



DISCUSSION PAPER

Assessing the Role of the Military in Post-‘Arab Spring’ Political Systems: The Case of Algeria and Sudan

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Executive Summary

Poor governance and the absence of democratic practices are practically undeniable causes of the unequivocal political and economic deficiencies among most states of the Arab World. Arguably, the national armies' interventions in the political arena have caused unhealable wounds in the functions of various hierarchical governmental structures. This paper examines both Algeria and Sudan as case studies of the Arab Spring revolutions. Firstly, it investigates the function of the military establishment, its direct or indirect involvement in structures of governance, and whether or not its role has been overrated. Secondly, this paper critically presents the unique structural characteristics of the Algerian and Sudanese armies, informed by their track records since their beginnings. Herein, the weight of history, tribal and sectarian allegiances, and the network of privileges and business relations will be assessed. Thirdly, the aim is to explore whether or not the direct intervention of the army can

be utterly ruled out. The notion of a comprehensive revolutionary approach that completely eradicates the possibility of intervention by army generals will be assessed. In juxtaposition, the idea of a gradual reform scheme which considers the deep-state factor and deep-rooted, multidimensional networks of the states' military wings in their relationship to the structure of the state will also be evaluated.

Finally, the paper attempts to present feasible recommendations for various potential scenarios, including the idea of civil-military relations within the boundaries of a gradual structural reform. This plan will eventually lead to an institutionalisation of the military having clear constitutional, executive and operational functions, monitored by a transparent and sound system of accountability and limitation upon power.



Algerian police are seen in front of president's headquarters as they protest violence against security forces in the south in Algiers Algeria on October 15, 2014. They also sought the resignation of security chief Gen. Abdelghani Hamel. (Bechir Ramzy - Anadolu Agency)

Introduction

According to Luckham (1998), the post-colonial military in North African countries has been perceived as an inevitable transfer and indispensable paradigmatic shift in the style of governance. However, the army's claim to power in these countries has basically emanated from the military establishment's conviction that any civilian government will not be reliable or trustworthy. The generals tacitly presuppose that any civil entity would be susceptible to corruption, economic malfunction and mismanagement due to excessive levels of flexibility. Thus, the military establishment argues that it is not their desire for power that urges them to maintain the upper hand and directly interfere in politics. Rather, the army considers the civilian sector incompetent, having proven themselves unsatisfactory in their participation in political life. The undeniable fact, however, is that none of the civil society organisations have been given a genuine chance to prove their capabilities (Maitland-Jones, 1973, p110).

Mafeje (2002) argues that the generals of the army have enthroned themselves as the custodians and saviours of their states. They realise that coups have been the simplest and shortest routes to cementing their grab of power over the states' establishments, and thus they confidently secure their rule. The experience of the Cold War rationalised the inevitability of the army's role in controlling the post-colonial Middle East and North African countries. For the colonial powers, the army has been the most effective and organised force. Furthermore, the allegiance of the generals can be guaranteed by various privileges. As a consequence, the military establishment has been presented as the guarantor of sound governance after the public has been convinced that civil society has undeniably squandered their legitimacy and proven their failure (Bayart et al, 1999).

According to Chuter (2000), the military has a number of specific functions:

1. The military establishment is entitled to command and control all operational army divisions;
2. It manages and addresses operative and executive planning and movements;
3. It recruits, holds training and administers reserves and all working forces, especially during peacetime.

4. The establishment is also authorised to perform intelligence analysis and occasionally intelligence gathering;
5. It sets up the national defence strategy and other military policies;
6. It also activates and implements the drawn defence strategies and policies;
7. It is in charge of Research and Development (RD) for military equipment and other operational and logistic matters.
8. It procures and secures arsenals and equipment.
9. It administers its own divisions.

Thus, the military establishment responsible for significant functions that require full devotion in order to fulfil. How then, could military personnel allocate time and resources for engaging in political activities? Popular perception and the judgments of analysts would say that they do. However, one former Algerian general claims otherwise claiming that the military only sporadically finds itself compelled to step into the political arena.

"Contrary to the widespread perception among Algerians, the Algerian national army is not the decision-maker when it comes to the political policy of the state; the military establishment has always pledged allegiance to the political power of the state," said Rachid Benyelles, retired army general and former commander of the Algerian navy (Meddi, 2018). He added, "For instance, former president Houari Boumediene never allowed the army to interfere in any decision-making related to the political dynamics or economic policies. He even banned politicians from communicating with the generals."



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Has the role of the army been overvalued in Algeria?

Undoubtedly, the Algerian military establishment has played an important role in paving the way for building the state, presenting itself as a deep-rooted variable in the Algerian nation-building blueprint (Radidja, 2010). The Algerian army has presented itself as the central power, which unquestionably retains and protects the state's political legitimacy. Officially, the military has withdrawn from the political sphere, however, in reality it leads from behind, which gives it the added benefit of not having to attend to the day-to-day operation of the government. Its role is promoted by mainstream media outlets and selected discourse from the elite, and it is portrayed as a broadminded force for the restructuring of reform in Algeria. Thus, the army indirectly guards a foothold for potential direct intervention should their notion of 'state sovereignty' be threatened.

There has been an undeniable paradigmatic shift in the role of the army immediately in the wake of the deterrence of the popular 'Islamist' uprising of the 1990s. Senior army leaders were directly involved in politics after the collapse of public institutions and

the failure of the political regime – at least from the perspective of the military establishment. Later, the Algerian army became extremely powerful, and within two decades it was ranked as one of the most powerful armies in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

If previous arguments were to be presumed valid, the Algerians themselves have concluded that the military establishment is the de-facto leader of the country. They designate the rule of generals and the deep state as *le pouvoir*, 'the power'. Algeria has been widely renowned as a 'controlled democracy', a country in which the armed forces and the 'chosen elite' of unelected individuals, purportedly identified as *le pouvoir*, are entitled to make major decisions, including the selection of the president (Kamel, 2015). This group includes an influential lobby of wealthy oligarchs from the inner circles of the ruling regime. Thus, the military today has no need to resort to the use of excessive force against protesters; they simply lead from behind, ensuring that all major decisions fall within their grasp.

The case of Sudan

In careful analysis of the Sudanese scenario, one might reckon that the military establishment has an obvious track record of stepping in to support civil protests. Undeniably, the military's entrenched interests in preserving the status quo raise questions about its ability to preserve a platform for reform or change through peaceful or democratic means. Since its foundation, the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) has taken on various roles that have moulded the relationship between its own entities and the surrounding environment. In two different decisive junctures, in 1964 and 1985, the military sided with popular demonstrations against the governments of Abboud and Numeiri. The army's support for civil protesters led to multi-party civil rule in both cases. However, the experience did not last long (Berridge, 2019).

Drastic changes within the military took place in the aftermath of the army's takeover during the 1989 coup, popularly led by the National Islamic Front (NIF).

Various paradigms have emerged among the new military leaders following the rise of political Islamism. The deposed president, Omar Al-Bashir himself, presided over a government that came to power after a hard-line Islamic party-engineered coup under the leadership of the late Hassan Al-Turabi. The plan was to present Al-Bashir as a military puppet and face of the regime. In that period, the generals' adventurism turned Sudan into a haven for various political groups and movements from across the region, including – but not limited to – Al-Qaeda. At that time, it hosted Osama bin Laden, Al-Qaeda's leader and founder. These seemingly uncalculated activities brought economic sanctions against Sudan, and an embargo that locked the Sudanese people in. Ironically, all hard-line Islamist leaders were later ousted or imprisoned, and Al-Bashir began to build a 'general's republic'. Most prominently, the army started to become deeply involved in businesses, especially the oil-rent economy. The military's involvement in business

and political polarisation interjected great harm to its professionalism (Adem, 2019).

The Sudanese President, Omar Al-Bashir, has constantly reshuffled the ranks of the military since his takeover in 1989. As a member of the military establishment, he has always been inundated with doubts about conspiracies that might aim to oust him. In the process, Al-Bashir managed to estrange a number of different parties within the Sudanese ruling system, along with prominent generals within the security sector and the pro-government militias. Being afraid of a coup, Al-Bashir retained his defence minister and subsequent vice president General Ibn Auf, who happened to be on a US sanctions list. Ibn Auf was not the only general who was kept close to the president. Ibn Auf seized the opportunity during recent public protests

against the rule of al-Bashir to get rid of the long-time president. However, this did not mean that the military establishment was willing to abandon its historical role in governance. There seemed to be a clear-cut succession plot. Ibn Auf's role was to take over in order to absorb public rage and secure a safe exist for his boss, Al-Bashir. But then he resigned (Adem, 2019).

While his departure might be interpreted as another victory for Sudan's peaceful public protests, the rise of General Abdul Fattah al-Burhan as the head of the military council shows that connections in the military establishment of the deep state, along with regional and neighbouring generals and monarchies, are not willing to relinquish their powers toward a smooth transition which would lead to democratic elections and the handing over of power to a civil government.

Common manoeuvres of the regional armies

Unlike other regional armies of polarised societies, the Algerian army has not rallied behind sectarian or tribal elites who share the affiliations and interests of army generals. From Libya to Syria, armies with deep ties to particular ethnic, tribal or religious groups have deployed force against their own people based on these affiliations. In Libya, this has contributed to what amounts to an East-West divide in the country's ongoing conflict.

As another example, the Egyptian military establishment blatantly represents the deep state and even considers itself an autonomous armed entity, utterly detached from the executive power, which is ironically headed by an ex-general. The Egyptian army cunningly managed to preserve its legitimacy and later enhanced its grab of power by disseminating a narrative of a victorious uprising, as if it had forced then-president Mohammed Hosni Mubarak to step down. However, and irrefutably, it was the manoeuvring of the armed forces that led to Mubarak's resignation, not mass demonstrations. That was clearly manifested when the Military High Council directly took over governmental organisations during the year between Mubarak's departure and Mohamed Morsi's inauguration in June 2012. Unsurprisingly, the military would also go on to eventually oust the first democratically elected president, Mohamed Morsi, in July 2013 after building upon popular resentment of the inefficiency and malfunction of Morsi's government.

Tunisia's army, on the other hand, has been traditionally less influential than Algeria's or Egypt's. Therefore, it did not heavily interfere with the actions and reactions of the popular uprising that eventually led to a relatively smooth transition to the newly born Tunisian democracy. In Algeria, the army has attempted to duplicate the Egyptian model. In other words, the generals have taken control from behind the scenes in order to minimise any potential damage to their privileged position. They still maintain media control, business lobbies, and other networks of privileges.



Sudan's ruling Military Council spokesperson Shamseddine Kabbashi makes a speech as he holds a press conference at the Presidential Palace in Khartoum, Sudan on May 08, 2019. v(Mahmoud Hjjaj - Anadolu Agency)

Can direct intervention of the army be utterly ruled out?

In Algeria, the inner circles of *Le Pouvoir* understood early on that the departure of the current president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, necessitated the immediate enactment of a contingency plan during the transitional period in order to adequately appease the popular movement. Meanwhile, it has given the army room to manoeuvre by preparing a successor who could be overtly an outsider, but covertly an insider and acceptable to the army generals. 'The *pouvoir* are not interested in any independent candidate, they want an obedient figure' (The Economist, 2019). Ousting Bouteflika has undoubtedly been a victory for the popular uprising. Still, protesters, mindful of the Egyptian experience, have deep concerns about the regime's manoeuvres toward staging a nominal transitional period.

According to The Guardian (2019), leading figures and activists are calling for a public referendum to decide upon the next moves. There is widespread sentiment among the public verging upon consensus that the army's political influence should be neutralised; in other words, the generals should not have the chance to interfere in the political decision. However, the deep state propaganda is expected to strike up concern about the deteriorated economy, illegitimacy of the opposition, pending existential threat, and a cosmopolitan conspiracy that aims to topple the state. The military establishment is expected to adopt the binary rhetoric of the neighbouring countries which are in tumult. In Egypt, Syria, Sudan and Libya, the military establishment has echoed the same claim, namely that people should choose stability under an able guarantor (the army), rather than the chaos and terrorism that would ensue if the allegedly immature political parties come to power. The pretext is that society is not ready for democracy.

Ironically, in mid-July, the Movement of Society for Peace (MSP, Algeria's main Islamist party) surprised many when they asked the chief of staff of the People's National Army (ANP) and the deputy minister of defence, Lieutenant General Ahmed Salah, to personally get involved to sort out the 'country's crisis' and lead a political transitional period. This period would be followed by elections, allowing the Algerian people to raise their voices and choose their president. In the meantime, Egypt's ultra-conservative Al-Nour party, one of the political parties

founded after the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, initially asked for the intervention of the 'the Egyptian military council' and later backed the military coup which ousted the first democratically elected 'Islamist' president.

However, the conditions in Algeria now are slightly different: the popular impulse reveals that there is a deep-rooted belief that any direct intervention from the military establishment as a solution to the current impasse will inevitably lead to looping in the same vicious cycle of the establishment's interference. In other words, the interference of the armed forces is not a legitimate response to Algerian political demands. Nonetheless, the failure of the military establishment to effectively control the state emanate from their militant mentality, which is, by default, structured on blind obedience to orders and exclusion of any argumentative channels. The crux of the dilemma is the military's ego that obstructs them from presenting a sound governance style. Since the actual withdrawal of the colonial powers, there has been a methodical insistence from successive post-colonial autocratic regimes that the 'political-civil establishment' is incapable of effective governance. Hence, the army habitually presents themselves as the guarantors of safety and security for citizens and the state.

To avoid the Egyptian scenario, protesters in Algeria and Sudan have been suspicious of the military establishment's promises. Therefore, mass demonstrations have continued even after the departure of their respective presidents. Activists and organisers of protests have insisted upon peaceful demonstrations out of fear of the possible eruption of armed conflict. Given their historical legacies, size, location, and the abundance of militant groups and militias present, especially in Sudan, activists relentlessly reiterate that they will not be dragged into armed confrontation with the army. Although protesters in Sudan and Algeria have stressed the local individuality of their aspirations, there are legitimate concerns that a peaceful handover of power is almost impossible simply because the armies of both countries, along with their regional and international backers, are not ready for that. Their pretext is the unavailability of a mature political elite who could lead a political transition (Kushkush, 2019).

Democratisation: Civil vs military

Democratisation theory seems to have overlooked a crucial element: emerging democracies in the post-colonial era faced genuine hurdles in the intervention of the military in the political arena. The same military attitude continued to constitute an everlasting paradigm until recently. After an authoritarian regime is toppled, it is a prevalent phenomenon in all Arab countries that the military establishment will retain power. The ideal result from democratization is to ensure that the people have the right to vote and have a voice in their political system. Therefore, as long these rules for civil rights and military entities are not sharply demarcated, it is unlikely for the democratic process to unfold smoothly as long as the power of the generals remains intact. What is certain is that the role of civil society is an indispensable component for the healthy development of democratisation (Aggad-Clerx, 2015).

A civil component is a prerequisite for sustainable development; it attracts international investors and partners. For example, the World Bank reportedly failed to lead economic reform in North African countries that were controlled predominantly by the military establishment. There are many reasons for this failure, but one of the most prominent reasons was bad governance and misleading budget allocations. In the shadow of a military junta controlling the government, most national spending will be in defence policies and strategies, not in development, technology, scientific research or infrastructure. The priorities of the army are always reversed. Though security is a requirement for investors and later donors, the international community tends to focus on economic schemes and sustainable development programs in agriculture, public health, education, roads and infrastructure. However, these issues are at the bottom of the army's list of priorities (Aggad-Clerx, 2015).

Fine-tuning civilian/military interaction

The major challenge that has faced post-Arab Spring countries - one that is playing out, to varying degrees, in Algeria and Sudan as well - is the direct intervention of the military establishment and its dominance over civil society. The solution, however, is the regulation of the armed forces to balance their role as the guarantors of national security and the providers of safety for their citizenry. According to the London-based Middle East Eye, a former Algerian minister told them that the economic agenda of the country was discussed and drawn bilaterally by the President and the Chief of Staff. The former minister explicitly alluded to the stakes, which included tweaking communications between political executive powers and the military (Meddi, 2019).

However, many political commentators argue that civil society must be entitled to monitor and assess the performance of the army, not the opposite. Even within army teaching and training, newly recruited soldiers are indoctrinated into the notion that the

army is the saviour of the nation, and that the army's highest-ranking general is the citizen. Without this understanding of power boundaries and specification of relationships and the hierarchy of power and control, there will be a blurred representation of the civilian/military split. A unique merit of the Arab countries' armed forces is the human component. Most second- and third-ranked military generals come from the underprivileged and marginalised social classes, which means that they are not disengaged with social reality. Furthermore, those military leaders are predominantly apolitical: they are not politically affiliated with any of the active political parties (Meddi, 2018).

In the past few decades, the Algerian army has made tangible steps toward the professionalization of its divisions and individuals by stepping up professional training and capacity building. As part of this professionalization drive, the Algerian army has included in its institutional outlook training according

to an ethos that sees the citizen as the true source of power. A crucial step in the attempt to establish proper control structures for the military establishment and foster security sector reform is to establish a true benchmark for democratisation and a bold dynamic toward the indispensable pursuit of harmonious, standardised integration of civil-military relations. Theoretically, there are many security sectors which are deeply political: these involve the shifting of the power scale between civilians and the armed forces. The executive and legislative branches of government are also involved in these sectors. Consequently, a major obstacle can be overcome by establishing security sector governance through the development of operative civil monitoring dynamics. In addition, reasonable entities can be strengthened which will provide security for the other national establishments and the citizens of the state (Brooks, 1998).

The coordination between the military and civilian structure can take on two forms: subjective or objective civilian domination (Hänggi, 2001). Objective, civilian control is feasible provided that the functions of both bodies, civil and military, are clearly demarcated. The armed forces are institutionally separate from the functions and activities of the civilian sector. In other words, the civil executive authorities must draw policies and set up broad strategies, while the military establishment is responsible for the implementation of civil society's security initiatives. Subjective civilian control is applicable when the established limitations between the civil administration and the armed forces are blurred, when the activities and functions of the armed divisions are not visibly demarcated, or when their activities are not clearly limited to security and civilian defence issues. Thus, subjective civilian domination is realised when the differentiation between civil administration and the military establishment is absent.

Conclusion and recommendations

To achieve the goal of a harmonic integration between the roles of both civilian and military institutions, a transparent monitoring body is a necessity. The oversight of the legislative branch over the military is sometimes strained, especially in the aftermath of any radical political transition. Civil society empowerment requires the creation of a platform or partnership between the armed forces and the organisations of civil society. This can be achieved by initiating public discussion forums (Chêne 2010). The effectiveness of such platforms and partnerships is totally dependent upon a wide range of circumstantial indicators, such as the degree of stability, a favourable political will, and the backing from influential players such as governmental organisations, various sectors of the security forces, and other dynamic and active civil society organisations (Groenewald & Peake 2004). Nonetheless, according to Menocal (2015), there is no evidence that civil society oversight of a reform process is utterly effective. Furthermore, there is no credible criteria to judge whether or not exterior accountability instruments function more effectively than those from the interior.

There are many researchers who argue that civil society involvement has its drawbacks. Ivkovic (2005) asserts that it is impractical and infeasible for a civilian body to

haphazardly, temporarily, or sporadically oversee the functions of the military establishment. For example, if media outlets are appointed to play such a role, they will focus upon one dimension which is narrowly focused upon various scandals that might go viral on the front pages of newspapers and social media platforms. If the task were assigned to independent commissions, they would focus on broad items such as citizens' reviews and complaints. Thus, the broad or narrow management of the problem does not offer an effective solution. For this reason, there should be a number of measures which can facilitate a smooth stream of duties for the monitoring body that will keep vigil over military and civilian order.

To guarantee effective monitoring, the committees that are assigned the task should tap into the expertise of researchers, think tanks, and political and security analysts. By inviting these professionals to public hearings, public opinion, voices of the opposition, the elite and the armed forces themselves may become acquainted with models of integration between civil and military sectors. Legislators should also attend international legislative meetings, and they should take part in international research groups which can offer insight into the needs of each country in question.

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