

DETERMINANTS OF MILITARY RETRENCHMENT: ARMY BEHAVIOR DURING POLITICAL TRANSITIONS

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Despite the potential threat the army poses during transitions, there is a great deal of variation in military activity. I focus on this wide range of army response to answer the following question: during transitional periods why do some political armies accept a reduced political role, or go back to the barracks entirely, while others intervene directly? The comprehensive theory I propose is that governing intervention (coup attempt) is most likely in transitional cases where a political army has high organizational cohesion, and it either perceives its corporate interests as threatened by the new regime, or believes there is an opportunity to improve its current position (or both). While assessing coup determinants in transitional states is necessary, it is not sufficient for understanding intervention patterns of political armies. My study moves beyond “coup-isms” and looks at a broad range of options available to political armies during transitional periods. That is, I consider the determinants of political, economic, and non-intervention options available to political armies.

Over the summer I spent a month in Cairo, Egypt conducting fieldwork for my dissertation project addressing this question. While in Egypt I conducted in-depth interviews with active and retired military personnel, as well as political activists and journalists with strong knowledge of the Egyptian military. My major findings from these interviews with the military indicate a sense of national obligation, and strong popular support as the primary reason for their direct intervention in 2013. Additionally, multiple officers cited President Morsi’s failure to resign peacefully in the midst of massive public outcry as a major reason why they directly intervened in 2013, but not 2011 when former President Mubarak resigned under similar conditions. The major findings from interviews with non-military personnel relate to the expansion of Egyptian military



control over the domestic economy since 2014. While the military has always played an important role in the Egyptian economy, my interviews revealed that this role has increased exponentially since General Sisi came to power. Thus, my sources indicate that the opportunity for the military to expand its economic interests was a motivating factor in the decision to overthrow President Morsi.

This information suggests that Egypt is appropriately classified as a self-financed political army (e.g. an army which helps fund its endeavors with extensive involvement in the private economy). This is relevant insofar as the existing literature has done a particularly poor job addressing the determinants of self-financed military intervention. As such, explicating these mechanisms will be one of the key contributions of my study. This field work marks an important initial step in explicating the mechanisms that drive patterns of military intervention during transitional periods. The next phase of my project will involve analysis of existing large-N datasets, as well as structured comparison of the Egyptian case with that of Indonesia. By combining large-N statistical analysis with structured comparisons of Egypt (2011-2014) and

Indonesia (1998-2004) my dissertation will make concrete propositions about how armies behave under different conditions, as well as what steps new democracies can take to reduce coup vulnerability.

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