Brothers-in-arms? The Egyptian military, the Ikhwan and the revolutions of 1952 and 2011

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Abstract

This article argues that examining the dynamics of interaction between the Egyptian military regime which took power in 1952 and the Muslim Brotherhood can aid our understanding of the strategic and tactical choices facing the post-Mubarak military regime and the Brotherhood following the revolution of 2011. Significant common factors at play in both periods include the shared desire of both the Brotherhood leadership and the military regime to secure the demobilisation of the popular protest movements which played a fundamental role in the destabilisation of the old regime in order to secure their own position in a post-revolutionary political order. In both cases, while the Brotherhood’s ability to organise independently of the state made it a valuable potential partner for the military rulers, the state played an active role in creating opportunities for the Brotherhood to extend its influence at the expense of its rivals.

However, comparison also reveals crucial differences between the two periods. Firstly, there is the very different relationship between the officers who assumed power and old regimes. The second difference is the altered relationship between the military seizure of power and popular participation in the revolution. A third area of contrast lies in the configuration of the military’s tactical alliance with its civilian partners.

Introduction:

This article examines the relationship between the post-revolutionary Egyptian military regime after the overthrow of King Faruq in 1952 and the Muslim Brotherhood (al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin), as a way of exploring questions about the relationship between the Brotherhood and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) which assumed power in February 2011. It is argued here that examining the dynamics of Brotherhood-military interaction in the early years of the Free Officers’ regime can aid our understanding of the strategic and tactical choices facing both protagonists in 2011. A number of similar factors shaping the relationship between the Brotherhood and the military in both periods make comparison both possible and meaningful.

1 The research for the historical sections of this article was completed during my postdoctoral fellowship attached to the ESRC’s Non-Governmental Public Action Research Programme which I held at the School of Oriental and African Studies in 2007-9. The remainder of the article was completed during my fellowship at the Centre for Research in the Arts Social Sciences and Humanities (CRASSH) at the University of Cambridge in 2011.
The most significant common factor is the shared desire of both the Brotherhood leadership and the military regime to secure the demobilisation of the popular protest movements which played a fundamental role in the destabilisation of the old regime in order to secure their own position in a post-revolutionary political order. Moreover, in 1952 and 2011 the ruling officers were unable to demobilise popular protest by repression alone. In both cases, while the Brotherhood’s ability to organise independently of the state made it a valuable potential partner for the military rulers, the state played an active role in creating opportunities for the Brotherhood to extend its influence at the expense of its rivals.

The comparison outlined below is also revealing of the important differences between the two periods. This article will argue that three of these differences in particular should caution against simplistic comparisons between the two revolutions. The first of these is the very different relationship between the officers who assumed power and old regimes. In 1952 the Egyptian army hierarchy fractured at the level of its junior officers who not only unseated King Faruq but also overthrew their own commanding officers. In 2011 Mubarak’s own senior generals deposed him, most likely acting to pre-empt the open breakdown of army discipline in the event of orders to suppress the popular uprising.

The second difference is the altered relationship between the military seizure of power and popular participation in the revolution. In 1952, protests against the monarchy reached their peak six months before the Free Officers’ coup d’état, which took place against the backdrop of empty streets. In 2011, the army leadership was forced to assume political power and oust Mubarak as a result of mass mobilisation from below. The continuation of this immensely powerful wave of popular protest over the first six months of military rule has played a crucial role in shaping the interaction between the Brotherhood and the military regime.

A third area of contrast lies in the configuration of the military’s tactical alliance with its civilian partners. Within two months of the 1952 revolution, the Free Officers had moved to repress Communist groups, despite the support of the largest of these for the military regime, and moved more quickly into alliance with the Brotherhood. In 2011, however, up to six months after the revolution, the SCAF appeared to be pursuing a policy which was more equally balanced between Islamist (including a broad array of groups beyond the Brotherhood) and secular civilian political forces.

Relations between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Free Officers’ regime have been relatively little studied. This article uses recently released British documentary sources which were unavailable to many previous authors. In particular, it draws heavily on the documentary record now available in the British National Archives collection of materials from the Foreign Office, in particular the regular reports by British Embassy officials to Whitehall discussing the new regime’s policies and practices. In relation to the revolution of 2011, the article relies on published material including press reports and websites in English and Arabic. Clearly, both of these sets

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2 In the last few days before the fall of Mubarak there were growing signs of the immense pressure on army discipline. Al Jazeera broadcast footage from Tahrir Square of a junior officer, Ahmad Shuman, resigning his commission and pleading with Mubarak to step down. The clip is available online here: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ft3YhEShfs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ft3YhEShfs)

3 Richard Mitchell’s classic work, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (London, Oxford University Press, 1969) remains an important reference point, as does Nasser’s *Blessed Movement* (London, Oxford University Press, 1992) by Joel Gordon, however the only substantial work in English dealing with this period in the Brotherhood’s history at this period to be published recently is Barbara Zollner’s 2009 study *Hasan al-Hudaybi and Ideology*, (Oxford, Routledge, 2009)
of sources present an incomplete and potentially distorted picture. Even the most recently-released material from the British National Archives has been censored to conceal the names of some sources, and there is no way of knowing what still remains in closed archives. Moreover, the differences between contemporary published accounts of the main protagonists’ actions and motives and those recorded secretly in the British official documentary record underscore the danger of drawing firm conclusions about the relationship between the MB and the military in 2011 from published accounts alone.4

**Countermovements and political opportunities**

Advocates of a political process approach to understanding relations between social movements and the state have often emphasized the agency of the state over that of non-state political actors in shaping ‘political opportunity structures’. McAdam’s classic statement of the ‘dimensions of political opportunity’, lists four of these, all of which revolve around the state: (1) ‘the relative openness or closure of the institutionalized political system’; (2) ‘the stability or instability of that broad set of elite alignments that typically undergird a polity’; (3) ‘the presence or absence of elite allies’ and (4) ‘the state’s capacity and propensity for repression’.5 Yet, as Meyer and Staggenborg note, movements and opposing movements ‘influence each other both directly and by altering the environment in which each side operates.’6 Interactions between movements and opponents also organised independently of the state in social movement form, may force activists to change tactics, alter the targets of collective action, mobilise in different political arenas, and change how demands are framed.

This article argues that the relationship between the military and the Brotherhood in 1952 and 2011 is shaped both by the presence of political opportunities created ‘from above’ (changes in the institutionalized political system, shifts in elite alignments and alliances and the state’s capacity for repression), and by the interactions ‘from below’ between the Brotherhood and its civilian rivals organised independently of the state. Furthermore, the capacity of these non-state actors to mobilise or demobilise popular protest was in the first six months of the revolution of 2011, itself a factor shaping the ‘political opportunity structure’ for the military.

Between 1952 and 1954 the Free Officers’ relationship with the Brotherhood fell into four phases, each characterised by shifts in the Society’s role in confronting internal and external threats to the new regime. The Brotherhood had a particularly distinctive and valuable role, it is argued here, in disciplining the Free Officers’ civilian opponents. The Brotherhood also played a subtle part in the drama surrounding the negotiations over withdrawal from the Canal Zone, which cannot be explored in detail here.

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4 A case in point is the meeting between the Muslim Brotherhood General Guide, Hassan al-Hudaybi, and the Oriental Counsellor at the British Embassy in Cairo, Trefor Evans in February 1953. The Revolution Command Council accused al-Hudaybi of making serious concessions to the British at this meeting, and cited these as justification for the Society’s suppression in January 1954. The notes of the meeting taken by Evans at the time and transmitted to the Foreign Office in London do not support the RCC’s claims, and instead tally broadly with the Brotherhood’s public account of the meeting. FO 371 / 102763 JE 1052/75, Letter, Chancery to Dept, 27 February 1953 and Record of Conversation between Mr T E Evans and the Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood on the 24th of February 1953


During the first phase, which lasted from the coup of July 1952 to early 1953, the Free Officers looked to the Brotherhood as a radical civilian ally in the domestic arena, whose role was to deploy its organisations in support of the new regime, and crucially to act as a countermovement against civilian rivals such as the Communists and the Wafd. The Brotherhood’s paramilitary organisation retained its previous freedom to organise, but the Canal Zone remained quiet. During this period, the Brotherhood’s presence in the streets and on the campuses was required by the military regime, provided that it acted in accordance with the Free Officers’ goals and essentially under their direction.

The second phase, beginning in January 1953 with the dissolution of political parties, saw the Free Officers take the first serious steps encroaching on the Brotherhood’s freedom to organise independently of the state. Yet at the same time, both privately and publicly, co-operation between the Brotherhood and the regime appeared to have deepened. Brotherhood activists and the regime’s newly-trained commandos marched together in the parades on the anniversary of the July revolution.

A third phase, from early autumn 1953 to the end of March 1954 was marked by Abdel Nasser’s energetic personal intervention in the Brotherhood’s internal conflicts (and effective paralysis in both the Brotherhood’s wider leadership and that of the secret paramilitary Special Section), the consolidation of the state-run paramilitary organisations competing with the Brotherhood, and the Brotherhood’s support for Abdel Nasser during the March Crisis of 1954. By this period, it was enough for Abdel Nasser to secure the Brotherhood’s absence to destabilise the coalition of his opponents, as he was able to deploy organisations created by the state itself, such as the paramilitary National Guard and the Liberation Rally as a replacement for independently-organised civilian forces in the struggle to dominate the streets.

The final phase saw the revival of Brotherhood opposition to the regime with the agreement over British evacuation from the Suez Canal Zone, followed by the assassination attempt in October 1954 and the reunion of the Brotherhood’s warring leadership: in death on the gallows and in prison following the society’s dissolution.

In its first six months the relationship between the Brotherhood and the military regime installed by the leadership of the armed forces in wake of the popular uprising of 25 January 2011 shares a number of features with the tactical alliance concluded between the Brotherhood and the Free Officers in 1952-4. The Brotherhood leadership has made strenuous efforts to present itself to the military as a valuable partner based partly on its ability to mobilise and demobilise popular protest. The military regime, for its part, has reciprocated by creating opportunities for the Brotherhood to build its organisation and extend its influence at the expense of its rivals.

Yet, the Brotherhood’s capacity to act as a countermovement to other potential civilian challengers to the regime has been constrained by a range of factors. Until the end of July 2011, the Brotherhood leadership largely attempted to influence the popular protest movement in the streets by its selective absence from particular mobilisations, or its refusal to endorse specific tactics (such the overnight ‘sit-in’ in Tahrir Square) or slogans (such as those critical of the military regime). For much of
the first six months following Mubarak’s fall, this tactic could be said to have
delivered mixed results at best, as the mobilising power of liberal and leftist groups
dominating the main revolutionary coalitions appeared to grow significantly despite
the absence of the Brotherhood. Moreover, a good portion of the Brotherhood’s youth
leadership openly rejected the leadership’s position on the protests and some split
from the Brotherhood to form their own political party, orientated on the
revolutionary youth movement.  

The large Islamist mobilisation on 29 July, under the banner of ‘The Friday of
Stability’ marked a shift towards asserting the Brotherhood’s presence in the streets,
and as such was an important blow to its secular rivals. However, in this case too, the
picture was complicated by the fact that actually it was other Islamist forces, in
particular the Salafist movement which took the initiative on 29 July and which
provided a larger proportion of the protestors in Tahrir Square and elsewhere.

In relation to the other major arena of popular protest since the revolution, the
workplaces, the Brotherhood has benefited from political opportunities created by the
state, such as the appointment of some of the leading figures in its own workers’
organisation to the temporary executive of the Egyptian Trade Union Federation,
despite playing almost no role in the rapid expansion of independent unions during
the first six months of the revolution.

However, in other respects the policies adopted by the military were inimical to the
Brotherhood’s interests, such as the July declaration of a set of ‘supra-constitutional
principles’ designed to act as a set of guidelines for the future committee tasked with
drafting a new constitution following elections scheduled for November 2011. This
move was rejected by the Brotherhood and other Islamist groups as prolonging the
military’s political influence and undermining the electoral process.

‘This blessed movement’: the Brotherhood and the revolution of July 1952

The coup d’état carried out by junior army officers on 23 July 1952 followed seven
years of rising levels of popular protest firstly directed against the continuation of
British military occupation of Egypt and secondly targeting the monarchy itself.  
The same period also saw great waves of social protest, largely driven by the rising cost of
living in the aftermath of World War II. At a regional level, the crisis of the Egyptian
monarchy unfolded against a backdrop of rising tension and then war in Palestine.

The Muslim Brotherhood played an important role in the downfall of the Egyptian
monarchy. With the decay of the Wafd Party, the Brotherhood grew in this period to
become probably the largest social and political organisation in Egypt. In the final
years of Hassan al-Banna’s leadership, the Brotherhood engaged in paramilitary
conflict with the authorities, leading to al-Banna’s assassination in 1948. More
significantly still, the Brotherhood developed a paramilitary organisation in the Canal
Zone. These played a crucial role in precipitating the final crisis of the monarchy by

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7 Sha’aban Hidaya and Nura Fakhry, ‘Shabab al-Ikhwan yu’assissun hizb “al-tayyar al-masri” wa’l gama’a tarud bfaslihum’,
8 See Tariq al-Bishri Al-haraka al-siyasiyya fi misr: 1945-1953 (Cairo: Dar al-Shuraq, 2002; 2nd edn), for the major account
of this period in Arabic, Joel Beinin and Zachary Lockman, Workers on the Nile: nationalism, Communism, Islam and the Egyptian
working class, 1882 – 1954 (London: IB Tauris, 1988); Anne Alexander, Leadership in the National Movements in Egypt and
drawing British forces into expanding counter-insurgency operations in the winter of 1951-2 which in turn triggered an urban uprising in protest. In relation to the Free Officers group itself, the Brotherhood was influential, but did not dominate. Gamal Abdel Nasser and a number of other members of the inner group of the Free Officers had taken part in Brotherhood paramilitary training, for example. The Muslim Brotherhood’s General Guide, Hassan al-Hudaybi, hailed the army’s “blessed move” in a statement which was reported on 28 July, and appealed to the Brotherhood’s members to support “its aims and reforms”. Mitchell argues that well in advance of the society’s public declaration of support, a detailed plan had been agreed by senior Brotherhood members and the Free Officers for the mobilisation of the paramilitary Special Section and the Rover groups to neutralise potential opposition to the coup from the police and to prepare for guerrilla warfare in the event of British military intervention to restore the monarchy. Information about these clandestine plans was restricted to a small number of leading figures in the Special Section, who may have been acting without the knowledge of the General Guide.

Alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood had much to offer the Free Officers: a civilian organisation which could act as a counterweight to the other parties and the establishment politicians, paramilitary formations including fighters with experience of guerrilla warfare in Palestine and the Suez Canal Zone, a tested ability to mobilise in the streets and on the university campuses. The Free Officers would have been well aware of the importance of retaining the capacity for guerrilla action in the Canal Zone as they embarked on negotiations for British withdrawal. At an ideological level, the Brotherhood’s leaders offered a coherent world view and a depth of political analysis which most of the Free Officers lacked. However, precisely those capacities which made the Brotherhood an attractive ally also meant that it posed a potentially serious threat to the new regime. The officers’ actions during the first few years of military rule demonstrate their determination to severely restrict the ability of any potential challengers to organise independently of the state in the streets and workplaces. This determination was reinforced by the deep-seated conviction of the core group of Free Officers, in particular Abdel Nasser, to preserve their independence of other political forces at all costs.

Enabling a countermovement

The first major challenge to the new military regime after the July revolution came from striking textile workers. On 12 August workers at the Misr Fine Spinning and Weaving mill occupied the factory and began a strike calling for the removal of abusive supervisors, the creation of a freely-elected union, equality in bonus payments for clerical and manual workers and wage increases. The following day, several workers, policemen and soldiers died during a clash between the army and the strikers. The Free Officers reacted quickly and brutally: over 500 workers were arrested, 29 of whom were brought before a hastily-convened military tribunal. Two workers who took part in the strike, Mustafa Khamis and Muhammad al-Baqari were...

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11 Mitchell, The Society of the Muslim Brothers, pp 102-4
12 Beinin and Lockman, Workers on the Nile, p 422
condemned to death and hanged, despite a lack of evidence that they were any more than individual participants in the protests.

Beinin and Lockman point to the composition of the military tribunal itself, under the leadership of ‘Abd-al-Mun’im Amin “the most pro-American of all the Free Officers”, as evidence that the Free Officers were motivated by anti-Communism. Amin, together with Sayyid Qutb, a prominent intellectual associated with the Muslim Brotherhood, was a driving force behind the Free Officers’ efforts to prevent the formation of a national trade union confederation until the labour movement had purged itself of Communist activists. On 21 August, just a few days after the death sentence against Khamis was announced, alleged Communists were arrested in Daqahliyya province, and in the Sayyida Zaynab and Hada’iq al-Qubba areas of Cairo. This marked the beginning of a concerted campaign of anti-communist repression, which by late September extended to the Free Officers’ own ranks with the arrest of Ahmad Hamrush, a member of both the Free Officers and the Democratic Movement for National Liberation, the largest Communist organisation, who had been appointed editor of the new army journal, *Al-Tahrir*.

The Brotherhood’s most prominent role in relation to Kafr al-Dawwar was in waging an ideological war against the strikers. Here Sayyid Qutb’s prominence as a pre-revolutionary opposition intellectual was particularly important. In a radio commentary broadcast on 16 August, Qutb expressed astonishment at workers’ actions.

“I cannot believe that the workers who dealt the first blow against imperialism in the Suez Canal Zone would allow themselves to become a tool in the hands of imperialism to be used to stab in the back the homeland and its movement of regeneration. Fellow-workers! I who now address you am well-known to you as one of the fighters for freedom, who attacked tyranny in your defence, in the defence of those who toil for hire. I who now speak to you and who fought for you am ashamed of the action some of you have taken … Dawn has broken, the yoke has been lifted. You, the workers, will benefit. You, the workers, who were in the forefront of the struggle for freedom, how could you turn overnight against liberty and her supporters?”

It was on the university campuses that a practical, working alliance between the Brotherhood and the Free Officers really began to take shape in the Autumn of 1952. Now organised formally in the Revolution Command Council (RCC), the leading Free Officers oscillated between enabling the Muslim Brotherhood to act as a countermovement to their opponents, and direct repression. The society’s student members were involved in a violent clash with Wafdist and Left-wing students at the...
university in November.\textsuperscript{18} According to Mitchell’s account, the Brotherhood not only concurred with the RCC’s view that forms of collective action with explicitly ‘political’ aims such as demonstrations and meetings should be suspended in the name of ‘unity’, but even agreed not to organise popular religious celebrations, including the feast of the Prophet’s birthday.\textsuperscript{19} When Wafdist students and other opposition activists at Cairo University attempted to hold a meeting commemorating the death of student guerrilla fighters in the Canal Zone in 1951 on 12 January, they were confronted not only by the police, but also by Muslim Brotherhood students.\textsuperscript{20}

**Public co-operation, private conflict**

January 1953 saw a perceptible shift in tactics by the RCC: direct repression of their civilian challengers intensified with the dissolution of political parties, and the regime continued to facilitate the Brotherhood’s role as a countermovement to the Left and the Wafd. In addition, however, the officers began to assert a new role for the state, as the organiser of a repertoire of public ceremonial which was explicitly conceived as transforming the unruly protests of the pre-revolutionary era. This role was not restricted to periodic parades and events marking out a new calendar of legitimate public action, but was given institutional form with the creation of the Liberation Rally (LR). The launch of the LR marked a significant change in the officers’ relationship to their principal civilian allies, the Muslim Brotherhood, however. While the RCC continued to enable the Brotherhood to act as a countermovement to the regime’s civilian opponents, and allowed the society to maintain its paramilitary groups for use against British forces in the Canal Zone, the creation of the LR demonstrated that in the officers’ view, alliance with the Brotherhood on such terms could only be a temporary affair. Within a few weeks of its founding, the Liberation Rally had gained another role beyond acting as a replacement for political parties (and embodying the antithesis of \textit{partyism}): preparing for the re-launch of guerrilla warfare in the Canal Zone should negotiations over British military withdrawal from Egypt fail. The Brotherhood’s desire to retain its paramilitary organisation in the face of opposition from the RCC was a key reason for the growing tension between the two sides and the eventual breakdown of their relationship in 1954.\textsuperscript{21}

Fiery rhetoric against the British in public masked a pragmatic attitude to the actual negotiations on Abdel Nasser’s part, however. He was in regular contact with British officials outside the actual negotiations, and indicated privately his willingness to discuss concessions—which he and his colleagues denied in public – over the maintenance of the base by non-Egyptian personnel and future access arrangements shortly before the start of formal negotiations on 27 April.\textsuperscript{22}

The first attempt by the military regime to restrict the Brotherhood’s paramilitary activities came on 30 October 1952, when Abdel Nasser reportedly met Brotherhood

\textsuperscript{18} Mitchell, \textit{The Society of the Muslim Brothers}, p106
\textsuperscript{19} Mitchell, \textit{The Society of the Muslim Brothers}, p106
\textsuperscript{20} British Foreign Office Archives, National Archives, Kew, London (BFOA) File FO 371/108319 JE 1016/12 ‘The Moslem Brotherhood (Ikhwan el Muslimin) under the Naguib regime’, report n.d. enclosed with letter, Stephenson to Eden, 24 March 1954
\textsuperscript{21} BFOA FO 371/102704 JE 1015/76/G Minute from Mr Mackwith-Young 21/05/53; FO 371/ 102705 JE 1015/95, Letter R. M Hankey, Cairo to Salisbury, FO. 29 June 53; Mitchell, \textit{The Society of the Muslim Brothers}, p110.
\textsuperscript{22} BFOA FO 371/102764 JE 1052/91 Telegram RS to FO 20/03/53. See also Winston Churchill’s report to the House of Commons on Foreign Affairs, 11 May 1953, Hansard - http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1953/may/11/foreign-affairs#SVC0515P0_19530511_HOC_217
leaders privately and told them that they must close their own training camps and use Army facilities instead. Al-Hudaybi apparently agreed to this request at the Guidance Council meeting on 6 December.\(^\text{23}\) In May 1953 the RCC renewed its attempts to bring the Brotherhood’s paramilitary activities under control. Salah Salim apparently met Al-Hudaybi to discuss the possibility of joint operations against the British in the Canal Zone, but received a vague, rhetorical answer which was tantamount to a refusal (or at least this is how the pro-government Al-Jumhuriya reported the conversation in September 1954).\(^\text{24}\) Around the same time the Brotherhood leadership also received an official request for the dissolution of the clandestine Special Section cells in the Army and Police.\(^\text{25}\)

Meanwhile, the training of volunteers by the Liberation Rally continued at a feverish pace in the run-up to the celebrations on the anniversary of the revolution. By 14 July, Kamal-al-Din Husayn, whom the RCC had placed in charge of the programme, was able to report that all young Egyptian men could receive military training. The following day the Army newspaper *Al-Tahrir* proclaimed in triumph: “The people will fight the British, and not the army alone”.\(^\text{26}\) Newly-trained commandos marched in the anniversary parades carrying their black ‘death’s head’ flags through the streets beside the Muslim Brotherhood’s red banners with the symbol of two crossed swords. The façade of public goodwill towards the Brotherhood was still visible in early August. Abdel Nasser, visiting a Muslim Brotherhood centre in Port Sa’id on 2 August told his listeners: “We have come today as brotherly visitors and we will be, in the future, brothers-in-arms.”\(^\text{27}\)

Behind the scenes, however, relations between the RCC and the Brotherhood were increasingly tense. British official documents provide a distinctive perspective on the developing conflict, and confirm that the question of whether the Brotherhood should retain an independent capacity for paramilitary action lay at the heart of the crisis. On 24 February 1953, before the beginning of formal negotiations over the Canal Zone, Trefor Evans, Oriental Counsellor at the British Embassy in Cairo met several senior members of the Brotherhood, including Al-Hudaybi. According to Evan’s account, they only discussed the circumstances in which the Canal Zone base could be reactivated in the context of British proposals for a Middle East Defence pact aimed at checking Soviet influence, and did not discuss the Brotherhood’s relationship with the military regime.\(^\text{28}\) By May 1953 British officials did, however, know from other sources of the growing conflict between the RCC and the Brotherhood and were extremely interested in the question of the role the Brotherhood’s paramilitary forces in the context of the Canal Zone negotiations. Foreign Office officials discussed the question in an exchange of minutes in late May, raising the possibility that the Brotherhood’s fighters “might go into action [in the Canal Zone] … to force the [Egyptian] Government’s hand.”\(^\text{29}\)
It was not until August 1953 that Al-Hudaybi talked more candidly to Evans about relations between the Brotherhood and the RCC. Evans called on the General Guide in Alexandria over the Eid al-Adha holiday and found him in a somewhat pessimistic mood. “All was not well” between the Brotherhood and the military regime, Al-Hudaybi said. When Evans asked if the Brotherhood had been “fighting the Liberation Rally”, he demurred, however. “He had certainly given instructions that members of the Brotherhood should not join the Rally, but he had at the same time made it clear that they were not to work against it.” Al-Hudaybi refused to comment on the progress of the Canal Zone negotiations and refused to be drawn on the question of what kind of agreement would be acceptable to the Brotherhood. He also categorically denied that the Brotherhood was responsible for recent attacks on British personnel.  

British officials were well-aware of the RCC’s intervention in the Brotherhood’s internal conflict. One key source of information was Abdel Nasser himself. At dinner with Trefor Evans on 10 September 1953 Abdel Nasser explained that he could count on the backing of the anti-Hudaybi faction (which he described as being headed by Abdul-Rahman al-Banna, Salah Ashmawi and followers of Shaykh al-Baquri), and was additionally in close contact with a “secret inner circle” within the Brotherhood. Unknown to either Al-Banna or Al-Hudaybi, this internal conspiracy aimed at seizing control of the Guidance Office during the upcoming meeting and elections planned for October.

The Brotherhood’s internal conflict reached a new level of tension in November 1953 as the struggle for leadership of the society erupted into violence. On 19 November, Sayyid Fayiz, second in command of the Special Section, was killed as a result of an explosion at his home. According to Mitchell, rumours quickly began to circulate through the ranks of the Society that Fayiz had been about to hand over to Al-Hudaybi the details of the Secret Apparatus membership and leadership, prompting his murder by one of his colleagues in the paramilitary group. Al-Hudaybi’s opponents struck back on 27 November: a delegation of his leading critics visited him at home to demand his resignation, and then took over the Society headquarters. Abdel Nasser then stepped in to mediate, and the dissidents agreed to allow the Brotherhood’s General Assembly to meet on 28 November. Al-Hudaybi’s enthusiastic reception by the Assembly left the isolation of his critics in no doubt, and four key dissidents were suspended on 29 November and expelled on 9 December. The expulsion of Ahmad Zaki Hassan, ‘Abd-al-Rahman al-Sanadi, Mahmoud Sayyid Khalil al-Sabbagh and Ahmad Adil Kamal by “unanimous vote” of the Guidance Council was seen as proof of co-operation with authorities, and Abdel Nasser and three colleagues accepted the General Guide’s invitation to lunch on 23 November.
The apparent rapprochement between Al-Hudaybi and Abdel Nasser did not last long. Following a clash between Brotherhood members and student supporters of the Liberation Rally at Cairo University, the RCC announced the dissolution of the Society, accusing the Brotherhood of betraying the national cause to the British during Hudaiby’s meeting with Evans the previous year. The banning of the Brotherhood by the RCC put on hold Al-Hudaybi’s attempt to neutralise the Secret Apparatus by appointing a new head, Yusuf Tala’t, who was charged with reforming the SA within the Brotherhood’s ‘family’ system of organisation.

The Brotherhood and Abdel Nasser’s Ides of March

The crises of February and March 1954 marked a turning point in the evolution of the military regime. Abdel Nasser faced his greatest challenge since the revolution itself in the form of an open split with Muhammad Nagib, the general who became the public face of the 1952 coup, and the first president of the republic. Despite the events of January, a key factor in Abdel Nasser’s victory was the Brotherhood’s withdrawal from the coalition supporting Nagib. Having secured the Brotherhood’s absence from the protests called by Nagib’s supporters on the streets and the university campuses, Abdel Nasser then successfully deployed the Liberation Rally and the National Guard to create a semblance of popular collective action in favour of continued military rule.

The sequence of events began with the announcement that the RCC had accepted Muhammad Nagib’s resignation on 25th February, triggering the largest street protests since January 1952. Nagib’s restoration to power on 27th February did not end the turmoil in either the barracks or the streets, however. A month later Abdel Nasser carried out, in Stephens’ words, “what was virtually a second coup, reminiscent in its timing and subtlety of Mark Antony’s speech on the death of Caesar.” In response to the RCC’s announcement on 25 March of its decision to dissolve itself, protests and strikes paralysed Cairo calling for the ‘continuation of the revolution’. Within days the RCC had rescinded its decision to disband, Nagib was confined to bed on the orders of his doctors, and repression of his supporters had begun in earnest. “Nasser emerges from all this as a pretty formidable antagonist”, was the somewhat laconic comment from the British Foreign Office reviewing events at the end of April.

The Brotherhood was visibly present in the streets during the crisis over Nagib’s resignation at the end of February. Large numbers of students gathered at Cairo University in Giza on 28 February, intending to march to Republic Square in order to join the crowds hailing Nagib in front of the ‘Abdin Palace. The police failed to disperse the march as it left the university precincts, but there was a serious clash with the security forces as demonstrators in the Qasr al-Nil bridge area. According to the statement released by the Interior Ministry, the security forces ‘were provoked’ by the demonstrators as they attempted to stop the march crossing the bridge, and opened fire, injuring 13 people. The news of the attack on the students reached the crowds in ‘Abdin Square in a dramatic fashion: ‘Abd-al-Qadir ‘Awdah of the Muslim

36 Mitchell, The Society of the Muslim Brothers, p124.
37 Mitchell, The Society of the Muslim Brothers, p125.
38 Stephens, Nasser, p127
39 BFOA FO317 / 108316 - JE1015/29 15 April Minute comment by G.E. Millard [?] ‘Nasser emerges from all this as a pretty formidable antagonist’. 22/4
40 Summary of World Broadcasts, 445, 5 Mar 54, Cairo 0500 010354
Brotherhood appeared by the side of Nagib as he addressed the crowd from a balcony in the Palace, brandishing a handkerchief which he said was stained with the blood of a student shot by the police.41

Yet within a short space of time, Abdel Nasser had struck a crucial blow against the RCC majority’s opponents by securing the withdrawal of the Muslim Brotherhood from the coalition supporting Nagib, following the release of Al-Hudaybi from prison. The call for a strike by pro-RCC majority trade union leaders, coupled with the authorities’ decision to cut off the power to public transport and factories appears to have had similar effect on the labour movement.42 The defection of the Brotherhood from the Nagib camp also changed the balance of forces on the university campuses. Abdel Nasser’s meeting with al-Hudaybi neutralised the Muslim Brotherhood and the society’s activists began to melt away from the protests against military rule, leaving their Leftist and Wafdist allies demoralised. Student supporters of the Liberation Rally began to make their presence felt by organising counter-demonstrations. The thousands of students who gathered on the Cairo University campus on 30 March were thus split three ways: into a group calling for the formation of a Muslim government, another calling for support for the return to party political life and the dissolution of the RCC, and a third organised by the Liberation Rally.43 Two days later, the police stormed the campus and the university authorities announced the closure of both Cairo and Ayn Shams universities for a week.44 Protests continued at Alexandria University for several more days, and demonstrating medical students were fired on by police on 6 April.45

Elsewhere directing hand of the state in organising much of the ‘spontaneous’ collective action during March 25-29 was apparent to observers at the time. The Lacoutures noticed columns of demonstrators in National Guard uniforms marching towards the Little Gazira Palace where the RCC was in session on 25 March, shouting slogans for ‘carrying on the revolution’.46 Khalid Muhyi-al-Din accompanied Muhammad Nagib and King Sa‘ud to Alexandria on 27 March. “At every station there was a mob of people shouting ‘Long live Nagib. Long live King Sa‘ud and then ‘Long live the revolution and No to parties.’” As the train swept through the lush Delta countryside, exactly the same slogans were heard at every station, leading him to conclude that the demonstrations had been organised by the LR and the security services. Fathallah Mahrus remembers seeing lorry-loads of peasants from the experimental agricultural projects in the Liberation Province marching with the National Guard through the streets of Alexandria shouting “Long live the revolution, down with the reactionaries, down with the traitors” in support of the RCC.47

Civilian allies, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood, joined by sections of the trade union leadership, played a crucial role in Abdel Nasser’s success, but by and large it was their absence from the streets rather than their presence as a countermovement

41 Lacoutre and Lacouture, Egypt in transition, p185. See also BFOA FO317 / 108316, JE 1015/12 Mar 17
42 Enclosure in Cairo Despatch No. 68. Resignation and Reinstatement of General Neguib.” 25th Feb – 11th March
43 See Pripstein Posusney, Labor and the state, pp54-56 for a detailed account.
44 FO317 / 108316 JE1015/29 ‘Summary of events, March 11 – April 15’
45 Lacoutures, Egypt in Transition, p189
46 Fathallah Mahrus, interview, London, 9 July 2009, in Arabic
which was vital. The semblance of popular collective action in favour of the continuation of military rule generated by small protests organised by the National Guard, Liberation Rally officials and the security forces, and amplified by the state media, played a key role in disorientating opponents and discouraging those passively hostile to the military regime from engaging in collective action alongside opponents of military rule.

Towards catastrophe: war with the regime

Reconciliation between the Brotherhood and Abdel Nasser did not last long. The outcome of negotiations over British withdrawal from the Canal Zone was pivotal in the final breakdown of relations between the Brotherhood and the regime. The Brotherhood began an active campaign against the Canal Zone Agreement in the summer of 1954. The initialling of the Heads of Agreement was followed by an attack on the Light Railway bridge at Abu-Sultan in the Canal Zone – “expertly blown up” on 2 August in what British officials felt was “clearly a gesture against the Agreement”. British reports emphasize the Egyptian authorities’ close co-operation with them over the incident, and cite information from “confidential sources” giving details of mass arrests of Brotherhood members, raids on the Brotherhood’s headquarters and the confiscation of hoarded arms. 48 Tension continued to run high into September, with scuffles between the police and Brotherhood supporters in Cairo on 30 August and an incident at Friday prayers in Tanta on 10 September after which 17 Brotherhood members and the preacher were arrested. 49 Even as Abdel Nasser equated the Brotherhood with the Zionists and Communists in angry speeches, the regime continued to work on the internal divisions within the Society, appealing for the support of “loyal” elements against the “corrupted” leadership. 50

The final act of the drama ended in catastrophe for the Brotherhood with both pro and anti-regime figures accused of complicity in a plot to kill Abdel Nasser. The attempted assassination took place on 26th October as Abdel Nasser was speaking in Alexandria. The regime’s retribution was swift and harsh. Six Brotherhood members were hanged after a military trial, including Deputy General Guide, ‘Abd-al-Qadir ‘Awda; Shaikh Faraghal, and Yusuf Tala’t, who had been appointed by Hudaybi to reform the Special Section only a year before. 51 Al-Hudaybi’s death sentence was commuted to imprisonment, and thousands of other Brotherhood members were jailed. The assassination attempt gave Abdel Nasser “the incontestable opportunity of being done with the Society of the Muslim Brothers”, and for good measure he was able to remove Nagib from his office as president, citing his association with the Brotherhood as proof of his unfitness. 52

The Brotherhood and the revolution of 2011

It is too early to say whether the relationship between the Muslim Brotherhood and the military regime which took power following the popular uprising against Mubarak

48 BFOA FO 371 / 108314 JE 1013 / 36 Egy FPS 11-24 Aug 54
49 BFOA FO 371/108314 JE1013/38 Egypt FPS Aug 25 – Sep 7 (Sep 9) ; FO 371/108314, JE 1013/40 Egypt FPS Sep 8-21 (Sep 23) 54
50 BFOA FO 371/108314 JE1013/38 Egypt FPS Aug 25 – Sep 7 (Sep 9) ; FO 371/108314, JE 1013/40 Egypt FPS Sep 8-21 (Sep 23) 54
51 Mitchell, The Society of the Muslim Brothers, pp151 - 161
52 Mitchell, The Society of the Muslim Brothers, p151
after 25 January 2011 will follow the same trajectory as in the period 1952-4. Nevertheless, there are a number of ways in which the experience of the first two years of the Free Officers’ regime can inform our understanding of the dynamics of the relationship between the Brotherhood and the military in 2011.

The experience of 1952-4 provides a compelling example of how the consolidation of a post-revolutionary regime is not only shaped by the political opportunity structure generated by elite decisions, but also by interactions between actors who are wholly or partly independent of the state. In particular, it reminds us of the valuable role that actors organised in social movement form can play for new regimes attempting to manage and demobilise popular protests. Herein lies the most important similarity between the Brotherhood-military relationship during the two periods in question: a common desire to demobilise popular protest and the military regime’s need to achieve this by means other than repression alone. As will be explored in more detail below, in 2011, the Brotherhood sought to influence the popular protests which continued during the first six months after the fall of Mubarak through first its selective absence from the streets, and then by its presence on the 29 July ‘Friday of Stability’ demonstration. However, these interactions outside the state have also to be understood in the context of the active role played by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces and the post-revolutionary government in changing the political opportunity structure from above, through alterations to the electoral system and legislative framework governing political parties. Yet the Brotherhood’s relative lack of success as a countermovement during the first six months of 2011, points to a crucial difference between the two periods: the active role played by popular protests in the removal of Mubarak from power and the continuation of mass street protests and strikes in the post-revolutionary period.

The popular uprising which began on 25 January 2011 has presented the Muslim Brotherhood with immense opportunities and great challenges. At the time of writing, parliamentary and presidential elections scheduled for November 2011 had yet to take place, but it was widely expected that the Brotherhood’s candidates and sympathisers would command a high vote in both, although the organisation pledged to only stand in 50 percent of parliamentary constituencies and said it would not be fielding an official candidate in the presidential election. In contrast to the relentless pressure from the Mubarak regime in its final years, as a result of the revolution, the Brotherhood was been able to openly form and register a political party, the Freedom and Justice Party. The Deputy Chairman of the Brotherhood, Khairat al-Shatir, was released in March 2011, after several years in prison. During the first six months of the revolution, the Brotherhood’s leadership, like its counterparts in 1952, openly proclaimed its support for the post-revolutionary military regime, exhorting striking workers to restart the ‘wheel of production’, and calling on protestors to leave the streets and give the ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces time to complete its declared mission of overseeing the post-Mubarak political transition.

Yet, the Brotherhood’s ability to take advantage of these opportunities has been compromised by internal conflict and fragmentation, including the departure of leading figures such as Abdul-Moneim Abu al-Futuh who announced in May that he would run for president, despite an official decision by the Brotherhood not to field a candidate. An important layer of youth activists in the Brotherhood also moved away from the organisation in the wake of the revolution, forming a new political party of their own, the Egyptian Current Party (Hizb al-Tayyar al-Masry).

Continued popular protest

Both the Brotherhood leadership and the post-revolutionary military rulers have shown a desire to work together in an attempt to demobilise popular protest. The Brotherhood leadership has attempted to achieve its ends through its presence in and absence from the streets. During the first five months of the revolution, it was through selective absences from the continuing street protests that the Brotherhood leadership sought to demonstrate its influence over the popular movement. Not until the end of July did the organisation forcibly assert its presence on the streets in a demonstration of its own in support of the SCAF’s call for ‘stability’. However, the Brotherhood was acting as part of a wider coalition of Islamist groups, with the initiative having passed to the Salafists.

The Brotherhood leadership made clear its willingness to withdraw from the streets in return for recognition by and concessions from the regime, even before the fall of Mubarak. Umar Sulayman, Mubarak’s Vice-President, met Essam al-Erian and other leading figures in the Brotherhood during the weekend of 5-6 February for talks aimed at negotiating the end of the demonstrations in Tahrir Square. Pressure from within the Brotherhood, particularly from the organisation’s youth activists, forced a retreat from these talks, with the MB leadership saying that they had only been of an ‘exploratory’ nature, and the protests continued until 11 February when the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces removed Mubarak from power.

The Brotherhood’s first statements following the downfall of Mubarak emphasized the need for stability and welcomed the role of the army, although these sentiments were echoed across the political mainstream. The referendum on 19 March over the constitutional amendments initiated by the SCAF saw the first signs of new political divisions emerging in the post-revolutionary landscape. The Brotherhood played a leading role in the campaign for a ‘Yes’ vote, along with other Islamist organisations, sections of the former ruling National Democratic Party, with the SCAF itself discreetly supporting the ‘Yes’ position from the background. The ‘No’ camp grouped


together many of the liberal and leftist political forces, including most of the leading revolutionary youth movements.\textsuperscript{60}

The constitutional referendum campaign was characterised by the lack of significant mobilisations in the streets, in contrast to the intense activity during the uprising against Mubarak, with neither Yes or No campaigns mobilising large protests or rallies. However, within a few weeks of the referendum demonstrations, particularly the Friday protests in Tahrir Square, had begun to grow in size again. The Brotherhood’s role in these demonstrations was symptomatic of the tensions within the organisation over the legitimacy of continued protest. Demands for the speeding up of the process of \textit{tathir} (cleansing) the purging of state institutions, and \textit{qasas} (retribution) the prosecution of those responsible for the killing of protestors during the uprising, began to mobilise tens and then hundreds of thousands in regular protests. The initiative in calling these demonstrations generally lay with the liberals and the left, organised in the revolutionary coalitions which had played such an important role in the uprising itself. The Brotherhood’s leadership did not at first oppose the demonstrations, and large numbers of Brotherhood members participated in the biggest protests. Yet there were clear limits to this support: where demonstrators raised slogans directly attacking the SCAF, or attempted to breach the curfew which prevented overnight sit-ins in Tahrir Square, the Brotherhood leadership generally distanced itself. On 8 April, for example, a large demonstration in Tahrir Square called under the slogan of ‘Friday of Cleansing’, to demand the faster prosecution of senior figures within the Mubarak regime, saw significant participation by Brotherhood members and leaders.\textsuperscript{61} However, an attempt by a group of junior army officers to extend the demonstration into an overnight sit-in, and their articulation of direct criticisms of the SCAF, was not supported by the Brotherhood. Not only did Brotherhood members leave the square rather than continue the sit-in, but the General Guide made a statement supporting the breaking up of the sit-in by the military police.\textsuperscript{62}

In April the Brotherhood’s position in relation to the officers’ protest was hardly unique – similar views were advanced across much of the political mainstream. However, over the following months, voices critical of the SCAF visibly gained in strength. The call for a ‘Second Revolution of Anger’ on 27 May, which included demands directly critical of the SCAF, mobilised around 500,000 in Tahrir Square, and hundreds of thousands around the country. The Brotherhood leadership refused to support the protest, but large numbers of the organisation’s youth activists were said to have participated. Chants included ‘Where is the Brotherhood? Tahrir is here!’\textsuperscript{63}

A series of events in late June and July propelled even larger numbers into the streets and saw the re-establishment of the protest camp in Tahrir Square. Clashes between the police and families of those killed during the uprising on 28 June triggered renewed protests demanding the speeding up of prosecutions of officers accused of


killing demonstrators, and of the purge of the Interior Ministry. On 8 July up to a million protested in Tahrir Square and in many major cities. Rather than boycott the demonstration, the Brotherhood leadership returned to its earlier tactic of participation in the protest during the day, but rejecting the call to stay in Tahrir overnight. The re-establishment of the Tahrir protest camp seemed to have shaken the government, prompting a cabinet reshuffle and a number of concessions related to the purge of the Interior Ministry. However, despite the large numbers on the early demonstrations, and the further radicalisation of a section of the protestors who raised renewed calls for the end to military rule, the SCAF was able to ride out the storm, and even facilitate new street mobilisations by civilian allies opposed to the criticism of the transitional regime at the end of the month.

The last week in July saw two important events which signalled the opening of a new phase in the struggle for domination of the streets. The first of these was an attack on a march from Tahrir Square in Abbasiyya, en route to the headquarters of the SCAF. The march was halted by the military police near Abbasiyya Square but marchers were attacked by thugs leading to hundreds of injuries and one death. The second was the Islamist mobilisation of 29 July, which saw the first mass protests clearly dominated by Islamist organisations and raising Islamist slogans. Organised under the slogan ‘Friday of stability’, the demonstrations brought together a variety of Islamist groups from the three main tendencies present in Egypt: the Brotherhood, the Salafists and the Jihadi organisations. The largest by far of the demonstrations took place in Tahrir Square, which witnessed a gathering of hundreds of thousands, but it was accompanied by smaller mobilisations in other cities, including around 10,000 in Alexandria.

The significance of 29 July for the analysis advanced here, is that this mobilisation confirmed the tremendous pressures on the Brotherhood as a result of the mass movement. Firstly, the initiative in calling for the 29 July protests, which had originally been set for 22 July, came from the Salafist movement, rather than the Brotherhood, which only backed the demonstration a week beforehand. The Brotherhood leadership’s decision to support the protests, however, prompted the a section of the organisation’s youth activists to issue a statement calling for its postponement in the interests of unity. Under pressure from both radical flanks, the Brotherhood’s actual participation in the streets on 29 July was fairly muted, giving the impression that the organisation was tailing the Salafists, while losing a good portion of its activist base who were pulled by the liberal and left revolutionary coalitions.

Openings from above

As in 1952-4 the relationship between the military regime and the Brotherhood in 2011 has been structured by the ruling officers’ ability to shape the institutional political system. Some of the changes to the constitution and electoral system in the wake of the 2011 uprising are likely to benefit the Brotherhood at the expense of less well-established political forces, and desire to capitalise on this advantage has been cited as a reason for the Brotherhood’s strong support for holding elections relatively rapidly. The electoral system proposed by the SCAF in a draft law in May 2011 reserved two thirds of the parliamentary seats to be elected by individual candidacy and the remainder from party lists, drawing fierce criticism from leftist and Nasserist parties. The Brotherhood declined to support one electoral system over another. “We are in support of a system which gains the broadest margin of approval from political forces,” Sa’ad al-Husayni, member of the Guidance Office told Ahram Online.

The timing of the elections in relation to the process of writing a new constitution was also a subject of intense debate, with the Brotherhood and the SCAF apparently in concurrence that the elections should take place first, in contrast to some liberal and leftist political parties who called for the convocation of a constituent assembly before the parliamentary elections.

Other changes in the constitutional arena have not been so favourable to the Brotherhood, however, suggesting that SCAF’s policy was guided by a desire to maintain a balance between Islamists and liberals in order to maintain domination over both. The debate over the so-called ‘supra-constitutional principles’ announced as a set of guidelines for the committee tasked with writing the new constitution is a case in point. The principles were announced on July 12 by SCAF spokesman Mohsen el-Fangary in the context of the renewal of mass protests in Tahrir Square, and confirmed in August. The Brotherhood, along with other Islamist organisations was categorical in its rejection of the proposal. Deputy General Guide Rashad Bayyumi told Daily News Egypt: "We don't accept the initiative in principle … Setting principles that regulate the constitution circumvents the will of the people … which I call the dictatorship of the minority."

The Brotherhood has benefited however, from opportunities created by the post-revolutionary government in other areas, however. One of the most significant of these is in the first six months of 2011 was the inclusion of Brotherhood figures in the temporary executive of the Egyptian Trade Union Federation, following the dissolution of the pro-Mubarak executive in August 2011.

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Aside from the streets, the other major site of popular protest during the first 6 months of the 2011 revolution was the workplaces. Egyptian NGO Awlad al-Ard collected data on nearly 1000 separate episodes of collective action by workers between January and July, of which around 500 occurred in February alone, mostly in the aftermath of Mubarak’s fall. Workers’ demands encompassed a wide range of issues, from the explicitly political demand for the sacking of managers and administrators associated with the former ruling party, to claims over unpaid wages and bonuses and demands for temporary staff to be given permanent contracts. The government and mainstream political organisations, from the Brotherhood to the Liberals, have been united in their condemnation of strikes for ‘sectional’ interests. Essam Sharaf’s cabinet adopted legislation criminalising certain categories of ‘disruptive’ strikes in March, although in practice, repression appeared to have had little effect in halting the strike wave. Meanwhile the post-revolutionary government has been more accommodating of the emergence of independent unions, allowing new unions to register for the first time in more than fifty years, and dissolving the executive of the Egyptian Trade Union Federation, which was dominated by the former ruling party.

In relation to workers’ protests, the Brotherhood played a relatively low profile role during the first six months of the revolution. Nevertheless, the organisation was able, as in 1952, to offer both ideological and practical support to the military regime in its attempt to contain and restrict workers’ protests. The Brotherhood, in common with much of the rest of the political mainstream, repeatedly called for a return to work. Beyond the ideological offensive against strikes, the Brotherhood made a small number of interventions into the workers’ movement. On May 1, at the same time as activists from the independent unions were celebrating international workers’ day in Tahrir Square, the Brotherhood’s workers’ group organised a protest outside the Egyptian Trade Union Federation headquarters, demanding its dissolution.

At the beginning of August, Ahmad al-Bura’i, Minister of Labour, did dissolve the executive of the ETUF, by implementing a court decision which annulled the results of the 2006 trade union elections. The Brotherhood was given strong representation on the temporary executive appointed by al-Bura’i to oversee the affairs of the ETUF prior to the holding of new trade union elections, including the appointment of Yusri Bayyumi, a leading figure in the Brotherhood’s workers’ organisation as the temporary executive’s treasurer.

75 Awlad al-Ard’s reports on strike activity include brief details of workers’ demands. See for example, Awlad al-Ard, ‘Hasad al-haraka al-ummaliyya fi mayu 2011’, Arabic Network for Human Rights Information website, [link], accessed 6 September 2011
76 Muhammad al-Gali, ‘Sharaf yuwafiq ala hal ittihad ummal masr’, [link], accessed 6 September 2011
Conclusion

This article has sought to make the case that comparison between the relationship between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Free Officers during the period 1952-4 is helpful in understanding the dynamics of the relationship between the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces and the Brotherhood in the wake of the 2011 revolution. While this comparison highlights some important similarities between the two sides’ attempts to negotiate the challenges of the immediate post-revolutionary situation in both periods, it also confirms three significant differences.

Between 1952-4, the Free Officers first created opportunities for the Brotherhood to continue organising independently of the state so long as it acted primarily as a countermovement to its liberal and leftist civilian rivals. During 1953, the military regime took steps to curtail the Brotherhood’s scope for organising, began to build new state-dominated institutions such as the Liberation Rally and the National Guard to take over some the role of the Brotherhood’s popular organisations, particularly its paramilitary commandos, and intervened actively in the Brotherhood’s internal conflicts, effectively paralysing the organisation. Finally during 1954, despite a brief interlude of co-operation during the March Crisis, the two sides moved into conflict, culminating in the full-scale repression of the Brotherhood and the execution of six of its leading members after the attempted assassination of Abdel Nasser in October 1954.

The relationship between the Brotherhood and the military regime instituted by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces in February 2011 shares some similarities with the Brotherhood-military relationship in 1952-4. In particular, the common desire of both parties to demobilise popular protests has been evident during the first six months of 2011, as has the active role of the military rulers in shaping some aspects of the new political system to the benefit of the Brotherhood. However, this article has argued that there are three important areas of difference between the two periods.

The first, and most important factor is the continuation of large-scale processes of popular mobilisation in the first six months of the revolution, including repeated mass street demonstrations, sit-ins in Tahrir Square and the biggest strike wave for more than 60 years. The Brotherhood’s attempts to influence these mobilisations were relatively unsuccessful. Its selective absence from key protests critical of the military regime did not, as in March 1954, cause its liberal and leftist rivals to lose heart. The presence of a large Islamist mobilisation in Tahrir Square on 29 July, could be said to have provoked something of a crisis among the secular revolutionary forces, but equally the 29 July protest was not an unequivocal success for the Brotherhood, as it was dominated rather by its more radical Islamist competitors, the Salafist movement.

A second factor is the nature of the military regime itself. The SCAF’s reluctance to pursue an energetic purge of state institutions reflects the fact that its members were central to the old regime, in contrast to the Free Officers who shared some common experiences of organising underground opposition to the monarchy with the Brotherhood and other pre-revolutionary opposition groups.

Finally, as a consequence both of the continuing mobilisation from below, and of the SCAF’s proximity to the old regime, the relationship between the Brotherhood and
the military has been far less exclusive than that between the Free Officers and the Brotherhood during 1952-4. The SCAF has facilitated the growth and political activism of the Salafist movement, as well as creating opportunities or the Brotherhood. Meanwhile, while the SCAF appeared to also want to balance between the Islamists and other political forces to a certain extent, as the promulgation of the supra-constitutional principles illustrated.

Unfortunately for the Brotherhood, the Free Officers’ tactical alliance with the Brotherhood between 1952 and 1954 masked a deeper strategic goal of destroying all civilian challengers to the consolidation of military rule, including their erstwhile allies. It is far too soon to say whether the generals who took power in Egypt in February 2011 will make the same strategic choices in this respect as Abdel Nasser and his colleagues. Yet the first six months of the Egyptian revolution of 2011 confirm that as in 1952, the post-revolutionary political landscape has been shaped by the new military regime’s search for civilian allies capable of demobilising the popular protest movement.

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