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## **EGYPT CULTURAL FIELD GUIDE**

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Prepared by: Marine Corps Intelligence Activity,  
2033 Barnett Avenue,  
Quantico, VA 22134-5103

Comments and Suggestions: [feedback@mcia.osis.gov](mailto:feedback@mcia.osis.gov)  
To order additional copies of this field guide, call (703) 784-6167,  
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## **Foreword**

The Egypt Cultural Field Guide is designed to provide deploying military personnel an overview of Egypt's cultural terrain. In this field guide, Egypt cultural history has been synopsisized to capture the more significant aspects of the Egypt cultural environment, with emphasis on factors having the greatest potential to impact operations.

The field guide presents background information to show the Egypt mind-set through its history, language, and religion. It also contains practical sections on lifestyle, customs, and habits. For those seeking more extensive information, MCI A produces a series of cultural intelligence studies on Egypt that explore the dynamics of Egypt culture at a deeper level.



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# CULTURAL FIELD GUIDE: EGYPT

Egyptians have one of the strongest senses of national identity of any people of the Middle East. Most Egyptians strongly identify with their Egyptian nationality, their religious faith (both Muslim and Christian), and their connections to all Arab nations. Egypt's people and history have been shaped by their shared and unique geography. Egypt sees itself as a bridge between Europe and Africa, as well as the east and the west. The country is located in northeast Africa and is bordered by the Mediterranean to the north, Israel and Gaza to the east, Sudan to the south, and Libya to the west.



Cairo, Egypt



## Egypt

The Egyptian capital of Cairo is the most populous city in both Africa and the Arab nations. Egypt also touches many bodies of water, including the Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea, the Nile

*“Egypt is the gift of the Nile.”*

*—Greek Historian  
Herodotus, 5th century BC*

*~ Peter E. Makari, Conflict  
and Cooperation:  
Christian-Muslim Relations  
in Contemporary Egypt.*

River, and the Suez Canal. Egypt depends in large part on the Nile River for its water because 97 percent of Egypt is desert. Since the reign of the pharaohs, Egypt has been divided north to south into Upper and Lower Egypt. Upper Egypt extends from the region just south of Cairo south to

Egypt’s southern border with Sudan, while Lower Egypt stretches from Cairo north toward the Mediterranean. Differences between the rural areas of Upper and Lower Egypt are influenced by geography, climate, history, and patterns of immigration.

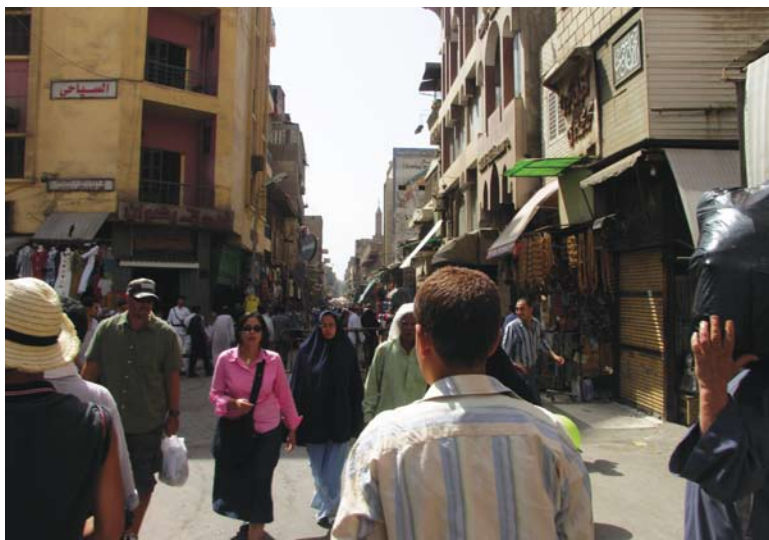
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## DEMOGRAPHICS

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Nearly 98 percent of Egypt’s population identifies as Egyptian Arab and speaks the Egyptian dialect of Arabic. Egypt is also home to tribal Bedouin and other small minority populations, as well as tens of thousands of Nubians, whose homeland in Upper Egypt borders the neighboring country of Sudan. In addition, Cairo and Alexandria host Greek and Armenian communities alongside Palestinian, Eritrean, and Sudanese refugees.

Many Egyptians see Cairo as a jewel in the Islamic world, and most Egyptians practice Sunni Islam. However, Egypt also has a Christian history that stretches back for more than 2,000 years and is home to a significant Christian minority. The exact percentage of the Muslim and Christian populations of Egypt is highly controversial and politicized in and out of the country. Most scholars estimate that between 8 to 15 percent of Egyptians practice Christianity.



## Street in Egypt

Egypt's population of 81,713,500 is densely concentrated and increasingly urban. At 1,001,450 square miles, the country is approximately three times the size of New Mexico. More than 98 percent of Egypt's population lives alongside the banks of the Nile, an area of land that comprises only 3.5 percent of Egypt's total land mass. In Cairo, the population density reaches more than 31,727 per square kilometer, which is among the highest population density rates in the world. More than 16 million Egyptians live in the greater Cairo area, and approximately 45 percent of Egypt's population live in urban slums.

Egypt's population is dominated by young people, a situation known as a "youth bulge." In 2005, 75 percent of Egypt's population was younger than 40. This has had a profound impact on

Egypt's youth, who suffer from high unemployment, low salaries, employment instability, and a lack of benefits such as insurance and social and leisure activities. These effects have reverberated throughout Egyptian society and politics. The youth unemployment rate for Egyptians aged 15 to 24 was 27.1 percent in 2002. The actual unemployment rate is often much higher than the official employment rate because the Egyptian government does not like to report on the country's economic problems.

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## CULTURAL HISTORY

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### Ancient History

Egyptians take great pride in the long and storied history of Egypt, using the phrase *Masr, umm il-dunya* (Egypt, mother of the world) to describe their view of Egypt's role in the birth of civilization. Ancient Egyptian civilization flourished initially in a multitude of small localized kingdoms that eventually united into two larger kingdoms, Lower Egypt and Upper Egypt. Lower Egypt lies in the north of Egypt stretching from Cairo through the Nile Delta to the Mediterranean Sea. Upper Egypt extends from the region just south of Cairo south to Egypt's southern border with Sudan. Cultural, linguistic, and economic differences between the two regions persist in Egypt. Eventually, legendary Egyptian King Menes united Upper and Lower Egypt and moved the capital of Egypt to Memphis, near Cairo.

The civilization of ancient Egypt persisted for more than 3,000 years. Egypt's legendary rulers are still known across the globe, these include people such as Queen Hatshepsut, the first known female ruler; the revolutionary monotheist King Akhenaton and his beautiful wife Nefertiti; the mysterious boy-king Tutankhamen; and the powerful King Ramses II. Relics of Egypt's ancient glory

can be found throughout Egypt and form the backbone of Egypt's tourist industry. These ancient wonders include the pyramids at Giza and the temples at Karnack and Luxor.

The long rule of Egypt's pharaohs ended in 332 BC when Alexander the Great of the Greek Empire conquered Egypt, ushering in centuries of foreign rule that would last until the Egyptian revolution of 1952. Greece ruled Egypt for 300 years, until the suicide of the famous Queen Cleopatra VII. In 30 BC, Egypt was incorporated into the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire would rule Egypt until the Islamic invasion of 639 AD. Egyptian culture and civilization continued to thrive under the Greeks and Romans. The Egyptian city of Alexandria, founded by Alexander the Great, was the site of the Museum, a research institute, and the Library, which housed nearly half a million documents written on papyrus scrolls. During the Greek period, large numbers of Greeks, Jews from Palestine, and western Asians migrated into urban Egypt,



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**Pyramids**

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and a portion of their descendants continue to live in Alexandria and Cairo.

During the Roman era, Christianity began to spread and flourish across Egypt. Many Christian Egyptians believe that Mark the Evangelist, author of the Book of Mark and companion of the Apostle Peter, brought Christianity to Egypt. Contemporary Egyptian Christians celebrate Mark's founding of the Coptic Cathedral in Alexandria, where they believe his head is preserved. Christianity did not spread to the Egyptian population as a whole until the end of the 4th century. Shortly thereafter, the Egyptian Church split from Orthodox Christianity following a dispute over the nature of Jesus Christ, and the Egyptian Coptic Church was formed (Copt is a form of the Greek word for Egyptian). The



**Saint Mark**

separate structures set up by the Coptic Egyptian Church during the 5th century continue to contribute to the Coptic Church's distinct Christian identity and practices. Approximately 10 percent of Egypt's population is Coptic Christian; a small portion of the population belongs to other denominations of the faith.

## Islamic History

The course of Egyptian history changed significantly in 639 AD when the nation was invaded by Muslim Arab conquerors. For their role in bringing Islam to their country, many Muslim Egyptians remember the Muslim conquerors with pride. For nearly 9 centuries, Egypt was ruled by a succession of Arab empires, including the Rashidun, the Ummayyads, the Abbasids, the Fatimids, the Ayyubids, and the Mamluks. Egypt's Arab Muslim rulers did not demonstrate much interest in converting Egypt's population to Islam. Most Egyptians gradually began to practice Islam around the 9th century and began to speak Arabic around the 10th century.

Egypt's Muslim rulers left an indelible mark on Egyptian society and culture, changing the people's language, religion, and orientation from the Mediterranean to the Middle East. Lower and Upper Egypt were affected by the Arab conquest of Egypt differently, and these differences continue to influence regional culture. Upper Egypt was not touched by the Arab conquest as quickly or deeply as Lower Egypt. Thus, a larger percentage of Upper Egypt's population remains Coptic Christian, and Coptic words are mingled throughout their dialect of Arabic.

The Fatimid Dynasty established both the capital city of Cairo and al-Azhar mosque, which remains one of the most significant institutions of religious scholarship throughout the Muslim nations, and is the pride of many Egyptians. After the collapse of the Fatimid Dynasty, Egypt fell under the control of the great Kurdish Muslim hero, Salah al-Din (Saladin), who had successfully defeated the European Crusader armies in Jerusalem two years before. His Ayyubid Dynasty's reliance on its military, composed of Turkish slaves, soon became its weakness as these slaves, known as Mamluks, rose



and conquered their masters. By the end of the 18th century, Mamluk misrule had driven many Egyptians to near starvation.

In 1517, Egypt fell under the control of yet another foreign ruler, the Ottoman Empire. As under previous rulers, Egyptians retained their separate Egyptian identity and remained alienated from their foreign leaders. Sharp differences between Upper and Lower Egypt remained during Ottoman rule. During the Ottoman period, Egypt's rulers deliberately kept Upper Egypt underdeveloped to continue to have a steady stream of exploitable migrant labor in the north, a pattern that many Upper Egyptians argue continues in contemporary Egypt. Ottoman rule over Egypt was weakened on 1 July 1798, when French General Napoleon Bonaparte landed on the shores of Alexandria and occupied Egypt for 3 years.

After the French left, Egypt fell under the control of Muhammad (Mehmet) `Ali, an Albanian Ottoman military officer. Egyptians' historical memories of Muhammad `Ali's accomplishments and cruelty remain strong. `Ali is known by many contemporary Egyptians as the "founder of modern Egypt" for the technological, bureaucratic, economic, and military advancements he brought to Egypt during his rule. He is also remembered as a hard ruler who forced large segments of the Egyptian peasantry to join the Egyptian military against their will. His rule marked the first time that the Egyptian people served in large numbers in any government capacity. He also forced the nomadic Bedouin population of Upper Egypt to settle. After his death, `Ali's sons and grandsons continued to reform Egypt's government, although their hold on the country was tenuous.

## Colonialism

The French occupation sparked the interest of the British, who soon began to assert their control over the country to keep their European rivals from gaining a foothold in Egypt. Although the Ottoman Empire and Muhammad `Ali's descendants were restored to power after the departure of the French, the British exerted increasing economic and political control over the country.

*"Egypt for the Egyptians."*

—*Egyptian nationalist slogan*

~ *Diane Singerman,*  
*Avenues of Participation:*  
*Family, Politics, and*  
*Networks in Urban Quarters*  
*of Cairo.*

The British did little to improve the lives of most Egyptians, and it was during their time in Egypt that the Egyptian nationalist movement first began to flourish. Egyptian nationalists argued that Egypt had been dominated by an elite foreign population since the invasion of Alexander the Great and that it was time to hand the government of Egypt to the Egyptian masses. In 1907, both the *Watani* (Nationalist) Party and the Party of the Nation were formed in an effort to regain Egypt for the Egyptians. The death of Mustafa Kamil, the founder of the *Watani* Party, marked the first modern mass funeral demonstration in Egypt and illustrated the widespread appeal of Egyptian nationalism among the Egyptian population.

During World War I, the British grip on Egypt tightened as the Ottoman Empire's entrance on the side of Germany gave Great Britain an excuse to declare Egypt a British protectorate. These events only served to increase nationalist feelings, and as a result, strikes and riots rocked the country. At the end of the war, a delegation (*wafd*) led by Sa'd Zaghlul asked to represent Egypt at the

Paris Peace Conference and circulated a petition of support signed by 100,000 Egyptians. Composed primarily of upper and middle class members, the *wafd* soon grew into an opposition movement and became one of Egypt's most influential political parties. The British retaliated by exiling Sa'd Zaghul and three of his associates to Malta. The Egyptian people then rose up in anger against the British, striking, demonstrating, rioting, blowing up railways, and holding interfaith rallies in churches and mosques. Although many Egyptians wanted an elected government, the British responded to Egyptians' cries for independence by appointing Ahmad Fuad, the titular ruler of Egypt under the British Protectorate, the king of Egypt. However, the British continued to play a major role in Egypt's politics for the next 3 decades.

Throughout the 1920s, Egyptian culture flourished in Cairo and the rest of the country. This period later became known as Egypt's Liberal Era. Some Egyptians remember this period nostalgically as a time of relative freedom of political and artistic expression. The first modern Egyptian banks, recording studios, film companies, and newspapers were founded and multiplied. Egyptian national hero and singer, Umm Kulthum, launched her career. By 1932, the popular Radio Cairo was broadcasting her voice and many others across the Arab community.

However, many Egyptians were left behind by the advancements made during the Liberal Era and began to grow frustrated. From the end of World War II until the Revolution of 1952, Egyptians experienced a falling standard of living, illiteracy, and poor health conditions. Cairo became more and more crowded. Although an increasing number of Egyptians graduated from universities, few jobs awaited them after graduation, creating an angry, disenfranchised, and educated middle class who blamed Britain's heavy

handed interference in Egypt's politics, economics, and government for Egypt's problems.

In 1928, the frustration felt by many Egyptians cumulated in the founding of the Muslim Brotherhood (*al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*) by Egyptian schoolteacher Hasan al-Banna. Today, the Brotherhood remains one of the most influential Muslim political associations not only in Egypt, but throughout the Muslim nations. The Brotherhood argued that Egyptians had strayed from the traditional Muslim values exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad and that a return to those values would bring justice and prosperity to Egypt.

Egyptians continued to resent Britain's interference in their affairs throughout the 1940s and early 1950s, especially during World War II, which deeply affected the population. Egyptians increased their resistance to British meddling, and incidents of violence occurred throughout the country. Pro-British members of the Egyptian government blamed the increasingly powerful Muslim Brotherhood for much of the violence and attempted to destroy the Brotherhood. One Brotherhood member assassinated Egyptian Prime Minister Mahmoud Fahmi Nuqrashi in 1948. The Egyptian government, in turn, assassinated Brotherhood founder Hassan al-Banna, despite his condemnation of the killing of Nuqrashi.

The tension came to a head on 26 January 1952, known today as "Black Saturday." On this day, rioters lit the Western dominated sections of Cairo aflame, protesting a British military attack on an Egyptian police station in the city of Isma`iliyya that had killed more than 50 Egyptian policemen. Six months later on 23 July 1952, a group of Egyptian military officers known as the "Free Officers" seized control of the country in an almost bloodless coup and exiled King Faruq. The Free Officers were the most success-

ful of the numerous Egyptian secret societies that had been plotting to overthrow King Faruq. The group consisted of young commissioned officers with lower and middle class roots. Two of these 300 officers were Gamal `Abd al-Nasser and Anwar Sadat, both future presidents of Egypt.

## Contemporary History

Free Officer Colonel Gamal `Abd al-Nasser soon rose to power in the Free Officers and became a prominent force in Egyptian politics. Some Egyptians remember Nasser's rule with a great deal of nostalgia for the prominent role that Egypt played in world politics during this period. Nasser remains best known throughout Egypt and the Arab community as the father of "Arab Nationalism," the idea that Arabs should unite across the artificial national boundaries created by colonialism and Western governments. Although Nasser's drive for Arab unity did attain great popularity among many Egyptians and non-Egyptian Arabs, his attempts at unity ultimately failed.

In 1956, Nasser became the president of Egypt. As president, Nasser carried out extensive land reform, expanded state ownership of industry, state involvement in the Egyptian economy, and state support of social services in keeping with his theory of "Arab Socialism." That same year, Nasser successfully nationalized the Suez Canal, sparking an international crisis and launching his career as a popular and world famous leader of Arab nations. By the close of the 1950s, most Eyp-

*"Nasser was the first native Egyptian to rule Egypt since the age of the Pharaohs."*

*~ Geneive Abdo, No God But God: Egypt and the Triumph of Islam.*

tians felt their situation was improving. The Egyptian standard of living was rising, as was the country's level of respect on the global stage. From 1958 until 1961, Nasser attempted to implement his theory of Arab Nationalism by uniting Egypt with Syria to form the United Arab Republic, despite the fact that the two countries do not share a border. Nasser's pursuit of Arab Nationalist goals also led him to intervene in multiple conflicts throughout the Arab communities. From 1962 to 1967, Egypt intervened in the Yemen civil war in support of Yemenis who opposed Yemen's royalist, pro-British rulers. Some Egyptians remember the divisive and draining conflict as Egypt's Vietnam.

Nasser's greatest defeat came during the 1967 War with Israel, known in the West as the Six Day War. Israel's surprise attack against Egypt resulted in a disastrous and humiliating defeat, to include losing the Sinai Peninsula to Israel. The defeat profoundly shook Egypt and the wider Arab world. Many Egyptians were shocked that Nasser, whom they viewed as nearly invincible, could lose in such a swift and stunning manner. Nasser offered to resign as president. However, after mass rallies by Egyptians in support of the Egyptian president, who many continued to see as a symbol of Arab nationalism, Egyptian pride, and anti-colonialism, Nasser stayed in office until his death in 1970.

Nasser was succeeded by his vice president and fellow Free Officer, Anwar Sadat. Although Sadat's initial hold over Egypt was shaky, he soon gained the admiration of many Egyptians and other Arabs when he launched a surprise attack against Israel on 6 October 1973 to regain the honor and territory that Egypt lost to Israel in 1967. Although in the eyes of the world Egypt lost the war in the end, Egyptians proudly saw the October War as their one and only military victory against Israel. This victory helped Sadat to chart his own path as Egypt's president. Sadat soon launched his *Inti-*

*fah* (Open Door) policy, which increased Egyptians' political and economic freedom for a short time. On the international front, after several years of stalled peace talks, Sadat took an unprecedented trip to Jerusalem in 1977 and signed the Camp David Peace Accords with Israel in 1979.

*"I have killed Pharaoh and I do not fear death."*

*—Sadat's assassin as he shot the president.*

*~ Geneive Abdo, No God But God: Egypt and the Triumph of Islam.*

Although Sadat's overtures to Israel impressed many in the international community, most Egyptians saw his actions as a concession to Western imperialism and a betrayal of the Palestinian people. Many Egyptians also felt left behind by his *Intifah*, which they believed allowed a few Egyptians to get rich while exploiting the remainder of the country. Egyptians were further angered when Sadat's government rigged the parliamentary elections of 1979 and launched a widespread campaign against free speech and political opposition. A year later, Sadat instituted the "Law of Shame," which outlawed Egyptians' right to insult the government, incite division in the population, or set a negative example for the youth. Offenses were punishable by the confiscation of property or imprisonment, and the law remains in effect. On 6 October 1981, he was assassinated by Egyptian soldiers who were also members of a radical Islamist group known as *Tanzim al-Jihad*.

Sadat was succeeded by his vice president, Air Force commander Muhammad Hosni Mubarak. Mubarak's first decade in power was marked by inflation, economic decline, and an increased dependency on money sent home from Egyptians working abroad in Gulf States. In the 1990s, Egyptians suffered under the structural adjustment policies implemented by Mubarak at the behest of West-

ern governments. These new economic policies ended many of the subsidies that large numbers of Egyptians depended on and caused widespread discontent across the country. This discontent has persisted, and Mubarak's regime is seen by many contemporary Egyptians as corrupt, inefficient, undemocratic, and brutally oppressive.

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## **CULTURAL DIVIDES AND SOURCES OF IDENTITY**

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### **Minorities**

Some Egyptian citizens do not identify with mainstream Egyptian society, as a result of cultural, linguistic, ethnic, or geographic differences. Though small, these groups are diverse and live throughout the country.



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**Nubians**



## ***The Nubians***

One of the largest minority groups in Egypt is the Nubians. Although there is little difference between the socio-economic status of the average Nubian and the average Egyptian, many Nubians feel alienated from broader Egyptian society because of the discrimination that they face on the basis of their darker skin tone, as well as the role that the Egyptian government played in the destruction of their homeland. The historic Nubian homeland (Old Nubia) lies on the banks of the Nile River in Upper Egypt and northern Sudan. Nubians and Egyptians have interacted for more than three millennia, and many ancient Egyptian pharaohs were of Nubian descent. In 1963, the construction of the High Aswan Dam flooded Old Nubia, and most of the Nubian population was resettled as one group in New Nubia in the Kom Ombo Valley of Upper Egypt. The Nubians were a historically diverse group that consisted of three main groups that spoke different dialects of the Nubian language, and until the construction of the dam, most Nubian villages remained isolated from the rest of Egypt. However, many Nubians traveled to Egyptian cities, such as Cairo, to work in the service industry. Employing Nubians became a status symbol among the Egyptian elite. Contemporary Nubians continue to grieve over the loss of their homeland, Old Nubia, and fear that their language and culture may be lost as they become more integrated into Egyptian society. They also face discrimination by Egyptians on ethnic and linguistic grounds and are sometimes referred to as *barbara* (barbarian) in the national press.

## ***The Bedouin***

Egyptian Bedouin live throughout Egypt, from the Sinai Peninsula to the Western Desert, along the northwest coast, in the Eastern Desert, and in Upper Egypt. These different groups hail from



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### **Bedouin Men of the Sinai Desert**

diverse backgrounds and are not united. Different Bedouin tribes speak different dialects of Arabic, wear different types of clothing, have different forms of justice systems and social structure, and have been influenced by diverse neighboring populations. Many Bedouin identify more strongly with their roots in Saudi Arabia than they do with other citizens of Egypt, whom they see as weak outsiders. Many of the different tribes share an antagonistic relationship with other Bedouin, Egyptian society, and the Egyptian government. Most Bedouin have settled in small towns and villages; thus, they no longer live a nomadic lifestyle in the desert. However, they continue to identify strongly with what they see as the Bedouin lifestyle, values, and history, which typically include a strong sense of honor and independence.

## **Refugees**

Egypt is also home to millions of refugees. Official estimates range between 500,000 to more than 3 million. Most refugees living in Egypt are Sudanese, followed by Palestinians, Somalis, Ethiopians, Eritreans, and smaller groups from other Arab and African countries. Since 2006, increasing numbers of Iraqi refugees have also settled in Egypt, and in 2008 the number of Eritreans increased as well. Nearly all of the refugees are fleeing the violence and instability that plagues many of Egypt's neighbors. There are no permanent refugee camps in Egypt, and most refugees live in Cairo and other Egyptian cities. Refugees and their Egyptian-born children and grandchildren are barred by law from many types of employment and face difficulty owning property and returning to Egypt once they have left.

The number of southern Sudanese arriving annually in Egypt as political refugees and asylum seekers has increased significantly during the past 15 years because of the deteriorating political and social conditions of Sudan. Sudanese refugees are drawn to Egypt because of its proximity to Sudan and the long standing historical and cultural ties between the two countries. Most Sudanese refugees do not feel welcome in Egypt and have been the subject of numerous police crackdowns by the Egyptian government, which fears that the refugees could destabilize the country.

## **The Rural-Urban Divide**

The everyday life experiences and cultural practices of Egyptians are influenced in large part by whether they live in urban or rural areas. In 2003, the total rural population of Egypt was 38.6 million, or 57.2 percent of the population. Many Egyptians, rural and urban alike, refer to the iconic *fallah* (plural *fellahin*), or Egyptian peasant, to evoke Egypt's history and national character.

Much of rural Egypt is characterized by farming villages and a few scattered Bedouin encampments on the edge of the desert. Agriculture forms the backbone of the rural Egyptian economy and has been profoundly influenced by Egypt's unique geography. Agriculture accounts for 17 percent of contemporary Egypt's GDP and employs approximately 30 percent of the labor force. The history of agriculture in rural Egypt has been marked by conflicts surrounding land ownership. In past centuries, rural Egypt was characterized significantly by vast estates owned by a small, wealthy elite and farmed by peasants. This resulted in occasional rebellions by the downtrodden *fellahin* (peasants), who comprised most of the population. One of the most important issues driving the Egyptian Revolution of 1952 by the Free Officers was the issue of land ownership in rural Egypt. In recent years, the Egyptian government has reversed its course and granted increased rights to landowners. Coupled with other economic liberalization measures, these changes have left a deep mark on many areas of rural Egypt, the most significant of which has been rising levels of rural poverty, unemployment, and landlessness during the past decade. Approximately 70 percent of Egypt's 10.7 million poor live in rural areas of the country.

*“My two sons are in Cairo. Thank God, they are working well. It is true that I only see them once a month, but this is better for them than staying here and doing nothing.... When they send me money, I save it for them. My eldest son plans for marriage. We are preparing his flat now in the upper floor.”*

*—Mother of two migrant workers*

*~ Ayman G. Zohry, “Rural-to-Urban Labor Migration: A Study of Upper Egyptian Laborers in Cairo.”*

*“When I leave my country I constantly feel homesick and want to go back. Yet, when I come back home and see the miserable conditions of the people I know, I desire to leave immediately. I have chosen the bitter to avoid the more bitter.”*

*—Egyptian migrant worker living abroad*

*~ El-Sayed al-Aswad, “Viewing the World through Upper Egyptian Eyes: From Regional Crisis to Global Blessing,” in Upper Egypt: Identity and Change.*

Although rural Egypt continues to be identified with agriculture, rural Egypt is dynamic, and many rural Egyptians are not employed as farmers. Increasing numbers of rural Egyptians are employed in the civil service, tourism industry, and heavy industry. In addition, many rural Egyptian men migrate to Cairo or abroad to earn money to support their families. In many rural Egyptian communities, nearly every family includes a member who has migrated abroad. The influx of money from migrant labor has changed social expectations in rural Egypt. Men are expected to provide their wives with large, expensive appliances. Without these gifts, men are often unable to marry. Many rural Egyptian women also need to work outside the home to support their families. While some are widowed, divorced, or have unemployed husbands, many are women whose families are not able to survive on their husbands' salaries alone.

Most migrants to Egyptian cities are guided to the city by relatives, friends, and former neighbors who have moved to the city. Rural migrants often find themselves isolated and living in difficult circumstances once they move to urban areas. Most unskilled migrants live together in outlying districts of the city. Many of these neighborhoods are composed almost exclusively of migrants from

one particular area, because living among family and friends allows them to rely on family and neighborhood networks to find housing and employment. Egyptians who migrate to urban areas often retain a strong sense of their rural identity and communicate regularly with their families in their home villages. Upper Egyptians in particular are known for maintaining ties to their villages.

## **Regional Differences: Upper and Lower Egypt**

Upper Egypt, known as the Sa'īd in Egyptian Arabic, is a distinct region of Egypt that stretches for 534 miles (860 kilometers) between Cairo in the north and Aswan to the south and is only 12 miles (20 kilometers) wide at its broadest point. Upper Egyptians have a unique history and culture that date back to the time of the Pharaohs. Although more than a third of Egypt's population live in Upper Egypt, the region remains significantly underdeveloped compared to Egypt's north. While improved transportation and communication networks have increased the connections between Upper and Lower Egypt, rural Upper Egypt remains one of the more isolated regions of the country.

Egyptian popular culture often depicts Upper Egypt as a poor backwater populated by uneducated, stubborn, and hot-tempered peasants. Popular jokes often depict Upper Egyptians as country bumpkins unable to navigate modern city life and defenders of conservative values on women and religion. These stereotypes are found throughout Egyptian television, movies, and literature. While Upper Egyptians agree that they have a distinct cultural identity, they view their identity through a more positive framework. Upper Egyptians believe that they are hardworking, family-oriented, honest, and pious.



**Traffic in Cairo**

## **Cairo: Capital of Egypt**

Cairo plays a highly significant role in the lives of most Egyptians. To many Egyptians, Cairo is synonymous with the entire nation. Egyptians often use the same term, “Egypt” (*Misr* in Arabic), to refer to both the country of Egypt and the city of Cairo. Cairo is home to magnificent historical sights, such as the Pyramids and the Sphinx, and religious institutions, such as the storied al-Azhar mosque and university. Cairo has also been home to some of the most prominent Arab and Muslim figures in history, including Salah Din (Saladin), who founded the city; influential Islamic philosopher Muhammad `Abduh; noble prize-winning novelist Naguib Mafouz; and beloved singer Umm Kalthum. As a cultural

capital, Cairo is known around the globe for its great works of literature, music, cinema, and television. As a result, Egyptians also see Cairo as the capital of the Arab nations.

Cairo is a large, crowded city that is home to opulent neighborhoods, historic landmarks, expansive slums, and serious pollution. Although some Cairo neighborhoods are quite luxurious, many Cairo neighborhoods are mixed-use spaces filled with unplanned block housing. Homes, businesses, and industry mix freely, at times contributing to noise, overcrowding, and pollution. Many buildings in these neighborhoods are in a constant state of remodeling and rebuilding, which gives them a dilapidated effect. Most building efforts are undertaken to add on extra floors, rooms, or apartments for married children who are unable to buy or rent their own apartments, as a result in the severe housing crisis facing most residents of Cairo.

Many Cairo residents satisfy their need for housing by crowding into illegal squatter neighborhoods. Housing shortages have also lead to huge settlements on the outskirts of the city. Many of these settlements are unregulated or illegal, and their homes, businesses, roads, and sewer services are built entirely by private citizens. Approximately 8 million Egyptians live in slums in the Cairo area,

*Cairo can be said to have the cultural significance of Paris, the religious importance of the Vatican, the entertainment value of Hollywood, the scholarly status of Oxford, and the industrial power of Detroit combined.*

*~ Modified from Saad Eddin Ibrahim Egypt, Islam, and Democracy: Critical Essays with a New Postscript.*



*“I had acquired the habit, since childhood, of calling it ‘Egypt’ instead of ‘Cairo.’ ‘I am going to Egypt,’ ‘I’m returning from Egypt,’ ‘I sent a courier to Egypt,’ ‘the young girls from Egypt,’.... Everyone refers to the capital city by saying ‘Egypt’ and not ‘Cairo,’ and nothing attests to its supremacy, its privileged situation better than this designation.... Cairo is a microcosm of Egypt. It is the heart of literature just as it is the heart of time and space.”*

*—Gamal al-Ghitani*

*~ Leila Vignal and Eric Denis, “Cairo as Regional/Global Economic Capital?” Cairo Cosmopolitan: Politics, Culture, and Urban Space in the New Globalized Middle East.*

which is home to three of the largest slums in the world. Many poor residents of Cairo are left to fend for themselves with minimal aid from the Egyptian government. Instead, they turn to charitable organizations and informal networks of mutual assistance.

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## **DOMINANT VALUES AND BELIEFS**

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### **Religion**

Religion is a significant facet of most Egyptians’ identity, whether Muslim or Christian. It influences their sense of history, their feelings of nationalism, and how they see their place in the wider world. Most Egyptians see religion as their source of morality and social justice. Egyptians’ religious identity also permeates many aspects of their social lives, influencing the holidays they celebrate, the rituals they perform, and their marriage choices. Most Egyptians highly respect religious leaders and seek their guidance in political, social, and family matters. In recent decades, increasing numbers of Muslim Egyptians have turned to political Islam as

a means to express their opposition to the Egyptian government, which they see as corrupt, oppressive, undemocratic, and secular.

## ***Islam***

Islam influences the daily rhythms of the lives of Egyptian Muslims. Many Muslims heed the ritual call to prayer five times a day and attend a special sermon at their neighborhood mosques on the Islamic holy day of Friday. In rural areas of Egypt, many Muslims practice a folk Islam that is influenced by pre-Islamic pagan and Christian Egyptian practices. Many rural and urban Egyptians belong to Sufi brotherhoods. Sufism is a form of Islamic practice that incorporates mysticism and the belief that meaning in life

comes only from the search for truth and unity with God. Most Sufis express their Sufi identity and practices through membership in a Sufi brotherhood. Sufi brotherhoods are organized around the teachings of a particular Sufi saint, who may be living or dead.

Increasing numbers of Egyptians and migrant workers are influenced by orthodox Islamist movements and the Islamic practices that they observed while working in Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Islam permeates Egyptian consumer culture as well. “Islamic” products and clothing are increasingly



**Mosque in Citadel Fort in Cairo**

being embraced by Egypt's middle and upper classes, which have increased their religious adherence in recent decades. In addition to traditional Islamic goods, such as religious texts and prayer mats, many everyday products have been repackaged as "Islamic" goods. Nail polish, foot cream, disk jockey services, and even elevators are being sold throughout Egypt as "Islamic."

### ***The Muslim Brotherhood: Religious and Political Movement***

Since its founding in the early part of the 20th century, the Muslim Brotherhood has become one of the most influential religious and political groups not only inside Egypt, but throughout the Muslim community. The Muslim Brotherhood's political and religious philosophy has evolved. Many of the more strident positions taken by founder Hassan al-Banna have now been repudiated. The Brotherhood officially renounced violence in the 1980s and, since then, has attempted to become a legal political party working in the Egyptian system. Although the Brotherhood is barred from organizing as a political party, Brotherhood candidates have been able to run for parliament as independent candidates. In 2005, the Muslim Brotherhood won nearly one fifth of the parliamentary seats up for election (88 out of 444). Most contemporary members of the Muslim Brotherhood are educated Egyptians, who are frustrated by poor government services, government corruption, and high rates of unemployment and underemployment.

### ***Coptic Christians***

The Coptic Christians of Egypt have been integrated into the social, cultural, and economic fabric of Egyptian society for centuries. Most Egyptian Christians are members of the Coptic Orthodox Church, which broke away from the Eastern Church in the 5th century. Members of the Coptic Orthodox Church are known

as “Copts.” A small number of Catholic, Protestant, and Greek Orthodox Christians also live in Egypt. Egypt’s Christian history stretches back for thousands of years. Contemporary Copts number about five million, or 10 percent of the Egyptian population, and are the largest Christian community in the Middle East. Coptic Christians are concentrated in Upper Egypt, where they comprise 10.8 percent of the population. While many Egyptians tend to



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**Coptic Orthodox Cross**



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**Modern Coptic Monastery**

stereotype the Copts as urban, educated, and upper class, most Egyptian Copts belong to the lower classes, just as most Egyptian Muslims belong to the lower classes, and many Copts live in small rural villages.

The question of Coptic identity and their place in Egyptian society can be highly sensitive in Egypt. For centuries, during times of upheaval, the Copts have become scapegoats and targets for violence from the broader Egyptian community. Nevertheless, many Copts played a role in the Egyptian nationalist movement during the first half of the 20th century. Today, Copts are underrepresented in the Egyptian government. Some Copts feel threatened by the increasing importance of Islamist politics and Muslim identity in the lives of many Egyptians.

Most Coptic Egyptians highly respect the Coptic Pope, Pope Shenouda III, and see him as an important political leader and spiritual guide. Copts incorporate reminders of Biblical stories into many of their everyday lives, usually in the form of prayer and fasting.

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## **SOCIAL ORGANIZATION, CUSTOMS, AND PRACTICES**

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### **Family**

Family is at the center of Egyptians' lives. Egyptians view their families as one of the most important sources of Egyptian identity, and family forms the basis of most Egyptians' social interaction. However, high marriage and housing costs cause many young Egyptians to defer this dream, leading to frustration and despair. Often entire families work together to ensure that a young family member has enough money to start his or her own family. Fathers take extra jobs; mothers save surplus household goods for decades;

and sisters and brothers pitch in to pay for each others' wedding expenses. High marriage costs have also led many young Egyptian men to take the step of moving away from their families to work.

Most Egyptians live with either their immediate or extended families. The 1980 Egyptian census showed that 90 percent of households in Cairo were composed of nuclear families or families with only one extended relative living in the home. In most Egyptian families, the father is considered the head of the household and the family's public face. Although many Egyptian women work outside the home, they are generally also responsible for caring for their children and maintaining the home. Many young girls in rural Egypt are taught to perform physically demanding labor such as caring for livestock, milking cows, collecting dung for fuel, cooking, cleaning, childcare, and collecting water. In urban areas, young girls are taught by their mothers how to engage in important housekeeping tasks and cook large meals for their families. In rural areas, Egyptians are more likely to live in compounds or neighborhoods made up of extended family members. Whatever the makeup of their households, Egyptians emphasize the importance of living with their families until marriage, exchanging visits with their extended families to preserve their bonds, and respecting their elders.

## ***Men***

Egyptian men are expected to be responsible for providing for their families. The ideal Egyptian man is moral, religious, honest, strong, employed, educated, and comes from a respected family.

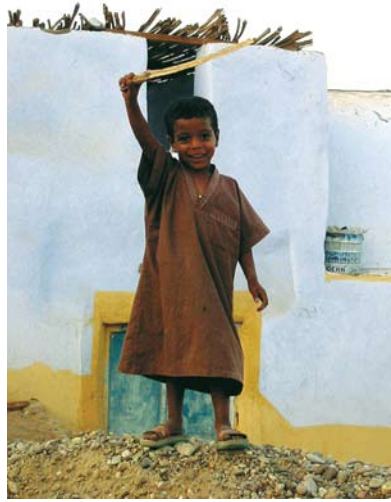
## ***Women***

Egyptian women are expected to be morally upright, courteous, intelligent, strong, and hard working. Most Egyptian families

teach their girls that good behavior, or *adab*, is vital when in public. Families, especially mothers, carefully guard their unmarried daughters and monitor their activities to ensure that they do not develop a reputation that could harm their marriage prospects. Many families prefer that their daughters travel with groups of female friends or with a family member to preserve their reputation. It is common to see Egyptian women in the streets, schools, stores, and factories of Cairo. However, it is less common to see them in cafés and restaurants or laboring in workshops because they fear that these activities may damage their reputations.

## **Children**

Egyptians see their children as gifts from God. Egyptian children are expected to learn from their families and teachers how to become respected members of society and start families of their own. Egyptian parents teach their children that they must respect their elders. Good behavior is considered necessary to uphold both the individual's name and the family's reputation. Older children are often given a significant responsibility for the care of younger children of the family and for the upkeep of their families' homes. Most Egyptian parents also stress education to their children because they highly



**Boy in Front of his Home**

respect education and see it as a potential means of economic and social advancement.

## Cultural Etiquette

- DO shake hands in greeting. When greeting a member of the opposite gender, wait for that person to extend a hand. If a hand is not extended, simply nod in acknowledgement.
- DO inquire about a guest's health when greeting.
- DO offer coffee, tea, or soda to your guests.
- DO offer food and drink to your guests repeatedly. It is common for Egyptians to initially decline offers or refreshments, but accept when pressed.
- DO walk your guests to the door when they are leaving.
- DO bring a gift of chocolate or flowers when visiting a home for a meal or when visiting a sick friend in the hospital.
- DO compliment your hostess on her culinary skills and expect to be offered a great deal of food.
- DO dress modestly; neither men nor women should wear shorts. Women should not wear sleeveless or low-cut tops.
- DO wear black and talk in a soft voice when attending funerals.
- DO NOT sit cross-legged or smoke in front of elders.
- DON'T be surprised to see men holding hands on the street, as this is merely a sign of friendship.

*"Il-Deif il-magnun yakul wi-y'um - "The crazy guest eats and leaves."*

*—Egyptian proverb  
describing rude behavior*

*~ Samia Abdennour,  
Egyptian Customs and  
Festivals.*



*Nawwart il-beet* – “You have brought light to our house.”  
*Nawwart masr* – “You have lit up Egypt.” (Phrases used by Egyptians to praise their guests)

~ *Diane Singerman, Avenues of Participation: Family, Politics, and Networks in Urban Quarters of Cairo.*

- DON'T show the bottom of your feet or shoes to an Egyptian or leave your shoes turned up-side down, as both are considered highly offensive.
- DON'T discuss religion.
- DON'T throw away bread. If given a piece of unwanted bread, quietly give it to another person or place it off the ground in an area where birds can eat it.
- DON'T watch loud television or make other noise for the first 3 days after the death of a neighbor.
- DON'T be offended if you are asked about your personal life or finances.
- DON'T be surprised by Egyptians' flexible attitudes toward time. Many Egyptians discuss time in terms of afternoon and evening, rather than in hours and minutes.
- DON'T leave a funeral while a priest or sheikh is speaking.
- DON'T send a wreath to a Muslim funeral, this is only acceptable at Coptic funerals.

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## DIET

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Food plays a central role in Egyptian culture. Families gather each day over meals. Holidays and special occasions are celebrated with special dishes. The basic staple food in Egypt is *`esh*, or bread. The Egyptian Arabic word for bread comes from the word *`esha* (life). Egyptians believe that it is sinful to throw bread away and

“*Akalna ‘esh wi malh ma ’ba’d* - “We shared bread and salt.”

—An Egyptian expression describing friendship

~ Samia Abdennour, *Egyptian Customs and Festivals*.

even the smallest piece should be savored. *Fuul*, or beans, are also a staple of Egyptian cuisine. The most commonly served Egyptian bean dishes are *fuul midammis* (stewed beans) and *ta`miya* (bean cake). Although most Egyptian meals are cooked at home, street food is also widely popular in Egypt, especially for morning and afternoon meals. *Koshari*, a mixture of rice, lentils, macaroni, onions, and spices, is a street food known as Cairo’s most famous dish. In recent years, *koshari* has also become widespread throughout Egypt.

Muslim Egyptians divide food into two groups: food that is *halal* (permissible) and food that is *haram* (forbidden). Halal foods include fruits, vegetables, seafood, and meat that has been slaughtered according to Islamic custom, which dictates that the animal in question be killed with a single knife to the throat while reciting the phrase *Bismillah, Allahu akbar* (In the name of God, God is the greatest). Food that is *haram* includes alcohol, pork (no matter how it is killed), meat that is not slaughtered according to Islamic custom, the meat of carnivorous animals, reptiles, and bugs.

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## CLOTHING

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### Men

Many Egyptian men wear Western fashions such as suits and ties or jeans and T-shirts. Men wearing Western suits, cufflinks, and watches and carrying briefcases are typically perceived as high



### **Cotton Merchant Wearing Western Clothing**

class by Egyptians. The traditional male Egyptian *gallabiya*, which is a long loose, piece of fabric that hangs to the ground and has long sleeves, is often worn at home by Egyptian men or in rural areas. Some Egyptian men do not wear the *gallabiya* in public because they believe that those who wear it will be stigmatized as uneducated or old-fashioned.

### **Women**

Women's dress is considered a contentious issue among some Egyptians. Egyptian women typically prefer to dress modestly, regardless of the style of clothing they wear—traditional, Western, or Islamic. Traditional urban Egyptian women of the lower

*“My friends act like I am dying because I put on the veil. But I’ve had four marriage proposals in the last year. More and more young girls are putting on the veil now, despite objections from their parents. They are doing it for the same reason I did, when I put on my veil I put on my brain as well.”*

*—Egyptian fashion model*

*~ Geneive Abdo, No God But God: Egypt and the Triumph of Islam.*

and middle classes wear a long black cloak over their clothing and around the head and upper body when they leave the house (*milaaya*). Many Egyptian women also wear Western style clothing such as dresses or jeans and blouses.



**Woman Wearing Hijab**

Although bare-headed women wearing Western style clothing can be seen across Egypt, increasing numbers of Egyptian women wear modest clothing and some type of head covering, known as *hijab*. This fashion, known as “Islamic Dress,” is particularly popular among young Egyptians, and it is common to see a woman in Western dress walking beside her daughter in Islamic dress. While many Egyptian women wear *hijab* as an outward sign of their piety, others wear *hijab* to resist Western fashion norms or simply because they are following the latest Egyptian fashions. *Hijab* can range from a loose headscarf worn with a long sleeved shirt and jeans to a full-length black robe worn with black gloves and a face veil, known as the *niqab*. The *niqab* is controversial and worn by only a few Egyptian women.

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## HOLIDAYS

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### The Mulid

Both Muslim and Coptic Egyptians celebrate *mulids*, or birthdays of honorable Sufi and Christian saints and other holy individuals. Many believe that the *mulid* tradition, rooted in the religious festivals of ancient Egypt, took place on the full moon, just as many contemporary *mulids* do. Egyptians see *mulids* as a time to break free from some of society’s everyday restrictions and burdens. In colloquial Egyptian Arabic, the term “*mulid*” is often used to refer to a state of chaos. *Mulid* celebrations typically include a street procession in which young men carry banners, children beat on drums, and food is sold on the street. Some processions also include a parade of carts that are decorated to depict various satirical scenes. A carnival atmosphere prevails, and the streets are decorated with banners, flags, and lights.

## Muslim Holidays

Muslim Egyptians see the many holidays that they observe throughout the year as an opportunity to both express their faith and connect with their families. Most of these holidays are celebrated with family gatherings, visits to friends and neighbors, special meals, and new clothes or small toys for children. The holiest month in the Muslim calendar is Ramadan. Throughout the month, Muslims abstain from food and water during the day to bring them spiritually closer to God and remember the suffering of those who are less fortunate. The fast ends each day at sunset, and during the night, Muslims gather to eat meals with their families. Throughout the month, many businesses are closed during the day to coincide with the hours of fasting, but remain open long into the night. Ramadan is also a festive month, with special sweets and foods, as well as customs like the Ramadan lantern. Ramadan comes to a close with *ʿId al-Fitr*, a 3-day holiday that begins with trips to the mosque and later includes large meals, picnics, visits to graveyards, and new clothes for children. *ʿId al-Adha*, which takes place on the 10<sup>th</sup> of *Dhu-l-Hijja*, the final month of the Muslim calendar, is also important to many Muslims. On this day, Muslims remember the Prophet Abraham's readiness to kill his son Ishmael to please God, and they recall the event by sacrificing their own sheep. Families visit their neighbors, and children play in the streets. The *ʿId* takes place over several days, and many families use the time to go on vacation.

## Christian Holidays

Coptic Egyptians observe both holidays familiar to Christians around the globe, as well as holidays particular to the Coptic Christian Church. Like Muslim Egyptians, Copts mark their holidays by attending religious services, visiting their family and friends,

and fasting during daylight hours. The Coptic Church follows its own calendar based on the calendar of the ancient Egyptians, thus Copts observe Christian holidays such as Christmas on a different day than those Christians who follow the Gregorian calendar, the most commonly followed calendar in the world. For instance, Copts celebrate *Id al-Milad* (Christmas), an official Egyptian holiday, on the seventh of January on the Gregorian calendar. Copts celebrate Christmas by decorating their homes with bean sprouts, attending Mass, and visiting their families. Copts observe Easter week, which marks the end of 55 days of fasting, by attending special Masses, gathering with their families, and giving their children money to buy new clothing.

The primary Egyptian Coptic holiday is *al-Siyam al-Saghir* (the small fast), which lasts from 25 November until 7 January. In addition to commemorating the 40 days that the Jews fasted while waiting for Moses to return from Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments, the fast also commemorates a 12<sup>th</sup> century Egyptian legend that states that Fatimid Caliph Hakim, known for his unbalanced mental state and cruelty, threatened to massacre the Copts unless they could prove that God existed by asking God to move a mountain. The Copts fasted for 3 days until the mountain was struck by an earthquake and did indeed move. Egyptian Copts also fast to observe the 3 days that the Biblical Jonah was trapped in the belly of the fish, during Lent, and on numerous other occasions.

## **National Holidays**

Egyptians of all faiths are united by their celebration of several national holidays. The most significant holiday is *Shamm al-Nisim* (Smelling the Breeze). Egyptians believe that *Shamm al-Nisim* is rooted in the traditions of Ancient Egypt. Many Egyptians celebrate the day by picnicking in parks and along the banks of the

Nile, eating special foods that symbolize fertility, and waking their children by rubbing onions on their noses.

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## **EGYPT'S MILITARY CULTURE**

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### **Cultural Style of Warfare**

The contemporary Egyptian military was established during the Free Officers Revolution of 1952, when a group of predominately mid-level Egyptian officers exiled Egyptian King Farouk and seized government control. In the ensuing years, Egypt's military has developed a reputation for perpetual ineffectiveness. Egyptian forces have consistently performed poorly on the battlefield in their repeated hostilities with Israel in the 1950s, '60s, and '70s, and the encounters with Yemeni forces in the 1960s. Even the conflicts that have been heralded by Egypt as grand examples of Egypt's superior military tactical skill—including the October War of 1973 and the Gulf War in 1990–1991—illustrated great deficiencies in Egypt's military's operational capability. In the contemporary period, Egypt's military is known for its over-centralized authority, discouraging personal initiative, lacking operational flexibility, consistent information manipulation, discouraging active leadership within the junior officer ranks, and poor enlisted conscript treatment.

### ***Historical Narrative***

The origin of the modern Egyptian military can be traced to the defeat of Egyptian forces during the 1948 War of Israeli Independence. At the start of the war, Egypt's military was small. It suffered from an underdeveloped logistics system that was limited in the ability to support ground forces outside Egypt's borders. The Egyptian army's poor preparation and the lack of planning between Egypt's military and other Arab forces contributed to



the Arabs' defeat. The defeat led to intense feelings of shame and despair across Egypt. Many Egyptians blamed government corruption and cronyism for the defeat, arguing that Egyptian King Farouk had not only tolerated the corruption, but also knowingly supplied the Egyptian army with faulty equipment. The general staff was so unprepared that it was forced to borrow a map of Palestine from Cairo's Buick dealer.

Many Egyptian officers shared the wider Egyptian concerns about the army's lack of preparation and poor performance during the 1948 war. In 1949, officer Gamal Abdel Nasser organized the Free Officers Movement, a coalition of Egyptian military officers concerned about the state of Egypt's military and disillusioned with the monarchy's close relationship with Great Britain, including the presence of British forces in the Suez Canal zone. The Free Officers addressed these problems by overthrowing the Egyptian government on 23 July 1952. King Farouk was exiled. The Free Officers gained control of Egypt. The 1952 Free Officer Revolution set the stage for the development of the modern Egyptian military and its relationship to the civilian government.

During the early years of the Free Officers' reign, and later during Nasser's presidency, Egypt's military served both as a protector of the regime and an active participant in the government. The military believed that it was the only organization in the country capable of carrying out the day-to-day functions of government. Cabinet ministries, including the ministries of War, War Production, Interior, and National Guidance, and the leadership of various government agencies were staffed primarily by military personnel. Military officers even led Egypt's most influential press organizations.

The Free Officers had carried out the 1952 Revolution in part to improve the capabilities of Egypt's military; however, for the

next several decades, the military continued to perform poorly in the field. During the Suez Canal Crisis of 1956, the military was caught unprepared for the British-French-Israeli invasion of the Canal Zone and the Sinai Peninsula. Egypt's military also performed so poorly and lost so many men during its intervention in the Yemeni Civil War of the 1960s that the war became known as "Egypt's Vietnam."

The greatest blow to Egypt's military came during the 1967 Six-Day War with Israel, known as *al-Nakbah* (the catastrophe) in Egypt. The war began on 5 June. Israel launched a preemptive attack on Egypt in response to Nasser's increasingly heated rhetoric against the country, the expulsion of the UN Emergency Force from the Sinai, and the Egyptian blockade of the Strait of Tiran. Israeli jets quickly destroyed most of Egypt's air force and air defense capability. Over the next 5 days, Israeli ground forces also defeated the Egyptian army and occupied the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula. Factionalism, command and control problems, and the politicization of the military command were all factors in Egypt's swift defeat.

The catastrophe of the Six-Day War shaped the modern Egyptian military more than any other single event. Dispirited and disorganized, Egypt's military felt that it needed to take decisive measures to restore the military's credibility. Egypt's military leadership was seized by a sense of mission. The leadership energetically worked around entrenched military bureaucracy toward reform. The military's goals included professionalizing and increasing military efficiency, preparing for a long war with Israel, regaining control of the Sinai Peninsula, and taking a smaller role in the politics of the civilian Egyptian government. To that end, the ruling military elite relinquished much of its role in the day-to-day governing of Egypt. Instead, military leadership concentrated on preparing

the military for the next battle with Israel. Egypt's military established a close relationship with the Soviet Union. The military began purchasing most of its equipment and military platforms from the Soviet Union. The rigid and centralized Soviet command structure also began influencing Egyptian operating procedures, influences that can still be seen today.

After the death of Nasser in 1970 and the succession of his vice president, former Free Officer Anwar Sadat, Egypt's military's recruitment, equipment acquisition, and training continued to improve. Sadat used his constitutional powers to dismiss top military brass who disagreed with him, solidifying the military's subordinate position to civilian leadership. However, these measures were controversial within the military. Sadat was compelled to surround himself with loyal senior officers, such as Chief of Staff General Muhammad Sadiq, who would ensure the survival of Sadat's government.

With the launch of a surprise attack on Israel on 6 October 1973, Sadat recaptured the Sinai Peninsula, created the strategic conditions that would allow him to negotiate with Israel from a place of honor, showcased the improved capabilities of Egypt's military, and increased his popularity across Egypt. Israel was caught off-guard. Egyptian forces performed well during the early days of the war. However, after 48 hours, the Israeli Defense Forces launched a successful counterattack, crossing the Suez Canal and cutting off the Egyptian Third Army. Egyptian military planners had not anticipated this course of action by the Israelis. Commanders on the ground failed to quickly report the counterattack to higher headquarters; thus, Egypt's military proved unable to react to the Israeli advancement. Nevertheless, most Egyptians felt that the actions of Egypt's military in the war had regained the honor lost in 1967.

President Sadat's next bold move came in 1977, when he became the first Arab leader to officially visit Jerusalem to begin the peace process between Egypt and Israel. This visit led to the U.S.-brokered Camp David accords and the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty of 1979. To cement the treaty, since 1979, the United States has provided Egypt and Egypt's military a package of aid, grants, subsidies, and American military equipment totaling US\$1.3 billion annually. As a result, Egypt's military began distancing itself from Soviet influence. The military came to embrace a much closer relationship with the United States. However, Sadat's agreements with Israel and the United States angered the Egyptian people, who felt betrayed. They were also frustrated by the failure of the peace treaty to improve their lives as Sadat had promised them. In 1981, disgruntled officers of the Egyptian army assassinated Sadat at a military parade; these officers were also members of the radical group *Tanzim al-Jihad* (the Jihad Organization).

Sadat was succeeded by his vice president, former air force officer Hosni Mubarak. Under the leadership of Mubarak, Egypt's military has gained a reputation as a cohesive and stable institution. Egypt's military has continued to deepen its cooperation with the U.S. military. The 1991 Gulf War was significant to Egyptian and U.S. military cooperation. Egyptian forces were asked to share only in a small part of the burden of the war; however, they still experienced significant difficulties. Compared to the coalition partners, Egyptians moved slowly and were unable to operate effectively in the face of unexpected obstacles. For instance, when Egypt's tanks encountered flaming trenches dug by Iraqi forces, the Egyptian forces waited more than 4 hours for the flames to burn out, rather than improvise a solution.

## ***Egypt's Military Today***

Egypt is a leading military power in Arab nations and on the African continent. With nearly 470,000 active duty and 479,000 reserve troops, Egypt is the largest military force in the region. However, Egypt's military maintains its force strength at the expense of force quality. Egypt's reserve forces are given trivial assignments. The forces receive little or no training above the battalion level. Even when given the opportunity to train, they are often forced to use old equipment that differs from that used by active units.

President Mubarak continues to modernize Egypt's military. Under his leadership, the military has gained a reputation as a cohesive and stable institution. Egypt's greatest military strength is the great pool of modern equipment and platforms the country has assembled since becoming a U.S. ally. Mubarak's primary objective is to maintain Egypt's deterrence capability toward Israel to preserve the peace between the two nations that has existed since 1979.

Egypt's military also has a significant role in Egypt's economy. Egypt's defense industry earns roughly US\$500 million annually and employs more than 100,000 people. In 1979, Law 32 enabled Egypt's military to open its own accounts in commercial banks. Since that time, military factories have produced a variety of military equipment and civilian products, ranging from tanks and helicopters to washing machines, pharmaceuticals, and stationery. The military has also become involved in large-scale commercial farming and the construction of numerous large shopping malls. This financial freedom has enabled the military to become partially economically independent from the state. Retired general officers have enriched themselves through their business ties. In general, these military enterprises fund the armed forces' oper-

ation and management while U.S. security assistance funds the forces' modernization.

## **Military Demographics**

### ***Conscription***

According to the 1980 Law No. 127, all Egyptian men between ages 18 and 30 must serve in Egypt's military for 3 years. Those men who have graduated from university serve for 18 months. After their service has been completed, former conscripts belong to the reserves for 7 years. University students may postpone their service until they are 28, as can younger sons whose older brothers are still serving. In some cases, only-sons may be exempt from service. The punishment for failure to perform military service is a year in prison and a fine.

### ***Geography***

Regional identity is important to most Egyptians; however, it does not serve a role in military promotions. As a result of conscription, Egyptians from all regions of the country serve in the military. Many Egyptians from marginalized areas of the country have risen to powerful positions.

### ***Religion***

The religious demographics of Egypt's military mirror the religious demographics of Egypt. Approximately 90 percent of Egyptians are Sunni Muslim; 10 percent are Coptic Christians. To accommodate the Muslim religious beliefs of the majority, meetings with senior military and government officials are often scheduled around the daily noon prayer. Few military exercises are scheduled during the holy Muslim month of Ramadan.

Prior to 2008, Egypt's small Baha'i population of approximately 2,000 was unable to serve in Egypt's military because they were prohibited from obtaining identification cards by the Egyptian government, which only recognizes Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Without ID cards, the Baha'i could not be conscripted. In April 2008, an Egyptian court ruled that the Baha'i can obtain ID cards with dashes listed in the religion section of their cards, which will allow them to serve in the military.

Egypt's military is also responsible for suppressing religious unrest in Egypt. The paramilitary-like Department for Combating Religious Activity focuses on monitoring radical Egyptian Islamic extremist groups such as Egyptian Islamic Jihad and the Vanguard of Conquest. The department is commanded by an Egyptian army general. The army also monitors the religious and political attitudes and activities of soldiers to detect any potential discipline problems.

### ***Ethnicity***

Egypt is ethnically homogenous. Nearly 98 percent of the population identifies as Egyptian Arab. Military service is compulsory for all male citizens of Egypt, including those who belong to minority groups, such as Nubians and Bedouin tribes.

### ***Language***

Nearly all Egyptians speak the Egyptian dialect of Arabic; however, there are some regional variations within the country. As with all Arabic dialects, the spoken dialect of Egyptian Arabic varies considerably from written Arabic. This contributes to the significant illiteracy rate in Egypt. In 2003, 28 percent of Egyptians between the ages of 15 and 24 were illiterate, contributing to

problems in military education, training, and equipment maintenance, primarily among conscripts.

## ***Tribe***

Similar to all other Egyptian males, young Bedouin men are conscripted into Egypt's military. For many, military service is their first exposure to urban life. However, some Bedouin tribes have an antagonistic relationship with the Egyptian government and Egypt's military. Many Bedouin tribes resent the government. They feel it forced them to give up their nomadic way of life and settle against their will. They also resent the military in particular for trespassing on their land and destroying the environment during exercises, and for disrupting Bedouin life by drafting their young men. Periodically, young Bedouin men flee to neighboring Libya to avoid conscription. Confrontations between the Bedouin and military have turned fatal. Still, a significant number of Bedouin serve in the Egyptian Frontier Corps, a force of 12,000 that guards the Egyptian border.

## ***Economic Status***

Egypt's economy is strained. Approximately 40 percent of the population lives in poverty. Unemployment is estimated at significantly more than 20 percent for young Egyptian men. Recent unrest over the rise in cost of subsidized food prices has led to riots. In early 2008, President Mubarak was forced to call on the army to increase its production of bread in army-owned bakeries to ease tensions.

As a result of Egypt's unemployment rate, military service is seen as an increasingly attractive employment opportunity for young Egyptians. The military affords steady pay and meals that many other civilian jobs do not offer. If an impoverished family is able



to educate a son to the point where he can be accepted into one of the officer schools, this is seen as similar to winning the lottery.

Although Egypt's military was dominated by powerful wealthy families in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, these families have lost much of their influence since the 1952 Revolution. As a result of conscription, Egyptians from all social classes are represented throughout the military.

## **Culture and Rank**

Egypt's military is deeply politicized, which at times hinders its performance. Senior officer advancement often depends on political connection, particularly to President Hosni Mubarak. Some senior officers have created their own independent fiefdoms within their services. This has led to rivalries so severe that they have made joint operations virtually impossible.

Information is compartmentalized at all levels of command, contributing to the generally slow pace and low morale. Officers regularly withhold information from their superiors and colleagues because they fear incurring shame. This fear often leads officers to be hesitant in decision-making. To avoid being blamed for mistakes, Egyptian military officers rarely debrief after a mission or critique their performances. This causes the same mistakes to be made repeatedly. In addition, many officers do not share information with their subordinates in order to maintain control over their junior officers. Decision-making occurs only at the highest levels of the chain of command, preventing tactical commanders from exercising independent leadership.

## **General Officers**

Members of the Egyptian general officer corps tend to be “doctrinaires” who avoid risk and rarely develop new or original strategies or tactics. General officers enjoy numerous benefits due to their powerful position within Egypt’s military. The most significant of these is that each general officer is assigned a lower-level officer, known as a *sayii*. The *sayii* works as the general officer’s driver and scheduler. The *sayii* rises through the ranks with the general officer throughout his career. The two men often develop a close personal relationship. If a *sayii* is not available to a new general officer, he will receive extra pay as compensation until a *sayii* can be assigned to him.

## **Junior Officers**

Officers in Egypt’s armed forces typically choose the military as their career path. They are more highly educated than most conscripts. Most Egyptian officers hold either a bachelor’s degree or have been educated at a military academy. Egyptian officers are also paid higher salaries and given healthcare and housing, benefits not given to enlisted men. These benefits are meant to ensure the officers’ loyalty to the government.

Officer advancement is in part based on skill and performance in training and in part based on personal connections. Loyalty to specific generals and the sponsorship of a more senior officer enables junior servicemen to move up in the ranks. Similarly, gaining entrance to the most prestigious military schools often depends on connections (*wasta*), sometimes referred to as “Vitamin W” by members of Egypt’s military. Many mid-level and junior officers recognize that cronyism prevails throughout Egypt’s military and that morale has suffered as a result. They argue that some officers place their own career advancement above reform or moderniza-

tion. Many junior officers have studied and trained in the United States and alongside U.S. servicemen. The Egyptian officers have observed the way U.S. junior officers are granted authority and flexibility and rise up through the chain of command. There is general agreement among the lower rungs of the Egyptian officer corps that it would be beneficial to possess a similar set of practices within Egypt's military culture.

Over the past 60 years, passive tactical leadership has led to junior field officers having little understanding of maneuver warfare or combined arms operations. Colonels and brigadier generals often must do the work that lieutenants and captains in Western militaries typically perform. This occurs because the colonel and brigadier generals are the only ones with the technical know-how to handle sophisticated gear. The officer corps does not encourage initiative. Many officers simply fill leadership roles that the U.S. military would leave to the NCO corps. The responsibility level of an Egyptian O-6 (colonel) has been compared to that of a United States army E-7 (sergeant first class).

### ***Non-commissioned Officers***

As is common in militaries throughout the world, a gap exists between the officer and the enlisted corps of Egypt's military. Many Western forces, including the United States, connect the two through the noncommissioned officer (NCO) corps. However, Egypt's military does not have a well-trained NCO corps, which has led to an increase in the divide between officers and conscripts. The government prefers decision-making to occur by officers at the top of the chain of command. The government does see a benefit in having junior leaders operate independently.

Egypt's lack of a strong NCO corps stems in part from the close relationship of Egypt's military with the military of the Soviet Union throughout the late 1950s and 1960s. The Soviet military's general disdain for regular soldiers and skepticism of the need for a well-developed NCO corps reinforced Egypt's belief that a strong and formal NCO corps was of little utility. Typically, the NCO corps serve in a training and advisory role and as the conduit to the officer corps for the enlisted soldiers. With no true NCO corps in Egypt, officers with ranks as high as major often perform jobs that a Western NCO would typically carry out.

### ***Enlisted and Conscripts***

There is a wide gap between the lives of most Egyptian officers and the lives of the enlisted corps. Roughly 80,000 Egyptian males are conscripted annually into the armed forces. Most in the enlisted corps are born into poor, often rural households. Many poor Egyptians believe that the rich are able to bribe their way out of service, something that most Egyptians cannot afford. Conscripts are occasionally drafted into an officer corps, something that many dread because it more than doubles the amount of time they have to serve. In 1987, conscripts drafted into the paramilitary rioted after hearing rumors that the length of their service was being extended. They targeted symbols of Egypt's wealth, such as hotels catering to foreign tourists.

Many Egyptian officers feel that it is acceptable to treat their enlisted soldiers poorly because of their disadvantaged backgrounds. For instance, it is common for officers stationed outside Cairo to drive home on the weekends, leaving their enlisted soldiers behind. In contrast, if an enlisted soldier wants to go home, he is forced to cross the desert to a highway and flag down a bus that can take him to the Cairo rail system. Poor treatment by officers

of the enlisted corps has caused most conscripts to dread and detest their military service. Soldiers who acquire the most basic of technical skills quickly leave the military to seek better-paying civilian jobs.

As Egypt's military has adopted increasingly complex weapons systems, the shortage of well-trained enlisted personnel has become a serious problem. Illiteracy in particular continues to be a consistent challenge within the enlisted ranks. Many conscripts have not completed high school. These conscripts must serve one more year than those who have completed high school before entering the military. Conscripts identified as lacking basic skills are given full-time vocational training emphasizing skills convertible to civilian employment for the last 6 months of their conscripted service. This vocational training appears to be designed to support national economic development; many conscripts who leave military service will be able to use these skills when they enter the civilian economic sector.

## **Organizational Cultures**

### ***Army***

Throughout Egypt's military history, the army has been its largest and most prestigious branch. The army's position as Egypt's most valued service was cemented with the army's performance during the October War of 1973. The engineers executed the crossing of the Suez Canal; the infantry made great advances into the Sinai during the first 24 to 48 hours of the war. Since that time, the army has dominated the General Staff and offices of the minister of defense and commander-in-chief. The engineers have been considered heroes; their officers' club is the most opulent in Cairo.

*“When the winds in Egypt one day carried biting sand particles from the desert during a demonstration for visiting U.S. dignitaries, I watched as a contingent of soldiers marched in and formed a single rank to shield the Americans; Egyptian soldiers, in other words, are used on occasion as nothing more than a windbreak.”*

*—Retired U.S. Army Colonel Norvell De Atkine*

*~ Norville de Atkine, “Why Arabs Lose Wars,” Middle East Review of International Affairs Journal.*

Egypt’s army is the largest in the African and Arab nations, with 340,000 active duty troops and 375,000 reservists. The army is organized into five military zones: the Central Zone (Cairo), the Eastern Zone (Ismailiya), the Western Zone (Marsa Matruh), the Southern Zone (Aswan), and the Northern Zone (Alexandria). Despite Egypt’s peace treaty with Israel, the Eastern Zone along the Suez and the Sinai remains the army’s top priority. However, the Egyptian army is not organized in a fashion that would allow for rapid maneuvering into the Sinai. Rather, the army has grown accustomed to the static defensive posture of a garrison army.

Other modern armies in the world have criticized the Egyptian army for maintaining its large size at the expense of force quality. However, Egyptians argue that a large army is necessary in a region where other nations continue to support large standing armies. In the Arab community, large numbers are equated with power and national prestige. Egypt is also dealing with a struggling economy. Egypt thus sees the army as a major source of employment for young Egyptians. Through conscription, Egyptians from rural areas are given the opportunity with the Egyptian

army to see the rest of the country and become better integrated into civil society.

## **Navy**

Egypt's navy is the smallest branch of its armed forces. Nevertheless, the navy is large by Middle Eastern standards; it is larger than even the neighboring Israeli navy. Its greatest triumph came in 1967, when it became the first navy in history to sink a ship using anti-ship missiles—the Egyptian Komar-class attack craft sank the Israeli destroyer *Eilat*. Subsequently, the Egyptian navy came to be considered the Achilles' heel of Egypt's military.

The navy has 20,000 men, more than half of whom are conscripts with limited training or experience; they also have a 2,000-man Coast Guard. The navy's mission is to protect the 1,243 miles (2,000 kilometers) of Egypt's coastline on the Mediterranean and Red seas, defend the Suez Canal, and support army operations. Most of the navy is deployed in the Mediterranean while a smaller force patrols the Red Sea. The fleet is made up of five operational divisions: frigate, submarine, mine warfare, missile boat command, and torpedo boat command. The navy does not have its own air capability; it depends on the air force for maritime reconnaissance and protection against submarines.

The Egyptian navy has been largely overlooked by the Ministry of Defense due to the ministry's focus on fulfilling the needs of the army, air force, and air defense forces. In recent decades, the navy has seen the quality of its personnel and equipment decline while other services benefited from large modernization programs. For the past decade, the navy has requested funds to modernize its submarine fleet; however, the requests have been turned down. The continued neglect of the navy has resulted in an aging, low-

capability fleet with limited readiness. The navy has also been forced to concentrate on force quantity over force quality to maintain its strength levels.

The Egyptian navy's modernization efforts have largely proved unsuccessful. The Egyptian navy has had a difficult time training its personnel to operate a fleet consisting of ships from a variety of countries and operating on vastly different technological levels. For instance, the Egyptians navy's poorly educated personnel have been unable to maintain and operate equipment and technology purchased from the West. At the same time, the navy has encountered similar issues when trying to maintain its fleet of Chinese Romeo-class submarines.

## ***Air Force***

Egypt's air force was built from the ground-up on two separate occasions, following the 1967 war and the 1973 war. These crushing defeats by Israel spurred the government to attempt to create an advanced force that could rival the U.S.-supplied Israeli air force. In the contemporary period, the air force is also favored by Egypt's current president, Hosni Mubarak, a former air force commander.

Proportionally, Egypt's air force receives the largest amount of resources and equipment of all of Egypt's services. Since the Camp David accords of 1978, Egypt's air force has turned away from Soviet equipment in favor of U.S., French, and Chinese aircraft. Egypt's air force has 220 F-16 fighter jets, the fourth-largest holding of any nation in the world. While the air force has been successful in acquiring high-tech platforms, the service still needs to develop joint warfare capabilities to better support Egypt's land and naval forces.



The air force also employs some of the mostly highly educated and motivated personnel. Many individuals who join the air force seek to acquire advanced technical skills that will be marketable in their civilian lives.

### ***Air Defense Force***

Egypt's Air Defense Force (ADF) was established in response to Egypt's defeat in the 1967 war, which included the destruction of most of Egypt's aircraft on the ground. The ADF was modeled after the ADF of the USSR; the force was meant to address the problems caused by dividing up air defense responsibilities between several general officers. It was established as a stand-alone service that integrated all of Egypt's air defense capabilities, including interceptor planes, radar, anti-aircraft guns, and rocket and missile units.

Soldiers in the air defense force are expected to be able to operate sophisticated technology. Cadets accepted to the Air Defense College study engineering, electro-physics, and communications. The ADF is composed of approximately 80,000 active-duty servicemen and 70,000 reservists. However, the status and readiness of the ADF have declined in recent years due to its failure to upgrade the largely Soviet-bloc airplanes.

### ***Paramilitary***

In addition to the Israeli threat, many in Egypt's military see internal opposition as one of the biggest threats facing the Egyptian regime. Most internal government opposition comes from Muslim political organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood and small violent Islamic radical groups such as the Egyptian Islamic Jihad and *Al-Jama`a al-Islamiyya* (the Islamic Group). In an attempt to measure and curtail opposition groups, the *Mukhaba-*

*rat el-Khabeya* (military intelligence services) have placed spies throughout Egypt's military to root out Islamists or those with Islamist sympathies.

Egypt maintains a sizable paramilitary force, sectors of which fall under either the Ministry of Interior or the Ministry of Defense. The Ministry of the Interior controls the Central Security Force, which is the largest paramilitary force in Egypt, numbering 325,000. Along with the Egyptian National Police, the Central Security Force acts as the law enforcement authority in the country. The personnel of the Central Security Force are semi-literate and underpaid, and occupy the bottom rung of the security hierarchy. The Ministry of the Interior also oversees other paramilitary activity, internal security, and counterterrorism with an additional mix of intelligence forces that are not well-known, but believed to be highly effective.

The Ministry of Defense operates the National Guard, the Border Security Force (a force of 20,000), the Egyptian Frontier Corps, and the Coast Guard. The National Guard, a force of 60,000, is manned primarily by surplus individuals that the army has rejected. The National Guard is used in counterterrorism operations. The Frontier Corps, made up of 12,000 men, is composed primarily of Bedouin. The Frontier Corps assists the army with border surveillance, anti-drug trafficking operations, and internal peacekeeping. The Coast Guard, a force of 2,000, is responsible for patrolling Egypt's coastline to prevent smuggling and to protect public installations along the shore.

## **Cultural Impact**

### ***Strategy***

For the past several decades, Egyptian military strategy has been developed with two main goals in mind: to prepare for a conventional war with Israel and to defend Egypt's access to the Nile River. The military's secondary goals include maintaining a secure environment for shipping through the Suez Canal and the Red Sea and strengthening the border between Egypt and the Gaza Strip to prevent radical influences from crossing into Egypt and smuggling.

A conventional war between Egypt and Israel has remained unlikely since the signing of the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty of 1979; however, Egypt's military continues to prepare for a conventional war with its neighbor. President Mubarak believes that Egypt must maintain a strong, modernized military to deter Israel or any other nation from launching an attack against Egypt. As a result, many in Egypt's military carefully monitor the level of U.S. aid to Israel and press the United States to provide Egypt with proportional aid packages.

Egypt has long been concerned with maintaining its level of access to the Nile River, which has served as the lifeblood of the Egyptian economy and the country's populace for millennia. The military is authorized to act preemptively without obtaining permission from the government's executive branch to any threat to the flow of the Nile or to the Aswan Dam. Egypt is particularly concerned that instability and drought in Sudan may cause the Sudanese to take action that will affect the Nile riverine system.

### ***Tactics***

Drills and maneuvers in Egypt's military are heavily scripted at both the tactical and strategic levels. Egyptian tactical command-

ers are unable to provide much independent leadership. Egypt's military tends to teach that there is only one correct method to solve any military problem. Memorization of the steps needed to perform a specific task is often emphasized over attaining the objective of the task. The effects of this policy could be seen during the 1973 war. At that time, Egyptian tank crews learned Soviet armor tactics, which at the time called for the commander of a tank platoon to designate a single target for the platoon to fire on until it was destroyed. It was calculated that it would likely take three shots per tank to destroy the target. Egyptian commanders used this calculation as a tactical rule for tank battles. Egyptians were taught to fire three shots at a target and then move on regardless of whether they had destroyed the first target. Egyptian marksmanship turned out to be much worse than Soviet marksmanship. Most targets fired upon by Egyptian tanks were not destroyed during the course of three shots. However, the Egyptians did not adjust their tactics and they lost many tank duels to the Israelis.

### ***Planning Process***

The Egyptian planning process is often detailed and elaborate; however, it is also significantly hindered by a lack of information sharing and flexibility. Only the highest echelons of the Egyptian command structure participate in the military planning process, which is so meticulous that officers attempt to plan for every conceivable contingency. However, many Egyptian officers do not share information with each other or along the chain of command. In addition, Egyptian officers and enlisted soldiers routinely withhold information from their allies and members of their own services, complicating coalition and joint operations. The Egyptian planning process is outdated in an era of simultaneous air and ground maneuver battles. Modern warfare requires a degree of

flexibility and ad hoc innovation from mid-level tactical commanders that does not exist in Egyptian operations.

### ***Training and Education***

Egypt's military has a well-established cadre of professional military schools that prepare servicemen for their future duties as junior officers. The oldest military school, Egypt's military academy, was established in 1811. The military also runs Egypt's military Technical College, the Air Academy, the Air Defenses Academy, and the Naval Academy. Advanced Egyptian military students are often sent to Western countries for further training.

Egypt's military education system emphasizes rote memorization. Officers are expected to commit scores of facts and figures to memory. Nontraditional ideas and solutions to operational problems are discouraged. If an officer is heard publicly questioning accepted doctrine, his career may be permanently damaged. Egyptian culture emphasizes deference to authority. Military instructors are rarely challenged by their students. Similarly, junior officers at times share their answers with their superiors in class so that the highest-ranking officers receive the highest grades. Direct and open competition among students is discouraged because it will lead to humiliation for the loser. This method of education tends to inhibit an officer's analytical thinking skills and ability to reason based on general principles.

Foreign military instructors should be aware that their Egyptian students will likely expect that their classes will consist of memorization, long lectures, and copious note-taking. A foreign instructor who must consult a book or his or her notes during a lecture instantly loses credibility in the eyes of the Arab students. In addition, foreign instructors must take great care when directing a

*American observers state that a sergeant first class in the United States army has roughly the same amount of authority as a colonel in the Egyptian army.*

*~ Norville de Atkine, "Why Arabs Lose Wars," Middle East Review of International Affairs Journal.*

question to an Egyptian student and refrain from posing the question unless they are sure the student knows the correct answer. If a student does not know the correct answer, the student will likely feel publicly humiliated.

Egypt's military rarely conducts exercises or training outside the classroom. Egypt's military and the civilian population are deeply proud of the modern platforms and technologies that the military has acquired from the United States, including M1 Abrams tanks and F-16 fighter jets. However, although Egypt's military spends large sums of money to acquire these highly technological platforms, it discourages training with the platforms. Many within the military are unable to operate the technology effectively. Consistent training on these platforms is inhibited by the desire not to break the equipment. Pilots are specifically prevented from logging many flight hours due to concern that they may break the planes.

### ***Leadership Style***

Egypt's military leadership style is rigidly hierarchical. All orders come from the top of the chain of command and are not meant to be reinterpreted or modified in any way. Junior officers are taught not to question their orders. In addition, officers typically avoid making autonomous decisions out of fear of being held responsible

if their decision is wrong. The ideal officer is loyal and compliant, and takes care not to outshine his superior officer. As a result, enlisted men often distrust their commanders because enlisted men feel as if their officers look out for their own interests and the interests of their superiors rather than the interests of their men.

### ***Logistics and Maintenance***

One of the most significant problems facing Egypt's military is underfunded logistics and maintenance. Egypt spends approximately 3.4 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) on military expenditures. Egypt also receives an annual package of military aid from the United States totaling nearly US\$1.3 billion. However, these resources are used primarily to purchase new technologies and platforms. Massive funding for expensive acquisition items leaves little funding to maintain current equipment. As a result, Egypt's military consistently cuts corners by scaling back hands-on training. Most of Egypt's air force bases receive only a few hundred dollars per month to conduct training and maintenance. As a result, officers attempt to preserve aircraft overuse by preventing their pilots from logging flight hours required to master such technologically advanced aircraft.

These problems are compounded by Egyptian's approach to delegation of authority. Equipment maintenance procedures and expectations require delegation of authority and independent action at the lowest level of the chain of command, which is antithetical to Egypt's rigid and hierarchal system. Delegation of authority is rare in Egypt's military; maintenance tools that, in the U.S. military would likely be allocated to a battalion, are handed off at a much higher level in Egypt's military. As a result, maintenance problems easily fixed at the unit level must await action from headquarters.

For several years, the United States has urged the Egyptians to cut back new weapon procurement in favor of training, maintenance, and logistics. In the past decade, Egypt has agreed to spend roughly 30 percent of the military aid the country receives from the United States on logistics and maintenance.

### ***Technology and Acquisition***

Egypt's acquisition cycle of new platforms and weapon systems is in part driven by the military's desire to keep up with its neighbors, including Israel and other Arab nations. As Egypt sees itself as a leader in the Middle East as well as on the African continent, the country believes it must continue to equal, or preferably outpace, its regional counterparts in tanks, aircraft, air defense capabilities, etc.

Egypt sees virtue in owning the best equipment, even if its military is not able to operate the equipment efficiently or effectively. In some cases, a sampling of Egypt's largest and most complex weapons systems is brought out only for shows and parades, or at an annual exercise where there is significant press coverage. Egypt's military personnel have limited technical skills. The armed forces rarely take full advantage of a weapons system. Due to the country's limited technical ability, Egypt has often fallen short in the integration of military capabilities. For example, technical deficiencies have hampered Egypt's ability to sequence fires from aviation and ground artillery units to effectively employ combined arms.

### ***Offense and Defense***

The role of Egypt's military, as defined by political leaders and senior military officers, is to defend Egypt and achieve its national interests. Public addresses from ministers and other senior officials



*“Peace does not mean relaxation. The endless development of military systems and the arms race prove that survival is only assured by the strongest and that military strength will always be necessary.”*

*—Minister of Defense and War Production Field Marshal  
Mohammed Hussein Tantawi*

*~ Hillel Frisch, “Guns and Butter in the Egyptian Army,”  
Middle East Review of International Affairs Journal.*

consistently stress peace over war and a defensive posture rather than an offensive posture. While Egypt has continuously sought to achieve a greater cadre of offensive military capabilities, the buildup of its armed forces is seen by the government as consistent with the nation’s overall national security strategy of deterrence.

In the eyes of the Egyptian government, military strength is a prerequisite for peace. Therefore, Egypt desires to approach its diplomatic relations with Israel, Egypt’s perceived military opponent, from a position of strength. Most of Egypt’s capabilities, equipment, and deployment patterns are designed to engage one particular military adversary: the Israeli Defense Forces. Egypt does not hide this fact. The country has even gone so far as to name Israel as a training target in past military exercises, the first of which were the Badr-96 exercises during the summer of 1996. There is consensus among the Egyptian leadership that the strategy of deterrence is a key enabler. Deterrence will help preserve the Arab-Israeli peace process.

*“History has taught us that the cause behind many wars is the weakness of one side and the increase and growth of military power of the other side. This prompts the second side to attack, as has happened and is happening around us now. Therefore, peace and stability must exist under the umbrella of military force that protects and preserves them.”*

*—President Hosni Mubarak*

*~ Hillel Frisch, “Guns and Butter in the Egyptian Army,”  
Middle East Review of International Affairs Journal.*

## ***Conventional and Irregular Tactics***

The last conventional war between Egypt’s military and the Israeli Defense Forces occurred in 1973; however, Egypt still perceives Israel as the greatest external threat to Egypt’s security and maintains that a buildup of conventional warfighting capabilities and technologies provides the greatest deterrent to conflict between the two nations. Unlike some Arab neighbors, who have employed irregular warfare-like tactics (including guerrilla warfare and civilian attacks against Israel), Egypt has relied on political agreements and conventional deterrence to maintain peace with Israel.

In recent years, Egypt’s military has spent significant time, effort, and resources on improving its conventional warfighting capabilities. Evidence of such a focus can be seen in the military’s downsizing of its paramilitary forces. By 2006, the total number of men in Egypt’s paramilitary forces had shrunk to 120,000 from more than 300,000 in recent years.

## Military Identity

The military remains one of the preeminent institutions in Egyptian society. Military officers no longer take part in civilian government; however, the identity of the military is directly connected in many ways with that of the government. Each of Egypt's presidents since the Free Officers Revolution of 1952 has had a strong military background. Each regime has placed military men in positions of great power within the government.

According to Articles 180 to 183 in the Egyptian Constitution of 1971, the armed forces of Egypt "shall belong to the people" and are charged "to defend the country, to safeguard its territory and security, and protect the socialist gains of the people's struggle. In the years since the constitution's ratification, the role of the military in Egyptian society has evolved to include two additional purposes: providing a social welfare system to poor Egyptians through conscription and food production, and protecting the regime from internal attacks and challenges.

The military's role in social welfare works in tandem with the goal of regime survivability. By owning and operating its own businesses and factories, the military can offer goods at subsidized, affordable rates to the general population in an effort to reduce social unrest. Most Egyptians benefit from the labor of the economic ventures of the military; 40 to 60 percent of the produce grown in Egypt is grown by the military. The military also operates a jobs program for many Egyptian youth. Many Egyptians acquire valuable skills that enable them to land jobs in the civilian market after their service commitment has ended.

Egypt's military has also been repeatedly called upon to maintain internal security and regime survival. For instance, in 1977, the military was called to suppress what became known as the "Bread

Riots,” protests carried out in response to the government’s reduction in food subsidies. In 1986, President Mubarak employed the military to put down the riots of Central Security Forces conscripts angered by their meager pay and poor working conditions. The government also calls upon the military to suppress opposition movements. For decades, the Egyptian government has tried opposition and terrorism suspects in military tribunals. In 2005, the Muslim Brotherhood opposition movement secured 20 percent of the seats in the People’s Assembly. President Mubarak called on the military to assist in the detention of many members of the group. In April 2008, Egypt used military tribunals to sentence leading members of the Muslim Brotherhood in hopes of silencing organized political opposition.

## **Military Values**

### ***Honor***

Egyptian culture highly values personal and family honor. Most Egyptians are taught from a young age to avoid being publicly shamed. Public disgrace is seen as the penalty for wrongdoing rather than stemming from a sense of personal remorse. Therefore, concealing the truth is encouraged as a method to escape humiliation. In Egypt’s military, the drive to preserve honor and avoid shame is often seen in the actions of junior officers who sometimes manipulate information to avoid loss of face. It is a regular practice to exaggerate or even lie to conceal mistakes from superiors. The value placed on honor and avoiding shame also contributes to Egypt’s military’s failure to debrief after missions or exercises. It can also influence the decision to go to war. The October War of 1973 was fought by Egypt with the specific purpose of reclaiming the honor the country had lost after their humiliating defeat to Israel during the Six-Day War.

## ***Just War***

The Egyptian armed forces take a defensive posture and believe that just war is carried out in direct defense of Egypt. Any attack on Egypt would be met with retaliation. The most likely scenario that would lead to a first strike by Egypt against another actor would be a threat to the water level of the Nile River. For instance, if Ethiopia or Sudan were to construct a dam that drew water from the White or Blue Nile, Egypt would consider these actions justification for war.

## ***Surrender***

Egyptian soldiers are known for being willing to surrender during battle. This reputation stems from their actions in the 1967 war, during which numerous Egyptian soldiers surrendered to Israeli forces. Most Egyptian soldiers are only willing to fight as hard as their chain of command. During the 1967 war, many officers abandoned their troops and drove to safety. The Egyptian units who fought the hardest were the units whose officers took care of their enlisted men's needs.

## ***POWs and Interrogation***

During the 1967 and 1973 wars with Israel, many reports of the mistreatment and execution of prisoners of war (POWs) emerged on both sides. Following these wars, Egypt became a signatory of multiple human rights treaties protecting POWs, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Convention against Torture. Since that time, the Egyptian government has repeatedly denied the systematic use of torture against its prisoners.

Nevertheless, many international organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International argue that torture remains a widespread problem in Egypt. Political dissidents, criminals, and particularly radical Islamists report the repeated use of torture by the intelligence services under both the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defense. Beatings, electric shock, sexual abuse, and prolonged suspension by the wrists and ankles are the most commonly cited methods of abuse.

### ***Unit Cohesion and Morale***

The morale of Egypt's military is generally low. The lowest point of Egyptian military morale came in 1967, when Egypt was defeated by Israel. During the 1973 war, Egypt felt that it regained some of its lost honor and morale. Later, during the tenure of Defense Minister Abu Ghazaleh in the 1970s and 1980s, the morale of Egypt's military fell once more because Defense Minister Ghazaleh was seen as corrupt. The level of morale within the military has improved under the current defense minister, Mohammed Hussein Tantawi.

Morale changes with service and rank in Egypt's military. In the army, high-ranking officers hold prestigious positions and report high levels of morale. At the other extreme, conscripts often feel forced into service and suffer from low morale. Those in the middle ranks of the military often suffer from low morale as well. Mid-level military service is seen by Egyptian society as a career choice of last resort for those who received poor grades in school. In addition, those officers who rank below colonel also suffer from low morale as a result of their near-total lack of command authority. The air force and air defense force generally have higher morale along the entire spectrum of command. These services are smaller, possess fewer conscripts, and are allowed more technical training.

## **Influences and Attitudes**

Egypt's military has been influenced by a diverse range of foreign militaries. The precursor to the contemporary Egyptian military was built on the French model; however, nearly all evidence of French influence has been erased with time. The pre-1952 Egyptian military was also strongly influenced by British customs, many of which remain in practice. For instance, the Egyptian salute and Egyptian military uniforms with red tags and collars stem from British tradition.

Since 1952, the greatest foreign influences on Egypt's military have been the Soviet Union and the United States. Soviet influence over Egypt's military began in 1955, when Egypt first negotiated an arms deal with the Soviet Union. Egypt then developed a command and control system modeled after Soviet doctrine, in which operational flexibility is not extended to brigade or battalion commanders and junior officers' decision-making authority was severely limited. This has contributed to its military's inability to perform well in ad-hoc operations. Egypt also adopted the Soviet system of organizing air assets into an air force and an independent air defense force. However, direct Soviet influence over Egypt's military ended in 1972, when President Anwar Sadat expelled Soviet military advisors in response to their patronizing attitude and failure to provide the Egyptians with equipment in a timely fashion. In 1976, the Egyptian's People Assembly formally abolished the Soviet-Egyptian Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. Although the Soviets fell out of favor, Soviet military doctrine and tactics continued to be studied in Egyptian military schools. As a result of the close relationship established between the United States and Egypt following the Camp David accords, in recent years the Egyptians have begun to adopt the American practice of writing joint or inter-service doctrine.

## ***Local Population***

The status of Egypt's military among the wider Egyptian population has fluctuated widely since the modern Egyptian military was founded in 1952. The status of the military reached its lowest points after Egypt's defeat in the 1967 war, during the quagmire of the Yemeni Civil War and during the tenure of Defense Minister Abu Ghazaleh, who was seen as corrupt by both the military and the population at large. In contrast, Egypt's military was embraced with pride after what Egyptians perceived as a victory in the 1973 war.

The tenure of Defense Minister Mohammed Hussein Tantawi has improved Egypt's military status in the eyes of many Egyptian citizens; he has slightly reduced the perception that Egypt's military is corrupt. However, military careers are still seen as a career of last resort by many. Many Egyptians resent that they are forced to dedicate 2 to 3 years of their youth to the military. However, conscripts do receive some benefits during their time in the service, including medical care, housing in barracks, rations, and a monthly salary. Civilian Egyptians do not resent the benefits given to conscripts. Egyptians know that eventually they or their male relatives will be conscripted into the military and receive benefits as well. However, it is possible that some civilians may come to resent the military's growing monopoly of certain sectors of Egypt's economy.

The attitude of Egypt's military toward the Egyptian population varies depending in large part upon rank. Most conscripts envy civilians' freedom from duty. On the other hand, officers are granted small privileges that sometimes cause them to see themselves as superior to the Egyptian masses. Some career military officers are also isolated from the general population, contributing to their sense of superiority. In the past three decades, Egypt's military has constructed more than 17 military cities, to include Nasir City in Cairo,



where officers and their families have access to special schools, nurseries, and discount stores that the civilian population is barred from visiting. Nasir City is also home to the central headquarters of the army, the Military Academy, the Ministry of Defense, officers' clubs, the Internal Security Apparatus (secret defense) and the military industries complex, and eight shopping malls.

### ***Civilian Government***

President Hosni Mubarak is a career air force officer. He has devoted significant resources to modernizing Egypt's air force. Some suggest that there is an unstated agreement between the military and the government that as long as the military protects the regime, the regime will protect the military's interests and privileges, including its various business holdings.

The military has dominated the civilian government of Egypt since the Free Officers Revolution of 1952. This has resulted in a civilian government that is generally sympathetic and supportive of the military. The relationship between the civilian government and the military is one of reciprocity. The military's stature is used to strengthen the regime; the regime ensures that the military's interests are satisfied. The civilian government sees the military as a stabilizing force in the economy and in the security of the region. Egypt's armed forces are the cornerstone of President Mubarak's regime, and hold a major role in maintaining peace internally and externally.

The military's ability to provide goods and employment to civilian Egyptians has further cemented the military's status as a favored institution. Egypt's military is in some sense a society within a society. The military grows its own food, manufactures its own tools, produces its own pharmaceuticals, and runs its own markets, clubs, and tour companies. The military also produces goods

at subsidized and affordable rates for civilians. The Egyptian government depends on these goods to ensure the regime's survival. The government also depends on the military to provide a 2- to 3-year period of employment for the large and growing population of young, unemployed men, who are seen as a potential threat to the government's stability.

## **Foreign Military Assistance**

U.S. aid enables Egypt to maintain its position as a powerful player in the Middle East and Africa and maintain a fragile peace with Israel. At first, U.S. military assistance to Egypt was a reward for making peace with Israel. Over time, the U.S.-Egypt partnership has grown. The foreign military assistance Egypt receives from the United States is considered mutually beneficial to both nations.

In each of the past 3 years (FY06-FY08), Egypt has received US\$1.3 billion in foreign military aid and services from the United States. U.S. military aid to Egypt is broken down into three general components—acquisition, upgrades to existing systems, and follow-on support/maintenance contracts. Approximately 30 percent of annual U.S. aid is spent on new weapons systems. Egypt's defense modernization plan is designed to gradually replace most of Egypt's older Soviet weaponry with U.S. equipment.

## **U.S. Military**

Members of Egypt's military generally respect U.S. personnel and take a practical approach to the U.S.-Egypt relationship. Occasionally, a few individuals within Egypt's military resent the size, strength, and prestige of the U.S. military; however, this attitude is rare. The general staff in particular is pragmatic about its relationship with the U.S. military. Egypt's military will likely continue to

have an amiable relationship with the United States as long as U.S. aid continues at current rates.

Egypt has proved to be a vital ally to the United States over the past 30 years. On several occasions, Egypt has committed troops to support U.S. policy initiatives. Egypt sent forces to Zaire in 1977 to assist the U.S.-backed Mobutu regime, to Morocco in 1979 to help the country in its war against Algeria, to Sudan in 1983 to oppose Libyan operations, to police Somalia in 1992, and to help pacify Bosnia in 1994. Egypt committed a large number of troops to the U.S.-led Operation DESERT STORM. Only the United Kingdom and the United States sent more troops than Egypt. Currently, the U.S. and Egyptian military relationship reflects a shared concern for international terrorism. Egypt has been a great ally of the United States in the global War on Terrorism. The U.S. military often relies on Egyptian intelligence in the U.S. strategic and operational planning process. Egypt also deployed a field hospital to Afghanistan.

Egypt is typically dependent upon U.S. military support during joint operations. For instance, during Operation DESERT STORM, Egypt's military was unable to move its forces to Saudi Arabia without the help of U.S. lift capabilities. Once in theater, Egypt was unable to supply its forces without the aid of U.S. logistics. Egypt also could not plan or direct its forces without U.S. command and control technology. Egypt's military is aware of its reliance on U.S. military support and seeks to maintain a stable relationship with the United States to ensure the country's continued support.

## **Exercise BRIGHT STAR**

Since 1980, the Egyptian and U.S. military have cooperated in the Egypt-hosted biannual joint coalition BRIGHT STAR exercise.

Three decades of cooperation have produced an Egyptian military leadership that is familiar and content with the U.S. approach to military doctrine and military personnel. BRIGHT STAR was launched in the wake of the Camp David accords, which initiated a close relationship between the two militaries. The exercise is intended to increase regional stability and promote military cooperation and interoperability among the United States, Egypt, and other coalition partners. BRIGHT STAR also helps the U.S. and Egyptian militaries understand and respect each other's cultures, customs, and military procedures. During the exercise, the U.S. military trains side by side in the Egyptian desert with its Egyptian counterparts. More than a dozen coalition partners and 70,000 personnel participated in BRIGHT STAR 2007.













