Generals and Autocrats: How Coup-Proofing Predetermined the Military Elite's Behavior in the Arab Spring

HICHAM BOU NASSIF

WHEN THE POLICE FORCES PROVED INCAPABLE of quelling the 2011 civilian mobilizations in the Arab world, Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, Bachar al-Assad of Syria, and Zein al-Abidin Ben Ali of Tunisia asked the senior military officers commanding the armed forces to defend their regimes; only the Syrian top brass obliged. The variation in the military elite's behavior remains one of the Arab Spring's greatest riddles: why did senior officers serving authoritarian regimes meet nonviolent revolutions with repression in some cases but not in others?

That the military's role was central in shaping the uprisings' outcomes was immediately recognized by students of Arab politics. Hazem Kandil maintains that the armed forces did not defend the regime in Egypt because the police had overtaken the military's role as a privileged member of the ruling coalition; consequently, the military was no longer interested in supporting the regime.[1] Tarek Masoud notes that Mubarak neglected his party during the 2011 crisis and relied instead on the security apparatus to

[1]Hazem Kandil, *Soldiers, Spies and Statesmen: Egypt's Road to Revolt* (London: Verso, 2012), 5.

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handle the situation.[2] Masoud highlights the military's malaise vis-à-vis the rise in prominence of Mubarak's National Democratic Party throughout the regime's last years, while Joshua Stacher also pinpoints the competition with the police as a central factor driving the military's behavior in Egypt.[3] Philippe Droz-Vincent observes that some Arab regimes penetrated their armed forces through the manipulation of tribal, familial, or ethnic solidarities, while others did not, which affected the armed forces' agency in the Arab Spring.[4] Zoltan Barany notes, along similar lines, that the ethnic factor, or absence thereof, was crucial in shaping the militaries' reactions to the 2011 uprisings.[5] Gregory Gause highlights the distinction between Arab armed forces that are institutionalized and others that are less so to explain the divergence in their reactions to the uprisings.[6] While the Arab Spring initially took observers by surprise, the depth of the scholarship exhibited by these and other related studies has fleshed out important political and institutional dynamics that led to the 2011 events. Yet little attention has been paid so far to intraofficer corps interactions between the senior officers and their subordinates, despite the tremendous influence they had on the unfolding of events. In addition, except for sectarian stacking,[7] the effects of coup-proofing tactics that molded the internal structures of Arab militaries on their behavior during the uprisings have been totally ignored. The focus on group solidarities is understandable in light of the central role that sectarian stacking plays in keeping the armed forces loyal to ruling elites; however, we should keep in mind the danger stemming from exclusive reliance on identity-based explanations, namely, the dichotomization of Arab armed forces into two categories only: militaries that are constructed along sectarian or tribal lines and others that are not. This classification is misleading because it lumps together cases that should remain analytically separate. As I will show in this article, the dynamics surrounding the military elite's role in the 2011 events in Egypt and Tunisia are different, although both armed forces are largely

[2]Tarek Masoud, "The Upheavals in Egypt and Tunisia: The Road to (and from) Liberation Square," *Journal of Democracy 22* (July 2011): 20–34, at 23.
[3]Joshua Stacher, *Adaptable Autocrats: Regime Power in Egypt and Syria* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 7–8.
[4]Philippe Droz-Vincent, "From Fighting Formal Wars to Maintaining Civil Peace?," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43 (August 2011): 392–394, at 393.
[5]Zoltan Barany, "Comparing the Arab Revolts: The Role of the Military," *Journal of Democracy* 22 (October 2011): 28–39, at 30.
[6]Gregory F. Gause III, "Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring: The Myth of Authoritarian Stability," *Foreign Affairs* 90 (July/August 2011): 81–90, at 84.
[7]The literature on coup-proofing typically uses the term "ethnic stacking" as shorthand for the exploitation of special loyalties and identity markers. I prefer to use "sectarian stacking" because the affinities to which I refer in this article are structured around sects, not ethnic groups.

homogenous from a sectarian perspective. Furthermore, while the exploitation of identity-related loyalties structured the armed forces in Syria, Bahrain, Yemen, and Libya, the militaries in these countries reacted differently to the 2011 uprisings. In Syria and Bahrain, the officer corps remained united and did the regimes' bidding; in Libya and Yemen, the troops splintered, and some units defected to the opposition. It is beyond the limits of this article to include a detailed analysis of the Yemeni, Libyan, and Bahraini cases. Suffice it to say that sectarian and tribal stacking, while certainly part of the story, is not the whole of it.

I argue in this article that studying coup-proofing techniques and disaggregating officer corps into their top-brass components, on one hand, and the mid-ranking and junior officers, on the other, takes us a step further toward a deeper understanding of the 2011 events, as well as additional and nuanced theorizing. Eva Bellin points out persuasively in her study of the Arab Spring that the term "coercive apparatus" "begs for disaggregation."[8] Generally, scholars do in fact disaggregate the coercive apparatus into its military and police wings. This is an analytical imperative because the armed forces and the internal security organizations are distinct institutions, frequently separated by different interests and cultures. Yet even though they typically distinguish the armed forces' agency from that of the police, students of authoritarianism have tended to treat the military in aggregated terms, as Siddharth Chandra and Douglas Anton Kammen correctly maintain.[9]

When scholars do not model the military as a unified actor, they disaggregate it horizontally by branches (namely, the army, the navy, and the air force).[10] I contend that we gain stronger analytical traction by thinking about disaggregation in vertical rather than horizontal terms. More specifically, I disaggregate the officer corps hierarchically by separating senior from mid-ranking and junior officers. This rank-based disaggregation is important because senior officers who have the authority to issue directives depend for the actual implementation of their

[8]Eva Bellin, "Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Arab Spring," *Comparative Politics* 44 (January 2012): 127–149, at 130.

[9]Siddharth Chandra and Douglas Anton Kammen, "Generating Reforms and Reforming Generations: Military Politics in Indonesia's Democratic Transition and Consolidation," *World Politics* 55 (October 2002): 96–136, at 99.

[10]For example, a lot of the early speculations about the Egyptian military's reaction to the events focused on the dichotomy between the armed forces at large, on one hand, and the Republican Guard and air force, on the other, both of which were perceived to be more loyal to Mubarak than other corps in the military. See Paul Amar, "Why Mubarak Is Out," *Jadaliyya*, 1 February 2011, accessed at http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/516/why-mubarak-is-out, 3 February 2011.

orders on their subordinates' willingness to execute them, a classic principal–agent problem.[11] Field marshals and chiefs of staff can order their troops to quell popular uprisings, but they themselves do not open fire on unarmed civilians demonstrating in public squares. When orders to suppress the mobilization are issued, mid-ranking and junior officers become operationally in charge of the slaughter. Because the butchering of unarmed fellow countrymen is a particularly problematic task to undertake, the mid-ranking and junior officers might refuse to follow orders to suppress the mobilization; indeed, they might defect by joining the uprising.[12] Enlisted men are likely to follow orders from their immediate superiors—that is, the mid-ranking and junior officers—even if doing so entails disobeying senior officers' orders. According to Eric Nordlinger,

> While the hierarchical principle accords ultimate authority to the senior commanders, the principle also includes the dictate that primary obedience is owed to immediate, face-to-face superiors. Direct orders are always to be obeyed. And it is the middle-level officers—the colonels, majors, and captains—who are the highest rankings immediate superiors of the men who wield the guns.[13]

Consequently, when the mid-ranking and junior officers signal their refusal to repress protesters, the soldiers under their command follow. This explains why avoiding a mutiny en masse among the mid-ranking and junior officers is paramount to the military elite, whose own influence and prestige—indeed, their very raison d'être—is dependent on preserving their authority over the officer corps and the military at large. There is a consensus in the literature that officers typically prioritize maintaining hierarchy, discipline, and cohesiveness within the military over any other

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[11]David Pion-Berlin and Harold Trinkunas have used principal–agent theories of civil-military relations to explain military shirking during constitutional crises in Latin America. See "Civilian Praetorianism and Military Shirking during Constitutional Crises in Latin America," *Comparative Politics* 42 (July 2010): 395–411. In Pion-Berlin and Trinkunas's article, the autocrat is the principal who delegates authority to the military subordinates, his agents; in my framework, I treat the military elite as the principal and their subordinates as the agent. For more on principal–agent theories applied to the study of civil-military relations, see Peter Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

[12]Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan have shown that large nonviolent campaigns have about a 60 percent chance of producing loyalty shifts within security forces. See *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 48. The reluctance of soldiers to harm civilians has been identified as one of the main reasons why they defect rather than follow orders to quell unarmed protesters. See Sharon Erickson Nepstad, *Nonviolent Revolutions: Civil Resistance in the Late 20th Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 122.

[13]Eric A. Nordlinger, *Soldiers in Politics: Military Coups and Governments* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1977), 102.

goal.[14] The risk of undermining the organizational integrity of the officer corps can severely constrain the military elite's leeway and alter their line of action. If the bulk of mid-ranking and junior officers are not willing to follow orders to suppress the mobilization, senior officers will not have the capacity to defend the regime.

Of course, divergence between the military elite and the mid-ranking and junior officers is not inevitable; both the top brass and their subordinates might agree on the necessity of suppressing the mobilization. Alternatively, they might be resentful of the status quo and thus unwilling to defend the regime. The convergence of views within the officer corps, or absence thereof, will depend on the strength of linkages between the autocratic rulers, the military elite, and the mid-ranking and junior officers. I argue in this article that by shaping these linkages into different molds, coup-proofing tactics generate the following outcomes: First, some military elite have both the will to defend embattled autocrats and the capacity to protect them without jeopardizing their own authority over the officer corps. Second, other military elite have the will to save a nondemocratic regime threatened by popular mobilization but not the capacity to do so because orders to suppress the protesters, if issued, would be ignored. Finally, yet other military elite have neither the will nor the capacity to uphold the status quo.

I proceed as follows: First, I make the case that studying political change remains truncated, indeed impossible, absent a solid understanding of the military's role in revolutionary processes; the literature on social movements and, particularly, political opportunity structures does itself a disservice by neglecting the armed forces. The military needs to be brought back in. Second, I proceed with an overview of the literature on military behavior in nonviolent uprisings. Third, I present my theoretical framework and flesh out causal mechanisms accounting for the divergence in the military elite's behavior in times of uprisings. Fourth, I explain the logic behind the case selection and outline the scope of the article. Next, I apply my theoretical framework to an empirical test of the 2011 Arab Spring in Egypt, Syria, and Tunisia. I conclude by reflecting on possibilities for future research on the topic.

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[14]Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1960); Samuel E. Finer, *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1975); Samuel Decalo, *Coups and Army Rule in Africa: Studies in Military Style* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976); Barbara Geddes, "What Do We Know about Democratization after Twenty Years," *Annual Review of Political Science* 2 (1999): 115–144; and Pion-Berlin and Trinkunas, "Civilian Praetorianism and Military Shirking."

DEMOCRACY WAVES AND AUTHORITARIANISM BREAKDOWN: WHY THE MILITARY MATTERS

The literature on social movements, revolutions, and civilian uprisings highlights the centrality of political opportunity structures in generating revolutionary outcomes, yet it typically neglects studying the military, although the armed forces create, when they defect, the opportunity structure par excellence for the expansion and ultimate triumph of contestation. Doug McAdam, one of the few social movement scholars to put the state's capacity to repress, or lack thereof, at the center of his conceptualization of political opportunity structures, finds the tendency to obscure state repression in the related literature "puzzling."[15] Indeed, it is. The importance of the armed forces' role in the revolutionary process was established long ago by the classical thinkers of revolutions:

> No revolution of the masses can triumph without the help of a portion of the armed forces that sustained the old regime.[16] (Lenin)

> It is obvious that revolutions have never taken place, and will never take place, save with the aid of an important faction of the army.[17] (Le Bon)

Nearly a century after the 1917 Revolution in Russia, practically every upheaval, violent or nonviolent, has been an occasion to corroborate the views expressed above, which by now are conventional wisdom. In 1979, the triumph of the Islamic Revolution in Iran demonstrated spectacularly how dependent on military defection revolutionary triumph is. By contrast, the tragedy of Tiananmen Square in 1989 China proved how insufficient the most favorable revolutionary conditions can be—divisions within the ruling elite, media backing, widespread mobilization—in the absence of armed forces defection; the same can be said about the failure of Iran's Green Revolution in 2009. Each time a new democracy wave has challenged authoritarianism, from southern Europe to Latin America, the Philippines, eastern Europe, Indonesia, and, more recently, Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine, and the countries of the Arab Spring, the central

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[15]Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
[16]D.E.H Russell, *Rebellion, Revolution, and Armed Force: A Comparative Study of Fifteen Countries with Special Emphasis on Cuba and South Africa* (New York: Academic Press, 1974), 12.
[17]Ibid.

question has been the same: will the military answer the call for repression, or will it be part of a "dissenting alliance"?[18]

While the political role of the military has been understudied and undertheorized, there have been encouraging signs in recent years that this neglect might be waning. The agency of the military elite, in particular, has attracted renewed scholarly attention. Bellin's influential work studies the behavior of the armed forces under authoritarian regimes from the vantage point of the senior officers' ethnic, familial, and economic ties with the political elite.[19] Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alasdair Smith emphasize authoritarianism's fiscal health and the autocrats' ability to buy the loyalty of the top brass.[20] Terence Lee, for his part, maintains that cohesive military elites are more likely to defend authoritarian regimes and that the opposite is also true.[21] My work is a contribution to this growing literature. I build on insights from previous studies, as well as on 12 months of extensive fieldwork in the Middle East, to build a new framework of the behavior of the military elite in times of popular uprisings.

COUP-PROOFING, THE MILITARY ELITE, AND CIVILIAN UPRISINGS: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

James Quinlivan's often-cited 1999 article "Coup-Proofing: Its Practice and Consequences in the Middle East," remains the fundamental work on coup-proofing in the region. According to Quinlivan,

> If the essence of a coup is the seizure of the state by a small group within the state apparatus, the essence of coup-proofing is the creation of structures that minimizes the possibilities of small groups leveraging the system to such ends. I define "coup-proofing" as the set of actions a regime takes to prevent a military coup.[22]

Autocrats resort to coup-proofing in order to avoid being toppled by competitors. Yet the side effects of autocratic tactics have ramifications beyond the realm of factional struggles for power. Quinlivan suggests that

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[18]Philippe C. Schmitter, "Speculations about the Prospective Demise of Authoritarian Regimes and Its Possible Consequences" (Working paper, no. 60, The Wilson Center, Washington, D.C, 1980); and Terence Lee, "The Armed Forces and Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Explaining the Role of the Military in 1986 Philippines and 1998 Indonesia," *Comparative Political Studies* 42 (February 2009): 640–669, at 641.

[19]Bellin, "Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East."

[20]Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair Smith, *The Dictator's Handbook: Why Bad Behavior Is Almost Always Good Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2012).

[21]Lee, "The Armed Forces and Transitions from Authoritarian Rule."

[22]James T. Quinlivan, "Coup-Proofing: Its Practice and Consequences in the Middle East," *International Security* 24 (Autumn 1999): 131–165, at 133.

coup-proofing has direct and negative implications on military performance in combat, an observation made by other scholars as well.[23] Aaron Belkin and Evan Schofer contend that coup-proofing can generate greater risk of low-level military international conflict,[24] whereas Jonathan Powell argues that "structural coup-proofing" (that is, counterbalancing) actually reduces leaders' incentives to use diversionary tactics such as engaging foreign adventures.[25] Philip Roessler studies the implication of coup-proofing on internal conflict and shows that coup-proofing heightens the risk of civil war.[26]

This article addresses yet another side effect of coup-proofing that has been neglected so far.[27] I contend that coup-proofing techniques have profound implications for armed forces' behavior vis-à-vis civilian uprisings. On the basis of an extensive reading of memoirs published by prominent retired Arab generals and the literature on Arab armed forces, as well as insights gleaned from months of fieldwork in the Middle East, I identify the following methods as the most essential to, and prevalent in, coup-proofing in the Arab world: counterbalancing the military through the establishment of parallel armed forces, promoting the material interests of senior officers, and fostering shared aversions between the regime and the armed forces.[28] These techniques are not mutually exclusive;

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[23]Feaver, *Armed Servants*; Stephen Biddle and Stephen Long, "Democracy and Military Effectiveness: A Deeper Look," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48 (August 2004): 525–546; and Ulrich Pilster and Tobias Böhmelt, "Coup-Proofing and Military Effectiveness in Interstate Wars, 1967–99," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 28 (September 2011): 331–350.

[24]Aaron Belkin and Evan Schofer, "Coup Risk, Counterbalancing and International Conflict," *Security Studies* 14 (2005): 140–177.

[25]Jonathan M. Powell, "Regime Vulnerability and the Diversionary Threat of Force," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 58 (February 2014): 169–196.

[26]Philip Roessler, "The Enemy Within: Personal Rule, Coups and Civil War in Africa," *World Politics* 63 (April 2011): 300–346.

[27]An exception is Theodore McLauchlin, "Loyalty Strategies and Military Defection in Rebellion," *Comparative Politics* 44 (April 2010): 333–350.

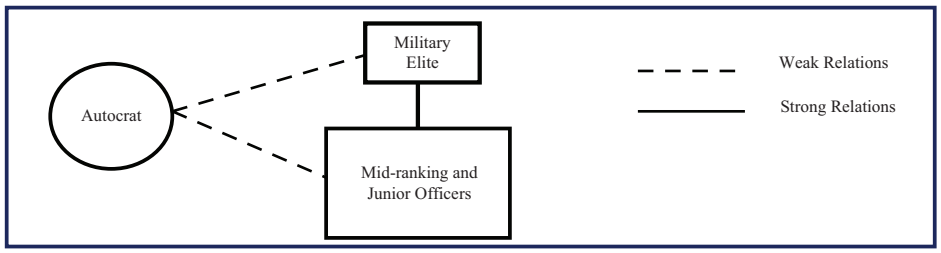
[28]Jamal Hammad, *Asrar Thawrat 23 Yolyo* [The Secrets of the 23 July Revolution] (Cairo: Dar al-'Ouloum, 2011); Sa'ad al-Din al-Chazli, *Harb October: Moudhakkarat Sa'ad al-Din al-Chazli* [The October War: Memoirs of Sa'aad al Din al-Chazli] (Cairo: Ro'ia lil Nachr wal-Tawzi', 2011); Amine Howeidi, *Khmason 'Aman Min al-'Awasif, Ma Ra' aytoho Qoultoho* [50 Years of Turmoil: I Said what I Saw] (Cairo: Markaz al-Ahram lil Tarjama wal Nachr, 2002); 'Abdullah Imam, *Al-Fariq Mohammad Fawzi, al-Naksa, al-Istnizaf, al-Sijn* [Fieldmarshall Mohammad Fawzi: The Debacle, the War of Attrition, the Prison] (Cairo: Dar al-khayyal, 2001); Mohammad al-Gawadi, *Fi 'Aakab al-Naksa, Moudhakkarat Qadat al-'Askariyya al-Masriyya* [After the debacle: The Memoirs of Egyptian Military Leaders] (1967–1972, Cairo: Dar al-Khayyal, 2001); Nikolaos Van Dam, *The Struggle for Power in Syria: Politics and Society under Asad and the Ba'th Party* (New York: I.B.Tauris, 1996); Michael Eisenstadt, "Syria's Defense Companies: Profile of a Praetorian Unit" (unpublished paper, 1989); Abdel Latif Al-Baghdadi, *Moudhakkarat* [Memoirs] (Cairo: al-Maktab al-Masri al-Hadith,1977); Khaled Muhyiddin, *Wal'an Atakallam* [Now I speak] (Cairo: Markaz al-Ahram lil Dirasat wal-Nachr, 1992); Mohammad 'Abdel-Ghani Al-Gamsy, *Moudhakkarat al-Gamsy, Harb October* [The al-Gamsy Memoirs: The October War] (San Francisco, CA: Dar Bouhouth al-Charq al-Awast al-Amirikia, 1977); and Abdel Karim Zahr al-Din, *Moudhakarati Aan al Infisal fi Souria* [My Memoirs on the Secession in Syria] (Beirut: Dar al-Itihad, 1968).

autocrats can, and have, integrated more than one in their arsenal. Yet the aforementioned methods are divergent in the control mechanisms they install over the armed forces. Consequently, they mold civil-military relations differently. Whether autocrats counterbalance, promote material interests, or manipulate shared aversions, the nature and strength of their links with the top brass, as well as with the mid-ranking and junior officers, is affected.

Counterbalancing

Some autocrats opt for keeping the armed forces in check by building rival security forces, typically the police. The quintessential example of this is communist Romania, where the Securitate, Nicolae Ceauşescu's infamous secret police, was the regime's most loyal protector.[29] In police states in which rulers distrust the military, the armed forces are kept undermanned and poorly financed. By contrast, resources are lavished on the police and paramilitary groups, which act as guardians of the established order. Two consequences ensue: First, the military is usually removed from internal security missions, which become the turf of the police. Through customary practice, the armed forces become conditioned to performing certain roles that do not include internal repression; the latter becomes anathema to their institutional culture. Inevitably, soldiers who are neither trained nor psychologically prepared to undertake police-like assignments become extremely reluctant to repress civilians, should the regime order them to. Second, the marginal position occupied by the armed forces within the regime's coercive apparatus generates a neglect of their institutional interests. The lack of resources cripples their ability to acquire advanced weaponry and imposes constraints on training, while low salaries and

FIGURE 1
Civil-Military Relations under "Counterbalancing" Technique



[29]Gerald Segal and John Phipps, "Why Communist Armies Defend Their Parties," *Asian Survey* 30 (October 1990): 959–976, at 965.

prestige complicate recruiting efforts. In addition, because the regime's coercive capacity is not fundamentally predicated on the strength of its links with the armed forces, the military elite are not integrated into its patronage network and thus do not benefit from its generosity. These conditions unite the top brass with the mid-ranking and junior officers in a common resentment of the regime, which makes the loyalty of the armed forces to the ruling elite even more questionable in times of civilian uprisings. Figure 1 shows how counterbalancing shapes civil-military relations.

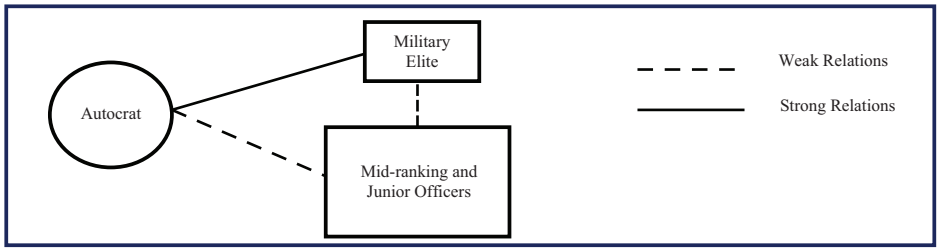
In brief, by keeping the armed forces weak, the counterbalancing technique shields the regime from coups d'état, despite the officers' malaise, because the loyalty of the police and other internal security organizations to the ruling elite creates an equilibrium that is unfavorable to military intervention.[30] However, the drawback of this technique is that the regime cannot depend on its military for support should a popular uprising challenge the status quo. Although the armed forces may not threaten autocratic rule themselves, their self-perceived raison d'être, as well as their alienation from the regime, means that officers will likely refuse to defend the regime if a massive popular uprising proves too formidable for the police alone to handle. Rather than heeding the regime's call to suppress the mobilization in its hour of need, the military will act as its gravedigger.

Promoting the Material Interests of the Military Elite

The military elite in autocratic regimes are frequently encouraged to get involved in economic activities. Officers active in business form

FIGURE 2

Civil-Military Relations under "Promoting the Material Interests of the Military Elite" Technique



[30]This does not mean that the police or the parallel military force need to be able to defeat the armed forces in a full-fledged battle; however, they must be strong and loyal enough to make the cost of a coup, and the confrontation that would ensue, prohibitive. See Quinlivan, "Coup-Proofing," 141–142; and Pilster and Böhmelt, Coup-Proofing and Military Effectiveness in Interstate Wars."

partnerships with private capital eager to benefit from their connections with the regime in exchange for commissions and financial assets. They hold lucrative managerial positions in military-dominated economic spheres, pocket kickbacks on arms trade, and appropriate public lands or sequestered properties of the regime's opponents. Because monitoring agencies are forbidden from scrutinizing their dealings, corruption among the top brass becomes rampant. Self-centered considerations wed senior officers to the regime they serve because the regime promotes their economic interests, but also because the autocrat who keeps the officers above the law can shield them from prosecution only as long as he remains in power. Autocrats who count on material incentives to coup-proof typically make their top generals wealthy, sometimes extremely so; however, rarely do they possess enough resources to make the mid-ranking and younger officers, let alone the rank and file, also affluent. Because the private goods that are lavished on the top brass do not trickle down, the officer corps becomes divided into two camps: senior officers who are loyal to the regime and mid-ranking and junior officers who are critical of it. A similar dichotomy was at play in Venezuela during the 1980s, when the wages and benefits of military officers failed to keep up with inflation:

> In the context of declining living standards, the growing corruption in military procurement among both civilian politicians and senior military officers simply infuriated many officers. . . . The failure to satisfactorily resolve many of these cases reinforced suspicions among the public and within the officer corps of the incompetence and dishonesty of senior military and political figures. Junior officers, who were expected to exhibit exemplary honesty in their own affairs, were offended by the enrichment of senior military officers and civilian politicians at a time when their own families suffered financial hardship and their troops lacked proper uniforms, food and lodging.[31]

The dichotomy in the officer corps severely restricts the leeway of the military elite should a nonviolent revolution threaten the continuity of authoritarian rule. Although the top brass are likely willing to impede change, they will not necessarily have the capacity to do so because their subordinates are less eager to defend the status quo. In order to avoid losing control over their subordinates, the top brass withdraw support from the embattled political elite, not because they have an interest in change but because the fear of a potential mutiny within the officer corps

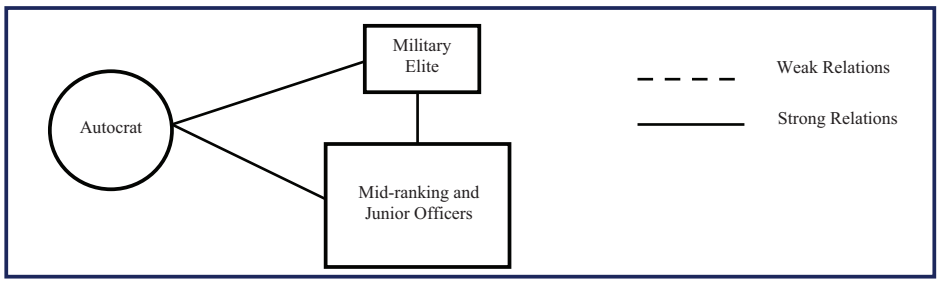
[31]Harold Trinkunas, *Crafting Civilian Control of the Military in Venezuela: A Comparative Perspective* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 176–177.

deprives them of the capacity to stop it. These dynamics are captured by Figure 2.

Fostering Shared Aversions

Perceptions of common threats and shared aversions and worldviews also wed militaries to nondemocratic regimes. When an autocrat in power becomes the symbol of a value system or an idea that is held dear by the soldiers serving under him, they are less likely to threaten his rule, especially if the vacuum created by his downfall could be filled by a loathed "other." Shared aversions can be built on either political ideology or identity-centered solidarity bonds—autocrats have manipulated both types of ideational links to garner the loyalty of their militaries. The contemporary history and societal structure of countries in the developing world have provided fertile terrain for autocrats to use ideology, or identity-related solidarity, to wed the armed forces to their regimes. Because the newly independent states after World War II had been under colonial domination for decades, sometimes centuries, rulers manipulated widespread animosities vis-à-vis former colonial masters, and the West in general, to build legitimacy on the basis of national militancy and struggle against hegemonic imperialism.[32] In addition, because the new states frequently joined together groups separated by rifts perceived to be primordial, autocrats of heterogeneous societies skewed their militaries by exploiting ethnic, sectarian, regional, or clannish loyalties. They estimated, often correctly, that soldiers in societies in which political loyalties break along identity-related lines are more likely to be devoted to autocratic rule when they hail from the same community as the power elite. Unlike the alienation of armed forces kept in check through the balancing technique, militaries that share a common threat perception with the

FIGURE 3
Civil-Military Relations under "Fostering Shared Aversions" Technique



[32]Gamal Abdel-Nasser of Egypt was a case in point.

political elite are more likely to identify with the regime and to defend it as their own; whereas relying strictly on material incentives puts only senior officers on the regime's side, ideational links based on shared aversions deliver the loyalty of the skewed officer corps as a whole, not just the military elite. If antiregime demonstrators take to the streets, shared aversions facilitate autocrats' efforts to frame them as "others"—agents of foreign powers and enemies of the ruling elite's religious, ethnic, or tribal group. Figure 3 shows how fostering shared aversions structures civil-military relations.

CASE SELECTION AND SCOPE

Similar circumstances surrounded the three cases under study in this article. The Tunisian, Egyptian, and Syrian militaries faced nearly simultaneous popular movements sharing the same common features: protest size (beyond tens of thousands), goal (regime change), and tactics (nonviolent mobilization).[33] The senior officers commanding the three militaries were all serving under autocrats who were ready to use force in order to quell the uprisings and stay in power. Against this common backdrop, the military elite's responses diverged. In Tunisia, the top officers precipitated the regime's fall by protecting the protestors from police attacks; in Egypt, the military elite favored keeping the status quo but refrained from using force to uphold it. Like their Egyptian counterparts, the Syrian top officers' disposition was also proregime. Unlike the Egyptians, however, they did not balk at using force to break civilian mobilization.

Three clarifications about the dependent variable and unit of analysis are needed. First, what I address is the behavior of senior officers in times of popular uprisings. While the military elite's predisposition to defend the regimes under which they serve, or lack thereof, affects autocrats' chances of survival, this article is not, strictly speaking, about regime change and continuity. Other factors also contribute to these outcomes, such as the intervention of foreign powers in domestic upheavals. These factors, and the question of regime change, are outside the scope of my framework. In brief, this is not an article about the *outcomes* of civilian uprisings but the military elite's *behavior* during the protests. Second, this article is strictly concerned with inclusive *nonviolent* challenges to autocratic regimes. When armed insurgents shoot at soldiers, the latter are likely to shoot back, if only to save their lives. By contrast, civilian protesters are unarmed,

[33]The Syrian uprising ultimately turned into armed insurgency, of course, but that came months after sustained and peaceful protests. Originally, the mobilization in Syria shared the very same features as those in Tunisia and Egypt.

which makes the decision to open fire on them more problematic—and thus more interesting to study. In addition, insurgent groups confine their membership to a restrained number of activists, for security reasons, whereas participation in nonviolent revolutions is open to all; inevitably, civilian uprisings project a more inclusive (nonpartisan) image than ideologically committed insurgents, which adds a further layer of complication to the always unpleasant task of repression. I examine the military elite's behavior when protests are both peaceful and widespread; the armed forces campaigns against Islamic insurgents that were recurrent in many Arab countries during the 1980s and 1990s remain outside the scope of this article. In brief, the three features of the protests that I mention earlier—size, goal, and tactics—are limiting conditions for the applicability of my causal model. If the size of a protest does not reach a critical mass capable of mounting an effective challenge to the authorities, if its goal is not regime change, or if its tactics are violent, my framework does not apply. Finally, the military elite are the unit of analysis in this article. By that I mean the commanders of the armed forces, officers promoted to the ranks of field marshal, lieutenant general, general, major general, and brigadier general.

THE MILITARY ELITE AND THE 2011 UPRISINGS

That seemingly entrenched Arab autocrats could suddenly be toppled was not a novelty in the 2011 Arab Spring. Before their regimes stabilized in the late 1970s, the tenure of Arab rulers was frequently interrupted by coups d'état, and leaders were unceremoniously exiled, imprisoned, or killed. The events of 2011 were paradigmatically different because the dynamics that culminated in regime change in four Arab countries were initially triggered by street activists, not officers. This was unprecedented. One nonviolent Middle Eastern revolution had toppled a dictator previously, but that was in 1979 Iran, not in the Arab world. Until 2011, when Arab dictators worried about losing power, they feared coups, not civilian uprisings—and rightly so.[34] The conventional wisdom that autocratic rulers dread their armed forces more than foreign invasions or other domestic threats certainly applies to the Arab world. From the postwar years until well into

[34]That autocrats have more often lost office through coups than through popular uprisings is an observation that is true worldwide, not just in the Arab region. Milan Svolik's data set pertaining to nonconstitutional exists of leaders in dictatorships shows that of 303 autocrats included, 32 were removed in the wake of popular uprisings, 30 stepped down as pressure to democratize became irrepressible, 20 were assassinated, and 16 were removed by foreign interventions, whereas 205 lost power to a successful coup (Milan Svolik, "Power-sharing and Leadership Dynamics in Authoritarian Regimes," *American Journal of Political Science* 53 (April 2009): 477–478).

the 1970s, coups d'état in the Middle East were so frequent that they were later described as the "main vehicle for regime change and instability in the region."[35] In only eight years from 1961 to 1969, 27 coups occurred in Arab countries. From 1949 to 1980, 55 coups were staged, 31 of which were successful.[36] Inevitably, Arab autocrats, whose right to rule was always in question, were permanently on the defensive: their politics became similar to what Joel Migdal labels the "politics of survival."[37]

Two processes ensued from the pervasiveness of the coup threat: First, regime maintenance became coterminous with coup-proofing. Second, officers who seized power through coups took all the measures necessary to avoid losing office the same way they had captured it; not even winning the wars with Israel was more important for them than regime security.[38] Progressively, Arab autocrats pushed the process of coup-proofing to a highly developed stage, and coups waned during the 1970s.[39] That coup-proofing proved successful ensured that the techniques that had made it so would endure. In addition, coup-proofing techniques became self-reinforcing: they created networks of powerful military actors whose influence and interests were dependent on making the reversal of the established pattern of civil-military relations difficult.

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[35]Raymond Hinnebusch, "Authoritarian Persistence, Democratization Theory and The Middle East: An Overview and Critique," *Democratization* 13 (June 2006): 373–395.

[36]Eliezer Be'eri, "The Waning of the Military Coup in Arab Politics," *Middle Eastern Studies* 18 (January 1982): 69–81.

[37]Joel Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).

[38]An anecdote from the memoirs of Major General Madkour Abou al-Iz captures eloquently the extent to which the priority of coup-proofing came to override all others among Arab leaders. Abou al-Iz was appointed commander of the Egyptian air force after its crushing defeat in 1967. Rebuilding the air force was the most indispensable condition for Egypt's military recovery, and Abou al-Iz was in need of officers capable of training new pilots. Yet Egyptian president Gamal Abdul-Nassser ordered him to dismiss 10 officers, all of whom were accomplished trainers in the air force, because they had relatives who belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood (see al-Gawadi, *Fi 'Aakab al-Naksa*, 119). In Syria, Hafez al-Assad's praetorian guards, the Defense Companies, enjoyed preferential access to Soviet weapons that the Syrian armed forces were receiving prior to the 1973 war with Israel, not because their assigned function in the upcoming battles but because they played a fundamental role in al-Assad's coup-proofing strategy (see Eisenstadt, "Syria's Defense Companies," 4). Similarly, the political leadership in Egypt gave priority to concerns related to regime security rather than strategic considerations when it allocated shipments of Soviet tanks to its different military units prior to the 1973 war. It made sure to keep a balance of power among the mechanized brigades so that none could pose a threat to the al-Sadat regime, even though the scattering of Soviet tanks among several brigades rather than concentrating them in a few was less efficient from a strictly military perspective (see al-Chazli, *Harb October,* 192–193). Other examples in the same vein are abound.

[39]Jonathan Powell and Clayton Thyne maintain that 72 coups were mounted in the Middle East from 1950 to 2010. See "Global Instances of Coups from 1950 to 2010: A New Dataset," *Journal of Peace Research* 48 (March 2011): 249–259, at 255. If, as Be'eri reports ("The Waning of the Military Coup in Arab Politics,"), 55 coups were staged in the three decades preceding 1980, then only 17 were triggered in the three decades that followed, a testimony to the effectiveness of coup-proofing.

In a word, the methods used by Arab autocrats to coup-proof became path dependent.[40] Because the top brass were performing within an institutional environment shaped by decades of coup-proofing, it is crucial to keep the historical background in mind rather than take a snapshot view of the 2011 events.

The Military Elite in Egypt: The Will but Not the Capacity to Defend the Regime

Putsches were frequent in the contemporary history of Egypt from the 1950s to the 1970s. In 1952, Gamal Abdel-Nasser and his Free Officers associates mounted a coup, abolished the monarchy, and established the republic. From then until his death in 1970, Nasser faced at least five coup attempts, all unsuccessful.[41] Nasser's successor in office, Anwar al-Sadat, faced two.[42] To coup-proof, Sadat relied on a system of quick rotation in the commandership of the Egyptian Armed Forces (EAF) and divide-and-rule tactics aimed at preventing military leaders from developing a following within the military's ranks.[43] In addition, Sadat strengthened the police and the Central Security Forces (CSF) to balance the military and break its hegemony over coercive means.[44] Finally, he actively encouraged the economic turn of the armed forces and their involvement in business, thus providing the top brass with venues to pursue their private material interests unhindered by monitoring agencies. The seeds of what would become a military-dominated economic empire were planted under Sadat's rule. The combined effects of these tactics contributed to the waning of coups in Egypt by the early 1970s.

When Hosni Mubarak became president in 1981, he discarded Sadat's permanent reshuffling of military commanders, but not the two other coup-proofing techniques, namely, counterbalancing and promoting the privileges of the military elite. Throughout Mubarak's long tenure, the forces controlled by the Interior Ministry kept growing; by the last years of

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[40]Paul Pierson, *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 4.

[41]See, respectively, Hammad, *Asrar Thawrat 23 Yolyo*; Muhyiddin, *Wal'an Atakallam*; al-Baghdadi, *Moudhakkarat*; and George Haddad, *Revolution and Military Rule in the Middle East: The Arab States*, Part II, *Egypt, the Sudan, Yemen and Libya* (New York: Robert Speller and Sons, 1973).

[42]Mohammad Fawzi, *Istratijiat al-Musalaha* [The Reconciliation Strategy] (Cairo: Dar al-Mustaqbal al-'Arabi, 1986); Anis Mansour, *Min Awraq al-Sadat* [From Sadat's Papers] (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 2010); and al-Chazli, *Harb October*.

[43]See Robert Springborg, *Mubarak's Egypt: Fragmentation of the Political Order* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989).

[44]Kandil, *Soldiers, Spies and Statesmen*, 170.

his rule, the police had swelled to more than a million men, whereas the CSF counted 450,000 conscripts in its ranks.[45] The budget of the Interior Ministry also expanded, rising from $1.05 billion in 1990 to $3.68 billion in 2008—a rate of increase three times that of the defense budget. Although the troops controlled by the Interior Ministry never became a match for the armed forces in military terms, they did represent 1.5 times the size of the EAF.[46] Through sheer numbers, they had to be taken into consideration in any balance of power calculation if the military—or a section of it—decided to move against the regime.

That the military resented the increasing importance of the Interior Ministry was an open secret in Egypt; not only were the police a competitor for the state's resources, but also it was well known that the Interior Ministry was a firm supporter of *tawrith* (inherited rule), that is, Gamal Mubarak's bid to replace his father, Hosni Mubarak, as president of Egypt, whereas the military was unenthusiastic about that prospect. Yet Mubarak's other coup-proofing tactic, promoting the privileges of the military elite, solidly wedded the top brass to his regime despite their bitter rivalry with the police. Under Mubarak, the senior officers secured postretirement appointments to prized civilian positions in the state's bureaucracy. Of the five officers who were appointed chiefs of staff of the Egyptian navy and retired under Mubarak, two became presidents of the national navigation company and another was appointed president of the Suez Canal Authority. Of the five officers who were appointed chiefs of staff of the Egyptian air force and retired under Mubarak, three were nominated as ambassadors; one became a governor; and another, Ahmad Chafiq, was appointed minister of aviation and then prime minister. Finally, of the 21 officers who were appointed chiefs of staffs of the second and third Egyptian field armies—the main infantry brigades in Egypt—10 were appointed governors; three were nominated as directors of the Arab Industrial Organization, Egypt's main weapons manufacturer; one was nominated as director of the national statistics bureau; and another, Mohammad Tantawi, became Mubarak's long-serving minister of defense.[47] Table 1 shows the extent to which local government in particular was stacked with retired major generals.

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[45]Kandil, *Soldiers, Spies and Statesmen,* 195; and Hillel Frisch, "Guns and Butter in the Egyptian Army," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 5 (Summer 2001): 1–12, at 6.

[46]Yezid Sayigh, *Above the State: The Officers' Republic in Egypt* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012), 6.

[47]For details about who got what under Mubarak in the Egyptian officer corps, see Hicham Bou Nassif, "Wedded to Mubarak: The Second Career and Financial Rewards of Egypt's Military Elite, 1981–2011," *Middle East Journal* 67 (Fall 2013): 509–530.

TABLE 1
Professional Background of Governors under Mubarak, by Decade[a]

	1981–1989	*1990–1999*	*2000–2011*	*Total*
Senior military officers	9/30 (30%)	28/67 (42%)	26/59 (44%)	63/156 (40%)
Police officers	11/30 (37%)	11/67 (16%)	12/59 (20%)	34/156 (22%)
Civilians	10/30 (33%)	28/67 (42%)	21/59 (36%)	59/156 (38%)

Notes: a. See Hicham Bou Nassif, "Wedded to Mubarak: The Second Career and Financial Rewards of Egypt's Military Elite from 1981 till 2011," *The Middle East Journal* 67 (Winter 2013): 509–530, at 517.

The economic reforms that began in the 1990s facilitated the transformation of the power wielded by the senior officers into wealth. Businessmen in Egypt had the resources to buy what the generals-turned-bureaucrats had the authority to sell, namely, public lands and companies, and the collaboration between the top brass and wealthy entrepreneurs proved profitable to both sides. In addition to postretirement second careers in the bureaucracy and local government, the armed forces' parallel economy—what Robert Springborg famously coined "Military, Inc."[48]—gave top officers additional opportunities for self-enrichment in an environment that was deliberately kept beyond the reach of monitoring agencies. While no in-depth study on the fortunes amassed by the military elite under Mubarak is available, a recent study suggests that some retired major generals earned monthly salaries ranging from $16,670 to $166,670.[49] Retired Major General Mohammad al Kachef, former vice president of the Egyptian antidrug agency, revealed in an interview that some officers occupying postretirement civilian positions earned $83,000 per month.[50]

Understandably, the senior officers had a vested interest in preserving such a favorable status quo. When events began unfolding in Egypt on 25 January 2011, the Egyptian military elite hoped at first that Mubarak would be able to deal with the protesters and uphold the status quo. That the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) met without the president—thus publicly dissociating itself from Mubarak—only on 10 February, whereas the events had begun two weeks earlier, indicates that the top officers were initially disinclined to let Mubarak fall, until they ran out of options.[51] SCAF members were asked several times about

[48]Nadine Marroushi, "U.S. Expert: Leadership of 'Military Inc.' Is Running Egypt," *Egypt Independent*, 26 October 2011.
[49]Sayigh, *Above the State,* 5.
[50]Hanum al-Finshani, "al-Kashif: Mukalimat Telefun Tahmi Tujjar al Mukhaddarat" [A Telephone Call Protects Drug Dealers], *al-Wafd,* 1 April 2011.
[51]Holger Albrecht and Dina Bishara, "Back on Horseback: The Military and Political Transformation in Egypt," *Middle East Law and Governance* 3 (2011): 13–23.

the reason for their inaction during the first days of the revolution. Their answers reveal that the military elite were indeed far from eager to drive Mubarak out:

> At the beginning, we gave the presidential institution the full opportunity to manage events. If it were able to succeed, nothing would have happened. We would have pulled our people back to the barracks. But they were incapable of responding to the events.[52]

> We gave Mubarak a chance to fix the deteriorating situation, but he could not. So we had to intervene.[53]

> The Egyptian military will not do what the Tunisian counterparts did with Ben-Ali.[54]

Yet not all the officers were happy with the regime. Mubarak wedded the top brass to his rule through a system of material incentives built on pecuniary rewards and the promise of a highly remunerated postretirement career. The mid-ranking and junior officers did considerably less well under his rule, however:

> A freshly graduated second-lieutenant from the military academy earns 2,000 pound a month maximum ($280). He may pay parts of his salary as a monthly installment for an apartment. But he also may have to wait for years, sometimes three to five, to get that apartment. He also benefits from a loan to buy a car and from a good health care system in military hospitals. He doesn't get any help for paying the education of his children. Under these conditions, the junior and mid-ranking officers were struggling financially. There was a widespread feeling among Egyptians that the regime was stealing the country—that there was a group of thieves around Gamal Mubarak pillaging Egypt. The officers were certainly aware of what the people were saying and they were affected by the prevalent atmosphere. That was particularly true among the junior officers who were not able to get married because of the lack of financial means or who did not get an apartment—they were particularly critical of Mubarak.[55]

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[52]"Egyptian Generals Speak about the Revolution, Elections," *Washington Post,* 18 May 2011.
[53]Interview with a SCAF general, 13 December 2011, in "Lost in Transition: The World According to Egypt's SCAF" (Report 121, International Crisis Group, 24 April 2012).
[54]The Egyptian chief of staff, Lieutenant General Sami Anan, speaking in Washington during the first day of the mobilization in Egypt. See Atef Said, "The Paradox of Transition to 'Democracy' under Military Rule," *Social Research* 79 (Summer 2012): 397–434, at 401.
[55]Interview with Major General (Ret.) Mohammad Qadri Said (army), Cairo, 1 July 2012.

This means that while mid-ranking and junior officers were doing comparatively better than their counterparts in the civilian bureaucracy, they were struggling financially, while Mubarak's allies, including the armed forces' senior officers, were becoming rich. In fact, the dichotomy between the senior officers and their subordinates did not go unnoticed prior to the uprising. Cables from the whistle-blower WikiLeaks website reveal that foreign diplomats described the mid-level officer corps as "generally disgruntled." Three years before the 2011 uprisings, cables reported that "the mid-level officers do not necessarily share their superiors' fealty to the regime" and that the commander of the armed forces, Field Marshall Tantawi, was unpopular among younger officers, who accused him of being "Mubarak's poodle."[56] The pervasive resentment among the lower ranks of the officer corps was evident in October 2011, shortly after the fall of Mubarak, when 500 mid-ranking and junior officers stationed in Alexandria assembled at the headquarters of the Air Defense Academy to protest harsh treatment and low wages. Young officers present at the gathering accused their senior colleagues of hoarding millions, while they struggled to make ends meet.[57]

It is also important to keep in mind that Egypt's is an army of conscripts. The latter were not ready to follow orders to fire on the population.[58] This, in fact, is unsurprising considering that many conscripts had members of their own families participating in the protests; add to this the fact that the financial situation of the conscripts was worse than that of the mid-ranking and junior officers. Consequently, the conscripts were even less eager to defend the regime than their immediate superiors. Mid-ranking and junior officers could not have been eager to give orders that they suspected would not be obeyed by the rank and file.

The friction between the upper and lower levels of the officer corps set the background for the military elite's behavior in 2011. To be sure, SCAF did announce on 31 January that the armed forces were aware of the legitimacy of the people's demands;[59] Sami Annan had preempted

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[56]Cable ID: 08CAIRO0291, "Academics See the Military in Decline, but Retaining Strong Influence," 23 September 2008.

[57]According to a major present at the officers' meeting, "Military ranks struggle like the rest of Egyptians because, like Egyptians society, the wealth is concentrated at the top and does not trickle down. You have to reach a specific rank before wealth is unlocked." Marwa Awad, "Special Report: In Egypt's Military, a March for Change," Reuters, 10 April 2012; see also Patrick Galey, "Why the Egyptian Military Fears a Captains' Revolt," *Foreign Policy*, 16 February 2012, accessed at http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/02/16/why-the-egyptian-military-fears-a-captains-revolt/, 22 March 2015.

[58]Interview with Mohammad Qadri Said.

[59]Samia Nakhoul, "Egypt Army: Will Not Use Violence against Citizens," Reuters, 31 January 2011, accessed at http://af.reuters.com/article/egyptNews/idAFLDE70U2JC20110131, 25 April 2013.

military intervention on behalf of the regime by his announcement of neutrality on television.[60] But the behavior of the military elite stands in stark contrast to their rhetoric. The agency of Egypt's top brass throughout the uprising reflects both their preferences, leaning toward the regime, and their inability to uphold the status quo because of the divergence separating them from their subordinates. As explained earlier, for two weeks after the mobilization began, the military elite gave Mubarak time to manage the situation. On 30 January, air force jets flew menacingly over the assembled crowds in Tahrir Square. Although a lot of ink has been spilled about the alleged fierce loyalty of the air force to Mubarak—a former officer in that branch of the military—the truth is that the jets could not have been ordered to fly over the crowds absent a directive from the SCAF and from Tantawi personally.[61] This means that SCAF as a whole was on the side of Mubarak, not just the air force. When, on 2 February, regime loyalists launched the infamous Battle of the Camel, riding into the protesters' ranks with whips and clubs, the soldiers were ordered to remain neutral. In effect, the military allowed the proregime thugs' assault to proceed, although some rogue officers tried to protect the protesters.[62] The military might also be responsible for the abduction and torture of protesters, some of whom were killed or simply "disappeared."[63] Unlike their Tunisian counterparts, the Egyptian senior officers did not intervene to prevent the police, or the regime's hired supporters, from exerting extreme violence on the protesters. Initially, they "hedged their bets."[64]

Yet when it became clear that saving the regime required quelling the demonstrators, the military elite balked at issuing orders for soldiers to shoot at the protesters. They had little other choice. Practically from the first day of the uprising, the mood within the lower echelons of the officer corps and the rank and file at large was supportive of the mobilization. The signals sent from the streets of Cairo were unmistakable. Soldiers and protesters were hugging and fraternizing on television. Major Ahmad Shouman publicly visited the site of the uprising on 10 February, along

[60]Cheryl Pellerin, "Egypt's Military Remains Neutral, Mullens Says," American Forces Press Service, 4 February 2011, accessed at http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=62693, 25 April 2013.
[61]Hicham Bou Nassif, "Why Didn't the Egyptian Army Shoot?," *Middle East Report* 42 (Winter 2012): 18–21, at 19.
[62]Said, "The Paradox of Transition," 410.
[63]Evan Hill and Muhammad Mansour, "Egypt's Army Took Part in Torture and Killings during Revolution, Report Shows," *The Guardian*, 10 April 2013, accessed at http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/apr/10/egypt-army-torture-killings-revolution, 10 April 2013.
[64]Barany, "Comparing the Arab Revolts," 31.

with 15 other mid-ranking and junior officers.[65] Their defection greatly alarmed the SCAF; the military leaders feared that a cascade of defection will follow.[66] Tank commanders in Tahrir were tearing off the headsets through which they received orders from their superiors.[67] One colonel pledged to cut his own hands "before firing one bullet" on the protesters.[68] It was unambiguous that the officer corps was not ready to commit a massacre in order to keep Mubarak in power:

> The Egyptian mid-rank and junior officers would not have obeyed orders to shoot on civilians; they are not psychologically prepared to do so. This is not their job, but that of the police if need be.[69]

> Tantawi was personally loyal to Mubarak. He tried to save him. But he understood that upholding the status quo required a large slaughter which the officer corps would not hear of. Had SCAF ordered the mid-ranking and junior officers to shoot on civilians, they would have turned their weapons against SCAF. The officer corps would have splintered along generational lines. Tantawi refrained from opening fire on the protesters not to protect the revolution, but to safeguard the unity of the armed forces.[70]

These quotations are straightforward; quelling the uprising was not an option for SCAF. Mubarak's coup-proofing techniques delivered the loyalty of the military elite only. The president and the top brass developed solid bonds of mutual interest, but no such links existed between him Mubarak and the younger officers. Nor were they wedded to him ideationally through a conception of common threat or shared aversions—the homogenous nature of Egyptian society precluded Mubarak from "othering" the protesters, the way Bachar al-Assad did in Syria. In addition, the professional identity of these officers excluded repression from the realm of permissible roles. This means that Mubarak's coercive system was built on an inherent contradiction: while the mid-ranking and junior officers would be in charge of heeding his call for repression, should the armed forces be needed to keep him in power, they were not the ones who actually

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[65]Marwa Awad, "Egypt Army Officer Says 15 Others Join Protesters," Reuters, 11 February 2011, accessed at http://www.theguardian.com/world/blog/2011/feb11/egypt-protest-mubarak, 25 April 2013.
[66]Interview with a retired major general, Cairo, 10 June 2012.
[67]Robert Fisk, "As Mubarak Clings On...What Now for Egypt?," *The Independent,* 11 February 2011, accessed at http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/fisk/robert-fisk-as-mubarak-clings-on-what-now-for-egypt-2211287.html, 22 March 2015.
[68]Kandil, *Soldiers, Spies and Statesmen,* 226.
[69]Interview with Mohammad Qadri Said.
[70]Interview with Abdullah Sinnawi, Egyptian daily Ashourouk columnist and commentator on Egyptian armed forces affairs, Cairo, 2 July 2012.

benefited from his regime and were deeply resentful of police-like assignments. Expectedly, those without a special interest in the status quo were not prepared to kill their unarmed countrymen in order to uphold it, a fact the military elite were aware of. Reluctantly, the top brass abandoned Mubarak to his fate because their subordinates rendered them incapable of saving him. In the words of a diplomat in Cairo, SCAF could not ask Egyptian soldiers to fire on the people lest they trigger "something like the Russian Revolution."[71]

A detailed analysis of the 2013 coup that ousted President Mohammad Morsi from power, and the ensuing events, falls outside the scope of this study, which is centered on the 2011 mobilizations. Still, it is interesting to note that the behavior of the military elite in 2013 corroborates my analysis. I have argued in this article that the Egyptian top brass did not favor the 2011 uprising. Yet the generals were unable to break the civilian mobilizations because their subordinates in the officer corps were not ready to use force against protestors. In 2013, the dynamics within the officer corps were markedly different. Expectedly, the overthrow of Morsi triggered a new wave of civilian protests in the streets. The difference between the protests in 2011 and 2013 stemmed from the nature of the mobilization, however. The uprising against Mubarak was cross-sectional and nonpartisan; it reflected the composition of Egyptian society as a whole. By contrast, the 2013 protests were strictly confined to the supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood. The officers were united in their opposition to the Muslim Brothers, irrespective of their rank in the military hierarchy, for two reasons. First, Egyptian officers are socialized into thinking that the Brothers are disloyal to Egypt because of their attachment to an imagined transnational nation of Muslim peoples. In the words of an observer of Egyptian military politics, the officers believe that the Brothers are "not Egyptian" (*Mosh Masriyyin*).[72] My extensive interviews with Egyptian officers conducted in the winter of 2014 substantiate this view.[73] Second, the officers believe that the Brothers keep a military wing that they use against their opponents. Officers and soldiers dispatched to monitor the protests of the Brothers were nervous and feared for their safety.[74] This was not the case in 2011. Consequently, the military elite in 2013 could count on the mid-ranking and junior officers to break the 2013

[71]Galey, "Why the Egyptian Military Fears a Captains' Revolt."
[72]Interview with Abdullah Sinnawi, Cairo, 9 March 2014.
[73]Hicham Bou Nassif, "Culture, Interests and Institutions: Why the Generals Are Back in Egypt" (manuscript under review).
[74]Interview with a retired major general in the Egyptian General Intelligence who did not wish to be named, Cairo, 23 March 2014.

mobilizations by violent means. Unlike 2011, the orders to shoot at the protesters did not threaten the unity of the officer corps—nor, for that matter, did the coup against Morsi.

The Military Elite in Syria: The Will and the Capacity to Defend the Regime

During the 1950s and 1960s, Syria shared with Iraq the dubious privilege of being the most coup-prone country in the Arab world. Fifteen coups were staged in Damascus between 1949 and 1970, three of which occurred in 1949 alone.[75] In 1970, Minister of Defense Hafez al-Assad mounted yet another coup and became the master of Syria until his death in 2000.[76] It was not inevitable that the wave of Syrian coups, uninterrupted between 1949 and 1970, should recede in the following three decades. If it did, it was because al-Assad surpassed all his predecessors as a master centralizer of power. I earlier stated that the three coup-proofing techniques described in this article are not mutually exclusive; al-Assad efficaciously combined them all in his control system.

First, al-Assad counterbalanced the regular troops by building five parallel units in charge of regime security. These included the Defense Companies, the Republican Guard, the Special Forces, the Third Armored Division, and Unit 549, all headed by the president's close family members. These organizations were mainly deployed in and around the Syrian capital of Damascus, and they functioned independently of the armed forces leadership. Second, al-Assad wedded the senior officers to his rule by promoting their material interests. He allowed the military barons of his regime to amass huge wealth by building economic partnerships with prominent businessmen, a trend that began in the wake of the 1973 war, when Syria benefited from a windfall of international loans, as well as from the generosity of Arab donors flush with money after the explosion in oil prices.[77] Finally, al-Assad skewed his military by heavily staking the officer corps with members hailing from his Alawi sect. A seasoned observer of Syrian politics, Eyal Zisser, contends that at the time

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[75]Gordon Torrey, *Syrian Politics and the Military, 1945–1958* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press. 1964); Quinlivan, "Coup-Proofing."

[76]Itamar Rabinovitch, *Syria under the Ba'ath, 1963–1966: The Army-Party Symbiosis* (Jerusalem: Israel University Press, 1972); Patrick Seale, *Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); and Van Dam, *The Struggle for Power in Syria.*

[77]Seale, *Asad of Syria,* 319; Eyal Zisser, "The Syrian Army: Between the Domestic and the External Fronts," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 5 (March 2001), accessed at http://www.gloria-center.org/2001/03/zisser-2001-03-01/, 22 June 2012.

al-Assad died in 2000, 90 percent of officers carrying the rank of general were Alawis.[78]

When Bachar al-Assad became president in 2000, the coup-proofing tactics mentioned earlier remained unchanged. Like his father, al-Assad balanced the military through praetorian units, the most prominent of them the all-Alawi Fourth Armored Division (Al-Firqa al-Rabiaa) headed by his brother, Maher al-Assad. In addition, Bachar al-Assad turned a blind eye, and even encouraged, intertwining Syrian business networks with the top brass. In a recent book, Bassam Haddad puts the number of military leaders converting their coercive power into economic assets at around several hundred, including top generals, their deputies, loyal underlings, and former heads of security organizations—all part of the military elite.[79] As soldiers, senior officers are not allowed to be publicly involved in business, but they still can operate through partners, to whom they provide protection in exchange for commissions and private rewards. Unlike the Gulf countries, Syria's oil exports are insubstantial. They cannot provide the regime with a solid monetary dividend to distribute on senior officers. However, because Syria depends on importing many luxuries and essentials, the import licenses became an important source of financial advantages that the regime used to keep its clients satisfied.[80] Finally, Bachar al-Assad kept the officer corps skewed in favor of Alawis.[81] In brief, the control mechanism developed by Hafez al-Assad remained very much the same under his son, Bachar. How did it structure the agency of the Syrian military elite in 2011?

Although balancing typically fosters resentment vis-à-vis the regime within the officer corps, the negative effects of this tactic on civil-military relations in Syria were offset by the other two techniques described earlier, namely, promoting the material interests of the military elite and fostering shared aversions.

The top brass have little interest in change because they benefit handsomely from the status quo. In addition, the military elite, as well as mid-ranking and junior officers, are loyal to Bachar al-Assad

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[78]Eyal Zisser, "Appearance and Reality: Syria's Decision-Making Structure," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 2 (May 1998), accessed at http://www.gloria-center.org/1998/05/zisser-1998-05-05/, 20 June 2012.

[79]Bassam Haddad, *Business Networks in Syria*: *The Political Economy of Authoritarian Resilience* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 68.

[80]Quinlivan, "Coup-Proofing," 154.

[81]A recent study maintains that Alawis form 80 percent of the officer corps and 70 percent of the army's 200,000 career soldiers, although Sunnis form the majority of its 300,000 conscripts. See Joseph Holliday, "The Struggle for Syria in 2011: An Operational and Regional Analysis" (Middle East Security Report 2, Institute for the Study of War, Washington, DC, December 2011), 10–11.

because of bonds of sectarian solidarity. The president and his officers all share the same aversion to the (Sunni) Muslim Brothers and other Islamist organizations, which are likely to emerge as serious contenders for power in a post-al-Assad Syria. Whether they occupy senior, mid-ranking, or junior positions, Alawi officers fear that their group will be targeted by retaliatory attacks and suffer from discrimination should the regime fall. This means that the military elite, who have the incentive to defend the status quo, also have the capacity to do so without undercutting their control of the officer corps because the bulk of their subordinates will not eschew violence against the Sunni "other." In addition, sectarian antagonism means that Syrian officers never developed an institutional culture excluding internal repression from the realm of the armed forces' permissible roles: since the time Hafez al-Assad seized power until the present, the military remained intimately involved in internal security and political repression—the Hama massacre in 1982 being the most tragic case in point. In sum, unlike their Tunisian counterparts, the Syrian military elite had no incentive to turn their back on their embattled president; in contrast to the Egyptian top brass, they could issue orders to shoot at civilians without putting the organizational coherence of the officer corps at stake or endangering their control over it.

The Military Elite in Tunisia: Neither the Will nor the Capacity to Defend the Regime

Coups in the Arab world were at their heyday when Habib Bourguiba became the first president of Tunisia in 1957, one year after his country gained independence from France. From day one, Bourguiba kept the military outside the political process. Whereas officers in other postcolonial countries frequently played the role of modernizers and nation builders, the Tunisian military was strictly confined to defending the country's borders and national sovereignty. So hostile was Bourguiba to military interference in politics that he denied officers the right to join even his own ruling Socialist Destourian Party.[82] It was inevitable that Bourguiba's distrust vis-à-vis the military would increase after the unsuccessful 1962 coup attempt; like most Arab rulers at the time, Bourguiba feared losing power to a putsch.[83] In order to coup-proof, he kept the Tunisian military

[82]L.B. Ware, "The Role of the Tunisian Military in the Post-Bourguiba Era," *Middle East Journal* 39 (Winter 1985): 27–47, at 37.

[83]Noura Borsali, *Bourguiba à l'épreuve de la démocratie, 1956–1963* [Bourguiba and the Democracy Trial] (Sfax: SAMES Editions, 2008), 145.

small and poorly funded while simultaneously establishing a powerful internal security apparatus under the control of the Ministry of Interior. Until his downfall in 1987, Bourguiba counted on his security apparatus to counterbalance the armed forces.[84]

When Zein al-Abidin Ben Ali, Bourguiba's prime minister, ousted the aging autocrat in a 1987 bloodless palace coup, observers speculated that the marginalization of the Tunisian armed forces would come to end because the new president had a military background; the fact that Ben Ali's second official act was to promote a group of senior officers to the next-highest grade also gave credence to these conjectures.[85] Yet it soon became clear that the new president no more trusted the military than his predecessor did, and his coup-proofing tactic was not dissimilar from Bourguiba's. It was thus consistent with Ben Ali's need to find a counterweight to the military to give preferential treatment to the internal security agencies and especially to the ruling party, the Rassemblement Constitutonnel Démocratique (RCD, Democratic Constitutional Rally). In the powerful security apparatus that Ben Ali built throughout his rule, the military remained a junior partner consistently overshadowed by the regime's police, internal security forces, and intelligence services. The armed forces' marginal position was reflected in Ben Ali's resource-allocation policies. Although the military's budget grew in the years that followed 1987, it did not keep pace with that of the security apparatus, which expanded fourfold between 1987 and 1999.[86] Nor did the armed forces' size increase dramatically as the security services' did, although the military did retain control over Tunisia's heavy weaponry, namely, the mechanized brigades and the air force. Peter Schraeder and Hamadi Redissi estimate that the combined personnel of Tunisia's different security formations are 130,000 men, including 8,000 in the Presidential Guard and 20,000 in the National Guard.[87] According to Beatrice Hibou, the different security agencies employ 80,000 to 133,000. Whereas the ratio of police to citizen in France is 1:265 and in the United Kingdom 1:380, it varied in Ben Ali's Tunisia, a country of only 10 million people, between 1:67 and 1:112, depending

[84]Michael Willis, *Politics and Power in the Maghreb: Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco from Independence to the Arab Spring* (London: C. Hurst, 2012), 87.
[85]L.B. Ware, "Ben Ali's Constitutional Coup in Tunisia," *Middle East Journal* 42 (Autumn 1988): 587–601, at 593.
[86]Willis, *Politics and Power in the Maghreb,* 104.
[87]Peter J. Schraeder and Hamadi Redissi, "The Upheavals in Egypt and Tunisia: Ben Ali's Fall," *Journal of Democracy* 22 (July 2011): 5–19.

TABLE 2
Professional Background of Governors under Ben Ali, by Decade[a]

	1987–1990	*1991–2000*	*2001–2010*	*Total*
Military officers	1/20	2/64	0/52	3/136
Police officers	0/20	1/64	0/52	1/136
Civilians	19/20	61/64	52/52	132/136

Notes: a. See Hicham Bou Nassif, "A Military Besieged: The Armed Forces, the Police and the Party in Ben Ali's Tunisia, 1987 – 2011," *International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES)* 47 (February 2015): 65–87, at 79.

on estimations.[88] By contrast, the armed forces never exceeded 35,000 men.

More important than the comparative size and budgets of the armed forces and the security apparatus, it is the conspicuous absence of military officers within the ruling elite that should be noted in any study of civil-military relations in Ben Ali's Tunisia. In his informative analysis on the core circle surrounding Ben Ali, Steffen Erdle maintains that it was composed of his family members and friends, as well as his nominees in the various secret services and in the ministries of home affairs, foreign affairs, social affairs, international cooperation, and economy-related portfolios.[89] When they did not belong to his or his wife's clan, Ben Ali's lieutenants were high bureaucrats, economic experts, and civilian advisers who hailed mostly from the ruling party. Table 2 shows the extent to which the Tunisian senior officers were kept away from prestigious civilian appointments.

This stands in stark contrasts to Hosni Mubarak and Bachar al-Assad, both of whom counted many senior officers among their close associates. Note that Tunisian officers are not involved in the economic realm of their country, another significant dissimilarity with Egypt and Syria. Neither did the Tunisian military develop an autonomous economic domain like the armed forces in Egypt, nor were Tunisian senior officers capitalizing on their influence to provide patronage and protection for economic entrepreneurs, in exchange for private gains, like their Syrian counterparts. Throughout Ben Ali's tenure, the top brass in Tunisia remained both uncorrupted and disdainful of the venality surrounding the president and his clique.[90] This means that unlike in Egypt, the friction between

[88]Beatrice Hibou, *The Force of Obedience: The Political Economy of Repression in Tunisia* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2011), 81.
[89]Steffen Erdle, "Tunisia: Economic Transformation and Political Restoration," in Volker Perthes, ed., *Arab Elites, Negotiating the Politics of Change* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2004), 215. Most civilians appointed governors belonged to RCD. The same is true of ministers.
[90]Barany, "Comparing the Arab Revolts," 31.

senior officers and their subordinates in Tunisia was minimal. Neither the top brass nor the mid-ranking and junior officers were benefiting from the regime:

> The salary of a second-lieutenant after graduation is 750 dinar ($450). The salary of a brigadier is a 1,500 dinar ($900). The young officers know that after 30 years of service our salaries are not much different from theirs. They see that we do not live in opulence and that our life style—e.g., the apartments we own, our cars—is similar to theirs. Consequently, there is no animosity, nor friction, between the senior officers in the Tunisian armed forces and their subordinates. The esprit de corps in the officer corps is very strong.[91]

> There is no friction between senior officers and their subordinates in Tunisia. The military elite never played a political role and are not politically influential; consequently, we as senior officers do not get special rewards that junior officers remain deprived of. Intergenerational friction is quasi-inexistent and the officer corps is very cohesive.[92]

How did this background affect the behavior of the military elite in 2011? I argued earlier that counterbalancing typically alienates the armed forces' officer corps vis-à-vis the regime, but other coup-proofing tactics can offset the resentment in the military's ranks. The Achilles heel in Ben Ali's coup-proofing system was its exclusive reliance on counterbalancing. That repression was handled by the Tunisian police meant that the military defined repression as anathema to its institutional culture—its professional identity, centered on border defense, did not include internal repression as a permissible role to play. Furthermore, the military elite were not integrated into the regime's patronage networks, which meant that they had no stake in the regime's survival. Finally, the mid-ranking and junior officers could not have been expected to perpetrate a massacre of civilians on the regime's behalf when no common aversion or worldview wedded them to Ben Ali. Far from being the living embodiment of an ideal, as Gamal Abdel-Nasser of Egypt once was to many of his soldiers and countrymen, Ben Ali was a notoriously corrupt autocrat commanding very little respect among soldiers and civilians alike. Nor could he portray himself as a sectarian leader on the survival of whom his group's future depended—Tunisia is too homogeneous a country for Ben Ali to have built a following on the basis of group solidarity. In brief, the Tunisian military

[91]Interview with Colonel-Major (Ret.) Mokhtar Hcheichi (army), former director of the Tunisian military academy and military attaché in Washington, DC, Tunis, 12 July 2013.
[92]Interview with Colonel-Major (Ret.) Abdullah Ben Abdullah (air force), Tunis, 1 July 2013.

elite did not have an incentive to save Ben Ali; even had this not been the case, the outcome would not have been any different because the senior officers did not have the capacity to uphold the status quo either, considering how alienated their subordinates were from the former president. From the moment General Rachid 'Ammar, the army chief of staff deployed his troops in the streets of Tunis, the regime's fate was sealed. Exile became Ben Ali's last remaining option.

The aftermath of the Tunisian revolution falls outside the scope of this article, but I note that the behavior of the military elite in the summer and fall of 2013 crisis confirms its main thrust. When secular opposition figures Chokri Belaid and Mohammad al-Borhami were assassinated in February and July 2013, respectively, thousands took to the streets to clamor for the resignation of the government dominated by An-Nahda, Tunisia's main Islamist party. For a while, polarization between Tunisia's different political formations fostered increasing instability—against the backdrop of mounting terrorist activities in the Jebel Chaambi Mountains on the border with Algeria. Political bickering and worsening security conditions could have provided the military elite with an alibi to intervene in politics—but, unlike their Egyptian counterparts, the Tunisian senior officers displayed lack of interest in doing so; nor were armed forces used to quell civilian protestors, which, once again, flooded the streets of Tunisian cities. The staunchly secular officer corps had little sympathy for An-Nahda. Irrespective of rank, the officers were not ready to perpetrate a massacre in order to defend a government dominated by an ideologically alien political formation.[93] Nor did the military elite have an economic stake in keeping An-Nahda in power.[94] Internal repression was incompatible with Tunisia's officers' self-perception under An-Nahda, just as it had been under Ben Ali. In addition, it was inconceivable for the Tunisian elite to consider staging a coup against a democratically elected government because they perceived the idea "dishonorable."[95] The military remained in its barracks, and the political crisis was resolved through negotiations.

CONCLUSION

I have argued in this article that coup-proofing tactics structure the behavior of the military elite in times of civilian uprisings. I have also

[93]Telephone interview with a retired colonel-major (army) who did not wish to reveal his name, 28 June 2014.
[94]Ibid.
[95]For more on the ethos and self-perception of the Tunisian military, see Hicham Bou Nassif, "A Military Besieged."

maintained that we need to problematize analytically the relationship between senior officers and their subordinates in order to fathom the military elite's conduct vis-a-vis civilian uprisings challenging autocratic regimes. The top brass depend on the compliance of mid-ranking and junior officers for the execution of their orders. If lower-echelon officers are not willing to uphold the status quo, the military elite have no capacity to do so by themselves, even though they might favor it. Alternatively, the senior officers might be eager to see regime breakdown, or the mid-ranking and junior officers might be loyal to the regime and ready to shoot on unarmed civilians in order to defend it. By shaping civil-military relations into different molds, coup-proofing tactics predetermine the disposition of the military elite, as well as that of the mid-ranking and junior officers, toward autocratic rulers and, consequently, the senior officers' incentive and capacity to defend the regime—or lack thereof.

Coups are not Arab-specific phenomena, nor are coup-proofing tactics. Anxiety over military insubordination was widespread throughout the twentieth century and shaped civil-military relations in different parts of the world. In Africa, autocrats fostered shared aversions and frequently resorted to ethnic stacking in order to keep the armed forces loyal. In the former Soviet Union and communist regimes in eastern Europe, the political elite also fostered shared aversions constructed around an ideologically driven worldview. As in the Arab World, sectarian or ethnic stacking kept African armed forces on the side of autocrats when civilian uprisings challenged their rule—the Kenyan military under the Daniel arap Moi dictatorship is a case in point. By contrast, the armed forces in eastern Europe were clearly reluctant to shed blood in order to save the regimes in 1989, despite decades of immersion in communist belief systems. Does that mean that shared aversions are more determinative when they are constructed around identity rather than ideology? This question is only one among several others that still need to be addressed in order to enrich our understanding of coup-proofing and its implications for military behavior in times of civilian uprisings. Although I confined my cases here to the Arab world, I was thinking theoretically as I approached the dynamics at play in Egypt, Syria, and Tunisia. A priori, nothing prevents my argument from traveling to cases outside the Middle East. It is indeed my hope that my framework will prove solid and intriguing enough for further studies to test its implications elsewhere.