

The Role of the Military in Regional Security in the Middle East

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Abstract: *The military played a significant role in political life in certain countries of the Middle East. There have been frequent military coups in countries such as Turkey, Syria, Egypt and Iraq. The military coups carried out in these countries had their reasons and at the same time significant consequences. For example, as a result of military coups in Turkey, especially in the 20th century, moderate Islamic parties, which posed certain threats to secularism, were removed from power. As for the Arab countries: Syria, Egypt and Iraq, the military coups in these countries developed for different reasons, unlike in Turkey. For example, the monarchies were overthrown in Iraq and Egypt. But the recent military coup in Egypt left the country's political and socio-economic situation almost unchanged. As for Syria, as a result of military coups, the country was led by the Shi'ite-Alawite party and an autocratic regime was established in the country, which was ruled by Hafiz al-Assad, then his son Bashar al-Assad.*

Military-political organizations, the Baghdad Pact, Sento and their involvement in the problems of the region

The military-political organization in the Middle East region was first established in the 50s of the twentieth century, the purpose of which was not only to resolve the conflicts in the region in a peaceful way, but this organization was supposed to be a kind of supporting force in the Middle East for the USA and Great Britain against the Soviet Union. As we have already mentioned, a similar organization was created in the middle of the last century, which was called the "Baghdad Pact". A continuation of this organization was Sento.

I will now consider the reasons for the creation of the Baghdad Pact, its activities and the degree of involvement in the problems of the region. We will also analyze how effective the activity of the mentioned organization was and how it justified the goals for which it was created.

The Baghdad Pact was established in May 1955 in Baghdad, the capital of Iraq. It included Turkey, Iraq, Great Britain, Pakistan and Iran. It was a defense organization for the promotion of common political, military and economic goals in the region. Like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO), the main objective of the Baghdad Pact was to prevent communist influence and promote peace in the Middle East.¹

In the early 1950s, the United States government expressed interest in the formation of a military-political organization in the Middle East that would protect the region from communist encroachment. The problems in the Middle East at that time, such as the conflict between Arab countries and Israel and the anti-colonialist movement led by Egypt, made it difficult to form an alliance. The United States turned its attention to the countries of the Middle East that bordered the USSR. The idea was to form an alliance that would link Turkey, the southernmost member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, with Pakistan, the westernmost member of the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization. In 1954, Turkey and Pakistan signed an agreement to increase security and stability in the region. And in February 1955, Iraq and Turkey signed a "Pact of Mutual Cooperation" in Baghdad to resist external aggression, paving the way for other countries in the region. In April of that year, the United Kingdom announced its intention to join the pact, followed by Pakistan and finally Iran. The King of Jordan considered joining the Pact, but he was unable to overcome domestic opposition to the Baghdad Pact. The United States has signed individual agreements with each member of the pact, but it has not officially

¹ „The Baghdad Pact (1955) and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO)“. p.1. <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/lw/98683.htm>

joined the organization. Instead, the United States participated as an observer and participated in the committee's meetings.

In the following years, the developments in the Middle East weakened the position of the "Baghdad Pact". In 1956, Egyptian President Gamal Abd al-Nasser (1954-1970) took control of the Suez Canal, an important international waterway. Israel responded to this move by the Egyptian president by invading the Sinai Peninsula. British and French military forces were also involved in this conflict. As a result of this incident, Britain lost its influence in the region and damaged its prestige, which in turn damaged Britain's leadership position in the Baghdad Pact.

In 1958, a revolution took place in Iraq, as a result of which the monarchy was overthrown and Iraq was declared a republic. The foreign policy course of the country's new government has changed significantly. It was no longer a priority for Iraq to be in the Baghdad Pact. Therefore, a little later, in 1959, Iraq withdrew from the Pact and the organization was called the Central Treaty Organization, or CENTO. Accordingly, the headquarters of the organization was moved from Baghdad. Its new seat was in Ankara.

In 1959, Iraq announced that it was officially withdrawing from the agreement. As a result, as mentioned above, the other members of the Baghdad Pact created the Central Treaty Organization or CENTO. Although the United States was not a member of the organization, it had signed bilateral military assistance agreements with CENTO members Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey, which should have ensured the active support of CENTO members.²

CENTO has never actually guaranteed the collective defense of its members. After Iraq's withdrawal from the Baghdad Pact, as already mentioned, CENTO moved its headquarters to Ankara, which was located there until the organization's dissolution (1979). The United States continued to support the organization as an associate, but not as an official member. CENTO, like the Baghdad Pact to which it was the legal successor, failed to establish a permanent military command structure or armed forces, but the United States nevertheless provided aid to its allies in the region. Gradually, it became clear to the members of CENTO that this organization was for economic and technical cooperation rather than a military alliance. In 1979, Iran's Islamic Revolution led to the overthrow of the Shah regime, leading to Iran's withdrawal from CENTO. Pakistan also left the organization that same year after it became clear that the organization no longer had a role to play in strengthening regional security. CENTO was officially disbanded in 1979.³

I. Military coups in the Middle East and their consequences

In some countries of the Middle East, there have been numerous military coups. We will focus on the military coups that began in the 1950s. Let's start with Egypt.

In 1952, young officers organized a revolution, also known as the July 23 Revolution. This period is a period of political, economic and social changes for Egypt. Power passed into the hands of the Revolutionary Leadership Council. In 1953, the monarchy was abolished in the country, and Egypt was declared a republic. This revolution ushered in a wave of revolutionary politics in the Arab world and contributed to the escalation of decolonization.⁴ In Egypt, the Revolutionary Council implemented political changes. Law on liquidation of political police was issued; A law was passed on cleaning the state apparatus from corrupt elements, and the titles "Pasha" and "Bey" were abolished; The constitution adopted in 1923 was abolished and the first provisional constitution was adopted in 1953; Parliament was dissolved; On January 17, 1953, the cancellation of political parties and the confiscation of their property was announced. Instead, the only official political union was created - the Liberation Organization, which was to become the stronghold of the new regime. Also, the Egyptian government decided several important issues related to its foreign policy. On February 12, 1953, the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty was signed in Cairo, granting Sudan the right to self-determination. In February of the same year, an agreement on "technical assistance" was signed between the USA and Egypt, and already in March 1954, the government of the USSR and Egypt replaced their diplomatic missions with embassies. On October 19, 1954, the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty was signed, which aimed to evacuate the British army from Egypt within 20 months. In September 1955, an agreement was signed to send arms to Egypt from Czechoslovakia. A defense agreement with Syria was signed on October 20 of the same year. October 27 against Saudi Arabia. In the middle of 1953, the confrontation between Naguib and Nasser became visible. Naguib, who did not have the same political influence as Nasser, relied on the Wafd party and the Muslim Brotherhood. In January 1954, after the bloody clashes between the supporters of the liberation organization and the student members of the Muslim Brotherhood and the unsuccessful attack on Nasser by the members of the association, in October the Muslim Brotherhood was brutally attacked. The creation of the Baghdad Pact in 1955 was evaluated by Egypt as a

² Hadley G. CENTO – The Forgotten Alliance, Brighton. 1971. pp.23-34.

³ Ramazani R.K. „Iran, CENTO and the Soviet Union“. Free World Forum 2/4. 1960. pp.52-55.

⁴ Charkviani N. "Egypt - never-ending revolution". Free Parliament, 2013

betrayal of "Arab interests" because non-Arab countries were part of the countries included in it. Thus, Egypt, along with Syria, spearheaded the campaign against the inclusion of Arab states in the Baghdad Pact. After the Bandung conference (1955), the majority of participants came out with anti-imperialist positions and for peaceful coexistence, Nasser became the leader of the "positive neutralism" bloc.

Despite the popularity of President Gamal Abdel Nasser, who ruled the country from 1954 to 1970, there were no political freedoms in the country. During this period, the Muslim Brotherhood already existed.

In early December 2010, several Arab countries in the Middle East organized mass demonstrations against poverty, corruption, and political repression, including Egypt. In 2011, the population revolted against Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011), one of the long-term leaders in the region. It was organized by opposition parties and youth groups demanding the resignation of Hosni Mubarak and opening the way for free and democratic elections. Demonstrations gathered forces as much as possible, there were clashes between the police and the demonstrators, although the Mubarak regime resorted to extremely violent ways against them, thus further irritating the population. About three weeks after the mass demonstrations, Mubarak resigned from the presidency and left the country to the Egyptian army to rule.

The revolution was over, but the expectations of the Egyptian people - better government and changing living conditions in the country - remained expectations. The interim government approved the election law in July 2011, as a result of which the parliament was elected in December 2011, and the advisory council was elected in January-February 2012. An additional 25% of the members of the Advisory Council were to be appointed by the President. In June 2012, the representative of the Muslim Brotherhood, Mohammed Morsi, won the presidential elections and became the first democratically elected president of Egypt. After almost three years of unrest and conflict, the Egyptian authorities have tried their best to establish stability in the countryside, although public dissatisfaction with the new legislation introduced by the interim government has been growing. In 2013, the Egyptian population took to the streets again to overthrow the country's government. This was the second coup d'état in a row recently. The protesters were then heavily supported by the country's military, which imprisoned the president, Islamist Mohamed Morsi. The Egyptian army was led by General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. He suspended Egypt's 2012 constitution and announced Supreme Constitutional Court President Adly Mansour as Egypt's interim president.⁵ From 2014 to the present, the country's president is Pathah al-Sisi.

Independent Syria was a politically unstable country from the 1940s to the 1970s. Military raids took place there almost permanently, until Defense Minister General Hafiz al-Assad established a stable authoritarian regime after the 1970 coup, and from 1971 to 2000 he was the unchanging president.

The first coup in Syria took place in March 1949 under Colonel Az-Zam, which is known as the first military coup in the Arab world before World War II. It was soon followed by another coup led by Colonel Sami al-Hinawi. In 1949, a third coup took place, where the military forces of Abid Shishak took power. Another coup in 1954 was caused by the rise of power of the Jabal al-Druze. The Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party, founded in 1947, participated in the latter coup. Nationalist veteran Shukri al-Quwatli was president from 1955 to 1958, although his position was only formal. In Syria, too, the 1960s were marked by uprisings, coups, military coups, and bloody protests.

The coup d'état of March 8, 1963 resulted in the establishment of a National Council composed of both civilians and the military, representing the legislative and executive branches. This coup was planned by the "Baath" party, headed by Michel Aflaqi and Salah al-Din al-Bitar. The new cabinet was dominated by Baath members. Leader Al-Bitar became prime minister and was later ousted by the party's left-wing military forces led by Salah Jadid. Clashes were taking place in Syria because of the conflict within the party. On November 13, 1970, as we mentioned above, Defense Minister Hafez al-Assad strengthened his military power and took power. He became the permanent president of the country until 2000 (until his death). After his death, Hafiz al-Assad's son Bashar al-Assad ruled the country. So, the military coup in Syria ended in the 70s.⁶

The first coup in Turkey took place on May 27, 1960. The reason for this was that on May 3, 1960, the commander of the ground forces, General Jemal Gursel, demanded political reforms and resigned when his demands were refused. Therefore, on May 27, their army was already activated. An almost bloodless coup was carried out by officers and cadets of military schools in Istanbul and Ankara. 38 young officers led by Afarslan Turkesh and General Cemal Gyurseli participated in the coup. The coup was directed against the democratically elected government in 1960. The coup resulted in the execution of Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, along with

⁵ Egypt protests: President Morsi removed by army, reportedly put under house arrest - By The Associated Press and Reuters, 2013

⁶ [Syria: World War II and independence](https://www.britannica.com/place/Syria), *Britannica Online Encyclopedia* - <https://www.britannica.com/place/Syria>

two of his ministers, Fatin Rushtu Zorlu and Hasan Polatkan. This coup was announced as "the beginning of a new period in the history of Turkey".⁷

On March 12, 1971, the second coup d'état took place in Turkey, which was called the coup with a memorandum. This name was given because of the memorandum, which was handed over by the Turkish General Staff to the Prime Minister. The memorandum called for the formation of a strong government. However, of course it had to be in the context of democratic principles. He also had to neutralize the current anarchic situation in the country and implement the laws provided by the constitution based on Atatürk's worldview. Anarchy, factional strife, and social and economic unrest were to end. Otherwise, the army would fulfill its constitutional obligation and take power into its own hands. After a three-hour meeting with the Cabinet of Ministers, Prime Minister Suleiman Demirel resigned. Instability continued in the country. The prime minister changed 11 times, the economy continued to stagnate, and left-right groups continued to clash violently in the streets. At the end of 1979, considering the current situation in the country, a possible coup was discussed. In March 1980, a group of generals already gave a recommendation to advance. Although it was postponed several times, it finally began on September 7, when officers Kenan Evren and four top commanders (Nureddin Ersin, Nate Thiumer, Tansin Shahinkia, Sedatz Gelasun) decided to overthrow the government. On September 12, they announced on state television that they were imposing martial law and would replace the government. Indeed, they dissolved the parliament and the government. They temporarily suspended the operation of the constitution, banned political parties, and on September 12, Kenan Evren was appointed president, and Bulent Ulusu took the post of prime minister. Their tenure was considered better than previous years.⁸ The 1995 elections in Turkey resulted in a landslide victory for the Islamist Welfare Party, which came to power the following year as the head of a coalition government. In 1997, the military issued a series of "recommendations" and left the government with no other choice. Except that he received them. Prime Minister Nejmettin Erbakan agreed to a mandatory eight-year education program (to prevent students from enrolling in religious schools), a headscarf ban in universities, and other measures. After that, Erbakan was forced to resign. In 1998, the welfare party was closed, and Erbakan was banned from politics for five years. Another military coup ended successfully.

Despite the many years that have passed, there was still insufficient peace in the country, and already on July 15, 2016, the coup attempt was repeated. The attempt was named because it failed and was directed against Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his government. The Turkish Peace Council took responsibility for the coup.

The coup attempt was followed by the strictest measures from the government, both inside the country and outside its borders. Turkey's main opposition parties condemned the coup attempt, while several international leaders, such as the US president, the NATO secretary general, EU officials and the UN Security Council, called for respect for democratic institutions and its elected officials and condemned the coup attempt. Turkish authorities quickly launched an investigation into those involved in the coup attempt, leading to mass arrests. Thousands of people were arrested, including soldiers, teachers, doctors, etc. For the coup attempt, President Erdogan blamed soldiers he believed to be linked to Fethullah Gulen's movement. The Turkish government has declared it a terrorist organization called Feto, however, Fethullah Gülen, who has been exiled to the US, has denounced the coup attempt and denied any links to it. On the contrary, he accused Erdoğan as a possible mastermind of the coup.⁹

In Iraq, on July 14, 1958, a group of his army officers led by General Abd al-Qasim and Colonel Abdul Salam Arif rose against the ruling regime. The rebels occupied the king's palace and government offices. The monarchy was overthrown and the establishment of the Republic of Iraq was announced. On July 26, 1958, the provisional constitution of Iraq was adopted. Abd Alkarim Kasim became the president. During his rule (1958-1963), Iraq withdrew from the Baghdad Pact, the Arab Federation of Iraq and Jordan, and established diplomatic relations with all communist countries.

The next military coup in Iraq took place in 1963 and overthrew the Qasmi dictatorship. Abdul Salam Arif (1963-1966) became the president this time. In the new government, the Ba'athists took the main positions - the Ba'athist Afmed Hassan al-Bakr became the vice president and the prime minister. The new regime began

⁷ The military coup of 1960 - *Britannica Online Encyclopedia* -

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkey/The-military-coup-of-1960>

⁸ Timeline: A History of Turkish coups - AL JAZEERA Media Network, 2016

⁹ Turkish premier: Country under full government control after coup attempt -

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/after-bloody-night-turkeys-president-declares-coup-attempt-foiled/2016/07/16/9b84151e-4af7-11e6-8dac-0c6e4acc5b1_story.html

mass terror, led by Iraqi Baathist leader As-Sidi - head of the Marbbi and minister of the interior. Under the leadership of Abdul Salam Arif, after the November 18, 1963 coup d'état, the military removed the Baath Party from power. The government adopted a new provisional constitution. A semblance of political stability has been established in Iraq. The struggle for power between different groups did not stop. In 1964, the regime resumed repression against Unionists and Baathists. Arif's regime turned into a military-bureaucratic dictatorship. The next coup d'état in Iraq was organized by the Ba'ath leadership on July 17, 1968. They arrested the country's president, Abdul Rahman Arif, and later expelled him from the country. The government completely passed into the hands of Baath. The Revolutionary Leadership Council was declared the highest body of the government. Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr (1968 - 1979), who at the same time held the post of the president and prime minister of Iraq, became the chairman. The future president of the country, Saddam Hussein, became the second person in the new government. In 1969, he took the post of Deputy Chairman of the Revolutionary Leadership Council. He also headed the party's security bureau and oversaw the Baath's department of organizational and ideological work. Saddam Hussein tried to gain the trust of al-Bakr, whom he called the "father-leader". Hussein succeeded in this, and from 1977 the leadership of provincial party organizations, security agencies, army chiefs and ministers reported no longer to Bakr, but directly to Saddam Hussein. On July 17, 1979, Bakri was removed from all posts and Shina was sentenced to prison. Saddam Hussein became the head of the state and the party. On July 16, Bakri appeared on television and announced his resignation and handover of power to Saddam Hussein. This fact was assessed as a "bloodless coup". In addition to the presidency, Saddam Hussein also served the country as Prime Minister, Chairman of the Revolutionary Leadership Council, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, and also held the posts of General Secretary of the Baath Party. Since then, there has been no coup d'état in Iraq, except for the 2003 event, when a coalition formed by the US and British government invaded Iraq, overthrew the government and removed Saddam Hussein from Iraq.¹⁰

II. Conclusion

Thus, military coups in certain countries of the Middle East occurred quite often. which in some cases brought significant changes for a specific country. In some cases, military coups could not change the existing situations. A good example of this is the recent events in Egypt.

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