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Civil-Military Relations in the Middle East: A Literature Review

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A Literature Review

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Contents

Summary	iv
About the authors.....	iv
Introduction.....	1
A Middle Eastern specificity?	2
The Civil-Military Problematique: The case of the Middle East	4
Military professionalisation.....	6
Military narratives: External and internal threats	7
The persistence of military rule	9
The economics of military dominance in the Middle East	10
The role of the military in the economy.....	11
The impact of communal divides.....	13
Cultural aspects and normative orientations	16
Conclusion	19
Notes	20

Summary

In the 1950s and 1960s, a wave of military coups in the Middle East triggered extensive research on the role of military forces throughout the region. Since the early 1980s however, civil-military relations in the Middle East have been the subject of scholarly neglect. In the wake of the Arab Spring, researchers are again turning their attention to the role of the armed forces and their impact on social and political developments in the Middle East.

Like earlier scholars, researchers are concerned with understanding under what conditions armed forces are likely to intervene in politics and overrule civilian authorities, or willingly withdraw from politics and “return to the barracks.” In addition, a new generation of researchers seeks to explore under what circumstances, and by what means, military forces are willing to defend authoritarian regimes against popular uprisings. The events of early 2011 encouraged a strong focus on dramatic moments of revolutionary change. More recent developments stress the need to examine the role of military forces in the slow-grinding processes of everyday politics, beyond the sudden fall of autocratic leaders.

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Introduction

Why did Middle East scholars miss the Arab Spring? In an article posing this question, F. Gregory Gause III (2011) argued that, for the past two decades, Middle East researchers have shown little interest in studying the role of the military in Arab politics, making them poorly equipped to understand recent political processes in the region.¹ This claim is supported by other scholars who contend that Arab militaries, and their role in Arab societies, have received little scholarly attention.² The events of the last few years have further demonstrated the need for thorough studies and analyses of the security sector in Arab countries, and of the relationship between armed forces and civilian actors.

This report seeks to provide an overview of existing studies on military forces and civil-military relations in the Middle East, present important scholarly debates, identify important gaps in the literature, and highlight central topics for further research, focusing on Arab countries. However, due to its historical ties to the Arab world, and its distinct history of civil-military relations, some literature on Turkey will be included as well.

The analysis of civil-military relations is well-established as a field of study within political science, but draws on insights from related disciplines such as history, anthropology and sociology as well. While some contributions to the scholarly debate discuss civil-military relations specifically, others include it as part of a broader discussion on colonial history, nationalism, state formation and state structures. It should be mentioned here that while part of the literature specifically addresses the role of the military, other portions of it include in their scope the broader security apparatus, as excluding it often makes little sense in the context of highly securitised regimes. Studies of civil-military relations in the Middle East include both the contributions discussing the topic of civil-military relations specifically, either based on single cases or on broader comparisons of several cases, as well as studies of the state formation of various Middle Eastern states, where civil-military relations are a central topic.

The study of civil-military relations is closely intertwined with processes of transition from one system of governance to another, whether through military coups, or through non-violent political reforms, and with democratisation more generally. A central characteristic of democratic regimes is the civilian control over the military, while a prominent characteristic of authoritarian rule and dictatorships is the direct military rule, or heavy military influence, over civilian institutions of government.³ Therefore, studying civil-military relations is one way of investigating different degrees of democracy versus authoritarianism. Examining the evolution in the relationship between the civilian and the military sectors of society also addresses processes of democratisation, or processes of return to more restrictive forms of governance.

In the following, we will present a brief review of earlier works on militaries in the Middle East, with a special focus on the “civil-military problematique.” This will be followed by a look at ongoing debates about the persistence of authoritarian rule, and the military’s hold on political power and economic resources within their national borders. Finally, we will look at how scholars have addressed communal identities and their impact on civil-military relations, before discussing socio-cultural issues as a neglected field within studies on militaries in the Middle East.

A Middle Eastern specificity?

Since the late 1980s, scholars have tried to explain the lack of democratisation, and the persistence of authoritarian regimes throughout the Middle East. In a widely cited article, Eva Bellin (2004) shows how this phenomenon has been addressed in earlier scholarship, before seeking alternative explanations for the Middle Eastern exceptionality in this area.⁴ Traditional explanations for the lack of democratisation in the Middle East usually refer to the following factors: 1) the weakness of civil societies; 2) economies that are usually state-controlled; 3) high levels of poverty, illiteracy and inequality; 4) geographical location at the periphery of the democratic “epicentre”; and 5) a certain cultural specificity of the region.

According to the first factor, the weakness of civil societies makes them little prepared to constitute a credible counter-weight capable of challenging the militarised centres of power. Augustus Richard Norton (1996) addresses this issue in two edited volumes entitled *Civil Society in the Middle East*,⁵ where Middle Eastern civil societies are identified as mainly driven by professional organisations, often vigorous and Islamist-dominated private groups, providing various services. He argues that the latter will temper its rhetoric if only allowed the freedom to organise. The volumes are a collection of case studies of various civil society organisations in the Middle East, yet with a generally pessimistic view of the state of civil societies in the Middle East outside the Islamist organisations. Rex Brynen, Baghat Korany and Paul Noble (1995) also treat this topic in another edited volume titled *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World*,⁶ where they analyse liberalisation and democratisation processes in light of the role played by domestic settings, regional and international contexts, political economy and civil societies.

The second factor relates to the high levels of state-centred economies,⁷ reinforced by a “legacy of statist ideologies and rent-fuelled opportunities”⁸ which prevents the building of a sector that is independent and can act as a counter-power to the state. The third factor highlights poverty, illiteracy and inequality as important elements preventing democratisation from advancing, as they compromise the population’s engagement with democracy—both the masses who cannot afford to engage with it, and the elites, who may feel threatened by any perspective of change. The fourth factor seeks to explain the lack of democratisation in the Middle East through its geographical location, at the periphery of the “epicentre” of democratisation—Europe—supposedly preventing it from benefiting from a spillover or “demonstration effect,” which has proved important in other regions. Giuseppe Di Palma writes about this in his book *To Craft Democracies*,⁹ which came out in 1990, in the wake of the fall of several dictatorships in Southern Europe and Latin America, and on the eve of more democratic transitions in Eastern Europe.

Finally, there is often a presumption of cultural specificity of the region. While some stress the prevalence of patriarchal power structures,¹⁰ a wider group of scholars point to Islam as distinguishing the region from others; specifically, “Islam is presumed to be inhospitable to democracy.”¹¹ This topic is further treated in *Democracy and Arab Political Culture* by Elie Kedourie (1994),¹² *Islam and the State* by P.J. Vatikiotis (1987),¹³ and “Islam vs. Democracy” by Martin Kramer (1993),¹⁴ all with a rather pessimistic approach to the “compatibility” between Islam and democracy, the latter comprising a solid overview of literature on the topic, revealing the paradox that many of the manifestations of democracy in the Middle East have come through fundamentalist Islamist groups seeking greater political power—through democratic channels.

Bellin deems that none of these explanations are satisfying, as none of them are unique to the Middle East. Other countries similarly deprived of these presumed prerequisites have nevertheless managed the transition. As an example, Sub-Saharan Africa is as poor as, if not poorer than, the Middle East, with weak civil societies and far away from centres of successful democracies, yet it is a region where several countries have managed to make the transition. In other words, these elements may explain

some of the resistance to democratisation, but not all of it. Bellin proposes to look not only at the failure to consolidate democratisation processes, but also at the failure to initiate democratisation altogether. In other words, she suggests looking at the robustness of autocratic regimes, rather than just at the weakness of presumed preconditions for democratisation. In highlighting the role of the coercive apparatus in shaping state developments, Bellin's call resonates with earlier scholarship on civil-military relations in the Middle East. We will present a brief review of central contributions to the study of civil-military relations in the Middle East, before returning to Bellin's analysis.

The Civil-Military Problematique: The case of the Middle East

In “Soldier and the State” (1957), one of the earliest scholarly works on civil-military relations, Samuel Huntington tries to tackle what is known as “the civil-military problematique”;¹⁵ the challenge of keeping an army that is militarily effective, but subordinate to civilian rule. In addressing this challenge, Huntington introduces the concept of “objective civilian control” involving an arrangement in which civilian authorities grant professional officer corps autonomy in the realm of military affairs.¹⁶ In his view, this will enhance military professionalism, and in return, civilian leaders will get a strong, robust military that is politically neutral and voluntarily subordinate to civilian control. Huntington’s theory rests on the following causal model: the recognition of autonomy within the military sphere encourages greater professionalism, which leads to political neutrality and voluntary subordination, thereby securing civilian control of the military. For Huntington, the defining element of professionalism in the military is its subordination to the civilian authority. In his view, a military that does not obey is not professional.¹⁷

Huntington’s prescription against a politicised military was dismissed by military sociologist Morris Janowitz (1960), who promoted a more dynamic conception of professionalism that includes a sense of professional self-esteem and moral worth. Janowitz held that, under certain conditions, this form of professionalism makes the military less, rather than more, responsive to civilian control.¹⁸ He further argued that the politicisation of the military is unavoidable, and that a neat division between a military and a civilian realm is unsustainable. Contrary to Huntington’s view, he suggested that the military should be kept in check through civilian oversight at many levels of military affairs.¹⁹

While Huntington and Janowitz focused on civil-military relations primarily in the United States, within the context of the Cold War, the 1960s and 1970s saw growing scholarly concern with the role of militaries in the newly independent Third World states. In the 1950s and 1960s, a series of military coups changed the political map of the Middle East. In Egypt (1952), a group of military officers abolished the Egyptian monarchy, and installed an authoritarian republic that was to be ruled by military officers. Following the 1952 coup, Nasser sought to transform Egyptian society by expropriating big landowners and introducing large-scale industrial production, health care and educational reforms under state control. These reforms, pursued under a banner of Arab socialism, were combined with foreign policies that emphasised Arab independence and solidarity in opposition to Western imperialism.²⁰ These ideas resonated across the Arab world and, following the Suez Canal crisis of 1956, unleashed a wave of pan-Arabism throughout the region.²¹ Amid volumes of literature on Nasser’s Egypt, a primary work of reference is Anouar Abdel-Malek’s *Egypt: Military Society; the Army Regime, the Left, and Social Change under Nasser*.²² The Egyptian revolution triggered political upheavals throughout the Arab world, and was followed by military coups in Iraq (1958, 1963, 1968), Syria (1963, 1970), Yemen (1962) and Libya (1969).²³ This demonstrated the importance of Middle Eastern militaries, and sparked heated debates among Middle East and military scholars.

Two interlinked debates revolved around whether military forces would represent a force for positive change, and under what conditions military forces would actively intervene in political affairs. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, some prominent scholars held a positive view of the role of military forces in Middle Eastern politics.²⁴ Manfred Halpern made the case that military professionals would serve as agents of modernisation in the newly independent states of the Middle East. He argued that the officer corps constituted a key component of the “New Middle Class,” which could serve as a vanguard in the social, economic and political development of these new states.²⁵ Other researchers such as Edward Shils²⁶ and P.J. Vatikiotis²⁷ made similar claims, both emphasising the military’s potential as a force of development. This reflected their embrace of modernisation theories, which dominated academia in the 1950s and 1970s and held that industrialisation was the key to the development of modern societies. Scholars like Halpern, Shils and Vatikiotis saw military forces as

well suited to lead such crucial processes of industrialisation, due to the organisational capacity and national commitment ascribed to their higher officers.

With his seminal work “Political Order in Changing Societies” (1968) Huntington attacked the central tenets of the modernisation theory, in particular assumptions that economic, political and military development were naturally connected. Nonetheless, like many of his theoretical adversaries, he held a positive view of the military, and made the case that, in newly independent Third World countries with weak political institutions, military forces would represent the most competent, enlightened branches of society, even while serving as guardians of conservative forces.²⁸ This position was not shared by Amos Pearlmutter (1969), who viewed the military primarily as a repressive force, keen on acquiring power and using it to serve its own interests. He argued that once a nation’s military had claimed power, it was unlikely to let go of it.²⁹ With particular reference to Egypt, Pearlmutter coined the term *praetorian state*, a state in which the military tends to intervene in the government and has the potential to dominate the executive. In a praetorian state political leaders come mainly from the military, and the military plays a dominant role in all key political institutions. Pearlmutter further distinguished between two types of praetorian armies: the “arbitrator army” which seeks to influence politics behind the scenes; and the “ruler army” which exercises direct rule over extended periods of time.³⁰

A similar typology is offered by Eric Nordlinger (1977) who has distinguished between military “moderator,” “guardian” and “ruler” regimes. In line with Pearlmutter, he argued that the actions of military forces are mainly determined by their own corporate self-interest, rather than by any wider conception of national interest.³¹ This position touched upon a related debate among scholars of civil-military relations; the question of when, and under what conditions military forces would be inclined to intervene in political decision making.

Comparing military interventions in several countries, Samuel F. Finer (1962) identified a series of factors that determine the military’s dispositions and opportunities for engaging in political interventions.³² In his opinion, the military’s disposition to intervene in politics stems from the following factors: national interest, corporate self-interest, social (especially ethnic, sectarian or class-based) self-interest, and individual self-interest. Finer points out that military interventions are often justified with reference to national interests, even when the protection of corporate interests and privileges is the primary motivation.³³ While highly motivated, militaries must be presented with opportunities to intervene, in the form of sociopolitical circumstances that *enable* military interventions. Opportunities to intervene can stem from civilian dependence on the military, from domestic crises undermining the legitimacy of civilian leaders, and from the popularity of the military forces themselves.³⁴

Nordlinger goes even further than Finer in highlighting the role of military corporatism in determining the decisions of military leaders on whether or not to intervene in political processes. He defines military corporatism as the protection and enhancement of the military’s own interests through adequate budgetary support, autonomy in internal affairs, the preservation of their responsibilities in the face of encroachments from rival institutions, and its own institutional continuity.³⁵ He argues that military forces are most likely to intervene in politics when their corporate interests are seen as being threatened. As such, Nordlinger identifies the primary condition for the military’s disengagement from politics as its confidence in the fact that its corporate autonomy and privileges will not be threatened by political leaders upon its withdrawal.

Looking at how military disengagement from political governance takes form in various countries, Claude Welch (1974) identifies five additional factors that may facilitate a military withdrawal from politics: 1) that military elites question their further involvement in politics; 2) that they receive an appropriate role in protecting the nation or engaging in international peacekeeping; 3) that their

withdrawal possibly help avoid internal conflicts; 4) that there be economic growth; and finally 5) that military elites gain confidence in the nation's political leadership.³⁶

Until the late 1970s, Middle Eastern regimes were at the center of scholarly debates on military coups, modernisation, post-colonial state building and nationalism. Since the 1980s, however, scholarship on the Middle East has been marginalised within the study of developing countries and the broader field of comparative politics.³⁷ In particular, civil-military relations and the political role of the military in the Middle East have been neglected as topics of scholarly enquiries.³⁸ A few exceptions to this deserve mentioning, and will be presented in the next section.

Military professionalisation

In a widely cited article on military professionalism in the Middle East, Kamrava (2000) investigates how political leaders in the Middle East have implemented military professionalisation while seeking to guard themselves against military coups.³⁹ Kamrava identifies a dilemma facing civilian leaders in that professionalisation—in the form of an upgrade of military weaponry and equipment, advanced technical training, and a formalisation of procedures for recruitment and promotions⁴⁰—enhances the military's corporate identity, and along with that, its political aspirations. Further on, he identifies three types of regimes that have dealt with this dilemma in different ways. Military democracies, such as Israel and Turkey, are part of the first type of regimes, characterised by democratic institutions, but with a military that enjoys great autonomy from civilian rule and exercises significant political influence with some degree of popular support.⁴¹ The second type includes those regimes that are ruled by “autocratic officer politicians,” that owe their genesis to the military and continue to be dominated by military commanders. This group includes countries like Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Algeria, Yemen and other republican regimes in the Middle East.⁴² Some of these countries have also seen the establishment of additional military forces that are more ideologically tied to regime leaders.⁴³ Finally, looking at the monarchies of the region, Kamrava separates between the oil monarchies of the Persian Gulf, whose small military forces are partly manned by foreign mercenaries, and the “civic myth monarchies” of Jordan and Morocco, where large, conscription-based armies enjoy a certain level of corporate autonomy, and higher officers enjoy moderate privileges in exchange for their loyalty to the regime.⁴⁴

A more instrumental approach is represented by a volume on armed forces in the Middle East edited by Barry Rubin and Thomas Kearney.⁴⁵ Published in 2002, this volume contained country-specific chapters covering the armed forces of Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Israel, Jordan, the Palestinian National Authority, Syria and Turkey. The objectives of these chapters were: 1) to assess the aims and capabilities of the armed forces in the Middle East, and whether or not their aims could be met; and 2) to examine the armed forces of the Middle East as sociopolitical institutions and the relationship between the military and political authority in general. Written by scholars based in the United States and Israel, these chapters are far more thorough in analysing military capabilities than examining sociopolitical dynamics. Overall, the armies of Arab countries are found lacking in combat readiness and thus incapable of responding forcefully to external threats. At the same time, Arab armies are ascribed with considerable influence and stabilising functions on the domestic scene. In his introductory chapter, Rubin states that civil-military relations in the Arab states have gone through two phases since the 1950's. During the first phase, in the 1950's and 1960's, the military was the prime challenger of the (non-democratic) governments. In the second phase, from about 1970 onwards, the role of the military changed into becoming the principal protector of (still authoritarian) regimes.⁴⁶

Steven A. Cook (2007) offers a deeper analysis of the military's political role in *Ruling but not Governing: The Military and Political Development in Egypt, Algeria and Turkey*.⁴⁷ He defines these countries as military-dominated regimes, characterised by indirect military rule, and a strong military

influence on political affairs.⁴⁸ While recognising differences, Cook sees striking similarities in the role of military officers in modern state formation, and the long-standing political dominance of the military in these countries. He examines how in each country, the military stopped short of establishing military dictatorships, but still found ways of controlling political developments. By handing direct control over government ministries and agencies to civilian allies, the militaries secured their own corporate privileges, and their own dominance within the political order of each country. Over time, militaries could withdraw to their barracks, and conceal their powers behind a facade of pseudo-democratic institutions. This facade enabled military officers to satisfy certain demands emerging from society without changing the character of the political order. These pseudo-democratic institutions also allowed military officers to remain in control, while other political actors bore the burden of day-to-day governance, and became the target of public discontent.

At certain junctures, military officers in Algeria, Egypt and Turkey allowed political openings to secure the maintenance of a democratic facade. Cook points to the emergence of multiparty elections in Egypt and Algeria, and the widened space for civilian politics in Turkey, as examples, but stresses that all these developments are reversible. While the military elites tolerate political dissent, they refuse to tolerate what they perceive as serious threats to the regime, and to their own privileged position.⁴⁹ A key argument in Cook's analysis is that formal institutions may place formal authority in the hands of civilian leaders, while military officers retain control of political developments through informal ties and control mechanisms.⁵⁰

Cook points out that Egypt's constitutions have specified in great detail the procedures for the selection of a new president in the event of an incumbent's retirement, resignation, incapacity or death. According to the Egyptian Constitution of 1971, the speaker of the People's Assembly was next in line for the presidency. However, following the assassination of Anwar Sadat in 1981, there was never any question that he would be succeeded by his Vice President and former Air Force General Hosni Mubarak, who enjoyed the decisive support of the officer corps.⁵¹

According to the same constitution, the Parliament was vested with wider-ranging powers of oversight over military expenditure, and Egypt's minister of defense was formally required to make an annual presentation before the Assembly's Standing Committee of Defense and National Security, to answer questions and allow the military budget to be scrutinised by members of the Parliament. In reality, the minister of defense would stand before the Parliament only once every few years, where he would—due to the reverence accorded to military officers—be spared any tough questioning.⁵² Most importantly, the informal power of the military is both reflected and reinforced in that the staff of the presidency have consisted almost exclusively of serving or retired military officers, who could impress upon the various branches of Egypt's state bureaucracy the priorities of the military leadership.⁵³

Military narratives: External and internal threats

The narratives invoked to secure public support for the militaries, and to legitimise their strong presence in national politics and society, are an important source of their informal powers in many countries. Cook emphasises the extent to which the military in Egypt, Algeria and Turkey derive their legitimacy from nationalist narratives that place the officers at the center of struggles against colonialism and external threats, and the realisation of "the national will." As an example, Cook presents a stylised version of an Egyptian nationalist narrative where the military holds center stage:

In 1952, the military toppled an alien and corrupt dynasty. Four years later the armed forces heroically defended Egypt's independence when it repelled the Israeli, British and French invasion of 1956. The loss of Sinai in 1967 was the result of Israeli aggression and came at a time when one-third of the armed forces was fulfilling its Pan-Arab duty in Yemen. The heroism of the officers and soldiers of Egypt's military

*made the crossing of the Suez Canal possible in October 1973 successfully restoring Egypt's collective national honor and ultimately its land. The Egyptian military is the guarantor of domestic stability and a source of regional stability.*⁵⁴

In this narrative, the army is credited with defending Egypt's national honour and sovereignty, and exempted from responsibility for its greatest failure in the War of 1967.

Another central narrative among militaries in the Middle East, at least in the secular regimes, is that they serve a vital role as a buffer against Islamist radical movements. In Algeria, Luis Martinez describes how during the civil war, a proper anti-guerrilla unit emerged starting in 1993, designed to fight back the Islamists and drawing on military and police forces (formerly private militias) with government support, and started to organise from 1994 onwards. In Egypt, the military, as part of a wider security sector, was viewed as a buffer against the Muslim Brotherhood and other more radical groups under Mubarak's rule.⁵⁵ After the overthrow of Mohammed Morsi as president in July 2013, and the instalment of an interim government, Egypt's military leaders further promoted their role as the bulwark against Islamist forces, with a special focus on the Muslim Brotherhood.

The emphasis on domestic Islamist movements reflects a broader point concerning the role of Middle Eastern militaries. In most countries, the primary function of the military is to protect the state from internal rather than external enemies. Internal threats can be represented by Islamist groups who challenge state authorities on religious and ideological grounds, or groups representing special communal interests in states where there is a minority rule and a high level of fragmentation between different communities. This is notably the case in Syria, as Thomas Pierret describes in his study of the relationship between the secular state and religion, tracing the military's primary role as defender of the regime against internal threats from the crushed insurrection of the Muslim Brothers in 1982 to the current uprisings which began in 2011.⁵⁶ Begüm Burak, in an article entitled "The Role of the Military in Turkish Politics: To Guard Whom and From What?," studied the role of the Turkish military in protecting the Turkish state and nation, first and foremost from internal threats, as Kurdish and Islamic identities are defined as security issues.⁵⁷

The military's struggle against internal enemies is also part of broader nationalist projects in which some groups and identities are privileged at the expense of others. Within such projects, certain groups may find themselves marginalised, even though they represent no threat to the wider national community, or its dominant groups. In the case of Egypt, the persecution against the Muslim Brotherhood does not involve a rejection of Islam as a central pillar of Egyptian society. The Egyptian army cultivates a role as defender of an Egyptian nationalism, of which Islam is highlighted as a central component. However, such a national construct in effect serves to exclude Egypt's Coptic community, and to marginalise their position within, and in relation to, the Egyptian army. This has been reflected in the near total absence of Copts among higher officers in the Egyptian army.⁵⁸ More recent acts of military violence against Coptic civilians,⁵⁹ and the military's failure to protect Copts from violent attacks following the military's ouster of President Morsi in July 2013,⁶⁰ have been interpreted as signs of the military's disconnect from Egypt's Coptic community, and its indifference to Coptic concerns.

Many Middle Eastern militaries have also built their identity and *raison d'être* on the necessity to constitute credible counter-weights and buffers against Israel. This has been translated, as outlined by Georges Corm in his seminal book on the modern history of the Middle East *Le Proche Orient éclaté, 1956-2003*,⁶¹ into two corollary and legitimating discourses. First, the need to counter the Israeli supremacy has heavily relied on a sub-discourse about the need to strengthen the Arab military's technological apparatus. From Nasser to Sadat in Egypt, but also in other countries, the military victories of Israel are interpreted as due to their technological advances. As Corm underlines, the argument is politically salient, as it enables to put the blame of things on an external entity—e.g., the United States supporting Israel with the most modern material, and the Soviet Union leaving its used

and outdated technologies to its Arab allies. This leads us to the second corollary legitimising discourse, namely the justification of a rapprochement with the United States, which slowly grew in intensity after the Israeli-Arab war of 1973.

The persistence of military rule

While powerful narratives are important, they alone do not explain the longevity of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East. Returning to Bellin's article, the author identifies four key variables which have enabled the coercive apparatus (including police, secret services, etc.) to hold on to power. Bellin distinguishes between the military's will on the one hand and its capacity to hold on to power on the other, and identifies the following factors:

- The fiscal health of the security apparatus
- The level of foreign support
- The level of institutionalisation versus the extension of patrimonialism as the organisational basis for the military/security apparatus
- The level of popular mobilisation

Bellin first stresses the importance of the militaries' economy, as a central factor to explain their holding on to power. She argues that "the security apparatus is most likely to give up when its financial foundation is seriously compromised."⁶² The rentier-based economies of the Middle East provide easy access to funds for the states and their militaries, and this constitutes a central explanatory factor for their robustness, according to her. Second, she emphasises the importance of international support as another factor that might push the militaries to "give up" if their support withers. Concerning the third factor, her argument is that "the more institutionalised the security establishment is, the more willing it will be to disengage from power and allow political reform to proceed."⁶³ In other words, in a patrimonial system, regime change means the end of the military's and security forces' livelihood. Yet, in an institutionalised system, clinging on to power too long in the face of demands for change may ruin the military's legitimacy, while the revolutionaries may trigger divisions within their apparatus. Bellin draws on an example from Latin America to illustrate this, stating that "one of the main factors that drove the military elite to transfer power to civilians in Brazil and Argentina was its concern to save the institutional integrity of the military establishments."⁶⁴ Her fourth explanatory factor, the level of popular mobilisation, is based on the idea that a small mobilisation may be easily repressed without too many consequences, yet that a violent repression of a large-scale mobilisation is costly in terms of "institutional integrity of the security apparatus, international support, and domestic legitimacy."⁶⁵ Interestingly, she observes that a military based on a patrimonial system will be more willing to take on this cost than an institutionalised (in the Weberian sense) security apparatus, where promotion is based on merit and not family ties or ethnicity. This is related to the perceived costs of giving up power, more devastating for militaries and security personnel in a patrimonial system: "In Latin America the presence of an organised labor movement and an active civil society, both mobilised on the side of democratisation, made coercive regimes in Argentina and Peru reconsider repression when other options seemed possible and safe."⁶⁶

Bellin's distinction between institutionalism and patrimonialism deserves further scrutiny. While leaning on Weberian ideal types, Bellin's notion of patrimonialism places great emphasis on primordial ties based on communal belonging,⁶⁷ marginalising other sources of informal loyalty. A wider concept of patrimonialism could include informal ties and personal loyalties established through joint service within tightly knit institutions, such as the military officer corps, loyalties that endure long after individual officers have left their military ranks. As an example, the Egyptian army is highly institutionalised, in the sense that it is rule-governed, fairly predictable and meritocratic, with

well-established paths of career advancement and recruitment. At the same time, as Cook reminds us, the military to a large extent controls civilian institutions of governance through informal ties with fellow officers—turned leading politicians and civil servants within government institutions and associated industries.⁶⁸

Following Bellin's reasoning, the military's institutional robustness helped military officers reach the conclusion that their institutional autonomy and their economic privileges were better served by giving Mubarak "the velvet shove" than by shooting at peaceful protesters.⁶⁹ However, following Cook, it may well be argued that the military's extensive informal ties within the state apparatus gave higher officers confidence in the fact that they would be able to control the transition process, and reinforce, and possibly strengthen, the military's institutional autonomy and privileges following Mubarak's ouster.

Martini and Taylor have argued that the grooming of Gamal Mubarak to succeed his father as president—and his close connections with crony capitalism—represented a threat to the military's own state-subsidised industries and its informal hold on the Egyptian state,⁷⁰ thus giving military officers strong incentives to end the rule of Hosni Mubarak. Following this reasoning, Martini and Taylor have argued that the January 25th Revolution offered a welcome opportunity for the military to get rid of Gamal Mubarak as well, making him the target of popular discontent, backed by legal charges of corruption.⁷¹

Other contributions to the literature indeed underline that the military apparatus has the power to either play an active role in popular uprisings, through suppressing them, or a more passive role, helping the protesters by not intervening. Philippe Droz-Vincent looks at the role of Middle Eastern armies, formerly crucial institutions of authoritarian rule, in either enabling an uprisings' success by refusing to shoot at civilian protesters, or preventing uprisings by remaining loyal to the regime and furthering old practices of repression.⁷² Denis C. Blair examines the causes of the transition from military dictatorships to more democratic regimes, and emphasises the military's positive role in bringing about change in the recent popular uprisings in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Yemen during the Arab Spring.⁷³

The economics of military dominance in the Middle East

In a long-term perspective, the military capacity of any state is constrained by its economic resources. Throughout the Middle East, armed forces demand a high proportion of their nation's economic resources, though far from the proportions of Sub-Saharan Africa. While poverty may be high in many Middle Eastern societies, none of the Middle Eastern states face the risk of economic collapse (save Sudan). Rather, most states have enough resources to sustain high levels of expenditure on security apparatuses, a level that is among the highest in the world, in terms of proportion of GNP spent on security.⁷⁴ The average in the Middle East is 6.7 per cent of GNP (in 2000), while it is 3.8 globally, and 2.2 in NATO countries.⁷⁵

A robust economy is central for militaries to keep their grip on power. Bellin explains not only the high military expenses, but also the fiscal strength of militaries in the Middle East, with the easy access to rentier income. Whether stemming from oil or gas resources, geostrategic utility or control of critical transit facilities, many Middle Eastern economies are able to sustain high military expenses even in times of economic hardship, where it is other sectors of the economy that will suffer more. She notes that in Egypt, the government increased the military budget by 22 per cent the same year as it, due to an economic crisis, signed an IMF accord requiring the reduction of subsidies of basic goods by 14 per cent. Likewise, in Algeria, the military expenses have always been upheld despite the ravaging civil war.⁷⁶

Holger Albrecht claims that it is the regime type, rather than socio-economic factors, that determines the outbreak of popular protests, as he observes a connection between the regimes of traditional monarchies in the region and the relative lack of popular uprisings in these countries on the one hand, and the authoritarian republics which have become targets of the Arab Spring uprisings on the other.⁷⁷ However, in a chapter on Egypt, written in 2012, he suggests that the survival of the authoritarian institutions from the old regime unlikely makes an immediate transition to liberal democracy.

The role of the military in the economy

The Middle Eastern militaries often entertain their solid position in society through a deep penetration in the broader national economy of their countries. Military holding companies are an example of the military as an economic actor beyond strictly military spending or the military industry. Some examples of military holding companies are the Turkish Armed Forces Trust and Pension Fund (OYAK), having evolved into a large conglomerate involved in a range of different sectors, as well as the Turkish Armed Forces Foundation, and in Egypt, the Arab Organization for Industrialization. Firat Demir writes about the Turkish military as a neo-mercantilist capitalist entrepreneur, in light of Turkey's attempts to liberalise its economy.⁷⁸ He shows that despite some recent constitutional changes, the military budget is hardly subjected to any form of public scrutiny.

Concrete examples:

- As described by Akca Ismet, the military-economic structure of Turkey rests upon three pillars: the military holding company (Armed Forces Trust and Pension Fund, OYAK), military spending (sky-high, almost totally controlled by the military), and the military industry (in rapid development, leading to a militarisation of the whole of the Turkish industry).⁷⁹
- Azzam Maha shows that in Egypt, the Supreme Council of Armed Forces has sought to direct the transitional process following Mubarak's regime. Maha argues that its ability to do so relies on its capacity to be transparent and accountable in terms of its role in the economy and its business interests.⁸⁰ Indeed, with democratisation comes also an increased public interest in the effects of the army's business interests, and a higher level of scrutiny. Daniel Brumberg and Hesham Sallam bring forth the prospects for security sector reform in Egypt, in light of the military's deep involvement in the economy.⁸¹ The Egyptian military has possessions in many different sectors, such as construction, tourism, maritime transport, production of petrochemicals, household appliances, pharmaceuticals and food products. While a vast range of enterprises are owned by the military, a number of state-owned companies, especially within the oil sector, are run by retired generals from the Egyptian army.⁸² These economic interests naturally influence the military's response to discussions on security sector reform.
- Ivan Briscoe, Floor Janssen and Rosan Smits analyse how the successive Assad regimes have built a system based on incentives to their supporters in exchange of loyalty from business and social circles, through a political economy analysis.⁸³
- In order to shore up support—among military officers—Hafez al-Assad allowed his military commanders and their supporters free reign to pursue their own parochial interests.⁸⁴ In particular, corruption surrounding government contracts and smuggling across the Lebanese-Syrian border became important sources of personal enrichment among Syrian officers. While Syrian civilians had to pay up to 250 per cent duty on goods brought across the border from Lebanon, Syrian officers, using their own private road between Beirut and the Syrian border, were allowed to flood the Syrian economy with a variety of goods from Lebanon with great personal profit.⁸⁵

In each of these cases, the military controls vast economic resources based on institutional privileges and informal understandings with political authorities. Under such conditions, it is to be expected that the role played by military officers in relation to political authorities will be informed by their own calculation of how their economic interests and privileges are best secured.

In line with earlier researchers like Finer⁸⁶ and Nordlinger,⁸⁷ Steven Cook (2006) recognised the importance of corporate interests—including lucrative “fringe benefits” as mentioned above—in determining the behaviour of the military. Accordingly, he has emphasised the potential value of political pacts as an instrument of conflict resolution that may allow autocratic rulers and military leaders to relinquish power without being prosecuted for past crimes, and without losing vast economic interests.⁸⁸

While economic concerns inform the political manoeuvrings of military leaders,⁸⁹ their control of industrial enterprises is bound to have a profound impact on their countries’ economies. In the case of Egypt, the military, through its control of state-owned holding companies, and its support of protectionist trade policies were seen as a powerful counter-force to neoliberal reforms and international pressures toward privatisation under the rule of Hosni Mubarak. ⁹⁰ At the same time, the military has disciplined striking workers with brutal sanctions, resisted legalisation of independent labour unions, as well as efforts to establish a legal minimum wage.⁹¹ In relation to civilian enterprises, military enterprises have held great advantages in the form of state subsidies and other privileges. Nonetheless, according to Robert Springborg, Egypt’s civilian private sector has also benefited greatly from close cooperation with the army, as private entrepreneurs have been awarded lucrative contracts with the army, and benefited strongly from technology sharing.⁹²

In recent years, the military has also expanded its portfolio far beyond state-owned holding companies, exploiting its monopoly over lucrative sectors, and granting exclusive access to foreign companies in order to attract international investment partners.⁹³ As such, the military’s occasional resistance to neoliberal policies appears to have reflected a pragmatic desire to block potential rivals from gaining access to the Egyptian economy, rather than ideological reservations.

No one knows for sure how much of Egypt’s economy is controlled by the military, and “expert” estimates vary between 5 and 40 per cent of the economy. The Egyptian Army’s economic holdings are classified as state secrets, and are in any case too vastly dispersed to be estimated with any accuracy.⁹⁴ As such, the extent and impact of the military’s influence on Egypt’s national economy is difficult to estimate. There is need for further research on the economic role and impact of militaries not only in Egypt. In recent years, the Jordanian military has sought to become a player in international arms and military technology production. According to their own promotional literature, Jordan’s armed forces have entered joint venture partnerships with at least 26 foreign defence companies to produce everything from armoured vehicles to pre-packaged field rations.⁹⁵ However, in most countries throughout the region, these are sensitive topics that are protected as state secrets and that must be approached with caution. Control of economic resources is an important factor in shaping the military’s relationship with civilian society. Another important factor is the degree to which a country’s armed forces are seen as reflecting the cultural composition of the wider population, which we will look into in the following section.

The impact of communal divides

Following recent uprisings in the Arab world, communal divides based on religious, ethnic and tribal identities have re-emerged as a focus of scholarly concern. Religious and ethnic divides have been given central attention within the literature on “coup-proofing,”⁹⁶ dealing with the “civil-military problematique” raised by earlier scholars. The presence of strong, capable security apparatuses is considered key to repressing internal dissent and sustaining authoritarian rule. However, by empowering their armed forces, authoritarian rulers run the risk of being overthrown by their own militaries. To protect themselves from such threats, authoritarian rulers have applied a variety of coup-proofing strategies. In the Middle East, these strategies have helped regimes prevent coup attempts since 1980, leading scholars to view the persistence of authoritarian regimes as a hallmark of regional politics.⁹⁷ Scholars commonly refer to three main strategies of coup-proofing: building parallel security institutions, distributing material incentives and exploiting communal ties.

Most authoritarian regimes build parallel military forces and security services to protect themselves from military intervention. In countries as different as Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Libya, political leaders have established domestic security services and elite forces designed to protect them from coup attempts at the hands of regular military forces.⁹⁸ Some regimes also seek to secure the loyalties of their militaries and security services through the distribution of material incentives and economic privileges unavailable to the rest of society. As an example, several scholars have emphasised the generous privileges enjoyed by the Egyptian officer corps.⁹⁹

Finally, authoritarian regimes have exploited communal divisions when building their armed forces, granting particular favours to certain communities, often staffing their own security apparatus with members of the ruler’s family, tribe, ethnic or sectarian group. While such a strategy has little to offer in countries characterised by great cultural homogeneity, such as Egypt and Tunisia, it appears to represent the primary strategy for preventing coups in countries that are more culturally diverse. Many authoritarian regimes in the Middle East are politically dominated by groups that constitute sectarian or ethnic minorities within their national borders; Sunni-Muslims in Iraq under Saddam Hussein, Alawites in Syria, East-Bankers in Jordan, Sunni-Muslims in Bahrain and the Western tribes in Libya under Gaddafi.¹⁰⁰ In all of these countries, political rulers have sought to secure their own survival by staffing military and security forces with members of their own group, thereby tying the survival of the military forces to that of the regime. In the words of Gregory Gause III, the logic is simple: “*If the regime falls and the majority takes over, the army leadership will likely be replaced as well.*”¹⁰¹

The Arab Spring appears to have revealed a blind spot in civil-military relations literature. While exploring how various strategies have served to prevent overt military coups, scholars have paid less attention to how such strategies might affect military behaviour in the face of massive popular uprisings. Overall, there has been little focus on the military’s daily interaction with civilian life, interaction that necessarily informs the military’s response when social protests occur. As a number of Arab rulers were faced with unprecedented protests, their political survival revolved around one question: “*Would the military defect? Or more specifically, would the military shoot the protesters or not?!*”¹⁰²

In Egypt and Tunisia, the military forces chose not to shoot, leaving political leaders with little choice but to flee in the face of massive protests. In Bahrain, the military proved willing to repress civilian protesters with brutal means, allowing the ruling monarch to remain in power. In Libya, as well as in Yemen, the military split, with some branches standing by the regime, and some branches opting to join the rebels rather than shoot at protesters. In both cases, the fragmentation of the army helped bring about the fall of long-term rulers. In Syria, the story is still unfolding, but due to limited military defections, the regime of Bashar al-Assad has endured more than two years of significant armed resistance. This diversity in military behaviour raises the general question of “when, and under what circumstances does a coercive apparatus defect?”¹⁰³

As mentioned in earlier paragraphs, it is a widely held assumption that military forces and security services seek to protect their own corporate interests, and will be motivated to overthrow or defect a ruling regime when these interests are violated. Nordlinger highlighted four types of interests that can trigger such behaviour: budgetary support, autonomy, the absence of credible rivals and institutional survival.¹⁰⁴ Of these, it is widely agreed that institutional survival represents an “existential interest that the military will set above its other corporate interests.”¹⁰⁵

Following these assumptions, the building of parallel military apparatuses, and the distribution of material incentives appear to fall short of securing the loyalty of Arab militaries in the face of popular uprisings. In line with the literature on coup-proofing, these measures may have limited effect unless combined with the presence and effective exploitation of communal divides in the structuring of a state’s security apparatus. Again, this explains the contrast between military responses to popular uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, and other countries in the region. Tunisia and Egypt were also the countries where military commanders saw that their institutional interests did not depend on the political survival of their former rulers.¹⁰⁶

By contrast, Bahrain and Syria are both dominated by religious minorities that have staffed their armies and key security services with members of their own sectarian community (in the case of Bahrain, Sunni-Muslim mercenaries from other countries).¹⁰⁷ This strategy serves to prevent, or at least limit, military defections by assuring that the military’s most basic interest, institutional survival, depend on the continued survival of the regime itself. In the case of Syria, roughly 90 per cent of the military officers in combat-ready battalions belong to the country’s Alawite minority. At the same time, the Syrian regime has deliberately fuelled fears of sectarian persecution against Alawites as well as Christians in the event of its demise. By tapping into communal narratives of Sunni hostility and discrimination against the Alawites, the regime has to some extent taken the Alawite minority hostage, linking its fate to its own.¹⁰⁸ This has consequences beyond the behaviour of the military itself. As the conflict has become increasingly sectarianised, the regime has benefited from the emergence of Alawite-dominated militias that have taken up arms against opposition forces, alongside the Syrian Army.¹⁰⁹

Nonetheless, the case of Syria also points to the limitations of a “communal strategy.” The Alawite minority constitutes only 12 per cent of Syria’s population. Though Alawites hold key positions within the security apparatus, a majority of Syria’s military personnel are Sunni-Muslims. Because of this, the Syrian regime is unable to deploy large military units that are not dominated by Alawite officers in key positions in combat against largely Sunni-Muslim rebels, due to the risk of large scale defection. With a standing army of 220,000 soldiers in 2011, it was estimated that the Assad regime could effectively deploy less than one third of its forces in combat.¹¹⁰ In a protracted civil war, this undermines the military sustainability of the regime, while entrenching communal divides and further complicating any prospects for a peaceful settlement in a post-Assad Syria.¹¹¹ A focus on coup-proofing strategies sheds light on the convergence between power relations and communal divides, on which groups are considered threats to the regime, and which ones are not. The unfolding of events following a series of popular uprisings has directed new scholarly attention towards the impact of communal divides, and their implications for civil-military relations in Arab countries. However, a sole focus on institutional arrangements cannot fully explain why some regimes are more successful than others at retaining power in contexts of communal division.

The Republic of Syria and the Kingdom of Jordan, while very different in institutional make up, are both regimes dominated by minority groups, supported by robust and extensive coercive apparatuses, including large, conscription-based military forces. In addition, they both rely on powerful state-crafted national narratives, and on the production of distinct national identities, while potentially conflicting loyalties are publicly suppressed or denied altogether. In Syria, the Baath regime and, by extension, the Syrian Armed Forces have been presented as defenders of a “non-sectarian” Arab nationalism, and as a bulwark against the threats of Islamic extremism and sectarian civil war—a

threat that has been cultivated by the regime for three decades, enabling the regime to politically neuter Syria's Sunni-Muslim majority. In addition, the regime and army are bound up with a personality cult centred at first around Hafiz al-Assad as the nation's saviour,¹¹² and in later years around Bashar al-Assad and his wife and children.¹¹³ The impact of such nationalist constructs among Syrians of different communal belonging has barely been studied—in spite of its importance to regime legitimacy and survival.

The Kingdom of Jordan, first constructed as a British mandate, relied on the creation of a new collective identity amid a population that had little a priori affinities, to generate allegiance to this newborn entity and its rulers. The crafting of a Jordanian national identity emphasised loyalty to a Hashemite royal family that holds Islamic credentials (descending from the Prophet Muhammad) as well as Arab credentials (a central role in the Great Arab Revolt), but it also emphasised an indigenous, Transjordanian, East-Bank, Beduin and tribal component.¹¹⁴ With the massive influx of Palestinians following the wars of 1948 and 1967, and the emergence of a de facto Palestinian population majority in Jordan, efforts were made to create a more inclusive Jordanian nationalism aimed at overriding divisions between Jordanians (from the East Bank of the Jordan River) and Palestinians (from the West Bank), while ensuring East Bank hegemony.¹¹⁵ Joseph Massad (2001) has emphasised the central role of the Jordanian army in the continuous construction of a Jordanian national identity, and in containing the impact of Palestinians in Jordan.¹¹⁶ Demonstrating the army's power, and its importance as a base of Jordanian dominance, military veterans have made public statements in recent years, criticising the King of Jordan for failing to curb the influence of Palestinians, and demanding dramatic political reforms.¹¹⁷ While a number of studies have explored tensions between Jordanian citizens of Jordanian or Palestinian origin,¹¹⁸ their impact on dynamics within the national army and position in Jordanian society have been the subject of few studies beyond Massad's book. The lack of available research on such issues reflects a wider, long-term neglect of social and cultural factors in studies on Arab military forces.¹¹⁹

Cultural aspects and normative orientations

Aside from earlier debates about the military as possible agents of modernisation, there has been little scholarly focus on norms, values and social relations within the armed forces in the Arab World. Some scholars have ascribed to higher military officers a distinctive worldview in which the military holds a crucial role in processes of national liberation, state formation, and modernisation.¹²⁰ Military officers are commonly described as “high modernists,” in their emphasis of certain scientific, organisational and technical skills, and with an elitist attitude that they, as officers possessing such skills, are especially suited to rule their countries.¹²¹ Such high modernist attitudes are highlighted by scholars who view the military as reluctant to let go of political power.¹²² In Egypt, army officers are trained within Egypt’s prestigious Military Academy, where student admission is hard-won, based on personal skills and school merits. While admitting students of different social backgrounds,¹²³ it is widely understood that the academy instils in prospective officers an elite identity, a collective understanding of themselves as men of extraordinary skill and moral qualities, especially qualified to protect and rule their own country.¹²⁴ However, no studies have examined in any depth, the impact of military training on collective self-conceptions and ideological dispositions among young officers, in Egypt or in other Arab countries.

In the United States, a few scholars have looked at the socialisation of soldiers within US armed forces, exploring the production of norms, ideals, collective narratives, identities, and relations of authority within different branches of the US Army.¹²⁵

In Israel, Anthropology Professor Eyal Ben-Ali has spearheaded the production of a substantial body of ethnographic research on Israel’s armed forces, its leadership structures, training and combat practices, and its integration of new soldiers into a military world defined by its own rules, values, enemy images and conceptions of threat.¹²⁶ Another important contribution from Israel, is Rhoda Kanaaneh’s study of Palestinian soldiers in the Israeli army.¹²⁷ With great sensitivity, Kanaaneh explores the motivations driving these soldiers, their painful conflicts of loyalty, their enduring marginalisation in relation to Jewish Israelis, and the social repercussions they face within their home communities.

Similar studies focusing on Arab armies are hard to come by. Research that touches upon social and cultural aspects of military forces in the Arab world has largely focused on instrumental concerns, in particular the impact of cultural factors on the combat capabilities of Arab armies. One example here is Kenneth Pollack’s “Arabs at War,”¹²⁸ published in 2002 based on his PhD thesis, which examines the war history of six Arab countries between 1945 and 1991.¹²⁹ Pollack’s starting point is that in spite of the presence of large military forces, with plenty of manpower and equipped with state of the art modern weaponry, Arab countries have suffered numerous defeats on the battlefield against seemingly weaker opponents.

In his efforts to explain the dismal record of Arab combat performance, Pollack looks to the organisation of Arab military forces. He finds that there is no consistent pattern in unit cohesion, generalship, logistics and maintenance, or even morale within Arab armies. Instead, he argues that Arab underperformance at war stems from poor tactical leadership, information management, weapon handling and equipment maintenance.¹³⁰ In country-specific assessments, he identifies the military strengths and weaknesses of various Arab armies. For example, writing about Egypt’s numerous wars with Israel, Pollack argues that Egyptian soldiers fought well in static positions, but that junior officers “consistently demonstrated an unwillingness to maneuver, innovate, take the initiative, or act independently.”¹³¹ While his PhD thesis explicitly attributes such military shortcomings to Arab cultural traits, he is far more cautious about making these connections in his book from 2002.

These reservations are not held by Norwell B. DeAtkine, a US Army veteran with three decades of experience working with armed forces in the Arab world. In a much debated article, he argues that a

series of Arab cultural traits undermine military training, making the armed forces of several Arab countries unfit for combat.¹³² Among the traits highlighted by DeAtkine is a tendency to monopolise rather than distribute vital technical knowledge within the military, an educational system centred on rote memorisation rather than analysis, a focus on social prestige and face saving that hinders effective training, and a focus on social rank and authority that inhibits troop cohesion and trust between low ranking soldiers and their officers, and that discourages initiative, improvisation and a capacity for independent decision-making among lower officers, traits that can prove vital in real combat situations.¹³³

DeAtkine also points to ties of trust and loyalty that he sees as being particularly pronounced in the Arab world; a lack of trust for anyone outside one's own family, the importance of sectarian and tribal loyalties in Arab societies, and a general lack of trust between civilian political leaders and military leaders. This encourages the recruitment of high level officers on the basis of tribal, sectarian or political loyalties rather than merit, and the emergence of parallel military branches and security forces that are designed to keep each other in check, and discouraged from cooperating, minimising the risk of coordinated military coups against political leaders. Shortly put, DeAtkine argues that Arab societies are culturally inclined to structure their armies in ways that may serve to prevent military coups, but that also make them militarily ineffective.¹³⁴

Amid sweeping generalisations, DeAtkine's article offers some interesting reflections on patterns of social interaction between low- and high-ranking officers, and on conflicts of loyalty and trust within military battalions, issues that have gone largely unaddressed among Middle East scholars who rarely have access to the "inner life" of military forces in the region. In recent decades, several Arab countries have engaged in military cooperation with the United States. Such cooperation has included coordinated training at combat operations, arms trade, and the education of higher officers from Arab armies at military academies in the United States. Since the signing of the 1979 peace agreement between Egypt and Israel, Egypt has taken on a role as the United States' main military ally in the Arab World. As a part of this alliance, two generations of Egyptian officers have attended military academies in the United States.¹³⁵ As an example, Commander-in-Chief of Egypt's Armed Forces, and Deputy Prime minister since July 2013, General Al-Sisi spent a year at the US Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania between 2005 and 2006.¹³⁶ One might assume that extensive cooperation with US military personnel has had an impact on organisational culture and interpersonal communication within the armed forces in Egypt, Jordan, and other countries in the Arab world. However, in a more recent article, DeAtkine makes the case that Western influence on Arab militaries is both short-lived and superficial.¹³⁷ Referring in particular to the case of Egypt, he argues that Western influence rarely outlives the officers most directly exposed to it: "Having gone through French, British, Soviet and now American involvement with their military, it is evident that the pervasive and powerful Arab/Egyptian culture seeps back in as soon as the advisors leave."¹³⁸

Overall, DeAtkine's articles serve as reminders of how little scholars have explored the inner dynamics of Arab military forces. This neglect may partly reflect the disciplinary dominance of political science within the field of civil-military relations. Up until today, studies addressing the role of armed forces in Arab countries have leaned heavily on analytical tools and theoretical perspectives that direct attention towards institutional mechanisms and power relations at a state and inter-state level. Issues that traditionally have occupied anthropologists and sociologists, such as interactional dynamics, normative orientations, and questions of identity and belonging among military personnel have been left understudied.

This neglect is also partly explained with reference to limitations of access to the military realm, legal restriction on what can be reported, and political sensitivity regarding "all things military" in much of the Arab world. While these limitations are significant, there are valuable sources of information that remain largely untapped by scholars of the Middle East. In a review of studies on the Arab security sector, Barak and David point out two such sources: 1) the emergence of a new Arab media

landscape, which has enabled heated public debates over military affairs and security-related issues, and has made available information that only a few years ago would have been shielded from public scrutiny, opening up new possibilities for study; 2) in some Arab countries, the national armed forces publish news bulletins and gazettes, through which they seek to shape their public image, and control public debates about the role of the military within their national communities.¹³⁹ Such material, though rarely explored by scholars, cannot make up for the difficulties of conducting ethnographic research. Nonetheless, these sources can still offer valuable insights into civil-military relations in the Arab world.

What Barak and David fail to address, is that while military institutions may be off-limits to most researchers, the civilian communities that surround them are not. Given the appropriate cautionary measures, people's views of their national militaries as institutions, as guardians of national and public security, as tools of state oppression, and as potential arenas for professional careers, can be examined through interviews, by following debates in social and mainstream media, and through other sources. Civilians' attitudes towards the military greatly impact its space for political manoeuvring, its ability to openly intervene in political affairs, and to exert military force against political opponents and voices of dissent without losing public support.

Conclusion

Since the early 1980s, civil-military relations in the Middle East have been the subject of scholarly neglect. In the wake of the Arab spring, Middle Eastern scholars are again turning their attention to the role of armed forces and their impact on social and political developments in the region. In this process, the works of earlier scholars such as Huntington, Finer, Nordlinger and Pearlmuter are being revisited.

Earlier debates focused much on the active involvement of armed forces, on the conditions under which armed forces would actively intervene or withdraw from politics as more or less independent actors. In recent years, researchers have focused on how armed forces respond to popular uprisings. In the wake of the Arab Spring, researchers are asking under what circumstances military forces are likely to defect rather than put down popular protests through the use of force. In exploring these questions, examining the behaviour of armed forces when faced with popular uprisings, scholars have emphasised three interconnected factors.

First, the level of institutionalism within the armed forces. As argued by Bellin¹⁴⁰ and Lutterbeck,¹⁴¹ the more formalised, rule-bound and merit-based the armed forces are, the less likely they are to prop up authoritarian rulers facing massive popular opposition.

Second, the extent to which the corporate interest and institutional survival of the military depends on the survival of the regime. As pointed out by Gause III and Holbrecht, if the military sees its own survival as intimately tied to the survival of the regime, it is more likely to stand by the regime, and be willing to use brutal force against regime opponents.

Finally, there is the matter of whether a regime and its military forces are dominated by particular groups or reflect the cultural diversity of the general population. Scholars comparing the uprisings in Libya, Bahrain, Syria and Yemen¹⁴² emphasise the impact of ethnic, tribal and sectarian divides in determining the behaviour of military forces facing popular uprisings. In contexts of heightened communal divisions, the behaviour of armed forces may reflect a powerful combination of institutional self-interest and communal solidarity.¹⁴³

The Arab Spring has served as a reminder of the need for a scholarly update on civil-military relations in the region. However, new research should not be limited to the role of the armed forces in upheavals and processes of political transition, whether as regime defenders, committed revolutionaries, or hesitant defectors. Future research should explore the role of the military and other security services in the politics of everyday life, their influence on decision-making processes and on power relations between competing political forces. The unfolding of events in Egypt serves as a reminder that the political manoeuvrings taking place between dramatic transitions are crucial to understanding the outcome of transitional processes. While regimes remain intact, their internal power dynamics, systems of coercion and means of self-legitimation evolve. The position of Arab militaries and their relations with political authorities and society at large remain central to understanding these processes.

Notes

¹ G. Gause III, "Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring: The Myth of Authoritarian Stability," *Foreign Affairs* 81 (2011), 83.

² Eva Bellin, "Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East. Lessons from the Arab Spring," *Comparative Politics*, vol. 44, no. 2 (2012), 127-149

Holger Albrecht and Dina Bishara, "Back on Horseback: The Military and Political Transformation in Egypt," *Middle East Law and Governance*, vol. 3, no. 3 (2011), 13-23.

³ This point is somewhat disputed. The relationship between authoritarianism and military influence is not clear-cut. While military subordination to civilian rule is widely regarded as a democratic requirement, some scholars argue that under some circumstances, a strong, interventionist army can serve as a guardian of constitutional democracy against civilian leaders with autocratic tendencies. For an overview of this debate, see: Ozan O. Varol, "The Military as the Guardian of Constitutional Democracy," *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law*, vol. 50 (Summer 2013).

⁴ Eva Bellin, "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective," *Comparative Politics*, vol. 36, no. 2 (January 2004), 139-157.

⁵ Augustus Richard Norton, ed., *Civil Society in the Middle East*, vol. 1-2 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995-1996).

⁶ Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany, and Paul Noble (eds.), *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1995).

⁷ UNDP, Arab Human Development Report (2002).

⁸ Bellin, "Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism," 139.

⁹ Giuseppe Di Palma, *To Craft Democracies: An Essay on Democratic Transitions* (University of California Press, 1990).

¹⁰ Hisham Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy, a Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

¹¹ Bellin, "Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism," 141.

¹² Elie Kedourie, *Democracy and Arab Political Culture* (London: Frank Cass, 1994).

¹³ P. J. Vatikiotis, *Islam and the State* (New York: Croom Helm, 1987).

¹⁴ Martin Karmer, "Islam vs. Democracy," *Commentary*, 95 (January 1993), 35-42.

¹⁵ Peter D. Feaver, "The Civil-Military Problematique: Huntington, Janowitz, and the Question of Civilian Control," *Armed Forces & Society*, vol. 23 no. 2 (Winter 1996), 149-178.

¹⁶ Samuel Huntington, *Soldier and the State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), VIII.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 81-85.

¹⁸ Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1960), 65-66.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 363-367.

²⁰ William L. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East* (Westview Press: Boulder, Colorado, 2010), 293-313.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 314-315.

²² Anouar Abdel-Malek, *Egypt: Military Society; the Army Regime, the Left, and Social Change under Nasser* (New York: Random House, 1968).

²³ Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 333-335.

²⁴ Augustus Richard Norton and Ali Alfoneh, "Developments in Civil Military Relations in the Middle East," ed. Carsten Jensen, Danish Defence College, (Copenhagen, Denmark, 2008), 18.

²⁵ Manfred Halpern, *The Politics of Social Change in the Middle East and North Africa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

²⁶ Edward Shils, "The Military in the Political Development of New States," in *The Role of the Military in Underdeveloped Countries*, ed. John J. Johnson, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962).

- ²⁷ Panayiotis Vatikiotis, *The Egyptian Army in Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961).
- ²⁸ Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1968), 192-264.
- ²⁹ Amos Perlmutter, "The Praetorian State and the Praetorian Army: Toward a Taxonomy of Civil-Military Relations in Developing Polities," *Comparative Politics* vol. 1, no. 3 (April 1969), 382-404.
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INDEXING TERMS

Literature review

Civil Military relations

The Middle East

In the 1950s and 1960s, a wave of military coups in the Middle East triggered extensive research on the role of military forces throughout the region. Since the early 1980s however, civil-military relations in the Middle East have been the subject of scholarly neglect. In the wake of the Arab Spring, researchers are again turning their attention to the role of the armed forces and their impact on social and political developments in the Middle East.

Like earlier scholars, researchers are concerned with understanding under what conditions armed forces are likely to intervene in politics and overrule civilian authorities, or willingly withdraw from politics and "return to the barracks." In addition, a new generation of researchers seeks to explore under what circumstances, and by what means, military forces are willing to defend authoritarian regimes against popular uprisings. The events of early 2011 encouraged a strong focus on dramatic moments of revolutionary change. More recent developments stress the need to examine the role of military forces in the slow-grinding processes of everyday politics, beyond the sudden fall of autocratic leaders.