in determining policy and its implementation. Understanding policy is further complicated because there is inevitably slippage between the original and final forms of the policy, and multiple Congressional committees with overlapping responsibilities can lead to confusion over which committee is ultimately responsible for a particular topic.

Two aspects tend to significantly shape actions. The first is shared images, which join together disparate players by shaping notions of national interests. Although shared images can be used as a cloak for personal or organizational interests, they are still important for understanding policy formulation. By recognizing them, one can then dig deeper into organizational motives. The second aspect is that foreign policy is influenced by domestic politics. To understand the foreign policy of the United States, it is first necessary to understand the domestic pressures that the president, Congress, and bureaucrats are responding or appealing to. Because of the complexity inherent in the process, foreign policy rarely undergoes significant reconsideration except during crises and other momentous events. Crises force a sudden and consequential shift in thinking because the situation on the ground has changed so dramatically in such a short time. Otherwise, policy is able to continue even when it is outdated or begins to negatively affect American interests.

A final point of this chapter is that just as American foreign policy is an unpredictable venture susceptible to many factors, so is the foreign policy of other countries and the interaction between two countries’ policies. Other countries do not know for certain what player is behind a
particular American foreign policy initiative, how heavily supported the policy is, and if it is being properly implemented or represented. The United States similarly does not know these answers for how another country, such as Egypt, conceives its own policy. Interaction boils down to the countries internally debating their own actions and the actions of the other country while assessing their next step based on their own shared images and domestic pressure, among other things. The relevance of this to the future chapters is that when one is analyzing the actions of both the United States and Egypt, it is important to ask not what “the” government has done but instead how the various players—and their corresponding motives and pressures—are interacting both internally and externally. Diplomacy, like foreign policy, is a complex and uncertain process.
Chapter 3: The Fall of Mubarak, the Rise of the SCAF

Introduction
This chapter’s content spans the transition period, starting at the beginning of the Egyptian revolution on January 25, 2011, and continuing through the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces’ (SCAF) interim government up to the Egyptian presidential elections in late May and early June, 2012. It is divided into three parts, each of which will provide an overview of events and an analysis of the rationale behind American and Egyptian decisions. The chapter begins with Mubarak’s overthrow, which began on January 25 and succeeded on February 11, 2011, when he stepped down. From February to late December, the U.S.-Egyptian relationship was defined by a seeming return to the status quo under the oversight of the SCAF. Finally, from the end of December through to May 2012, the relationship was significantly muddied by the sentencing of American workers in Egypt, but managed to survive despite the strain. The chapter concludes with an synopsis of events and the lessons learned from them.

Mubarak’s Overthrow
Hosni Mubarak, president of Egypt since Sadat’s assassination in 1981, was overthrown in a mere eighteen days. Few were expecting it, least of all Mubarak and the United States. As explored in the previous chapter, crises are marked by uncertainty. This makes them an opportune time to reconsider interests or, conversely, necessitates a strong defense of them. This section explores how the United States and Egypt interacted while reevaluating their interests in such a constrained time span.

Chain of Events
Protests against the Egyptian regime began on January 25, 2011. The so-called “Day of Rage” was scheduled for the 25th because it marked National Police Day and the protesters...
sought to draw attention to the police forces’ abuses. At this point there were only demands for reform. The protest itself was inspired by the success of the Tunisian Revolution, which drove the Tunisian dictator, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, out of the country on January 14 after twenty eight days of demonstrations. To the consternation and fear of the Mubarak regime, the protests continued in the following days and the government began to crack down. This led the United States to weigh in. After having held a short telephone conversation with Mubarak, President Obama called for him to begin delivering reforms in a televised speech on the 28th. Yet in the same speech, Obama said, “we are committed to working with the Egyptian Government and the Egyptian people—all quarters—to achieve it.” In this way, the United States stated its intent to remain associated with Mubarak. In a similar vein, White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs warned Egypt that the continuance of its military aid was dependent on its response to the protests. Although strong on bark, Gibbs’ statement was light on bite because it failed to set any red lines that would force Mubarak to consider his actions carefully.

The situation worsened as Mubarak mixed superficial promises of reform with attempts of suppression. On the same day that Obama delivered his speech, the Egyptian government began to disrupt internet services in order to hamper communication among the protesters. Troops were deployed into the streets, although they were merely observers. By the next day, Mubarak had sacked his cabinet, appointed as vice president Omar Suleiman—who, as former head of the General Intelligence Directorate, was a far cry from a symbol for a democratic future—and refused to step down. Police continued to assault the protesters, with hundreds

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arrested after only a few days of protests. Troops were then deployed further into the streets, but they restricted their actions to firing in the air while the police continued to function as the regime’s primary instrument of coercion.

At this point, policymakers in the United States began to voice their opinions on the protests. The Republican leadership supported the administration’s cautious approach of supporting both the regime and the people. House Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) backed the views of Representative Thad McCotter (R-MI)—who incidentally had a large Arab-American constituency—that Mubarak should remain in office to oversee reforms. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton added to the voices of support for Mubarak when, on Meet the Press, she said, “There is no discussion as of this time of cutting off any aid.” At the same time, individual members of Congress began to move ahead of the official position. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), Chairwoman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, preempted the Obama administration and Congressional leadership when she called for immediate elections in Egypt on January 29. Senator John McCain (R-AZ) urged Obama “to get on the right side of history” and to begin reviewing Egypt’s military aid. And on the 31st, John Kerry (D-MA), then Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, released an op-ed in which he called for Mubarak, as well as his son Gamal, not to run for president in future elections. Simultaneously, he said, “a

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7 Bresnahan, “GOP cautious.”
productive relationship with Egypt remains crucial for both us and the Middle East” and called for the United States to give Egypt additional civilian assistance.⁸

Over the coming days, the situation in Egypt continued to heat up. On January 31, the same day that Suleiman called for dialogue with the opposition, there were 250,000 protesters in Tahrir Square, the focal point of the revolution. Bowing to pressure, Mubarak announced on February 1 that he would not contest future elections. But his reiteration that he would not step down before the end of his term did little to satisfy the protesters, who had by then grown to approximately one million people in Tahrir alone. On the morning of the 2nd, life appeared to be going back to normal as the internet gradually returned and clashes slowed. But by night time, at least three were dead and 1,500 more injured in pro- and anti-government clashes that occurred as the army stood by and watched. By February 5, the estimated number of people killed over the twelve days of protests began ranged between the Egyptian Ministry of Health’s eleven and the United Nation’s three hundred, and terrorists had started targeting the Israel-Egypt gas pipeline in the Sinai. Over the 6th and 7th, the government cycled back from repression to appeasement in an effort to restart the ailing Egyptian economy. Government civil servants and pensioners were given a 15% raise to bolster their support for the regime while Suleiman sought to lead protesters on by promising reforms and dialogue after clashes had subsided.

In response, the United States began to modify its approach. Even as Secretary of Defense Robert Gates was calling Egyptian military leaders to reassure them, President Obama and Vice President Joe Biden shifted tack in the beginning of February and called for Suleiman to take over and lead all-inclusive talks. They started pressuring Egypt’s regional allies to push

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this approach, too. Alluding to these efforts, Mubarak and other senior officials responded by saying that comments by the leaders of “friendly” nations were unfavorable and were meddling in Egypt’s internal affairs.

The White House also began trying to reconcile internal policy fissures. By February, all American policymakers agreed that Mubarak had to go; the question was by which method he should leave. On one side were Clinton, the Department of State, Gates, and Thomas Donilon, Obama’s National Security Advisor, who supported a methodical transition in which Suleiman would assume the presidency and lead reforms. On the other side were Biden, Obama’s press secretary Gibbs, as well as Benjamin Rhodes and Samantha Powers, two National Security Council staffers, who favored an immediate transition away from members of the regime. These two groups took different approaches because they had contrasting ways of looking at the world. The former group favored retaining Suleiman because the emphasis was on maintaining regional stability and reassuring regional allies who would become dubious of future American support if the United States so readily abandoned Mubarak, an American ally for two decades, after two weeks of protests. The latter group was more concerned with avoiding the United States’ further association with the dictatorial Egyptian regime, which went against their perception of what the United States should represent: liberty, democracy, human rights, freedom. Obama entered the crisis as a supporter of the methodical transition but, reacting to the course of events and perhaps lobbying from staffers, shifted to the immediate transition.

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On February 10, it appeared as if change was imminent. Rumors began spreading that Mubarak was stepping down. Instead, he appeared on television to denounce the rumors and asserted that he would remain as president to oversee reforms until September. This came as a shock to Obama, who earlier in the day had declared transformation imminent. As it turned out, Mubarak’s end was looming and on February 11, Suleiman announced that Mubarak was stepping down and that the SCAF was to take charge of Egypt until elections could be held.

The Rationale Behind the United States’ Stances

On January 25, the Obama administration fully backed the Mubarak regime; by the time Mubarak left, the administration was actively lobbying for his departure. As demonstrated in the above narrative, the change was not immediate or easy. The question arises as to the deeper motives behind the administration’s evolution.

The administration’s initial reactions were defined by caution. There was little clarity as to what was happening on the ground and, naturally, the United States did not want to throw its ally under the bus when there was not an actual threat to the regime. Because the situation was fluid in the heat of the crisis, the administration opted to pause rather than restructure its regional interests without knowing what it was restructuring. However, it retained the careful approach as protests developed, first calling on Mubarak to merely reform, then supporting his decision to be replaced by his hand-selected vice president. Although this was often treated by the press and the Egyptian people as a deep and illiberal attachment to a dictator, the reality is that this hesitancy was guided by a number of concerns.

One factor that was undoubtedly driving American actions was maintaining its position in the region. Abandonment of the Mubarak regime could have destabilized America’s relationships in the Middle East by affecting the shared image that America would be there for

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them when they needed it. If the United States so readily cast off Egypt, the bedrock of its strategy in the region and the culmination of tens of billions of dollars in aid, then there were few assurances for the other states in the pro-America camp. Indeed, Israel and Saudi Arabia were both quick to voice their negative opinions over the United States’ wavering position. An added worry was that if the situation was allowed to deteriorate in Egypt, then instability could continue to spread. If it returned to the west—where it originated in Tunisia—it risked upsetting Libya and Algeria, both authoritarian regimes and large oil exporters. If it traveled eastward, it would harm Israel through chaos in the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula. Accordingly, the administration’s response had to consider the entire Middle East, not merely the will of the Egyptian people.

However, the administration also had to be mindful of the brewing domestic pressures. Allowing Egypt to fall to populist control would have attracted the attention of the Israeli lobby and a number of prominent Congressmen, who would have been concerned with whether the 1979 peace treaty was to be preserved. Furthermore, if Egypt fell into a quagmire, it risked hurting the American economy through a rise in oil prices. According to Jason Grumet, president of the Bipartisan Policy Center, a one dollar increase in oil for one day costs the American economy $12 million. A five dollar increase for three months would cost more than $5 billion. This is relatively miniscule compared to the entire American economy, but if Obama wanted to get the economy back on track and spur job creation, allowing chaos to perpetuate in the Middle East was a poor way to do it. Because Egypt is a fairly minor oil producer—it was the 21st largest in 2011—the real harm would be from the spread of instability. Egypt itself produces about 673,000 barrels a day but, as of 2009, it saw another 1.8 million barrels daily carried through the Suez Canal and 1.1 million barrels transported through the Sumed pipeline, an alternative to the
canal connecting the Red Sea to the Mediterranean. Even more damage could have been witnessed if the revolution carried on to Libya and Algeria. Clearly there were few incentives for President Obama to abandon Mubarak’s regime without seeing out events further.

Over time, the official position shifted towards transitioning Mubarak out of power. There are several reasons why this occurred even as the original motivations for supporting Mubarak remained. Obama could have been driven by a desire to catch up to popular opinion and Congress. In a Gallup poll conducted mid-way through the revolution, 82% of Americans sympathized with the Egyptian protesters and 60% felt that the changes that were happening in Egypt would be good for the United States. Although there were much larger issues that mattered for Obama’s upcoming reelection bid, supporting a dictatorship would not gain him any domestic plaudits regardless of the interests at root. Congress, or rather the rank-and-file of Congress, had also been more closely connected to public opinion and tended to be several steps ahead of the White House in encouraging the Egyptian people’s demands. For example, Ros-Lehtinen, Chairwoman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, was already calling for elections on January 29; it was not until his February 1 speech that Obama brought up the suggestion of an orderly transition.

As time went on, Obama was also under increasing pressure to get on the right side of history and preserve America’s image. A strong part of the lore and self-image of the United States is that it is the champion of democracy and freedom. This was a central shared image during the Cold War that legitimized the greater struggle. It was then carried over to the war on terror, as demonstrated by the naming of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom for the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq respectively. Thus, whether for domestic or international

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consumption, the administration felt the need to get on the side of the people as the abuses of the Mubarak regime worsened.

A final aspect is that the administration could have been bowing to reality. During the first several days, there was the possibility that Mubarak could have remained as president or, at a minimum, that someone from his regime like Suleiman would be able to take over to implement reforms. But as time went on, it became increasingly clear—at least to everyone except for Mubarak himself—that the protesters would accept nothing short of the regime’s fall and that Mubarak had to step down. At that point, it would have been counterproductive for the Obama administration to attempt to shore up Mubarak. Even if he had stayed in power, Mubarak had lost legitimacy in governing the country and would have struggled to retain any role for Egypt in the Arab world. Keeping him in power would have been a self-defeating task.

The transformation was complicated by the conflicting messages being released by different players and organizations. The rift was the largest between the Departments of State and Defense, who tended to advance a more conservative line, and White House staffers, who were often pressing for a more progressive position. The result is that different players were occasionally out of synch with the official policy. There are several important points that should be made in relation to this.

First, some confusion naturally arises during a crisis. When Clinton contravened the White House press secretary in saying that Egypt’s aid was not under reconsideration, it was not necessarily a purposeful error. In the heat of the matter when the interested parties are all trying to respond, there will always be some degree of policy miscommunication. Second, some of the slowness in adhering to the official line came out of organizational interests. As observed in chapter 2, players and their organizations seek to advance their interests during a crisis. As
careerist, bureaucratic institutions, the Departments of State and Defense already had significant stakes in the Egyptian government in terms of assistance and relations with governmental figures. Letting the government fall would have been counter to decades of institutional efforts. Conversely, the White House staffers did not have a long-term commitment to Mubarak’s regime. Their responsibilities lay in defending the greater interests of the United States and the president’s political capital. Third, some of the uncertainty was also due to Obama’s management style. For key decisions, Obama has traditionally preferred open-ended debates between his main advisors before choosing a position. For example, in determining whether to implement a surge in Afghanistan, he allowed the military and Biden to argue out their opposing proposals before settling on an intermediate position.\footnote{Peter Nicholas and Christi Parsons, “Obama’s advisors split on when and how Mubarak should go,” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, last modified February 10, 2011, http://articles.latimes.com/2011/feb/10/world/la-fg-obama-team-20110210.} Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, is that once the president had chosen an approach, that is the position that the United States pursued. Despite all of the confusion and differing opinions, once he decided that Mubarak should step down, the other players were forced to toe the line. The disagreements among players also gave the president more room to maneuver and find his preferred solution.

\textit{Use of Leverage}

A common refrain of American policymakers was that Egypt’s future was its own and that it was up to the Egyptian people to determine it. In reality, Egypt was too important to be left completely to its own devices. While the United States did not actively intervene, it nevertheless sought to exert leverage on the Egyptian regime. The most visible attempts to leverage the United States’ relationship with Egypt were through the three speeches delivered by Obama, the various statements and press releases by other policymakers, and the warning by Gibbs that aid would be reconsidered if events took a negative turn. Less observably, policy and military figures engaged in a number of direct phone calls with their counterparts. Obama held
several calls with Mubarak, including one before his first speech on the Egyptian revolution. Gates had at least six calls with the Egyptian leadership and Admiral Michael Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, worked to reassure the Egyptian military. The United States also reached out to Egypt’s regional allies to pressure them to support the transition. Less controllably, Congress weighed in on the matter, predominately by arguing that aid should be frozen, or at least carefully watched, and that elections should be held.

The effectiveness of the leverage depends on the goals that the leverage was intended to achieve. On one hand, Marc Lynch, a professor at George Washington University, said:

When Mubarak finally stepped down peacefully, however, the first stage of Obama’s handling of the Egyptian crisis could only be judged a success. It played an important role in preventing, through constant, private pressure on the Egyptian military, the escalation into brutality which later happened in Libya, and ultimately helped to broker the departure of Mubarak. It also left intact at least the chance that a more representative, accountable and transparent Egyptian regime could be built.14

In his opinion, the United States was able to successfully act as a restraint on the actions of the regime so as to ensure that a democratic transition would take place. On the other hand, Steve Clemons, a scholar at the New America Foundation, and Shibley Telhami, a professor at the University of Maryland, both derided the United States’ leverage because of its inability to affect anything taking place. According to Clemons, fifteen years ago the United States could have had an impact on Mubarak but, due to changing dynamics, the “White House was very clear that their ability to dictate an outcome, or even stridently predict one, was almost nil.”15 Telhami similarly felt that “the U.S. can make very little difference in what’s taking place in Egypt” beyond pressuring the military to weigh the costs and benefits of their behavior.16 I argue that

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16 Thrush and Gerstein, “Finger-pointing.”
both positions are correct: the United States had imperfect leverage during the revolution but it managed to realize its narrow goals by the revolution’s completion.

The United States definitely had limited influence over the course of the revolution. The regime, police, and military were all acting according to their own, and not the United States’, calculations of how to best preserve their power and safeguard their interests. After all, threatening Mubarak that his aid could be suspended did not matter to him if he would no longer be in any position to use it. The United States’ leverage was further hampered by its inability to take a solid stance on the conditionality of its aid, which was its strongest form of leverage. Not only were there conflicting messages over the aid, but since no red lines or specific penalties were publicly mentioned, there was no limit to the regime’s actions. Since the United States was often left reacting to events, it was in a poor position to truly guide them.

At the same time, if the United States was truly letting the Egyptian people act for themselves, then its use of leverage could be considered a relative success. Mubarak, and Suleiman, eventually stepped down with comparably little blood spilled. While not desirable, eighteen days of protests and approximately three hundred people killed is still a lot better than the situations in Bahrain, Syria, and Libya. There is the added aspect that a significant amount of the leverage was applied through back channels. Without the aid in the first place, it is unlikely that the United States would have had easy access to Mubarak, Suleiman, or the military generals. Since it was conducted quietly, it is hard to tell how hard the military was pressed to take a peaceful position or how much it was motivated by a desire to retain the $1.3 billion in annual assistance. Ultimately it is difficult to know how much influence the United States actually had. Events were often moving too quickly to properly react to and Egyptian institutions were driven by their own interests. But it is likely that the United States was able to play at least
a small role and achieved its final limited objectives of ensuring a relatively bloodless transition to democracy, regardless of how effective the leverage was.

*The View From Egypt*

I will devote the final part of this section to an analysis of the Egyptian players’ actions. This thesis is primarily focused on the U.S.-Egyptian military relationship at large and how the United States has sought to use the relationship as leverage; yet the strength and direction of the relationship cannot be understood without knowing how Egyptian institutions perceived it and why they acted as they did. Just like American institutions, Egyptian institutions are guided by organizational interests, shared images, and domestic pressures. This subsection addresses two aspects: how American involvement was viewed, and why the military actually acted as it did.

The United States’ effort to shape events was poorly received. Naturally, Mubarak was not fond of the gradual turn away from him. In response to Obama’s increasing calls for reforms and democracy, Mubarak made allusions to friendly countries meddling in Egyptian domestic affairs. Further, he remained determined to chart his own course by ignoring these messages and insisting that he would stay on to oversee any future reforms. Yet in spite of these accusations, the entire regime continued to receive the calls of American policymakers and generals, showing that it still valued the relationship. On the opposite end, Egyptian protesters were also dissatisfied with the United States and Obama. But they were upset because Obama procrastinated for too long and failed to do enough to push Mubarak out of power; by the time he fully sided with them, they had already been through the worst of it. Therefore, he was perceived as having been on the side of the dictator rather than the people, failing to uphold America’s promise to champion democracy. The outcome is that America gained no plaudits from Mubarak for having backed him only in the beginning and received no credit for switching to support the Egyptian people.
There are two overarching questions regarding the army. The first is why the army avoided shooting protesters. If the army had been willing to use force, it could have crushed the revolution or at least sustained the regime for longer than the eighteen days it actually lasted. The United States might argue that its communications with the army influenced its decision; propping up Mubarak would have been a pyrrhic victory if it meant losing $1.3 billion. While this likely played a role, it is doubtful that this was the army’s main calculus. Rather, the army remained peaceful for the sake of its integrity and reputation. The army is based on conscripts, so by ordering them to fire on the crowds, the officers would have been asking conscripts to risk firing on family, friends, or people of similarly poor social position as themselves. If the officers ordered the soldiers to shoot and they did not, the army’s ability to function would have disintegrated. Thus, rather than take that risk, the officers chose to hold back. They also wished to preserve the army’s place, which it had held since the 1952 coup, as guardian of the state. The police acted as the main enforcer of the regime and as such, its reputation suffered heavily both in spirit—the police force was hated by the people—and in actions—people who worked as police officers were detested. If the army had fired on the protesters, it would have sullied its reputation.

A connected question is why was the army willing to see Mubarak, one of its own, overthrown. I argue that there were three reasons. First, the army did not foresee a bright future under Mubarak. Historically the president came from the military, but Mubarak had been grooming his son, Gamal, to succeed him. Gamal had never served in the military. He was a businessman and a member of the National Democratic Party, the ruling party. If Gamal became president, he would have likely sought to privatize the military’s extensive economic holdings,

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17 Omar Ashour, “From Bad Cop to Good Cop: The Challenge of Security Sector Reform in Egypt,” Brookings Doha Center, Paper 3, November 2012, 9. According to Ashour, over 95 police stations and 4,000 police vehicles were set on fire during the revolution. Members of the police were attacked both physically and verbally.
valued between five and forty percent of the Egyptian economy and spanning everything from water bottles to jeeps. In this way, Mubarak’s retention and Gamal’s ascension would have challenged the military’s political and economic positions.\textsuperscript{18}

Second, and related, is that during Mubarak’s presidency, the military had seen its standing degraded vis-à-vis the security apparatus (i.e., the police, Central Security Force, intelligence agencies, and related organizations). This occurred because, as on display during the revolution, it was the security apparatus that protected Mubarak’s regime from political and extremist opponents. The army saw its responsibility as defending the country from external threats, not internal ones. The consequence of this is that between 2002 and 2008, the budget of the police force increased seven-fold, from $583 million to $3.5 billion, whereas the military’s budget only doubled.\textsuperscript{19} With its loss of status, the military had little incentive to support a president who had come to favor a bureaucratic competitor.

The third reason is that by the final days, when Mubarak began to look toward the army, it was too late and there was no benefit in retaining him. In the words of one SCAF officer, “At the beginning, we gave the presidential institution the full opportunity to manage events. If it were able to succeed, nothing would have happened.”\textsuperscript{20} That is, the army was not looking to remove Mubarak. When he failed to contain the protests, it was forced to step in. An added incentive to remove him came with the loss of American backing, which made the regime look

\textsuperscript{19} Hillel Frisch, “The Egyptian Army and Egypt’s ‘Spring,’” \textit{Journal of Strategic Studies} 36 (Feb. 2013), 182.
fragile and risked the loss of military aid. The confluence of these three factors made it not only acceptable to remove Mubarak, but also beneficial from an institutional viewpoint.

**Return to the Status Quo**

In the aftermath of the “soft coup,” relations between the United States and Egypt appeared to return to normal or even improve. In a speech on February 11, Obama lauded the role the military had played in bringing the crisis to a close, saying, “The military has served patriotically and responsibly as a caretaker to the state and will now have to ensure a transition that is credible in the eyes of the Egyptian people.” Lawmakers similarly praised the outcome of the revolution, although with less of a focus on the military and more to the potential for future democracy. As a sign of getting back to normal, Obama also said:

> The United States will continue to be a friend and partner to Egypt. We stand ready to provide whatever assistance is necessary—and asked for—to pursue a credible transition to a democracy.

To this end, on February 17, Clinton announced that the United States was reprogramming $150 million in aid to help Egypt’s economy during the transition. The administration also stated that it intended to ask for the standard amount aid: $1.3 billion in military aid and $250 million in economic assistance. In making these gestures, the administration was hoping to uphold stability in the region by helping Egypt pick itself up and to preserve influence with the military, which now found itself in the driver’s seat and responsible for delivering democracy and steadiness to the stumbling nation. Steven Cook, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, argues that the revolution might have even enhanced Egypt’s prospects of receiving

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aid. Whereas before the relationship was strained and uncertain, now Washington had to deliver assistance if it wanted to incentivize the military and ensure Egypt’s transition.26

In the coming months, the relationship continued to be championed by both sides. On March 16, Clinton called on Egypt, where she visited Tahrir Square and had meetings with Prime Minister Essam Sharaf and the head of the SCAF.27 In a May speech, Obama also promised that the United States would help relieve Egypt of up to $1 billion of its debt and guarantee it loan financing so that the Egyptian economy could get back on track.28 For their part, in a May interview with the Washington Post, several members of the SCAF reiterated Egypt’s dedication to the 1979 peace treaty with Israel, a prime concern in Congress and the basis of the country’s military aid. In remarking that a thirty year relationship could not be easily canceled, they said, “There has been strong military cooperation between Egypt and the U.S. ... [and we] have had a wonderful two-sided relationship with the U.S.”29 Such statements are in stark contrast to the tense pre-revolution relationship when Egypt was arguing that it was anything but two-sided. Both sides had obvious reasons to desire good relations. The United States wanted to have its cake and eat it too: it wanted a democratic transition while retaining a friendly regime supportive of its interests. Meanwhile, Egypt needed to guarantee its aid during the time of vulnerability. The United States had to exert very little leverage to achieve this harmony since both sides were still committed to old shared images and, domestically, Congress

27 Jennifer Epstein, “Clinton tours site of Egypt uprising,” Politico, last modified March 16, 2011, http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0311/51393.html. A less positive side of Clinton’s visit is that a coalition of youth groups refused to meet with her because of “the U.S. administration’s weak position at the start of the revolution due to its close relationship with the ousted president.”
was a strong supporter of continuing the previous agreements in the interest of protecting Israel and avoiding the rise of religious extremists.

Although it would have scant immediate effects on the relationship, the situation in Egypt was less than perfect and was only getting worse. After Mubarak stepped down, most protesters left Tahrir Square. Those who did not were cleared out by the military two days later. However, protesters soon returned and a number of public servants, including police officers, held demonstrations for better pay. Questions soon began to arise over the true intentions of the SCAF. It failed to repeal the Emergency Law, one of the main demands of the protesters, or transfer power to a civilian-led transitional team. It retained Mubarak’s final cabinet and continued to employ many of the same security figures who had carried out abuses for Mubarak. As the ultimate arbiter of elections, it kept pushing back the transition. First it moved the timeline from August to October, with parliamentary elections in June. Then in March, it pushed parliamentary elections back to September with no mention of presidential elections. By the summer of 2011, it had extended the transition into 2013.30

Additionally, the SCAF was struggling to contain Egypt’s economic deterioration. Between the beginning of the revolution and the end of February, Egypt lost over $15 billion from its economy due to strikes, capital flight, and rising food prices.31 By mid-May, economic growth was down to 1% and the country had witnessed a 25% drop in its foreign reserves. With few tourists visiting, Egypt was missing $40 million a day from suspended tourism. Officially—meaning that the actual picture was likely worse—70% of Egyptians were now under the poverty line, which was aggravated by 12% inflation and a 25% unemployment rate.32 To put it into

30 Frisch, “The Egyptian Army,” 188.
32 Masoud, “Road,” 32.
perspective, the United States’ extra financial assistance of $150 million amounted to less than four days worth of lost tourism revenue—hardly a significant sum.

It is also important to note that while relations with Egypt were good, they were not perfect. In April, two Democrats in the House proposed H.R. 1514, a bill to make aid contingent on Egypt adhering to the 1979 treaty. The bill failed to get out of the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia and was unnecessary because, at least for the interim, the Egyptian military was still dedicated to its previous agreements. Nevertheless, it demonstrates Congress’ state of mind during this period. Congress was largely skeptical of Egypt’s future stance and, in particular, of the consequences if the Muslim Brotherhood were to win future elections. With doubts surrounding both the SCAF’s willingness to democratize and the potential outcome of democratization, Congress repeatedly expressed a desire to protect future interests. A further hitch occurred on August 17 when Bright Star, the biannual military exercise, was canceled. Bright Star was due to be held later that year but was instead pushed back to its next iteration in 2013. Although the decision was agreed upon by both sides for logistical reasons—planning was behind schedule and the Egyptian military had more important concerns—it was still likely a blow to Egypt. In the bilateral conversations, American participants also voiced concerns about growing anti-Americanism in the country in general and in state media in particular. The decision was further bad news for the Egyptian economy: it robbed Egypt of the opportunity to host tens of thousands of participants and to make a profit by renting every single item used.

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The relationship’s status at the close of December 2011 is best shown by H.R. 2055, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2012. As Obama had promised after Mubarak stepped down, aid was its standard amount with $1.3 billion in military aid and $250 million in economic aid. But as a sign of Congress’ distrust over Egypt’s future prospects, several certification requirements were attached to Egypt’s aid. The additions required that the Secretary of State certify that Egypt was continuing to meet the obligations of the 1979 treaty and was carrying out a transition to a civilian government while protecting the human rights of the populace. These requirements were allowed to be waived if the Secretary of State deemed it “in the national security interest of the United States.” Thus ten months after Mubarak stepped down, little had changed in the relationship and in some ways, it had even improved. Certainly there was still pressure on the Egyptian government to democratize—in December and early January, parliamentary elections were finally held with resounding returns for Islamist and Salafist coalitions—but the administration continued to perceive the military, and the aid given to it, as the best guarantor of its regional interests.

**Ebb and Flow of the Relationship**

From the end of December 2011 through to March 2012, the U.S.-Egyptian relationship appeared to be in danger of disintegrating. The start came in July 2011 when the Minister of Planning and International Cooperation, Faiza Abou el-Naga, announced a fact-finding committee into the foreign funding of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in Egypt. Naga, who had been in that post since 2004 and was a Mubarak holdover, was the controller of foreign assistance and had long resented the West’s efforts to impinge on Egypt’s sovereignty by telling it how to operate. On December 29, the situation escalated when security officers raided several NGO offices, seizing technology, papers, and cash while indefinitely

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shutting them down. Four American NGOs were caught in the sweep: the International Republican Institute (IRI), National Democratic Institute (NDI), Freedom House, and the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ). A month later, NDI and IRI were informed that eleven of their employees, six of them American, were not allowed to leave the country. On February 5, the Egyptian Ministry of Justice recommended that forty-three employees, among them sixteen Americans, be sent to trial for accepting funds from international organizations, pursuing activities forbidden by the law, and carrying out political training programs. On March 1, the Americans who had not been able to get out of the country earlier, as well as some of the other NGO workers, were allowed to leave the country. But charges were not dropped and the trial was merely pushed back to April with the workers forced to post bail.

The United States’ Reaction

There was united denouncement by American policymakers of Egypt’s treatment of the NGO workers. Speaking from Munich shortly before the workers were recommended for trial, Clinton said, “We are very clear that there are problems that arise from this situation that can impact all the rest of our relationship with Egypt.”38 This was echoed by the Department of State, Department of Defense, and members from both sides of the aisle in Congress. Egypt’s assistance immediately came under reconsideration and some members of Congress believed that it would now be impossible for the Secretary of State to approve or waive the certification requirements. Gary Ackerman (D-NY), the ranking member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee’s Middle East and South Asia Subcommittee, went so far as to say that if the waiver was used, Congress would retract the waiver and take back the appropriations.39

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In spite of the outcry, seemingly little leverage was used to resolve the situation. Aid was put on hold but nothing was done further to it. The American government participated in secret negotiations with the NGOs and the Egyptian government, but talks were slow and took two months to show any result. Congress’ efforts were also sluggish, whether out of deferment to the administration’s negotiation attempts or otherwise. H.R. 4340, requiring fair and free elections for continued assistance, and S. 2327, requiring certification of the treatment of NGO workers, were proposed after the climax of the crisis—on March 29 and April 19 respectively—and both failed to gain any traction. In the end, the United States had to pay $300,000 in bail for each of the remaining workers in the country, a total of $5 million for seven Americans. Perhaps this was a face saving measure to get Egypt to reverse its position, but in the long-run $1.5 billion in annual aid should matter more than $5 million in one-time bail. It is difficult to know what went on behind closed doors but this fact speaks to the relative ineffectiveness of America’s use of leverage.

After this peak of mutual displeasure, the tension had subsided by late March when Clinton waived all of the certification requirements, including one for human rights, and allowed the next tranche of aid to be deposited in Egypt’s Federal Reserve account. No new funds had been disbursed to Egypt since October so with its funds almost dry, it was a now or never moment. One reason that the administration might have opted for the release is that there was no reason to destroy the relationship over something that had been essentially resolved. It could have also been to maintain leverage and a future role in Egypt. Cutting the assistance would have

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deprived the United States of all future leverage and would have risked its interests in Egypt and the region. It might have also imperiled Egyptian advancement. Parliamentary elections had already happened and presidential elections were beginning in May. One senior Department of State official was quoted as having said, “We’ve seen more progress in 16 months than we’ve seen in 60 years.” With aid canceled, the SCAF could have decided to reverse all of the progress that had been achieved up to that point.

Arguably, though, the greatest factor was domestic concerns. Egypt’s military assistance plays an important part in providing business to the American defense industry. For example, a $1.3 billion order by Egypt for 125 M1A1 Abrams tanks was to keep production lines open at General Dynamic’s Lima, Ohio plant through 2014. This meant that at a time when the United States Army was stopping its orders, American workers would continue to be employed in this crucial swing state through elections. Other businesses were similarly affected either through a reliance on Egypt’s orders or through contracts to maintain Egypt’s existing equipment. Further, because of the circumstances surrounding Egypt’s aid disbursement, it was the United States which had officially placed Egypt’s orders, and it would be the United States which would incur the penalties for halting them—an estimated $2 billion cost to American taxpayers. Clinton personally preferred a partial waiver to permit some assistance through while keeping pressure on the generals to ensure a domestic transition. But with the looming payment deadline, the White House and the Department of Defense pressed for the full waiver. Congress was overwhelmingly upset with the decision, with Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT), the one who added the certification requirements in the first place, calling it regrettable and “business as usual.”

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43 Ibid.
45 Myers, “Once Imperiled.”
But with the benefits that Congress gained from giving aid to Egypt, among them employment and the continuance of peace with Israel, there was little else it could do.

**Egyptian Motivation**

In my analysis, I identify four reasons why Egypt might have been willing to continue its crackdown on the NGOs despite the danger to its relationship with the United States. None of them are necessarily right or wrong, but they provide explanations on why it might have occurred as it did. One argument is that the crackdown was a purely internal statement. Although the American organizations and citizens involved in the case drew the focus of the American press’ attention, the majority of those involved were Egyptian nationals and Egyptian organizations. In the words of Tamara Wittes, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, “The goal [of the shutdown and trial] is to demonize an entire sector of Egyptian society by associating them with an alleged foreign conspiracy and by making the current government the defender of Egyptian interests.”

By smearing the strongest pro-democracy groups and then crushing them, the SCAF would cow the entire sector, quiet some of its more vocal opponents, and hopefully come out as the ultimate savior of Egypt by finally seizing its sovereignty back. The American NGOs were only indirectly the target, but if they had been left alone, then the blow to the sector would not have been as great and the SCAF would not have been able to achieve greater control over society.

Another motive may have been to capitalize on Egyptian anti-American sentiments in order to distract from internal problems. Around the time of the crisis, a Gallup poll found that 71% of Egyptians opposed Egypt receiving the United States’ aid. Likewise, a poll conducted later in May found that an overwhelming 85% of Egyptians had an unfavorable view of the

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47 Ibid., 39.
United States and 80% saw the United States as one of Egypt’s primary threats, falling behind only Israel with 94% viewing it as a threat. By accusing foreign countries of meddling with Egyptian domestic affairs, the government might have hoped that a play on domestic opinion would draw attention away from the plights of a collapsing economy and government oppression by calling upon the nationalist spirit.

A third possibility is that it was a final stand over who controlled foreign assistance. Ever since the U.S.-Egyptian relationship started, the two countries have been in a struggle over who controlled the disbursement and use of economic aid—although there has also been dissatisfaction over the fact that the United States holds onto its military assistance, too. The two countries had opposing images of how the aid should be distributed. Whereas Egypt felt that it should supervise it and that the assistance should only be used on programs and groups sanctioned by the government, the United States wanted the aid to go to where it will best be able to help civil society. Naga, the provocateur of the incident, was known for fostering a dislike for the United States’ oversight. In a March press conference on the trial of the NGOs, Kamel el-Ganzouri, the Prime Minister at the time, reaffirmed that the case would continue and asserted that the judiciary had to function independently. Responding to a question, el-Ganzouri voiced Egypt’s independent attitude when he said, “No one at my age or with my background could accept for Egypt to kneel before anyone or to make his country kneel before any other.”

Perhaps the Egyptian government saw a chance to take a stand and hoped that the need to

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49 House Committee on Foreign Relations, *Egypt at a Crossroads*, 25. Incidentally, it was impossible for the NGOs in question to operate legally because the government refused to recognize any of them. Up to the crackdown, the organizations had been allowed to operate in a legal gray area out in the open but without official approval. Several had applied for licenses in October, two months before the raids, but had yet to see any progress before they were shut down.
support Egypt would have overpowered the United States’ anger—an appraisal that turned out correct.

A final possible explanation is that it was a case of mixed messages and competing interests. Just like the United States and practically every other government in the world, Egypt is not a single, centralized system. One hand does not always know what the other hand is doing and each player has his or her own motives, which they then express through the country’s shared images. When the charges against the NGOs were announced, there was actually a SCAF delegation in Washington, D.C., that was due to meet with the Senate the following day. The delegation was caught by surprise and had to rush back to Egypt without completing its mission.\textsuperscript{51} If it had truly been a coordinated effort by the military to slander the United States, it suffered from extremely poor planning. In reality, there were competing powers within the government, including members of the deep state left over from Mubarak’s regime. Although the government resisted intervening in the matter until dropping the travel restriction two months in, it could have been bound by the need to protect its reputation. Even if the SCAF did not have a hand in the initial raids and sentencing, it could not rescind orders from the civilian government and judiciary. Doing so would have contravened the images of Egypt standing up for itself and regaining its power, and would have brought domestic pressure because it would have been kneeling to an unpopular power. Instead, the government needed to wait for a face-saving measure while allowing the process to play out. Any damage caused to the relationship was unfortunate but necessary for internal cohesion.

\textit{Eve of the Presidential Elections}

Although Egypt’s insistence on sticking to its position worsened the relationship and revealed the United States’ weak leverage, the greater relationship weathered the crisis, as

\textsuperscript{51} House Committee on Foreign Relations, \textit{Reflections on the Revolution in Egypt, Part I}, 49.
demonstrated by the return of aid less than a month afterwards. The relationship was further proven secure when, on May 25, the 2013 State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations bill was passed with the standard levels of assistance for Egypt. The only sign that Egypt and the United States had been at each other’s throats a few months previously was that additional certifications were added in relation to the events that had happened and it now imposed a reporting requirement on the Secretary of State. But the option to waive the requirements remained and the bill “recognizes that the success of Egypt’s economy is critical to maintaining stability in the region.”52 In the words of Senator Leahy, it was business as usual.

**Conclusion**

Between January 25, 2011 and May, 2012, the U.S.-Egyptian relationship saw several ups and downs. Following Mubarak’s overthrow, it appeared as if the relationship might have been entering a new era. If nothing else, both sides were looking to put the past behind them and had in common some of the same shared images. During the same period, the relationship also hit two nadirs, the first during the revolution itself and the second during the NGO crisis. Yet although the relationship is clearly not indestructible, it seems to have reset at its equilibrium of mutual distrust with continued cooperation. Drawing from the year’s events, two lessons can be learned.

The first, which should be clear from the path of events, is that the United States had limited leverage over Egypt’s actions, particularly as they pertained to domestic interests. During the revolution, the outcome was determined according to events on the ground and the military’s interests. The Obama administration was not able to protect Mubarak or control the government that succeeded him. Later, the Egyptian government’s ability to effectively hold seven Americans hostage and to receive bail and its full aid laid bare America’s limitation. Yet it

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cannot be denied that the United States did retain some leverage during this period and since leverage can be applied privately, it can be hard to evaluate properly. The administration’s persistent calls during the revolution may have restrained some bloodshed and would not have been possible without the strong bond formed over decades of cooperation between the American and Egyptian armed forces. Likewise, the eventual release of the American NGO workers may have been a much longer process if there had not been the prospect of losing aid. Fundamental American interests continued to be pursued throughout and democratic transition followed slowly but surely.

The second lesson was that the United States was seemingly more dedicated to the relationship than Egypt was. Egypt would certainly miss the assistance if it were to disappear, but during every time of conflict, it was the United States that first stepped back from the brink. The reasons for Egypt’s willingness to imperil its aid will be explored more in chapter 5, but it is obvious why the United States would be so hesitant to sever the relationship. With it, it can guarantee, or at least have a say in, Egypt’s adherence to the 1979 peace treaty, the security of the Sinai Canal and Sinai Peninsula, and Egypt’s overall direction of foreign policy. At the heart of the difference is that both countries are driven by shared images, which the governments have in common to a certain extent, and by domestic pressures, which take them in opposing directions. For the United States, ensuring Israel’s protection, continued oil flow, and regional stability are paramount; keeping the international economy stable and domestic constituents satisfied are also key. For Egypt, the image of the government serving the United States’ interests is contrary to the desires of the population, which has long resented Egypt’s position as America’s lackey and continues its strong dislike for the United States. The result is that the Egyptian government cannot march in lockstep with the American government. Since the
revolution, Egypt has sometimes sided with the United States, but sometimes, much to the consternation of the United States, it has sought its own path.
Chapter 4: Morsi’s Presidency

Introduction

The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces’ interim rule ended with the election of Mohammed Morsi, the country’s first democratically chosen president. Despite this credential, Morsi only remained in office from June 30, 2012, to July 3, 2013 and was overthrown shortly after his one year anniversary in office. This chapter begins with a brief overview of the Muslim Brotherhood—Morsi’s organization and primary base of support—and how the United States has interacted with it up to Morsi’s election. Subsequently, Morsi’s year in power is broken into four parts for analysis. The first covers the beginning of his presidency, from June to August, as Morsi waged a low-level power struggle with the SCAF while preserving relations with the United States. The second part revolves around two major events toward the end of 2012: the September 11 attack on the American embassy and the November clashes between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Whereas the embassy attack raised questions over Morsi’s commitment to the U.S.-Egyptian relationship and the flow of aid, his moderating influence during the November clashes pointed him in the opposite direction.

Following that, from January through to May of the new year, Morsi’s domestic situation became increasingly unsettled as protests against Morsi gained ground. At the same time, Congress reacted to the Morsi government’s behavior by intervening in the U.S.-Egyptian relationship with attempts to reduce or condition American assistance. The last part is dedicated to the final month of Morsi’s presidency, which led to his overthrow of his embattled government, and examines the United States’ motivations for inaction as events in Egypt reached a climax.
An Overview of the Muslim Brotherhood

Before addressing Morsi’s presidency, it is necessary to briefly explore the role of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egyptian politics, along with how the United States has interacted with it. Morsi technically left the Muslim Brotherhood and its associated post-revolution political party, the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), upon running for president, but he remained heavily attached to it in spirit and policy. Because Morsi grew up with the group’s convictions and problems, his choices can only be comprehended by understanding the Muslim Brotherhood’s experiences.

The Muslim Brotherhood

The Muslim Brotherhood was founded in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna, an Egyptian school teacher. The movement opposed having a secular, democratic form of government and instead called for governance based on Islamic principles and Islamic law. The movement also played an important role in the anti-imperialist struggle against Britain, Egypt’s occupier. The Muslim Brotherhood chose to align with Nasser and the Free Officers when they overthrew King Farouk in 1952. The Free Officers wanted the mass support that the Muslim Brotherhood could offer while the Muslim Brotherhood was led to believe that the Free Officers would support Islamic governance. Based on this false assumption, the relationship quickly soured to the point that in October 1954, a member tried to assassinate Nasser. The Muslim Brotherhood was quickly oppressed and made illegal. The group’s main ideologue, Sayyid Qutb, was arrested and eventually hanged. But demonstrating the group’s perseverance, Nasser failed to eradicate it.

Following Nasser’s death, the group began to be accepted, but not legitimized, in Egypt’s political sphere. Sadat rehabilitated the group to serve as a balance to the leftist opposition that his policies were encountering by Nasserists and communists. Any thaw between the state and the Muslim Brotherhood ended with the signing of the 1979 peace treaty with Israel, an action
which the Muslim Brotherhood vehemently rejected. Yet Mubarak continued the balancing act of allowing the Muslim Brotherhood to play a part in politics while, at the same time, ensuring that it would never have any real power. To this end, the Muslim Brotherhood was permitted to contest elections as independents or in partnership with secular parties. When the group was too successful in the 1987 parliamentary elections and won thirty-six seats, Mubarak had the courts invalidate the results. Accordingly, the Muslim Brotherhood’s history is one of oppression and distrust by a state that never allowed the group anywhere near real power.

Since the beginning of the 2011 revolution, the Muslim Brotherhood began to play a significant role in Egyptian politics. Although it was not among the groups that initiated the protests against Mubarak, it later joined in and was able to provide assistance with its organizational skills, mass mobilization of followers, and experience gained from decades of state repression. Since Mubarak and his predecessors had decimated all of the secular opposition parties, the Muslim Brotherhood was the only pre-existing mass organization that could join in the fray. This put it in the best position to take advantage of the new environment. It was this network of followers, built over decades of providing social assistance to areas ignored by the state, that allowed it to triumph in the December 2011 parliamentary elections.

Yet even before Morsi’s election, the group encountered a lot of suspicion. The secular opposition opposed the Muslim Brotherhood because of the chasm dividing them ideologically. To them, the words of Khariat al-Shater, a Muslim Brotherhood luminary, that “the Ikhwan [Brothers] are working to restore Islam in its all-encompassing conception to the lives of

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people,” were contradictory to the entire goal of the revolution. But it also perceived the Muslim Brotherhood as having come late to the protests only to take them over and seize the gains. The Brotherhood turned out for the later days of the protests, but once there, started maneuvering itself into controlling the demonstrations. The Egyptian state similarly had an inherent dislike for the Muslim Brotherhood; after all, it had spent the past several decades monitoring and excluding the group.

The Muslim Brotherhood’s post-revolution actions only engendered further distrust. Initially, it declared that its party, the FJP, would reserve itself to contesting one-third of parliamentary seats. This was meant to assuage fears that it would take over the government and force Islamization upon the country. But this promise was quickly dropped and the FJP ended up winning nearly half of all available seats. Likewise, it had promised to not submit a candidate for presidency. By entering Morsi into the fray, it once again went back on its word before it even had a chance to govern.

*Interactions With the United States*

In the 1980s and 1990s, the United States and the Muslim Brotherhood engaged in limited contact, for each side was wary of the other. As champion of democracy and freedom, the United States was skeptical of the Muslim Brotherhood’s ulterior motives. It also did not want to get too close and risk upsetting the Egyptian government since maintaining a good relationship with Mubarak was much more important than contact with Muslim Brotherhood. For their part, the Muslim Brotherhood did not wish to be associated with any foreign power both out of principle and to avoid any reason for further persecution by the regime.

It was only slowly after the revolution that the United States began reaching out to the Muslim Brotherhood. Up to February 9, 2011—two days before the revolution’s culmination—

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Benjamin Rhodes, in charge of strategic communications for the National Security Council, was still insisting that the United States had not had any contact with the Muslim Brotherhood. He also encouraged the regime to conduct outreach with opposition beyond the Muslim Brotherhood. It was not until June 2011, nearly half a year after the revolution, that the Obama administration officially announced that it was expanding contacts with the Muslim Brotherhood due to the group’s increasing role in Egyptian politics.

At best, the United States was hesitant to engage with the Muslim Brotherhood; at worst, it was downright suspicious and unhelpful. Part of this could have been for fear of upsetting institutional interests. Getting close to the Muslim Brotherhood would have raised objections on the behalf of the Egyptian and Israeli governments. Another reason is that associating with the Muslim Brotherhood would have gone counter to the United States’ idea of what a friend should look like. The Muslim Brotherhood took some conciliatory stances, including wishing to preserve good relations between Egypt and Israel. But they were overshadowed by negative statements regarding, among other things, the legitimacy of Israel and intentions of changing the form of government, both of which went counter to the expected language of the United States’ friends. Even Mubarak, whose position as a dictator contradicted America’s idea of ensuring freedom, at least paid lip service to democracy, a liberal economy, and a secular state. Domestic pressure might have added further pressure to maintain limited contact. A constant refrain from Congress, even before the revolution ended, was that the outcome of the revolution was good but that it would be harmful if it brought Islamists to power. Consequently, at the time that Morsi

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5 House Committee on Foreign Relations, Reflections on the Revolution in Egypt, Part I, 47.
assumed the presidency, there was little promise for a strong relationship between the United States and the new president.

**The First Months**

On June 30, 2012, Morsi was sworn in as president of Egypt after beating Ahmed Shafiq, the regime candidate, in the second round of elections with 51.7% of the vote. In spite of his popular victory, Morsi’s first months in office—in fact, his entire appointment—would be defined by a struggle for power with the deep state, the SCAF, and a dubious opposition movement.

**Early Power Struggles**

Even before being sworn in, Morsi’s presidency was an embattled one. Shortly beforehand, the SCAF issued a constitutional declaration that moved some powers from the presidency to the military and dissolved the FJP-majority People’s Assembly. On July 9, Morsi attempted to undo this and reinstate the People’s Assembly but was blocked by the Supreme Constitutional Court, whose decision he acceded to. Morsi argued that he bowed to the court out of respect for it and Egyptian laws, but in reality he likely sought to avoid a major confrontation before he had a chance to develop his power.

As time went on, Morsi seemed to have a small success in reining in the military. On August 5, an attack on a police station in the Sinai killed sixteen guards. On August 12, Morsi used this security lapse to force Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, Minister of Defense and Chairman of the SCAF, and Sami Anan, Armed Forces Chief of Staff, into retirement. He also used the opportunity to scrap the constitutional document that gave the military legislative and executive powers. Some applauded this move as rightfully returning power to the executive. In actuality, this was not a highly consequential move because Morsi still needed good relations

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6 The historical chronology for this chapter is largely based off of “Egypt’s President Morsi in Power: A Timeline,” and Ozdemir and Haddad, “Timeline: Morsi’s rule over Egypt.”
with the military. Tantawi and Anan were made presidential advisers to make up for their
removals and while Tantawi’s wings may have been clipped, other SCAF members were given
prominent jobs. One example of this was Vice Admiral Mohab Mamish, who was put in charge
of the important Suez Canal Authority. Thus the move proved to be cautious, not revolutionary.

Morsi’s Foreign Policy

Morsi was able to make a larger mark on foreign policy as he worked to revive Egypt’s
anemic foreign policy. From the United States’ perspective, some of these moves were desirable.
By August 15, Morsi had already twice visited Saudi Arabia, a prime opponent of the Egyptian
revolution and the Muslim Brotherhood. Morsi likely did this to indicate his aligning of shared
interests with the military, who saw Saudi Arabia as an ally and sponsor. During the second visit,
Morsi spoke out against Syria’s Bashar al-Assad, saying that Assad should step down. Morsi’s
denouncement of Assad made sense from a religious standpoint: Assad, an Alawite—a Shia
branch considered heretical by many Sunnis—was fighting Sunnis, Morsi’s co-religionists. It
was also understandable from a political standpoint because Egypt had a historically hostile
relationship with Syria tracing back to a failed union in 1961.

Additionally, Morsi was working with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to obtain
loans in order to put Egypt’s economy back on track. He increased the pre-election request from
$3.2 billion up to $4.8 billion to address the rapidly growing budget deficit and Egypt’s
contracting currency. Ostensibly, in applying for the loan, Morsi was demonstrating that he was
willing to make liberal economic reforms in order to get it, something that the United States had
been trying to achieve for decades through half-hearted pressure. An important point to make is
that while the visits to Saudi Arabia, denouncement of Syria, and cooperation with the IMF may
have aligned with American interests, they were conducted predominately or solely for Egyptian

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7 “Egypt’s Morsi ‘empowered’ by army shake-up.” Al-Jazeera, last modified August 14, 2012,
interests. There was no evident pressure by the United States for Morsi to visit Saudi Arabia or criticize the Syrian regime, both of which were beneficial to Morsi’s position in Egypt. As for the IMF process, it had started before Morsi was sworn in and was one of the most affordable ways to arrange such a large loan.

However, several of Morsi’s foreign policy decisions had a negative or mixed impact on American foreign policy. He visited Iran on August 30, the first such trip by an Egyptian president since the 1979 Iranian revolution. While there, he did criticize Iran for supporting the Syrian president. Nevertheless, such a visit was still counter to the United States’ interests of controlling the Middle East and restricting potential regional hegemons. On a more mixed note were Morsi’s early relations with Israel. On the one hand, the Muslim Brotherhood was clearly no friend of Israel and questioned its legitimacy to exist. Israel was likewise unfavorable towards the Muslim Brotherhood and did not want an Islamist neighbor. Israel was paying close attention to Egypt’s domestic maneuvers; for example, Israel voiced its “great concern” with the removal of Tantawi, seeing that Tantawi was a proven ally of Israel whereas Morsi was a wildcard. On the other hand, Morsi ensured that cooperation on military and intelligence matters continued. This was demonstrated by the fact that following the attack on the Sinai police station in August, Egyptian and Israeli forces cooperated in a large security sweep that saw thirty-two “criminal elements” killed and a further thirty-eight arrested. Such collaboration was necessary for any effective measures because the size and actions of Egyptian forces in the Sinai were limited under the 1979 treaty. Morsi’s early foreign relations were far from perfect, but he showed that

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8 “Egypt’s Morsi ‘empowered.’”
he was dedicated to maintaining the status quo with Israel, ensuring the security of the Sinai, and adhering to the 1979 treaty—something it was feared that he would drop.

**U.S.-Egyptian Relations**

The United States initiated relations with the new government with a visit by Secretary of State Clinton from July 14-15, soon after Morsi’s swearing in. During her visit, she met with Morsi and Tantawi—when he was still Chairman of the SCAF—as well as various government, business, and civic leaders in an attempt to show that the United States was in touch with all parts of Egyptian society. During her visit, Clinton promised Egypt hundreds of millions of dollars in assistance that the United States had previously pledged to Egypt in May 2011. In explaining the continued cooperation, Clinton said that the two countries’ “shared strategic interests far outnumber our differences.” With this, Clinton indicated that the United States wished to continue the relationship despite any disagreements in outlook. However, in her other remarks, Clinton emphasized support for the Egyptian people and democracy, signifying that Morsi would not receive the same level of personal support that Mubarak and the SCAF had received.

Overall, though, the relationship was fairly quiet during Morsi’s first months. Egypt appeared to be relatively stable and carrying out its security commitments. With no crisis in sight, the White House had more pressing issues to devote its attention to and the bureaucracy was able to return to its standard operating procedure. For his part, Morsi was mostly trying to maintain the status quo, including its treaty with Israel, and was focused on domestic issues. The relationship continued to function in an acceptable, if not particularly close, manner.

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Morsi’s Dichotomy: September 11 and Gaza

The next period, spanning from September to December, was defined by two contrasting events: the September 11 attack on the American embassy and the clashes in the Gaza Strip November 14-21. The former received the opprobrium of the United States, the latter its praise. This section explores how such a dichotomy came to be and how it affected the relationship.

September 11 Embassy Attack

On September 11, 2012, American diplomatic facilities in several Muslim countries were attacked in reaction to a heretical trailer of the prophet Muhammad being circulated that originated in the United States. The worst attack occurred in Libya where four Americans, including the ambassador, were killed in a diplomatic compound in Benghazi. In Egypt, the embassy was breached and the American flag torn down to be replaced by an Islamist banner. While significantly more minor than the Libyan attack, it was still of considerable concern to the United States government. Even more concerning was that Egyptian security forces failed to do anything to prevent it.

The Egyptian response was silence. On the day of the attack, there was no comment from the Egyptian government. The following day, Morsi, through a spokesman, condemned the trailer and called for the Egyptian embassy in Washington to take legal action against the film, but there was still no reaction to the attack itself. Obama responded to this deafening silence in an interview with Telemundo on the night of the 12th, where he said, “I don't think that we would consider them [Egypt] an ally. But we don't consider them an enemy…. I think that we are going to have to see how they respond to this incident.”

Although Egypt had never been a true ally, Obama appeared to question the future of the U.S.-Egyptian relationship with

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this statement. On September 13, Obama called Morsi to review the strategic partnership.\footnote{Readout of the President’s Call with Egyptian President Morsi,” White House, press release, September 13, 2012, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/09/13/readout-presidents-call-egyptian-president-morsi.} It was only with Obama’s seeming denouncement of Egypt and a follow-up call that prompted Morsi to respond in a broadcast. In it, he reiterated his condemnation of the film and said that Egyptians must not attack embassies when they protest.

The logic behind Morsi’s non-response was two-fold. In focusing his condemnation on the trailer rather than the protesters, he was playing on the shared images of standing up for Islam and against the domineering ways of the United States, proving that he was no puppet and could defend his people’s values. More pressingly, he was acting based on domestic pressure. The main elements behind the protests were conservative Muslims, Morsi’s main constituency and allies. By disowning or even cracking down on the protests, he would have been targeting his own power base. With little popularity for the United States in Egypt, he would have gained little approval from other groups, too. Morsi must have weighed the options and decided that he would only suffer domestically by taking a strong stance against the attack.

The United States, and Obama specifically, were disappointed with Egypt’s response. At the same time, the fallout from the Libyan attack captured a majority of the attention, and because the attacks also affected Yemen and Tunisia, Egypt was not the only country at fault. Despite Obama’s seeming devaluation of the relationship in his Telemundo interview, American leverage was fairly weak. Obama’s phone call with Morsi only brought about a minor reaction on the part of Egypt. Senator Rand Paul (R-KY) attempted to pass a bill to block aid to any country under sanction for allowing an embassy attack to happen, but it was stopped in the Senate with a 10-81 vote.\footnote{S. 3576, 112th Cong. (2012).} In the same Telemundo interview, Obama referenced Egypt’s assistance when he said that the United States “doesn't have an option of withdrawing from the
world ... we're the one indispensable nation.” Whatever its concerns, Obama admitted that the United States could not afford to punish the negligent countries because American interests were at stake and could not be tossed away for a relatively minor issue.14

This apparent disinterest in using leverage or taking the issue further was displayed in late September when the administration informed Congress that it intended to give Egypt a $450 million cash infusion. The money was to be the first tranche of the $1 billion that had been promised in May 2011 but held up by negotiations. The aid, $190 million immediately, was meant to help Egypt with its $12 billion budget shortfall. Representative Kay Granger (R-TX), chairwoman of the appropriations subcommittee responsible for foreign assistance, responded that she would block the aid and, further, that Egypt’s aid had been under intense scrutiny since Morsi’s election.15 Although Granger was the first and most ardent to speak out in this instance, she was far from the only Congress member to harbor underlying concerns about continued assistance to Morsi’s Egypt.

The question arises why Congress and the administration approached the aftermath of the attack with such different priorities. In part, Congress was responding to domestic pressure. For obvious reasons, the attacks were poorly received by the American people. Less than a month after the attack, 71% of Americans were found to desire a reduction in aid to Egypt as compared to only 52% seeking a reduction in June 2012.16 Because of Congress’ duty to represent its constituents, it was only natural that it would respond to this swing in public opinion.

Furthermore, Congress was taking advantage of the crisis to push its own objectives. Crises are a

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time when different institutions—including Congress—can advance their own agendas and have a better chance at affecting change. Congress had been deeply suspicious of the Muslim Brotherhood even before Morsi’s rise to the presidency, and this incident served as a confirmation of pre-existing views. By blocking aid, Congress hoped to implant its own direction into foreign policy and force Egypt to reform. Conversely, the administration wanted to protect the United States’ interests, and not only for the short-term. As Obama said on Telemundo, Egypt might not have been an ally but since it was also not an enemy, the United States did not have the option to sever a relationship that otherwise appeared to be serving its interests. Using the crisis model, the administration was the defender of the existing interests that Congress was challenging.

*Clashes in Gaza*

On November 14, the Israel Defense Forces began the eight day Operation Pillar of Defense in the Gaza Strip. The operation was launched against Hamas in response to mass rocket attacks and the ambush of an Israeli patrol along the border. Israeli initiated the operation with the killing of Ahmed Jabari, the chief of Hamas’ military wing. It spent the rest of the time wiping out Hamas’ facilities and reducing its ability to put up future resistance.

The United States embraced the operation as the right for Israeli self-defense; Egypt’s reaction was more mixed. Publicly, Egypt stood against the operation. It condemned Israeli aggression and summoned the Egyptian ambassador from Israel who had only been appointed on October 17, and who had arrived in Israel with a very warm letter from Morsi to President Shimon Peres. Egypt also dispatched its Prime Minister to Gaza, giving Hamas a temporary shield because Israel would not want to risk killing the Egyptian politician. Behind the scenes, however, it had a much more positive impact. It helped de-escalate the conflict by assisting in the reaching of a ceasefire. Additionally, Egypt used security and intelligence contacts to maintain
communication with Israel and emphasize that Egypt intended to continue adhering to the 1979 treaty. Morsi reached out to Obama over the phone to stress the importance of good relations between Washington and Cairo, indicating that Egypt was on the United States’ side for the conflict.¹⁷

Egypt’s mixed actions were guided by contradictory interests. Morsi had to play to domestic pressure and internal shared images, which both called for public actions standing up to Egypt’s historical antagonist. At the very least, Morsi could not be perceived as doing less than the previous regime. While certainly not a populist leader, Mubarak regularly summoned the Egyptian ambassador back to Cairo as a sign of disapproval during crises. Similarly, because Hamas is a Muslim Brotherhood offshoot—albeit a completely independent one—with similar goals of bringing Islamist governance to the region, it would have had a negative impact on the Muslim Brotherhood if it were to stand by, or even help, as Hamas was being crushed.

At the same time, Morsi himself was struggling to contain Islamic insurgents in the Sinai and was not receiving any benefits from Hamas lashing out against Israel. As such, he used the crisis to re-build his reputation with Israel and the United States, both of whose support he needed for security and economic recovery. The instability that Hamas and other groups were creating in the Sinai and the Gaza Strip were certainly not attracting tourism or foreign investment to Egypt. By taking a moderate approach during the operation, Egypt could kill two birds with one stone: it would receive help in cracking down on groups sapping its resources and would prove its credentials to Western backers for future assistance. Since there was no hope of

Egypt controlling Israel or pushing it out of Gaza by itself, the best it could do was solve the conflict quickly while lessening the burden on Hamas.

   Beyond praising the Egyptian response after the fact, the United States did not appear to use any leverage on Egypt to get it to act in such a positive manner. The United States was clearly pleased that Egypt chose to act as mediator, reminiscent of its role in the 1980s and 1990s between Israel and Palestine that helped lead to the Oslo Accords. Yet in this case, it did not need to pressure Egypt because Morsi was doing what he perceived as being in Egypt’s interests. Despite the praise by the administration, Morsi’s action did not help his reputation with Congress or erase memories of the September 11 attack. Egypt was due to begin having 20 F-16s delivered in mid-January as part of a deal concluded under Mubarak. In mid-December, Representative Mac Thornberry (R-TX), Vice Chairman of the House Armed Service Committee, stated that giving modern fighters to Egypt was dangerous—even though Egypt already possessed over 200 F-16s. Representing the conflicting approaches, a Pentagon spokesman replied that the delivery “reflects the U.S. commitment to supporting the Egyptian military’s modernization efforts [and] will increase our militaries’ interoperability, and enhance Egypt’s capacity to contribute to regional mission sets,” while also emphasizing the historic relationship. Where Congress saw the possibility of future misuse, the administration and bureaucracy saw the possibility of a stronger future.

   Just as there was a dichotomy in Morsi’s policy during this period, so was there a dichotomy in the effects on the U.S.-Egyptian relationship. Congress’ opinion of Egypt soured from the September attack on the embassy and did not improve from Egypt’s positive role in Gaza. Conversely, the administration chided Morsi for failing to protect the American embassy

but did not allow it to affect the relationship. Both were driven by their pre-existing views.

Congress never trusted Morsi and never seemed willing to give him a chance to prove himself.

The administration, while not necessarily trusting of Morsi, still saw the U.S.-Egyptian relationship as being more important than any one regime or incident. If there is one important change during this period, it is that Congress began to seek to apply more leverage to the relationship. Before, Congress was cautious about disbursing aid to Egypt but always permitted it in the end. With the September attack, Congress now had a reason to back up its intentions. Specifically, Congress blocked extra funds to assist Egypt’s inflating deficit, attempted to sanction Egypt over the embassy attack, and stated its intent to halt the F-16 delivery. Such actions would only escalate in the coming year.

**New Year, New Priorities**

Between January and May of 2013, Egyptian politics were defined by Morsi’s besieged presidency. In turn, this uncertainty began to affect parts of Egypt’s relationship with the United States.

*Domestic Events*

During these five months, Egypt was beset by protests. In mid-December, Morsi had finally pushed his version of Egypt’s constitution through in a referendum that was passed with 63.8% of the vote but only 32.9% turnout. This led many opposition figures to question the legitimacy of the new constitution if only about a fifth of the country’s population actually voted for it. Protests started on January 25, the two year anniversary of the Egyptian revolution, and saw clashes in Tahrir Square that resulted in hundreds injured and several dead. Clashes between pro- and anti-Muslim Brotherhood protesters continued, forcing Morsi to cut a trip to Europe short, and over fifty people were dead by January 31. By late March, clashes had escalated to attacks on FJP offices and Morsi threatened to “cut off the fingers of those meddling in Egypt’s
affairs.” By April, the strife had extended to attacks by Christians and Muslims against one another, with one clash on April 6 leaving four Christians and one Muslim dead. On May 7, Morsi tried to revamp his government by shaking up the cabinet. Among the changes, he replaced three ministers with members from the Muslim Brotherhood, giving the new cabinet a composition of eleven Muslim Brotherhood ministers out of a total of thirty-five ministers. Among the new Muslim Brotherhood members was Yehia Hamed, Minister of Planning and International Cooperation, which is responsible for handling foreign assistance.

Racked by the protests and stalled government, Egypt’s economy was deteriorating at a rapid pace. In January, Standard and Poor’s downgraded Egypt’s credit rating to a “B-,” the same as Greece, which was on the edge of defaulting.19 By April, Egypt’s foreign currency reserves were 60% below its December 2010 levels, having fallen from $36 billion to $13.4 billion.20 Egypt’s economic recovery was hampered by the failure to obtain the IMF loan. By 2013, the negotiations had been dragging on for two years. When negotiations started, the loan may have been able to make a difference but by this point, the loan was desperately needed merely to keep things from falling further apart. Negotiations were regularly interrupted by the clashes. But negotiations were also hurt by Egypt’s inability to provide the desired reforms. IMF loans come with the expectation that the receiving country will implement certain measures—usually including economic liberalization, expenditure cutting, and an end to subsidies—so as to fix the root of the problem. In Egypt, such measures would have been a death sentence to the government. Budget and subsidy cuts would have eroded any remaining acceptance of Morsi’s

leadership among the bureaucracy and military, and it would have brought the populace to a state of even greater fury towards his administration.

In this case, Qatar was Egypt’s white knight. On January 8, Qatar stepped in with a $2.5 billion package, composed of a $500 million grant and a $2 billion deposit into the Central Bank, for Egypt to shore up its foreign reserves. Three months later, Qatar supplied another $3 billion in deposits as the situation became even worse. This was in addition to a range of other benefits including covering Egypt’s gas exporting contracts for the summer and giving Egyptians favorable business exemptions in Qatar. Even before that, in September 2012, Qatar had announced that it would channel $18 billion in investments into Egypt over five years focusing on gas and tourism.

There are a number of reasons why Qatar decided to step in where the United States, the IMF, and most other nations were hesitant to do so. One is that Qatar had long been a supporter of Islamist movements in general and the Muslim Brotherhood in particular. Supporting Egypt meant supporting its ideological position and a natural ally. Another possible explanation is that Qatar’s support for Egypt was part of its larger scheme for expanding its influence in the Middle East. Qatar and Saudi Arabia were engaged in a contest of which country could exert greater sway over the region. This was best on display in Syria, where each country supported different opposition groups to the detriment of the overall resistance. By being there for Egypt in its time of need, Qatar might have hoped to capture a large player in the Middle East and the resulting status that would have come with it. An alternate reason is that Qatar was practicing good business. It would hurt the entire Middle East, not only Egypt, if Egypt became a failed state.

21 “Egypt finance.”
22 Tuttle and El-Tablawy, “Egypt.”
Qatar’s grand investment was a way to shore up the Egyptian economy while getting in on the Egyptian economy on the ground floor. In all likelihood, Qatar was motivated by a combination of all three reasons and, perhaps, by some other incentives. The impact on the U.S.-Egyptian relationship, while not clear, is that the United States probably lost some influence with Egypt because Qatar, not the United States, was now Egypt’s main benefactor. However, just as American aid has historically been poorly received by Egyptians, so was Qatari aid. Qatar’s deposits were met with opposition rather than thanks by the Egyptian people because, going back to the time of Mubarak, the government had fostered a distrust of Qatar. The populace also knew that no aid is completely free of strings, despite contrary claims.  


Bipolarity of American Policy  
Continuing the trend from the previous period, American foreign policy entered a stage of even greater divergence between the intentions of the executive and legislative branches. The bureaucracy, particularly the Department of State and Secretary of State John Kerry, continued pressing for a preservation of the status quo regardless of its criticism and flaws. In a letter to a senator who requested freezing the F-16 delivery, the Department of State’s Assistant Secretary of Legislative Affairs voiced the standard argument that:

Egypt continues to play an important role in regional peace and stability. ... Delaying or cancelling deliveries of the F-16 aircraft would undermine our efforts to address our regional security interests through a more capable Egyptian military and send a damaging and lasting signal to Egypt’s civilian and military leadership as we work toward a democratic transition in this key Middle Eastern state.
This rhetoric was subsequently demonstrated in several actions. On February 10, it was confirmed that Bright Star planning was going forward despite instability. In early March, Kerry released $250 million, including $190 million of the aid promised in September, that had been held up by Congress while he was in Egypt during his first trip outside of the United States as Secretary of State—itself a symbol of Egypt’s importance to the administration. On May 10, Kerry quietly waived the certification requirements to allow the disbursement of Egypt’s assistance even as the country was falling into chaos. Throughout, the Department of State and other bureaucratic organizations were guided by the idea of supporting America’s strategic interests above all else. Officials perceived Egypt as being critical to the continued stability of the region since it could affect all four of America’s predominant interests: Israel, oil supply, control, and stability. Although largely silent on the relationship since his September condemnation of Egypt, the president clearly sided with the bureaucracy’s position or else Kerry would not have been able to act as he had.

Congress stood on the opposite end of the spectrum, directly contradicting the efforts of the bureaucracy. These efforts preceded this period, going back as far as when the administration promised $1 billion in extra assistance to Egypt; in the end, it took two years to disperse only one-fifth of its value. However, efforts were particularly intense during Morsi’s presidency and, in particular, from January through May. By my count, there were fifteen Congressional resolutions aimed at cutting or freezing Egypt’s aid during Morsi’s presidency. Of those, ten

29 In contrast, I count only three similar resolutions during the much longer period under the SCAF from February 2011 to June 2012.
resolutions were proposed between January and May. Several aspects stand out in regard to these resolutions. First, most of the resolutions—ten out of the fifteen—originated within the House, the more populist of the two sides. Second, the resolutions were strikingly partisan. All but one resolution was proposed and cosponsored solely by Republicans. Even the one bill with a sheen of partisanship, which aimed to transfer $500 million from Egypt’s assistance to the Department of Defense’s tuition assistance program, had two Democratic sponsors to thirty-nine Republicans. Third, every single free-standing proposal failed. Of the fifteen resolutions, only one appears to have even made it out of its committee, and it lost by a margin of seventy-one votes in the Senate. The increase in bills was a sign of changing currents but not of new policy making. Congress was more successful with altering the certification requirements of Egypt’s aid through the appropriations bills, but the administration had easily brushed aside this added layer.

Whereas the administration’s motivations for continuing assistance were clear, Congress’ reasons for limiting Egypt’s aid were more complex. One justification for freezing aid that was regularly given to the press was the fear that Egypt would misuse its military equipment against Israel and, to a lesser extent, protesters. This arose out of the popular image that Islamists were particularly undemocratic and revisionist in behavior. For example, one Democrat in the House who joined efforts to freeze the F-16 transfer said, “I would hate to see American weapons, sophisticated F-16s, being used against Israel. We’ve seen historically, it could happen again, especially with the radicalization of Egypt.”

However, although this was a legitimate rationale behind Congressional efforts, I argue that this reason is factually ridiculous. The relatively insignificant amounts of equipment being delivered to Egypt were not enough to change Egypt’s capabilities or intentions. The twenty F-

16s that were due to be delivered would have supplemented the two hundred F-16s already in Egypt’s air force, and Egypt operates one of the largest M1A1 tank contingents in the world with over one thousand of that tank alone. Additionally, even if Egypt acquired advanced weaponry, its military would still have not been in any condition to attack Israel. Egypt would not only lose because of lack of preparedness, but also because Israel receives even more superior weaponry than Egypt does and keeps it in better condition. Although Senator Jim Inhofe (R-OK) based his bill for halting the transfer of military equipment on the belief that “Egypt’s military is our friend – Morsi is our enemy,” it was Egypt’s military which was to have control of the equipment, not Morsi.  

Yet behind this flawed perception were two deeper ideas. The first was a distrust of Morsi’s presidency because of its pro-Islam and anti-Israel rhetoric, as well as Morsi’s indelicate attempts to rebalance power in his favor. Mubarak was never a good friend of Israel or a paragon of democracy, but he knew how to keep his actions acceptable to the United States and, importantly, put on a sheen of liberal values such as by holding elections. Morsi contravened the image of an American friend—even if that friend is a dictator—and held a very different ideology than what was expected. Representative Tom Cole (R-OK) expressed this when he argued that even if Morsi had taken many actions beneficial to the United States, his rhetoric against Israel and actions contrary to democracy still warranted the conditioning of Egypt’s aid. The second is that, stemming from this distrust, Congress desperately sought to achieve some form of leverage that would give it greater control over Egypt’s behavior. The need for leverage

was the justification given for preventing the administration from delivering the $450 million in aid. Inhofe defended his bill for conditionally halting the transfer of military equipment by saying that cutting all sales—and presumably permitting all sales—“would rob the U.S. of leverage to put Egypt on the path toward true democracy.”

Congress was also acting based on domestic pressure. By conditioning Egypt’s assistance, Congress was appealing to popular sentiment. It was found in a May poll that 51% of Americans thought that the United States “should insist [to Egypt] that rights be guaranteed for all citizens as a condition for any U.S. support.” As the representative of the American people, Congress sought to reflect this feeling. Further, by freezing the aid, Congress would have been moving closer to cutting wasteful programs and achieving financial solvency. Although foreign aid accounts for approximately 1% of the federal budget, popular conception holds that it makes up a significant amount of the budget: in one poll, the average answer was that 28% of the budget is spent on foreign assistance. With Republicans in the mood for cutting unnecessary expenses, limiting aid to a questionably friendly country seemed like it would be a good gesture towards reducing the United States’ ballooning deficit.

**Leverage by the United States**

During this period, the United States’ leverage was defined by its inability to deliver and, as such, to capitalize on potential leverage. This was exacerbated by the different intentions of the administration and Congress. By this point in the relationship, the United States’ annual $1.5

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33 Inhofe, “Inhofe Introduces Legislation.”
36 Londoño, “U.S. lawmakers.” One representative who introduced a bill to suspend Egypt’s assistance rationalized his action by asking, “Why are we giving billions to Egypt, when in my mind it is not a friend of America? We’re drowning in a sea of debt. Why are we spending so much money in a part of the world that doesn’t like us?”
billion in assistance had become routine and by refusing to disburse it, it might have hurt the United States’ position more than Egypt’s. The United States did possess potential leverage with its additional aid. Yet it took two years to deliver less than $450 million during a time when Egypt was probably losing that much every month in its foreign reserves alone. If anything, the delay proved the United States’ inability to be there for Egypt when required. Likewise, adding extra conditions onto the F-16 jets, which were already paid for, would have hurt Egypt’s willingness to act on the United States’ interests more than anything else. A third instance that the United States failed to live up to its promise was with the IMF loan. The United States told Egypt that it would help in obtaining the loan, yet negotiations continued throughout Morsi’s entire presidency with nothing to show for the United States’ effort.

A less material form of leverage that the United States possessed was its engagement with the Muslim Brotherhood. As a superpower working with an embattled political party, the mere act of engaging would, in some ways, help legitimize the Egyptian regime. For instance, there were two visits by a Secretary of State during this period. Yet this, too, fell short. Even if the United States’ backing would have made a difference for Morsi—which is debatable, seeing how unpopular the United States was in Egypt—it was not able to give even this. Obama devalued the relationship following the September 11 attack, which he never retracted, and Congress’ constant verbal attacks did little to assure Egyptians or other Arabs that the United States actually supported the Egyptian government.

The message from the United States was that while Egypt was expected to continue upholding the United States’ interests, the United States could not coordinate its own actions well enough to assist. In trying to exert leverage by withholding these things, Congress was only

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harming the United States’ ability to leverage its relationship because leverage of this type only works if there is something to lose. Since Egypt was barely receiving anything from the United States in the first place, there was little motivation to meet Congress’ expectations. The amounts in question also paled next to the grants, deposits, and promised investment—reaching around $25 billion—that Qatar had given to Egypt within the span of a year with nothing asked for in return. The outcome is that the administration was not able to affect anything during this period and Congress’ actions were arguably counterproductive to American interests because they allowed Egypt’s security and economy to deteriorate further, reducing Egypt’s capacity for ensuring stability in the region.

*Egypt’s Perspective*

Morsi’s government was caught between the need not to alienate the United States’ assistance, however small it was, and domestic sentiments that held otherwise. Egypt’s response was muted because it wanted the United States’ aid, regardless of its size, and did not want to do anything to specifically jeopardize the relationship. A little aid was still better than no aid for a country that was barely surviving. Likewise, as noted above, the United States’ interaction with Egypt, such as Kerry’s visit to Egypt, conveyed legitimacy on Morsi. The United States could also act as a moderating force on the Egyptian military, which, at best, was passively hostile toward the Muslim Brotherhood and, at worst, actively subverting its power. In spite of his rhetoric that would indicate otherwise, it appears as if Morsi’s interests aligned with those of the United States in many ways, including maintaining peace with Israel, controlling the Sinai and the Gaza Strip, and countering terrorism.

At the same time, Morsi could not permit the United States to have any significant influence. Egypt’s shared images still held that Egypt was a sovereign territory in which no
country, especially a domineering Western power, would be allowed to meddle. This point was made by Amr Darrag, Egypt’s Minister of Planning, when he said:

The Egyptian-American relationship is a strategic one, but to sustain it, it has to be correct on equal footing and based on mutual interests, and the U.S. aid is an investment in U.S. interests. If we start talking about conditionality, it would not be a healthy relationship.\(^{38}\)

This has been the position of every Egyptian regime since 1979: assistance should be given to ensure mutual interests, not to prioritize American interests over Egyptian ones. Domestic pressures were also strongly against bowing to American demands. It was a popular move to oppose the United States. A poll of Egyptians in May found a heavily negative view of the United States and its assistance: 81% saw the United States unfavorably; 70% believed that a strong U.S.-Egyptian bilateral relationship was not important; approximately 55% felt that economic and military aid had a negative impact on Egypt; and 63% wanted to annul the 1979 peace treaty while only 32% wanted it to remain.\(^{39}\) Since Morsi needed all of the support he could gather during this period, acceding to American pressure would have only hurt him further while opposition to it could have only helped.

Furthermore, similar to Mubarak during the 2011 revolution, Morsi was not in a position to make the changes that Congress was demanding. Morsi was fighting for his political life with daily protests and, toward the end of the period, attacks on FJP and Muslim Brotherhood facilities. He was not going to consent to demands for respecting protesters’ rights in return for a few hundred million dollars and, in all likelihood, the loss of his presidency. His constituency—made up of Muslim Brotherhood members, Salafists, and other Islamist groups—became more

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\(^{38}\) Elshinnawi, “US Adjusting.”

\(^{39}\) “Egyptians Increasingly Glum: Not Optimistic about Economy or Certain They Are Better Off Post-Mubarak,” Pew Research Center, May 16, 2013. Similar to their American counterparts, the Egyptian public was not well educated about the specifics of foreign aid: 25% believed that military aid was the largest, 30% that economic aid was, and 33% that both forms were equal.
important to him as his presidency was increasingly threatened. Because his constituency viewed the United States and Israel as enemies, not allies, Morsi would have been even harder pressed to meet American demands. The result is that as Congress applied increasing pressure, Morsi was in less and less of a position to fulfill it.

**Descent into Counter-Revolution and American Inaction**

*The Road to Morsi’s Overthrow*

Events entered a downward spiral for Morsi’s presidency in June. In the beginning of the month, the anti-Morsi Tamarod (Rebel) movement began to gain traction. The movement sought to remove Morsi from the presidency. As a show of intention, Tamarod declared that it would hold a mass demonstration outside of the presidential palace on June 30, the anniversary of Morsi’s appointment to office. If the opposition was able to gather more supporters than the number of people who approved the new constitution, it was hoped that it would prove the illegitimacy of Morsi’s rule. Instead of calming tensions, Morsi managed to inflame them when, on June 16, he announced sixteen new governate heads. Among them were seven members of the Muslim Brotherhood and, in Luxor, a former member of a terrorist group that had conducted a deadly attack in Luxor in 1997. These appointments were poorly thought out and even more poorly received, serving to prove that Morsi was out of touch with the public.

The pressure to reach a solution increased quickly as the date for the mass protest drew closer. On June 26, the Salafist Nour Party, with the army’s backing, began last ditch attempts to mediate between the Muslim Brotherhood and the opposition. Morsi appeared oblivious in his responding speeches, refusing to step down or accommodate the opposition. Parallel to Morsi’s intransigence, the army began to deploy into the streets without Morsi’s permission. On the 27th,  

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40 A counterargument is that Morsi was willing to take criticism from Salafists for drawing closer to Shiite Iran when he received Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad at the Cairo airport for a conference on February 5. A possible rebuttal to this counterargument is that because Morsi did not engage with Iran after this incident, he noted the dissent and changed his actions.
Muslim Brotherhood leaders ordered its members to mobilize in order to defend the organization’s establishments—including the presidential palace—as the army continued its deployment. The Muslim Brotherhood’s mobilization proved necessary the following day when the military, police, and intelligence organizations announced that they would bow to the will of the people, meaning that the Muslim Brotherhood was left alone in defending its government. On June 29, several Western countries called for compromise, but millions took to the streets the following day to oppose Morsi’s presidency. With the mass show of support against Morsi, the Western capitals began to become more accommodating to the protests but still urged adherence to the democratic process.

The showdown was triggered the day following the mass demonstrations when the army issued Morsi a forty-eight hour ultimatum to accede to the opposition’s demands by either stepping down or relinquishing his powers to a new cabinet. This prompted ten members of the cabinet to resign. Yet Morsi remained defiant in the face of this outright challenge and insisted that he would retain his power as the democratically elected leader. Nevertheless, the Muslim Brotherhood began to reach out to Western capitals for support against a possible coup. It even claimed that it had the continued support of the White House, but the White House denied this. On the 2nd, the remainder of the cabinet resigned. The army reiterated that Morsi had to step down or hand his powers over to a new cabinet. Like Morsi, it had also been reaching out to the West to convince the governments that it did not want to rule. At midnight, reminiscent of Mubarak, Morsi took to the television to say that he would defend the presidency with his own blood if necessary. The following day, the army seized power for the second time in almost as many years.
The United States’ Role

The United States’ response to Egypt’s deterioration was underwhelming. Perhaps learning from the previous revolution, during which it was largely incapable of affecting the outcome, the United States stepped back and allowed events to take their own direction. For example, when the White House denied Morsi’s claim that it supported him, the action signaled the United States’ overall disinterest in his fate and robbed Morsi of any of the remaining legitimacy that cooperation with the United States had imbued him with. If anything, the United States sided with the opposition as a default by not actively supporting Morsi. This is because as the legitimate government—at least according to democratic process—and a relatively reliant American partner, the United States should have backed him up. Instead it readily discontinued the relationship with the political regime. On July 2, Jen Psaki, the Department of States’ spokeswoman, said, “We’re on neither side. We’re on the side of the Egyptian people.” In reality this was choosing a side because Morsi was the internationally-recognized leader and without resistance, he was going to be ousted from that position in a very undemocratic manner. Likewise, the Department of State chided Morsi for not doing more to appease the protesters and Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel was in contact with the military to caution the use of force, not to demand its absence from the political process.

Obama sets the tone as the leader of the American government and, in a July 1 speech from Tanzania, he distinctly set it against Morsi’s government. In the speech, made near the height of tensions, Obama said, “Our commitment to Egypt has never been around any particular individual or party. Our commitment has been to a process.” Such a statement was a far cry from the support that the same administration gave to Mubarak at the beginning of his troubles, displaying a certain commitment to his individual, but with it Obama dismissed the United States’ stake in Morsi. To Obama, the United States’ largest concern was not the peacefulness or
rightfulness of the protests but rather, harkening back to the September attack, the security of
American facilities. Moreover, Obama said:

We do make decisions [for assistance] based on whether or not a government is
listening to the opposition, maintaining a free press, maintaining freedom of assembly,
not using violence or intimidation, conducting fair and free elections. And those are the
kinds of things that we're examining, and we press the Egyptian government very hard on
those issues.41

With this, Obama did two things. First, he openly criticized Morsi’s government during a period
of crisis, thereby demonstrating the United States’ disinterest in its fate. Second, by saying that
the United States was closely examining Morsi’s government for whether or not aid should be
reconsidered, he brought the future of assistance into question and gave the military an added
incentive to remove Morsi.

There are several reasons for why the United States so readily abandoned Morsi. One is
that even if though Morsi’s actions in regard to security and international relations were
generally in line with American interests, some of his interests were in direct contradiction with
America’s. In particular, his rhetoric towards Israel, combined with his domestic agenda,
challenged the United States’ perceptions for how a friendly country should act. Morsi was as
good as, if not better than, Mubarak in holding up his side of international agreements. But
because Morsi advocated for values that were starkly different from American ones, American
domestic pressure was against him even before he came to office. Congress’ measures have been
well covered in this chapter, and the American public had an equally poor view of Egypt’s
government. Additionally, the United States government probably realized that it had little
leverage over events regardless of what it did. With its halting aid, Morsi owed little to the
United States while the masses protesting against him were uncontrollable. It was likely accepted

41 Barack Obama, “Remarks by President Obama and President Kikwete of Tanzanian at Joint Press Conference,”
speech, State House, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, July 1, 2013.
that the crisis would be resolved by domestic forces, as occurred during the 2011 revolution. Since the United States had extremely limited insight into what was happening, any position taken risked alienating both sides without achieving any result. Consequently, the United States decided to sit it out—while inherently turning away from Morsi—and opted to deal with the status of the relationship after events took their own turn.

**Conclusion**

Morsi’s presidency, lasting from June 30, 2012 to July 3, 2013, was predominately a period of lows for the U.S.-Egyptian relationship. Although Egypt continued to adhere to its obligations and there were no overt breaks in the relationship, each country soured toward the other. Specifically, there were two stumbling blocks during this period. The first was the September 11 attack on the American embassy in Cairo. This attack upset the administration and led it to question the quality of the partnership with Morsi. The second stumbling block was Congress’ sustained opposition to working with Morsi, thereby preventing the administration from building a deeper relationship with him or supporting Egypt’s economy. This antagonism was built around a disconnect of shared images between the two countries as well as mutual public hostility. For his part, Morsi had limited room to maneuver with the United States because of domestic pressure and his promotion of values, such as Islamic governance, that went contrary to America’s values. His position was not made any easier by the fact that even though he generally toed to the American line, the Obama administration was not able to fulfill its promises of extra assistance. The result was that Morsi’s government began to crumble under a barrage of circumstances and, in the end, the United States opted to abandon rather than defend him.

By the end of this period, the U.S.-Egyptian relationship was uncertain. Congress was largely successful in delaying, although not completely stopping, America’s disbursements to Egypt, thus reducing its leverage. In fact, during this entire period, as during the previous period
under the SCAF, the United States had limited leverage over the Egyptian government. This was made worse during Morsi’s presidency because the United States guaranteed him help and then was unable to do so in a timely manner. As evidenced by its quick abandonment of him, Obama’s administration saw little use in maintaining the relationship with him.

There are several lessons that can be learned from this year of the relationship. From the policy perspective, a divide in intentions between the White House and Congress can harm the relationship even if the administration and bureaucracy want to sustain it. Congress’ growing hostility toward Egypt’s leadership, which actually began in the mid-2000s, rose to new levels against Morsi and limited the administration’s maneuverability. At the same time, Congress appeared to have difficulty when making policy that contravened the administration’s line. Of the fifteen free-standing bills proposed during this period that sought to add conditions to Egypt’s assistance, all fifteen failed. Yet Congress did prove its effectiveness in stopping certain policies, especially when it required funding, and managed to delay a few hundred million dollars in fairly insignificant assistance for months. Nevertheless, the administration and its bureaucracy, as the main organs determining and implementing policy, eventually won out and delivered most of what it wanted, even if it was not when it had intended.

Two other lessons deal with the quality of the relationship. First, it is not sufficient for a relationship to merely function on the working level; rather, there needs to be cohesion between the two sides on issues pertaining to politics and values. By most measures, Morsi adhered to Egypt’s prior commitments as well as Mubarak did. Yet even though the relationship continued to function relatively well on the working level, it floundered on the political level and was doomed because of this. The inability to see eye to eye on political issues alienated them from one another and led to the United States allowing Morsi to be overthrown. Therefore, the mere
pursuance of mutual interests is not enough to sustain a relationship in the long-term; there must also be some affinity in values or political goals.

Second, as Egypt entered an era of regularly changing governments, the United States came to value the larger relationship and connections with permanent institutions, such as the military, more than any one regime. The United States never became attached to the SCAF or Morsi the same way it had been to Mubarak. It applauded as they gained power but stood by as they left it. Similarly, the United States did not allow individual incidents, such as the NGO trial under the SCAF or the embassy attack under Morsi, to interfere with the relationship. More important were the pursuit of American interests and the continued military-to-military relationship, both of which could outlast any individual leader. This indicated the possibility of an increased future attachment to the military and a reduced interest in Egypt’s domestic political problems.
Chapter 5: Relations Under Sisi

Introduction

Tensions that had been building for Mohammed Morsi’s entire presidency finally flared in late June and early July, leading to Morsi’s overthrow on July 3, 2013, by Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and the Egyptian army. At the time of the 2011 revolution, Sisi was the youngest member of the SCAF and the director of military intelligence. After the August 2012 debacle in the Sinai, Morsi chose the religiously-observant Sisi as his new Minister of Defense. With time, Sisi supplanted Morsi, eventually rising to become president, savoir of Egypt, and staunch opponent of the Muslim Brotherhood. Since July 3, it has been his actions and his government that have shaped the U.S.-Egyptian relationship.

This chapter, divided into three phases, examines the course of the U.S.-Egyptian relationship from July 3, 2013, up to December 2014. The first phase spans July 3 to August 14, a time of escalating confrontation between the new government and supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood. The U.S.-Egyptian relationship was in a holding pattern as the United States tried to evaluate whether it should accept the course of events or retract aid in retribution for the undemocratic overthrow of the government. The second phase, from August 15 to mid-December, was marked by the increasing withholding of military assistance in response to the Egyptian government’s decision to brutally crack down on its opponents. The final phase goes from mid-December 2013 to December 2014 and addresses the slow but steady return of the relationship to normalcy. Although the relationship has so far continued its upward trend into 2015, this paper does not go beyond the end of 2014 because events are still developing.

The Middle of the Road

For Egypt, the month and a half between July 3, 2013, and August 14, 2013, was defined by two parallel occurrences that went hand in hand: the rise of an interim, post-Morsi
government, and the increasing confrontation between the state and the Muslim Brotherhood. The new government was weak on legitimacy after overthrowing the old government. Because it still believed that it had the right to govern, the Muslim Brotherhood refused to back down and continued to press its position. The outcome is that the government held that it had to decapitate the Muslim Brotherhood to ensure its own survival, whereas the Muslim Brotherhood could not stand down or else it would never be allowed to return to power.

*Events in Egypt*

On the same day that Morsi was placed under arrest by the military, Minister of Defense Sisi announced a roadmap on television. He framed the army’s intervention as an undesirable necessity against a presidency that had ignored the will of the people. As a result, the army invoked its patriotic duty to remove Morsi while renouncing any interest in future politics. The most important points of the roadmap included a temporary suspension of the constitution, the appointment of the chief of the Supreme Constitutional Court as interim president, and early presidential elections. Although one of the other points was to form a committee for national reconciliation, it quickly proved to be hollow when arrest warrants were issued for three hundred Muslim Brotherhood members, aggravating rather than soothing the situation.

One of the priorities of the interim regime was to build the foundation for a strong, anti-Islamist government. On June 4, Adly Mansour, the chief justice of the Supreme Constitutional Court, was sworn in as president. Five days later, he set out a charter for Egypt’s political transition with elections planned for early 2014 and appointed Hazem el-Beblawi, a liberal economist, as Egypt’s Prime Minister. On the same day, Egypt received $12 billion in assistance from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait, all of whom supported the Muslim

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2 When not from an article, events from this period have largely been based off of “Egypt since Mohammed Morsi was ousted: timeline,” “Timeline: Egypt in Turmoil,” and “Timeline: What’s Happened Since Egypt’s Revolution?”
Brotherhood’s removal from power. These packages helped prop up Egypt’s sagging economy and allowed it to drop out of the negotiations for the IMF loan. The exclusion of Islamists from the government was solidified when a new cabinet was appointed on June 16. Of the thirty-three ministers, none were Islamists. Sisi retained his position as the Minister of Defense, consolidating his hold on the government.

As this was happening, the government and the Muslim Brotherhood became locked in conflict. The Muslim Brotherhood’s supreme guide declared July 5 the “Friday of Rejection” and insisted that protests would not cease until the legitimate government was returned to power. The result was sustained protests and dozens of deaths. Three days later, there was a massacre at a Muslim Brotherhood sit-in outside of the Republican Guard club—where Morsi was believed to be held—that saw over fifty Muslim Brotherhood supporters and three soldiers killed. On July 27, clashes intensified outside of Rabaa al-Adawiya mosque, where the Muslim Brotherhood had camped out and made the center of its protests, with at least eighty more people killed. August witnessed a rapid escalation in tensions. The trial for “incitement to murder” of six Muslim Brotherhood leaders was announced on the 4th. On the 7th, the government announced that diplomacy with the protesters had failed and, now that the holy month of Ramadan was over, it would conduct a crackdown after its previous restraint. On August 11, it issued an ultimatum for protesters to clear out from Rabaa al-Adawiya within twenty-four hours. With no surrender three days later, the government declared a month-long state of emergency and moved in to dismantle the camp. Although the Ministry of Health claimed that 149 people were killed, independent

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sources assert that the actual number was over six hundred with thousands more injured as clashes flared across Egypt.

*The United States’ Response*

The United States hesitantly accepted Morsi’s ousting after the fact. In a speech on July 3, Obama criticized the decision, calling it a deep concern. But he refrained from taking any decisive actions, requesting only for a review on whether it affected any American laws relevant to assistance. General Martin Dempsey, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, reacted by saying, “The world needs Egypt to be stable.” He argued that what was occurring in Egypt was for Egyptians, not Americans, to determine, giving implicit approval for the turn of events. John Kerry, as Secretary of State, referred to the military’s actions as “restoring democracy,” while William Burns, the Deputy Secretary of State, declared it a second chance for Egyptians to get their country on track to democracy. Both based their assumptions on the belief that the new government would be more democratic than Morsi’s. Therefore, the administration’s top policymakers were cautiously positive of the move, particularly after the cold shoulder given to Morsi’s government in its final month.

The elephant in the room was whether Morsi’s ousting could be categorized as a coup d’état. According to section 7008 of the appropriations bill responsible for foreign aid:

None of the funds appropriated ... shall be obligated or expended to finance directly any assistance to the government of any country whose duly elected head of government is deposed by military coup d’état or decree or, after the date of enactment of this Act, a coup d’état or decree in which the military plays a decisive role.

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If the administration were to acknowledge that the Egyptian military’s actions could be construed as a coup, by law it would be required to stop all aid except that which was intended for humanitarian and election assistance. The only way to reverse it would then have been for Egypt to hold a free and fair election. This put the administration in a tough spot. The ouster was clearly undemocratic and against legal procedure. At the same time, if the administration were to condemn it, it would immediately affect the U.S.-Egyptian relationship and rob the United States of the ability to leverage its aid to encourage further democracy. The United States would also risk losing its various privileges, such as flights over Egypt and expedited use of the Suez Canal.

Consequently, the American government tried to stay in the middle, neither supporting nor condemning the new government. The United States guardedly approved the transitional government’s election plans, which seemed to be getting Egypt back on track, and even urged the Muslim Brotherhood to participate in the upcoming elections. The United States reached out to both the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, the former to encourage it to press the new government for national reconciliation and the latter to convey concerns over the course of events. But the administration withdrew its ambassador shortly after the ouster and halted the delivery of four F-16s on July 24 to signal its displeasure over the continuing crackdowns that had left more than one hundred dead.

Yet in the same announcement that froze the F-16s, the administration stressed that there were no implications for military assistance, military-to-military cooperation, or Bright Star. It was to act solely as a warning shot, not as a sign of changing relations. The Obama administration calculated that the F-16s were a matter of prestige and were not relevant to

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Egypt’s current situation. A senior defense official framed this decision as a struggle between the administration and Congress. The administration wanted to continue aid whereas certain members of Congress were fighting for a complete cutoff. In this context, the move was meant to assuage Congress and give the administration more time to sell its position before any harsher measures were taken. At the end of July, Obama asked Senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham, both senior members of the Senate Armed Services Committee, to travel to Egypt and meet with its leaders. In Egypt, they pressed the administration’s position for reconciliation involving negotiations by both parties. They simultaneously conveyed a warning that Congress, with or without the administration, could eventually withhold further aid if crackdowns persisted.

There were only minimal attempts to use leverage to change the new government’s behavior, and the few times that leverage was used, it failed to achieve any impact. The administration froze the fighter jet transfer, but it was recognized as an insignificant gesture by both sides and was accompanied by an explicit assurance that nothing more important was being considered. Congress, unlike during Morsi’s presidency, was largely accepting of the administration’s and Congressional leadership’s line that the situation was too fluid to take

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decisive actions.\textsuperscript{12} Hagel had seventeen phone calls with Sisi in an effort to convince him against the sit-in cleanup. Clearly Hagel’s calls had no effect on Sisi’s calculations, but Sisi still answered all of the calls even though he knew that they would be to chide him. This demonstrates that although Sisi easily brushed off the United States’ efforts to control his actions, he was still committed to the relationship.\textsuperscript{13}

There are several reasons why the United States had such a constrained response. Policymakers commonly cited that the situation was too fluid. In other words, they did not want to take an action if they could not predict its repercussions, or risk damaging the relationship if the chaos was going to subside shortly. Another reason is that, similar to previous crackdowns, the United States acknowledged its limited sway over the Egyptian actions and hoped to be a moderating influence on the government, such as through Hagel’s phone calls. This could not be done if the United States froze all of its aid since it would then risk cutting itself out of the picture completely. Furthermore, the United States accepted that Morsi, while elected democratically, had some undemocratic habits and that there was popular support for his removal.\textsuperscript{14} By working with the new government, the United States was still aiming for a proper democratic government, especially if the right pressure could be applied. A final possible rationale is that Egypt was too fragile to be abandoned to its own means. As General Dempsey

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\textsuperscript{12} An exception to Congress’ passivity was Senator Paul, who introduced the Egyptian Military Coup Act of 2013 in early July. He also attempted to block aid through an amendment on a transportation bill. However, his efforts were poorly received by the rest of Congress: his free-standing bill was voted down by eighty-six senators. See Zengerle, “Obama asks”; Allen, “Obama on Egypt”; S. 2477.
\textsuperscript{14} House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Next Steps on Egypt Policy: Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Affairs. 113\textsuperscript{th} Cong., 1\textsuperscript{st} sess., October 29, 2013, 33. In the words of the Acting Assistant Secretary of State testifying before Congress: “At the time, Congressman, we were very clear that we understood that the removal of President Morsi was based on a very strong—very strong view by the—by the Egyptian people on the basis of millions of people on the street that they considered the administration not to have been democratic and we determined that we should continue to work with the interim government as they announced their roadmap to return to civilian—to a democratically-elected civilian government.”
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said, Egypt needed to be stable. Egypt’s stability was good not only for Egypt itself but also for the United States and the entire region because its instability could spill over to other countries, particularly Israel. Stopping aid would have hurt the United States and its regional allies without improving Egypt’s behavior, meaning that the outcome could only be a lose-lose for the United States.

*The Egyptian Government’s Perception of Events*

The actors behind Morsi’s removal justified their decisions on the belief that it was necessary and popular. Where some saw a coup, the civic nationalists behind Morsi’s ouster viewed it as a second revolution similar to the one against Mubarak, which represented the desire for change by a large segment of the population. Groups as diverse as the security forces, liberal seculars, Christian Coptics, and the Salafist Nour Party all joined in applauding the military’s action. In his July 3 speech, Sisi defended the army’s actions by saying that it was urged to act by the people. Nabil Fahmy, who became Egypt’s Foreign Minister, later framed the ouster this way to an American audience, arguing that the Muslim Brotherhood was a failure at governing and had marginalized groups in society. The United States’ reaction was understandable but failed to look at it as an Egyptian. The difference to him was that the United States approached it from a political perspective and ignored the greater societal picture, that the 2011 and 2013 revolutions were fueled by Egypt’s bulging youth population and wanted to control its own future. It was also a fight for survival in which either the army or the Muslim Brotherhood, but not both, could walk away alive. The army’s retention of power would doom the Muslim Brotherhood to repression for the foreseeable future, while the return of the Muslim Brotherhood to power would likely lead it to lash out against the security apparatus and its leaders.

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As a result, the interim government ignored the United States’ pressure for national reconciliation. For one, the United States was not threatening any substantial aid cut off. The United States was also not making any specific demands nor offering clear solutions to the problem. The freezing of aid might have been a blow to the military’s honor, but it would not be nearly enough to change actions for what was perceived as a life-or-death struggle by both sides. After their trip to Egypt, Senators McCain and Graham admitted the futility of their actions, saying that even if they had managed to convince the Egyptian government to offer Morsi a deal, it was unlikely that he would have accepted it. Even if the government had been tempted to accede to the United States’ demands under greater pressure, it would have had second thoughts because of the domestic pressure against the United States and the Muslim Brotherhood. During their visit, the Tamarod movement, which was behind the June 2013 protests against Morsi, refused to meet with McCain and Graham in the then latest sign of anti-Americanism in Egypt. It was not going to be swayed; the United States had rarely supported Egyptians when they needed it. The government actually benefited from perpetuating fear of the Muslim Brotherhood and the undesirability of negotiating with it. By riling up the population, Sisi could attract greater support for his government and policies. Reconciliation would remove the need for a strongman figure who could steer the nation back to prosperity.

Nevertheless, even as he projected a strong image in public, Sisi was at least mildly accommodating in private. Sisi vowed to chart his own course, saying in an interview in early August that the United States had turned its back on Egypt and that the freeze on the F-16s was no way to treat “a patriotic military.” In private, he clearly still valued Egypt’s relationship

17 Hauslohner and Gearan, “Egypt visit.”
with the United States. He returned all of Hagel’s calls and received the visits from Kerry, Burns, and McCain and Graham. Despite his dismissals of American pressure, he also worked to avoid crossing any red lines that would have put the relationship in trouble and necessitated the retraction of aid. However, although Sisi was careful to maintain the relationship, it had nevertheless become less important after Morsi’s ouster because the United States’ leverage was diluted by the Gulf states’ $12 billion in immediate aid. The Gulf aid was significantly larger than the United States’ annual $1.5 billion and came with no restrictions. Moreover, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates had a very different conception of what was desirable in Egypt. They encouraged the crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood, which was a political and ideological opponent in both countries. As a sign of his approval, Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz congratulated Sisi within minutes of his seizure of power. While the United States retained importance—it was still the lifeline of Egypt’s military equipment—its influence was lessened by the domestic struggle and a regional shift in power.

A Partial Halt to Aid

The period between August 15 and mid-December was marked by a downward turn in United States assistance to Egypt and, correspondingly, its remaining influence. At the same time, the freeze of assistance was not complete, and low-level cooperation continued as usual with no move for a complete severing of aid. This section seeks to understand the events behind the period and the United States’ rationale for the partial halt.

Downward Turn

On August 15, Obama reacted to the Egyptian government’s killing of hundreds of Muslim Brotherhood protesters from the previous day. In a speech, he condemned the government’s actions and canceled Bright Star—the first time that Bright Star was canceled out.

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post-interviews-egyptian-gen-abdel-fatah-al-gen-sissi/2013/08/03/6409e0a2-fbc0-11e2-a369-d1954abcb7e3_story.html.
of retribution—which was due to be held in September. He asked his national security team to assess how the events would affect the U.S.-Egyptian relationship. However, he admitted that the United States could not determine Egypt’s future. Obama’s remark proved prescient, for the Muslim Brotherhood staged protests the following day and at least 173 more people were killed. With the death toll now surpassing 1,000, the United States put hold all economic programs directly involving the Egyptian government, announced that it would charge Egypt fees for storing the delayed F-16s, and contemplated whether to halt of a delivery of Apache helicopters.

The interim government continued to solidify its position despite the United States’ pressure. On September 1, Morsi and fourteen other Muslim Brotherhood members were charged with “committing acts of violence and inciting killing and thuggery.” On September 12, the state of emergency, which had been put in place shortly before the August 14 crackdown, was extended for another two months. Egypt also began to distance itself from Qatar, the Muslim Brotherhood’s supporter and a contributor of about $8 billion dollars in mostly Central Bank deposits, by returning $2 billion in deposits. In yet another step toward reining in Egypt, in early October the United States put on hold deliveries of Apache helicopters, Harpoon missiles, M1A1 tank parts, F-16 jets, and $260 million intended for the Egyptian general budget. However, a senior administration official said, “This is not meant to be permanent; this is meant to be the

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19 There are only three other times that Bright Star was canceled: the 1991 Gulf War, the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and the 2011 Egyptian revolution. All three occasions were due to a preoccupation of forces and the inconvenience of the exercises rather than discontent with the relationship. The 2013 cancellation also meant that Bright Star would not be held for four consecutive years.


opposite. It is meant to be continually reviewed.”22 Egypt’s reaction was to renew its relations with Russia. On November 8, Russian officials traveled to Egypt for talks on military-technical cooperation, which included the possibility of buying up to $4 billion in Russian arms with financing from the Gulf.23 A Russian warship concurrently paid a six-day visit to Alexandria, the first such visit since 1992.24 The purpose was to send a message to the United States that if delays persisted, Egypt could turn to Russia, an alternative arms exporter and an American opponent on the international stage.

Even as these stops were being put in place, other parts of the relationship were left alone. On August 19, following the administration’s cancelation of economic program’s with Egypt, the Pentagon awarded a contract to upgrade the Egyptian Air Force’s jets under the assumption that the relationship was to continue normally.25 The October freeze left alone training programs and most spare parts—barring those for the M4A1 tanks—as well as aid destined for healthcare, education, and Egyptian businesses. Announcements put heavy emphasis on the fact that it was only a temporary decision that would not have a lasting impact on the relationship, thus devaluing of its impact.

Policy Considerations for the United States

This subsection investigates why the United States decided to take one of the furthest steps so far in putting the relationship on ice, even if only minimally so. I argue that the United States had three clear options: the status quo (i.e., do nothing), sever aid completely, or—as it

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chose—do a partial halt of aid from where it could either return or retract aid. A fourth option advocated by some was to reallocate the aid itself toward counter-terrorism and non-governmental projects, in the former case ensuring that it would actually be used for a mutual interest and in the latter case bypassing the government to instill democracy from below. This fourth option was not realistic because Egypt would not have approved the change and doing so without Egypt’s approval would only alienate Egypt further. Regardless, Egypt had contracts extending through 2017 such that any modification would have taken years to have an effect.

Ensuring the status quo has been the traditional approach of the United States to avoid jeopardizing the relationship and its benefits. A dominant argument has been that Egypt is too important to alienate. Egypt’s geography, culture, size, and history put it at the heart of the Arab world and make it a central player in regional politics. With tens of billions of dollars already invested into the relationship, it would have been pointless to abandon it only to lose the special privileges and harm Egypt’s ability to act in the two countries’ mutual interests. As covered in chapter 1, Egypt affects all of the United States four vital regional interests. It protects Israel by enforcing peace on its side of the border. It ensures the continued flow of oil by keeping the Suez Canal and the Sumed pipeline open. It helps the United States keep control of the region by opposing countries attempting to become a regional hegemon. And it maintains stability by fighting domestic terrorism and participating in American coalitions. In the words of Derek Chollet, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, continuing Egypt’s assistance “is essential to advancing our core national security interests in the region.”26 The centrality of Egypt in America’s regional strategy had been ingrained in the United States’ collective perception since 1979 and was hard to give up.

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26 House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Next Steps on Egypt Policy: Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Affairs. 113th Cong., 1st sess., October 29, 2013, 17.
The status quo was also strongly supported by the United States’ main allies in the region. Any weakness of the Egyptian government would perpetuate lawlessness in the Sinai and Gaza, in turn hurting Israel. It was the United States’ aid that assured adherence to the 1979 peace treaty; without the aid, there was no guarantee that Egypt would remain faithful to the agreement, especially when a majority of the population opposed it. Israel had already expressed concern over the turn of events in October when the United States had barely affected Egypt’s deliveries.27 The United States is particularly sensitive to Israel’s concerns due to the importance of the Jewish lobby in domestic politics, a consideration for both the administration and Congress. For its part, Saudi Arabia was interested in ensuring that Egypt became stable and defeated the Muslim Brotherhood. Shortly following Obama’s mild critique in mid-August, the Saudi foreign minister referred to Egypt as “our second homeland” and said that his country would compensate Egypt for any lost aid.28 In one gesture, Saudi Arabia sapped the United States’ leverage and displayed that two, not one, relationships were at stake in Egypt. Since both Israel and Saudi Arabia had a more direct interest in Egypt’s fate than the United States did, and therefore more to lose, a decision against supporting Egypt would damage those relationships and raise questions about the United States’ ability to guarantee future security obligations.

A further motivation against altering the status quo is that any change would have hurt the United States without changing Egypt’s behavior. It was highly unlikely that the Egyptian government would alter its course because it viewed the destruction of the Muslim Brotherhood as a necessity for the government’s integrity. If anything, reducing assistance would only damage the already low trust that Egypt and its population held of the United States. This view

27 Gordon and Landler, “Crackdown Response.”
was expressed by Representative Elliot Engel (D-NY), the ranking minority member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. In his opening statement to an October hearing on the future of policy toward Egypt, he said:

I do not believe that suspending the military aid will make the Egyptian Government more democratic or make it easier for the United States to influence its behavior in the future. ... I think it’s more than likely to have the opposite effect and I’m afraid it could jeopardize the close U.S.-Egypt military cooperation that we’ve worked so hard to build over the last several decades.29

It was better to sustain aid in order to retain a seat at the table, at least so that the United States could act as some moderating influence, rather than step away, lose all control over the course of events in Egypt, and cause potentially lasting damage to the relationship.

However, there were at least two strong arguments against maintaining the status quo. The first is that the interim government’s actions were unacceptable and untenable. The United States, with its self-image as a champion of democracy and human rights, could not be seen standing by as the government slaughtered a thousand of its citizens and worked to exclude tens or hundreds of thousands more. The United States had to take some action and, with repeated requests ignored, the only option was to revise Egypt’s assistance. The second is that leaving the aid unchanged would degrade the prospect for future leverage. If the United States failed to amend its aid even as the interim government blatantly attacked its own citizens, then Egypt could question when the United States would ever do so. It would render the United States’ threats a paper tiger, something that could be ignored. Thus, despite the pressure to carry on with the status quo, the United States could not afford to do nothing.

The inverse option was to bring about a large, and potentially long-term, scale down of aid with clear guidelines on what Egypt would have to satisfy to have it returned. One advantage is that Egypt would have been highly unlikely to stop pursuing any mutual interests, such as

29 House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Next Steps*, 4.
peace with Israel and fighting terrorism in the Sinai, because they were vital to both Egypt and the United States. Withdrawing aid might have lost some of the United States’ privileges and made Egypt’s task more difficult, but Egypt could not afford to ignore its security. Furthermore, supporting the interim government was going against every American value. According to a Brookings Institution study by Shadi Hamid and Meredith Wheeler, on a scale from 10 (most democratic) to -10 (most autocratic), Morsi was a 2. This made him more democratic than autocratic, and more democratic than even the average government transitioning to democracy. In contrast, Sisi was given anything between -4 and -7, a significant decline in democracy and a blow to hopes for achieving an actual democratic government. The administration had to consider its domestic image. Supporting an autocratic regime is not a good way to build domestic support, especially if that regime is in the news for murdering its citizens.

A complete halt of aid was also the best chance of having any significant leverage over Egypt. As noted above, refusing to manipulate assistance removes the ability to use future leverage because the United States would appear weak. If the United States is perceived as needing Egypt more than Egypt needs it, then Egypt has all of the power in the relationship. After the August 14 massacre, Senators McCain and Graham said, “The failure of the Obama administration to use our influence to shape events in this critical part of the world has only diminished our credibility, limited our influence, and constrained our policy options.” The only way to reverse this trend was to make a dramatic gesture. Egypt could easily brush off partial aid halts, especially when they were framed as temporary, but the same could not be said for a complete freeze.

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31 DeYoung and Wilson, “Obama balances.”
The reality is that Egypt does depend on the United States and would have encountered difficulty lasting for a long time without the United States. The United States’ aid covered 80% of Egyptian military purchases. Approximately 15% of Egypt’s annual military assistance, or $200 million, was traditionally reserved for Egyptian maintenance costs. Since Egypt had neglected to learn how to maintain its systems, repairs were left to American contractors paid for with American money. Therefore, even if Egypt received complete compensation from Saudi Arabia and decided to cannibalize its own parts, Egypt would not have been able to keep its weapons systems working indefinitely. A foreign weapons supplier like Russia would not be able to introduce its equipment quickly enough or assist with repairs, and Egypt’s equipment was already known for its poor condition and high crash rate of fighter jets. Of course, doing so would hurt Egypt’s ability to pursue American interests, but more importantly it would harm the government’s ability to protect its own interests. The Egyptian government was lackluster about America’s interests, but it could not afford the same attitude towards its own.

There were obvious disadvantages to a complete aid halt. There was the possibility that canceling aid would remove all remaining American influence over the Egyptian government instead of increasing leverage in the long-run. This would have allowed the Egyptian government to take even more drastic actions towards the protesters. Such a decision would also undermine the United States’ standing with Egypt and its regional allies, making future initiatives more difficult. A complete halt could have been construed as support for the Muslim Brotherhood by the Muslim Brotherhood itself and the civic nationalists opposing it. This would have encouraged even more resistance, which was against the point, while inspiring even stronger animosity by the Egyptian population toward the United States. Cutting aid could have

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further meant relinquishing influence with Egypt to an American opponent, such as Russia—which was looking to complete an arms deal—or China. This would have affected not only the United States’ influence over the region but also the billions that American defense contractors have been guaranteed from Egypt. Above all else, it would have meant abandoning vital American interests for ethical ones. Cutting aid certainly would not have helped Egypt counter terrorism, revive its economy, protect the Suez Canal’s security, or enforce peace on its side of the Israeli border, all of which were in the United States’ security interests.

The third option, and the one that was taken, was for a partial reduction of aid. It was intended to serve as a signal, at once both threatening further cutbacks if Egypt continued its actions and promising that the relationship would function normally. An advantage is that this served as a temporary holding pattern that would allow the United States to change direction without any permanent harm to the relationship and without needing to deal with issues of reappropriating canceled aid. A partial freeze was able to gain some of the benefits from each of the two previous options. It would send a message to the Egyptian government but still protect the United States’ interests, and would assuage some of its allies’ concerns while providing domestic cover for the administration’s image. For instance, the assistance that was delayed consisted largely of prestige items: Harpoon missiles and F-16 jets were not going to affect Egypt’s immediate security concerns. As such, symbolic items were withheld for a symbolic purpose, to try and warn Egypt away from its repression.

But the reality is that the middle of the road similarly combined many of the disadvantages from the two other approaches. The middle ground might have made sense in theory but, as seen during the 2011 revolution, all it does is alienate both sides and show that

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warnings can be safely ignored. This position frustrated the United States’ regional allies without improving its reputation. It dismissed Sisi while denying support to the Muslim Brotherhood and pro-democracy activists. It removed the leverage of the aid without giving the United States any more influence. This was considered a safe option but it achieved nothing.

_Egypt’s Nonchalance_

For all of the United States’ agonizing over assistance and how to gain the most leverage, Egypt brushed off the halts to its aid. From a foreign policy perspective, one reason for this reaction is that the United States took so long to react to the coup and refused to call it a coup. Because the United States appeared so reluctant to do anything to the relationship, the Egyptian leadership did not see any reason to fear the latest period of coldness. The emphasis on the impermanence of the delays only reaffirmed that the United States did not want it to last. Furthermore, Egypt knew that even if it did not lobby for itself, Israel and Saudi Arabia were both pressing the United States in Egypt’s interest and, in Saudi Arabia’s case, replacing the United States’ monetary assistance. Sisi could feel safe, even confident, that the aid would return regardless of his reaction, as long as he did not do anything specific to disparage the assistance itself.

Sisi also had a powerful motivation to play to domestic opinion. By standing up to the Muslim Brotherhood and the United States, Sisi hoped to build an image as savior of the nation. Several months in, he still needed to develop the legitimacy of the interim government and, in particular, of himself as its future leader. Bowing to the United States’ demands was a good way to appear weak, contravening the entire myth that he was attempting to build. Instead, Sisi had to appeal to his constituencies—first the military, then the country as a whole—before he could

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consider the United States. At the same time, he carefully avoided crossing any red lines that would permanently sever aid and he continued pursuing the two countries’ mutual interests. Egypt actually stepped up cooperation with Israel after the aid halt, perhaps because of a greater need due to rising terrorism or because it knew that Israel would then apply pressure on the United States.\(^{35}\) When the United States suspended aid in October, Sisi stated that the decision would hurt the United States more than Egypt. Perhaps this was true. But he also did nothing to threaten the loss of more aid and made sure to leave a path open for resuming assistance. From this, it can be deduced that although Sisi put on a strong face, the United States’ aid was important. The United States either could not see this or did not want to risk jeopardizing the relationship.

**A Slow Return to Normalcy**

The year between December 2013 and December 2014 saw a reversal of direction. After August through December of 2013 witnessed a steady decline in relations between the two countries, the new year was marked by the United States’ efforts to restart the relationship stemming from the overwhelming pressures of America’s interests and allies. This section considers the logic behind the United States’ rebuilding of the status quo. It stops in December 2014, even though the trend of mending the relationship continued beyond it, to provide a point for final analysis.

*The United States’ Reversal*

During the year in question, relations slowly but surely began to revert to normal between the United States and Egypt. This initiative was supported by both Congress and the administration. On December 18, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee passed the Egypt Assistance Reform Act of 2013 by a vote of 16-1. The act was intended to ease controls on aid

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by restructuring its conditions to focus on adherence to the 1979 treaty, counterterrorism, and restoring democracy—the first two of which would have been quite easy to fulfill. It also allowed greater flexibility in maintaining assistance after a coup. It is unclear what motivated the committee to bring the bill up in December; perhaps its sponsors reasoned that the halts had not had the desired effect or maybe there was pressure to get the assistance flowing again, particularly from the administration and defense industry. Senator Robert Menendez, the chairman of the committee and cosponsor of the bill, rationalized the bill by saying, “Given the scale of U.S. aid and the ongoing strategic significance of a stable, prosperous Egypt, this total shutdown (of aid) does not serve, in my view, U.S. or Egypt's interests.”

The bill appears to have never made it off of the calendar for a full Senate vote, but it served as a signal to the easing of Congress’ position. The following day, Hagel called Sisi. Although he highlighted concerns over Egypt’s domestic politics, he conveyed the United States’ commitment to the relationship and noted his intent to remain in frequent contact.

After a further pause, the administration attempted to get aid flowing again. In late April, it requested $650 million in military assistance be released for Egypt and, separately, that ten Apache helicopters be delivered. Senator Leahy, a regular critic of Egypt’s assistance, responded by placing a hold on the money and received support from senators of both parties. To him, the United States was getting ahead of itself because the Egyptian government was still clearly undemocratic: by January 2014, the statistics since Morsi’s overthrow had risen to over

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2,500 dead, 17,000 wounded, and 18,000 more detained.\(^{39}\) This effort showed that although the relationship was returning, it was not at full strength yet. On June 8, Sisi was sworn in as Egypt’s latest president after winning the election with 97% of the vote. Kerry followed up by visiting Egypt and releasing $575 million in aid that had been held up for nearly a year. In his remarks, Kerry said, “After three difficult years of transition, the United States remains deeply committed to seeing Egypt succeed.”\(^{40}\) Kerry also expressed confidence that the $650 million put on hold a month prior would soon be restored.\(^{41}\)

The relationship continued this pattern for the second half of the year. Critically, in late June, the State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriation Bill of 2015 was passed. The bill requested Egypt’s standard allotment of $1.5 billion and “recognizes that continued military-to-military cooperation between the United States and Egypt is critical.” It loosened some conditions applied during the 2014 bill, namely returning the Secretary of State’s ability to waive requirements, and allowed free spending of aid on military training and counterterrorism efforts. However, it added that that before the first $725 million could be spent for purposes other purposes, Egypt would have to hold free and fair parliamentary elections, among other things.\(^{42}\) In September, Egypt was one of ten Arab countries to sign up for the United States’ anti-Islamic State coalition, harkening back to Egypt’s participation in the 1991 Gulf War.\(^{43}\) Also in September, Obama and Sisi met on the side of the UN General Assembly for

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\(^{42}\) H.R. 5013, 113th Cong. (2014).

their first face-to-face meeting in which they focused on regional security issues. In December, the United States finally filled the post of ambassador to Egypt, which had gone empty for sixteen months. Several days before that, Obama called Sisi to affirm the United States’ commitment to the strategic relationship and bilateral cooperation while agreeing to stay in touch over the following weeks.46

Yet not everything was perfect. Sisi did manage to take several positive steps as president, among them increasing cooperation with Israel and rolling back expensive state subsidies that had previously seemed impervious. But he also stood up to the West with a refusal to release journalists from prison. In line with that, Egypt was not any more democratic than it had been from June to August of 2013. A segment of the population was still widely oppressed. Mass trials were sentencing the government’s opponents to death. The fact that Sisi was elected with 97% of the vote showed that even if there were elections in Egypt, they were far from free and fair. In another indication of the government’s unreformed nature, in November, Fayza Abu el-Naga—the instigator of the NGO trial against American citizens and a Mubarak holdover—was appointed as advisor to the President for National Security Affairs. Although Sisi remained in contact with the United States, he declined an invite in late July to a White House summit, which would have been his first official visit to the United States as president, even though the

United States had released half a billion dollars in aid only a month prior. In September, Egypt and Russia, in a follow-up to their November meeting, signed a preliminary deal for $3.5 billion in weapons. Both countries insisted that the deal was intended to supplement, not replace, Egypt’s relationship with the United States. Nevertheless, it was a definite signal to the United States that it should be concerned, for if it continued to hold down the relationship, it risked losing influence in and business with Egypt.

The United States’ Logic Behind Normalization

Despite these issues, largest among them the failure to democratize, this period was a time of increasing normalcy. Yet the United States had practically no leverage during this year. In fact, it was Egypt that was using the leverage and the United States that was bowing to it. Egypt was playing a game of chicken with the relationship over who would surrender first. As it were, the United States blinked first because Egypt was too important to lose. Egypt was central in the Arab world but, as a state, it was threatened not only by its economy but also by its security. Between June 2013 and January 2014, there were over three hundred reported attacks in the Sinai as the United States stood by. The materials withheld by the United States were not hurting Egypt’s efforts, but they certainly were not helping them either. This conflict, put alongside the partial freeze of aid, endangered America’s interests. The attacks were already spilling over onto Israel, and terrorism risked affecting the oil traveling through the Suez Canal and the Sumed pipeline. The United States faced a loss of control over the region as Saudi

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Arabia and Russia worked to increase their influence with Egypt. And whereas a strong Egypt could help fight terrorism in the region, a weak Egypt would only perpetuate it.

Pronouncements by American officials only served to show how Egypt was held centrally in their shared image of protecting American interests abroad. In statements by Obama and Kerry during this period, they stressed two aspects: the “historic partnership” and the strategic relationship. The former emphasized how old the relationship is, and thus what a keystone it is to the United States’ position in the region. The latter focused on Egypt’s importance to American interests in the region. Both highlight that the United States values the long-run strategy, sustaining the relationship despite short-run disagreements. This was reiterated by the May 2014 Congressional testimony of General Lloyd Austin III, Commander of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), the military command responsible for the Middle East. In his testimony, General Austin said called Egypt “an anchor state in the Central Region.” Of CENTCOM’s top ten priorities for the coming year, Egypt could have been considered important for at least six of them: containing sectarian fault-lines; defeating Al-Qaeda; protecting lines of communication and global commerce; developing bilateral and multilateral security cooperation; leading collective security frameworks; and shaping partnership programs to make best use of military resources.\footnote{The Posture of U.S. Central Command: Statement Before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense, United States House, 113\textsuperscript{th} Cong. (2014) (statement of General Lloyd Austin III, Commander, U.S. Central Command, Washington D.C.).} This unified image between the president, who is at the center of foreign policy decisions, and the Department of Defense, with its influential bureaucracy and outside supporters, meant that a reversion to pursuing America’s security interests would inevitably happen.

The United States was also motivated to return to the U.S.-Egyptian relationship by pressure from its regional allies and their corresponding domestic interest groups. Saudi Arabia
and Israel mobilization for the return of assistance. A White House aide revealed that the 2015 appropriation bill’s positive changes were lobbied for by Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the United Arab Emirates, and Jordan.53 The United States could not afford to ignore four of its closest regional associates, all of whom were playing important roles fighting terrorism and instability. Similarly, AIPAC and other pro-Israel groups exert considerable domestic pressure in Washington, especially at a time when Jewish voters were being courted by Republican politicians.

Ultimately, the United States realized that the partial hold on aid was not having the desired effect. Assistance was delayed in order to make a statement to Egypt so that it would reform its political system. If anything, that political system became further entrenched, culminating with Sisi’s election to the presidency. Parallel to this, the threats to Egypt were only becoming greater. Adding to instability in the Sinai and Gaza Strip were the dramatic rise of the Islamic State in most regions of the Middle East and the further chaos of Libya, right on Egypt’s western border. This made it so that while there were no benefits to the aid cut-off, there were certainly costs. To regain some level of influence with Egypt and contribute to its efforts, the United States needed to renew aid.

There was clear support for this decision among decision makers within the executive branch. The Department of Defense had attempted to continue the relationship as close to normal even with the partial halts. In his speeches, Kerry came off as overwhelmingly sympathetic to Sisi and the Egyptian government, even more so than the Department of State itself, which was trying to emphasize Egypt’s human rights and democracy issues. As the Secretary of State, Kerry

was able to have a significant impact on his department’s policy decisions, especially when those
decisions were already approved by the president and the Department of Defense.

Unlike during the past several years, Congress on the whole seemed ambivalent or even
supportive towards the return of aid—excluding some outliers, such as Senators Paul and Leahy,
who were vocal but largely ineffective critics of Egypt’s aid. Representative Peter King (R-NY),
Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, had argued that the
aid cut “displays a dangerous indifference to our shared interests with Egypt, which is defeating
jihadist networks operating in the Sinai and throughout the country.”54 On the other side of the
aisle, another influential lawmaker, Senator Menendez, as Chairman of the Senate Foreign
Relations Committee, had earlier made a similar argument that the shutoff of aid did not serve
Egypt’s or the United States’ interests.55 Therefore, the White House had the support of the three
other centers of policymaking—the Department of Defense, Department of State, and
Congress—for changing the failed partial halt.

_**Egypt’s Cool Reaction**_

For the most part, Egypt stood back, at least publicly, from the United States’
contemplations over the future of its assistance. It did not lead a lobbying campaign, but it also
did not lash out at the United States. There were four overall reasons for this. First, Egypt was
confident that the aid would be returned without any effort on its part. Sisi and other senior
officials publicly voiced their expectations that the freeze would blow over with time. In a
television interview, Sisi predicted that the United States’ position would change after his
election—which it did.56 Even if it did not, the twenty to twenty-five billion dollars in assistance
from the Gulf dwarfed the United States’ package. Second, Egypt did not have the option to bow

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55 Zengerle, “U.S. Senate.”
56 Kirkpatrick and Gordon, “Kerry Says.”
to the United States’ demands: if it changed course, the Muslim Brotherhood and its allies would only regain confidence and rise up again. The government’s sole option was to crush them completely, and that required ignoring the United States.

Third, Sisi had to protect his domestic image. In a May 2014 poll, Sisi’s approval rating was found to be 54%, similar to Morsi’s approval rating shortly before his removal. The best way to solidify his position was to play on fears and sentiments. He had to show himself as the defender of Egyptian society—politically, economically, and socially—from the Muslim Brotherhood and its chaos, appear as the champion of the nation, and stand up to the United States to show that he was no pushover or Mubarak. It was especially easy to play to domestic pressure against the United States. An October 2014 poll of Egyptians found a 12% approval rating for the United States, which was less than the Muslim Brotherhood (35%), Hamas (33%), the Syrian regime (14%), and even the much-hated Shiite Iran (13%).

Fourth, he was playing for a better position in the relationship with the United States. The less Egypt appeared to need the United States, the more the United States would need to appeal to Egypt and modify its stance.

**Conclusion**

The outcome of this period, reaching from the early days of July 2013 to December 2014, is that the United States continued on the path of returning aid to its normal status with nothing to show for its partial halt. In the first months after Morsi’s ousting, the Obama administration attempted a balancing act of condemning the Egyptian interim government’s violent repression of protesters while maintaining aid. However, after events became particularly bloody starting on August 14, when over six hundred protesters were killed, the administration was forced to begin

57 Kirkpatrick, “As Egyptians Grasp.”
steadily delaying deliveries and assistance in an attempt to rein in the Egyptian government. It continued this policy until mid-December 2013 with increasingly larger freezes. Yet the administration stressed that the halts were not meant to affect the working-level relationship between the two countries and were only temporary. This helped ensure that the attempt at leverage resulted in no leverage at all. Mid-December 2013 through to December 2014 saw the retraction from this policy as the United States steadily began to normalize the relationship, even though the United States received nothing that it had wanted and Egypt continued to act as it chose. Going into 2015, the relationship seemed destined to return to the status quo once again, with the United States paying Egypt to help protect mutual interests, not to mention the Egyptian military’s prestige.

There are two additional lessons that can be taken away from this chapter. The first is that the United States always ends up placing aid for strategic consensus before aid for economic and political reform. That is, it prioritizes assistance that supports vital interests over secondary interests such as democracy. This was witnessed multiple times in chapter 1 and was observable again in this chapter: for all of its objections, protests, and threats, the United States bowed to pragmatism and forgave Egypt for its violations. First and foremost, the U.S.-Egyptian relationship is for protecting American interests, not for protecting Egypt’s citizenry.

The second lesson is that the U.S.-Egyptian relationship is not occurring in a vacuum. It is not a two-player game between only the United States and Egypt. From the beginning, the entire relationship has always been based on a third country, Israel, and the two countries’ relations with it. This chapter further demonstrated the importance of the United States’ allies—and opponents, for that matter—in directing America’s and Egypt’s interactions. The United States might have revived assistance a lot slower, or not at all, if there had not been such great
pressure from Saudi Arabia and Israel or if Russia had not begun to court Egypt. With their intervention in the relationship, the United States had to take into account a lot more than Egypt’s behavior. The United States’ decisions have to reflect its interests for the entire region, not just with Egypt.
Conclusion

Entering 2015, an observer could be forgiven for missing that anything had happened to the U.S.-Egyptian relationship since 2010. Egypt has witnessed four different governments—Hosni Mubarak, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, Mohammed Morsi, and finally Abdel Fattah el-Sisi—since the beginning of 2011, with cries at each stage for altering the relationship. The United States initially supported Mubarak against large-scale protests that began on January 25, 2011, but it abandoned him once his collapse appeared imminent. The Obama administration subsequently embraced the interim government of the SCAF, which took power on February 11, 2011. The two countries maintained good relations but the relationship became imperiled in the first months of 2012 over the charging of American NGO workers.

The United States applauded the June 2012 appointment of President Mohammed Morsi, the first such democratic presidential election in Egypt’s modern history. Congress never approved of Morsi because of his fiery rhetoric and visions of Islamic governance, leading it to constantly press for cutting off assistance while he was in power. This was further exacerbated by Morsi’s poor handling of the September 11 attack on the American embassy in Cairo and by a vocal Egyptian opposition. Morsi’s year in power abruptly ended with his overthrow on July 3, 2013, by the military as the United States stood by and watched. The United States was hesitant to support the new government but was equally cautious against defining its actions as a coup. The administration was forced to act in mid-August after Sisi’s government began to massacre the Muslim Brotherhood opposition, but the administration restricted its actions to partial aid halts and stressed that they were temporary until Egypt showed signs of improvement.

At each negative turn of events, the United States threatened to take action against the standing Egyptian government; yet by the end of each period, the relationship was largely
functioning as normal again. The relationship, despite hitting its lowest point yet in the fall of 2013, has once again returned to the status quo ante. At the end of March 2015, the administration announced that the weapons freeze—the final remaining sanction from the earlier events—would be removed. This meant that Egypt’s F-16s, Harpoon missiles, and M1A1 tanks could finally be delivered. President Obama assured President Sisi that he would continue to support Egypt’s annual military assistance package of $1.3 billion, the same as it had always received.¹

There were only two pieces from the announcement indicating that anything had happened over the preceding four years. First, to make its spending more flexible, Egypt is no longer allowed to draw from future foreign aid appropriations. Previously Egypt could use its assistance up to three years in advance, such that it could be spending aid from 2013 in 2010. The downside is that this locked Egypt and the United States into decisions made for circumstances years before the delivery. The equipment that Egypt is receiving today is still from Mubarak’s time in office even though Egypt has significantly different threats now than it did in 2010. Restricting Egypt to current appropriations means that the money will be better positioned to be spent on current needs in an unstable environment. An additional element is that it makes it easier for the United States to cut aid on short notice. The Obama administration realized in March 2012 that halting assistance would have burdened the United States, not Egypt, with billions of dollars in penalties. Shortening the timeframe of Egyptian contracts would reduce the cost of any future severance. Second, military aid will be restricted to four spending categories: counterterrorism, border security, maritime security, and Sinai security. The categories are to

ensure that money is spent on projects that will reinforce American interests instead of on Egyptian prestige projects.

Therefore, in response to the first question that this thesis posed—whether the U.S.-Egyptian relationship has drastically changed since 2011 and why or why not—I argue that there has not been a significant transformation in relations between the two countries. It may not appear as sacrosanct as it once was, but it never received serious reconsideration, whether before or after the revolution. Even in light of the March 2015 reevaluation, the relationship is still largely as it was before, merely with a new Egyptian strongman in the place of Mubarak. What changes have occurred are largely superficial and emotional, not affecting the bedrock of the relationship.

I posit that there are four overarching reasons for the reversion to the status quo ante. First, the United States must remain engaged in the Middle East if it wants to protect its interests. If it were to withdraw from its relationship with Egypt, there would no longer be any guarantee that Egypt would safeguards its interests, which include peace with Israel and the continued flow of oil through the Suez Canal and Sumed pipeline. More realistically, Egypt is unlikely to attack the more powerful Israel or shut down the Suez Canal, which is a crucial source of revenue for the state. The effect of cancelling assistance would therefore have a primary impact in reducing Egypt’s ability to pursue mutual interests, which currently centers on fighting terrorism and extremist groups.

This ties into the second reason, which is that the United States values its relationship with Egypt more than Egypt does for its relationship with the United States. Egypt is pivotal to American strategy in the Middle East because it simply cannot be replaced. The United States can find another friend in the region and formulate a new strategy, but Egypt will always be on
Israel’s border and will be critical to American interests as long as Israel itself is. The United States is certainly important to Egypt as a source of assistance and advanced weaponry, and any pivot away would harm Egypt. But Egypt has possible recourse to other supporters, such as Saudi Arabia for money and Russia for weaponry. From the United States’ perspective, the relationship has to be preserved in spite of the disagreements and problems because it does not want to risk losing or destabilizing Egypt. Although it was the one exerting pressure on Egypt to change its behavior, the United States always caved first so that the relationship to revert to normal.

Third, the low points of the relationship could be viewed as an Egyptian negotiating tactic rather than a legitimate threat to the relationship. I observed in the first chapter that in an asymmetric relationship where the United States holds most of the power, one of Egypt’s few tools for rebalancing the relationship is coercive deficiency, whereby Egypt threatens American interests through its vulnerability. The weakness necessitates continued assistance or else Egypt’s deterioration could destabilize the region. Egypt used coercive deficiency to its advantage multiple times before 2010 because it allows Egypt to acquire what it needs while only promising its stability in return. Egypt still needs the United States. It has come to depend on the United States’ regular assistance and military equipment. Pushing the boundary was Egypt’s own method for leveraging the relationship with the United States. As an indication that the relationship was never truly threatened, all four Egyptian governments took precautions to avoid irreparably damaging their relationship with the United States. Through this lens, Egypt’s actions were brinksmanship rather than an actual danger to the relationship.

Finally, despite all of the disputes, threats, and partial freezes, nothing was ever done by the United States to irreversibly transform the relationship. Parts of the relationship continued to
function during its worst points as they normally would have. For example, in August 2013, the Pentagon issued a contract for upgrading Egyptian fighter jets even as the administration froze other parts of the relationship. This goes in hand with the three explanations listed above, but it specifically demonstrates that the changes encountered were largely superficial because no decisions were made that could not have been reversed within the span of a few months. This is made clear by the fact that Egypt’s annual assistance, the linchpin of the relationship, continued to be included in Congressional appropriations at its typical levels during the entire four years.

Applying this to the larger picture, relationships that are relevant to vital interests tend to endure for long periods of time with only minor reconsiderations. Just as the U.S.-Egyptian relationship has survived over three decades with minimal change, so do many others. This stems from the fact that the United States is invested in its own interests and often has few alternatives for existing relationships. Other countries are equally dedicated to ensuring their own interests. Regimes like Syria and Venezuela are unlikely to become overnight proponents of American interests, while countries like Israel and Saudi Arabia often have few alternatives to working with the United States. Once a beneficial relationship has arisen, interest groups tends to form on both sides of the relationship who defend the status quo because of its perceived benefits. These dual influences—vital interests and domestic pressure groups—mean that, as noted in the theoretical framework, changes are often only able to occur during crises or significant shifts in thinking.

The outcome is that the United States is willing to forgive disputes as long as the deeper interests of the relationship are preserved. We have seen the United States do this time and time again with Egypt. The United States and Israel have icy relations at the time of writing, but it is unlikely to last because each country is too deeply attached to the other. The United States has
regularly disagreed with Saudi Arabia, the most recent case being the prospective nuclear agreement with Iran. This did not stop the United States from assisting the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen. Another instance is the United States’ notoriously poor relationship with Pakistan. The two countries have rarely been on the same page over the past decade in terms of what is mutually beneficial. For example, both governments perceive the advantages of drone strikes, but the Pakistani government is much more sensitive about their usage because it is the one that has to deal with the domestic backlash from botched operations. Each country has recognized that it gains from working with the other country. This coexistence has not prevented them from occasionally acting contrary to the other’s interests, such as Pakistan’s support of terrorism, and yet the relationship continues up to this day. In essence, relationships often prove indispensible once formed, which means that there is flexibility in surmounting their shortcomings.

The converse is also true: the United States has tended to be dubious of improving antagonistic relationships. Hostility has regularly been maintained even when the initial logic behind the confrontation has since disappeared. This is because the United States perceives that its interests will not be served through cooperation and, similar to friendly relationships, groups form on each side which seek to perpetuate the antagonism. After awhile, the reasons behind the enmity are forgotten and are replaced by boilerplate reactions that are reinforced by pressure groups. Support for Nationalist China over Communist China was sustained by the powerful China lobby long after it was clear that Communist China was there to stay. The People’s Republic of China was not recognized by the United States until 1979, which was eight years after it had been admitted to the United Nations and long after it was apparent that National China would not regain its primacy. Cuban American communities ensured that the United
States government remained hostile towards Cuba even after the rationale for Cuba’s threat disappeared with the end of the Cold War.

This is not to say that changes cannot happen, for they clearly can. Muammar al-Gaddafi’s Libya was partially rehabilitated after it promised to give up terrorism and its nuclear weapons program. The United States’ relationship with Pakistan was seriously endangered by Pakistan’s development of nuclear weapons—although, notably, the United States came to tacitly accept Pakistan’s new reality. Nevertheless, it must be stressed that relationships are often able to overcome disagreements, even in the long term, because of ingrained interests, while antagonism can be retained long after its rationale has disappeared.

The second question this thesis asked was how the United States tried to use leverage to influence Egypt’s domestic politics and whether it was successful. The most prevalent techniques that the United States utilized were threatening to reconsider assistance, reducing assistance, issuing speeches, conducting visits by American officials, and holding telephone conversations. As to whether the leverage was effective, I respond that it depends. This is because, as seen in the analysis of leverage during the January 2011 revolution, leverage must be measured by what it is attempting to accomplish, not by what it might be able to achieve.

The United States’ leverage could be considered successful on a number of levels. For one, the United States has maintained communication with Egypt’s top officials regardless of how bad the relationship itself became. Whether American citizens were on trial or Sisi was repressing the Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt’s leaders still answered calls from the United States even when assistance was partially frozen. These backchannels allowed the United States to act as a moderating influence during tense situations. There would have been fewer considerations for Egypt’s generals to take into account without it. After all, Egypt was never allowed to
descend into the chaos that Syria or Libya did, and the approximately 2,000 citizens killed under Sisi still pales in comparison to the tens of thousands killed in several other countries. It may have also allowed the United States to resolve situations faster than it would have been able to, such as during the NGO trial, and helped it stay abreast of developments in Egypt. And, as repeated throughout this thesis, the United States has always prioritized its primary security interests over secondary interests (e.g., spreading democracy). Since Egypt continued to defend the United States’ vital security interests, the aid’s principal purpose was accomplished. That the secondary interests were not realized was at least partially the fault of the United States. It refused to use the leverage to its full capability in fear of upsetting vital interests in the process.

The United States’ more significant and public attempts at leveraging the relationship all clearly failed. Mubarak did not agree to reforms, the SCAF did not cancel the NGO trial, Morsi did not alter his rhetoric, and Sisi did not stop his repressive measures. Egypt could afford to modify its behavior to suit American interests in the more minor instances mentioned above, but it was impossible for Egypt to adapt in the more significant cases. Answering a phone call from the Secretary of Defense requires nothing except time and patience. Bowing to demands for the participation of the opposition in politics could doom the current government, and retaining America’s assistance is useless if the government is not around to use it. Even if Egypt could have been swayed on these issues, the United States refused to use its full leverage because doing so would have hurt its own interests by reducing Egypt’s ability to safeguard them. It would have harmed the United States domestically: the American government would have been responsible for billions in fees for equipment that it would not need, while the defense industry would lose considerable amounts in future orders. The length that the United States could go to rein in Egypt was also limited by other policy determinants. Israel and Saudi Arabia strongly
opposed any change to the status quo; both countries possess leverage of their own over the United States. Further, if the United States stepped away from Egypt, it risked losing its influence and being replaced by a competitor, such as Russia.

The reality is that no sovereign country appreciates being told what to do. Leverage will always be limited regardless of the actions that the United States takes. If it is difficult to control the governments of countries that the United States has physically occupied, such as Vietnam and Afghanistan, then any independent country will be even harder. As Egypt has often argued, United States aid is more an investment toward mutual interests than it is a method for prioritizing its own interests. Assistance is a good way for the United States to contribute towards its interests when another country holds those same interests, but even billions of dollars—or the threat of losing billions of dollars—is not sufficient to make a government do something that it perceives as being harmful to itself. Such pressure might only make a government more adamant that it will not cave to foreign demands. The United States needs to be considerate of how it uses leverage because leverage is constrained by the circumstances surrounding the relationship. Each country is different and leverage is restricted to certain issues that both sides will agree to, meaning that is more effective in achieving certain types of objectives than others. Applied toward mutual interests, leverage can achieve its goals and encourage beneficial behavior on the part of the receiving government. If the United States attempts to strong arm another country into doing something and fails, it only devalues future leverage.

To reiterate, the U.S.-Egyptian relationship did not significantly change between January 2011 and December 2014, and attempts to leverage American assistance had mixed results in influencing Egyptian domestic politics. Even though the relationship encountered rough points, it
always returned to normal because each side, especially the United States, had too much at stake in the relationship. The effectiveness of the United States’ leverage is more ambivalent because it depends on what it was supposed to accomplish. If the United States had been satisfied with guaranteeing that Egypt fostered America’s vital interests in the region, leverage would have largely succeeded. Egypt actually increased security cooperation with Israel and began to pay closer attention to fighting terrorism. However, the United States was more ambitious than that and sought to bring about domestic political reform, an area where it had historically been unsuccessful. These efforts failed because they were against the various Egyptian governments’ interests. The United States was forced to backtrack in order to preserve the greater relationship, devaluing its future leverage in the process. These outcomes are not specific to the U.S.-Egyptian relationship, either. Interest groups form around a relationship once it is established and sustain the status quo long after the relationship should be reevaluated, while leverage can improve mutual interests but is rarely able to force one country’s needs upon another country.

There are two further insights that can be gleaned from this thesis. The first has to deal with decision making in the United States. Although the process of formulating and implementing foreign policy is long and complex, the president is its primary shaper and is guided by shared images, domestic pressure, and the United States’ national security interests. Shared images provide a foundation for consensus by acting as a unifying view of how the United States should act and how the rest of the world is supposed to look. Domestic pressure plays a role because policy makers need to either reshape public opinion to support a policy or mold a policy so that it will gain support; otherwise, the fallout can have negative consequences on the administration’s ability to carry out its other policies. Vital interests—Israel, oil, control, and stability—tell the president what he is striving to attain through his decisions.
Yet as we have seen in the preceding chapters, foreign policy is far from perfect and the president has two interrelated weaknesses: Congress and implementation. The president controls the executive branch and its bureaucracy. There can be disagreements between the president and bureaucracy, such as during the 2011 revolution when the Secretary of State was still defending Mubarak after the administration had moved away from him. In the end, though, the bureaucracy will move to the president’s position. If that is impossible, the bureaucratic player will resign because he or she serves as the pleasure of the president. The same cannot be said for Congress, whose members are independent and must appeal to constituents, rather than the president, to keep their positions. Because of different responsibilities, Congress often has different motivations than the president that can lead to competing conceptions of what is best for the United States. The result is that Congress often takes positions contrary to the administration’s.

The president also cannot guarantee that his policy decisions will be enacted. There were numerous times during the course of events that the president attempted to pass a certain policy and was blocked by Congress. On several occasions, holds were placed by members of Congress on aid disbursement or equipment deliveries. The most extreme case of this was the $1 billion promised in May 2011, which was delayed for over two years. There were also occasions when the language of the appropriations bill was altered or when Congress threatened to take unilateral action. It is important to note that assistance was always eventually delivered, modification of the appropriation bill’s language did not change the administration’s policy, and unilateral action by Congress never succeeded. As chapter four concluded, Congress can be effective in stopping policy but it has had a harder time making it. Among the reasons for this is that some members of Congress express deference to the president’s foreign policy mandate, and a lack of unity goes
both ways, making it difficult for the president to control Congress but also making it hard for Congress to unite in opposition to an organized bureaucracy.

The final insight surrounds the future of the U.S.-Egyptian relationship. The four years between 2011 and 2014 were arguably the most difficult period since the relationship was formed in 1979. There were disagreements earlier on, particularly in the late 1980s as Egypt’s debt to the United States grew to unacceptable levels. But never before has the assistance been threatened so many times or to such an extent. Yet in spite of the trials and tribulations, the relationship survived and has once again returned to the status quo ante. The staying power of the relationship has been highlighted throughout the thesis. Egypt, due to its size and location, is too important for the United States to ignore, and failing to finance Egypt’s security would mean abandoning important American interests in the Middle East. The two countries need each other as much as ever, the United States for its fight against terrorism and Egypt so that it can afford that fight. The relationship is unlikely to be severed any time soon because of this. With no obvious competitors for the region—Russia, despite its arms agreement with Egypt, has enough on its plate already and was never welcome in Egypt in the first place—the United States will be able to retain its place for the foreseeable future.

However, the events over the past several years have shown that the status quo is not working. Three issues are at the root of the problem. First, each side expects something different out of the relationship. Egypt wants to have full control over the assistance and for it to use the aid as it sees fit to best address Egypt’s concerns, which in turn would benefit the United States. The United States feels that the assistance entitles it to direct how the aid is spent and to weigh in on Egyptian politics. Congress takes the administration’s position even further. The result is
conflicting visions that harm the overall utility of the relationship and which need to be resolved in frank discussions by the two sides to avoid future disputes.

Second, assistance is not going towards the right capabilities. Certain American policymakers, most prominent among them Senator McCain, have long bemoaned that Egypt is wasting its money on expensive equipment that serves no purpose beyond prestige. Egypt has little use for a thousand tanks or hundreds of fighter jets when its primary opponent is nonconventional and on Egypt’s own soil. Even if Egyptian forces did have the proper equipment, they lack training. The army has trained for conventional warfare; it is not interested in or prepared to fight terrorism in the Sinai Peninsula. It is also incapable of maintaining its own equipment. The United States has done little to remedy this and spends less than $2 million a year on training efforts. Devoting more money to training would be inexpensive but would considerably increase the effectiveness of Egyptian forces. It would also contribute to military-to-military cooperation between the United States and Egypt. Sisi himself spent time training in the United States, and the upshot is that he is likely more sensitive to American feelings, even if he does not always listen to them. In his March 2015 announcement, Obama recognized that aid needs to be more flexible and be allocated for specific purposes. This is a start, but it fails to address deeper issues within the Egyptian military in regards to purpose, professionalism, and spending, all of which have plagued it since the 1960s.

Third, the relationship is outdated; for the most part, it has been untouched since it was signed in 1979. Egypt is receiving the same amount of military assistance as it was in 1985, despite the fact that it takes nearly three dollars in 2015 to buy the same amount as one dollar did in 1985. This means that Egypt can only buy one third of what it once could. Israel, which received a similar agreement in 1979 with slightly more assistance, renegotiated its relationship
with the United States between 1998 and 2008. The new agreement raised Israel’s military assistance from $1.8 billion in 1998 to $2.4 billion in 2008 and $3.1 billion in 2013.\(^2\) The United States and Egypt failed to make a comparable reevaluation of their relationship and Egypt’s assistance has remained stagnant. The 1979 Egypt-Israel peace treaty was a product of its times. It was signed when Israel and Egypt were still each other’s primary threat. The United States was driven to back the agreement with assistance because it wanted to protect Israel and remove Egypt from the Soviet sphere of influence, which included helping Egypt transition from Soviet weaponry to American weaponry. Neither rationale was still a concern by the time Egyptian revolution: the last war between Israel and Egypt was in 1973, while Egypt was established in America’s sphere and reliant on American weapons. The security environment for the Middle East has also been altered, especially since the start of the Arab Spring and the rise of the Islamic State.

The United States and Egypt adhere to an agreement that is addressing old security requirements, not modern ones. As such, the relationship would benefit from an new assessment as to what its primary purpose is and how that can best be accomplished. If the relationship is first and foremost to ensure Egypt’s stability, the relationship might be better served by directing aid towards Egypt’s economy and building better governmental practices rather than pouring money into defense projects. If the United States wants Egypt to function as its policeman in the region, it needs to determine whether the current aid arrangement is the best way to achieve that. Since $1.3 billion is an arbitrary amount, particularly decades after it was instituted, the United States must ask itself if the relationship could fulfill its objectives with less funding directed at

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\(^2\) Sharp, “U.S. Foreign Aid to Israel,” 26. Israel’s total aid was the same in 1998 and 2013: approximately $3 billion. The difference is that military assistance replaced the economic aid that was phased out between 1998 and 2008 under the Glide Path Agreement. The two countries reasoned that Israel’s improved economy removed the need for such assistance. In a clear reaffirming of interests, the economic aid was merely shifted to military aid.
more precise tasks. Apache helicopters and tactical training would be valuable for counterterrorism missions; Harpoon missiles, which are anti-ship missiles, serve little purpose for a nation whose enemies are in the desert. If current assistance is not sufficient, then the United States would benefit from increasing it but would need to determine by how much. These are only some of the questions that need to be asked, but answering them is critical to getting the most out of the U.S.-Egyptian relationship. Otherwise, the United States is throwing money at Egypt without paying attention to where it is going.

The U.S.-Egyptian relationship is, and will continue to prove, advantageous towards the United States’ vital interests. Notwithstanding the problems encountered since Mubarak’s overthrow, each country still needs the other. This means that the relationship is unlikely to be discontinued any time soon. However, it is far from optimal in its current form. Some issues may never be resolved: as a great power, the United States will always desire more influence over Egyptian decisions than Egypt is willing to give. That does not mean that the two countries should not work towards a mutual recalibration of the relationship. To get the most out of the relationship, consensus needs to be reached as to what the functions of the relationship are and how the aid can be best used for these interests, rather than for Egyptian prestige and American defense industry subsidies. If this is not realized, the relationship is likely to only hit more rough points in the future without realizing its full potential.
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