

Case Study

Egypt and the United States after the Egyptian Revolution in 2011

Hossein Taghdar¹, Zaid Ahmad¹ and Abdolreza Alami^{2,3*}

¹*Department of Politics and Government, Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia*

²*Department of Sociology, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Kharazmi University, 1571914911, Tehran, Iran*

³*Media and Communication Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia*

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to pursue two main objectives, i.e., understanding the effect of new developments in Egypt in a post-revolution era, which had affected the United States' hegemony, and explored how the United States had attempted to maintain its hegemony in Egypt. Having conducted a comprehensive analysis of academic documents, and ethnic, academic, and administrative elites, two main conclusions were drawn. Firstly, it was understood that the recent developments in Egypt had affected the United States hegemony in Egypt, and secondly, the United States had been able to cope with the new conditions and maintained its hegemony in Egypt.

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E-mail addresses:

Taghdar@yahoo.com (Hossein Taghdar)

zaid_a@upm.edu.my (Zaid Ahmad)

Abdolrezaalami@gmail.com (Abdolreza Alami)

*Corresponding author

INTRODUCTION

Problem Formulation

The United States' interest in Egypt is justified, as after tolerating the turmoil of a hegemonic cycle and fending off its main rival such as Great Britain, and Japan, the United States became more interested in regionalism. On the other hand, Egypt is a blessed land which can fulfill the United States' primary interests. Among the main

reasons the United States' is interested in Egypt are:

1. Egypt's geopolitical location
2. Its role in Israel-Palestine conflict
3. Suez Canal
4. Its influence in Arab League

It seems that the United States' presence has affected the objectives of the 2011 revolution in Egypt. Although Egypt seeks independence, the United States' interests in Egypt continued (Jadallah, 2014). This situation makes understanding the depth of the United States' hegemony in Egypt a worthy topic.

The United States has benefited from the geopolitical position of Egypt in the past. Flint (2006) pointed to the military power in Egypt, which was considerably strong and had been used to provide the security of Israel. On several occasions, the United States had strengthened Egypt's military power to secure Israel, especially after the 1979 Israel-Egypt treaty. This situation also marks the role of Egypt in Palestine case. Egypt has been involved in 4 different wars with Israel in 4 decades (1947-1971) (Flint, 2006) Therefore, Egypt had a considerable role in the fight against Zionists. However, the Camp David Treaty by Anwar al-Sadat changed the prospect of Egypt over Israel, which led to strengthening Israel.

Egypt After 2011

The first political party that gained power after the Egyptian revolution in 2011 was the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP). The elected president, Muhammad Al-Morsi, gained power through parliamentary and

democratic elections. As a political party that did not have much experience in politics, FJP received frequent consultations from the Muslim Brotherhood party to the extent that, for many, FJP was not an independent party (Sharp, 2014). Morsi's election as a president resulted in winning 47.2 percent of all seats in the parliament. Morsi worked as the Egyptian president for one year and three days. Although the duration of him ruling Egypt was short, during Morsi's time and due to the anti-western agenda of both FJP and Muslim Brotherhood, the relationships of Egypt with the United States was negatively affected (Wolkov, 2015). Morsi was planting the seeds to cause a shift in foreign policy with the United States. This issue was a real threat to the United States' hegemony, as Morsi began to establish mutual relations with Tehran, and had a plan to cut the relationship with Israel (Wolkov, 2015).

By the advent of the FJP party in Egypt, the unique alliance with the United States had come to a state of imperfection (Wolkov, 2015). America's aid policy in Egypt was altered. For example, in April 2011, a bill was given to Congress in the United States (H.R.1514) to consider an aid contingent on Egypt due to being faithful to Camp David treaty. This bill failed at the subcommittee of the Middle East and South Asia and was found unnecessary. Later on the same year, on August 17, which was the date due for biannual military exercise (Bright Star) between Egypt and the United States, it was announced that the military exercises had been canceled (Holland & Mason, 2013).

Therefore, the end of a unique alliance between Egypt and the United States, in general, affected the United States' policy in Egypt. Tourism was also largely affected by the United States and Egypt (Roston & Rohde, 2011). Wolkov (2015) stated that the unique alliance between the United States, Egypt, and Israel was under tension and subject to change for ten months until the United States' new plans began to affect the relationship and change it back to normal.

The advent of El-Sisi changed this situation. It seems that in the El-Sisi era, the objectives of the Egyptian revolution were forgotten. According to Weinbaum (2019), Egypt and the United States have close foreign relationships, although the Egyptians sought independence. Smith (2020) stated that, even after the revolution in 2011, Egypt's experience with democracy was not a lasting one. Smith (2020) pointed to El-Sisi's election as a dubious one. Finally, Egypt became a close ally to the United States again to the extent that Trump called El-Sisi a 'fantastic guy' (Lima, 2016).

Conceptual Framework

The main query in this study is the United States' hegemony in Egypt after the Egyptian revolution in 2011. Power Transition theory was used as the basis of analysis. The Power Transition theory is a theory through which one can seek how the transition of power has affected the relationship between nations (Flint & Taylor, 2007). In this theory, the effects of both domestic variables and global variables are sought. Thus, in the current study, both domestic variables and

international variables were taken into account.

This theory is often used to justify power in international relations (Tammen, 2000). Therefore, this theory is among the theories which can best suit the purpose of this study. On the other hand, one of the most significant aspects which should be investigated in the Power Transition Theory is that of domestic variables. In the case of Egypt, the domestic variables played a considerable role in the revolution. As Korany and El-Mahdi (2012) stated, The Egyptians sought their societal rights and independence in 2011; thus, domestic factors' role could not be ignored.

The power transition theory, as stated earlier, is a theory of international systems; however, it is also used to justify regional hierarchies (Lemke, 2002). In Lemke's (2002) view, every region has a dominant power and other small powers; thus, international hierarchies are first made of regional hierarchies. While this theory can be used to explain war trends among states in the last five centuries, its general statement is that if a nation achieves hegemonic power, it is challenged by great powers.

METHOD

This study has a qualitative design. Soft data was collected through 1) content analysis of previously published articles, and documents, and 2) conducting a semi-structured interview with 12 ethnic, academic, and administrative elites who were informed of the Egyptian revolution in 2011. Among the published documents

reviewed for this study, some articles provided influential insights. These articles include Sharp (2014, 2017), Wolkov (2015), Jadallah (2014), and Hamid (2012). To implement the Power Transition theory, the researcher categorized the extracted themes into domestic and global variables. This categorization was done for both the published documents and the interview results.

To analyze the data of both published documents and the semi-structured interviews, the researcher makes use of Hsieh and Shannon’s (2005) qualitative content analysis approach. In Hsieh and Shannon tradition, the successful content analysis consists of 8 main stages, i.e.,

1) preparation of data, 2) defining the units or themes of analysis, 3) developing categories and coding scheme, 4) pre-testing the coding scheme on the sample, 5) coding all the text, 6) assessing the consistency of coding employed 7) drawing inferences based on coding or themes, and 8) presentation of results. Hsieh and Shannon’s (2005) qualitative analytical approach has been used in over 13000 studies in various fields such as medicine, forestry, politics, law. Accordingly, the researcher followed the eight steps in the research to accomplish the purpose of the research, which is to answer the questions of the research. Figure 1 reveals the steps taken to analyze the data.

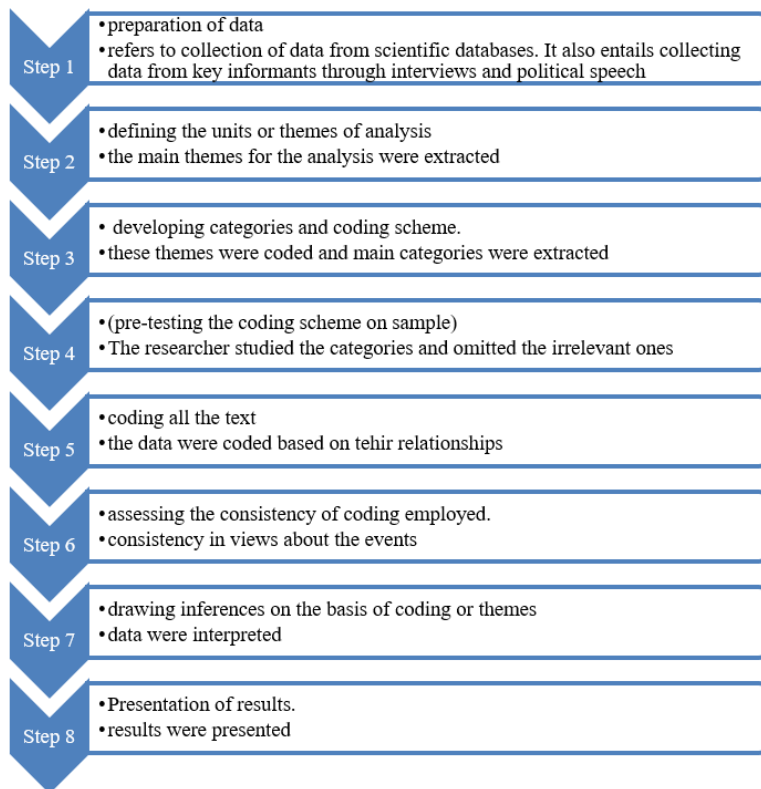


Figure 1: Steps in qualitative content analysis

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Before discussing the findings, and to understand the extracted themes in this study in light of the Power Transition Theory, the themes are presented in Table 1. The themes are categorized into domestic themes and international themes in order to make them easier to understand.

The analysis of the documents revealed that several changes in Egyptian foreign policy after 2011 had an impact on the United States’ supremacy. After the 2011 revolution in Egypt, the relationships between Israel and Egypt were not as close as they used to be in Mubarak’s Era. Also, Egypt began relationships with the Islamic Republic of Iran, which has been the long

term supporter of Palestine against Israel. These new relationships had a tremendous effect on the United States’ hegemony in Egypt to the extent that Obama announced Egypt as “neither a friend nor an enemy”. Needless to mention, President Bush announced the national threat as ‘axes of Evil,’ Iran was considered to be among the most critical regions in these axes.

It was mentioned that the first party held in Egypt after 2011 was the freedom and justice party (FJP), and Morsi was elected as the first President of Egypt after the revolution. FJP was in close association with the Muslim Brotherhood, and like the Muslim Brothers, they had an anti-western agenda. Previously the United States had

Table 1
Themes extracted from the respondents’ responses

Themes			
Domestic		International	
Elites’ views	Published documents	Elites’ Views	Published Documents
Forgetting the revolution’s objectives	Aborting FJP	Trumps’ attempts to rebuild the relationships	The aid Policy
Benefitting from the inexperience of Egyptian politicians	Forming protests in Egypt	Continuation of aid from the United States to Egypt	Working on intimacy between the two countries by the United States
Moving away from the revolution agenda	Exposing Western culture to Egyptians	Economic and military aid to Egypt	
Egypt’s decision to strengthen its relationship with the United States			

the most active role in Egypt among western countries. To deal with this problem and to maintain its hegemony in Egypt, the United States adopted two main policies. As some points, President Obama's administration attempted to change FJP's new president, as his anti-western ideology was threatening the United States' supremacy. Later, the United States adopted a tolerance policy and continued to spread its hegemony by giving Muslim Brotherhood large sums of donation.

It was also mentioned that the United States is an industrial country and attempted to move from agriculture to industry in the 19th century. This issue is significant as industry is a hegemonic asset and can be used to make other countries dependent. The industry helped the United States to increase its agricultural products excessively (tripled in the 1910s). The surplus of its grains and products could be exported to other countries. The United States well realized Egypt's need for wheat, and made Egypt dependent on American wheat. This issue was among the strategies the United States used even after 2011 to maintain its leadership in Egypt. It continued to donate wheat to Egypt so much that it was called 'the wheat weapon' by Dethier and Funk (1987).

Previously, the role of culture on spreading the United States' hegemonic power had been mentioned by many scholars (i.e., Doyle, 1989; Rosenberg, 1982). The United States sets its values in other regions of the world by spreading its culture. Culture provokes the need for new

products and increases interest in types of art and sport which might not have even been known to people of a country. In turn, it opens the gate for musicians, artists, filmmakers, businessmen, and traders to sell their products in the target country. Over time, it turns into dependence and a regional tendency among the people, and they will be more interested in welcoming the people of the new culture.

As mentioned earlier, public consent is among the most significant domestic variables in Power Transition theory, as suggested by Modelski (1987). The United States has always made extensive use of Western culture to win public consent. Having introduced itself as a civilized country (Jadallah, 2014), which is detached from the uncivilized world, the United States has won the consent of many people in Egypt. Thus, even after the 2011 revolution in Egypt and the sudden act of Morsi's government in closing businesses related to Mubarak's family and the Western world, many Egyptians wish to continue buying Western products. Many musical and film festivals, along with many Western sports events, are being held in Egypt. This is another approach adopted by the United States to suppress the effect of new developments in Egypt on its hegemony.

The United States-Egyptian relationship did not significantly change between January 2011 and December 2014. Attempts made to leverage the United States' assistance had mixed results in influencing Egyptian domestic politics. Even though the relationship encountered rough points, it

always returned to normal, as each side, especially the United States, had too much at stake in the relationship. As a result, Egypt increased security cooperation with Israel and began to pay closer attention to fighting terrorism. However, the United States was more ambitious and sought to bring about domestic political reform. These efforts failed, as they were against various Egyptian governments' interests. The United States was forced to backtrack in order to preserve the greater relationship.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that the objectives of the Egyptian revolution in 2011 were not fully met. The reasons include forgetting the revolution's objectives, aborting FJP, Trumps' attempts to rebuild the relationships, the aid Policy, benefitting from the inexperience of Egyptian politicians, the continuation of aid from the United States to Egypt, working on intimacy between the two countries by the United States, moving away from the revolution agenda, exposing the Western culture to Egyptians, economic and military aid to Egypt, and Egypt's decision to strengthen its relationship with the United States.

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