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Does Coup-Proofing Work? Political-Military Relations in Authoritarian Regimes amid the Arab Uprisings

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Does Coup-Proofing Work? Political–Military Relations in Authoritarian Regimes amid the Arab Uprisings

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ABSTRACT *The popular mass uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) call into question the assumption, widespread prior to the "Arab Spring", that militaries in these countries were subservient to civilianized and consolidated authoritarian regime incumbents. In most countries militaries have stepped in to suppress uprisings, replace incumbents, or cause civil wars. The analysis of political-military relations explains the immediate outcome of popular mass mobilization in the MENA region and helps re-conceptualize coup-proofing as an important authoritarian survival strategy. Accounting for variation in the degree of officers' loyalty toward incumbents provides an opportunity to test the efficacy of coup-proofing. The article accounts for questions largely ignored in the theoretical literature: which coup-proofing mechanisms work best, and under which circumstances? In a qualitative comparison of Egypt and Syria, the article illustrates that authoritarian regimes have applied fundamentally different coup-proofing strategies. The Syrian regime has engineered integrative strategies to tie officers closer to the incumbent, provoking a greater degree of loyalty during regime crisis than in Egypt where officers were excluded from politics.*

The 2011 uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) brought two major lessons to the attention of scholars. First, the substantial degree of mobilization in the region calls into question assumptions that Arab societies were plagued by political apathy, masterfully engineered in stable autocracies (Teti & Gervasio, 2011; Pace & Cavatorta, 2012). Second, we detect the active engagement of militaries at a much higher level than anticipated in previous research (Barany, 2012; Bellin, 2012). It is tempting to study the MENA uprisings primarily 'from below', that is, to account for the dynamic processes unfolding when people take to the streets to challenge authoritarian rule. While such a point of departure will prove

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valuable to explain the *causes* of the uprisings, it remains insufficient to explain their immediate *outcome*: regime change or survival, processes of elite reconfiguration, state breakdown, or civil war.

I am concerned with the second set of questions and, in an attempt to make sense of the divergent outcome of the uprisings, suggest studying the role of the military. My core question is: what accounts for variation in the military's reaction to the uprising in regimes where military apparatuses have been vulnerable to various forms of 'coup-proofing'? Studies of political–military relations in the MENA region found that, prior to the uprisings, coup-proofing strategies were applied by authoritarian incumbents to secure the loyalty of their armed forces and, at the same time, keep ambitious officers in their barracks. Scholars of Middle East politics offered a substantial contribution to the broader body of literature on coup-proofing, based on their empirical expertise of the inner working mechanisms of regimes and armies (Springborg, 1987; Brooks, 1998; Quinlivan, 1999; Kamrava, 2000; Harb, 2003; Droz-Vincent, 2007; Cook, 2007; McLauchlin, 2010; Bou Nassif, 2013; Makara, 2013). The intervention of officers to protect respective regimes in Syria and Bahrain bears witness to the success of such protective measures. This holds true irrespective of the long-term developments in these countries that may well witness autocrats finally succumbing to popular mobilization. Yet, in other cases, such as in Libya and Yemen, a significant number of officer defections occurred, whereas Tunisia and Egypt witnessed their militaries replacing long-serving incumbents. Accounting for variation in loyalty patterns provides an opportunity to test the efficacy of coup-proofing measures and therefore contributes to a better understanding of authoritarian regime survival.

Using Egypt and Syria as illustrative examples, the aim of this article is twofold. First, I show how the military's engagement in politics shaped the immediate outcome of the popular uprisings in the Middle East. In 2011, Egypt experienced the ousting of a long-serving authoritarian incumbent, Hosni Mubarak, the partial breakdown of the regime's institutional infrastructure, and the beginning of an uncertain transition process. In Syria, the officers' loyalty to the incumbent led to the violent repression of the popular mass uprising of 2011, and subsequently civil war. Empirical insight into the two countries was propelled through expert interviews that I conducted in Cairo and Washington, DC, during 2012 and 2013.

The second aim of this article is to help refine our conceptual understanding of authoritarian coup-proofing. A controlled comparison of Egypt and Syria as similar cases addresses desiderata in prior studies and contributes to theoretical refinement. Such theoretical advancement is necessary because it has remained unclear which coup-proofing strategies prove efficient and successful, and which ones do not. Insights into the two cases suggest that – in times of regime crisis – those coup-proofing strategies that tie military officers closely to the political incumbents work best to secure loyalty. In turn, coup-proofing strategies that keep officers out of politics, but, at the same time, enhance their corporate autonomy vis-à-vis the political incumbents, will fail during crises.

Hence, comparing Egypt and Syria illustrates the paradox of authoritarian coup-proofing: in times of relative peace and stability, a whole array of coup-proofing strategies has the effects intended by incumbents, provoking consolidated regimes to

apply measures aimed at keeping their officers out of politics. Wendy Hunter (2001: 44) generalizes that 'politicians concerned about effective governance tend to seek maximum control over events and processes that occur within their jurisdiction, territorial or functional'. Yet, during systemic crisis and popular mass rebellion, some coup-proofing measures undermine incumbent capacities to use militaries as a needed coercive machine, and it is the close personal relationship between incumbents and officers that keeps the former in office.

Coup-Proofing in the Middle East Revisited

The role of the military and security apparatuses neither explains the causes of the 2011 mass uprisings in the MENA region, nor the dominant patterns of long-term regime change and prospects of democratization. Contentious mass mobilization led to the destruction of core political institutions (ruling parties), the suspension of legal frameworks of the state (constitutions), and the displacement of elite coalitions and rulers from executive office. By any measure, the authoritarian regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria and Yemen faced systemic challenges that can be conceptualized as 'endgame scenarios' in which 'a government has exhausted most of its political capital or will to find a peaceful resolution to a conflict' (Pion-Berlin & Trinkunas, 2010: 398).

The respective military's engagement was decisive in determining the immediate course of events once people took to the streets (Barany, 2012; Bellin, 2012; Makara, 2013). Military officers have deposed long-serving presidents in Egypt (actively) and Tunisia (withdrawing support from President Ben Ali). In Bahrain, domestic and foreign combat forces, mostly from Saudi Arabia, cracked down on the social uprising. In Libya and Yemen, social uprisings caused splits in the respective military apparatuses and the ousting of the two longest-serving incumbents in the region. In Syria, most officers stood firm by the embattled incumbent, Bashar al-Asad, but they failed to quell a decentralized revolt that turned into an ultimate threat for the survival of the Asad regime.

It is imperative to understand how military apparatuses intervene in politics under conditions of social mass mobilization because they have constituted integral parts of authoritarian regimes' infrastructure. Military apparatuses have formed the 'final guarantor of power' (Brooks, 1998: 18) that incumbents would employ not only in times of war, but also in times of challenges originating in domestic politics. In the Middle East, 'repressive dictators have consistently had some of the world's largest standing armies per capita, and have used them to suppress dissent' (Albertus & Menaldo, 2012: 153). Since all MENA states could rely on 'high-scope' military apparatuses (Levitsky & Way, 2010: 59), the nature of political–military relations and the military's intervention in politics determine the immediate outcome of social uprisings – that is, the survival or demise of autocrats.

Variation in the form and kind of military intervention during the MENA uprisings is puzzling, both empirically and conceptually, because all regimes in the region had applied sophisticated coup-proofing prior to the events; and incumbents therefore had cause to believe that their military apparatuses would step in to protect them in the face of popular opposition. 'Coup-proofing' is a term used to denote

actions of authoritarian incumbents to prevent militaries from assuming power.[1] This includes all those measures executed with the aim of increasing the coordination costs for officers to stage coup attempts. Coup-proofing measures were also designed to help rulers survive coup attempts in the case that these could not be prevented. Coup-proofing entails the establishment of strong personal loyalty between officers and incumbents through ethnic, religious and personal bonds; divided security apparatuses, pitting regular armed forces against militias and special security forces; the frequent rotation of officers to avoid the emergence of alternative power centres; and buying off the officer corps by granting them economic privileges and opportunities for self-enrichment (see Brooks, 1998; Quinlivan, 1999; Kamrava, 2000; Belkin & Schofer, 2003, 2005; Cook, 2007; Pilster & Böhmelt, 2011; Powell, 2012).

Prior to the 2011 uprisings, it was held that Middle Eastern incumbents had successfully applied coup-proofing strategies to solve the major puzzle of authoritarian power maintenance: the 'principal–agent problem' – that is, the paradox of establishing coercive power designed to support the incumbent, while avoiding that this power-within-the-state turns into a threat (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003; Svolik, 2013). Scholars of Egyptian politics, for instance, maintained that coup-proofing led to civilian control, firmly established over a military that 'refrains from intervening in politics, has re-professionalized, has allowed for the civilianization of the regime, and has succumbed to the control of civilians' (Harb, 2003: 289). It was assumed that 'Mubarak's close association with the military has rendered Egypt "coup-proof"' (Cook, 2007: 139). In light of the military's intervention in politics to oust Presidents Hosni Mubarak, on 11 February 2011, and Mohammed Morsi, on 3 July 2013, a reassessment of political–military relations in Egypt seems appropriate.

Yet these earlier studies were not at all unfounded. Scholars of Middle East politics observed the decreasing number of coups d'état and the obvious civilianization of political regimes as indicators for the success of coup-proofing. This is intuitively compelling, but it obscures an important analytical facet of political–military relationships: the distinction – as highlighted by Samuel Finer (1962) – between *opportunities* and *motives* of officers to intervene in politics. Aaron Belkin and Evan Schofer (2003) framed the argument that the absence of military intervention may either indicate low structural coup risk, as in the United States and other established democracies; or it may simply imply the absence of opportunities for officers to assume power owing to efficient coup-proofing. In the latter case, structural coup risk remains high over time. An example would be Egypt in the period 1954–2011. According to this understanding, structural coup risk for Middle Eastern autocracies would have remained high, despite the decreasing number of coup incidents.

The current wave of military interventions in politics does not only provide counterfactual evidence for prior assumptions of Middle Eastern scholars; it also highlights three desiderata in the conceptual coup-proofing literature. First, most scholars have focused primarily on endogenous factors, trying to understand how incumbents have remodelled the military, its officer corps and organizational

military features rather than social and economic factors. A perspective on the potential agents of military coups and interventions is also truly compelling. It has its roots in classical readings on personal interests and grievances among military personnel (Finer, 1962; Thompson, 1980; Decalo, 1990) and connects to more recently developed agency analyses (Agüero, 1995; Geddes, 1999; Feaver, 2003; Lee, 2009; Pion-Berlin, Esparza & Grisham, 2012; Albrecht & Ohl, 2014). Yet this strand in the literature tends to underemphasize important social, economic and institutional factors that most certainly influence the propensity of officers to intervene. Perhaps with the exception of the recent works of Belkin and Schofer (2003, 2005) and Jonathan Powell (2012), the study of coup-proofing was not linked well to other major works in political–military relations highlighting structural factors, including the fabrics of political institutions (Nordlinger, 1977; Jackman, 1978; Pion-Berlin, 1997), the economy (O'Kane, 1981; Londregan & Poole, 1990; Geddes, 1999), or international factors (Desch, 1999).

A second, perhaps more serious shortcoming in the study of coup-proofing is the tendency to analyze measures employed by incumbents without accounting for their relative importance and efficacy.[2] This is a consequence of the research design applied in most scholarly inquiries. Scholars tended to select cases on the positive observation of the phenomenon in the dependent variable: studying the efficacy of coup-proofing in cases where coups were absent did not allow analysts to move beyond the selection of stochastic variables that may, or may not, have an effect on regime stability. This does not allow for an informed judgement as to which coup-proofing measures may prove particularly efficient under certain conditions. Intriguing questions remain unanswered: which coup-proofing mechanisms do really matter? When do they matter? Which types of regimes are particularly vulnerable to coups? And which types of militaries would be most resilient to coup-proofing?

A third challenge in accounts of coup-proofing is that some measures have been lumped together under a certain strategy without accounting for possibly contradictory effects associated with the strategy's implementation. The economic realm of coup-proofing is but one example. Buying officers out of politics is one of the most prominent and widely used components of coup-proofing (Brooks, 1998; Cook, 2007); and it was believed to have been an efficient strategy to secure loyalty during popular mass uprisings (Nepstad, 2013; Makara, 2013).

Yet the provision of economic incentives may come about in various forms, with substantially different effects. The distinctive trait is the degree of institutionalization vs. autonomy. The establishment of military–economic enclaves provides officers with independent sources of income and, it is believed, keeps them busy making money rather than with plans to occupy the state. However, economic enclaves will also contribute to the organizational autonomy of the officer corps from the political regime. An alternative coup-proofing strategy is to offer officers opportunities of self-enrichment on a more informal, private basis relying on close personal relations to the incumbent. What is important here is that the literature on coup-proofing has hardly ever inquired into the efficacy of strategies that would either enhance the distance between politics and an increasingly autonomous military, or tether officers closer to the regime.[3]

Military intervention triggered by endgame scenarios in the MENA region invites testing of the efficacy of endogenous coup-proofing measures and helps us better understand the relative importance of various strategies. I distinguish between two rationales underlying coup-proofing: some measures are designed to bind officers closer to incumbents (*integration*), others to move the officer corps out of the political arena (*segregation*) (Table 1).

I assume that, during times of systemic regime crisis, integrative coup-proofing is more effective than segregation. Higher military officers are members of ruling coalitions in authoritarian regimes. In an endgame scenario, it is the active engagement of officers that will determine the fate of the incumbent – but possibly also the fate of the officer who will be associated with the execution of a shooting order. The repression of uprisings is risky and potentially costly; and the loyalty of military officers is guaranteed only if coup-proofing measures have been designed to tie them to the incumbent. The cases of Egypt and Syria provide empirical support for this contention.

Military Engagement during Social Uprisings in Egypt and Syria

Egypt and Syria shared a number of core characteristics prior to the outbreak of the mass uprisings in 2011.[4] Hence, they make a good pair for the comparison of similar cases among authoritarian regimes that have executed coup-proofing prior to social mass mobilization.[5] Both regimes came into being through anti-colonial and anti-establishment military coups. The militaries of both countries played a significant role in political leadership in the first two decades of the state-building processes and during socio-economic modernization. Both military apparatuses developed political ideologies of sorts, 'Nasserism' and 'Ba'thism', combining nationalist, socialist, anti-feudal, egalitarian, pan-Arab and etatist notions. In the course of regime consolidation, the presidents in both countries strengthened their positions against other political institutions of the state and attempted to establish quasi-

Table 1. Coup-Proofing in Authoritarian Regimes.

	Integration	Segregation
Professionalization	... of officers in the public realm	... of officers in war-making
Military organization	Targeted recruitment of soldiers; establishment of militias; counterbalancing of divided militaries	General conscription; organizational cohesion of military apparatuses
Officer appointment	Reshuffling of officer corps only at critical junctures	Frequent and regular rotation of officers
Economic coup-proofing	Individual opportunities of self-enrichment; often illicit activities	Establishment of military enclaves; autonomous sources of income
Social composition	Kinship recruitment from among privileged minorities; ethnic coherence of officer corps	Social heterogeneity; expansion of social basis of officer corps

hereditary lines of power transfer (Owen, 2012). As a consequence of the defeat in the 1967 Six Day War with Israel and the 1973 war, both military apparatuses experienced a professionalization of sorts aimed at strengthening the combat capacities of the armed forces (Brooks, 2006); domestic security was left to 'mukhabarat states' (Kamrava, 2000: 81). The regimes witnessed the strengthening of ruling parties and presidents vis-à-vis the military apparatuses and the latter's separation from day-to-day political management. Yet the militaries sustained strong influence behind the scenes as self-proclaimed guardians of the modern state and have stepped in, on several occasions, as saviors of the respective regimes (Brooks, 1998; Droz-Vincent, 2007): the Syrian army to quell an Islamist uprising in Hama 1982 and the Egyptian military to repress bread riots in 1977 and a revolt of the Central Security Forces in 1986.

Other similarities between the two cases can be found regarding the type of social challenge posed to the authoritarian regimes. Neither of the uprisings was initiated by the political opposition establishments of the respective countries, but rather by a leaderless social movement, comprised of a younger generation of urban, middle-class activists in Egypt (Kandil, 2012) and clan-based social networks (Leenders & Heydemann, 2012).[6] The uprisings happened during phases of economic stability, but relative socio-economic decline for larger parts of the population in the 4–5 years prior to the events. Spiraling food prices (Egypt) and severe droughts (Syria) had brought about hardship in particular for the urban lower middle classes in society. A widening gap between the rich and the poor, reinforced by business-oriented economic reforms, contributed to the potency of radical political demands expressed by the organizers of demonstrations.

Comparing Egypt and Syria is intriguing because the uprisings took entirely different paths, caused by different forms of interventions of the respective military forces. While Egypt's officers were keen to de-escalate the stand-off between protesters and the regime, Syria's army reacted with uncompromising physical violence.

In the course of the Egyptian uprising, the domestic coercive forces of the regime as well as its core political institution, the National Democratic Party (NDP), broke down. As an immediate consequence, the Egyptian army was deployed, on 28 January 2011, in order to secure strategic buildings and locations in downtown Cairo. The military leadership – organized in the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) – took over political power, first under the leadership of Hosni Mubarak and the regime's second man, Omar Sulayman. Mubarak and Sulayman were ousted from the inner circle of the regime on 11 February, and the SCAF consolidated its takeover during the two following months (Albrecht & Bishara, 2011). The Egyptian military's stance during the 25 January uprising was certainly more ambiguous than implied by Mubarak's ousting. Various incidents in the post-Mubarak transition, most importantly the ousting of Mohammed Morsi on 3 July 2013, indicate that the military leadership was keen on preserving not only state and nation, but also the core fabrics of the political regime established by the Free Officers' coup in 1952. Yet the dismissal of Hosni Mubarak, the dissolution of the NDP and the suspension of the Egyptian constitution are testament to a marked shift in officers' loyalty offered to the main representatives of the incumbent regime.

The Syrian uprising provoked a harsh reaction by the security forces which opened fire on demonstrators; yet protests continued and spread beyond initial demonstrations in the southern city of Dera'a to the Sunni heartland around Homs, Hama, Deir al-Zur and Aleppo. As a consequence of the uncompromising reaction, pockets of militant resistance emerged as soon as June 2011, and the defection of a number of low-ranking officers resulted in the establishment of the Free Syrian Army (FSA). In the course of the regime's military initiative in spring 2012 and the rebel attacks in Damascus and Aleppo in the summer of that same year, Syria slipped into civil war, with the rebels strengthened by international support and the regime's forces losing control over large swaths of the country's territory.

Given the high stakes as well as the proven vulnerability of the Syrian regime in 2012, the officer corps has remained remarkably loyal to Bashar al-Asad. Defections among officers were almost entirely restricted to the lower ranks, including Lieutenants (*molazim*), Captains (*naqeeb*) and Majors (*ra'ed*). Defections among higher officers remained isolated incidents: on 20 June 2012, the pilot of a Mig-21 fighter jet escaped to Jordan to apply for political asylum; on 24 June, one general, two majors, one lieutenant and 33 soldiers crossed the border into Turkey; on 6 October, former prime minister Riad Hijab, also from Deir al-Zor, along with 17 officers fled the country. The greatest blow to the regime's inner circle was the defection, along with 23 military officers, of Manaf Tlass, a general in the regime's elite force Republican Guard and son of former minister of defense Mustapha Tlass. The incident did not come as a complete surprise, however, because the relationship between the Tlass family and the regime had soured earlier (Albrecht & Ohl, 2014).

Comparing Egypt and Syria allows for a test of the efficacy of coup-proofing during severe regime crisis. Yet not all of the measures laid out in table 1 can be addressed here. I hold constant the kind and degree of military professionalization as well as the military's organizational structure because there are no substantial differences between the two cases. Both countries have developed relatively professional armies in terms of their capacities to go to war or, at least, constitute a credible threat to prevent invasion (Kamrava, 2000; Brooks, 2006). Officers retained some influence on the regimes, yet without involvement in day-to-day political decision-making, which was exercised by civilianized former officers (Kamrava, 2000; Cook, 2007).

Concerning the internal military organization, both regimes employed a similar mix of inclusion and segregation strategies. The militaries have in common a comparatively cohesive and effective chain of command; and both armies are sizeable owing to general conscription for soldiers' recruitment. On the integration side, both militaries – as in most other Middle Eastern countries – are characterized by functionally divided apparatuses in an attempt to counterbalance units (Brooks, 1998: 36–40; Quinlivan, 1999: 141–153; Makara, 2013). The Syrian military has established a network of multiple intelligence and security agencies; and the Egyptian *mukhabarat* and Central Security Forces have effectively replaced the military as coercive forces in domestic politics.[7]

The main differences between the two cases pertain to officer appointments, economic coup-proofing and the social composition of the officer corps. Prior to the 2011 uprisings, the Syrian regime used these strategies in order to tether the higher

officer corps to the power centre, whereas the Egyptian regime's aim was to distance the military. During relative peace and stability, both strategies worked well. In times of crisis, the former was superior to the latter. The remainder of the paper illustrates this argument, discussing the reasons why the Syrian officer corps remained loyal to Bashar al-Asad, while the Egyptian higher command replaced Hosni Mubarak after the popular mass uprising in early 2011.

Officer Appointment

By the time Egyptians took to the streets, on 25 January 2011, Hosni Mubarak as a post-Nasserist military-hero-turned-president did not have much in common with the younger generation of upper military officers. With the exception of Husayn Tantawi, minister of defense and the SCAF strongman in the immediate post-Mubarak period, most officers in the SCAF were around 20 years younger than the former president, had never fought in a war and were exposed – through Egypt's alliance with the United States – to Western training and military cooperation. Mubarak and Tantawi were the two remaining representatives of the 'October Generation', having served in the 1973 war with Israel, known in Egypt as the 'October War'.

The generational distance between the incumbent and his higher officers were reinforced through appointment patterns that did not allow Mubarak to forge or maintain personal bonds with the majority of higher officers. As a strategy designed to exclude the officers from directly influencing political decision-making, this had a detrimental effect on loyalty at a time when it was most needed. With the exception of Tantawi, officers had been subjected to frequent and regular reshuffling, including the position of chief-of-staff, arguably the most eminent post in the Egyptian officer corps, with Tantawi widely regarded as a member of the political elite, rather than the man at the apex of the military apparatus.[8] Officers usually do not serve for much longer than four to five years in their respective appointments; they rise in the ranks and retire typically in their mid-forties to assume positions in the bureaucratic apparatus, public administration, political office, the state economy or private business.[9]

There is reason to believe that the president's influence on the placement of officers after their military careers was somewhat compromised. Since the 1980s, placement patterns seem to have been increasingly institutionalized, with certain positions within the military leading to specific posts in the bureaucratic apparatus.[10] Hicham Bou Nassif has uncovered these path-dependent post-military careers: for instance, the post of governor in South Sina'i seems to have always been occupied by retired commanders of the Republican Guard (Bou Nassif, 2013: 520). Such path-dependent post-military career patterns imply that the personal involvement of the president was not particularly strong. In the eyes of an officer, it was not the personal loyalty to the president that guaranteed an attractive post-retirement position. It was rather seen as a reward associated with military career accomplishments.

Quite like his father, the president's designated successor, Gamal Mubarak, had not invested any substantial efforts to cultivating relations with the officer corps, let alone designing a role for them in future politics. As a former bank manager,

Gamal Mubarak did not have any military background and introduced himself as the first civilian president-to-be in a state created through a military coup. He established his political standing in the political elite, primarily in the influential Policies Secretariat of the NDP. He also invited a younger generation of politicians with strong business interests to enter the political arena on his coat-tails and henceforth challenged the ruling party's old guard when his father was still in power (Brownlee, 2008; Stacher, 2012: 98–107).

The situation was different in Syria. Bashar stepped in as heir apparent of second choice after the designated successor of Hafez al-Asad, his brother Basil, died in a car accident in January 1994. Contrary to Gamal Mubarak, Bashar al-Asad did not affiliate himself strongly with the ruling Ba'th Party (Brownlee, 2008: 41). Rather, he entered the political arena in Syria through military channels and became commander of the Republican Guard and supervisor of military intelligence. When Bashar assumed the presidency in June 2000, he faced a strong and autonomous political establishment. But he had the backing of the military and was accepted by the Ba'th Party's big-wigs as a candidate of compromise to keep the regime united.

In order to foster his takeover of power, Bashar's father Hafez had already taken measures to reshuffle the leadership of the military and intelligence services (Brooks, 1998: 58; Ghadbian, 2001: 625; Zisser, 2001; Owen, 2012: 84–87). Upon his takeover, Bashar al-Asad certainly did not exert full control over the vast network of military, security and intelligence apparatuses. Yet he did not lose much time in installing loyal personnel and dismissed members of the old guard (Droz-Vincent, 2007: 208). In 2002, he replaced the army's chief-of-staff Ali Aslan with Hassan Turkmani and enforced changes in the leadership positions of the diverse intelligence apparatuses (Gambill, 2002). Even long-time minister of defense Mustapha Tlass, who had facilitated Bashar's ascent to power in 2000, was forced to resign in 2004. Bashar also introduced his brother-in-law Assef Shawkat as a dominant figure behind the scenes to oversee the security establishment; and Bashar's brother Maher became commander of the Presidential Guard.

The cases of Syria and Egypt illustrate entirely different strategies of successors in hereditary authoritarian republics to introduce themselves in the political establishment, assume influence and expand elite networks. While Gamal Mubarak virtually ignored the military apparatus and took over the politicized institutions of the state, backed by a younger business community, the ruling family in Syria followed Roger Owen's (2012: 46) guidelines 'to identify both the president and his son – where they existed – directly with the military establishment'. Bashar al-Asad relied heavily on his personal connections to the military apparatus to assume the presidency vis-à-vis the ruling Ba'th party, a power center in its own right. His strategy proved advantageous in his ascent to the presidency, but also at a moment in time when the military's loyalty became decisive because an active engagement in politics was necessary to keep the incumbent in office. Neither Hosni nor Gamal Mubarak had any robust links to the military to rely on once the domestic security forces that Hosni Mubarak had created to quell protests were overpowered by protestors in January 2011. They had neglected to nurture personal bonds with the military leadership beyond the figure of the minister of defence.

Economic Coup-Proofing

During the three decades prior to the 2011 uprisings, both countries witnessed the establishment of parallel military–business economies, though the implications for incumbent–officer relations were different. Economic ties were strengthened between politicians and officers in Syria and opened up areas of conflict in Egypt.

In the early 1980s, a deal of sorts was forged between the new Egyptian president, Hosni Mubarak, and his minister of defence, Abd al-Halim Abu Ghazala, the content of which was the establishment of a vast economic empire – today presumably worth 10–15 percent of annual GDP – over which the military leadership would have autonomous control and which would guarantee the officers' loyalty (Springborg, 1987; Harb, 2003; Marshall & Stacher, 2012; Sayigh, 2012; Bou Nassif, 2013). Military-owned enterprises have been engaged in arms industries, e.g. in the production, sometimes under licence, of small arms, ammunition, tanks and fighter jets. Civilian goods comprise drinking water, household items, chemicals, heavy industries, machines and food processing. The army is the biggest landowner in the country and controls multiple stakes in agriculture and tourism businesses (Frisch, 2013: 185).

The establishment of the military economy in the 1980s helped the regime to consolidate its metamorphosis into a civilian state and, at the same time, decreased the danger of military coups. This worked well until the civilian government's own economic policy clashed with the interests of the officers' economic engagement. In the decade prior to the 2011 uprising, the military leadership distanced itself from the civilian elites, primarily over disagreement on socio-economic developments. Since 2004, the regime, represented by a younger faction within the NDP, worked to implement a business-friendly reform package.

Yet a traditional perspective has survived among the military, reminiscent of the days of Gamal Abdel Nasser. The officers continued to advertise for an etatist economic order and called for distributive politics and social justice as core elements in economic decision-making. Apart from competition between civilian and military enterprises (e.g. in steel production), the military leadership opposed, or even actively torpedoed, reform activities on several occasions, for instance in the privatization of banks and public enterprises.[11] The extent of conflicts between private and military entrepreneurs remains difficult to measure, primarily due to the lack of information and data. Nevertheless, in the context of the argument presented here, it is important to pronounce the fact that the Egyptian military's economic engagement has offered the officers a significant measure of economic autarchy, to which US military assistance – averaging US$1.3bn. per year – has been a significant contribution. Second, the military's economic empire has functioned along a different logic than the political elites' reform project: a corporatist, etatist economy has operated autonomously from thriving crony capitalism.

In Egypt, the military's economic activities were institutionalized and resulted in the establishment of an autonomous sector. Most military establishments report to the Ministry of Military Production, the National Service Projects Organization and the Organization for Industrial Development in addition to several state holdings

controlled by the armed forces (Cook, 2007: 19; Marshall & Stacher, 2012: 12–14). The Syrian military's economic involvement differs significantly from the Egyptian experience. Here, the military's involvement was made possible primarily through informal, uninstitutionalized and patrimonial means.[12] Mora and Wiktorowicz (2003: 110) found that 'much of this wealth was produced as a result of political privileges rather than productive activities'. Military personnel were recipients of material favoritism on an individual basis rather than as a corporate body, as in Egypt. Officers have been primarily involved in illicit economic activities, such as smuggling, economic involvement in Lebanon and currency manipulations. Already during the 1980s and 1990s, a harmonization of elite change was engineered by the late Hafez al-Asad who carefully opened the economy to allow both private business people and military officers limited engagement in the private sector. This 'military–merchant complex' saw the careful selection of individuals who remained directly dependent on the regime's incumbents (Mora & Wiktorowicz, 2003: 113; Haddad, 2012). Their personal relations to the ruler as well as their individual involvement in illicit economic activities rendered the officer-entrepreneurs vulnerable to disciplinary measures in cases where their loyalty was in doubt.

In sum, it is not the increased economic involvement of the military in itself that guaranteed the officers' loyalty to the incumbent, but rather the fabrics of patron–client dependency through which they were connected to the core of the regime. The crucial point is that, in Egypt, officers are rewarded after they strip off their uniform, whereas Syrian officers receive economic privileges during their time in active duty. The Egyptian military conglomerate brought about a significant degree of autonomy for a professionalized military apparatus. And the visions of military industrialists on economic development strategies contradicted those of the civilian policy-makers. As Hillel Frisch concluded, the 'package deal of hereditary succession coupled by a free-market economy was too much for the military to bear' (Frisch, 2013: 187). To the contrary, the Syrian officer-entrepreneurs were bound closer, through personal ties, to the political regime. Mora and Wiktorowicz (2003: 115) conclude that there was 'a conjuncture of interests between private business and the "military in business"'. Whereas the Egyptian military economy could well survive without Mubarak, the Syrian higher officers believed that their economic privileges could not be preserved in the case of Bashar al-Asad's fall.

Social Composition

A major difference exists between the two countries concerning recruitment patterns of the officer corps. Whereas Egypt mirrors Eric Nordlinger's (1977: 37–42) 'secular-nationalizing soldier', Syria fits into the category of 'communal military'.

Recruitment patterns in Syria have confirmed sectarian bonds established in a political regime dominated by the Alawis, the faith of the Asad family and large parts of the political elite. At times, 90 percent of the higher officers were Alawis who comprise only 10–12 percent of the population, with Sunni Muslims at around 75 percent and significant minorities of Kurds, Christians, Druze and Shi'a Muslims

(Zisser, 2001: 5; Haklai, 2000). Eva Bellin (2012: 133) mentions that, 'where military leaders are linked to regime elites, through bonds of blood, sect or ethnicity, where career advancement is governed by cronyism and political loyalty rather than merit … the fate and interests of the military's leadership become intrinsically linked to the longevity of the regime'. The Syrian officer corps has strong incentives to preserve a regime led by the same religious sect (Haklai, 2000); and so do other minorities and even segments of the Sunni majority, particularly among the business community. Bashar al-Asad has focused on the military and security apparatuses as channels used for his ascent to power and carefully reversed the politics of his late father who had, in the 1990s, increasingly introduced Sunni Muslims into political positions in an attempt to expand the social basis of the regime.[13] Bashar relied to a greater extent on Alawis as a traditional support base in conjunction with his own family members, in particular in the military and security apparatuses. Hardly any Sunnis have remained in higher military positions; and only a few of them retained their posts in the intelligence apparatus.[14]

What proved problematic for the successful repression of the current uprising was not the officers' loyalty, but the fact that – as in Egypt – rank-and-file soldiers were recruited through conscription – that is, a majority of soldiers were Sunni Muslims. Hence, serious concerns have prevailed in the inner circle of the Alawi regime as to the deployment of army units ordered to execute physical force against the population, a problem that had already appeared in the 1982 Hama uprising (McLauchlin, 2010: 342).

During the course of the uprising, the Syrian regime reinvented its containment strategies to prevent mutinies and defections. Usually those units were employed that were expected to stand firm by the president, in particular the Presidential Guard and the 4th division under the command of Bashar's brother Maher. The Republican Guard was almost exclusively composed of Alawi soldiers, mostly from around Tartous in the Alawi heartland, and Alawis dominated the ranks of soldiers in the 4th Division at around 80 per cent.[15] Those units where loyalty was questionable were kept in their barracks; some were dissolved.[16] In stationed units, soldiers were heavily monitored to effectively discourage group defections. The individual defection of soldiers could not entirely be prevented but high co-ordination costs were put in place by threatening the family members of defectors with collective punishment.[17]

The Egyptian officer corps is ethnically quite heterogeneous compared to the Syrian army, for recruitment patterns were informed primarily by meritocratic factors and recruits were targeted from across the entire country. The vast majority of officers were recruited from among the lower middle classes of society, reinventing channels of upward social mobility.[18] The social background of the officer corps did not come as an advantage especially for the acceptance of Gamal Mubarak as Egypt's possible future president because he, and his entourage of business cronies, had gained a reputation as members of an upper class (*bashas*) who would live in gated communities and had lost touch with Egyptian society.

Apart from the officers' social background, which was alien to the personal experience of the Gamalists among the political elite, they experienced, following

the humiliating defeat of the armed forces in the 1967 war with Israel, a process of profound internal reforms aimed at establishing greater efficiency in combat (Brooks, 2006). To this aim, the officers' training and educational curricula were reformed by the introduction of specialized military academies.[19] Today's officers have been socialized in a military training – partly in the United States – with an emphasis on efficiency in warfare, modern technology, computer sciences and languages.

Officers have been recruited for political positions as part of their 'retirement package' or when a security dimension was part of the job description (Sayigh, 2012; Bou Nassif, 2013). Most of the governor positions have been occupied by former military personnel; or in the bureaucratic apparatus when the military's interest and expertise were at stake (e.g. in the ministries of defence, military production, interior, civil aviation). Serving officers, however, had only limited experience in direct political management across a broad spectrum of policy arenas. In the 18-member SCAF only a small number of officers had previous practical experience in politics: Mohsen al-Fanagry and Mukhtar al-Mullah were former deputy ministers of defence; Mohamed al-Assar was deputy minister of interior; Mamdouh Shahin was a judicial expert. All other SCAF members were active military personnel without any prior political experience, such as the commanders of regional (north, south, east and west) or functional (army, air force, air defence, border guard and navy) divisions.

It is not the military's professionalization itself which explains its lack of support for the incumbent. Previous interventions in 1977 and 1986 – that is, at a time when the Egyptian military had already undergone substantial internal reforms – defy this understanding. Rather, it is the outcome of very different directions of military restructuring which explains variation between Syria and Egypt. In Syria, military restructuring was accompanied by the establishment of personal bonds between the incumbent and the military leadership; in Egypt, the military's exclusion from political day-to-day affairs guaranteed the passivity of the upper officer corps in decision-making and, at the same time, the military's organizational autonomy.

Conclusions

Fine-grained empirical research of the relationship between authoritarian incumbents and military apparatuses offer valuable explanations for the latter's loyalty to the former when regimes are under pressure (Albrecht & Ohl, 2014). I found that neither the very existence of a hereditary regime-succession strategy, nor an army's professionalization or the persistence of a military economy guarantee loyalty among military officers – and hence decrease structural coup risk. Rather, it is the way in which personal bonds of loyalty are incorporated in all these coup-proofing strategies which prove successful, or not, when incumbents face serious challenges. A similar social background and personal bonds provoke the loyalty of the higher officer corps. On the flip side, the loyalty of even comparatively professionalized militaries declines when incumbents, and their would-be successors, have alienated themselves from their militaries.

Egypt and Syria offer empirical illustration for the contention formulated above: the paradox of authoritarian coup-proofing implies a rationale for the segregation of the armed forces from the political sphere in the regime's consolidation process. This was engineered in Egypt through the application of a set of coup-proofing measures that have detached the military from politics proper and the incumbent. Yet the latter proved vulnerable in times of severe crisis and ruptures of the regime's institutional infrastructure, which would necessitate an action of the military as the ultimate savior of the regime. In understanding this lesson, autocrats in the MENA region at large will reconsider their coup-proofing strategies and develop a preference for the Syrian model. We should therefore expect an increasing involvement of officers in politics as a consequence of authoritarian learning, at least in those cases where authoritarian regimes survive popular mass uprisings.

In a more conceptual perspective, this article encourages scholars to return to the study of civil–military relations in authoritarian regimes. Social mobilizing can reorganize patterns of loyalty, patronage and defection and may lead individual agents within military apparatuses – including officers and soldiers – to reconsider established allegiances. Popular mass uprisings serve as stress tests for coup-proofed incumbent–officer relations and show variation in strategies and effects of measures intended to keep officers away from power. Various forms of coup-proofing determine the way in which officers intervene in politics in response to social mobilization. Further research may well move to reformulate the puzzle that has inspired much of the literature on authoritarian civil–military relations: rather than ask whether or not officers would intervene in politics, one would want to ask *how* they do so.

Finally, a word of caution remains appropriate. Based on a small-n qualitative comparison, the theoretical claim posed in this article is potentially far-reaching, but its empirical foundation is limited. Owing to the limited number of cases, the relative weight of factors discussed here cannot be fully measured. Moreover, I cannot determine whether it is the importance of singular factors or the combination of those factors identified above that explains variation in military intervention. In immediate reactions to the popular uprisings that came to be known as the 'Arab Spring', scholars tended to overemphasize the salience of ethnic recruitment as the single most important factor to explain loyalty vs. defection. Yet the jury is still out on that contention which may have been disproportionately influenced by the Syrian case. Broader empirical research, including cases such as in Yemen and Libya, but also insights in political–military relations in sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia, will facilitate robust validation.

Notes

1. In democracies, scholars assumed the subordination of officers to civilian supremacy as a necessary precondition for democratic regime consolidation; hence the virtual absence of the term in studies of civil–military relations in established democracies.
2. Scholarship on Middle East politics has, perhaps sometimes on good intuitive reasoning, pronounced the salience of the ethnic modeling of military apparatuses, including the recruitment of members of privileged minorities into the officer corps and rank-and-file (see Haklai, 2000; McLauchlin, 2010; Bellin, 2012; Lutterbeck, 2013; Gaub, 2013; Makara, 2013; see also Roessler, 2011, on sub-Saharan

Africa). Yet a robust empirical test of the efficacy of this singular aspect of coup-proofing in comparison to others is missing as yet.

3. Examples abound of officers close to the power center who moved to overthrow the incumbent as soon as an opportunity arises. But Mehran Kamrava (2000: 69) also reminds us that military 'professionalization enhances the autonomy of the military and, if politically unchecked, can increase its tendency to intervene in the affairs of the state'. See also Stepan (1988); Powell (2012).
4. For an account of Egyptian politics in general, see Abdel-Malek (1968); Perlmutter (1974); Baker (1978); Springborg (1989); Kassem (1999); on Syria, see Seale (1988); Hinnebusch (1990); Perthes (1995); Heydemann (1999); Lesch (2005).
5. I exclude other Arab Spring cases primarily to hold constant a number of endogenous factors of military organization. In Yemen, Libya and Bahrain, for instance, the military's organizational cohesion is severely compromised by the existence of militias and ethnic exclusion in the composition of military apparatuses. Those factors may well intervene in decisions of loyalty and defection. Yet I am primarily interested here in the effectiveness of coup-proofing mechanisms.
6. The Syrian revolt later reinforced ethnic divides, pitting a predominantly Sunni militant insurgency against a regime representing religious minorities. But at the early stage of the demonstrations – that is, when the military made a strategic decision to actively intervene for Bashar al-Asad – demonstrations did not emphasize sectarianism or ethnic divides.
7. The security sector has remained a somewhat neglected topic in social science research (Barak & David, 2010); for the Egyptian case, see Sirrs (2010).
8. In 2011, Sami Annan was due for replacement after having served for six years as chief-of-staff. It was understood, within the officer corps, that his leadership was decisive during the crisis; hence the delay of his retirement until the election of a new president, Mohammed Morsi, in June 2012 (author interview with Egyptian military expert, Cairo, December 2012).
9. Author interview with Egyptian military expert, Cairo, May 2012; see also Sayigh (2012).
10. The majority of Republican Guard commanders as well as those in the Second and the Third Field Army assumed posts as governors after retirement; see Bou Nassif (2013: 517).
11. Author interview with Egyptian military expert, Cairo, May 2011.
12. Institutionalized economic engagement of the Syrian military was confined to military production in the Syrian Organization of Military Factories (Droz-Vincent, 2007: 200).
13. Among the most influential Sunni Muslims under Hafez were minister of defense Mustapha Tlass, foreign minister Farouq al-Shara, vice-president Abdel-Halim Khaddam and chief-of-staff Hekmat Shehabi (Brooks, 1998: 21).
14. Murhaf Jouejati said that the higher echelons of the intelligence apparatus were particularly loyal. Since they had the most 'blood on their hands', they would fear retribution in the case of regime breakdown (author interview, Washington, DC, April 2013).
15. Author interview with Oubab Khalil, chief-of-staff of the US bureau of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, Washington, DC, March 2013.
16. Author interviews with Radwan Ziadeh and Joseph Holliday, Washington, DC, February and March 2013.
17. Author interviews with soldiers who defected from the Syrian military and security apparatuses; Kilis Refugee Camp, Turkey, March 2013.
18. Author interview with Egyptian military expert, Cairo, May 2011.
19. The classical recruitment and education of military officers was carried out through the Military Academy (*al-kulliya al-harbiya*) in a three-year curriculum. Since the 1970s, specialized academies, such as the Military Technical College (*al-kulliya al-fanniya al-harbiya*), language institutes and other specialized colleges, have gained importance. They offer five-year tracks combining military training with civilian education (author interview with Egyptian military expert, Cairo, May 2011).

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