Assessing the Impact: North African Militaries in the Arab Spring

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Abstract: Whereas Morocco and Algeria managed to navigate quite calmly through the troubled waters of the Arab Spring, three other North-African countries, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt, experienced varying degrees of upheaval. The aim of this study is to highlight the distinct roles played by the armed forces of the latter three states in this tentative political transition by analysing the interests that effectively determined their level of involvement during and after the revolts, postures which in turn impacted on the orientation of this potentially groundbreaking political transformation.[**] The main argument developed in this study is that the three militaries, as a rule, did not side with the revolution per se but acted according to their own institutional interests.

Keywords: North Africa, Arab Spring, armed forces, political transition, authoritarianism
Stichworte: Nordafrika, Arabischer Frühling, Streitkräfte, politische Transition, Autoritarismus

1. Introduction

Toward the end of year four of the so-called Arab Spring, a rather benevolent, short-sighted and euphemistic term but potentially capturing some of the initial revolutionary spirit, it transpired that the armed forces have come to play a significant and, at times, decisive role in determining the trajectory of this political transition in various countries of the Middle East and North Africa. However, the main argument developed in this article, which concentrates on three North African countries (Egypt, Libya, Tunisia), underscores that the armed forces did not at any point in time 'side with the revolution', as conventional wisdom would tend to assert, but acted out of straightforward, conservative institutional self-interest, at times seemingly or incidentally in coincidence with the "revolutions' goals", i.e. the development of a democratic political system and the opening of the political space, amongst other demands.

Military coups have been shaping the political sphere in the Arab world during the post-colonial phases of the 1950s and 60s, where Egypt or Libya have been no exception to this pattern. Only Tunisia, without an armed struggle for independence, has been an atypical exemption to this rule, paving the way for a thoroughly de-politicised force and non-military administration under Bourguiba's direct control. In Egypt and Libya, respectively, the armed forces were either established as an essential pillar of the regime or an element of erratic policies, leading to a rather dysfunctional institution and a non-cohesive force.

Over the past decades since independence, particularly following Nasser's and Qadhafi's coups, the fortunes of the armed forces in the three analysed countries could not have varied more. In Tunisia the military was never allowed to attain the status of a political or economic player, contrary to Egypt, where the *Free Officers'* successful attempt to seize power resulted in their structural enmeshment with state affairs, ranging from direct political influence to large-scale economic endeavours. The picture in Libya differed in the sense that the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) had not been able to establish lasting political stability, and the continuous contest facing Qadhafi led him to sideline the regular armed forces while erecting a praetorian guard with the sole purpose of ensuring regime survival.

The general authoritarian political setting devoid of institutional accountability (e.g. elections, or other mechanisms allowing an alternation of power), combined with disappointed promises for economic development, eventually led to the recent outburst of frustration. Yet, such a wide scale of social unrest not only puts to the test the capacity – willingness – of the civilian repressive apparatus, but, as a theoretical last resort for regime survival, calls in the military. Therefore, the postures taken by the militaries over the past years of massive unrest[1] must be understood against the backdrop of a still unfolding large-scale shift and might therefore trigger new decisions and redefine involvement in stability maintenance and continuity preservation by ultimately fundamentally conservative actors.

The findings of this concise study should enable the reader to appreciate the forces at play in the Arab Spring and to conclude under which circumstances the military would favour a paradigmatic shift towards a pluralistic political system (Tunisia), opt for regime survival, even at the risk of exposing a fundamental lack of corps cohesion (Libya), or seek privilege retention, paving the way via a twin-coup to authoritarian system continuity (Egypt).

The theoretical framework developed and used in this article is based on the assumption that an appreciation of the militaries' motivation to engage, or not, in repression of sweeping social dissent switching into rebellion should be based on the appreciation of the following three basic parameters: regime type, civil-military relations and 'militarised bureaucracy'. By applying this pattern to the three countries, a basic understanding of the military forces' interests emerges and deductions can be produced about the rationale behind their positioning during the upheaval and the ensuing transition, as well as about the consequences of their postures (e.g. effects on cohesion). For our purposes, the theoretical aspects of this article are based on Eva Bellin's comparative study of Middle

Eastern authoritarianism,[2] grounded in the regime and civil-military relation typologies set forth by Mehran Kamrava[3] and the description of militarised administrations,[4] as exemplified by Yezid Sayigh's recent work on Egypt.[5]

Taking into consideration and combining the analytical layers of these three concepts allows for a holistic approach to the problem and provides a comparative conceptual framework to assess the role of the armed forces in major political transitions.[6] This method should allow for thorough comprehension of essential features such as allegiance, cohesion, corporatism, institutionalisation, professionalism, and, ultimately, enable to judge not whether in principle, but rather under which circumstances armed forces might support a path of political pluralism and democratisation. The following matrix helps to visualise this model (see table 1).

2. Tunisia: siding with the rebellion?

2.1 "La grande muette"

President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali left behind the crumbling and delegitimised structures of an authoritarian regime, a classical "securitocracy" based on repression of political dissent via the security apparatus of the Ministry of Interior. Executive powers of the government and the legislative role of parliament had been hollowed out by a power concentration under Ben Ali's command. Interestingly though, the military was not a vital part of the regime and the Saint Cyrien Ben Ali[7] perpetuated its marginalisation policy in strict compliance with his predecessor Habib Bourguiba.

Civil-military relations were therefore characterised by a sidelining strategy directed against the armed forces, implemented by a civilian autocratic ruler. As a military traditionally without political access or particular clout, it was kept at bay and remained small compared to an increasingly bloated civilian security sector.[8] Its function was limited to classical territorial defence, including border control and left no systemic role for domestic, i.e. internal security. These elements led to a corporatist, legalist, and professional structure, with a clear cut and – in times of peace – minimalistic operative agenda under the guidance of a civilian Minister of Defence. Furthermore, these characteristics

gave rise to the image and public perception of "la grande muette", in the sense of a quietist, self-restrained, and apolitical actor.[9]

Tunisia's post-colonial administration has been of a pronounced civilian type, devoid of military or militarised features. The closely knit clientelistic network developed under Ben Ali excluded the military and ministerial posts, or regional governors would typically be political or rather crony appointees. Strategic infrastructure, state-run companies or main businesses all remain under civilian management.

Therefore, the determining features of the Tunisian military are those of an apolitical, patriotic and non-modernising (and non-revolutionary) professional institution, operating until recently in a civil Arab republic under the only secular constitution of the Arab world.

2.2 A sidelined force to be reckoned with

The fact that the army was never involved in military operations during decolonisation[10] and did not participate in political interference via coups[11] paved the way for a domestic player devoid of political experience – or appetite, as it seems. In addition, a set of legal measures blocked political initiative or relevance, the reason why the military elite could neither build up corresponding networks, nor establish economic or bureaucratic experience. In other words, the military has never been co-opted into the political system, e.g. by cronyism or privileges, and thus had no particular incentive to keep Ben Ali or his regime afloat.

Intervention of the armed forces in domestic affairs occurred only twice after the Bizerte incident. A general strike in 1978 and the "bread riots" of 1984 were put down with active military engagement. Although their purpose is clearly limited to external defence and does not include internal policing, this division of labour led to a competitive situation with the Ministry of Interior, which could reap additional budgetary resources, much to the detriment of the military.[12] All in all, the army got accustomed to the role of social arbiter and crisis manager[13], including the option for intervention in cases of major societal turmoil. Yet, it goes without saying that even for such a professional, cohesive, institutionalised and apolitical force, the events of the Arab Spring represented a major stress test.[14]

2.3 From crisis observer to conflict manager…

While the initial role (in late 2010/early 2011) was limited to observing and monitoring the situation at the start of the

2 Military Professionalization and Civil-Military Relations in the Middle East, Political Science Quarterly, vol. 115, no. 1, 2000.

3 The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective, Comparative Politics, vol. 36, no. 2, January 2004.

4 The scope of this article does not allow for theoretical or methodological reflections. Yet it could be argued that a 'militarised bureaucracy' is the result or a feature of a specific type of civil-military relations, where the military element dominates (e.g. in nominations) and has gradually undercut the civilian character of the bureaucracy.

5 Above the State: the Officers' Republic in Egypt, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, August 2012. Note: Even though Sayigh does not develop a theory, his thoughts on the topic provide an excellent framework for analysis.

6 Inspiration for this model was drawn from reflections on an 'ideal model' for measuring military influence. Cf. Augustus R. Norton and Ali Alfoneh, The Study of Civil-Military relations and Civil-Society in the Middle East and North Africa, in: Carsten Jensen (ed.), Developments in Civil-Military Relations in the Middle East, 2008.

7 Le Point, Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali: un saint-cyrien très discret, 18th January 2011 (http://www.lepoint.fr/editos-du-point/jean-guisnel/zine-el-abidine-ben-ali-un-saint-cyrien-tres-discret-18-01-2011-1285797_53.php).

8 Daguzan speaks of the subordinated or marginal military. Cf. Jean-Francois Daguzan, Armées et société dans le monde arabe : entre révolte et conservatisme, note no. 05/13, Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique, 2013, p. 6.

9 Derek Lutterbeck, After the Fall: Security Sector Reform in post-Ben Ali Tunisia, Arab Reform Initiative, September 2012, p. 6.

10 Combat with French units was limited to the Bizerte incident in 1961, when Tunisia used military force to push out the French from their military naval base. Cf. L. Carl Brown, Bourguiba and Bourguibism Revisited: Reflections and Interpretation, MEJ, vol. 55, no. 1, Winter 2001, p. 45.

11 A single coup attempt is reported to have occurred in 1962.

12 Querine Hanlon, Security Sector Reform in Tunisia: A Year after the Jasmine Revolution, Special Report 304, USIP, March 2012, pp. 4-5.

13 L.B. Ware, The Role of the Tunisian Military in the Post-Bourgiba [sic] Era, MEJ, vol. 39, no. 1, Winter 1985, p. 41.

14 Philippe Droz-Vincent, Prospects for "Democratic Control of the Armed Forces"? Comparative Insights and Lessons for the Arab World in Transition, Armed Forces and Society, March 2013.

Table 1

North African Armed Forces	Regime	Civil-military relations	Militarised administration	Institutionalisation	Professionalisation/ sense of mission	Interests & objectives	Cohesion/ Esprit de corps	Allegiance	Posture/ involvement during transition ("stress test")
Tunisia: Marginalised actor – transition facilitator	securitocracy, with "cleptocratic" aspects	Civilian domination of armed forces; sidelined, apolitical military	none: civilian MoD; no economic stakes;	high to very high: patriotic, meritocratic, non-coopted (thus legalist & apolitical)	High levels of professionalism, limited duties (territorial and border defense; lately CT); defense of the constitution	upgrade and rebalancing of status (and budget); end of sidelining strategy	strong cohesion; legalist attitude; Islamist element unknown	state/nation, potentially anti-regime (Ben Ali)	Clear anti-Ben Ali stance, cloaked in "prorevolutionary" statements; armed conflict with police
Libya: Twin structure – opposition & total fragmentation	sultanistic securitocracy	Civilian domination; military opposition (coups); Praetorian Guard (PG) for regime survival	none, due to systematic sidelining strategy against the regular military forces	limited to low: twin structure per se an expression of a dysfunctional institution, with strong tribal elements	Disorganized and uncoordinated regular forces with unclear mission; PG: well-trained, well-equipped, and highly motivated, with strong sense of purpose	PG: regime survival; Military: demise of Qadhafi & re-building of cohesive, national force	Split and implosion; Dual military: PG and regular army opposed	Strong regime allegiance of PG; regular armed forces anti-Qadhafi	Regular forces openly anti-Qadhafi; leading to direct confrontation with PG, and fragmentation of the military
Egypt: Deep state army – control/ takeover of transition	complex; elements of a military-dominated system (but multiple regime pillars, including the military)	competitive, with civilian domination in peace time or domestic stability	outspoken (element of co-option strategy); state bureaucracy under systematic military influence	medium to low: strongly coopted force, thus neither apolitical nor strictly legalist; meritocratic elements; appropriation of patriotic narrative	Professionalised aspects, but traces old (Soviet) military dogma; close cooperation with US armed forces; duty: protection of the nation (trope); currently CT (Sinai)	conservation of autonomy & related powerbase (incl. vested economic interests); maintenance of territorial integrity	Relatively strong cohesion; national army, with uncertain levels of Islamist sympathies (risk)	Regime, i.e. self-centered perquisite protector, with state elements (rhetoric)	Anti-Mubarak; pro-status quo (regime); thus careful maneuvering: avoiding chaos/ anarchy & excessive cohesion stress test

revolt, the army was increasingly interfering by separating Ben Ali's security apparatus from the demonstrators. The Chief of Staff, General Rachid Ammar, had been fired on the 12th of January 2011 by Ben Ali for his refusal to use force to quell the insurrection in Sidi Bou Zid and Kasserine.[15] At a later stage, it would actively engage hardcore repressive regime elements and eventually guide the political transition through protection and surveillance of the electoral process. This stance served the purpose of shying away Islamist radicals or potential unrest emanating from the *ancien régime*[16], while simultaneously indicating a lack of political ambitions and strengthening its patriotic credentials. In his 24th January 2011 public allocution, ten days after the ouster of Ben Ali, Chief of Staff Rachid Ammar eventually pledged open support for the revolution.[17]

The essential motivation for a return to the barracks, besides the principled apolitical stance, lay first and foremost in restored social calm (such as in 1978 and 1984) and a meaningful political process set in motion that provided relative stability in times of turmoil.[18] Secondly, due to its corporatist ethos, the army resented replacing the police and restoring domestic order. It was simply not ready to ruin its reputation by crushing the revolt with military might, whereby it would have carried the political cost of Ben Ali's coercive regime. Thirdly, in times of political pluralisation it would have been difficult for the military to impose itself as a sole legitimate actor, even if only

for a while like the SCAF in Egypt. Popular tolerance of such a posture would only have been possible in case the turmoil had lasted longer or threatened to get out of control.

However, the Tunisian armed forces have not always been acting as a democratic force or by such means during the transition. Several interventions against strikes occurred where the workforce had been forced, at gunpoint, to return to work. Bloggers or critiques of the military institution have been sentenced to jail, and military courts are involved in very sensitive cases, such as the one of Ali Seriati, Ben Ali's former head of his 3,000 strong bodyguards, who was acquitted on appeal.[19] These developments seem to indicate two facts. First, the stance of the armed forces is based less on democratic considerations, or as 'siding with the revolution', who would rather have envisaged Seriati and the likes behind bars. Second, the military seems to favour a pragmatic and therefore relatively inclusive approach to post-revolutionary crisis management. In the long run, this might turn out to be a stabilising element.

In sum, the future posture of the military will also depend on the governance record of the new government. In turn, this will help to shape the relations with old and new political players, especially those from the Islamist spectrum such as en-Nahda. As current circumstances suggest, the fight against terrorism will shape the objectives and values of the Tunisian military and lead to an evolving role. This setting, in addition to the positive image reaped from the careful intervention during the upheaval, will certainly be leveraged to request a suitable upgrade of capacities[20], currently to face the fundamentalist

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15 Nawaat, Rachid Ammar : homme fort de la Tunisie : « L'armée ne tire pas », 17 January 2011. (http://nawaat.org/portail/2011/01/17/rachid-ammar-homme-fort-de-la-tunisie-larmee-ne-tire-pas).

16 This posture could be interpreted as a unifying reaction to the looming threat of fundamentalist militancy. On the other hand it remains an open question if the army is ready at all to defend the values of Bourguibist secularism.

17 The New York Times, Chief of Tunisian Army Pledges His Support for 'the Revolution', 24 January 2011.

18 Badra Gaaloul, Back to the Barracks: the Tunisian Army Post-Revolution, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 3 November 2011.

19 Jeune Afrique, Tunisie : Ali Seriati gagnant en appel, 24 April 2014 (http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/JA2780p012.xml0).

20 Jeune Afrique, Défense: Quelles capacités militaires pour la Tunisie en 2014 ?, Blog Défense, 23 July 2014 (http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/ARTJAWEB20140723115341).

threat, since certain cells have now passed to the phase of declared militancy against the state.[21]

2.4 … and back to the barracks

No single actor, even those fearing the loss of essential perquisites (privileges, autonomy, etc) from democratisation, had the capacity to take over and control the transition process on their own or through a hidden pact. For this reason, all politically relevant actors, including the military, *faute de mieux*, favoured a transition from authoritarian structures to democratic politics. In that sense it could be argued, that the Tunisian armed forces did "side with the revolution".[22] Yet, the underlying rationale to favour an open-ended, uncertain transition lay less in revolutionary fervour but rather in the possibility to remove Ben Ali and his entourage from power, to control a smooth transition pre-empting chaos and the outlook, apparently positively evaluated, to be able to return to the barracks after the transition. Thereby, the Tunisian armed forces first avoided the loss of legitimacy in case of mass repression and, second – by remaining a sort of facilitator – of a second stress test as political agent without such experience. Thirdly, it opened a window of opportunity to reassert and somehow normalize the standing of the military institution within the Tunisian state, including the possibility of increased operational scope and organisational autonomy.

3. Libya's military: dysfunction by design

3.1 A dual structure

Qadhafi operated under a sultanistic,[23] securitocratic regime type, with internal security and domestic repression delegated only in case of wide scale public unrest to a praetorian guard in order to ensure regime continuity. The deeply autocratic nature of the regime, centered on the *Murshid* (the Revolutionary Guide) and his, mainly, kin (the '*ahl al-khayma*'), was paralleled by weak institutions, of which the armed forces had been a prime target in Qadhafi's policies. Interoperability or even communication between units was hindered, and despite huge amounts of equipment, training was lacking to build up an effective force. Qadhafi's distrust and ideological rejection of institutions in general, effectively culminated with regard to the military, which he kept disorganised and ineffective.

In the Libyan case, civil-military relations, controlled entirely by the civilian element, have been shaped by this lack of trust and the introduction of kinship features to the extent that a dual military structure emerged. The regular army was financed and equipped in satisfactory ways but not enabled to function as a cohesive and capable force and dominated entirely by the civilian element. In that sense, Qadhafi's attention, in terms of building up useful and

effective capacities, was limited to the Praetorian Guard, his last resort for regime survival under command of his direct progeny.[24]

The Libyan administration did not feature any specific elements of militarisation. Even though 'military training' was part of the regular school curriculum, replacing sports lessons, this could not be equated to an effective militarization of the society or its values, even less to direct military influence over the bureaucracy.[25] As much as the armed forces were kept at bay from the political power centre, they were equally sealed off and denied access to the patronage system, excluding access to privileges and the lately liberalising economy. Military districts have been under military command, whereas the civilian administration and the bureaucracy featured no distinct militarised elements and presented no options for post-service career paths, as in neighbouring Egypt.

Successful coup-proofing methods,[26] military adventures and defeats (Chad), and random, dysfunctional chains of command produced de-politicised and demoralised regular armed forces, whose lack of cohesion and co-ordination capacity would be severely put to the test in case of countrywide revolt. The dual nature of the military (in terms of tasks, assignments, equipment, and esprit de corps) would therefore quickly unravel according to its inherent logic during the upheaval starting in February 2011.

3.2 The colonel turned revolutionary

The coup d'état in 1969 led to a military controlled political structure, the RCC (Revolutionary Command Council), which was quickly disbanded by a distrustful Qadhafi, who continuously faced opposition, including from the military. Coup attempts were regularly followed by purges at all levels of the armed forces, and led to a specific sidelining strategy and disruptive tactics within the military structure. Institutionalisation of the armed forces was thus crippled by design, and professionalisation eventually limited to the few, trustworthy units under kin control, such as the *Khamis* or 32nd brigade.[27]

Whereas the coup of 1969 arguably sported a revolutionary character by toppling the monarchy and trying to imitate the Nasserist path of development, his later revolutionary projects (including the Green Book) were paralleled by the erection of a plethora of security agencies and intelligence services, mainly with the purpose of internal repression. However, this did not provide an opportunity for the armed forces to develop into a professional force since Qadhafi would not allow alternative power centres to evolve within the steady institutional flux he created and moulded at will. The fragmented nature of the military apparatus and its fundamental lack of regime allegiance would adversely affect Qadhafi during the 2011 uprising.

21 Magharebia, Tunisia military receives US gear, 19 August 2014 (http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/awi/features/2014/08/19/feature-06).
22 Rita Brooks, Abandoned at the Palace: Why the Tunisian Military Defected from the Ben Ali Regime in January 2011, The Journal of Strategic Studies, vol. 36, no. 2, 2013, p. 217.
23 Alfred Stepan and Juan Linz, Democratization Theory and the "Arab Spring", in: Larry Diamond and Marc F. Platter (eds.), Democratization and Authoritarianism in the Arab World, 2014, pp. 92-93.

24 Derek Lutterbeck, Arab Uprisings and Armed Forces : Between Openness and Resistance, SSR Paper 2, DCAF, p.33.
25 Florence Gaub, Incertitude en Libye: le rêve de Kadhafi devient-il réalité ? Politique Étrangère, no. 3, 2012, p. 6.
26 James T. Quinlivan, Coup-Proofing: Its Practice and Consequences in the Middle East, International Security, vol. 24, no. 2, Fall 1999, pp. 131-134.
27 Florence Gaub, *Arab Armies: Agents of change? Before and After 2011*, EU ISS Chaillot Paper, no. 131, March 2014.

3.3 "Zenga zenga": a militarised rebellion vs. loyalist elite units[28]

Sultanistic regime types leave no room for alternative power centres, being based on total control of political processes and institutions by the autocratic head of state. This leads to a lack of chances for peaceful transitions should social contest mobilise on a widespread scale and resist the repressive logic of the regime. As the revolt gained momentum, Qadhafi unleashed his special forces and tried to mobilise regular army units. However, a perceived lack of legitimacy of the regime within the army's ranks led to severe lack of obedience, conducive to mass defections. Yet, the army did not split into clearly opposed camps, as was the case with the rebel Free Syrian Army opposed to loyal regime forces. It rather disintegrated, with numerous defectors and even entire units joining the various militias of the rebel forces.[29] But the levels of motivation, sense of purpose and capacities of the Praetorian Guard would have been decisive in this conflict, the reason why only significant external support for the militarised uprising could empower the victory of the latter. Eventually, a routed Praetorian Guard and a decomposed military where both not capable of supporting the political transition, a transformation process where militias have emerged as the strongest force, undermining attempts to build a democratic system.

3.4 From institutional chaos to anarchy

Qadhafi's regime had never been able to support his purported revolutionary state building project with a strong and centralised bureaucracy, i.e. functioning and dedicated institutions.[30] This problematic extended to the armed forces, who were built up as a dual force, and whose regular units dissolved quickly "in the face" of a countrywide rebellion. Being a de-politicised, dysfunctional and "aimless" force, it was not capable of organising a military challenge to the loyalist units, leading eventually to a near total erosion of the military. Lately, Khalifa Heftar, a former high-ranking officer disgraced by Qadhafi for his poor military showing in the Chad-War, has tried to capitalize on negative attitudes against Islamist militancy and could rally military forces around his 'Operation Dignity'. Ideally, the combination of these elements with the scattered remainders of the old army could represent a nucleus for re-integrating a national army.[31] In reality, however, Libya is slowly sliding into the next stage of its political transition: a civil war between the new power brokers, incapable of compromise, not even within the framework of the nascent democratic representative institutions. And without a strong military to safeguard the ongoing political transition, Libya will either engage the path of Somalia or attract new foreign interventions.

4. Egypt: revolution under military tutelage

4.1 A hidden domestic hegemon

Since a quasi-republican political system was established by Gamal Abdel-Nasser's military coup, the regime evolved along authoritarian and increasingly oligarchic lines. Former president Mubarak's autocratic "reign" had been paralleled by the built-up of a bloated civilian security apparatus,[32] in analogy to Ben Ali's repressive strategy for regime continuation. The decision-making process was highly personalised, converging on Mubarak and his prerogative in budgetary matters and for appointments. The NDC single-party served, at best, as a smokescreen for genuinely undemocratic power patterns.

Due to the specificities of the regime, civil-military relations epitomized the intimate ties between the civilian power centre and the armed forces. The military, an essential pillar of this nexus, enjoyed virtually no oversight from civilian authorities, an essential privilege the army sought to preserve by all means during the transition. Budgets are still not disclosed and can only partially be reconstructed with indirect methods, such as the figures on foreign military assistance. In stable times the domination of this relationship clearly tilted in favour of the civilian head of state, and was engineered in this direction under Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak. Two essential features have characterised the conflation of these two domains, interlocked in a mutually dependent relationship. The fact that the Egyptian Armed Forces carved out a state-in-the-state provides them with the necessary autonomy for manoeuvers within the deep state. Second, the "uncodified law" regarding the military origins of the head of state is an undeclared but essential red line for the military establishment. The defeat of the army's candidate, Ahmed Shafiq, at the presidential elections in 2012 must therefore have put the top brass on high alert.

An Egyptian specificity, vis-à-vis Tunisia or Libya, is the militarised administration. The cabinet proper started to be thoroughly demilitarised under Sadat,[33] but considerable military presence can still be located in the civilian bureaucracy and certain sectors of the economy. The posts of regional governors, top business positions, and the management of strategic infrastructure (e.g. the Suez Canal) all firmly remain in the hands of former high-ranking militaries.[34] For the military, two factors present a strategic advantage in this pattern, facilitating or sometimes dictating access to these positions: the number of companies under state control and the sector of military production per se, under command of a separate ministry. In that sense, the rising influence of Gamal Mubarak, heir apparent of Mubarak Senior and a professed liberaliser of the economy, represented a double threat to the armed forces.[35] The privatisation of state companies would have blocked access to senior management positions and the military production sector could have been

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28 In a televised speech on 22 February 2011 Qadhafi vowed to chase and eliminate the insurgents, "alleyway by alleyway" (Arabic: "Zenga Zenga").

29 Wolfgang Mühlberger: Last Exit Sirte: Libya's Fragile Security Climate in the Aftermath of Civil War and Intervention, in: Africa and the Mediterranean: Evolving Security Dynamics after the Arab Uprisings, IAI/GMF Mediterranean Paper Series, 2014.

30 Moncef Ouannès, Militaires, Élites et Modernisation dans la Libye Contemporaine, L'Harmattan, 2009, pp. 409-413.

31 Financial Times, Khalifa Heftar, a hard-headed Libyan Warrior, 23 May 2014.

32 The budget for the civilian security apparatus grew at a faster pace than the military's but remained inferior in absolute figures. Cf. Yezid Sayigh, Above the State: The Officers' Republic in Egypt, 2012, p. 7.

33 Mark N. Cooper, The Demilitarization of the Egyptian Cabinet, International Journal of Middle East Studies, vol. 14, no. 2, May 1992, pp. 203-225.

34 Cf. Hillel Frisch, The Egyptian Army and Egypt's 'Spring', Journal of Strategic Studies, vol. 36, no. 2, pp. 182-186.

35 Steven A. Cook, The Military, Reform, and the Question of Succession: the Case of Egypt, in: The Unspoken Power: Civil-Military Relations and Prospects for Reform, Brookings Paper, 2004.

subject to similar policies, increasing the risk for transparency requests and demand for professional managers.

Appreciating the autonomous standing of the military institution, including the ideological, economic and financial foundations thereof (patriotic rhetoric and identification, economic stakes and undisputed sources of income, including US military aid), helps to understand its 'genetic' drive for preserving the status quo, making it an ultra-conservative force, neither inclined to revolutionary experiments nor to uncontrolled succession of power at the helm of the state.

In the case of a major stress-test, the military would therefore opt for the preservation of internal cohesion and the upholding of the autonomy status. In the complex setting of a political transition, however, these goals might be reached by subtle tactical steps within the framework of a conservative strategy. As long as the political system in the making does not present a challenge, either currently or at a later stage, the army will not interfere. This upholding of the status quo, equivalent to the balance of between the traditional movers and shakers, represents a preferred way forward, since it minimizes the risks of major disruptions. System and regime maintenance are thus prime objectives, be it at the sacrifice of ephemeral political liberties and political pluralization. The appropriation of a revolutionary discourse at the later stage of the current transition should not be mistaken for adopting a genuine revolutionary attitude but rather as a means of occulting the underlying rationale for action and interference.

4.2 "Egypt is the army, the army is Egypt"

Even though the army was not involved in anti-colonial warfare in the wake of WW2, its access to power via the 1952 anti-monarchic coup and the subsequent role in state-building or, more precisely, the intertwining of the statehood narrative with the identity of the armed forces provides the military with a certain level of esteem and legitimacy. Nevertheless, the defeat of 1967 against Israel, coupled with the crypto-victory of 1973, increased public criticism directed at the armed forces, and tarnished its image, even more so since it was linked to the crushing defeat of Arab nationalism, an ideology it happily embraced to increase its standing. On the other hand, the military as an institution had been able to transform its limited operational capabilities via the political settlement of the conflict with Israel, into the status of recipient of significant military aid from the US. Thereby, the armed forces secured substantial material windfall from the Peace Dividend, whereby it developed into a more cautious actor, taking full profit from the status quo as it had evolved to their advantage.

The Egyptian armed forces' formal tasks, with its huge standing army, can be summed up as protecting the nation and defending the constitution. This leaves a lot of room for interpretation that political players try to shape to their own advantage. Also Nasser's main rival, Abdelhakim Amer, hailed from the military.[36] But the competition ended with the suicide of the latter. Anwar

Sadat and Hosni Mubarak, while corresponding to the unwritten rule of military presidential origins, proceeded skilfully with the demilitarisation of the government initiated under Nasser, successfully reducing the number of ministerial portfolios in military hands.[37] However, such policies are not a guarantee against a resurgence of the military in politics, especially in times of crises, and did not alter the niche the military carved out to its advantage. In other words, a demilitarised cabinet does not necessarily correspond to a civilianised administration at large.

4.3 Gradual military takeover

The path followed by the Egyptian army during the upheaval evolved in three phases according to a remarkable logic from the "guardian of the revolution" to a self-proclaimed "revolutionary actor". This specific development can only be understood against the backdrop of the armed forces' vested interests and the way they sought to accommodate them during the recent political transition.

As the mass demonstrations gained momentum in late January/ early February 2011 and the trajectory to an armed rebellion could not be excluded anymore, the military made its first deployments in Ismailiyya and other strategic sites close to the Suez Canal. Protection of key infrastructure and of related fundamental state interests were high on the agenda and paved the way for increased military involvement in political affairs. The swift takeover by the SCAF (Supreme Command of the Armed Forces), assuming legislative and executive power, a series of declarations (*Communiqués*) addressed to the public (confirming the legitimacy of their demands, while requesting the return to their homes) and the toppling of Mubarak indicated the willingness of the military leadership to control a potentially very chaotic unfolding of the uprising.[38]

In fact, President Mubarak's "dismissal" was more than a pawn sacrifice to calm the revolutionary outburst. He tempted to install a hereditary republic by grooming his son Gamal, corresponding to the political sidelining of the army as a kingmaker, and thereby additionally endangered vested economic interests of the army, due to the liberal economic orientation of his son. The timing for a 'soft coup' could not have been more ideal: giving the impression to the public that it sided with the revolt against the regime (*An-nidhaam*), of which it is part and parcel, it could rid itself of an unpredictable head of state and try to control the transition, ideally leading to a status quo ex ante Mubarak.

The supposedly democratic orientation of the SCAF was called into question since it provided no active defence for demonstrators against thugs or regime forces, conducted arrests, led military trials and imprisoned protestors. The most problematic instance occurred during the "Maspero massacre", when military APCs were used to disperse a demonstration of mainly Egyptian Copts in October 2011, leading to the death of dozens. In addition, in late

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36 Rita Brooks, *An Autocracy at War: Explaining Egypt's Military Effectiveness, 1967 and 1973*, Security Studies, vol. 5, no. 3, 2006, pp. 396-430.

37 Sadat based his de-militarisation strategy on the 'October Working Paper', the extent of which, somewhat paradoxically, was limited by his nomination of another military, Mohammed Hosni Mubarak, as Vice-President. Cf. Elizabeth Picard, *Arab Military in Politics: From Revolutionary Plot to Authoritarian State*, in: Giacomo Luciani (ed.), The Arab State, Berkley, 1999, p. 198.

38 Hillel, The Egyptian Army, p. 189.

2011 the "El-Selmi document" was produced to abrogate supra-constitutional powers to the army.[39] Such a step could not have been more diametrically opposed to the revolution's goals and its hopes for an opening of the political space. However, the military establishment and its highest cadres have a different take on the potential for democratic evolution. To quote el-Sisi, at the time Brigadier-General training in a US facility: 'The strategic nature of the region coupled with [the] religious nature of culture creates an environment that prevents [sic] challenges to the establishment of a democracy throughout the region in the near term.'[40]

Following the road map set out by the SCAF, presidential elections took place in 2012 that saw the victory of the Islamist candidate, el-Morsi, narrowly beating the army's favoured candidate, Ahmed Shafiq, originating from within their ranks. President Morsi proceeded with appointing new regional governors hailing from the *Ikhwan* (Muslim Brotherhood), replacing the previous generation of retired army personnel. Yet, in general he tried to stay on good terms with the armed forces, an indispensable player for his own political survival. Ultimately, Morsi underestimated to what extent his "republican" Islamist policies were even more at odds with influential regional players, such as Saudi Arabia, who eventually supported his unseating by means of yet another coup.

4.4 From SCAF to President el-Sisi

Mubarak had developed into a threat, not only a risk, for the autonomy which the armed forces have been able to establish via their economic stakes and the appropriation of the singularly attractive peace dividend reaped from the Camp David agreement. On the other hand, Morsi, and his Islamist policies, could have presented a danger for the structure of the armed forces in terms of cohesion, since the numbers of rank and file with Islamist leanings are difficult to establish. A disagreement on the attitude toward President between the cadres and the lower ranks could have presented a challenge with uncertain consequences. In both cases, the army was therefore admonished to take action to control the process of the political transition. Ironically, the army itself reverted to the use of revolutionary rhetoric to justify the second coup and, eventually, the return of the *ancien régime*. Meanwhile, President el-Sisi engages in grandiose economic projects, to deliver on his promises, and to ensure the persistence of military implication in economic matters.[41]

5. Three diverging trajectories: democratisation, chaos and military assertiveness

The last comparable historical wave of regional unrest – including military involvement – occurred in the 1950s and 60s, when Arab armed forces were able to access political power in several cases, usually via coups. Traditionally, the stark political role of Arab militaries is being interpreted as the single most powerful stumbling block on the way to democratisation, or to civilian oversight of the security sector. Therefore, counting on the armies as agents of democratisation seems to follow a flawed logic.

Ben Ali and Mubarak were both trying to shape civil-military relations by asserting civilian dominance over the armed forces. For Ben Ali, the culture of legality of the Tunisian army and its professional ethos was certainly helpful in achieving this goal. For Mubarak, engaging the military behemoth in this battle was certainly more of a daunting task. Yet, both clearly overplayed their hand and eventually paid a political price. Tunisian professionalism and Egyptian corporatism sealed the fate of these two authoritarian leaders. In the Libyan case, the curtailing of the regular army eventually turned out to be detrimental to regime survival, since relying solely on a Praetorian Guard was insufficient.

More importantly, in none of the cases did the armies 'side with the revolution'. The Tunisian armed forces jumped on the bandwagon of popular uproar to depose a widely despised ruler. The purpose of this step was to ensure a smooth transition, not a democratic trajectory per se, and to rearrange the distorted security sector in its own favour. This posture enabled not only a relatively bloodless transition, but eventually provided the armed forces with much sought after additional resources.

The regular forces in Libya had no motivation either to support the long-time ruler who had kept them dislodged to the extent that they fragmented quickly under the pressure of the upheaval. The aim of regime survival could not be achieved due to a lack of cohesion between the praetorian guards and the regular armed units, and with the second category. This splitting and fragmentation combined with external military intervention provided the death-blow to the dysfunctional armed forces and, eventually, the regime of Muammar Qadhafi, opening the option for a chaotic unwinding.

In the Egyptian case, the conservative nature of the military is mainly driven by being one of the regime pillars and the socio-economic niche it has been able to carve out over the past decades. In states where armies have the capability to run the scenes from behind, they resurface as eminent political agents in times of serious crisis in order to preserve their endangered position. Therefore, the armed forces had to act against the republican project of the Muslim brothers that, if successful, could have proven even more detrimental to its fiefdoms than a potential succession of Mubarak's son at the helm of the state. In that sense, in a comparative approach, the Egyptian military is by far the most conservative force, due to its institutional enmeshment and the vast material interests it pursues. The Egyptian army is part and parcel of the underlying structures of authoritarian resilience and accordingly has no incentive to opt for and support a democratic transition, which would seriously undermine its comfortable position within the status quo.

This study tries to provide an answer to the question if the armed forces in three North African countries acted as idealistic agents of democratisation or turned out as pragmatic and self-referential actors during and in the aftermath of the recent upheavals that started to shake the Arab world in late 2010. For this purpose, an analysis of the role the militaries played in the political transition was conducted, to assess whether

39 Philippe Droz-Vincent, Prospects for Democratic Control, p. 16.
40 Abdelfattah Said ElSisi [sic], Democracy in the Middle East, USAWC Strategy Research Project, 2006.
41 Reuters, Egypt Awards Suez Hub Project to Consortium that Includes Army, 3 August 2014 (http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/08/03/us-egypt-suezcanal-idUSKBN0G30HY20140803).

the armed forces have been tolerating, supporting or even directing a transition from authoritarian or sultanistic regimes to more democratic political systems, beyond the most basic electoral aspect of majority determination. Their effectively determining role in the transitions is highlighted by describing their positions on political uncertainty and stability threats, against the backdrop of their sometimes considerable vested

interests. Three varying but principally identical answers shed light on the highly variegating conditions in which the militaries of the three countries operate. Ultimately, the core interests of the armies (ranging from self-preservation via cohesion to regime-survival), not democratic idealism or specific ideological positions, have defined their levels of involvement during the transition.

The Military and Security Sector Reform in Southeast Asia

Felix Heiduk*

Abstract: This article examines the different roles that the military has played in Southeast Asia's young democracies. While reforms of the security sector have overall only gained moderate traction, the differences in reform outcomes between Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand are nonetheless striking. The article argues that in order to explain the different reform trajectories we need to move beyond the traditional focus on structural reform impediments towards an analysis of actors' preferences and questions of agency in the context of SSR. The article finds that the prevalent interpretations of military reform as a political tool to alter the states' domestic balance of power have been a crucial factor behind successful (Thailand) and unsuccessful (Philippines) military interventions. Conversely, far lower levels of reform politicization in Indonesia have enabled a successful implementation of a number of institutional reforms.

Keywords: Security Sector Reform, civil-military relations, military reform, Southeast Asia
Stichworte: Sicherheitssektorreform, zivil-militärische Beziehungen, Militärreform, Südostasien

1. Introduction

Transitions to democracy did not topple authoritarian regimes in Southeast Asia until the late 1980s / 1990s, when Indonesia, Timor-Leste, Cambodia, the Philippines and Thailand underwent democratic transitions. The coups in Thailand in 2006 and 2014 and a number of unsuccessful coup attempts in the Philippines, however, lay bare that democratization processes in the region are far from irreversible. Conversely Indonesia's armed forces, which had long been the main pillar of Suharto's authoritarian new order, refrained from any interventions in politics in post-Suharto Indonesia.[1] This begets the question: How can the different roles that the military has played in democratic transitions in Southeast Asia be explained? What explains the fact that reforms of the security sector in Indonesia, at least at first glance, have been more successful than in Thailand or the Philippines?

The diversity in reform outcomes aside, all three countries share a number of characteristics germane to Security Sector Reform (SSR)[2]: highly politicized militaries have been the backbone of respective authoritarian regimes; civilian control of the armed forces was weak and ran predominantly along highly

personalized patronage networks; security forces were involved in rampant human rights abuses; the state's monopoly of the legitimate use of force was weak; and, due to long-running insurgencies, all three states perceived the main predicaments of national security to stem from internal rather than external threats. Hence, SSR's objective to help countries 'meet the range of security and justice challenges they face, in a manner consistent with democratic norms, and sound principles of governance and the rule of law'[3] appears to be of unremitting relevance to the region. Yet, SSR has so far only gained very moderate traction in the region. And rather than the holistic "whole-of-government" approach promoted by donor agencies, reforms have at best taken on a piecemeal, ad hoc character.[4]

Various explanations for the dearth of SSR in Southeast Asia have been given: Southeast Asian states had little external support because the Global War on Terror (GWOT) changed the strategic priorities of Western states from democratic reforms to counter-terrorism cooperation;[5] and ASEAN's non-binding approach to regional integration and its emphasis on non-interference have prevented SSR from being reinforced at the regional level.[6] Other

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1 Felix Heiduk, „From guardians to democrats? Attempts to explain change and continuity in the civil–military relations of post-authoritarian Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines", *The Pacific Review* 24, No. 2 (2011): 249–71.

2 While the term SSR encompasses all actors involved in the protection of the state and its citizens, including the military, police and intelligence services as well as private security forces and oversight institutions such as executive, parliament, judiciary and civil society organizations, the analytical focus of this article is on the armed forces because of the strength of the armed forces to act as a potential veto player in the democratization process.

3 OECD Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC), *Handbook on Security System Reform: Supporting Security and Justice* (Paris: OECD, 2007), 21.

4 Felix Heiduk, „Conclusion: Assessing Security Sector Reform in Southeast Asia", in *Security Sector Reform in Southeast Asia: From Policy to Practice*, ed. by Felix Heiduk (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 225-37.

5 Jake Sherman, „The "Global War on Terrorism" and Its Implications for US Security Sector Reform Support", in *The Future of Security Sector Reform*, ed. by Mark Sedra (Waterloo: The Centre for International Governance Innovation, 2010), 59-73; Mark Beeson and Alex J. Bellamy, *Securing Southeast Asia: the politics of security sector reform* (London: Routledge, 2007).

6 David Law, „Intergovernmental Organisations and Their Role in Security Sector Reform", in *Intergovernmental Organisations and Security Sector Reform*, ed. by David Law (Berlin: Lit, 2007), 3-24.