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Business As Usual: The Egyptian–U.S. Intelligence Relationship

Michele Black^A & Osamah Alhenaki^B

The aim of this article is to address the question of the future of Egyptian–US intelligence relations through an examination of history and an analysis of the present time. We empirically show that Egypt, while under the leadership of al-Sisi, will return to a ‘Mubarak-era intelligence-sharing relationship’ with the United States. We argue that the events leading up to today, with a short break under the leadership of Morsi, have proven that Egypt and the United States share similar interest in regards to intelligence. Finally, this article discusses the challenges and opportunities regarding the future relationship between Egypt and the US intelligence agencies in context with the newly elected Egyptian President, Abdul Fattah al-Sisi. Despite the changes and challenges, it is our conclusion that Egypt and the United States will return back to their intelligence-sharing relationship, in a “business as usual” manner.

Keywords: *Abdul Fattah al-Sisi, Extraordinary Rendition, Intelligence Sharing, Foreign Intelligence Agencies, Egyptian Intelligence*

Before 2011, it would have been unimaginable to think that Egypt would “oust” its President, Muhammad Hosni Mubarak, and “democratically” elect two new leaders. These recent events, commonly associated with the Arab Spring, have not only affected Egypt’s domestic stability, but have also altered its international relationships, specifically with the United States. On the basis of these events and newly elected leaders, there were initial concerns that the relationship between Egypt and the United States, particularly in the area of intelligence, would be negatively affected.

Egypt has been a key political partner with the United States since 1922, and defense cooperation between the two countries has included intelligence sharing since 1942 (“US Relations with Egypt” 2014; Sirrs 2010). This relationship has been particularly due to Egypt being known for its legacy in intelligence and serving as mentor to most developing Arab intelligence establishments (Sirrs 2010, 1; Murphy 1991).

Intelligence is the key to every country’s national security and its policymakers. In its broadest meaning, it refers to any kind of information that meets the stated or understood needs of policymakers and has been collected, processed, and narrowed

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to meet those needs” (Lowenthal 2008, 2). For purposes such as avoiding strategic surprise and providing long-term expertise on critical issues, countries consider their intelligence agencies among the most important assets within their governments.

However, Arab countries view intelligence a little differently than the United States, and rely heavily on their intelligence and security establishment mainly for “coup-proofing” regime security, and preserving the status quo. Their main goal, even more important than preventing or conducting foreign espionage, is to avoid coups and keep their current rulers in power (Sirrs 2010, 1).

Ironically, and “given the centrality of the security apparatus to the Arab regime stability,” it is “surprising that so little has been written about the *Mukhabarat* [intelligence agency] in any Arab state. Much more has been written about the intelligence agencies of the United States, United Kingdom, Russia, France, Israel, China, and Germany than the individual Arab services” (Ignatius 2013). This gap in knowledge hinders our ability to understand the impact of events such as the Arab Spring, as well as provide policy recommendations regarding U.S. interests in the region.

As new leadership takes hold in Egypt, there are still many questions we need to ask, such as: “Will the Egyptian intelligence community continue to partner with the United States?” and “Will the relationship with the United States be the same as before, or experience a dramatic change now that Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has been elected president?”

The aim of this article is to address these questions through the examination of the Egyptian-U.S. intelligence relationship throughout history. We empirically show that Egypt, while under the leadership of el-Sisi, will return to a “Mubarak-era intelligence-sharing relationship” with the United States. We argue that the events leading up to today, with a short break under the leadership of Morsi, have proven that Egypt and the United States share similar interest in regard to intelligence. Therefore the intelligence relationship will continue as it did before under Mubarak, and be “business as usual.”

We support this argument through the literature that has discussed similar situations in the past, particularly in regard to intelligence sharing, alliance building, and restructuring based on regime change (Olson 1971; Walsh 2007; Morrow 1991; Siverson and Starr 1994). The theories we have uncovered to support our argument explain that countries share intelligence because of similar interests, and both Egypt and the United States may benefit by creating an intelligence-sharing relationship based on those similar interests (Olson 1971; Walsh 2007).

Next, the intelligence they share will only be on “specific topics and sources where the participant states’ interests are most closely aligned” (Walsh 2007). This means that not all intelligence-sharing relationships will share every aspect of their national security, but rather those areas where their interests most closely align. This is based on the benefit each gains from the particular subject, as well as the fear that one of the members could defect from the intelligence relationship based on a change in government or policy (Walsh 2007). The fear of defection or change in the intelligence-sharing relationship is naturally a large concern for countries because

they share sensitive assets, capabilities, and resources (Walsh 2007).

Finally, we specifically highlight the impact of regime change on an intelligence-sharing relationship, finding support that regime change does in fact alter this relationship (Morrow 1991). It is argued that if one of the participants in the relationship experiences a significant regime change in which policies or interests change, a shift or defection in the intelligence-sharing agreement can be expected (Morrow 1991). Likewise, we can expect the reverse to be true when there is an additional change in leadership that returns like-minded leaders and original policies to their historical status. In this case, the relationship can return back to the previous relationship.

We took these theories and applied them to the case of the Egyptian and U.S. intelligence-sharing relationship, finding empirical evidence supporting our claim that this relationship does, in fact, contain similar interests—historically (under Mubarak) and currently (under el-Sisi). On the basis of our historical case study, we demonstrate that Egypt and the United States had under Mubarak, and still have under el-Sisi, similar interests in the category of security that warrant an intelligence-sharing relationship. These security interests can be broken down into two subcategories: (1) stability in the region and (2) countering terrorism (also known as Islamic fundamentalism) (Olson 1971; Walsh 2007). We demonstrate that these similar interests brought the two countries closer together and served as the foundation of the intelligence relationship. These interests are also what brought the relationship back together under el-Sisi (Walsh 2007).

To support these claims, we present the historical intelligence relationship of Egypt and the United States, specifically identifying the security factors we note above and showing how they contribute to intelligence cooperation. To perform this task, the article is organized into two sections: (1) evolution of intelligence relationship and (2) present and future challenges. The first section provides the background necessary to understand the political and historical context of the Egyptian–U.S. intelligence relationship, and how this relationship has shown to strengthen throughout the years based on interests. We focus on the key historical events that show those mutual interests and benefits between Egypt and the United States. The events that specifically highlight those mutual interests and benefits include President Anwar Sadat’s assassination, which resulted in Mubarak taking over the presidency, the Egyptian–Israeli peace agreements, the Afghan War, the First Gulf War, the terrorist attacks on 9/11, and the Second Gulf War.

The second section of this article focuses on the present state of the intelligence agency, which was significantly impacted during the Arab Spring and the overthrow of Mubarak. This demonstrates that if regime change impacts previously agreed to benefits and interests, a shift or defection in the intelligence sharing can be expected (Walsh 2007). Additionally, we examine the future status and challenges between the United States and Egypt now that el-Sisi has been elected president. Finally, we discuss why we perceive that the intelligence relationship has returned to its historical status and that el-Sisi will continue to share intelligence with the United States in a “business as usual” manner.

Evolution of Intelligence Relationship

The Egyptian intelligence service is the oldest-running Arab intelligence agency, and started even before the British colonization in 1882. When Britain officially occupied Egypt, it found a weak intelligence system in desperate need of reform (Sharp 2014). The inherited intelligence system was basically a secret police that investigated antiregime conspiracies and monitored foreigners. Its sources were limited, and it consisted of a number of plainclothes policemen, informant networks, and anonymous boxes where citizens could place petitions for the release of prisoners, denounce neighbors, and report on antigovernment plots (Sirrs 2010). At the end of the nineteenth century, Egyptian intelligence lacked sufficient resources and centralized management to handle the emerging internal threats to the government (Sirrs 2010, 7).

After the assassination of Prime Minister Boutros Ghali in 1910, Britain realized that the Egyptian secret police was in need of radical change. Subsequently, the British amalgamated the secret police networks into one Central Special Office. Following this consolidation, the British continued to work with the Egyptians over the next few years to implement improvements and structural modifications (Sirrs 2010, 8). It wasn't until 1942 that the Egyptian–U.S. intelligence relations started. In 1942, the U.S. Office for Strategic Services (OSS) established an office in Cairo with responsibility for intelligence collection, counterintelligence, and analysis (Sirrs 2010, 23).

In October 1981, Vice President Muhammad Hosni Mubarak came to power after the assassination of President Anwar Sadat. President Mubarak, Egypt's fourth president and its longest-serving ruler after Muhammad Ali Pasha, was Egypt's president and chief military commander for almost 30 years from 1981 until 2011. Following the war, Sadat groomed Mubarak as his successor by giving him assignment in his ruling party and eventually making him the vice president. During his time as vice president in the 1970s, Mubarak was charged with coordinating Egypt's intelligence community, which gave him tremendous experience in intelligence that was useful to him during the successes in his presidency.

Throughout his reign, Mubarak helped develop the Egyptian intelligence community, which was built around three agencies with unique missions and responsibilities: the Egyptian General Intelligence Service, State Security Investigations Service, and Egyptian Homeland Security. **The Egyptian General Intelligence Service (EGIS)** was created in March 1954 by a Republican decree from President Gamal Abdel Nasser and is still active. This intelligence agency is considered the most important intelligence service due to its foreign liaison ties, size, technical sophistication, and history (Sirrs 2010, 43). It also distinguishes itself as a covert action player and a collector of foreign intelligence, with historically known responsibilities for developing and executing important foreign policies toward multiple key issues such as the relationship with Sudan and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict (Sirrs 2010, 44).

Competing with the EGIS is another of Nasser's creations, the **State Security Investigations Service (SSIS)**, which is directly tied to the Ministry of Interior. SSIS enjoys the distinction of being the oldest intelligence service in Egypt (Caroz 1978). Roughly equivalent to the United States' Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the

SSIS is largely focused on domestic issues where it has the responsibility for internal security, counterterrorism, and counterintelligence. Under Egypt's emergency law, the SSIS has wide-ranging powers of surveillance and detention. It is often linked to torture allegations by human rights organizations. However, on March 15, 2011, due to its failure in countering the Arab Spring revolution, the SSIS was replaced by a new organization under the new name of **Egyptian Homeland Security** (EHS) and it is still tied to the Ministry of Interior ("Egypt Dissolves Notorious Internal Security Agency" 2011). After the military coup of 2013 and the overthrow of the newly elected Muslim Brotherhood government, nearly one hundred of the sacked senior officers of SSIS during Muhammad Morsi's time in power, returned to work under EHS (El Deeb 2014).

Finally, and currently rising in influence and power after the military coup of 2013, is the Military Intelligence Department (MID). Before the Arab Spring, and with no significant military threats in sight, the MID used to be largely overshadowed by EGIS and SSIS as they battled religious extremism at home and abroad. However, following the latest military coup and the failure of EGIS and SSIS to preserve the status quo of Mubarak's regime, the MID seems to be taking over the intelligence community. It is also the organization fundamentally responsible for monitoring the loyalty of the armed forces. The current president of Egypt and the former head of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, formerly served as the director of MID between 2010 and 2012 when he allegedly orchestrated a coup against the newly elected President Muhammad Morsi ("Mukhbarat el-Khabeya" 2011).

Since Sadat's assassination, these three agencies have constituted the core of Egypt's intelligence community. In fact, one of Mubarak's priorities after becoming president was to have the secret police investigate the loyalty of the armed forces, and focus Egypt's intelligence on the murder of Sadat. Initially, Mubarak's leadership feared a larger military conspiracy and immediately imposed a state of emergency. Mubarak was doubtful of MID's reliability, and allowed the Ministry of Interior, the Republican Guards, and the SSIS to play an important role in the days after the assassination to ensure presidential security.

When Sadat was assassinated, the United States' Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was surprised, as well as concerned. Specifically, it was concerned that Mubarak would cut ties and blame it for not properly training Sadat's bodyguards (Woodward 1987, 168). The CIA immediately sent a team to Cairo to assist in the investigation, ensure the confidence of the new president, maintain the good relationship with the Egyptian intelligence, and ensure the flow of weapons to the Afghan Mujahideen. Additionally, the CIA reaffirmed its commitment to help Mubarak's Egypt neutralize threats from Libya, Syria, Iran, and Palestine (Sirrs 2010, 152).

It was during this time that mutual interests between Egypt and the United States come to the forefront to cultivate an intelligence-sharing relationship. Prior to Mubarak's reign, there was little information to show why there was an Egyptian-U.S. intelligence-sharing relationship. When Mubarak took over rule after Sadat's assassination, there was an increase on the U.S. side to provide capabilities and expertise to help specifically with stability in the region and to counter-terrorism.

Those capabilities included the United States providing Egypt with unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), and both the jet-powered Teledyne Ryan Aeronautical Model 324 Scarab and Developmental Sciences Corporation's R4E-50 Skyeye UAV systems which it used on the Libyan and Sudanese borders to monitor and counter any military movements or weapon smugglings (Nordeen and Nicolle 1996, 330). Egypt also acquired two EC-130 electronic intelligence/countermeasures aircraft (ELINT/ECM) and four Beech Guardrail ELINT platforms, which significantly advanced Egypt's airborne electronic intelligence capabilities (Nordeen and Nicolle 1996, 330). Egypt's intelligence also acquired other surveillance technologies during the 1980s such as video cameras and enhanced telephone-tapping capabilities.

A number of significant international events specifically concerned with security interests also occurred during this developing relationship under the rule of Mubarak that helped shape the relationship between Egypt and the United States: four wars followed by a peace treaty with Israel (1948, 1956, 1967, 1973, and 1979), two wars in Afghanistan (1980s and 2001), the 9/11 attacks, two Gulf Wars (1990 and 2003), and the Arab Spring. The following section of this article will focus on the two countries' support to each other.

Israeli Peace Treaty

Starting with Israel, it is important to discuss the Egyptian–Israeli interaction because it is strongly linked to the Egypt–U.S. intelligence relationship. After years of wars, from 1948 until the 1970s, and months of negotiations, Egypt and Israel signed the 1979 peace treaty. This followed the 1978 Camp David Accords, which was negotiated by the United States. The treaty, which made Egypt the first Arab state to recognize Israel, included mutual recognition, cessation of the state of war, normalization of relations, and the complete withdrawal by Israel from the Sinai Peninsula. The agreement also provided for the free passage of Israeli ships through the Suez Canal and the Egyptian demilitarization of Sinai (Sharp 2014).

It was in 1979, through the help of the treaty, where Egypt under Sadat but later reinforced by Mubarak, Israel, and the United States began to align security interests. The two countries realized that working together through mutual support on security issues could assist in achieving their own internal interests, which was outlined in the treaty as “Economic and Trade Relations, Cultural Relations, Freedom of Movement, Cooperation for Development and Good Neighborly Relations, and Transportation and Telecommunications” (Peace Treaty between Israel and Egypt 1979).

As part of the agreement, the United States began to provide economic and military aid to Egypt, and political backing for its subsequent governments. Additionally, a significant amount of the military aid from the United States is spent on Egyptian intelligence services (Sharp 2014, 18).

“U.S. policy makers have routinely justified aid to Egypt as an investment in regional stability, built primarily on long-running cooperation with the Egyptian military and on sustaining the March 1979 Egyptian–Israeli peace treaty. Successive U.S. Administrations have publicly characterized Egypt's government as generally influencing

developments in the Middle East in line with U.S. interests” (Sharp 2014, 18).

The Israel–Egyptian relationship and treaty acted as leverage for the United States to provide military aid to Egypt and to ensure the alignment of interests . Essentially, the treaty was not simply an agreement between Israel–Egypt, but also with the United States, which included their interest within the region. However, after Mubarak’s downfall and the takeover of Morsi, Egypt’s interests dramatically changed. The treaty was not supported by Morsi, which we will present evidence and argue later, and changed the relationship between both Israel and Egypt, causing concern within the United States.

Afghanistan

The Afghan–Soviet War was another contributing factor that assisted in strengthening the intelligence-sharing relationship between Egypt and the United States, and it was a critical issue for their mutual interests. Unlike his predecessors, Mubarak was more cautious in dealing with the Mujahideen, but more flexible when dealing with the United States. The Afghan–Soviet conflict served two purposes for Mubarak: (1) cash from the United States and Saudi Arabia flowed into the Egyptian weapon industry and (2) the war was a convenient way to get rid of Islamic extremists who challenged their regime and was also a shared interest with the United States that led to more cooperation in intelligence between the two countries. However, the 1980s were a critical developmental phase in the history of Islamic jihadist movements when they gained valuable experience in Afghan guerilla warfare (Sirrs 2010, 154).

The Arab fighters eventually returned to Egypt as a militant opposition to the regime, or were welcomed by the neighboring country of Sudan that started to pose a serious threat to Mubarak’s regime. Egypt’s security apparatus was focused on fighting these internal threats during the late 1980s and the 1990s. By the mid-1990s, Mubarak’s government started to take the upper hand because of SSIS’ brutal interrogation tactics, torture, intimidation, and success in recruiting informants and arresting key militant leaders. This step was also in line with U.S. interests in the region (Sirrs 2010, 154).

The First Gulf War

When Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990, Egypt and its allies faced new challenges and threats that could have reshaped the region. Egyptian intelligence confronted those challenges by collecting and analyzing intelligence on Iraq’s leadership, military, and opposition as well as monitoring pro-Iraq Palestinian activists. The U.S.–Egyptian liaison channels were extremely busy during the war, passing assessments and exchanging critical intelligence as Egypt officially joined the coalition of forces to liberate Kuwait (“Egypt’s Involvement in the Gulf War 91”

Egyptian intelligence also contributed to the coalition by working closely with the Saudi intelligence agency. It also worked with the United States’ National Security

Agency (NSA) to intercept intelligence communication from Iraq whereby security interests of both Egypt and the United States benefited (Sirrs 2010).

Due to its contributions during the war, Egypt's intelligence was recognized by the Arab world as the best and most useful intelligence agency in the region. Subsequently, Egypt's intelligence kept strong relationship with its partner Arab intelligence services. They continued to exchange analysis, information, and intelligence of mutual interest after the war. Egypt also helped other countries develop their intelligence services. For instance, it was reported that the Egyptian intelligence was training its Kuwaiti counterpart in interrogation and torture (Murphy 1991).

9/11 Attacks

Mubarak claims that the Egyptian intelligence services passed warnings on to the CIA and other U.S. intelligence services about al-Qaeda's intentions to attack the United States before 9/11 (Tyler and MacFarquhar 2002). President George W. Bush and the CIA claimed that they did not receive any detailed, specific warnings on the attacks (Sirrs 2010, 179).

Indeed, the 9/11 attacks were a warning of how Islamic militants were growing globally. But 9/11 also gave EGIS the opportunity to build on its intelligence relationship with the United States. The U.S.–Egyptian intelligence relationship was taken to a new level following the attacks. After the United States announced its War on Terror, Egyptian intelligence gained greater access to U.S. intelligence and analytical training, the CIA's extensive hub of international contacts, and surveillance technology. Subsequently, Egypt became one of more than 100 world intelligence agencies whose primary goal was to destroy al-Qaeda's network (Rudner 2004).

In 2002, the U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff praised Egypt for sharing intelligence on the al-Qaeda terror network. As General Richard Myers said after a meeting with Hosni Mubarak, "We could not ask for more from the Egyptian government. They have supported us in essentially every way we've asked and we've also shared with them what we have in terms of intelligence" ("U.S. Pleased with Egyptian Intelligence-Sharing" 2002).

Second Gulf War

In Egypt, as in all Arab states, the period of the U.S. military campaign against Iraq saw government efforts to contain popular anger at the war in a climate already highly charged by events in Israel and Palestine. "Put in a highly uncomfortable position by its relationship with the United States, the regime responded by strengthening its antiwar message and, at times, joining the opposition's demonstrations." (International Crisis Group 2003, 4). Therefore, for the first time, Egypt was in a tough position on whether or not to support its long-term intelligence ally, the United States.

According to an interview with President Mubarak in 2003, he said that Iraqi forces fighting U.S. and British troops were "guarding Iraq's lands and defending its national honor and nobility in the conflict." He also said the war would cause a "great

tragedy (and) destroy a deep-rooted culture and people.” In addition, he stated, “Egypt’s position has been and still is clear in rejecting ... the military option and rejecting participation in military action of the coalition forces against brotherly Iraq” (“Mubarak warns of ‘100 bin Ladens’” 2003).

There can be little doubt that the regime was genuinely against the war, but it was caught in a bind. As they declared their opposition to the war, while remaining committed to maintaining their intelligence-sharing relationship with the United States, President Mubarak and his government repeatedly warned Washington against prioritizing Iraq over the Palestinian issue. He called for the conflict to be managed under the auspices of the United Nations. He also asserted on state television on March 27, 2003 that Egypt was not providing assistance to the U.S.-led coalition (International Crisis Group 2003).

Lastly, a figure that deserves mentioning due to his contribution toward strengthening the Egyptian and U.S. relationship during this time and throughout these events is Omar Suleiman. His authority over the intelligence agencies was during the key historical events presented above, and he was identified as being the one who established close relations with the CIA, especially in the issues related to terrorism and Islamic extremism. During his time as a lead intelligence leader, Egypt was considered a “black hole” where terrorists could be rendered for interrogation and torture. According to a number of reports, joint EGIS–CIA rendition started with Tal`at Fu`ad Qassim in 1995 and did not end until recently. In a public hearing before the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, CIA Director George Tenet has said that his organization took part in more than 80 renditions before September 11, 2001 (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States 2004). According to Human Rights Watch, press accounts suggest that the United States has flown 100–150 suspects to foreign countries, many of them to Egypt, since September 11 (Human Rights Watch 2005, 4). SSIS also cooperated with the CIA on the same issues; cooperation included many areas other than rendition programs including intelligence exchange and training. According to former U.S. Ambassador to Cairo Edward Walker, the CIA trained an Egyptian Special Forces unit in counterterrorism until the program was shut down in 1998 (Grey 2007, 141).

These historical events outlined above demonstrate that Egypt and the United States shared intelligence based on their similar interests regarding stability in the region and countering terrorism. However, when change occurred to Egypt’s leadership during the Arab Spring, this impacted the intelligence-sharing relationship between Egypt and the United States.

Present and Future Challenges

In December 2010, mass antigovernment protests began in Tunisia and spread across the Middle East. By February 2011, revolutions occurred in Tunisia and Egypt, while Libya and Syria experienced their own civil wars. Other Arab countries also faced protests that varied in size but did not end up with successful revolutions nor did they have civil wars.

For Egypt, the Arab Spring produced what is called the January 25 Revolution, a diverse movement of demonstrations, marches, nonviolent civil resistance, and labor strikes. Millions of Egyptian citizens from a variety of socioeconomic and religious backgrounds demanded the overthrow of the regime of President Mubarak. There were also important Islamic, liberal, anticapitalist, nationalist, and feminist undercurrents of the revolution. Violent clashes between security forces and protesters resulted in at least 846 people killed and 100,000 injured (“Egypt: Cairo's Tahrir Square Fills with Protesters” 2011).

The primary demand from protesters was the end of Mubarak’s 30-year presidency; however, some of the causes of the demonstrations included police brutality, prolonged state of emergency laws, and lack of free elections and freedom of speech, government corruption, high unemployment, food price inflation, poverty, and low wages. Additionally, some specific complaints had to do with Egyptian intelligence agencies free reign against anyone perceived to be the government’s opposition (Sharp 2014).

Following the failure of Mubarak’s regime and intelligence services to overcome the conflict, Mubarak dissolved his government and appointed former head of the EGIS Omar Suleiman as vice president in an attempt to quell dissent. Later, and in a response to pressure, Mubarak announced he had not intended to seek reelection in September. Mubarak’s presidency ended after 18 days of demonstrations during the 2011 Arab Spring Revolution. On February 11, 2011 Vice President Suleiman announced that Mubarak had resigned and transferred his power to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces.

On March 5, 2011 protesters raided SSIS buildings across Egypt, including the headquarters in Alexandria and the main national headquarters in Cairo. Protesters stated they raided the buildings to secure documents they believed to show various crimes committed by the intelligence agency against the people of Egypt during Mubarak’s rule (“Egypt Security Building Stormed” 2011).

On March 15, 2011 the Ministry of Interior announced the dissolution of SSIS and the arrest of its leader under suspicion of ordering the killings of demonstrators. The service was then replaced by EHS. Mubarak and both of his sons were later detained for questioning about allegations of corruption and abuse of power. In August 2011, Mubarak was tried in court on charges of negligence for not giving orders to stop the killing of peaceful protestors during the revolution; he later was sentenced to life imprisonment.

A 2012 presidential election was held in Egypt in two rounds, the first on May 23 and 24, and the second on June 16 and 17. The elections resulted in a win for the Muslim Brotherhood’s second candidate, Muhammad Morsi, which was the first victory of an Islamist as head of state in the Arab world. After Morsi took office, his supporting party, the Muslim Brotherhood, said it needed to review all previous international arrangements by the previous regime, stating “We weren’t party to the peace treaty [referring to the issue of Israel], it was signed away from the Egyptian people and thus the people must have its say” (Khoury 2012). In fact, the Muslim Brotherhood explained that it was not required to recognize nor cooperate

with Israel (Khoury 2012). It classified Israel as an “occupying entity” and stated it would not “allow anyone of our members to meet with an Israeli” (Khoury 2012). These comments signify that Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood had no intention of working with current policies that incorporated Israel into the new government, which was a milestone of the U.S.–Egyptian agreements. These actions started the move of changing interests from what they were prior to Morsi (i.e., stability in the region, countering terrorism) to interests more in line with the Muslim Brotherhood. Specifically, Morsi met with Hamas’ chief Khaled Meshal shortly after his election and discussed how Egypt could bypass an Israeli blockade in order to deliver them gas and petroleum (“Hamas Chief Meets Egypt’s Morsi in Cairo, Hails ‘New Era’” 2012). These new interests directly went against the U.S. position, within the treaty, since the United States had classified Hamas as a terrorist organization (National Counterterrorism Center).

In addition, the regime change and presidential election of the Muslim Brotherhood’s Morsi did not improve the U.S.–Egyptian intelligence relationship, as the other events have shown. It created many challenges for the two countries as they tried to move forward together. For example, according to former CIA officer Michael Scheuer, “the help we were getting from the Egyptian intelligence service ... has dried up—either because of resentment at our governments stabbing their political leaders in the back, or because those who worked for the services have taken off in fear of being incarcerated or worse” (Higgins 2011). In an interview with the *Guardian*, Scheuer said that “the amount of work that has devolved on U.S. and British services is enormous, and the result is blindness in our ability to watch what’s going on among militants.” Scheuer explained that this, during Egypt’s revolution and regime change, was “an intelligence disaster for the United States and for Britain, and other European services” (Higgins 2011).

After years of peace, the 2011 regime change in Egypt led to fears in Israel about the future of the March 1979 Egypt–Israel Peace Treaty. For the first time since Mubarak, the treaty and the Egypt–Israel relationship could be seen as in jeopardy.

Morsi, however, only lasted a little over a year because he was ousted in a military coup in July 2013. He was taken under custody by the military, and el-Sisi (who at that time was in charge of the Egyptian Armed Forces) announced that Adly Mansour would be the interim leader until a new Constitution could be created and presidential election could take place (Hughesa and Hunter 2013). A few months after the coup, an Egyptian court ordered Mubarak’s release due to the lack of legal grounds for his detention and he later was put under house arrest.

Shortly after Morsi was arrested, el-Sisi announced his run for the presidency, running on the platform of regional security and counter-terrorism (Abaza 2014). On June 3, 2013 Abdel Fattah el-Sisi was elected president, signaling that the Muslim Brotherhood administration under Morsi had ended and been replaced with Mubarak-like governance. Many of the policies and interests that had been in place under Mubarak had been changed by Morsi, but when el-Sisi won the election, he returned them to the way they had existed during the Mubarak era. For example, during el-Sisi’s

speech to the United Nations after being elected president he specifically stated that “countries should coordinate and cooperate to confront extremist forces and the crisis of terrorism facing the region” (U.N. General Assembly 2014).

Additionally, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi told Israeli officials that the peace treaty with Israel “is an important commitment that can be relied and built upon in order to serve both countries’ interests.” el-Sisi also said that this was the time to “create the right atmosphere to solve the Palestinian issue and work to spread peace in the entire Middle East, so the nations of the region could live better” (Al-Sisi: Egypt is Committed [sic] to Peace with Israel” 2014).

Furthermore, Egypt had banned the Islamic group of Hamas, which posed a major security threat to the United States and Israel. As previously mentioned, Morsi reversed this policy, allowing discussion to commence with Hamas under his presidency. After the 2013 coups, this policy was immediately reversed and Hamas (along with the Muslim Brotherhood) was redesignated a terrorist organization (“Egypt Court Bans Palestinian Hamas Group” 2014). Moreover, under Mubarak and now under el-Sisi, Egypt has promised and worked to stop weapons smuggling into the Gaza Strip and its de facto Hamas government. In recent years, the United States may have been facilitating Israeli–Egyptian cooperation on the smuggling issue. “Reportedly, Israel may be more willing to renegotiate a 2005 MOU [Memorandum of Understanding] with Egypt to expand the number of Egyptian BGF [Boarder Guard Forces] from 750 to between 1,500 and 2,200 men. Reports also indicate that Israeli–Egyptian intelligence sharing has increased” (Zanotti et al. 2009, 20).

el-Sisi, whose main campaign message was to fight for Egypt’s homeland security against terrorism, has followed in Mubarak’s footsteps to fight against Islamic militant movements in Sinai and the Gaza border. Many military missions against “terrorism” in Sinai have been reported after el-Sisi assumed office. During the first months of his presidency, the Egyptian army destroyed a significant number of Gaza tunnels and stood firm on the issue during the July–August 2014 Israeli–Palestinian conflict (Masi 2014) el-Sisi returned Egypt’s interests back to pre-Morsi rule to “stability in the region” and “countering terrorism,” which fall back in line with the United States’ interests.

On the basis of these events and policy reversals, it is clear that Egypt has returned back to Mubarak-era policies, putting them back in line with U.S. interests. However, it is important to note that even though interests under el-Sisi have returned to Mubarak-era interests, there are additional challenges facing the Egyptian and U.S. relationship in the context of the new Egyptian president. Pulling from el-Sisi’s previous schoolwork completed at the U.S. Army War College on “Democracy in the Middle East,” his writings give us an insight into his thoughts on an overall Egyptian–U.S. relationship (not limited to intelligence). el-Sisi claims that the United States has always put its own interests first and, “as a result, is under constant pressure to satisfy multiple country agendas that may not coincide with the needs or the wants of the Middle Eastern people” (el-Sisi 2006). el-Sisi has questioned the U.S.’ motives, claiming that the “U.S. has supported nondemocratic regimes and some regimes that

were not necessarily well respected in the Middle East. As a result, many in the Middle East question the motives of the United States and her desire to establish democracy in the Middle East now” (el-Sisi 2006).

el-Sisi claims that the United States has known about autocratic leaders that “claim” they are in favor of democratic reforms, but resist relinquishing control, and the United States has done little to challenge them if it serves U.S. interests. Instead, el-Sisi insists “for democracy to be successful in the Middle East, it must reflect Middle Eastern interests and not United States’ interests only” (el-Sisi 2006). He challenges whether the United States is ready to accept “Middle East democracy” that could contend with Western interests or may not be in line with Western policies (el-Sisi 2006).

Additionally, we have seen el-Sisi challenges U.S. influence within Egypt through recent actions regarding the two administrations. Specifically, during the interim government and after the 2013 military coups, the United States was calling for less harsh punishment on anti-coups or pro-Morsi protesters and for more democratic reforms. Egypt politely “ignored” its calls and pressed ahead with its initial plans and roadmap, not buckling under the pressure of the United States or the international community. Furthermore, the United States has also used previously agreed upon military aid to Egypt as a way to try to influence its democratic roadmap. It was not until June 2014 that the United States finally unlocked the promised military aid, backing President el-Sisi’s role in the country (“U.S. Unlocks Military Aid to Egypt, Backing President Sisi” 2014). This delay in arms delivery from the United States angered the Egyptian government, sparking Egypt entering into military trading discussions with Russia (Michael 2013).

In addition to these challenges, some internal Egyptian intelligence agency adjustments may be incorporated as el-Sisi governs Egypt. Specifically, two of the three intelligence agencies have survived after Mubarak. One agency, the SSIS, blamed for the failure in the Arab Spring period, was replaced by EHS, a new homeland security agency. More reforms are expected to happen in the near future, but the full picture of what the largest and most prestigious Arab intelligence services will look like remains unpredictable due to the current complicated political situation in the country. However, since this agency failed to prevent the fall of the regime during the Arab Spring, one should expect some radical changes and reforms within the intelligence community in Egypt after the dust settles from the election. Another expected move would be the rise of importance and role for the MID, being closer to the military and a viable alternative to the failing EGIS and SSIS.

In sum, el-Sisi may have returned Egypt’s interests and policies back to Mubarka-era rule, which places Egypt’s interests back in line with the United States, and, based on past narrative and recent actions, we can conclude that el-Sisi knows and understands the importance of the Egyptian–U.S. diplomatic relationship. He also knows there is a large gap between U.S. policy and reality within the Middle East, however, meaning that democracy within the Middle East will not develop exactly as the United States plans or orders. Instead, as expressed by el-Sisi himself, the U.S.

footprint in the Middle East may be less influential than during Mubarak’s reign, and more on Egyptian terms during el-Sisi’s reign. This would include all aspects of the Egyptian–U.S. relationship, especially defense and intelligence.

Findings and Conclusions

Questions remain, however, on whether the Egyptian intelligence community will continue to partner with the United States, and if that relationship will be different now under the direction of el-Sisi. The answer to both of these questions is “Yes.” Yes, it will continue, and yes, there may be some slight challenges as both countries move forward with their intelligence relationship.

Our historical analysis confirms that under Mubarak’s regime, Egypt partnered with the United States based on these interests: stability in the region and countering terrorism. Through our historical analysis, we found that both countries identified that they would benefit from each other by partnering in these aspects.⁷⁴ Furthermore, our case study supports the theory that when there is a significant regime change in which the new leadership may alter the importance of previous interests, a shift or defection in the intelligence-sharing agreement can be expected.⁷⁵ This is supported by the Arab Spring events that took place in Egypt, causing Mubarak to be deposed and Morsi to be elected as the new president in 2012. Our case study shows that due to the significant change in policy implemented by Morsi, there was a significant lull in intelligence-sharing activity with the United States. The policies implemented by Morsi, which focused on supporting Muslim Brotherhood interests in much of the Arab world, were counter to the previous interests that provided the basis of the Egyptian–U.S. intelligence relationship, which, therefore, altered the previously agreed terms and policies of the intelligence-sharing relationship previously agreed to by Egypt and the United States.

However, Morsi’s rule and policies were short lived, and another significant change in leadership was implemented in Egypt in 2013 by a military coup d’état and eventual presidential election of el-Sisi. Our case study shows that this additional new shift in Egyptian leadership returned the original interests of “stability in the region” and “countering terrorism” back to the forefront. Due to the shift in policy and interests returning back to their historical status (if not the same, close to), the Egyptian and U.S. intelligence-sharing relationship will revert to its original agreement. However, based on recent actions and past narrative by el-Sisi, this relationship may alter the terms of the original agreement, perhaps ensuring that all of Egypt’s interests are represented—even the terms of intelligence. Granted, many of el-Sisi’s comments center more on democratic and political influence, but these topics may trickle over into the defense and intelligence relationships.

In sum, it is our conclusion that Egypt and the United States will return to the Mubarak-era intelligence-sharing relationship while under el-Sisi. We argue that the events leading up to today have proven that Egypt and the United States will return back to their intelligence relationship as they did before the Arab Spring and Egyptian

Revolution, but acknowledging that there will be challenges along the way. That being said, we argue that the United States will always play a major role in Egyptian intelligence as long as the countries share mutual interests. The long and enduring history of the intelligence relationship between the two shows that there can continue to be mutual interests and benefits, allowing them to return to a “business as usual” intelligence sharing manner.

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