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Explaining Military Responses to Revolutions

Zoltan Barany | June 2013

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Introduction

The recent uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa confirmed, yet again, that social scientists, not to mention politicians and intelligence analysts, are not good at predicting revolutions. We may correctly observe that a country or region may display all the symptoms of being ripe for an uprising – or, as Lenin memorably put it, "Europe is pregnant with revolution"[1] – but we have no idea when, if at all, a revolution might actually break out. Indeed, it is rather amazing how autocracy may exist decade after decade and then a seemingly trivial event can trigger a massive and, on rare occasions, region-wide upheaval against it: the handing-out of leaflets criticizing the monarch in Sicily in January 1848 or the humiliation of a fruit vendor by a low-level municipal official in Tunisia in December 2010.

While our puzzlement about what sparks revolutions continues, we do know one critically important thing about them: once they do begin, they can seldom succeed without the support of the regime's coercive apparatus, in particular the regular army. Lenin remarked that "No revolution of the masses can triumph without the help of a portion of the armed forces that sustained the old regime."[2] Andrzejewski was similarly categorical in his contention that "So long as the government retains the loyalty of the armed forces, no revolt can succeed."[3] The two seminal studies focused on the role of the army in revolutionary crises also reach the conclusion that revolutions will fail if the military remains intact and it is used effectively by the status quo regime.[4]

The army's response to a revolution is certainly not the only predictor of whether it will succeed in supplanting the status quo regime or not. Rather, the point is that the military's backing of or, at the very least, neutrality toward the revolution is a necessary condition for it to succeed. Consequently, if we could predict the army's reaction to a revolution, we would be in strong position to speculate about the fate of that revolution. Why do armies react to revolts the way they do? What determines whether

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[1] V. I. Lenin, "Lecture on the 1905 Revolution," *Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), vol. 23, 253.

[2] Cited by D. E. H. Russell, *Rebellion Revolution, and Armed Force* (London: Academic Press, 1974), 3.

[3] Stanislaw Andrzejewski, *Military Organization and Society* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954), 71.

[4] Katherine Chorley, *Armies and the Art of Revolution* (London: Faber & Faber, 1943) and Russell, *op. cit.*

they support the old regime, the rebels, or split their support between the two? Is it possible to predict the generals' reaction to a revolution in a specific context?

The multitude of variables that may influence an army's stance toward a revolution cautions strongly against making an outright prediction. This analysis, however, is based on the premise that it *is* possible to make a highly educated guess about the military's response to a revolution if we know enough about that army, the state it is supposed to serve, the society it comes from, and the international environment in which it exists. Several scholars have attempted to explain the considerations that enter into the military's decision of how to respond to a revolution, either listing a few factors or privileging one variable or another in their analyses.[5] In most cases their attention was limited to attributes of the armed forces, the regime, or society. This essay argues that a more comprehensive approach, one that takes into account all the main sources where the army obtains its information, will not only lead to a more accurate prognosis of its likely reaction to a revolution, but will also have broad applicability to disparate settings.

Consider the following scenario: you are an analyst at an intelligence organization and your assignment is to advise your government of the probable action the armed forces are expected to take in Country X that is experiencing a revolutionary upheaval. Where will you start looking for answers? What factors will inform your inquiry? The objective of this essay is to give one the tools – more precisely, to identify the questions one needs to ask and answer – that will allow one to produce a coherent and logical analysis and to give his or her government the most informed report possible.

Spheres of Information

The army draws on four separate domains of inputs as it formulates its response to a revolution. In descending order of importance these are 1) the military establishment, 2) the state, 3) society, and 4) the external environment. Most critically, the generals

[5] See, for instance, Chorley, Russell, and, more recently, Eva Bellin, "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective," *Comparative Politics*, 36:2 (2004), 145-146; "Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Arab Spring," *Comparative Politics*, 44:2 (January 2012): 130-135; Zoltan Barany, "Comparing the Arab Revolts: The Role of the Military," *Journal of Democracy*, 22:4 (October 2011): 25-26; and Derek Lutterbeck, "Arab Uprisings and Armed Forces: Between Openness and Resistance," DCAF (Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces), SSR Paper 2 (2011), 15-17.

must consider the attributes, conditions, and composition of the armed forces. The second source of data into the army's decision-making process is the state, its treatment of the armed forces, record of governance, and directions to the military during the revolution. The third sphere of information military leaders take into account is society, in particular relations between armed forces and society and the key characteristics of the protests or rebellion. Finally, the army's response to a revolution is often influenced by the international setting, issues such as revolutionary diffusion and the threat of foreign intervention. The factors emanating from the four sources do not exist in isolation but often influence one another. Since the primary concern here is the military's reaction to revolutions, we will consider the state, society, and external factors from the army's perspective. Therefore, the variable "the generals' view of the status quo regime," which could be categorized under both military factors and state factors will be in the "state" column.

Needless to say, all these explanatory factors are not created equal: some go much farther in explaining the armed forces' reaction to the revolution than others. Then again, issues that may be extremely important in one case – say, religious divisions within the officer corps – may be of trivial significance in other cases or might not be a factor at all in others. Although there is no clever model that could tell us, once we "plug in" all the appropriate variables, what action will the military take, the evidence from past revolutions allows one to reach some useful generalizations. There is, however, no way around the sobering reality that the weight of each variable is ultimately determined by the individual context and that there is simply no short-cut and no substitute to knowing deeply the individual case we are interested in speculating about.

This essay will identify the main sources that influence the military's response to revolutions. It will begin with outlining the variables associated with the armed forces, then move on to state-related factors, societal variables, and finally, explain the ways the external environment can impact upon the generals' reaction to revolutions. In all of these, analysis will be made of the various factors in declining sequence of general importance, that is, list the variables in the order of more to less significant in most contexts.

Military Factors

Considerations specific to the armed forces are the most important determinants of how generals respond to uprisings. The most critical among them generally is the military's internal cohesion, although, of course, there are other factors that, given the "right" conditions, will play a decisive role. The analysis given below will examine these explanatory variables more closely.

The Armed Forces' Internal Cohesion

The most important attribute of the armed forces regarding its response to a revolution is its internal cohesion. An internally unified military will most probably act in unison – it will either support the regime or not – and it is unlikely to be much affected by defections. The military's internal cohesion is, in fact, a composite of several factors having to do with the potential cleavages within the armed forces. What are the markers of a cohesive military or, put differently, what potential divisions can affect the army's unity? What sort of rifts should one be attentive to?

Ethno-Religious Splits

Armies, particularly conscript armies, in many cases represent a cross-section of a country's population. In multi-ethnic and multi-religious states, the armed forces are often affected by the sectarian and ethnic rifts that exist in society at large. The ethnic and/or religious identity of individuals often trumps their other identities – identities such as those of professional soldiers, citizens of a state, or adherents to an ideology – even in settings where the army makes substantial efforts at indoctrination and building a common identity. In such environments the ethno-religious splits in the officer corps could well be the most important divide in the military and, especially if ethno-religious grievances are relevant to the revolution, they are likely to determine the officers' stance.

Multi-ethnic and multi-religious states have tried to prevent ethno-religious contingents within their armies from coalescing into organized groups through different methods. For instance, in the Soviet Union conscripts from different nationalities generally served in far-away republics in mixed units. Some nationalities – such as Turkmens, Uzbeks, and other predominantly Muslim groups – were not entrusted with weapons and usually

served in construction battalions and performed non-military tasks.[6] In some countries relations between different ethnic and/or religious groups are so contentious that political and military elites effectively shut out the marginalized population from the armed forces and, often from the entire military-security establishment. This is the case in Jordan and Bahrain where it is difficult for Jordanians of Palestinian origin and Shi'a Muslims, respectively, to enter the military profession. The on-going unrest in Bahrain has justified the calculations of the Sunni Muslim regime.

Sociopolitical Divisions between Military Elites

The top brass may be divided over any number of socio-political issues, such as political orientation, professional differences, and different educational experiences. Some generals may support the status quo regime while others might be more sympathetic to the goals of the opposition. The generals might disagree on doctrinal matters, armament programs, and training methods. High-ranking officers who were trained at elite military academies might nurture a bias against colleagues who were educated at less prestigious institutions. In other armies – for instance those of South Korea, Thailand, and Indonesia – the year of one's graduation from the military academy has been an important marker of intra-army cliques. Those in the same graduating class tend to band together and look out for one another for the rest of their careers.

In some armies the officer corps hails from very different backgrounds. More specifically, one part of the officers might come from the social elites, usually from families where military service has been a long-standing and highly valued tradition. The other part of the officer corps may come from less affluent social backgrounds, from families that view the military career as a key to social advancement. The former will probably consider revolution less favorably than the latter; in any case, the two groups are probably going to have different opinions regarding the desirability of a revolution.

Divisions between Elite vs. Regular Units

Many authoritarian regimes set up elite units or even entire special branches of service to complement the armed forces. In some cases these units are administratively located within the armed forces while they are separate and independent from the mainstream

[6] See Debora Yarsike Ball, "Ethnic Conflict, Unit Performance, and the Soviet Armed Forces," *Armed Forces & Society*, 20:2 (Winter 1994): 239-258.

military in others. The real reason for creating such organizations is frequently to create professional competition between the regular army and the elite troops. Generally, however, the ruling elites do not fully trust the army and seek to establish rival forces that are directly subordinated and loyal to them. Elite units tend to receive better treatment – higher salaries, enhanced perquisites, more modern equipment – than the regular army. Not surprisingly, institutional rivalries often develop between the regular forces that resent and envy the superior conditions of the special units. Such split in the military-security establishment is often manifested by different levels of allegiance to the regime: elite units are likely to be more loyal than the regular army, whose sympathies will be easier attracted by the revolution.

There are many examples. In Ghana, President Kwame Nkrumah established a Presidential Guard in 1960, a company-sized unit that in six years had grown to 1,200 soldiers and officers and was renamed the President's Own Guard Regiment. The existence of this privileged parallel force created a direct threat to the regular army's professional autonomy and self-image and intensified the officer corps' already deep-seated resentment of Nkrumah's regime.[7] Iraq's elite Republican Guard (and subsequently a Special Republican Guard, also referred to as the Republican Guard Special Protection Forces) was formed in 1969 as a Presidential bodyguard. It fought reliably in Iraq's wars and under Saddam Hussein's rule the Republican Guard was under the direct command of his son, Qusay.[8] Not all examples support the hypothesis of elite units' greater allegiance to the regime. After World War II, Ethiopia's Emperor Haile Selassie developed a crack professional military contingent – the Imperial Guard – loyal to him personally. In December 1960, while the Emperor was abroad, it was the Imperial Guard, not the regular army that staged a coup attempt and briefly took control of the capital, Addis Ababa.[9]

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[7] Simon Baynham, *The Military and Politics in Nkrumah's Ghana* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988), 139.

[8] Ibrahim Al-Marashi, "Iraq's Security and Intelligence Network: A Guide and Analysis," *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 6:3 (September 2002), http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2002/issue3/jv6n3a1.html.

[9] Ernest W. Lefever, *Spear and Scepter: Army, Police, and Politics in Tropical Africa* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1970), 146.

Splits between Army and Other Security Establishment Organizations

In many authoritarian states the regular armed forces have institutional rivals not inside the military proper but outside of the military's organizational confines. These institutions can be a police or secret police force that becomes powerful and favored by the regime (such as the police in Tunisia under Zine El Abidine Ben Ali or the *Securitate* in Nicolae Ceauşescu's Romania). The motivation behind the creation of distinct security organizations may be to provide command positions for members of a ruling family (e.g., Bahrain, Libya, and Yemen) as well as to balance each other's influence and that of the regular armed forces. Ordinarily the army views these entities with suspicion because they question their political loyalties and their likely stance toward a revolution.

Divisions between Branches of the Armed Forces

Those serving in the army, navy, or the air force often develop a strong attachment to their own branch. In fact, such loyalty is encouraged and carefully nurtured by the given service because it strengthens camaraderie and esprit de corps. Individual branches are often stereotyped in the military establishment: for instance, in many armed forces the navy is considered elitist and the air force as technologically advanced and used to comfortable surroundings. The attachment to one's service can also manifest itself as antagonistic behavior toward the other branches. In many cases of military rule, only one branch of the armed forces – most often the army – becomes involved in politics while others are content to remain on the sidelines. For example the regime of the Greek colonels (1967-1974) was just that; the junta of twelve *army* colonels. The air force and the navy were notable for their less than enthusiastic backing of the regime and they played only a minor role in the government. In fact, in May 1973 naval officers were implicated in an unsuccessful countercoup attempt against the army.[10]

Generational Divisions (Senior vs. Junior Officers)

As in many other contexts, the varying perspectives of young people and those of their elders can be a source of conflict. This is especially so in the armed forces, a highly

[10] Zoltan Barany, *The Soldier and the Changing State: Building Democratic Armies in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 131-132.

hierarchical organization where age – that is to say, length of service – translates into higher rank, better remuneration and perquisites, more responsibilities. Junior officers in many cases tend to be more liberal and more prone to radicalism and thus more liable to support revolutionary action. Furthermore, because of their shorter service in the military they also tend to be less invested in the status quo regime and thus more likely to support rebellions than their more senior colleagues. There are many examples of coups and revolutions supported by junior officers – usually contravening the actions of their superiors – just think of Egypt (1953), Turkey (1960), Portugal (1974), and Ghana (1979).

Professional Soldiers vs. Conscripts

One of the most important characteristics of an army is whether its soldiers are volunteers who enlist out of their free will or conscripts for whom military service is mandatory. Those who enlist are a self-selected group of young men and women who tend to embrace the military's hierarchical nature, discipline, regimented life, and conservative values. Draftees, on the other hand, represent – or, in any event, supposed to represent if conscription is conducted fairly – a cross-section of society. The point is that drafted soldiers are likely to be more sympathetic to a revolution with a broad societal support base whereas enlisted soldiers would be more likely to favor the stance of the armed forces leadership, whatever that might be. Consequently, enlisted soldiers are far more likely to apply violence against demonstrators than conscripts.

Virtually all major rebellions in the twenty-first century bear out this hypothesis. Revolts in countries where soldiers were conscripted from the general population tended to succeed: Serbia and Montenegro (2000), Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2005), Lebanon (2005), Kyrgyzstan (2005), Tunisia (2011), Egypt (2011). Conversely, uprisings in countries where armies were staffed by professional soldiers – who entered the armed forces via enlistment or targeted recruitment – were unsuccessful: Burma (2007), Zimbabwe (2008), Iran (2009), Bahrain (2011).[11]

[11] See Lutterbeck, 16-17.

Generals' Decision-Making Autonomy

How much freedom do generals have to make decisions? Have they been straightjacketed by its civilian masters or have they been allowed to make independent choices about their professional concerns? These questions are rooted in the differences of what Samuel Huntington called objective control (under which the top brass enjoy a substantial amount of professional autonomy) and subjective control (where generals are closely supervised and have minimal independent decision making authority) of the armed forces.[12] In some countries the state holds the military on an extraordinarily short leash, perhaps owing to its past political involvement (e.g., Argentina) or fears that autonomous decision-making by the generals would lead to their increasing independence that might ultimately turn into in political interference (e.g., India and Japan).

The point is that military elites that are not used to making important decisions and whose civilian masters are always looking over their shoulders may be hesitant or unwilling to take decisive action. In some cases, they may even be virtually paralyzed by the great responsibility facing them: should they back the regime or should they turn against it? An excellent example for this is Iran's military leadership during the 1978-1979 Islamic Revolution that unseated the Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. The Shah micro-managed his Imperial Armed Forces – he personally oversaw all promotions over the rank of major in his 400,000-strong army – and effectively rendered them "a crippled giant" that was incapable of taking bold action.[13] In short, the generals' history as decision makers is a factor that an alert analyst speculating about their response to revolution ought to take into account.

State Factors

There are fewer variables the military needs to consider from the state's side of the equation but they are, particularly the first two – the regime's treatment of the army and the top brass' assessment of the regime's performance –extremely important in

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[12] Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), 79-83.

[13] Steven R. Ward, *Immortal: A Military History of Iran and Its Armed Forces* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2009), 210-218.

most contexts. Either one of these can easily tilt the balance and become the decisive factor in the armed forces' response to a revolution in the right setting.

The Regime's Treatment of the Military

All things being equal, if the regime treats the armed forces well, the generals are likely to support it in a revolutionary scenario. Conversely, if the military is treated poorly by the regime the soldiers will be more likely to turn against their civilian masters. There are several components of the "treatment" in question. First, does the regime take care of the armed forces financially, by extending military personnel – especially professional soldiers, that is, officers, non-commissioned officers, and enlisted soldiers – decent salaries and perquisites? Second, does the regime provide the armed forces with bases, weapons, fuel, spare parts, and other things necessary for the execution of their mission? Third, does the state interfere in the professional concerns of the military, such as training and routine promotions and does it attempt control the minutia of military life? Fourth, does the regime follow the principles of seniority and merit in approving the promotion of top generals? Fifth, does the state involve the military in unwise, unnecessary, and unpopular (among the military) missions? Sixth, does the regime encourage high public esteem and societal prestige of the armed forces?

It is important to underscore that this is another multifaceted variable. The regime' management of the armed forces, after all, is made up of several components: salaries, perquisites, weapons acquisition, level of state involvement, permission of extra-military activities (e.g., in business, media, etc.). The point is that even a materially well looked-after army might turn against a regime if its other interests, say, social prestige or political influence, are not satisfied. An apt example is the Egyptian military in the recent upheaval. Even though the army was financially well taken care of – both through salaries and its license to run a substantial part of the Egyptian economy – it was not satisfied with its lot due to 1) its diminishing political influence particularly vis-à-vis the internal security establishment; 2) its intense disdain of Mubarak's powerful son, Gamal, who was being groomed to succeed his father; and 3) the poor record of the regime especially in resolving the issues of youth unemployment and Islamic radicalism.

The Generals' View of the Status Quo Regime

How does the senior military leadership appraise the regime? Do the top brass consider the political elites' rule legitimate? Do the generals believe that the regime is popular

with society at large or do they think that the majority of the people would like to have it replaced? Military elites are more likely to support a regime that they believe to be robust and popular, a regime that only a small minority of radical rebels are trying to unseat than a regime that it considers weak, unpopular, and easy to topple. Their unfavorable views of regime legitimacy were certainly important reasons for the military's support of the revolutions Romania (1989), Tunisia (2011), and Egypt (2011).

Following a defeat in war the military's opinion of regime legitimacy often plummet. Revolutions in the wake of a losing war frequently enjoy the army's backing because the top brass tends to blame political elites for policies that got the country into the war to begin with and for poor leadership during the war effort. Furthermore, the officer corps and the rank and file often disintegrate by the end of a long, exhausting, and losing campaign. For some of the most illustrative examples think of the Paris Commune of 1871 and the numerous revolutions following World War I in 1918 (e.g., Austria, Germany, Hungary).

Regime Directions to the Military

During revolutionary upheavals the armed forces need unambiguous orders from their civilian masters. At what point should the military get involved and in what manner? Should it use police tactics against demonstrators or should it employ heavy weapons and live ammunition against them? These decisions should be reached by political leaders who must clearly communicate them to the military leadership. The army's command will respond to a revolution differently if it receives clear objectives from the political leadership than if it gets crossed signals, hesitant or contradictory messages, or no direction at all. The differences between clear and confused leadership are easy to appreciate if we contrast the direction the Russian Imperial Army received, near the conclusion of losing wars, in the unsuccessful 1905 Revolution and the triumphant 1917 February Revolution.[14]

Societal Factors

The third major source of information for the armed forces regarding the revolution is society, which spawns the revolution. The military's reaction to the upheaval will be

[14] Theda Skocpol, *State and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analaysis of France, Russia and China* (Cambridge University Press, 1979), 95-99.

heavily influenced by the various characteristics of the demonstrations. The size of demonstrations often determine whether or not the army will become involved at all. The personnel composition and the nature of the protests, however, will strongly affect *how* the military will respond. Additional societal factors are the generals' perception of the extent of popular support and the degree of threat the revolution presents to the regime.

The Size, Personnel Composition, and Nature of Demonstrations

Just how large a protest is makes a significant difference in the army's response. Small demonstrations usually do not even need the army's involvement as they can be handled by the police, security agencies, or paramilitary forces. If army units are deployed to relatively small protests – and especially if they arrive in armored vehicles which are often used merely to intimidate – it is usually a signal that the regime is committed to crushing the unrest quickly. The larger the demonstration, the more likely it is that the regular army will be involved. Mass demonstrations in which tens of thousands of people participate, will generally lead regimes to deploy the armed forces. Nonetheless, there is no clear correlation between the size of the crowd and the army's likelihood of opening fire. The military's decision to shoot at the crowd will probably hinge on two further related factors: the composition and nature of demonstrations.

One of the most important attributes of demonstrations is the question of who are the demonstrators. Do they represent a wide spectrum of society or just a specific segment or segments of it? The military will be far more likely to violently suppress a demonstration made up of radical young men than one that includes men, women, and children of all ages representing a variety of political views. Another important factor is the ethno-religious identity of the demonstrators, particularly if it differs from the dominant ethno-religious identity of the army. The most important reason Bahrain's army supported King Hamad's regime in the recent revolution was the difference between the religious identity of the military and the ruling elites (Sunni Muslim) and the protesters (mostly members of the marginalized Shi'a Muslim majority).

Some protests are peaceful marches while others turn into demonstrators physically confronting the security forces, counter-demonstrators, and even by-standers. Clearly, the nature of the protests enters into the military calculations about how to react to them. Generally speaking, the more violent the protests are the more likely that soldiers will respond to them with violence. In fact, the army would be seldom deployed against peaceful and orderly demonstrations and if it were, it would rarely suppress it violently.

To be sure, occasionally even peaceful marches are crushed by the military but it is certainly a rare occurrence and tends to foreshadow the regime's uncompromising stance toward demonstrations. One recent example is the Syrian military's violent suppression of the peaceful protests in Daraa in March 2011.

The Army's Record of Conduct vis-à-vis Society

A military establishment is not just part of the state but it is also part of society where its members come from. The behavior of the armed forces toward society is likely to influence their calculations as to which side of the revolt should they intervene on. An army that has brutally suppressed demonstrations, committed human rights violations, involved in large-scale corruption, and generally treated people poorly, is more likely to stick with the status quo regime than to support a revolutionary force that, once the dust settles, might hold it accountable for its past misdeeds. It is hardly surprising, for instance, that when Chile's military junta gave up power in 1990, one of its main conditions was to be granted immunity for their regime's past human rights abuses.

The Popularity of the Revolution

Another factor that enters into the army's calculations of how to respond to a revolution is the top brass' perception of the popular support behind that revolution. All things being equal, military leaders are going to be more likely to back a revolution that enjoys broad-based societal support. Conversely, a revolution that does not have a wide segment of the population behind it will be less likely to obtain the army's backing.

Nevertheless, as always, it is important to be aware of the particular setting. For instance, military leaders who have much to lose if a broadly popular revolution would topple the regime – because, for example, the army is guilty of human rights violations and expects to be held accountable or because it expects the new regime to drastically reduce defense spending – can be expected to turn against the rebels. A contemporary illustration is the uprising in Syria whose broad social base is not expected to deter the Alawite military elites from fighting till the end, because, given the history of the conflict and of the Alawite elites under the Assads (Hafez [1971-2000] and his son, Bashar [2000-), they can hardly anticipate any mercy from a victorious revolution.

The Rebels' Efforts to Win the Army's Support

One of the recurring images of revolutions is dissidents placing flowers in the turrets of the tanks that were sent to frighten them or shoot at them. Those who participate in

revolutions often realize just how indispensable is the military's support for their success. The history of revolutions is replete with rebels appealing to the soldiers through fraternization, information campaigns, attempts to exploit the disaffection and flagging morale of the troops, and promises of policies favorable to those in the military sympathetic to the uprising once it triumphs. In most cases, low- or middle-rank officers, sergeants, and ordinary soldiers are the most receptive to the rebels' entreaties because they tend to be relatively poorly paid, and often mistreated, and they have less to gain from the regime's survival than senior officers. Fraternization was a widely-used tactic of insurgents in many revolutions, for instance in France (1789, 1848, 1871), Russia (1917), Hungary (1956), Iran (1979), and all of the recent Arab revolts with the exception of Bahrain.

External Variables

All the above-mentioned factors that influence the military's reaction to revolutions are internal – that is, they originate within the armed forces, in the state, or in society. Nevertheless, the external environment may also influence and, under the right circumstances, even alter the generals' decision of how to respond to the revolution.

The Potential for Foreign Intervention

In many contexts the most important external variable is the possibility of a foreign intervention in the country experiencing revolutionary upheaval. There are two fundamental (and obvious) questions. First, is there a realistic potential for foreign intervention at all? Second, on which side are forces from abroad expected to intervene: in support of the revolution or in support of the status quo regime?

Although the threat of a foreign intervention is non-existent in many revolutions, in some contexts the importance of this variable would be difficult to overstate. In the recent upheaval in Libya the expected NATO bombing impelled many of Muammar Gaddafi's officers to defect and, in many cases, to join rebel militias. In other instances, such as the Gulf Cooperation Council's intervention in support of Bahrain's status quo regime is likely to have made no difference in the calculations of the country's military elites given their solid loyalty to the king. The intervention itself just eased their job of suppressing the opposition.

Some armies have a reputation of not putting up a fight against invasionary forces in numerous different contexts. For instance, the well-trained and well-equipped

Czechoslovak army stayed in its barracks during the occupation of their country by the *Wehrmacht* in 1938. Thirty years later, when the Soviet Union, aided by several Warsaw Pact member-states, invaded Czechoslovakia to put down the reformist Prague Spring movement, the Czechoslovak People's Army once again failed to get involved. Such a tradition of non-fighting – no one who read Jaroslav Hašek's *The Good Soldier Švejk* is likely to ignore it – should also inform expert analysis regarding the army's potential response against domestic unrest.

Revolutionary Diffusion

On rare occasions multiple revolutions happen in quick succession as the revolutionary fervor "infects" usually a neighboring country. This is a phenomenon known as revolutionary diffusion and it took place, most recently in 1989 in Eastern Europe, 1990-2008, in the republics of the former Soviet Union, and in 2011 in the Middle East and North Africa. On even more rare occasions revolutions actually spread from one continent to another, as in 1848-1849, from Europe to Latin America.[15] How will this diffusion of revolutions impact upon the generals' calculations? Officers who have just seen the fall of a neighboring regime will take note of such events and will be more inclined to support the revolution in their own country than to go against "the tide of history" and support what they may consider a losing cause. Conversely, the fates of dictators elsewhere might redouble the generals' efforts to stay in power and crush revolutions. Burmese leaders during the "Saffron Revolution" in 2007 were aware of Ceauşescu's destiny and there can be little doubt that the fate of Muammar Gaddafi and other deposed leaders of the regions is on Bashar Assad's mind as the civil war in Syria unfolds.[16]

Foreign Exposure of Officers

The past foreign exposure of military officers, especially high ranking ones, might be a factor that will influence their behavior during revolutions. One of the implicit – and often explicit – objective of countries that instruct foreign officers in their educational institutions is not only to provide professional training but also to imbue the participants

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[15] See Kurt Weyland, "The Diffusion of Revolution: '1848' in Europe and Latin America," *International Organization*, 63:3 (July 2009): 391-423.

[16] Christina Fink, "The Moment of the Monks: Burma, 2007," in Adam Roberts and Timothy Garton Ash, eds., *Civil Resistance and Power Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 361.

with the political values they hold. This was especially apparent during the Cold War when foreign officers studying in the Soviet Union, the United States, or the United Kingdom were expected to become supporters of the host nation.

In the post-Cold War world, foreign officers studying in the military institutions of democratic states also receive instruction in democratic civil-military relations. If such education makes an impact in the officers' worldview, they might be more inclined to be sympathetic to revolutions that aim to establish democratic governance. Nonetheless, foreign exposure is usually a factor of minor consequence and is unlike to override more substantial ones such as the regime' treatment of the armed forces or divisions within military elites. In some cases study abroad might even turn officers against the host nation. One example is Mengistu Haile Mariam who, as a promising Ethiopian officer was educated in the United States for six months in 1967 where he developed anti-American sentiments. A decade later he became the leader of the communist military junta and its genocidal regime.[17]

Conclusion: Four Sketches (with 20/20 Hindsight)

By examining the factors above, analysts will be well equipped to make informed guesses regarding the military's position about future revolutions and, consequently, about the ultimate fates of those revolutions. Hindsight is always 20/20, but the following brief analysis will give insight into why the stance of the armies in some recent revolutions was hardly surprising and, in the final analysis, neither was the outcome of the revolutions themselves.

In December 1989, the Romanian Army, following a brief period of hesitation, decided to support the people against the regime of Ceauşescu for a number of foreseeable reasons. This was an army of conscripts whose leadership had institutional differences with the secret police, *Securitate*, which enjoyed privileged treatment by the regime. Army leaders had a low opinion of the Ceauşescu regime, they faced large and peaceful demonstrations whose participants represented all Romanian society, and they were well aware of the increasingly swift demise of communist regimes in Eastern Europe.[18]

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[17] See Dawit Shifaw, *The Diary of Terror: Ethiopia 1974 to 1991* (Bloomington, IN: Trafford, 2012).

[18] See, for instance, Zoltan Barany, *Soldiers and Politics in Eastern Europe, 1945-1990* (London: Macmillan, 1993), 155-159.

The revolution, the only violent regime change in the region, succeeded with the army's critical support.

The Burmese generals' regime was not in serious danger in 2007 for a number of largely predictable reasons. Most importantly, while the entire military leadership might not have endorsed using violence against the unarmed monks, they certainly remained united in their desire to stay in power. The top brass *was* the regime, the army (*tatmadaw*) was a professional force, and the rebels were not successful in persuading soldiers to support their cause, perhaps because potential turncoats realized that they might well had to pay the ultimate price if the uprising could not topple the generals.[19]

The Tunisian army's support of the uprisings seems just as foreseeable as the fierce opposition of their Bahraini colleagues to the demonstration in their country. The former, a conscript army, was the marginalized component of Ben Ali's security establishment, the regime had little legitimacy in the eyes of its soldiers, the uprising was extremely popular and the troops were open to fraternization. The latter, an army composed of regime loyalists and mercenaries had an existential interest in crushing the demonstrations predominantly made up of Bahrain's Shi'a Muslim majority who had no chance of turning soldiers to their side. The military was well treated by the regime and expected an intervention from Bahrain's foreign allies in support of its actions.

Clearly, the military's reaction to revolutions is not equally easy or difficult to anticipate in all cases given the myriad of factors that potentially influence it. Still, approaching this important question in the holistic and systematic manner adopted in this analysis, will provide a useful tool for those interested in the generals' likely response to revolutions in the future.

[19] Fink, 354-370; and Mary P. Callahan, "Myanmar's Perpetual Junta," *New Left Review*, 60 (November-December 2009), 27-63.

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