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Abandoned at the Palace: Why the Tunisian Military Defected from the Ben Ali Regime in January 2011

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ABSTRACT Many analysts have focused on the Tunisian protests and the economic and political grievances that fueled them. Equally central, however, was the role played by the military leadership and the decision to forgo using force to actively suppress the protesters. Contrary to arguments that stress the reflexively apolitical or professional nature of the military, or its leaders’ normative commitment to supporting the protesters, this article explains how the decisions made reflected political calculations and served the military’s organizational interests. Although heralded as the savior of the revolution, the Tunisian military acted out of its own organizational self-interest in defecting from the Ben Ali regime.

KEY WORDS: Arab Spring, Arab Uprisings, Civil-Military Relations, Middle East, Military Defection

Few could have predicted in December 2010 that events in a small town in Tunisia’s interior would trigger a cascade of uprisings across the Arab world. The catalyst was the self-immolation of a university graduate turned street vendor protesting his lack of economic opportunities. Simmering grievances, stemming from a lack of jobs in the country’s less developed south and west sparked riots and protests in several interior towns, which elicited a violent response from police and security forces. Lawyers, other professionals and union leaders joined the protest movement and the uprising spread to major towns, increasingly reflecting calls not only for economic justice, but also for political change. Beginning on 12 January 2011, large protests involving tens of thousands of Tunisians occurred in the capital, filling the streets of Habib Bourguiba Avenue and massing in front of key government institutions. Largely uncommunicative throughout the crisis (President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali appeared in just three televised speeches during the month long protests), the regime seemed to be
biding time, perhaps foreseeing a violent end to the uprising, similar to that which occurred in 2008 when labor protests in the country’s interior ended with the deployment of the army to the streets and violent repression by the police.¹

Only in mid-January did the seriousness of the situation seem to become apparent to President Ben Ali.² In the early hours of 12 January, just two days before Ben Ali would depart the country, he deployed his army to the streets of capital – a significant development because the military normally played no role in policing the capital and safeguarding domestic security. Protests in other parts of the country had overwhelmed the police and the regime increasingly faced the prospect of a growing uprising in the country’s urban centers.³ In addition to sending it into the streets, Ben Ali also reportedly called upon the Army to use force against the protesters (the police and security forces had already been using live ammunition as well as non-lethal methods, such as rubber bullets, tear gas and beatings to disperse protesters).⁴ When the Army Chief of Staff, General Rachid Ammar, refused to comply, Ben Ali tried to place him under house arrest. In a potential sign of divisions in the regime, on 13 January the army withdrew its forces from Tunis, only returning them to the streets of the capital on the 14th with Ben Ali’s departure from the country.⁵

²Ben Ali’s strategy was to contain protests to the interior, which had a history of being restive. The spread to the cosmopolitan areas of the capital and the coastline was an important signal that the situation was worsening, ‘Has Ben Ali played his last cards’, Maghreb Confidential, 6 Jan. 2011.
⁵Although widely reported, the precise details of Ben Ali’s orders and subsequent effort to arrest or detain Gen. Ammar remain murky. There is indirect evidence that supports the conclusion that the Army refused to fire. First, unlike the police and the security forces, the Army had not used live ammunition in other cities where it had already been deployed; to the contrary there were reports that soldiers were interposing themselves between police and protesters to try to protect that latter and calm the situation. Forces first appeared in the capital (the Army never operated in Tunis and security was provided by police and other forces controlled by the Interior Ministry) in major intersections and in front of government buildings on the 12th. However, those forces were observed withdrawing on Thursday the 13th, which was interpreted as a sign of the military’s refusal to repress the protest, only to return to the streets after Ben Ali fled the country on 14 January. See David D. Kirkpatrick, ‘Military backs new leaders in
military complied with Ben Ali’s demands to suppress forcefully the uprising, events in Tunisia would have taken a different – potentially much bloodier – course. As it was, the refusal of the Tunisian military to participate in repressing the protests initiated the end of the regime and ushered in a period of change that amounts to the most far-reaching of the Arab ‘revolutions’ of 2011 to date.6

In short, critical to understanding the course of events in January 2011 were the actions of the Tunisian military and the decision to refrain from violently repressing the protests. Explaining why the military refused to fire on the protesters and instead defected from the Ben Ali regime is the central task of this article.

I argue that the actions of military leaders in January 2011 must be understood in light of the country’s civil-military relations and their implications for what the Tunisian military and its senior leaders had to gain or lose, organizationally and individually, in acting to support Ben Ali. There were few benefits to sustaining Ben Ali in power, or ultimately in retaining the broader regime of which he was the leader, especially given the costs the military would have incurred in violently suppressing the uprising in defense of the regime. In fact, Ben Ali and his increasingly personalist and corrupt regime may have been a growing liability for the military, subverting its core organizational interests. The decision to refrain from using force against the Tunisian protesters therefore occurred in a context in which the military had little to lose (and potentially some to gain) from abandoning Ben Ali, while protecting him would have introduced significant costs to the military. In short, while the Army is commonly portrayed as acting to protect the revolution, less appreciated is how the actions it took in January 2011 also were consistent with its organizational interests.

The reasons for its lack of incentives to defend the regime originate in the nature of civil-military relations and the mechanisms through which Ben Ali maintained political control of his military, in combination with features of the uprising itself. Building on the model of civil-military relations developed under his predecessor, Habib Bourguiba, Ben Ali sought to keep the military at a distance from the regime, limiting its influence and investing in police and security services to act

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as the mainstay coercive forces of the regime. The military therefore effectively operated at the periphery of politics in the regime, where it continued a long-standing historical role of acting as an apparatus of the state with limited responsibilities and without a daily role in the regular management of the regime.

Specifically, Ben Ali’s approach to managing the military involved two complementary tactics. First, it involved marginalizing his military leaders’ roles in state institutions and limiting the organization’s and its officers’ access to resources. Ben Ali kept the military small and poorly funded, limiting its leaders’ opportunities for personal enrichment or influence in political networks and regime institutions. This, in turn, paradoxically limited the stake the military and its leaders had in sustaining Ben Ali in power in January 2011. Second, and related, Ben Ali’s approach involved maintaining a division of labor in which the task of regime security would fall to forces under control of the interior ministry and its constituent components, while the military would be largely excluded from daily security roles. This meant that the military was not readily associated with the oppressive security apparatus scorned and feared by ordinary Tunisians, creating an important opening for the military leadership ‘to seize the high ground’ and abstain from assisting the police during the events in 2011.

Combined, these features of civil-military relations contributed to a third distinctive characteristic of the Tunisian military. The absence of a daily role in securing the leadership and de facto relegation to the periphery of the regime helped sustain a corporate ethos in which officers appeared to identify with the institution itself, such that they placed value on maintaining its organizational integrity, freedom from civilian interference and social prestige. This corporate ethos – sustained by a particular configuration of civil-military relations – is important to understanding the costs, in terms of what it implied for the Army’s organizational integrity and social esteem, that firing on protesters represented in January 2011 would have entailed.

Together these three features of civil-military relations had important implications for the incentives of the military leadership to support or defect from Ben Ali in January 2011. The Army lacked incentive to protect the regime, while facing the prospect of bearing significant costs were it to engage in the mass repression necessary to defending it.

Below I discuss these key dimensions of civil-military relations in Tunisia, beginning with some historical background.

The Bourguiba Legacy

Understanding the structure of civil-military relations under the Ben Ali regime requires first assessing the historical role of the military and the
methods employed by the country’s first post-independence leader, Habib Bourguiba, in managing relations with his armed forces. The character of civil-military relations in Tunisia exhibit some degree of path dependence, with Ben Ali inheriting a particular set of informal norms and institutions and then elaborating on that structure.

Unlike its counterparts in other Arab republics, when Bourguiba assumed power in 1956 as head of what would be the country’s dominant political party, the Socialist Destourian Party (renamed the Neo Destourian party), the military did not play an important role. In contrast to cases like Egypt and Syria, the Tunisian military did not bring the Bourguiba regime to power; nor did it play a vanguard role as a symbol of revolutionary change in a newly established republic. Indeed, when Bourguiba became the country’s first president, he did so with a very particular conception of the military’s role in the state in which it would play little role in politics. He organized civil-military relations in ways to sustain that role, establishing routines and institutional roles accordingly.

Bourguiba, for example, prohibited the officer corps the right of political association, preventing them from playing a role in the regime’s dominant political party, thereby denying them access to an important institution of elite politics in Tunisia. The military was run by a civilian, and today is overseen by a civilian Minister of National Defense. The military was deliberately kept small, both in size and in resources. Bourguiba also sought deliberately to distance the military from daily policing and coercive functions, investing that role with the Interior Ministry, and the conglomerate of police, security and paramilitary forces under its control (see below).

So notable was the marginalization of military from regime politics that when Ben Ali became minister of the interior in 1986 under Bourguiba, for example, he was the first career military officer to be appointed a cabinet level post. Ben Ali had attended the St Cyr military academy in France and also received intelligence and security training as a young officer in the United States. Early in his career he served in military intelligence. Later, within the interior ministry, he helped coordinate security in the aftermath of the bread riots that occurred in January 1978. After a stint as Tunisia’s ambassador to Poland, he returned to the Interior Ministry moving up through its leadership ranks and finally in April 1986 being appointed Interior

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Minister. He retained that portfolio when in October 1987 he became prime minister. One month later he would maneuver Bourguiba, whose health and erratic behavior had become increasingly serious, out of office through a bloodless coup.

Civil-Military Relations under Ben Ali

When Ben Ali assumed power in 1987 he built upon the civil-military formula established by Bourguiba, keeping the military small and marginalized, while sponsoring a dramatic growth of the security forces. Despite a short honeymoon in which Ben Ali flirted with political liberalization, following elections in 1989, he began to build what would emerge in the following two decades as a substantial security state.

In 2011 the regular armed forces included a 27,000 strong Army, of which approximately 20,000 were conscripts; a Navy with 4,800 personnel and an Air Force of 4,000. A 12,000 strong paramilitary force, the National Guard, fell under the control of the Interior Ministry. The budget was approximately 1.4 per cent of GDP, such that in 2010 Tunisia ranked 109th in the world in terms of per cent of GDP devoted to defense expenditure – figures that contrasted sharply with other states in the Arab world. Much of the Tunisian military’s French and American equipment was outdated, if not obsolete. The military, unlike its Egyptian counterparts, did not maintain sizable commercial economic enterprises; nor did its officers enjoy the same perquisites or ready access to key positions in state institutions or the private sector upon retirement. The operational responsibilities of the military were also limited; the military played a role in infrastructure development, disaster relief and humanitarian assistance and the Army operated alongside the National Guard (a paramilitary force under control of the Ministry of Interior) in border control, and alone in southern parts of the country.

12See the description, for example, offered by the minister of defense to American embassy officials and leaked by wikileaks (Wikileaks cable/09TUNIS506).
Notably, the military did not operate in Tunis; security was provided by police and other forces controlled by the Interior Ministry. Outside Tunis, the National Guard played a primary policing role in the countryside and smaller cities. When, for example Ben Ali deployed the army to the capital on 12 January 2011, it indicated the severity of the situation facing the regime.\textsuperscript{13} Like its counterpart in Egypt, the Tunisian military had only rarely been called upon to participate actively in repressing political activity.\textsuperscript{14}

In short, Ben Ali’s formula had been largely one of control through exclusion, keeping the military distant from the regime, both literally and figuratively, while, as I explain below, balancing it with a large police and security apparatus. Intriguingly, Ben Ali relied on this approach despite the very different patterns of elite control and regime management that he employed more broadly. Ben Ali ruled through direct control and management of a small cohort of elites, who rotated in and out of government institutions and a clique of presidential advisors operating out of the palace. Unlike Bourguiba who managed elite politics through an agile game of divide and rule, as Ben Ali’s personalistic system of rule evolved, few elites were able to develop independent power bases and power was increasingly concentrated in a narrow cohort with Ben Ali at the center.\textsuperscript{15} Indeed, in recent years the regime was largely mobilized to facilitate the personal enrichment of Ben Ali’s family.


Division of Labor

Ben Ali has sought to build a substantial counterbalance to the military with security forces housed in the Ministry of Interior.\(^\text{16}\) Beginning in the 1990s, the size of the police and security forces grew substantially, by some accounts quadrupling, and included forces within the formal control of the Interior Ministry, as well as militias accountable directly to the palace.\(^\text{17}\) The number of police and security services employed was estimated to be between 120,000 and 200,000, a substantial number in a country of ten and a half million.\(^\text{18}\) As Christopher Alexander captures it, ‘The police force, uniformed and plainclothes, became the regime’s praetorian guard.’\(^\text{19}\)

The Interior Ministry’s forces include the Public Order Brigade (Brigade de l’Ordre Publique, BOP) or riot police, which played an important role in the regime’s efforts to repress the 2010/2011 uprising.\(^\text{20}\) Especially dreaded by the population was the State Security Department, which was abolished in March 2011. Also housed within the Interior Ministry were several elite units. These include the Rapid Intervention Response Brigade (BNIR); the Anti-Terrorism Brigade (BAT) which is a specialized unit drawn from the national police (it is similar in function to SWAT teams in the United States); and an elite


\(^{17}\) The police numbered 40,000 under Bourguiba according to Amy Aisen Kallander, ‘Tunisia’s Post ben Ali Challenge: A Primer,’ \textit{Middle East Research and Information Project}, 26 Jan. 2011; also see Christopher Alexander, ‘Authoritarianism and Civil Society in Tunisia: Back from the Democratic Brink’, \textit{Middle East Research and Information Project} 27 (Winter 1997), 36–7.


tactical unit of the National Guard, the National Guard Special Unit (USGN). Within the army, there exists a Special Forces brigade (GFS) based at Bizerta.

Central to Ben Ali’s security forces was his 5,000–6,000 strong presidential guard, which played an important role as protector of the regime and whose chief, Ali Seriati, was arrested soon after Ben Ali’s departure from the country. The Presidential Guard was notable both for how well equipped and well treated were its members under Ben Ali. Indeed, privileging of the Presidential Guard was rumored to have generated substantial hostility and resentment from other security forces.

Within the final days of the regime, the presidential guard would stay loyal to the regime, although it ultimately would prove incapable of protecting it. Immediately following Ben Ali’s departure on 14 January, the army in combination with some segments of the police fought fierce gun battles around the capital, including at the presidential palace in Carthage and interior ministry, with members of the presidential guard and private militia recruited and directed by Ben Ali who remained loyal to the leader. Members of those forces engaged in looting and violence, which appeared to have been part of a strategy to sow chaos and lay the groundwork for Ben Ali’s return to the country, forcing citizen patrols to mobilize to protect their neighborhoods.

Corporateness

One important byproduct of the marginalization of the military and its relegation to the periphery of the regime is that it effectively granted the military some degree of organizational autonomy. In part as a result, the military was able to sustain a corporate ethos that prioritized mission and duty and regard for the military as an institution. That is,

21Borowiec, Modern Tunisia, 79.
the exclusion from daily regime maintenance limited the vulnerability of the military to the distortions and mixed incentives that can come from participation in elite politics and patronage networks within the state. The division of labor also may have had an important implication in January 2011: when the regime crisis occurred, the military was not identified by Tunisians as being part of the coercive apparatus in the same way as were police and other security forces. This created an opening for the military to capitalize on these sentiments and to enhance its social position and prestige by not using armed force, thereby avoiding the disdain Tunisians heaped on the police and security forces.

Also significant in this context is the interaction of the Tunisian military with foreign military forces and relations with its military counterparts in the United States. Although limited, the United States has a long established tradition of military-military relations with Tunisia. The forces participate in annual meetings of a Joint Military Commission, are involved in regular training exercises and the Tunisian military benefits from both Foreign Military Financing (FMF) and International Military Education and Training (IMET), which in 2011 amounted to approximately $17 million and $1.7 million, respectively; although this military assistance is nominally small, it is provided in context of a military deprived of resources and reliant on limited funds to maintain its aging equipment.

The significance of these relationships must be seen, moreover, in context of Tunisian civil-military relations which in effect, if not necessarily by design, afford the armed services some degree of internal autonomy and insulation from regime institutions. In other civil-military contexts, such military-military relationships might lack traction or resonance (as for example in cases where military leaders are more centrally engaged in daily regime maintenance). Although difficult to evaluate, they may be significant in the Tunisian case, for their socialization effects: they facilitate interaction with US military

27 In 2009 total FMF was 12 million dollars; 17 million in 2011. Tunisia relied on FMF to maintain its 1980s and 1990s era US origin military equipment, which accounts for 70 per cent of its total inventory. Since 1994 Tunisian has been one of the top 20 recipients of IMET, which was close to two million in 2011. In addition, Tunisia in 2011 received 20 million in Section 1206 funding which provided DoD funds for use in training and equipping the military’s maritime security capability to aid counter-terrorism. A US-Tunisian Joint Military Commission meets annually and joint exercises are held regularly. Arieff, ‘Political Transition in Tunisia’, 24–5.
officers who see themselves as professional experts and whose organizational norms mean they place high value on cultivating expertise and protecting the integrity of their military institutions.

This corporate ethos, however, does not mean that the military is reflexively ‘apolitical’ and incapable of engaging in political interventions. Discussions of the Tunisian revolution are replete with references to the apolitical nature of the Tunisian military and many scholars have used that terminology as shorthand in explaining its actions in 2011.28 On the one hand, however, one must situate the commonly noted ‘apolitical’ character of the Tunisian military within a context in which Bourguiba and then Ben Ali maintained a clear division of labor in domestic security and sought to control the military by marginalizing it. On the other, the positive normative connotations of events in Tunisia – the military acted to protect the people and safeguard the revolution – should not obscure what in effect was an ineluctably political, if not especially overt, role played by the military in the regime, both before and during the uprising.29

In fact, the military’s actions in December and January 2011 were deeply ‘political’: it deployed to cities in the south and west and stood by while security forces used extreme tactics, including live ammunition at times, to suppress the demonstrations.30 Although some units and soldiers reportedly tried to calm the volatile situation on the ground by interposing themselves between protesters and the police, as a whole the military was sitting on the fence and watching the regime try and suppress the protest, only drawing a line at using force itself in the final days of the uprising. Moreover, this was not the only time the military had behaved in such a passive way toward the regime’s efforts to repress protesters. It had similarly been deployed and stood by while


29Angrist, ‘Whither the ben Ali regime in Tunisia?’.

Moreover, the decisions made during the final days of the uprising were also political in the sense that they meant the Army and its leader, General Ammar was de facto the key power broker in the country – a role which in the weeks following the protests became manifestly clear. Not only had the military defected from Ben Ali, precipitating his departure from the country, it subsequently played a vital role in reestablishing control under a new government in the days that followed. Military personnel participated in the arrest of key officials and provided essential backing to the interim government led by Ben Ali’s long time prime minister, Mohammed Ghounoucchi. In turn, it defended the government from threats posed by Ben Ali loyalists by engaging in a series of street battles with members of security forces allied to the leader.\footnote{Tunisian interim president asks Al-Jazeera to “contribute to encouraging calm”, *BBC Monitoring Middle East*, 16 Jan. 2011. According to the prime minister, the army was acting in accordance with the constitutional state of emergency declared on 14 Jan.} In short, when General Ammar, famously stated that ‘the army will protect the revolution’, he was essentially admitting to the military’s fundamental role as power broker.\footnote{David D. Kirkpatrick, ‘Chief of Tunisian army pledges his support for the revolution’, *New York Times*, 25 Jan. 2011.}

What remains to be explained, therefore, is why the military decided to defect from the regime in mid-January 2011. Key is the nature of civil-military relations in Tunisia. The structure of these relations meant that organizationally and individually, the Army and its senior leaders did not depend on Ben Ali for resources or access to power, which lessened their investment in sustaining him in office. In fact, not only did the military lack a substantial vested interest in keeping Ben Ali in power, there may have been benefits in sidelining him. Ben Ali may have played a role in the downing of a helicopter in 2002, which killed General Ammar’s predecessor and 12 other senior officers and personnel – if these suspicions are accurate, there would be no love lost between the army and Ben Ali.\footnote{Tunisian army chief dies in air crash’, *BBC News*, 1 May 2002; Kallander, ‘Tunisia’s Post ben Ali Challenge’.} The regime’s policies, including its rampant corruption, which had accelerated in recent years and been placed on public display with the exposure by Wikileaks of US embassy cables, not only potentially provoked the personal ire of Tunisia’s

\footnotesize{32}Tunisian interim president asks Al-Jazeera to “contribute to encouraging calm”’, *BBC Monitoring Middle East*, 16 Jan. 2011. According to the prime minister, the army was acting in accordance with the constitutional state of emergency declared on 14 Jan.
\footnotesize{34}Tunisian army chief dies in air crash’, *BBC News*, 1 May 2002; Kallander, ‘Tunisia’s Post ben Ali Challenge’.
military officers, but also may have raised the specter of the military being called upon to repress future protests and restore civil order – a role it was known to disdain.\footnote{Gassner, ‘Transition in Tunisia’.} Add to that the shadow of succession hanging over the regime, which might have allowed a regime insider like Ben Ali’s corrupt son-in-law Sakher El-Materi to take over, and/or catalyzed instability and a breakdown in the civil order, forcing the military to maintain in power a potentially illegitimately chosen and despised political leader. In short, the reasons to stay in the relationship were small and may have been diminishing.

Finally, mass repression of the kind required in mid-January to quash the protests was likely to be viewed as a threat to the integrity of the organization and engender a loss of prestige and social esteem; in this regard the corporate interests of the military were best realized by rejecting the order to fire, thereby resulting in the military effectively siding with the protesters. The magnitude of the uprising and the organizational costs involved in repressing the protests are critical in this regard. Not only had the uprising grown from localized protests in the restive interior to a mass movement encompassing the cosmopolitan capital and wealthy coastal regions,\footnote{Laryssa Chomiak and John P. Entellis, ‘The Making of North Africa’s Intifadas’, \textit{Middle East Report} 259 (Summer 2011), 13–15.} by the time the army was deployed to the capital, the uprising had taken on an expansive cross-class character: this was no longer a protest by unemployed Tunisians in the country’s hinterland, but included calls for political change and encompassed professionals and middle class elements from major cities. The magnitude of the protest grew while the police had proven increasingly incapable of suppressing it; in fact, the security force’s inefficacy and tactics served to increase societal mobilization in the uprising’s early phases as reports of the police brutality spread across Tunisia.\footnote{Apparently, protesters used social media to track the roles that different security forces were playing in the conflict. Nadia Marzouki, ‘Tunisia’s Wall has fallen’, \textit{MERIP}, 19 Jan. 2011. Also see, ‘Capturing Tunisia protests on video’, \textit{Al-Jazeera}, 5 Jan. 2011; ‘Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (IV): Tunisia’s War’, International Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report No. 106, 28 April 2011, 4.}

When the military finally shifted from neutrality or passivity to a position that effectively supported the protests (that is, refusing to fire to defuse them) it occurred in a context in which the balance of power between the protesters and the police had shifted. Had the protests been contained to cities in the marginalized interior of the country, the situation might have ended differently, especially given the successful,
if brutal, repression that occurred during labor protests in Gafsa in 2008.\textsuperscript{38} However, by 12 January it was clear momentum had shifted with the rapidly escalating protests in Tunis and in the country’s second largest city, Sfax. The situation was also getting increasingly out of the regime’s control as illustrated on the 13th when police fled in the face of demonstrations in the coastal city of Hammamet, allowing protesters to ransack the mansion of one of Ben Ali’s relatives.\textsuperscript{39}

This raises the intriguing question of why the police and security forces were so ineffective in containing the protests. While the eventual size and magnitude of the uprising were factors, early on the protests were small and discrete events and it is conceivable they could have been contained. One issue is the national police force’s lack of skill and preparation for the task at hand. Recruitment to the police in Tunisia operated effectively as a jobs program and rank and file recruits were generally poorly paid, trained and managed.\textsuperscript{40} They were ill-equipped to handle the protests from the start. Provocations of the police by youths in the initial riots in mid-December only added to the explosiveness of a situation in which the security forces resorted to increasingly brutal tactics and indiscriminate uses of force.\textsuperscript{41} These tactics inflamed the situation, helping fuel social mobilization and ultimately proved self-defeating to the regime’s capacity to contain the protests.\textsuperscript{42}

A second issue relates to how the regime’s effort to organize its security institutions to safeguard against internal threats may indirectly serve to undermine the capabilities and effectiveness of those institutions in other tasks. One set of problems relates to the challenges in ensuring accountability and effective leadership in these institutions. Put simply, it is difficult, if not risky, to discipline forces on whose political loyalty a leader depends, and on whose chiefs a leader relies to monitor security forces and society for opposition and therefore prevent coordinated action against the regime.\textsuperscript{43} These organizations


\textsuperscript{41}Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (IV)’, 3.

\textsuperscript{42}Tunisia in Revolt: State Violence During Anti-government Protests’, Amnesty International, Feb. 2011; ‘Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (IV)’.

\textsuperscript{43}Difficulties in reforming the ministry of interior are illustrative. ‘Tunisia: General Director of Security Units Moncef Laajmi is dismissed’, \textit{Africa News}, 10 Jan. 2012;
and their leaders may be less oriented toward, or simply ineffectual at, training and preparing their security forces for purposes like managing societal protest in order to defuse or contain it, instead of just resorting to indiscriminately applied, blunt force, attrition style tactics. In some respects, the ineffectiveness induced by organizational pathologies sometimes observed in autocratic militaries on the battlefield may mirror the ineffectiveness of domestic security institutions in managing domestic uprisings.

Lessons from the Tunisian Case

What lessons can be drawn from the Tunisian case for understanding the role of security forces in other uprisings? The case suggests that the nature of civil-military relations in an autocratic regime facing mass protests are crucial to understanding whether the armed forces will defect from a leader, or act to maintain him in office: key is how relations directly and indirectly shape military leaders’ investment in sustaining the leader. In addition, the nature of the popular uprising also may be crucial, and specifically whether it represents a mass revolt, or is geographically isolated and only represents a subsection of the population (a class or a sect). Both of these factors can affect the costs and benefits facing senior military leaders and their organizations in choosing to pay the costs of repressing protesters in support of a leader and/or his regime, versus defecting and unleashing his potential downfall from power. Fortunately, for Tunisians in December 2010/January 2011, Ben Ali’s military benefited marginally from its position in the regime, and would have had to pay significant costs organizationally to defend it. Because it had little to gain by safeguarding Ben Ali, and much potentially to lose, it acted in a way that allowed the popular uprising to prevail and the country’s ‘revolution’ to proceed.

Note on Contributor

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