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## Egypt's Junta an Economic as Well as Military Power

By Jason Ditz

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Last month's coup and the ensuing massacres of anti-coup protesters have underscored the sheer force that Egypt's military can bring to bear when it chooses. The military's power, however, is more than just military.



It might be surprising, what with Egypt's military annually on the take for some \$1.5 billion from the US you might think they're hurting for money. Actually, they're one of the biggest economic powers on the planet.

They make the cars, they make the household appliances. They control the energy market in Egypt, they grow much of the nation's food and they have one of the biggest bottled water concerns in the world.

Modern Egypt is built around a command economy, with military conscripts being used as trivial-income forced labor, and dominance over politics ensuring that the regulations all benefit them over any private market competitors.

Starting with the idea of cutting costs by growing some of their own food, Egypt's military quickly transformed itself into the driving force for the nation's whole economy. Any industry they want, they take, no questions asked.

The size and scope of this is a matter of enormous speculation, nothing is public. The military is believed by some to be upwards of 40% of the whole nation's economy at this point, and it's warchest, which ensures the cushy retirements of career generals turned multimillionaires, is believed to be one of the world's great fortunes.

With that much money behind them, it was trivial for the junta to buy enough protest organizers to provide a pretext for the coup, and with so much ill-gotten money at stake, it isn't hard to see why they're willing to slaughter people by the hundreds if not thousands to avoid ceding power to a potential "threat."