# CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN TUNISIA AND LIBYA THROUGH THE ARAB SPRING

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This paper analyzes the role of civil-military relations in the disparate outcomes of two Arab-spring countries: Tunisia and Libya. Applying paradigms developed by Serra, Schedler, and Matei, the paper explores the state of civil-military relations before, during, and after the Arab spring and shows that civil-military relations were a key variable in the outcomes. The findings demonstrate the importance of international military education and training efforts in developing countries as a hedge against instability. The global community has an important role to play in helping to professionalize military forces around the world and improve civilmilitary relationships.

**Key words:** *civil-military relations, Libya, Tunisia, Arab Spring, international military education and training (IMET).* 

# **1. INTRODUCTION**

In 2011 a tidal wave of change swept across the Middle East and North Africa toppling authoritarian regimes that had stood for decades. In the aftermath, as countries picked through the detritus of their government institutions, fledgling democracies began to rise. Tunisia and Libya both witnessed the fall of dictators. In the three years since the Arab Spring, the outcomes of democratic transitions Tunisia in and Libva have diverged significantly. Tunisia appears to have made the transition to democracy with minimal upset, while in neighboring Libya chaos reigns. This paper follows the different trajectories in the civil-military relations in Libya and Tunisia, and how these differences influenced these disparate outcomes before, during, and after the fall of the countries' dictators and results in very different outcomes. The lessons of Libya and Tunisia highlight the critical importance of civil-military relations in transitions to democracy, particularly in transitions from military-supported authoritarian rule. Likewise, these lessons show the importance of foreign

support for the professionalization and institutionalization of militaries in developing nations.

## 1.1. Civil-Military Relations Paradigm

To understand the role of civilmilitary relations in the disparate outcomes of the transitions to democracy of Libva and Tunisia, there is a wealth of scholarship to consider. Huntington argues for a professional military, isolated from politics as a cornerstone of established democracies [1]. Janowitz agrees with the necessity of professionalism but believes that militaries should be closer to society, accepting of the values of that society, and continuously subject to civilian assessment [2]. Finer outlines a scale of civil-military relations with regard to intrusiveness from constitutional cooperation to outright overthrow of civilian authority by the military [3]. Serra delineates seven steps that transitioning democracies go through with regard to military control [4]. Barany defines a trilogy of institutions that determine the nature of the civil-military relationship: the state, the society, and the military [5]. Finally, Matei provides three areas for evaluating civil-military relations:

democratic civilian control, military effectiveness, and efficiency with which resources are applied in accomplishing military missions [6]. The civil-military relations and their role in the transitions of Libya and Tunisia will be analyzed within these frameworks.

## **1.2. Transitions to Democracy.** The Normative Picture

Narcis Serra notes that transitions to democracy from authoritarian rule require a transformation of the military from its old roles in supporting the regime to its new role as a servant of the civilian authorities. Serra defines three issues that shape transitions to democracy: military reform cannot be isolated from democratic reform, society operates as a third front in legitimate transition, and military assertion of autonomy. First, efforts must be made in both civil and military arenas simultaneously; a stoppage in one area cannot be corrected by pressing ahead in the other. Second, social legitimacy is a key concern in transitions, necessitating depoliticization and institutionalization of the military as a pillar of civil society. Finally, the level of autonomy in the military during and after a transition must be decided by civilian authorities, and not left to the whims of military leadership [7].

Schedler outlines a four-step scale of governance from authoritarian to advanced democracy [8]. Immediately following the Arab Spring transitions, Libya and Tunisia were faced with a rapid transition to an elected government and left to prevent democratic breakdown and a return to authoritarian rule. Schedler identifies "eliminating, neutralizing, or converting disloyal players" as the immediate mission of fledgling democracies [9]. Beyond outright breakdown, Schedler also cautions about the danger of democratic erosion even after transition.

Matei notes the insufficiency of the democratic civilian control framework in addressing the issues faced by leaders in transition and recommends an analysis based on control, effectiveness, and efficiency. Control is measured by Matei's paradigm as the presence of institutional control mechanisms, oversight, and professional norms. Effectiveness will be assessed according to the efficacy of plans, structures, and resources [10]. Efficiency will be evaluated according to Bruneau's requirement for regular government review of expenditures related to military operations [11].

## **1.3. Tunisian Civil-Military Relations** Before and During the Arab Spring

Though authoritarian in nature, the Tunisian government had wellestablished, stable institutions as a result of decades of French rule [12]. The Tunisian Military consists of an Army, Navy, and Air Force. The Army is the largest of the branches with 27,000 soldiers; the Navy and Air Force each have less than 5000 members. The military has, since its inception, participated in foreign conflicts and peacekeeping operations [13]. The military was founded on the French model, under civilian control and wholly separate from the exercise of power.

The coup in 1987 saw the rise of General Ben Ali to the presidency, but he was an officer of the intelligence services and not the military. Distrustful of the military and their potential for usurpation, Ben Ali further isolated the military from any semblance of political power with a ban on military officers from holding office [14]. While defense spending was low in Tunisia-around 1.4% of the gross domestic product — the military was very professional, with training in American institutions, a responsibility to defend the nation, and a respected position within society. The result was a highly professional and cohesive officer corps with little connection to the ruling elites. A security force five times larger than the military was used to enforce the will of the dictator on the people, freeing the military from an antagonistic role within society [15]. An apolitical military with no role in suppressing the populace was ideal for the Tunisian people's dreams of democratic freedom.

When the Arab Spring began in earnest in 2011, the military, under orders

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from General Ammar, refused to fire on protestors based on their professional ethics and pre-existing formal rules of engagement. The military, consistent with Janowitz, was a symbol of the nation and, as such would no more fire on the people than it would shoot itself, eliciting cries of *"the military and the people are one hand"* from the gathered masses [16].

As the government collapsed and its praetorian guard took to the rooftops sniping at protestors, the military stepped forward to defend the people and restore the security situation in the streets [17]. Ben Ali fled with his wife in tow and a new era dawned in Tunisia. As the military returned to its barracks, the stage was set for democratic rule. Time would tell the role of the military in the future of Tunisia.

## **1.4. Libyan Civil-Military Relations** Before and During the Arab Spring

Libya became a state under very different conditions than its neighbor to the West. Instead of the stable state institutions, a British supported monarchy arose, stabilized by the subsequent discovery of oil in the region [18]. This stateless state was propped up by rents from oil revenue until the rise of Colonel Moammar Qaddafi in 1969 [19]. An early coup attempt left Qaddafi distrusting the military from which he had arisen and led to his efforts to ensure that unit commanders and high ranking officer were almost exclusively from his tribe and loyal to him [20]. This heavyhanded interference in officer promotions and placement resulted in a lack of cohesion in the officer corps and the potential for significant disconnect between the senior officers and their subordinates [21]. Rather than a single defense force, Qaddafi formed multiple militaries: The Khamis Brigade with 10,000 soldiers and heavy weapons that included air power, the People's Militia with 45,000 tribal warriors, the 50,000 soldier regular army, and the sporadically staffed Islamic Legion responsible for Qaddafi's African ambitions.

Libya's Arab Spring began as an uprising in the eastern city of Bengazi. Rather than a populist movement as

in other Arab nations, Libva's spring manifested as a civil war, with portions of the military in the East declaring themselves free and independent of Qaddafi's reign [22]. Whereas other dictators folded under public pressure, Qaddafi launched a harsh retribution campaign against his detractors. As praetorian forces marshaled in the West and began their advance, NATO, led by the United States, took action to protect the Bengazi opposition from extermination at the hands of loyalists [23]. Operation Unified Protector represented an international effort to support a transition from authoritarian rule in Libya at a cost of several billion dollars. Success in the Kosovo air campaign is credited for successful transition there; the key difference in the interventions came in the aftermath of the strikes: no troops were deployed to secure Libya after the airstrikes toppled the regime [24].

The schism in Libyan forces left in the wake of the collapse left the country with no viable security apparatus and a total lack of a Weberian monopoly on violence [25]. The military in the East loosely coalesced around the civilian establishment, but Islamic militias arose in the west from the shattered remnants of Qaddafi's forces bent on asserting their version of a Libyan state. The splintering in Libyan forces and the resultant loss of control on violence would set the stage for an extremely difficult transition as key players descended into the tribal morass that existed prior to Italian rule following World War I.

The lack of centralized control on a cohesive armed force rendered hopeless any idea of the return to barracks necessitated in Finer's paradigm [26]. Qaddafi's total suppression of any political activity during his reign, preferring his idea of "peoplehood" over any true governance, had left paucity in political experience [27]. The airstrikes had blasted the country through the transition to democracy phases, with no attention for the now necessary consolidation. Over the next three years Libya would follow a very different path from its western neighbor, Tunisia.

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#### 2. AN ANALYSIS OF DEMOCRATIZATION & CMR AFTER THE ARAB SPRING

## 2.1. Tunisia After the Spring

The progress in Tunisia has been encouraging. A professional army was solidly institutionalized—and invested in—under the previous regime and its credibility, coupled with support for civilian governance has made for a relatively smooth transition. Images of the protestors hiding from police bullets behind Army tanks have burned an indelible image of unity between the people and their military [28]. Tunisia was quick to return to barracks. promising to uphold security as the fledgling government worked towards establishing a representative system and a constitution. Early elections saw the Islamists sweep to power, due to their existing coordination networks present in the mosques, but the recent election went to the secularists who have vowed to work with the Islamists to preserve their new democracy [29]. The transition in Tunisia has brought the forefront the bureaucrats. to judges, activists, labor unions, and political parties that toppled a dictator and launched the wave that swept through the Middle East [30]. The military in Tunisia has accepted the civilian leaders, providing security while the new leadership negotiated the constitution and the way forward for the country.

Tunisia fits the criteria of a deepening democracy according to Schedler's scale [31]. While a constitution is in place and a peaceful transition of power occurred between the parties after the recent election reversed the majority, the government still needs to demonstrate its capabilities in "public administration, judicial systems, party systems, interest groups, civil society, political culture, and styles of decision making"[32]. In Serra's model, Tunisia is at the far end, with fairly strong "democratic civil control over the armed forces" [33].

Matei's framework is well suited to analyze the state of civil-military relations in Tunisia [34]. Any analysis of efficiency would be premature; the presence of civil control in the Ministry of Defense, enshrined in the new constitutions provides mechanisms for financial oversight, though larger economic concerns like unemployment are likely to dominate the discussion for now [35].

Institutional control mechanisms and oversight measures are prescribed in the new constitution, which outlines the responsibilities of the Ministry of Defense. Policing and crime-fighting functions are allocated to the police forces under the Ministry of the Interior. Article 2 specifies the nation as a civic nation and Article 18 requires military neutrality in politics and submission to civil authorities [36]. Internal to the military, control mechanisms exist in detailed standard operating procedures, such as the rules of engagement, which prevent violent intervention against peaceful protests [37]. The professional norms of the military have been evident in their restraint during the transition, their willingness to return to barracks, their continued a-political stance and lack of interference in civilian wrangling between the Islamists and secularists.

Matei's description of effectiveness the use of plans, institutions, as resources, and interagency coordination/ cooperation to accomplish military missions provides a tool with which to measure it in Tunisia [38]. The Tunisian military is a very formal institution, firmly established and respected by Tunisian society, with written plans that are reviewed regularly [39]. Supporting institutions like civilian ministries are present and functioning. An active and recently empowered judiciary stands capable of reviewing legal questions with regards to the application of military force. All three categories of resources people, equipment, and financial—are sufficient for military effectiveness and provided through a mixture of taxation and foreign assistance, with the US providing the lion's share at \$32 million [40]. Coordination between the Ministries of Defense and the Interior allow for strict divisions of force application, leaving internal security to the police and allowing the military to

focus on the problematic borders and the flow of jihadists to, and their likely return from, regional conflicts [41].

Tunisia's future seems bright. Civilmilitary relations are well established and poised to provide the security the nation needs to continue its democratic consolidation. Further measures to formalize control channels, ensure effectiveness, and evaluate efficiency will help to solidify the country as a secular, democratic model for other countries in the Middle East.

#### 2.2. Libya's Arab Summer

Libva's transition has been characterized by a complete lack of a monopoly on violence and a subsequent lack of security in the country [42]. Rebel militias litter the countryside, and have been bold enough to kidnap the elected prime minister. This danger was not unanticipated; an international report warned efforts should be made to disarm or disband anti-Qaddafi militias if they could not be "merged into a new, democratically accountable national security organization" [43]. Without a peacekeeping force, or any international efforts to stabilize the security forces, the various armed militias, with an estimated strength between 125,000 and 150,000, became entrenched and began expanding their power. In some cities these militias supplanted the civilian authorities entirely. In others they seized infrastructure and economic assets like oil refineries [44].

There are two main problems that have plagued the transition as a result of the lack of security: leftover armaments and porous borders. Leftover armaments, estimated at close to a million weapons, continue to fuel violence and enable interference with civilian authorities [45]. The plethora of unsecured weapons could easily have been smuggled to groups in other countries because there is no control over the borders. The lack of border security has allowed for Al-Qaeda forces, expelled from Mali, to settle with relative ease in the southern barrens of Libya. Qaddafi's former border arrangement with local tribes to provide security is now null and void, with no effort made by the interim government to restore such arrangements [46].

Qaddafi, ever wary of coup attempts, abolished his Ministry of Defense years ago and constantly shuffled officers through billets [47]. The military forces were never able to solidify as an institution and that failure has remained glaringly obvious as civilian efforts to create these institutions on the spot continue to produce little benefit. When Qaddafi fell, different tribal and military leaders claimed positions as Minister of Defense, Minister of Interior, and Chief of Defense with no regard for central governance [48].

The military in Libya has stalled at step two of Serra's transition paradigm. The military, what is left of it, has largely held itself above civil control. Armed militia groups outright deny any central government that would limit the power and autonomy of the militias. While there have been some top-down efforts with international support, the military has not been able to transition to stage three where they are merely a constraint on civil governance and not an outright detractor.

According to Schedler's scale, Libyan civil control is in its infancy, still preoccupied with preventing a slide back into authoritarian rule by militias and Islamistseagertotakepower. These forces represent the "unbound uncertainties". Schedler warns must be eliminated to "avoid democratic breakdown" [49]. Democracy must be solidified quite a bit more before protection against erosion is worth considering. The militias in Libya must be brought under control or eliminated before democratic government can flourish, but many of these armed groups are the only security their tribe and region have because of the lack of central security. It will take efforts to establish a central security force and military capable of defending the populace before armed groups would even consider laying down their arms [50]. The double-headed specter of Jihadism and Islamism continue to threaten secular central governance, preferring their brand of Sharia law to civilian government.

Matei provides a framework with which to analyze the state of Libya's civilmilitary relations [51]. Any consideration of the efficiency of civil-military relations at this stage is not possible simply because no mechanism exists that can perform the mission [52]. Consideration of control and effectiveness, however, is possible, if depressing. There is not currently a legal framework for the operations of military forces beyond a UN White paper that prescribes the basic roles and responsibilities of the military [53]. Efforts to draft a constitution have been entirely unproductive for the last three years. The Interim Transitional Counsel (ITC) that represented Eastern rebels was not elected and therefore lacked legitimacy [54]. Hastily arranged elections created a General National Congress (GNC), truly national elections were not possible due to the lack of security and the GNC lacks credibility. Rather than draft a constitution that would formalize civil-military relations, the two parties of the GNC are perceived as merely jockeying for position, power, and reelection with no serious effort towards the central legal framework needed in the country [55].

Democratic control and oversight are extremely weak, partially due to the lack of legal framework for such activities, but also due to the lack of control on violence in the country. Executive, legislative, and judicial control is impossible without a centralized force. While there have been some external efforts by the United Nations to provide oversight, the evershifting face of the military is difficult to identify much less control. The lack of a central military also results in a lack of professional norms. International efforts headed by the UN are underway to provide training and education, but without a credible central government there is little hope for normalizing recruitment and promotions into anything resembling a professional career path.

Matei describes effectiveness as the use of plans, institutions, resources, and interagency coordination/cooperation to accomplish military missions [56]. While basic institutions exist in the Ministries of Defense and the Interior, and financial resources are available, other resources like people and equipment are sore lacking, plans are non-existent, and the agencies are in a state of competition not cooperation [57].

Libya has a long, tough road ahead if it is to consolidate democracy and establish a central civilian-controlled military capable of securing the nation maintaining a monopoly and on International peacekeepers violence. may be necessary to provide the stability needed to accomplish this consolidation. International efforts must continue to assist with the training and formalization of the military and civilian institutions in order to prevent a slide back into the rule of the strongest, which could be devastating for security in the region. Libva has not transitioned well, and is stuck in a gray area between democracy and chaos. International efforts created this situation with seven months of bombing, and should be brought to bear to ease the transition and provide a future for Libya's people. Training and education for the military is necessary to restore security and protect the government as it coalesces.

## **3. CONCLUSION**

This article demonstrated that civilmilitary relations before, during, and after the transitions from authoritarian rule in Tunisia and Libya played a significant role in the outcomes of those transitions. The results are summarized in Table 1. Tunisia, with its well institutionalized, legalistic, and politically neutral military, was able to throw off the chains of dictatorship, elect officials, draft a constitution, and set the stage for successful democratic rule. By contrast, in Libya the lack of institutionalization and professionalism in the military, coupled with government interference led to the fragmentation of the military into an impossible to control quagmire of unrestrained violence. Admittedly, foreign intervention will likely be required in Libya to secure the country until civilian leaders can develop a framework for governance.

Paradigm			Matei	
Nation	Schedler	Serra	Control	Efficiency
Tunisia	Deepening	Democratic Control	High	Med-High
Libya	Preventing Backslide	Military above Civil Control	Very Low	Low

 Table 1. Country Analysis by Paradigm

In this context, investments in civilian elites, as well as military officer training in civil-military relations are an important tool for professionalization. It provides the civilian and military counterparts with a mutual understanding of the other's role and place in a democratic environment. Towards this end, the United States has invested in both countries over the years, but the investment has not been equal. The United States spent 17 times more money on Tunisian military professionalization than Libyan in the three years prior to the Arab Spring and the outcomes speak for themselves [58]. In Libya, International Military Education and Training (IMET) funds have increased, but it has received half the funding of Tunisia since the Arab Spring [59]. This is an indicator that more needs to be done, not just by the United States, but any organization with a vested interest in democratization and the development of successful CMR. Future research should seek to evaluate specific methods of professionalism and institutionalization for effectiveness to better target these investments. The disparate outcomes of these transitions is a powerful indicator of the importance of foreign efforts to improve the professionalism and institutionalization of militaries in developing countries to ensure that when there are seismic shifts in the governance of these countries, the military is a tool for peaceful success and not chaos.

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