

PAPER DETAILS

TITLE: THE MILITARY\\S ROLE DURING CRISES (2011-2022) EGYPT AND SYRIA AS A
MODEL

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PAGES: 8-37

ORIGINAL PDF URL: <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/4665570>

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Makale Türü: Arařtırma makalesi

Geliř Tarihi: 05.03.2025

Kabul Tarihi: 29.04.2025

Article Type: Research article

Submitted: 05.03.2025

Accepted: 29.04.2025



<https://doi.org/10.56448/ataddergi.1649300>

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The military's Role during Crises (2011-2022) Egypt and Syria as a model

Abstract: The concept of the military establishment that we know today goes back to the beginning of the sixteenth century when the European federations were established, such as the French Union during Louis XI in 1483, the British Union led by Henry VII in 1485, the authority of the Catholic Kings in Spain in 1469, and the beginning of the formation of local authorities that required institutions to serve the king and the armies to protect These states or empires. The contemporary form of the military institution, the duties stipulated in the era of the state and modern constitutions, and the relations of these institutions with the rest of the

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state institutions are completely different from those of his predecessor, and made their presence more powerful and influential "according to the constitution". This is what we have seen after the events in the Arab region since late 2010 that led to the overthrow of authoritarian regimes, as happened in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen, and the pillars of other regimes were shaken, but did not fall until the time of writing this study, as happened in Syria, and these events are now known. Later in the Arab Spring. As is the case in most countries that witness large-scale popular protests whose goal is to bring down the government or even the entire system, political leaders usually resort - as a means of suppressing demonstrators - to request the support of the armies, after the security forces retreat in the face of the resilience of the demonstrators. The political survival of the rulers depends on answering this question, "Will the army respond to orders to confront the demonstrators and shoot or not?" Especially since, according to the literature on civil-military relations, the army's support for the revolution, or at least its neutrality, is a necessary condition for the success of the revolutionary act in overthrowing the political leadership in the country. Therefore, this study attempts to track the reactions of the Arab armies towards popular protests with a focus on the two countries of Egypt, so that the time scope of this study extends to include the period from January 25 to February 11 in the Egyptian case.

Key Words: Military Institution - Crises - Arab Spring - Egypt – Syria

2021-2022 Krizlerinde Ordunun Rolü: Mısır ve Suriye Örneği

Özet: Bugün bildiğimiz askeri kurum kavramı, 1483'te XI. Louis döneminde Fransız Birliği, 1485'te VII. Henry liderliğindeki İngiliz Birliği,

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1469'da İspanya'da Katolik Kralların otoritesi ve krala hizmet edecek kurumlar ve bu devletleri veya imparatorlukları koruyacak ordular gerektiren yerel otoritelerin oluřumunun bařlangıcı gibi Avrupa federasyonlarının kurulduđu on altıncı yüzyılın bařlarına kadar uzanır. Askeri kurumun çağdař biçimi, devlet ve modern anayasalar döneminde öngörülen görevler ve bu kurumların diđer devlet kurumlarıyla ilişkileri, sefeininkinden tamamen farklıdır ve varlıklarını "anayasaya göre" daha güçlü ve etkili hale getirmiřtir. Bu, 2010'un sonlarından bu yana Arap bölgesinde otoriter rejimlerin devrilmesine yol açan olaylardan sonra gördüğümüz şeydir, tıpkı Tunus, Mısır, Libya ve Yemen'de olduđu gibi ve diđer rejimlerin temelleri sarsıldı, ancak bu çalışmayı yazma zamanına kadar yıkılmadı, tıpkı Suriye'de olduđu gibi ve bu olaylar artık biliniyor. Daha sonra Arap Baharı'nda. Hükümeti veya hatta tüm sistemi devirmeyi amaçlayan büyük ölçekli halk protestolarına tanık olan çođu ülkede olduđu gibi, siyasi liderler genellikle göstericileri bastırmanın bir yolu olarak, güvenlik güçleri göstericilerin direnci karşısında geri çekildikten sonra orduların desteğini talep etmeye başvururlar. Yöneticilerin siyasi hayatta kalması řu sorunun cevabına bađlıdır: "Ordu göstericilerle yüzleşme ve ateř etme emirlerine cevap verecek mi, vermeyecek mi?" Özellikle, sivil-asker ilişkileri literatürüne göre, ordunun devrime desteđi veya en azından tarafsızlıđı, ülkedeki siyasi liderliđi devirmede devrimci eylemin bařarısı için gerekli bir kořuldur. Bu nedenle, bu çalışma, Arap ordularının popöler protestolara karşı tepkilerini, özellikle Mısır'ın iki ülkesine odaklanarak izlemeyi amaçlamaktadır, böylece bu çalışmanın zaman kapsamı, Mısır örneğinde 25 Ocak'tan 11 řubat'a kadar olan dönemi kapsayacak řekilde genişlemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Askeri Kurum - Krizler - Arap Baharı - Mısır – Suriye

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Geniřletilmiř Özet

Modern kurumsallařmıř ordu, 15. yüzyılın sonlarında, özellikle Fransa Kralı XI. Louis (hüküm süresi 1461-1483), İngiltere Kralı VII. Henry (hüküm süresi 1485-1509) ve İspanya Katolik Kralları (1469'dan itibaren) tarafından yürütölen merkezi devlet kurma projeleriyle ortaya çıktı. Bu monarřiler, feodal askerlik sisteminden uzaklařarak, toprak kontrolünü pekiřtirmek için daimi orduları sistematik hale getirdi. Ancak askeri-siyasi gücün öncülleri klasik antik çaęa kadar uzanır. Platon'un Devlet (375 BCE) adlı eserinde asker-vatandaşlar (phylakes) "timokrası"nın temelleri olarak tanımlanırken, Aristoteles'in Siyaset Kitabı'nda (Kitap IV, 1297b) militarize oligarřiler yozlařmıř bir yönetim biçimi olarak tanımlanmıřtır. Daha sonraki tarihsel örnekler — Roma'daki Praetorian Muhafızlarının entrikalarından 20. yüzyıl fařist rejimlerine kadar — askeri güç ile devlet egemenlięi arasındaki süregelen gerilimi göstermektedir. Ancak günümüzün sivil-askeri iliřkileri, geliřmiř anayasal normları ve kurumsal denetimleri yansıtmaktadır. Modern ordular teorik olarak sivil otoriteye tabidir, ancak darbelerin siyasi olarak önemli olduęu ölkelerde istisnalar devam etmektedir. Bu tarihsel seyir, çalışmamız için önemli bir analitik soruyu ortaya çıkarmaktadır: Kriz sonrası bağlamlarda, yola baęlı askeri miraslar resmi demokratik kurumlarla nasıl etkileřime girer?

Arařtırmanın Önemi

Bu çalışma, Arap siyasetinin kritik ancak yeterince incelenmemiř bir boyutunu incelemektedir: Askeri kurumların toplumsal krizleri nasıl şekillendirdięi ve bu krizlerden nasıl etkilendięi. Arap ordularının ayaklanmalara (2011-günümüz) verdięi farklı tepkileri analiz ederek, kurumsal kültür, ideolojik uyum ve iktidar yapılarının orduların istikrar

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sağlayıcı, rejim uygulayıcı veya siyasi hakem olarak hareket etmesini nasıl belirlediğini ortaya koymaktadır. Mısır-Suriye karşılaştırması, askeri özerklik ve bunun bölgesel istikrar için etkileri hakkında benzersiz içgörüler sunmaktadır.

Araştırma Hedefleri

- Arap ordularının hem sosyal hem de siyasi aktörler olarak tarihsel gelişimini izlemek.
- Önemli olaylar sırasında (örneğin 2011 ayaklanmaları) kriz davranışlarını değerlendirmek.
- Arap yönetim sistemlerinde askeri reform için ileriye dönük bir çerçeve geliştirmek.

Araştırma Soruları

Bu çalışma, Mısır (25 Ocak Devrimi) ve Suriye (15 Mart Ayaklanması) örneklerine odaklanarak, Arap ordularının benzer krizlere neden asimetrik tepki verdiklerini araştırmaktadır. Anahtar sorular:

- Farklı Tepkiler: Mısır ordusu 2011'de rejim geçişini kolaylaştırırken, Suriye ordusu neden bölündü ve şiddeti tırmandırdı?
- Tarafsızlık Paradoksu: Arap orduları, köklü ekonomik ve siyasi çıkarları göz önüne alındığında, toplumsal çatışmalarda gerçekten tarafsız hakemler olarak hareket edebilir mi?
- Özerklik İkilemi: Arap orduları, ne ölçüde bağımsız hareket ederler ve ne ölçüde iktidar elitlerinin uzantıları olarak faaliyet gösterirler?

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Arařtırma hipotezleri:

Arařtırma ařağıdaki hipotezlere dayanmaktadır:

- Ordunun kökeni, orduda görev alan ve etkili olanların davranıřlarını etkileyen faktörlerden biridir.
- Ordunun teknik ve savař yetenekleri, iç ve dış risklerle ilgili rollerini etkiler.
- Ordunun dış ve iç finansmanı, yönetim ideolojisi ve siyasi partiler, ordunun davranıř ve tutumlarını etkileyen faktörlerdir.

Arařtırma yaklařımları:

Tarihsel yaklařım: Bugünü anlamamıza yardımcı olacak gerçeklere ve genellemelere ulařmak amacıyla, tarihsel olguları ve olayları bilimsel ve metodolojik temeller üzerinde okumak, incelemek, yorumlamak ve analiz etmek. Böylelikle, askeri kurumların evrimini ve Arap ve uluslararası kökenlerini okuyabiliriz.

Tanımlayıcı yaklařım:

Bu yaklařım, olgunun özelliklerini belirlemek, doğasını ve deęiřkenleri ile nedenleri arasındaki iliřkinin niteliğini tanımlamak üzerine kuruludur. Sonuç olarak, bu yaklařımı kullanarak tarihsel ve siyasi olayları, halk hareketlerinde ordunun rolünü ve bu eğilimi etkileyen faktörleri aydınlatabiliriz.

Davranıřsal yaklařım: Bu yaklařım, söz konusu devletlerin ve bu devletlerdeki egemen kurumların davranıřlarını, özellikle de “halk hareketine ve yerel krizlere karřı askeri kurumların davranıřlarını” anlamak için uygulanır.

Vaka çalışması yöntemi:

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Vaka çalışması yöntemi, diğer birimlere de uygulanabilecek genellemeler elde etmek amacıyla, bir toplum birimini çeşitli yönleriyle ayrıntılı olarak inceleyen betimsel yöntemlerden biri olarak kabul edilir. Bu yöntem, birim derinlemesine incelenmesi ile karakterize edilir; bu birim bir birey, bir kabile, bir köy, bir sosyal kurum veya bir yerel topluluk olabilir. Bizim durumumuzda, Suriye ve Mısır örnekleri her iki ülkedeki askeri olguyu incelemek için temel bir konu oluşturmaktadır.

Karşılaştırmalı yaklaşım:

Bu yaklaşım, olguyu incelerken karşılaştırmaya dayanan ve iki veya daha fazla olgu arasındaki benzerlikleri ve farklılıkları ortaya çıkaran yaklaşımdır. Bu sayede araştırmacı, incelenen olgu ile ilgili bilimsel gerçeğe ulaşmak için bir dizi adıma başvurur. Araştırmacı, devrimlerde askeri kurumların performansı açısından Mısır ve Suriye örneklerini karşılaştırmıştır.

The Military' Role during Crises (2011-2020)

Egypt and Syria as a Model

The study of the military and its relationship with society is a significant focus of military sociology. The military is also one of the most important official institutions of the state, and there is considerable overlap between the military, politics, and state administration.

1. Genesis, Concept, Evolution and Ideology of the Military

The military institution traces its origins to humanity's earliest civilizations, where organized defense became necessary for survival and expansion. Historical records identify the Egyptian army of 3200 B.C. as the world's first formal military structure, serving as a prototype subsequently emulated by Chinese, Assyrian, and Babylonian empires.

This evolutionary pattern underscores the military's foundational role in state-building processes across civilizations.

1.1 Concept of the Military

The military establishment represents a complex social subsystem, as evidenced by the definition that: "The concept of the military establishment is defined in relation to the social structure through the orderly interplay of roles or subordinate structures within the military institution which is essentially a key part of the organized large society. It is also defined vis-à-vis the complementarity of roles within the highly cohesive military if it is considered part of the larger society or part of the social structure. Accordingly, the definition of the military establishment and some related concepts have been developed"² This conceptualization reveals the military's dual nature as both a microcosm of society and a specialized institution with unique internal dynamics.

1.2 Definition of the Military

Scholarly perspectives on military definition vary by disciplinary focus:

From an administrative viewpoint: "The military is defined as one of the non-political state institutions performing the non-political function of defending the national territory against any threat to its security, stability and viability. In addition, It is a purely administrative institution whose role is to conduct the war without taking the decision to go to war because the decision of war is a political act that falls within the competence of political institutions, particularly legislative institutions. Thus, the role of the military is to select technical ways to implement the political decisions."³ This technical characterization is reinforced by the assertion

² Suleiman, Ashraf. Military Sociology, p. 77.

³ Sobhiyeh, Buqfi. The Impact of the Military Institution on the Arab Regimes, The Model of Egypt (1981-2013). Complementary Memorandum for a Master's Degree in Political Science, 2016, p. 30.

that: "It can therefore be argued that the military is an administrative institution whose task is to implement, not to make, the decision of war."⁴

Sociological interpretations emphasize that: "The military institution is a cohesive unit of society, and in order to know and understand the relationship between the military and society, we must bear in mind that the military institution is a social institution with a strong relationship to other systems that prevail in the society."⁵

Operational definitions describe the army as "A large organized body of armed personnel trained for war and a unit capable of making independent decisions and actions and maintaining general command."⁶ with the additional specification that: "Military force usually belongs to a country and has the training and equipment to fight on land."⁷

Historical evolution has significantly transformed military structures that: "the concept of armies have changed. Social and political aspects of nations and development of weapons have also influenced organization and the makeup of armies, and these armies have been divided into infantry soldiers or mounted warriors. They have been made up of professionals or amateurs, of mercenaries fighting for pay or for plunder, or of patriots fighting for a cause."⁸

The term's conceptual breadth presents both comprehensive and narrow aspects: "The term 'military' appears both inclusive and very limited in scope. It is inclusive when suggesting that the military is a mix-up of individual or collective actors within the army as a complex institution. It is also an arm of the state and an autonomous system that finds almost all

⁴ Abdel Rahman, Hamada Muhammad Atiyah. The Military Institution and Opportunities for Democratic Transition, The Egyptian Case. Arab Democratic Center for Studies, 2006, p. 10.

⁵ The Impact of the Military on Arab Regimes, p. 30.

⁶ "Army", www.merriam-webster.com, Retrieved 22-3-2018. Edited.

⁷ "Army", www.dictionary.cambridge.org, Retrieved 22-3-2018. Edited

⁸ "Army", www.britannica.com, Retrieved 22-3-2018. Edited.

of its own within itself. In contrast, it is limited when it refers only to soldiers of a regular army."⁹

1.3 Legal Concept of the Army

Contemporary legal scholarship universally acknowledges that "the term 'army' refers to two great forces, namely, the armed and security forces; they say: no state exists without the oppressive and coercive armed and security forces. This fact is world-renowned, media-adopted and field-based."¹⁰

1.4 The term "Army" in the Arabic Language:

The term "army" is plural with no singular form. The Arabs use it to approximate or guess an unknown number of people whose number could not specify in the crowd. In addition, it may be used for the purpose of daunting and intimidation. The soldiers or a group of people in war may also be called an army. It is: an army is soldiers marching to war or otherwise.¹¹

Historically, Arab political concept of the term "army" referred to all the people, and it was divided into major fighting and supporting forces. In ancient Yemeni inscriptions, the Army of Queen Balqis was made up of all the subjects of the people and its tasks and duties were divided between two main forces; a defence force and a construction force.¹²

1.5 Army concept in early Islam:

⁹ Farhani, Omar. The Leadership Crisis in the Arab World and the Problem of Political-Military Conflict, Case Study of Algeria. Doctorate dissertation, Mohamed Khider University, Biskra, 2013-2014, p. 27.

¹⁰ Woodies, Jack. Armies and Politics. Translated by Abdelhamid Abdulla, Arab Research Foundation, 1982.

¹¹ Ibn Manzour. Lisan al-Arab, part 6. Dar al-Ma'aref, 1st ed., 2011, p. 277.

¹² Shalabi, Abu Zaid. History of Islamic Civilization and Islamic Thought. 1st ed., Cairo, 2010, p. 150.

At the beginning of Islam, the holy prophet Muhammad gave the term "army" a different meaning, whereby all members of society, under the Sharia Law, are included in the term and made it a solid norm, including that of the mobilization, according to which everyone capable of taking up arms becomes a soldier within the national army. This is one of the most powerful military concepts that the history of the armies has ever known, and that the enemies are still fighting against and are still actively seeking to dilute and dissipate it to this very moment. Only the Israeli entity applies the principle of mobilization in modern times.¹³

1.5.1 Army Concept in contemporary Islam:

The term "army", as a contemporary Islamic concept, includes two components; the military and civil components. The former is divided into two sections; the armed and security forces. The latter is divided into society and the home national front, each of which has its own tasks and duties but the home national front, in whatever country, is the motivating force of the armies. This concept is applied in Eight Arab and Islamic states (Egypt, Syria, Libya, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Jordan and Yemen)."¹⁴

2. Historical and Current Roles of Arab Armies

Arab militaries have played a central role in modern politics due to several interconnected factors:¹⁵

- Their foundational role in securing national independence from colonial powers
- The relative weakness of civilian political institutions (parties, civil organizations)

¹³ Ibn Manzour. Lisan al-Arab, part 6. Dar al-Ma'aref, 1st ed., 2011, p. 278.

¹⁴ Salameh, Ghassan. Society and State in the Orient. Centre for Arab Unity Studies, 1987, p. 111.

¹⁵ Muslim, Anis. Media Between Public Opinion and Popular Will. Lebanese Ta'oneea for Authoring and Publishing, 1984, p. 313.

- Distinctive military education systems and civil-military relationship models

The Arab uprisings (2010-present) have brought renewed scrutiny to this interventionist tradition, as armies decisively influenced outcomes - either supporting transitions (Tunisia) or suppressing revolutions (Syria). This raises critical questions about whether Arab militaries can transition to a guardian role that protects rather than dominates political processes, particularly in an era where democratic norms are increasingly demanded.

Historical Roots of Military Intervention

The political engagement of Arab armies has deep historical foundations: Egypt's 1881 Orabi Revolt demonstrated early military-political entanglement. The 1908 Young Turk Revolution established a template for military-led political change that resonated across Ottoman successor states. The modern era saw this trend intensify:

- Iraq's 1936 Bakr Sidqi coup marked the Arab world's first successful military takeover
- Yemen's 1948 coup attempt by Abdullah al-Wazir continued this pattern
- Syria emerged as the epicenter of military coups with three successful takeovers in 1949 alone (al-Za'im, al-Hinnawi, al-Shishakli)

The watershed 1952 Egyptian Revolution by the Free Officers cemented military intervention as a recurring political mechanism. Between 1936-1970, Arab states experienced 41 successful or attempted coups¹⁶, with militaries employing various methods:

- Covert pressure on civilian governments
- Public threats of insurrection
- Direct seizure of state institutions

¹⁶ Satori, G. Parties and Party System. Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 64.
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- Comprehensive restructuring of political systems

This historical trajectory demonstrates how Arab armies have functioned as political actors rather than neutral state institutions, shaping regimes and governance models throughout the 20th century.

2.1 Egyptian army as a model:

Egyptian army has No.9 world ranking and is the only Arab army among the most powerful 10 worldwide in 2020, a new Global Fire military strength ranking reported. The report also included an improved strength of some Arab armies, unlike some Arab countries fighting wars or experiencing disturbances, such as Syria, Yemen and Libya.¹⁷

Egyptian military budget	\$10 billion
Population	104 million people
Number of military forces	1.33 million people (1.3%)
Reserve forces	480,000 soldiers (5%)
Available manpower out of population	42.6 million (40%)
Number of eligible for military service	35.8 million people (34.4%)
Reaches military service age annually	1.5 million people (1.5%)
Tank	3,735

¹⁷ <https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing-middle-east.asp>
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Armored vehicle	11,000
Self-propelled gun	1,165
Field gun	2,200
Missile launcher	1,235

"The Egyptian air force includes 1132 warplanes, including 337 combat fighters, 427 attack aircrafts, 260 military transport aircrafts, 348 training aircrafts and 257 military helicopters, including 46 attack helicopters."¹⁸

Aircraft Carrier	2
Frigates	9
Corvette	7
Submarines	8
Patrol Vessel	50
Minesweeper	23

The U.S. Global Firepower website report on the Egyptian army in 2018 included:¹⁹ Military forces of up to 1.3 million strong, including 875,000 reservists. The population of Egypt exceeds 94 million, including 42 million manpower, of whom 35 million are fit for military service.

¹⁸ <https://sptnkne.ws/g3Zd>

¹⁹ https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=egypt

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Up to 1.5 million people annually reach the age of military service in Egypt. Egypt possesses more than 4,000 tanks, 13,900 armored vehicles, 889 self-propelled artillery, 2,300 field artillery, and 1481 rocket launchers.

Egyptian military budget	\$4.4 billion
Population	94 million people
Number of military forces	1.3 million people
Reserve forces	875 soldiers
Available manpower out of population	42 million
Number of eligible for military service	35 million people
Reaches military service age annually	1.5 million people
Tank	+4,000
Armored vehicle	+13,900
Self-propelled gun	889
Field gun	2,300
Missile launcher	1,481

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Egypt possesses a large naval fleet of 319 vessels, including 2 aircraft carriers, 9 frigates, 2 corvettes, 5 submarines, 227 patrol ships and 23 marine minesweeper A military budget of \$ 4.4 billion.

Aircraft Carrier	2
Frigates	9
Corvette	2
Submarines	5
Patrol Vessel	227
Minesweeper	23

Egypt has witnessed numerous revolutions and uprisings since the nineteenth century—whether led by military factions against ruling regimes or driven by popular movements against tyranny and oppression. The most recent, the January 25, 2011 revolution, marked a defining moment in civil-military relations, as the army played a decisive role in facilitating the non-violent ouster of Hosni Mubarak’s regime.

The Military’s Dual Role in the 2011 Revolution

The Egyptian army emerged as a critical stabilizing force during the uprising. When police forces withdrew from the streets, the military stepped in to fill the security vacuum. Notably, it maintained a measured stance—distancing itself from Mubarak’s regime while cautiously engaging to de-escalate the crisis. Its refusal to fire on peaceful protesters

and its deployment of troops to curb violence were pivotal in ensuring a relatively bloodless transition.²⁰

However, the military's intervention was not entirely neutral. While it publicly aligned with protesters' demands, its leadership ultimately oversaw the political transition. Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi, then head of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), assumed interim control after Mubarak's resignation, retaining power until Mohamed Morsi's election in June 2012.

A Shift in Trajectory: The 2013 Coup and Its Aftermath

The military's initially balanced posture did not endure. In July 2013, it abruptly diverged from its transitional role by deposing Egypt's first democratically elected president, Mohamed Morsi. This intervention marked a stark reversal from its earlier stance, demonstrating the enduring tension between the military's self-perception as a guardian of stability and its latent political ambitions.

2.1.1 Mubarak-era military and its role in political decision-making

During the Mubarak era, the relationship between the military and the executive was entirely congruent. Many members of the military held important and distinguished positions within the executive, and several other members served as the ministers of defence. The last of these was Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, who He took over as Minister of Defense in May20, 1991, and was promoted to the rank of field marshal in 1993, the longest serving minister of defence, with a close and distinguished relationship with Mubarak.²¹

2.1.2 Military doctrine:

²⁰ Badr, Ahmed. The Role of Public Opinion in Public Policy. Kuwait Press Agency, 1973, p. 247.

²¹ Al-Baz, Muhammad. The Fall of the Gods: How Mubarak and His Men Collapsed. Generals and Revolutionaries. The Island of Roses Library, 2012, p. 30.

"The doctrine of the military in Egypt remains a national one, irrespective of its controversial role in running the country's affairs. Moreover, There is no doubt that the Egyptian army does not protect a religion, ethnicity or sect, but rather the Egyptian republican regime, a point not to be overlooked in the elements of the strength and autonomy of the military in Egypt." ²²

2.1.3 Role of the military in the revolution of January 25, 2011

"The difficult and deplorable conditions of the Egyptian people pushed millions of Egyptians out to Tahrir Square to demand change and reform on January 25, 2011. Here we will elaborate on the main reasons for declaring the revolution of anger against the regime, and how the military dealt with the situation." ²³

Origins of the Revolution

Hosni Mubarak's 30-year rule had entrenched systemic corruption, economic stagnation, and political repression. His attempt to groom his son, Gamal, as a successor—mirroring dynastic transitions in other Arab states—further inflamed public discontent. Faced with deteriorating living conditions and a stagnant political system, Egyptians mobilized en masse, recognizing that only regime change could bring meaningful reform.

Outbreak of Protests and Initial Crackdown

"On Tuesday, 25 January 2011, protesters took to the streets to demand the overthrow of the regime. They called it the day of anger. It coincided with Egyptian Police Day." The demonstrations, spearheaded by groups

²² The Military Establishment and Its Impact on the Egyptian Political System 1981-2013

²³ Sobhiyeh, Buqfi. The Impact of the Military Institution on the Arab Regimes, The Model of Egypt (1981-2013). Complementary Thesis for obtaining a Master's Degree in Political Science, 2016, p. 122.

like Kifaya (the Egyptian Movement for Change) and the April 6 Youth Movement, quickly escalated into a nationwide uprising.²⁴

Chants of "The people want to overthrow the regime! Leave! Leave!"²⁵ reverberated through Tahrir Square as security forces—without military involvement—responded with brutal suppression. Riot police deployed armored vehicles, fire trucks, and plainclothes officers in violent crackdowns across downtown Cairo.

The Military's Calculated Neutrality

As protests intensified, Mubarak—acting as Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces—declared a nationwide curfew (6:00 PM to 7:00 AM). However, sensing the military's reluctance to back his regime, he attempted to co-opt its leadership by offering Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi the vice presidency and authority to form a new government. Tantawi refused, signaling the army's detachment from Mubarak's crumbling administration.²⁶

When the armed forces were finally deployed, their mandate was strikingly different from that of the police:

- Orders emphasized restraint—soldiers were instructed to avoid violence, treat protesters respectfully, and under no circumstances use live ammunition.²⁷
- Troops positioned themselves as mediators rather than enforcers, a strategic move that bolstered their image as guardians of the people.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 127.

²⁵ Mandor, Mustafa. *So We Can Reap the Fruits of the Revolution*. Library of the Island of Roses, 2011, p. 41.

²⁶ Al-Baz, p. 63.

²⁷ Sobhiyeh, p. 128.

This calculated neutrality allowed the military to emerge as the ultimate arbiter of Egypt's transition—first facilitating Mubarak's ouster, then overseeing the interim period until the 2012 elections.

2.1.4 Most organized interventions by the army²⁸:

The Egyptian military's response to the 2011 uprising was marked by a blend of calculated restraint and deliberate strategic positioning. One of the defining aspects of this approach was the clear formulation of rules of engagement: troops were issued strict orders prohibiting the use of firearms against protesters and were authorized to employ only non-lethal means such as water cannons and verbal warnings to manage crowds. In parallel, the military executed a series of strategic security deployments aimed at maintaining national stability. Armored units were dispatched to secure Cairo International Airport, while special forces were assigned to safeguard diplomatic missions across Cairo and Giza. Additionally, armored vehicles were stationed at critical protest hotspots, including Tahrir Square—the symbolic heart of the uprising—as well as Ramses and Matariyah Squares.

Concurrently, the protection of vital infrastructure emerged as a key priority. The military successfully defended the Egyptian Museum from looting attempts and maintained a firm presence around essential government institutions, such as the People's Assembly, the Consultative Council, and the headquarters of the Radio and Television Union. Moreover, heightened security was imposed on sensitive sites including the Central Bank's printing press, the Tora Prison complex, Salah al-Din Citadel, and several major archaeological zones. This multifaceted strategy reflected not only an effort to maintain order, but also a

²⁸ Bakri, Mostafa. Army and Revolution: The Story of the Last Days. Today's News, 2011, p. 118.

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calculated attempt to preserve the integrity of national symbols and prevent institutional collapse.²⁹

Analysts observe these deployments served dual purposes:

- Maintaining basic state functionality during civil unrest
- Positioning the military as the ultimate guarantor of national stability

As tensions escalated, a telling moment occurred when Mubarak visited the military operations center - a symbolic attempt to project control that instead revealed his eroding authority. The armed forces' gradual alignment with protesters became increasingly apparent, particularly in their role facilitating Mubarak's resignation.

The Final Transition (February 2011)

The revolution reached its climax on February 11, 2011 ("Friday of Departure"), when:

- Massive demonstrations surrounded state media headquarters
- Military leadership pressured Mubarak to resign
- Vice President Omar Suleiman announced the resignation at 6:00 PM

This sequence suggests what scholars term a "constitutional coup" - the military acted as midwife to a political transition while preserving institutional interests. Immediate post-revolution measures included:

- 1) Dissolution of parliament
- 2) Suspension of the constitution
- 3) Establishment of military-led transitional governance (6-month timeline)

²⁹ Sobhiyeh, Buqfi. The Impact of the Military Institution on the Arab Regimes, The Model of Egypt (1981-2013). Complementary Thesis for the Master's Degree in Political Science, 2016, p. 130.

4) Commitment to facilitate competitive elections and party development³⁰

The military's calibrated approach - beginning with studied neutrality before decisive intervention - allowed it to emerge as the ultimate arbiter of Egypt's political transition while avoiding direct responsibility for regime collapse.

2.2 Post-Independence Transformation of the Syrian Military

Following independence, Syria experienced profound political, economic, and social transformations that fundamentally reshaped its military institutions. The most significant development was the ascendance of minority groups, particularly from rural areas, within the armed forces. This shift gradually replaced the traditional dominance of Sunni officers from urban centers like Damascus and the Hauran region. By the mid-1960s, a new class of politicized officers - predominantly Alawite Ba'athists - had consolidated control over the military apparatus³¹

2.2.1 Sectarian Restructuring Under Hafez al-Assad

The military's sectarian transformation accelerated dramatically when Hafez al-Assad became Defense Minister in 1966:

- Systematic recruitment of Alawites into officer corps
- Creation of patronage networks that facilitated Assad's 1970 takeover
- Marginalization of Sunni officers through discriminatory practices
- Complete consolidation of military control by the 1980s

This restructuring converted the Syrian army into what scholars term a "praetorian guard" - an institution primarily loyal to the ruling clan rather than the state.

³⁰ Bakri, p. 294.

³¹ Al-Dusuki, Ayman. The Syrian Military Establishment in 2019: Sectarian, Militias and Foreign Investments. Omran Center for Strategic Studies, p. 14.

2.2.2 The Military as Regime Safeguard

Under Bashar al-Assad, the military remains the regime's critical survival mechanism:

- Maintained cohesion despite significant defections
- Relies on external support from Russia, Iran, Hezbollah, and Shia militaries³²
- Complements formal military structures with parallel security services, pro-government paramilitary groups, and Sectarian militias involved in civilian targeting

2.2.3 Military Response to the Syrian Revolution

The 2011 uprising revealed a profound transformation within the Syrian military, highlighting its shift from a national institution to a fragmented, sectarian force. Early in the conflict, sectarian polarization intensified, particularly following the Jisr al-Shughur incident in June 2011, which deepened the Sunni-Alawite divide.³³ This led to mass defections among Sunni officers and further entrenched Alawite dominance within the military's upper command, signaling the erosion of its pluralistic character.

As the conflict progressed, institutional breakdown became increasingly evident. The army, once perceived as a national force, gradually morphed into a sectarian fighting entity. This shift was marked by a complete departure from political neutrality and a growing infusion of Ba'athist ideological doctrine into its operational ethos, further blurring the line between military and party.³⁴

³² Al Dahmour, Khaled Mohamed. Military and Governance in Syria. Unpublished Master's thesis, Cairo University, 2009, p. 213.

³³ Al-Daswaki, Ayman. The Syrian Military Establishment in 2019: Sectarian, Militias and Foreign Investments. Omran Center for Strategic Studies, p. 15.

³⁴ Al-Daswaki, Ayman. The Syrian Military Establishment in 2019: Sectarian, Militias and Foreign Investments. Omran Center for Strategic Studies, p. 15.

Compounding these internal fractures was the military's mounting external dependence. Unable to suppress the rebellion through its own resources, the institution fragmented into competing patron-client networks, each tied to different foreign actors. This dependency culminated in a growing reliance on Russian air support and Iranian-backed ground forces, underscoring the military's diminishing autonomy and the regionalization of Syria's internal conflict.

The Military as Conflict Perpetuator

The Syrian armed forces have fundamentally:

- Aligned exclusively with regime survival
- Adopted sectarian warfare tactics
- Catalyzed the transition from protest to civil war
- Become dependent on foreign backers
- Lost all pretenses of national representation

3 Post-revolution armies:

The historical trajectory of Arab militaries—from anti-colonial forces to post-independence power brokers—provides crucial insights into their contemporary roles during the Arab Spring uprisings. Their conduct reveals three distinct typologies that continue to shape political transitions³⁵

3.1. Typology of Post-Revolutionary Military Engagement

In the aftermath of the Arab uprisings, different military institutions across the region adopted divergent roles, shaping their respective countries' political trajectories. In Tunisia, the military acted as a **Protective Army**, maintaining strict constitutional neutrality even amid a profound political vacuum. It notably refrained from seizing power, instead facilitating the transitional governance process through existing legal mechanisms, particularly Articles 56 and 57 of the Tunisian

³⁵ Janowitz, M. The Military in the Political Development of New Nation. Chicago University Press, 1969, pp. 192-93.

constitution. By serving as an institutional stabilizer without ideological interference, the Tunisian military helped preserve the integrity of the state during a volatile period.

In contrast, Egypt's military assumed the role of a **Guarantor Army**, positioning itself as an arbiter during the transition. It strategically leveraged a national, non-ideological identity to legitimize its involvement, initially enabling a democratic opening between 2011 and 2013. However, this facilitative role eventually evolved into the reassertion of military dominance, as the army maintained significant extra-constitutional influence even under the veneer of formal civilian governance.³⁶

Meanwhile, Syria witnessed the collapse of its military as a national institution, giving rise to what can be described as a **Disbanded Army**. Sectarian fractures deepened, transforming the military into a regime protection force rather than a guardian of national unity. This partisan militarization not only dismantled the army's national character but also directly catalyzed the escalation into full-scale civil war, highlighting the destructive consequences of a military's descent into sectarian partisanship.

3.2. Comparative Institutional Analysis

Tunisia's Exceptionalism

The Tunisian military's restraint stemmed from:

- Absence of economic empire (unlike Egypt)
- Professionalized command structure
- Consensus on constitutional boundaries

Egypt's Paradox

³⁶ Al-Haffni, Ahmad Shawqi. "Military Phenomenon Factors." Al-Manar Magazine, no. 64, Apr. 1990.

Despite the 2013 coup, the military retained:

- Cross-class national composition
- Cultural legitimacy as "guardian" institution
- Flexible constitutional interpretation [35]

3.3. Emerging Patterns in Fragile States

Cases like Libya, Yemen, and Syria demonstrate:

- Institutional collapse leading to militia proliferation
- External patronage replacing national command structures
- Sectarian mobilization overriding professional ethics

The Tunisian/Egyptian models remain exceptional rather than normative, suggesting that:

- Cohesive pre-revolution states were prerequisite for orderly transitions
- Military restraint correlates with institutional autonomy from ruling parties
- Constitutional clarity alone cannot prevent intervention without cultural buy-in

3.4. Future Trajectories

Although the notion of "sentinel armies" — militaries that serve as impartial guardians of constitutional order — may appear as an ideal type in theoretical frameworks, the actual post-revolutionary realities across the Arab world reveal far more complex and hybrid developments. In countries like Sudan and Algeria, rather than adhering strictly to the sentinel model, the military institutions have evolved into hybrid forms. These hybrids combine partial professionalization with ongoing political entanglements, oscillating between claims of national stewardship and the retention of deeply entrenched political privileges.

Moreover, a persistent tension exists between the drive for professionalization — that is, building apolitical, technically competent armed forces — and the forces of politicization, wherein military elites

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seek to preserve or expand their political and economic influence. This struggle often prevents the consolidation of stable civil-military relations, keeping political transitions in a state of fragility and flux.

Complicating matters further is the growing influence of external actors in shaping the trajectory of military restructuring. Foreign powers increasingly intervene through military aid, training programs, and security guarantees, effectively embedding geopolitical interests within domestic military institutions. This external involvement often exacerbates internal divisions and delays genuine institutional reform.

Ultimately, the emerging taxonomy of post-revolutionary military roles suggests that outcomes depend less on the formal design of military institutions and more heavily on deeper structural factors. Chief among these are the nature of the pre-existing social contract between the military and society, the degree of economic independence enjoyed by the armed forces (especially their control over autonomous business networks), and the overarching constraints imposed by regional and international geopolitics. Thus, the destiny of post-revolution armies is shaped not merely by organizational engineering, but by the broader political economies and historical legacies in which these militaries are embedded.

4. Outcomes:

1. The Changing Academic Lens on Arab Militaries

Research perspectives have evolved from solely examining coup mechanisms and interstate conflicts to analyzing the military's complex societal role. Where scholars once focused on how armies seize power, we now study how they manage transitions, influence civil society, and respond to popular uprisings. This shift exposes the limitations of Western-derived theories in explaining Arab civil-military dynamics.

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2. The Rise of Hybrid Security Landscapes

The Arab Spring shattered traditional military monopolies on violence, creating fragmented environments where:

- National armies compete with militias and resistance movements
- Sectarian (Syria), tribal (Yemen), and ideological (Libya) divisions reshape loyalties
- External actors like Russia and Iran create parallel command structures

This transformation has produced unprecedented conflict dynamics that defy conventional warfare classifications.

3. The Budget-Power Paradox

While international pressure has increased oversight of military spending:

- Gulf states face U.S. demands for spending limits
- Egypt balances \$1.3 billion in conditional U.S. aid with regime priorities
- Militaries creatively circumvent restrictions through shadow economies

Simultaneously, their domestic political influence continues expanding despite (or because of) these financial constraints.

4. The Primacy of Regime Survival

Arab militaries have consistently revealed their core priority:

- Syrian forces deployed 85% of assets against civilians
 - Egyptian leadership chose coup over democratic consolidation
 - Algerian generals engineered "managed transitions"
- This reflects institutional designs where national defense mandates remain secondary to regime protection systems.

5. Structural Barriers to Reform

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Three interlocking factors preserve military dominance:

- **Institutional vacuum:** Collapsed religious/political counterweights
 - **Economic hegemony:** Control of 15-40% of productive economies
 - **Constitutional ambiguity:** Deliberately vague oversight mechanisms
- These create systems where meaningful change requires military approval.

6. Engineered Divisions in the Ranks

Documented patterns of systematic exclusion:

- Syria's Alawite-dominated officer corps (80% at senior levels)
- Iraq's Sunni purge post-2003
- Yemen's tribal favoritism

These are not organic developments but calculated "counter-professionalization" strategies to ensure regime loyalty over national representation.

7. The International Community's Double Bind

Foreign actors face inherent contradictions:

- Security partnerships reinforce authoritarian structures
 - Democratization demands risk destabilization
 - Aid conditionality shows limited effectiveness
- This requires fundamentally rethinking engagement frameworks.

5. Recommendations:

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The military must be subjected to permanent human rights monitoring to ensure that a policy of internal intimidation and attacks on the freedoms of the citizen is not pursued under the pretext of imposing security. It also must be held accountable for violations.

Eliminating the harmful effects caused by previous regimes in building the military on the basis of a partisan political hierarchy, all concerned with preserving the regime's security or establishing autocracy.

Getting rid of all political and religious dependencies, and the sole affiliation of the military should be to the military honors and protection of the homeland.

The military should be academically constructed in accordance with the international forms, systems and standards, under the supervision of professional experts who previously had practical supervision over other similar institutions.

Effective cooperation between the local military academy and its international counterparts, and academic exchange, to exchange experience, to stay always informed of the international military sciences and to strengthen knowledge convergence.

Cooperating with other military institutions and agencies in the field of maneuvers and exchange of military expertise, provided that these measures have meaningful national dimensions.

The permanent follow-up and accountability by the military intelligence services, to prevent and stop corruption showing their consequences on the entire structure of the military institution.

Not to deploy or to seek refuge in the city under any internal or external security circumstance, and security concerns should not be used as an excuse for a broad and visible presence on the populated areas.

The use of special teams to face internal crises, taking civilians' rights and duties into account, and that the army does not intervene except in accordance with extreme necessities.

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In addition, the international scientific expertise should be employed in building the military, and that the military should be a factor of stability, and not use its potential to extend its influence over the people.

6. Conclusion

In many third world countries, the military has traditionally played a role far beyond national defense, acting primarily as the guarantor of regime continuity—particularly for authoritarian and security-centered governments. Rather than remaining confined to the barracks, militaries in these contexts have frequently intervened in political affairs, dominating state authorities and institutions. This dynamic is rooted in a historical pattern where numerous regimes rose to power through military coups and subsequently entrenched military influence as a foundational element of their governance structures.

The absence of a clear, coherent vision for the future role of the military—especially evident in several Arab states—can largely be attributed to civil and partisan failures. Fragile political classes, fragmented societal consensus, and deeply polarized party systems have all hindered serious efforts to restructure the armed forces into professional, national institutions. Without addressing these underlying civilian weaknesses, attempts at reform risk either reinforcing old patterns of militarization or creating power vacuums that the military will once again feel compelled to fill.

Given this reality, it becomes imperative to approach military reform with a holistic strategy that considers the broader international context, learns from comparative experiences, and grounds itself firmly in each country's specific religious, economic, political, and social fabric. Reform efforts must be culturally and structurally authentic rather than externally imposed or superficially borrowed. Only by doing so can states hope to escape the persistent crisis of militarization — a phenomenon where the

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state itself becomes increasingly subordinated to military logics — and instead open the way for political novelty, institutional sophistication, and the development of genuine civilian supremacy over the military.

Thus, the ultimate goal is not merely the technical restructuring of armed forces, but the deeper transformation of the state-military relationship, making it responsive to democratic aspirations and national particularities rather than authoritarian inertia.

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