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Conflict analysis of Egypt

Anna Louise Strachan
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Question

What does the literature indicate about the current conflict dynamics in Egypt (excluding the Sinai Peninsula[1]), including key actors, proximate and structural causes, dynamics and triggers, and opportunities for peace and institutional resilience?

Contents

1. Overview

In 2011 Egypt experienced mass protests culminating in the fall of long serving president, Hosni Mubarak. The country's first democratically elected President, the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi's, time in power was short-lived. He was deposed by Egypt's military on 3 July 2013, following anti-government demonstrations (Tobin et al, 2015, p. 31). Abdul Fatah el-Sisi, former head of the armed forces, was elected in June 2014 (Tobin et al, 2015, p. 31). Sisi's presidency has seen a return to military rule. There has also been a rise in the number of terrorist attacks in Egypt since he came to power in 2014.

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[1] For a conflict analysis of the Sinai Peninsula see Idris, I. (2017). *Conflict analysis of Sinai* (K4D Helpdesk Research Report). Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies..

Key actors in Egypt, include the Egyptian Armed Forces (EAF), trade unions, the currently banned Muslim Brotherhood, other Salafist parties, and both Salafist and non-Salafist extremist groups.

Conflict in Egypt mainly manifests itself in the form of popular unrest and terrorist attacks. Proximate drivers of conflict in Egypt include:

- **Repressive political system**: The authoritarian nature of the Sisi regime, and widespread repression in Egypt, have the potential to spark a populist backlash.
- **Military control over the judiciary**: Military control over the judiciary has increased significantly, resulting in an increase in military trials of civilians. This has contributed to the atmosphere of repression in Egypt.
- **Migration**: Egypt is a source, transit and destination country for migrants. The main risks facing migrants are detention by the security forces and being kidnapped and extorted by people smugglers. Moreover, the presence of a significant number of Syrian refugees has put significant economic pressure on the communities in which they live.

Structural drivers of conflict include:

- **Economy**: Egypt's faltering economy dominates the literature. Challenges include rising inflation, a weak Egyptian pound and high levels of unemployment. They have the potential to lead to widespread unrest, having already resulted in nationwide protests.
- **Environmental factors:** Climate change is affecting both water and food security in Egypt. This increases the risk of popular protests.

In addition to the above, Egypt faces a number of external pressures. These include tensions with Sudan over the disputed Hala'ib triangle, trans-boundary water issues, and the impact of the conflict in Libya.

The literature does not identify any significant opportunities for peace or institutional resilience in Egypt. It does however provide some policy recommendations.

Much of the English language literature on conflict in Egypt consists of opinion pieces produced by European and North American think tanks. There are also a small number of peer-reviewed journal articles, discussing Egypt post-Arab Spring. Gender is largely addressed in the context of sexual violence and in the context of unemployment.

2. Conflict dynamics and triggers

Conflict in Egypt principally manifests itself in the form of violent extremism and popular protests. The rise of IS[2] and other extremist groups in Egypt has meant that terrorist attacks occur frequently.[3] While the majority of these occur in the Sinai Peninsula,[4] there are groups that also

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[2] Islamic State, also known as Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)/Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)/Da'esh

[3] For details of incidents see for example: https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/

operate in the rest of Egypt, most notably in Cairo (see *Key actors* section below). The rise in violent extremism in Egypt can be attributed to both the proximate and structural drivers of conflict discussed below.

An ACLED conflict trends report suggests that levels of violence in 2016 were down on those of the previous year. However, it notes that there were 'multiple, discrete, political contentions across Egypt' (p. 8). According to the report 'the continued consolidation of political authority by the Sisi regime coupled with a reserved approach to non-violent resistance suggests that 2017 will see a continuation of low- level protest activity that remains undeveloped' (ACLED, 2016, p. 8). The report also finds that 2016 saw a move away from protests organised by religious groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, towards protests organised by labour and trade unions (ACLED, 2016, p. 8). According to an article published by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, there were 1,117 reported labour protests in 2015, and a further 493 protests from January to April 2016 (Acconcia, 2016).

3. Key actors

Key actors in Egypt include the military government, trade unions, Salafist parties and extremist groups.

Egyptian Armed Forces (EAF)

The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) governed Egypt following the fall of Hosni Mubarak. Following the removal from power of Morsi in 2013, the military governed again. In June 2014, Sisi, former head of the armed forces, was elected as President winning 96 per cent of the vote (The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, 2016b, pp. 11 – 12). The military has subsequently consolidated its control over almost all aspects of the state apparatus in Egypt.

Trade Unions

While popular protests have reduced under the current government, due to state repression, trade unions remain active and strikes and labour protests continue (Acconcia, 2016).

Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU)

The EFITU is an umbrella organisation for non-governmental labour unions (Acconcia, 2016). It was reportedly one of the most important opposition forces during the 2011 protests in Egypt (Acconcia, 2016). According to an article published by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 'despite capitalizing on the labor movement's opposition to Morsi to propel him to power, Sisi's presidency continued a policy of state capitalism, neglecting the protesters' requests for social justice' (Acconcia, 2016). While the government's targeting of the EFITU has reportedly stopped it becoming a more structured organisation, the EFITU has support at the local level, and continues to organize new strikes (Acconcia, 2016)

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[4] See Idris, I. (2017). *Conflict analysis of Sinai* (K4D Helpdesk Research Report no. 49). Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham.

Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF)

The ETUF is the government-run labour union syndicate (Acconcia, 2016). In 2015, the ETUF issued a document declaring its intention to oppose and marginalize the EFITU (Acconcia, 2016).

Salafist parties

All Salafist parties in Egypt share some common goals. For example, they all seek the implementation of Sharia law to protect Egypt's 'Islamic identity' from westernisation and secularisation (Ranko & Nedza, 2015, p. 5). Moreover, they all also reportedly address the major 'social realities' in Egypt, rejecting the corruption, dictatorship, and social inequality that led to the 2011 revolution. They reportedly also engage with the widespread popular demand for popular sovereignty, in the sense of regular elections and a separation of powers to prevent autocratic rule. They have therefore started to engage with 'some' democratic principles, thereby setting themselves apart from 'conventional notions of politically quietsist and militant Salafists known for their anti-democratic outlook' (Ranko & Nedza, 2015, p. 5).

Muslim Brotherhood

The fall of Morsi's government was followed by a crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood. The Egyptian government declared them a terrorist organisation in December 2013, and in August 2014 the organisation's political wing, the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) was banned by an Egyptian court (Tobin et al, 2015, p. 32). After its fall from power, the Muslim Brotherhood has been unable to re-enter the political system (Lynch, 2016, p. 31). Despite increasing elite criticism of Sisi's regime, it has been unable to 'reassure a hostile Egyptian public or to establish new political alliances' (Lynch, 2016, p. 31). Moreover, the Muslim Brotherhood remains internally divided over its political strategy and over key ideological questions about violence and political participation (Lynch, 2016, p. 31).

Hizb al-Nur

Founded in May 2011, this is the largest Salafist party, although the extent of their support is unclear. Its stronghold is in Alexandria, but it is active in all of Egypt's governorates (Ranko & Nedza, 2015, p. 2). For Hizb al-Nur citizenship is linked to a person's 'quality and quantity of creed.' Despite the fact that Hizb al- Nur states that non-Muslims would be granted the 'same rights and same duties' as Muslims, their view on citizenship means that there is no equality before the law for all individuals, especially not for non-Muslims (Ranko & Nedza, 2015, pp. 5-6). Moreover, Hizb al-Nur takes a fairly rigid approach to the implementation of Sharia law, in contrast to the Muslim Brotherhood, which is more flexible on this (Ranko & Nedza, 2015, p. 6).

Al-Watan

This party was founded in January 2013 by the ex-president of the al-Nur party, Abd al-Ghafur, after he split away from the Hizb al-Nur (Ranko & Nedza, 2015, p. 2). The party views itself as more inclusive and open towards Christians than other Salafist parties, as well as being more open towards non-Salafist Muslims (Ranko & Nedza, 2015, p. 7). It also portrays itself as belonging to the political centre.

Al-Fadila

This is a Cairo-based party, which was founded in March 2011. It was the first Salafist party in Egypt (Ranko & Nedza, 2015, p. 2). Unlike Hizb al-Nur and al-Raya, al-Fadila takes a relatively relaxed approach to the implementation of Sharia law (Ranko & Nedza, 2015, p. 7).

Al-Raya

Al-Raya was founded by Salafist Hazim Salah Abu Ismail, who is reportedly particularly popular among the young people in Salafist circles (Ranko & Nedza, 2015, p. 3). For al-Raya all rights and freedoms are defined by a strict and literal understanding of Sharia law (Ranko & Nedza, 2015, p. 6). Moreover, the party does not regard the nation-state as the primary framework for politics. Rather, it wants to establish a political and economic union of Arab-Islamic states (Ranko & Nedza, 2015, p. 6).

Extremist groups

Islamic State – Sinai Peninsula (previously known as Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis)

The Islamic State - Sinai Peninsula is reportedly distinct from the Islamic State in Egypt (discussed below). However, while it mainly operates in the Sinai Peninsula[5] the group has claimed responsibility for attacks in other parts of Egypt, including a Cairo car bombing, and series of grenade attacks that targeted police forces and killed civilians in January 2014, and an attack on a military base in Western Egypt in July 2014.[6] The Islamic State – Sinai Peninsula is believed to have anywhere between a few hundred and a thousand members.[7]

Islamic State in Egypt

The Islamic State in Egypt reportedly emerged in 2015, when it claimed responsibility for the bombing of the Italian Consulate in Cairo. The group was responsible for nine further attacks between July 2015 and June 2016. Of these, five took place in Cairo, and one each in Giza, Daqhalia, Damietta, and Qalyubia (The Tahrir Instiute for Middle East Policy, 2016a, p. 16). The size of Islamic State in Egypt remains unclear.

Ajnad Misr

Formed in January 2014, this is a Cairo-based group, which has, to date, carried out its attacks in Greater Cairo (Ranko & Nedza, 2015, p. 8). The current Egyptian government is the group's primary enemy. It has referred to its attacks as 'Retribution is life.' While Ajnad Misr appears to adhere to militant Salafist ideology, it does not refer to anyone as unbelievers or apostates. It refers to the police, army, and security apparatus as 'criminal agencies.' Therefore, instead of

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[5] See Idris, I. (2017). *Conflict analysis of Sinai* (K4D Helpdesk Research Report no. 49). Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham.

[6] http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/557

[7] https://timep.org/esw/profiles/terror-groups/wilayat-sinai/

justifying its actions with *takfir*[8] like some of the other groups operating in Egypt, it calls for vengeance and retribution. According to Ranko & Nedza, Ajnad Misr therefore 'functions as an ideological hinge: as representatives of the militant Salafist strand, it potentially opens up for non-Salafists by tying its call for jihad to retribution' (2015, p. 13). The size of Ajnad Misr remains unclear.

Al-Furqan Brigades

This group operates throughout Egypt. In 2013 it attacked merchant ships in the Suez Canal using rocket- propelled grenades. It also launched two rocket-propelled grenades at a satellite station in the Cairo suburb of Maadi in the same year. The research undertaken for this report has not found any information about more recent attacks. The group is believed to have close ties to other extremist groups. Ideologically, the group believes the current government to be illegitimate, as it does not apply sharia law.[9] The size of Al-Furqan Brigades remains unclear.

Non-Salafist/ Jihadi violent groups

Since 2014, a number of non-Salafist violent groups have emerged in Egypt. These include:

Revolutionary Punishment

Formed in January 2015, this is the newest non-Salafist violent group in Egypt (Awad & Hashem, p. 12). By September 2015, the group had reportedly carried out around 150 attacks across sixteen governorates. It also claims to have killed at least 157 members of the security forces (Awad & Hashem, p. 13). The group's methods include planting IEDs targeting infrastructure and police convoys, conducting armed ambushes of police checkpoints, and assassinating senior police officers (Awad & Hashem, p. 13). While there is very little evidence to suggest that the group has Islamist tendencies, there is reportedly a risk that it could be influenced by Islamist elements (Awad & Hashem, p. 13).

The group is also believed to be the most organised among the new non-Salafist violent groups. It has recorded every attack it has carried out, which suggests it may have a central command and access to a logistical network and financing (Awad & Hashem, p. 13). The size of Revolutionary Punishment remains unclear.

Popular Resistance Movement

This was the first non-Salafist violent group to emerge in Egypt. It was formed in 2014 (Awad & Hashem, p. 12). The group does not appear to have a clear leadership. The Popular Resistance Movement is active throughout Egypt, and its *modus operandi* is low-violence attacks generally using rudimentary weapons. These include crude improvised explosives, Molotov cocktails, and

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[8] *Takfir* is the pronouncement that someone is an unbeliever and no longer Muslim. Today *takfir* is used to sanction violence against leaders of Islamic states who are deemed insufficiently religious. It has become a central ideology of militant groups such as those in Egypt (http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e2319).

[9] https://timep.org/esw/profiles/terror-groups/kitab-al-furqan/

stun or 'sound' grenades.[10] The group's attacks have reportedly become increasingly sophisticated and violent.[11] The Popular Resistance Movement's ideology is reportedly 'religiously nationalist' rather than jihadist. However, it reportedly has conservative Salafist tendencies, in addition to being anti-capitalist. Recently, it has shifted from attacking government and police targets to economic targets.[12] It is unclear how many members the Popular Resistance Movement has.

4. Proximate causes of conflict

Many of the proximate causes of conflict in Egypt are inter-linked.

Repressive political system

According to Mansour, Egypt has experienced 'a shift from a full revolution to an almost-full restoration of the Mubarak regime: civilian, as well as military and oligarchic, networks are on the rise, Mubarak-era political parties are forcing their way back into the political sphere, and political and civil liberties have been severely curbed' (2016, p. 7). Parliamentary elections were held in 2015. Voter turnout was low, standing at 28 per cent. Parliament is reportedly dominated by 'Sisi loyalists' (Sharp, 2016, p. 2).

Sisi's government has been accused of committing serious human rights abuses against both secular and Islamist opponents (Sharp, 2016, p. 3). Forced disappearances have been on the rise since he came to power. Moreover, security forces have reportedly carried out abductions in public and in 'broad daylight' (Cachalia, 2015). There are also reports of extra-judicial killings (Cachalia, 2015). An Amnesty International report documents the widespread use of torture to extract 'confessions' of 'terrorist' activity from political activists and protesters, including students and children (2016). Torture is also used to force victims to implicate others (Amnesty International, 2016, p. 8). Methods used include electric shocks to sensitive body parts, such as the genitals, lips and ears; suspension by the limbs while handcuffed and naked; and sexual abuse, including rape; beatings and threats (Amnesty International, 2016, p. 8). However, according to a report by the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, counter-terrorism operations against the Muslim Brotherhood had 'effectively ceased' in the second quarter of 2016, with no Muslim Brotherhood related arrests for terrorism related offences being reported during the period April – June 2016 (2016a, p. 22).

The government has also taken steps to curtail religious freedom. Around 27,000 mosques were reportedly closed down in 2015, and mosque activities have been subject to strict regulation, including who can preach, and what can be discussed during sermons. Some classical Islamic literature has also been banned (Cachalia, 2015).

According to an article published by the European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), the risk of social unrest caused by the economic challenges discussed later on this report, will be

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[10] https://timep.org/esw/profiles/terror-groups/aprm/

[11] https://timep.org/esw/profiles/terror-groups/aprm/

[12] https://timep.org/esw/profiles/terror-groups/aprm/

exacerbated by this government repression and the abuses perpetrated by security forces (Luengo – Cabrera, 2016, p. 2).

Military control over the judiciary

Military jurisdiction in Egypt is expanding, and military trials of civilians are increasing. According to an article published by the Carnegie Middle East Center, strong public support for the government, and the absence of a parliament prior to the 2015 elections, made it possible for Sisi to issue hundreds of presidential decrees unilaterally. Many of these undermined the rule of law. Sisi issued Law 136 in 2014, which granted the military the authority to protect public and state facilities for two years. Military courts were granted jurisdiction over any alleged crimes occurring on public land (Aziz, 2016). In August 2016 the new parliament approved extending Law 136 of 2014 for another five years until 2021 (Aziz, 2016).

A number of amendments to the Military Judiciary Law that count state properties and institutions as military property, mean that the military courts' jurisdiction has become extensive. Buildings, factories, companies, or roads owned by the government have become military spaces where civilian courts no longer have jurisdiction. According to Aziz, an indictment by a military court is almost always a guarantee of conviction (Aziz, 2016).

In January 2016, parliament approved a new anti-terrorism law, which specifies sentences for various terrorism-related offences, protects the police from penalties for 'proportionate use of force,' and fines journalists for contradicting the government's version of any terrorist attack (Sharp, 2016, p. 3).

The military's expanding control over the judiciary is closely linked to the repressive political system in Egypt. According to a paper published by the Carnegie Middle East Center, the leadership's 'overt manipulation' of the legal system could create divisions between the regime and its liberal supporters (Marshall, 2015).

Migration

Egypt is a source, transit, and destination country for migrants. Irregular migrants in Egypt have reportedly been subjected to police violence and killings (EUI, 2016, p. 1). A report by the North Africa Mixed Migration Taskforce details a number of routes used by migrants coming from Sudan to Egypt. These are:

- Aswan-Abu Simbel-Lake Nasser – mainly used by Sudanese and Eritrean migrants.
- East Oweinat in the West of Egypt - mainly used by Sudanese and Eritrean migrants.
- Halayeb-Shalateen (due to the high military presence in the Red Sea region, this route sometimes also crosses the Allaqi Valley) - mainly used by Sudanese and Eritrean migrants.
- Through the north of the country from Libya via Matruh – mainly used by Libyans (NAMTF, 2015, pp. 29 – 33).

Dangers facing migrants and refugees include detention and kidnapping for extortion by people smugglers (NAMTF, 2015, pp. 29 – 33). While this was principally a problem in the Sinai Peninsula before that route effectively closed due to Israel cracking down on irregular migrants,

there have also been reports of migrants being kidnapped for extortion in the Aswan area (NAMTF, 2015, pp. 29 – 33).

The presence of around 300,000 Syrian refugees in Egypt has reportedly exacerbated pre-existing vulnerabilities in the communities in which they live, and has put pressure on the local economy, especially in education and health services.[13]

5. Structural causes of conflict

There is consensus in the literature that Egypt's faltering economy is the country's greatest challenge and presents the greatest risk to stability. Egypt also faces a number of environmental challenges, which are closely linked to the economic problems facing the country.

Economy

According to a policy brief published by the Orient-Institut Beirut (OIB), 26.3 per cent of Egyptians were living below the World Bank's poverty line in 2014. In 2005, the figure was lower, standing at 19.6 per cent of the population (Mansour, 2016, p. 5). Moreover, a third of Egypt's youth are unemployed and three out of five children are malnourished (Mansour, 2016, p.2).

In the second half of 2016, Egyptians faced rising electricity prices, high inflation, tax increases and staple food shortages (ACLED, 2016, p. 8). This led to an increase in small-scale protests. However, according to an ACLED report on conflict trends in Egypt, there have not been large-scale protests due to the continuing detention of journalists, lawyers, and protest organisers (ACLED, 2016, p. 8). Mansour provides more detailed statistics on the economy: annual GDP growth reportedly fell from 5.1 per cent in 2010, to 2 per cent in 2016. Moreover, as of May 2014, the Egyptian pound lost more than 19 per cent of its value, inflation reached 10 per cent and the budget deficit reached 11.5 per cent in 2014/2015. Egypt's foreign currency reserves also reportedly halved from USD 36 billion in 2011 to just USD 13.5 billion in 2016 (Mansour, 2016, p. 5). Moreover, tourism revenues, on which Egypt is highly dependent, reduced significantly as a result of the downing of a Russian airliner over the Sinai Peninsula by terrorists in October 2015, and due to an Egypt Air crash in May 2016. Export earnings have also declined because of lower oil prices (crude oil makes up 40 percent of total exports) and due to the economic recession in the European Union (Adly, 2016, p. 7). According to Mansour, 'poverty, social justice and inequality remain unaddressed and are rather used to justify harsh austerity measures that provide only temporary solutions' (Mansour, 2016, p. 12). However, the African Economic Outlook paints a brighter picture, arguing that if the Egyptian government continues with its economic reform programme, the economy should recover steadily (Bhakta et al, 2016, p. 2).

The military controls a significant proportion of Egypt's economy. It has reportedly moved from operating a shadow economy to overseeing major economic projects. According to a report published by the Carnegie Middle East Center, by the time Sisi was elected the military had 'subordinated the private sector as the economy's subcontractors, also serving as the nation's general contractor' (Aziz, 2016). The military's pre-existing businesses have reportedly expanded

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[13] http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/news/government-egypt-united-nations-partners-launch-major-aid-plan-syrian-refugees-egypt-host-community/

their operations in a wide range of industries, including agriculture, hotels and resorts, manufacturing of consumer goods, and housing (Aziz, 2016). According to a paper published by the Carnegie Middle East Center, there is a risk that 'the EAF's new allies and heightened influence may bring out cleavages that had been submerged, as factions struggle to stake a claim to new economic and political turf' (Marshall, 2015).

Employment related challenges

Employment related challenges facing Egypt include high levels of unemployment, under-employment, a large informal sector, and depressed wages (ILO, p. 7). According to an ILO report, just one third of paid employees in Egypt have legal contracts, and of those only 30 per cent have social insurance and 21 per cent have medical insurance (ILO, p. 17).

Female labour participation in Egypt stands at just 18.5 per cent (Mansour, 2016, p. 10). Moreover, female unemployment reportedly stands at 49.8 per cent (Ghafar, 2016, p. 5). Structural bias against women reportedly starts from an early age, as fewer women attend primary and secondary school than men. Rural women are even more disadvantaged, as they are less likely to obtain employment in the formal sector than women living in urban areas (Ghafar, 2016, p. 5). Reasons cited for the high unemployment rate amongst educated women are:

- Decreasing employment in the public sector, which was historically one of the largest employers of Egyptian women (Ghafar, 2016, p. 5).
- Cultural and practical barriers to entry for females in the private sector (Ghafar, 2016, p. 5).
- Limited job opportunities for women in the private sector, with most opportunities limited to the areas of education and healthcare (Ghafar, 2016, p. 5).

Demographics are closely related to Egypt's employment related challenges. Egypt's youth population (15 – 29 year olds) rose from 13.3 million in 1988 to 22.2 million in 2006 (Ghafar, 2016, p. 5). One policy brief published by the Brookings Institution states that there is a direct correlation between youth unemployment and the socio-economic and political stability of a state (Ghafar, 2016, p. 1). The private sector has reportedly been unable to meet the increased demand for jobs (Ghafar, 2016, p. 5). University level graduates have the highest rate of unemployment at 34 percent, compared to 2.4 percent among youth with less than primary level education (Ghafar, 2016, p. 1). Forty-eight per cent of employed young people are in jobs that do not match their level of education (Ghafar, 2016, p. 6). This has resulted in graduate degree holders staging a significant number of anti-government protests about the lack of government jobs in research and academia (Ghafar, 2016, p. 6). Moreover, according to the ILO, 91 per cent of young people in Egypt work in the informal sector (2015, p. 17). The consequences of the dominance of informal sector employment include the loss of potential tax revenue for the government, and a lack of social and financial security for workers (Ghafar, 2016, p. 6).

Ghafar argues that the combination of a youth bulge and high unemployment will pose security challenges in the future (2016, p. 5). In 2015, there were over 1,117 labour protests, an average of 93 protests per month, in 26 out of 27 governorates. Moreover, public sector unions have been demanding higher wages and social allowances to protect themselves against the reduction in purchasing power due to rising inflation (Luengo-Cabrera, 2016, p. 2).

Environmental factors

There are a number of environmental factors, which constitute potential drivers of conflict in Egypt.

Water insecurity

According to a policy brief on climate related challenges facing Egypt, Egypt's reliance on the Nile for fresh water means that climate impacts on the availability of water from the Nile will present significant threats to the food security, water security, energy security and the livelihoods and wellbeing of those directly and indirectly dependent on it (Finaz, 2015, p. 1). Existing pressures on Nile water resources, such as increased water consumption and the disruption caused by dam-building in upstream countries, will reportedly be exacerbated by climate change impacts such as greater variability in seasonal flows, less available water, and increasing salinization (Finaz, 2015, p. 1). Moreover, it is argued that economic growth in Egypt threatens the quality and quantity of water resources, exacerbating the existing contamination problem, and contributing to water insecurity (Finaz, 2015, p. 1).

The policy brief also argues that heavy government subsidies encourage inefficiencies, and that unequal distribution of water contributes to water insecurity. It is noted that water insecurity, and particularly water shortages, have already caused popular protests in Egypt, for example in July 2010, in the southern governorate of Minya (Finaz, 2015, p. 1).

Food insecurity

The loss of agricultural land due to urban expansion is a considerable problem in Egypt. Moreover, climate impacts on the quality and quantity of global food production also contribute to rising food prices, which is problematic as Egypt is extremely dependent on food imports. For example, it is the world's largest wheat importer (Finaz, 2015, p. 2). Egypt also has a long history of subsidising food. Government removal of subsidies reportedly has the potential to lead to protests and violent riots (Finaz, 2015, p. 2).

Rapid urbanisation

Rapid urbanisation and 'urban encroachment' around metropolitan areas of Cairo and Alexandria, as well as around the cities in the Nile delta, are reportedly increasing putting pressure on urban infrastructure, basic service provision, and agricultural productivity (Finaz, 2015, p. 2). One policy brief suggests that if urbanisation is not properly planned, it could result in increased unemployment, poverty, and violence in urban areas. It adds that urban violence has already been identified as a major risk in Egypt's growing cities, noting that daily incidences of urban violence are already reported throughout Egypt (Finaz, 2015, p. 2). Cairo is reportedly at particular risk, as it is one of the most densely populated cities in the world (Finaz, 2015, p. 2).

6. External pressures

Egypt faces a number of external pressures and trans-boundary challenges, which threaten domestic stability.

The Hala'ib triangle

The dispute between Egypt and Sudan over the Hala'ib triangle dates back to 1958. In 1995 Egypt began a policy of 'Egyptianising' the disputed territory. Egypt has been building police stations, opening civil registers, and teaching children in the territory using the Egyptian curriculum. It has also been establishing administrative units, holding elections and including the Hala'ib triangle on maps of Egypt. [14] Should Sudan decide to opt for international arbitration Egypt's actions could reportedly affect the outcome in its favour.[15] Recently, there have been tensions between Egypt and Sudan over gold mines in the territory.[16]

Trans-boundary water issues

Ethiopia's construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, a hydroelectric dam on the Blue Nile has caused tensions between Ethiopia and Egypt (Tadesse, 2012). According to one policy brief, increasing internal pressure on the Egyptian government to address food, water, and energy insecurity, reportedly means that there is a 'real risk' that the Egyptian government may turn to nationalism and seek to prevent any further upstream water infrastructure development by force (Finaz, 2015, p. 1). This might be done by supporting rebel groups or creating political destabilization, and fragility in the region (Finaz, 2015, p. 1).

Conflict in Libya

Egypt intervened militarily in Libya in response to terrorist violence reportedly originating in the country, and directed against Egyptian citizens living and working there. In February 2015, Islamists, believed to be allied with IS, released a video in which 21 Egyptian hostages were beheaded on a beach near Sirte in Libya. The next day Egypt responded with air strikes against terrorist camps in Derna, an IS stronghold in eastern Libya (Sharp, 2016, p. 9).

Transfer of the Red Sea islands of Tiran and Sanafir to Saudi Arabia

In April 2016, Sisi ceded control of the Red Sea islands of Tiran and Sanafir to Saudi Arabia, in exchange for political backing and financial investment (ACLED, 2016, p. 8). This resulted in nationwide protests (ACLED, 2016, p. 8). A court ruling annulled the transfer in June 2016 (ACLED, 2016, p. 8).

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[14] https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20151231-a-meeting-of-the-sudanese-and-egyptian-presidents-will-be-perfunctory/

[15] https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20151231-a-meeting-of-the-sudanese-and-egyptian-presidents-will-be-perfunctory/

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https://www.dur.ac.uk/ibru/news/boundary_news/?itemno=26799&rehref=%2Fibru%2Fnews%2F&resubj=Boundary+news+Headlines

7. Opportunities for peace and institutional resilience

The research undertaken for this report has found no information on specific opportunities for peace and institutional resilience in Egypt. However, the literature does provide some policy recommendations. These include:

Ending repression

There is a general consensus in the literature that the government needs to improve prison conditions, release those in detention who have not committed criminal acts, and end forced disappearances, extrajudicial killing, and sexual abuse. This is due to the fact that government repression is widely believed to serve as a recruitment tool for violent extremists (see for example Amnesty International, 2016 and Awad & Hashem, 2015). In June 2016, the Ministry of Interior reportedly announced that low-ranking police officers' weapons would be turned in when they are on leave (The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, 2016a, p. 26). Moreover, in March 2016 MPs proposed amendments to the Police Law, which aimed to reduce human rights violations. These included bans on carrying firearms while off duty, and stiffer penalties for violations (The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, 2016a, p. 26). It is not clear whether either of these changes have been implemented.

Economic reform

One policy brief suggests that foreign investment and a reduction in the army's role in the economy are essential in countering the challenges facing Egypt today (Finaz, 2015, p. 3). Another policy brief states that the government needs to adopt a more inclusive understanding of citizenship to overcome these challenges. It suggests that this can be achieved by 'increasing the minimum wage; creating a stable environment for investment; initiating projects that would create jobs and rationalizing public spending on projects' (Mansour, 2016, p. 12). It is argued that this would empower the poor economically and politically thereby reducing the 'disconnect' between state and society (Mansour, 2016, p. 12). However, according to Adly, Egypt's options for improving its economic situation are very limited, due to its dependency on external factors. Most notable among these is the health of the regional and global economies, which is currently uncertain (2016, p. 17). He argues that even if the government were able to reduce spending, this would come at the expense of economic recovery, in a way that would hinder economic growth and job creation (Adly, 2016, p. 17).

Addressing population growth

According to one policy brief, voluntary sexual and reproductive health measures should be a priority for tackling increasing climate and resource pressures resulting from rapid population growth (Finaz, 2015, p. 3).

Addressing food and water insecurity

Sustainable agricultural production systems and improved water infrastructure are reportedly key for coping with Egypt's growing population, and limited productive land and water (Finaz, 2015, p. 3). Moreover, according to one policy brief, better Nile river management would facilitate climate change adaptation and help build peace in the region (Finaz, 2015, p. 1).

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Key websites

ECC Platform (Environment, Conflict and Cooperation Platform):
https://www.ecc-platform.org

The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy:
https://timep.org

Carnegie Middle East Center:
http://carnegie-mec.org/

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About this report

This report is based on five days of desk-based research. The K4D research helpdesk provides rapid syntheses of a selection of recent relevant literature and international expert thinking in response to specific questions relating to international development. For any enquiries, contact helpdesk@k4d.info.

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