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THE JOURNAL OF NORTH AFRICAN STUDIES
https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2018.1525004

Military influence in foreign policy-making: changing dynamics in North African regimes

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ABSTRACT
The strong political position armed forces enjoy in authoritarian states and the high priority military elites assign to foreign affairs would lead one to believe that in North Africa – a region made up of authoritarian states with the sole, recent, and partial exception of Tunisia – generals had the political standing to exert a major influence on foreign policy decisions. This would not be a correct assumption because in this region the armed forces' political influence is actually highly variable. Of the five states analysed in this article (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia) the military is the dominant political institution only in Algeria and Egypt. In the other three countries, the army plays a marginal political role and, by extension, possesses modest foreign policy. Moreover, the political clout of these armies is not constant. Since the Arab Spring the political influence of Egyptian generals has considerably increased, that of their Tunisian colleagues has marginally risen, while the status of Libya's military leaders has diminished.

KEYWORDS Political change; military; civil–military relations; Arab Spring; foreign policy; Algeria; Egypt; Libya; Morocco; Tunisia

Introduction

The scholarly literature on Middle Eastern militaries until very recently has been extremely sparse. An article published just a year before the 2011 uprisings lamented that the region's armies

> had received inadequate scholarly attention in recent years, and the (very few) available works on this topic are only rarely informed by significant theoretical and comparative advances in the study of the security sector in general and the military in particular (Barak and David 2010, 804).

North African militaries have been difficult to study given that the authoritarian states of the region did their best to control information and shroud their security sectors in secrecy.

What immediately strikes the would-be researcher of the North African and, more generally, Middle Eastern armies' contribution to or involvement

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in their countries' foreign policy-making process is the absence of a targeted literature. Even the general issue of military elites' engagement in foreign policy-making has not been adequately studied. Just how inadequately, is hinted at by the fact that in the past 50-plus years, Lewis Edinger's essay in the *American Political Science Review* (1963), the seminal article in this field, was cited a mere 16 times (according to Google Scholar). It is not surprising then that far less scholarly attention has been directed to African, let alone *North* African armies' foreign policy involvement. Indeed, the classic essay on this subject, Henry Bienen's (1980) contribution in *International Security* mentions only two North African states (Algeria and Morocco) in passing.[1]

An exhaustive research of the literature unearthed no publication focusing on this topic before or after the Arab Spring. Even the recently published books and compendia on foreign policy-making in North Africa neglect to include any substantial discussion of the role of the military leadership or that of the military institution.[2] For instance, the 2013 edition of a 400-page textbook on the international relations of the Middle East, which devotes 130 pages and seven chapters to 'key issues and actors', barely mentions the armed forces as an influence of foreign policy in a region that is comprised, with one partial exception, exclusively of authoritarian states where the military, by definition, is a key state institution with massive foreign policy interests (Fawcett 2013). Although the upheavals of 2010–12 called more attention to the Middle Eastern armies and spawned a number of research projects, focusing particularly on those that played a decisive role in the outcome of the uprisings (Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Tunisia, Yemen), this renewed interest has yet to extend to the generals' influence on foreign policy-making.

Before proceeding further, it may be useful to briefly discuss the origins and structure of military establishments in North Africa. First, in this article 'army' denotes the entire military establishment, including its constituent branch services such as the army, air force, and the navy. In most Middle Eastern including North African states, the army is the dominant force that has traditionally enjoyed the most political influence and has received the lion's share of state resources. Second, the term 'generals' is used here as a synonym for 'military elites', that is, the senior officers in the military establishments of the five North African states. Third, it is important to remember that while in most democracies the minister of defense is usually a civilian politician, in authoritarian states that position tends to be filled by a senior military (in most cases, army) officer. The latter is true for all contemporary North African countries with the exception of Morocco, that, as I explain below, has had neither a defense ministry nor a defense minister for nearly five decades, and Tunisia, where the post is held by a civilian, Abdelkarim Zbidi, a medical doctor by training.

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Given their histories, it is hardly surprising that the army has played a major role in the creation and guidance of post-colonial states in North Africa and beyond. Military coups were easily mounted against often disorganised and fractious civilian politicians (Vatikiotis 1961). Coups differed across the Middle East: in Egypt, they were staged by colonels and captains commanding units and the state apparatus was sufficiently developed by 1952 to allow them to sweep all their rivals and rule. In Iraq and Syria, coup makers were able to wrest control of the state only in 1958 and 1963, respectively. Monarchies were overthrown and republics were proclaimed (e.g. Egypt, 1953; Iraq, 1958; Libya, 1969; North Yemen, 1962). At the other end of the spectrum, there was no coup in Tunisia, whose armed forces, quite exceptionally for the region, stayed away from politics entirely.

In most Middle Eastern republics the military became *the* quintessential state institution. In the absence of other strong and cohesive institutions, the public invested its hopes of socio-economic development into the army which responded to these expectations by intervening in politics. At least in the early post-independence era, North African societies tended to approve of the army and its role, all the more so because a growing proportion of military men came from humble backgrounds and thus symbolised social mobility. After all, Middle Eastern armies, far more than civilian institutions, emphasised national unity and the consolidation of the state: officers redefined norms of legitimacy for governments by strengthening state authority and the government's penetration of society not just with coercive power but also through redistributive policies. Predictably, given the military's traditional interest in foreign affairs and the lack of a diplomatic corps, the armies also became active in foreign policy-making.

Given the aforementioned dearth of targeted literature, in this essay I will rely on insights gleaned from work that touches on the North African military elites' interests in and influence on foreign policy, inductive reasoning rooted in research done on the foreign behaviuor of generals in other regions, as well as personal interviews conducted in North Africa and the broader Middle East since 2011. My focus is on the regular armed forces, not on elite contingents, security troops, or paramilitary elements of the state's coercive apparatus. I will first consider the traditional foreign policy concerns of generals everywhere, then discuss the political strength of the military establishments of five North African states – Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia – and finally investigate the difference, if any, that the recent upheavals have made in their involvement in foreign policy-making.

The foreign policy interests of generals

The military is one of the most important state institutions. Without it, the very survival of the state is at the mercy of its neighbours. Given that the army's key

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function is the protection of the state from its external enemies, it has a primary interest in foreign affairs by definition. In authoritarian states – and, thus, in North African countries – the armed forces' external security task goes hand-in-hand with and is often supplanted by its internal protection imperative: defending the regime from its internal foes. In fact, in many authoritarian states that either do not face obvious and pressing external security threats and whose sovereignty is guaranteed by larger patron states or foreign allies, the army's internal repressive function trumps its role of shielding the country from invasion from abroad (examples from the Gulf are Bahrain and Kuwait).

In an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world, foreign affairs have become one of the important policy areas for most modern states. The main exceptions to this generalisation are dictatorships that have deliberately isolated themselves from the outside world (e.g. Burma in 1962–2010). Although the influence of military leaders on foreign policy-making tends to vary according to the state's level of preoccupation with external issues, ministries of defense and foreign affairs, along with interior, intelligence, and finance, are nearly always among the most important cabinet posts. As Edinger noted, the extent of the generals' influence on foreign policy-making could be charted on a scale at the opposite ends of which are 'civilian state' and 'garrison state' (1963, 395). At the latter end of the spectrum, the military's influence on foreign policy would be absolute given that policy-making in a garrison state is entirely under the control of the top brass.

One would reasonably expect that in authoritarian states – which tend to be, though are not always, illegitimate and in need of the military's support for their survival – the armed forces, almost by definition, would have an important political role. This political role, then, would be manifested in robust influence in foreign policy-making. In other words, if an army would enjoy significant political clout, then that army, in all probability – given the vested interest of armies in foreign affairs – would also be in the position to sway foreign policy decisions.

What are the traditional foreign policy concerns of generals everywhere? First, most armies – even the largest and strongest ones – wish to have committed and reliable allies abroad. Generally speaking, the smaller, less powerful, and the more strategically located the country, the more it needs to form informal (or participate in) institutionalised alliances. Second, armies need weapons. Although some contemporary authoritarian states, such as China and Russia, do have major armament industries, most rely on democracies for their equipment, and often for their advanced training. Consequently, for generals, easy access to the weapons they want from foreign suppliers is a crucial aspect of foreign policy. Third, in most cases military leaders prefer that their countries remain members in good standing of international organisations in order to be able to draw on the benefits those organisations

may grant. For instance, supplying troops to the United Nations' peacekeeping operations or participating in the joint exercises and in the privileged training and weapons programmes of regional military alliances are, from the perspective of military elites, major incentives to join and maintain good relations with international organisations. Fourth, military elites expect to control their country's borders. 'Control' does not necessarily equate with creating and maintaining impenetrable boundaries; just that the armed forces are in the position to decide who and what crosses the border. Finally, generals everywhere prefer not to be criticised by foreign organisations and NGOs and expect their government's foreign policy to prevent or moderate such censure.

In North African states the military's foreign policy interests are, of course, also affected by their location and their concern with the situation of disadvantaged Arab communities elsewhere. Although the enumeration and description of various foreign policy concerns is not the objective of this article, it might be useful to point to just some of the more specific and long-standing foreign policy concerns of North African generals (Williams 2016). Morocco and Algeria have been locked in a decades-old conflict owing to their common interest over the Western Sahara (Cornwell 2016; Jensen 2011). Algeria and Libya have also been concerned about a potential new intervention in Libya by Western powers and Gulf Cooperation Council member states (most probably the United Arab Emirates) because it would almost surely result in thousands of refugees fleeing the violence. North African states' relationship with the European power that dominated them prior to independence (France for Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, Italy for Libya, and Britain for Egypt) are of particularly importance given ex-patriate and émigré communities and economic and cultural links. Morocco's King Mohammed VI likes to insist though, that Africa is the 'top priority' in his country's foreign policy (Pham 2016). In the post-cold war era, their nexus to the United States remains crucial especially in the areas of security cooperation and anti-terrorist activities (Oyebade 2014). All of the region's foreign policy-makers and practitioners are, of course, interested in the fate of Palestinians in Israel and beyond, albeit to varying degrees as well as in the risks stemming from instability in bordering states. Geographical proximity is generally a reliable guide, in this respect. For military leaders participating in foreign policy-making to coordinate the response to *jihadist* movements and terrorist organisations has been and will continue to be a priority.

Going a step further, what are the foreign policy concerns of militaries after the uprisings? How do they differ from their concerns during more tranquil periods? Upheavals such as the Middle East experienced during the Arab Spring tend to shock the prevailing political and socio-economic system. The special interest of army elites in post-uprising environments, first and foremost, is to restore and, if possible, increase their influence on foreign

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policy-making in the emerging new political order to ensure the representation of and due attention to their concerns.

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The military's political clout in North Africa

Prior to the Arab Spring all Arab-majority countries in North Africa and the Middle East were authoritarian states. Six years after the onset of the uprisings their record of bringing about positive change is disappointing: authoritarian rule has been reinforced in every country with four exceptions. The 'good
210 exception' is Tunisia which embarked on the path to democratic transition with genuinely competitive elections and some promising political developments although it – given problems with Islamic radicalism, economic malaise, and some nagging security issues – is not out of the proverbial woods just yet. The three other exceptions are unequivocally 'bad' ones:
215 the state in Libya, Syria, and Yemen has collapsed to various degrees, the civil wars that have enveloped these countries have caused unspeakable suffering to millions, and few would disagree that the populations of all three states were far better off under the harsh dictatorships of Muammar Qaddafi, Bashar al-Assad, and Ali Abdullah Saleh.

220 What about the relative power of the military in the states of North Africa and beyond? It would be reasonable to expect, that in all of these states armies were the most important, or, at least, *one* of the most important, political institutions, but this assumption would be wrong. In fact, prior to the Arab Spring, that is, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, only in
225 Algeria was the military the most dominant political institution owing to the relative diminution of Egyptian military's political clout in that period. Let us survey briefly the political clout of the five North African states, going from the most politically powerful military to the least.

Since the end of the Algerian War of Independence (1954–62) the military
230 has been the most influential political actor in Algeria. This has not changed in recent years even though the army has shared some power with the *Département du Renseignement et de la Sécurité* (DRS), the State Intelligence Service. It was the army that elevated a civilian, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, to the presidency in 1999, following a decade-long and bloody civil war (Martínez 2000). The
235 presidency received wide-ranging powers from the army and the intelligence services but, and this must be underscored, Bouteflika has been doing the army's bidding (Boubekeur 2014). Quite simply, the army remains Algeria's most important political institution. Recent reform efforts and what political elites have called 'the civilianisation of the regime' are at best a façade
240 (Cook 2007, 38–41). As the Algerian opposition figure Dr. Salah-Éddine Sidhoum put it, adjustments in the military-dominated polity serve only the objective of continuity and stability: 'Every time there is a crisis inside the regime, they change the window-dressing' (Serrano 2016). Real power lies

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with what Algerians call *le Pouvoir* ('the power'): the military and security leadership and the political elites that enjoy the former's approval. In sharp contrast with Algeria's Constitution, 'The People is not sovereign. In reality, the army is. But the army is disinclined to affirm its sovereign status openly' (Roberts 1998, 19–30). Since independence Algeria has had five constitutions (1963, 1976, 1989, 1996, 2016) but the main problem lies not with those documents themselves – for instance, the military's political role was minimised in the 1989 basic law – but with the implementation, let alone enforcement, of their provisions (Khettab 2016).

In Egypt, the army was also *the* key political actor from 1952 until about the end of the twentieth century. This is well illustrated by the point that, with the sole exception of Mohamed Morsi (2012–13), all of the country's presidents have been former generals. Nevertheless, in the last third of Hosni Mubarak's long tenure (1981–2011) the army's political clout had somewhat diminished and was replaced by the growing influence of the secret police, the National Democratic Party (NDP), and emerging business elites, led by the president's son, Gamal (who was also the NDP's deputy secretary general). Still, the long-serving Defense Minister Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi (1991–2012) was Mubarak's close associate for decades, ran the military without interference, and the armed forces remained a key part of Mubarak's support base. The generals were able to make up for their slightly waning political clout, moreover, with growing economic involvement.

After Lieutenant-Colonel Qaddafi seised power in a bloodless 1969 coup, his fellow army officers attempted to remove him from power four times (most recently in October 1993). Not surprisingly, he deliberately marginalised and underfunded the military from the mid-1980s, particularly after suspecting its involvement in a coup attempt and following the major losses his expeditionary force suffered in Chad, in 1987, ending an unsuccessful military intervention (Pollack 2002, 391–394). He gave priority treatment, instead, to parallel elite and paramilitary forces, most of them newly established and commanded by his relatives. Libya's army was the most heavily politicised and quite possibly the most demoralised Middle Eastern army, but some senior army officers were able to use their positions to skim funds through arms deals and other weapon-acquisition related ventures (Sorenson 2007, 109–110). The political power of the military as an institution was negligible, however. Some military officers were a part of Qaddafi's inner sanctum; their political influence derived from their membership in the ruling clique rather than from their official positions.

Political elites sidelined the armed forces in Tunisia as well. From the moment of independence from France, Habib Bourguiba had deliberately kept soldiers out of politics during his presidency (1957–87), even banning them from joining the ruling party and withholding from them the right to vote. A military academy graduate, Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali became a police-

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state apparatchik who overthrew Bourguiba bloodlessly in 1987, continued the practice of keeping the armed forces out of politics.[3] Unlike most other North African armies, Tunisia's had never even attempted a coup, had never taken part in making political decisions, had never been a 'nation-building' instrument, and had never joined in economic-development schemes. Ben Ali kept it a politically inconsequential, small (approximately 30,000-strong in contrast to the much larger interior ministry forces [about 49,000 men plus up to 30,000 informers]), poorly equipped, and modestly funded force focused on border defense (Ware 1985, 39).[4] The officer corps concentrated more or less exclusively on professional matters and enjoyed virtually no political clout.[5]

Under King Mohammed VI Morocco remains an absolute monarchy where political power resides first and foremost with the king. The second 'circle of power' is the *makhzen* – literally 'warehouse' in Maghrebi Arabic, but in common parlance refers to the ruling elites that include the king and royal notables as well as the leading military, security, business, and government people – that is essentially responsible for running the country. The military as an institution has a curious position in Morocco that it attained following the coup attempts it staged against King Hassan II – the current monarch's father – in 1971 and 1972. The armed forces then were transferred to the Ministry of Interior; since then there has been no defense ministry in Morocco. The most politically influential component of Morocco's coercive apparatus is the Gendarmerie Royale and the most powerful official has been its long-serving (since 1972) Commander-in-Chief, the octogenarian General Housni Benslimane.[6] Ordinarily, being engaged in an armed conflict would increase a military's political clout but this is not the case in Morocco. Although since 1970 Rabat's military has been involved in the struggle for the control of Western Sahara, this campaign has failed to inflate its political influence. Similar to Libya, some leading Moroccan army, air force, or naval officers may be part of the regime's inner circle (i.e. the *makhzen*) but the military as an institution enjoys only modest political weight.

The armies' foreign policy influence prior to the uprisings

The amount of political power North African militaries enjoy varies greatly by country. Bienen (1980) identified attributes of African armies that militaries in other regions share: internal divisions; targeted recruitment; and isolation from society. Although his work concentrated on Sub-Saharan Africa, the armies of North Africa also display these traits. Internal divisions within the military could be of several varieties: ethnic, religious, tribal, and regional splits; generational divisions between senior and junior officers; divisions between officers on the one hand and non-commissioned officers and privates on the other; divisions between elite and regular units; and splits

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between the different service branches of the military (e.g. army, navy, air force) and between the military and other security sector entities (Barany 2016, 24–29).

These divisions are important because they hamper the military's internal cohesion and thus its capacity to respond to internal and external security challenges in unison. Some of these schisms – e.g. between senior and junior officers – exist in every army to one extent or another. The split between the military and other security sector entities, however, is common in North Africa, and in part serves to balance and separate forces as a coup-prevention method. In Morocco, for instance, the army, gendarmerie, and the *Force Auxiliaire* are to some extent rival institutions. In Libya under Muammar Qaddafi so-called security brigades (*al-kata'ib al-amniya*) were recruited from tribes considered loyal to the regime while the regular army split into two rival organisations (eastern and western/southern), based on their natural regional origins and identity. Importantly, the eastern units defected in 2011 while the western/southern units remained largely intact and loyal to Qaddafi (Lacher and Cole 2014, 20–21).

Targeted recruitment into the security sector has also been an important tactic of North African central authorities. This was especially common in Libya, where certain tribes and regions were singled out for enlistment, but virtually every country in the region followed this policy, intent on ending up with the most reliable and loyal recruits. In countries with mandatory conscription (e.g. Egypt and Tunisia), targeted recruitment focused on selecting young men for the units viewed by the regime leadership as most important and dependable. Finally, isolation from society has been increasingly a feature of the coercive apparatuses of North African states, not just of the secret police (*mukhabarat*) but also of the regular armed forces. Military officers from Morocco to Egypt tend to live in housing estates earmarked for the armed forces, get treated in military hospitals, shop in stores set aside for military personnel, and receive economic perquisites – i.e. gain business licenses in Morocco and run and profit from a wide variety of enterprises in Egypt – that sets the army apart from other segments of society (*Mail & Guardian Africa* 2015).

Several of these characteristics have direct implications for foreign policy and international relations. African armies, including *North* African ones have been dependent on external sources for hardware, technology, and training. They tend to have 'a remarkably low level of defense capability', though this statement, made in 1980, was certainly truer for Sub-Saharan armies than Egypt's military or those of the Maghreb (Bienen 1980, 176). Another important aspect of foreign policy-making in Africa that was and continues to be germane for North Africa is that the number of interest groups with foreign policy concerns was very limited, thus implying the substantial role of military establishments.

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As Bienen (1980, 177) also pointed out, foreign affairs in Africa has tended to be the *domaine privé* of the individual leaders and their close associates, regardless of whether those associates held positions in the foreign policy establishment. Therefore, the armies would tend to have an outsized role in foreign affairs if a general or a civilian leader identifying with or beholden to the military were in power. As we saw in the previous section, in North Africa this was the case only in Algeria and, to a somewhat lesser extent, Egypt, prior to the Arab Spring. The Egyptian foreign policy decision-making process came closest to the 'leader-staff' or the 'presidential center' type, in which the authoritarian leader can act alone or with only limited consultation with other people and institutions (Dessouki 2010, 182).

Gauging the foreign policy-making influence of the armed forces in the first decade of the twenty-first century, it is hard not to notice that their clout is generally commensurate with their overall political strength. Foreign policy decisions were made more or less solely by King Mohammed VI in Morocco (Rosenblum and Zartman 2010, 331–332; Fernandez-Molina 2016); in Algeria by the military-security complex (though officially by the ailing President Bouteflika) (Benchicou 2004); in Tunisia by President Ben Ali and his inner circle (Murphy 2002, 248–249); in Libya by Qaddafi, the 'Brotherly Leader and Guide of the Revolution' (Ronen 2008; St. John 1987); and in Egypt by President Mubarak (Gaub 2015).

Only in the last case, it is important to note, is the military's influence on foreign policy slightly different than one might expect observing its overall political clout. How so? I argued that the Egyptian army's political standing somewhat diminished in the last decade of Mubarak's presidency though it still remained a major player and was compensated with an expanded economic role (Abdul-Magd 2017; Noll 2017). One of the key reasons for this change – not surprising in a highly personality-driven polity – was the 2001 departure of the highly capable foreign minister, Amr Moussa, to lead the Arab League. At that point the Foreign Ministry was essentially marginalised at the expense of the General Intelligence Directorate (in other words, the secret police, i.e. *mukhabarat*) and its influential director, Omar Suleiman. Prior to his transfer to the secret police in 1993, Suleiman served in the army for 37 years and in his position as Mubarak's top foreign policy adviser he was a strong advocate of military interests. (Grimm and Roll 2012). Thus, in the foreign policy realm the armed forces leadership remained highly influential in pursuing its interests – which, as some experts have argued, occasionally contradicted national interests – and, one might argue, enjoyed even more clout than its general political strength would have indicated (Shama 2013). Although a number of institutions were established to deal with national security and foreign affairs – such as the National Defence Council which was already referred to in the 1956 Constitution as the highest state organ to address such matters – during much of Mubarak's presidency personal relations trumped institutional channels (Dessouki 2010, 184).

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North African generals and their foreign policy clout since 2011

Has the political power of the military changed in North Africa since the uprisings? In general, considering the entire region, the answer would be 'only modestly'. But, again, a case-by-case analysis reveals important nuances. Detecting any shift in the political status of the armed forces in Morocco and Algeria would be difficult, even as the conflict between the two countries has gone on unabated and was recently characterised as 'peace impossible, war improbable' (Lefèvre 2016, 738). In Tunisia, on the other hand, the military's position *has* changed since 2011. With the onset of the democratic transition, the armed forces have been subjected to democratic civilian control. This process might be traumatic or difficult for armies that had enjoyed political power in the *ancien régime*. Nevertheless, just as in the case of the armies of the East European state-socialist regimes, the Tunisian army had little experience with political influence, thus this authoritarian legacy had actually allowed it to accept the control of the new, democratically elected civilian authorities as a matter of course. As Risa Brooks observed, 'The military's exclusion from politics means it is apt to view such activities as outside its normal role and identity' (Brooks 2016, 114).

The real challenge of the security sector reform in Tunisia is to transform the internal security forces and the Ministry of Interior, which did wield a great deal of political clout under Ben Ali, into entities integrated into a democratic institutional framework. Tunisia's military leadership – marginalised prior to the fall of Ben Ali – has gained a modest voice in foreign policy since the Arab Spring, owing to the widespread public approval of its performance during the upheaval and the subsequent restructuring of the country's coercive apparatus. This voice, however, is entirely in keeping with Tunisia's democratisation efforts and is limited to offering advice if asked for, by various executive bodies and registering the armed forces' preferences with the defense minister. For instance, the military urged the Tunisian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to accept Algeria's request that it be notified before Tunis signed a military agreement with another country (Cherif 2015).

Another reason for the modest increase in the Tunisian military's political profile has been its growing everyday responsibility in national security matters. The army has struggled with a jihadist insurgency near the border with Algeria and the threat of Islamic State spillover from Libya in the south since 2012 (Malka and Balboni 2016). By all accounts the Tunisian military has put up a valiant resistance, notwithstanding its limited firepower, equipment, and personnel. Moreover, Tunisian military leaders, unlike many of their colleagues in North Africa, have taken responsibility when mistakes were made; for instance, the Chief of Staff, General Mohamed Salah Hamdi, resigned after an Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) raid killed 15 Tunisian soldiers in July 2014. While the political clout of the military as an

institution might have grown, in public debates regarding electoral reform the majority opinion maintained that members of the armed forces should not be extended voting rights in order to preserve the army's apolitical character (Ghanmi 2016). Indeed, one of the chief reasons for the popularity and legitimacy of the army, long called *La Grande Muette* ('The Big Silent One'), is that it is widely considered to be above partisan politics.

In the six years since the beginning of the uprising, Libya has become a failed state wracked by civil war. Soon after the 2011 revolution the country's security sector completely disintegrated in large part because organisations – including the police, the military, and a number of other security agencies created as coup-proofing measures – were under-institutionalised. Under Qaddafi, for instance, 'the Ministry of Defense and chief of staff's office did not have an institutional base and staffing functions' (Wehrey 2014, 15). Over time, numerous militias filled the void left by the collapsed organisations and had become organised into 'shadow state security structures'. The so-called Supreme Security Committee replaced the police, and 'Libya Shield' assumed the functions of the army (Boduszyński 2015, 742). The regular military and the police still exist but are secondary and have often extremely contentious relations with the militias. Although most of the militias in Libya are linked to the state one way or another, the already very limited political authority the regular army and security forces enjoyed under Qaddafi has largely eroded. The current situation of rootless organisations and the insubstantial and ephemeral relationships between them is, again, in many ways a legacy of the Qaddafi era's lack of institutionalisation and all-encompassing corruption (Howes-Ward 2018; Lacher 2018).

Although Libya's security sector is deeply fragmented, in 2011 the government established the Libyan National Army, composed of several rival factions and commanded by the 75-year old Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, a veteran of both the Yom Kippur War and the aforementioned Chadian-Libyan conflict. Haftar has routinely intervened in domestic politics attempting to control presidential elections with the ultimate goal to duplicate the career trajectory of Egypt's Abdul Fattah al-Sisi and exchange his uniform with the presidential sash (Megerisi 2018). In doing so, Haftar also became active in foreign policy and has developed strong ties with the Russian and Egyptian governments (MacDonald 2017; Pigman and Orton 2017; Walsh 2018).

The outlier among these cases is Egypt where the military's fortunes had been similar to a roller-coaster ride in the first three years following the Arab Spring. The army essentially saved the revolution, dispatched and later prosecuted Mubarak and his sons (although they were freed after serving prison sentences), and thereby enhanced its appeal to millions of ordinary Egyptians. In February 2011 the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) stepped into the political vacuum left by Mubarak's departure and ruled the country as a caretaker government until August 2012, when

basically free and fair national elections resulted in the victory of Mohamed Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood. Morsi intended to reduce the military's political influence via numerous reforms and personnel changes in the top brass (in August 2012), that included the retirement of Sami Anan, the army's chief-of-staff as well as Defense Minister Tantawi, who was replaced by Abdul Fattah al-Sisi, the head of military intelligence. It is important to note that while Anan was sidelined, the much older Tantawi's departure more than likely signalled merely a generational change: he was nearly 77 and exhausted by the preceding couple of years. As of early 2018, he continues to enjoy the high esteem of top military and political circles.[7]

The military did not take kindly to its reduced role and the amateurish and polarising policies of Morsi's regime and in early July 2013 staged what amounted to be a textbook *coup d'état*. Following another transition period which saw the rise of the army and the violent and indiscriminate repression of the Muslim Brotherhood and its supporters, Sisi was elected as Egypt's president with 96 per cent of the vote in a deeply flawed contest in May 2014. The Muslim Brotherhood's banned Freedom and Justice Party, that won every post-Mubarak election, could not participate.

The armed forces' contribution to foreign policy decision-making has increased to a certain degree in some North African states while in others it remained more or less the same. It has not diminished anywhere in the region. In Morocco the army's foreign policy clout has continued to be negligible. It is difficult to say with any measure of confidence whether what remains of the Libyan army – which was marginalised under Qaddafi *and* in the current chaotic situation albeit by different actors – enjoys any foreign policy influence; a cautious gambler would bet against it. One might conjecture that the foreign policy clout of the Tunisian military might have increased somewhat if only owing to its positive role during the revolution and its politically marginalised status under the *ancien régime*. Indeed, the Tunisian Ministry of Defense drafted a white paper on defense – a 'first' in the Middle East – which devotes a section to the assessment of the external environment and discusses foreign policy issues from the military's perspective (Grewal 2016).

The army is still the dominant foreign policy actor in Algeria and, judging by the significant expansion of defense budgets since 2011, its clout might even have risen. President Bouteflika and his powerful brother, Saïd, who is a member of the powerful clan that runs the country, have tried to exploit divisions within the military and the intelligence services but most observers agree that they have not been successful (Zoubir 2016). The military regime's foreign policy has been oscillating between active cooperation with the U.S. on counter-terror operations and the aloofness of the cold war era, when Algeria was a Soviet ally (Sakthivel 2016, 3). An important difference between the generals' foreign policy role in the region's two quasi-military regimes is that oil-rich Algeria is not reliant on foreign aid and can therefore pursue more

independent foreign policies, although just how long this autonomy can be sustained is highly conditional on the world market price of oil (Mortimer 2015). Egypt, on the other hand, is hooked on foreign financial assistance and has several major constraints (treaty with Israel, ambitions as a regional hegemon) that limit Cairo's room for foreign policy maneuvers. In late 2017 Washington signalled that it should not be counted on as an unconditional supporter of Egypt's military establishment. Experts argue that Egypt is '[a]ctually … a terrible ally' and the United States has little to show for the $13 billion it has poured into the country in security assistance over the past decade (Miller and Sokolsky 2017)

There seems to be little doubt that under Sisi's military regime the army's foreign policy influence had increased along with its overall political power. Sisi himself has been an active foreign policy president promoting regional cooperation – an objective he identified, along with democratisation (!), in his U.S. Army War College research project in 2006 – good relations with Israel, and supporting the presidency of Bashar al-Assad in Syria (el-Sisi 2006, 11; Roll 2016). In early 2018 it was revealed that for over two years Cairo had allowed Israel to carry out airstrikes against ISIS and other terrorist forces in Egypt (in the North Sinai) with unmarked drones and covered up insignia on its jets and helicopters. This development suggests the reconfiguration of the region's security politics insofar as 'shared enemies of ISIS, Iran and political Islam have quietly brought the leaders of several Arab states into growing alignment with Israel' although in public this new alliance is seldom acknowledged and harsh criticisms of the Jewish State continue unabated (Kirkpatrick 2018b). In the meantime it has emerged that, notwithstanding official protestations, Cairo would give its tacit acceptance to U.S. President Donald Trump's initiative to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital and move America's embassy there (Kirkpatrick 2018a). Needless to say, Egypt's evolving and widening alliance with Israel – their expanding cooperation has important economic and political dimensions aside from the military-security aspect – starkly compromises the former's credibility as a mediator in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and as an advocate of the Palestinian people (Mandour 2018).

Sisi's close relations with the Gulf monarchies, especially Saudi Arabia, resulted in tens of billions of dollars in aid which he largely squandered on wasteful mega-projects while Egypt's external debt surpassed $60 billion (Mandour 2017; Noll and Roll 2015; Washington Post 2016). In any event, in January 2017 Egypt's top court (the Higher Administrative Court) blocked the previously negotiated transfer of two small uninhabited Red Sea islands, Tiran and Sanafir, from Egypt to Saudi Arabia dealing further damage to their relationship that recently has experienced some friction. (Al Jazeera 2017). In the following June, however, the Cairo legislature voted to transfer the islands to Riyadh anyway. The passing of this deeply unpopular measure – a mere 11 percent of Egyptians polled thought the islands rightfully belonged to the Saudis – was proof of Sisi's domination of Egypt's

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parliament and political system (Walsh 2017). The issue marked the only major street protests in Egypt since Sisi took office in 2014 and became a rallying point of the weak and vulnerable political opposition. Nonetheless, in March 2018 Egypt's Supreme Court upheld the decision.

565 One, albeit partial, measure that hints at the importance of the armed forces' foreign policy influence is the defense budget given that none of these countries, with the partial exception of Egypt, can fulfil their arms requirements from domestic sources. The table below traces the military outlays of the five North African states, using data compiled by the London-
570 based International Institute for Strategic Studies.

What can we glean from Table 1? First, Morocco's defense budget has remained stable across the years revealing only a very modest upward trajectory. Second, given the on-going civil war, data from Libya, even if it were readily available, probably would have to be treated very cautiously. Third,
575 the other three countries' defense budgets have substantially increased since the uprisings in the beginning of the decade. In the Tunisian case this is quite easy to explain considering the Ben Ali regime's neglect of the armed forces. Incidentally, U.S. foreign military aid for Tunis also rose rapidly (from US$4.9 million in 2011 to US$63 million in 2016, reflecting the
580 Obama Administration's high hopes for continued democratisation).

The situation with Algeria and Egypt is quite different. Both countries have considerably expanded their defense budgets notwithstanding their persistent and deep-seated economic problems. In fact, since 2014 the military regime in Cairo has gone on a shopping spree spending billions on arma-
585 ments. Some experts claim that Egypt has acquired sophisticated weapons it does not need (Rafale jets from France, Apache helicopters from the U.S.) while others contend that as a regional power Egypt must ensure its capacity to project power and offer security to its allies in the region (Mandour 2017). At the same time Algeria's defense spending has nearly doubled. According to
590 the generals in Algiers the extra expense is necessary to counter instability stemming from the conflict in Libya to the east and terrorist incursions from Mali in the south (Looney 2016; Zaater 2017, 87–115). The fact that both Algeria and Egypt are essentially military regimes is hardly coincidental; neither army is required to account for its actions, including the spending of
595 public funds, to *any* authority (Martínez and Boserup 2016; Springborg 2017). Still, one must be careful before positing a causal relationship between the Arab Spring and the increases in Algerian and Egyptian defense budgets.

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Assessment

Given the robust political role of armed forces in authoritarian states, one would suppose that in North Africa – a region made up of authoritarian states with the sole, recent, and partial exception of Tunisia – generals had

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Table 1. Military expenditure in North African states, 2010–2016 (in billion U.S. $)[a].

Country/Year	2010	Δ%	2011	Δ%	2012	Δ%	2013	Δ%	2014	Δ%	2015	Δ%	2016
Algeria	5.59	55.0	8.68	7.3	9.32	11.6	10.4	14.4	11.9	−12.6	10.4	1.9	10.6
Egypt	4.47	−3.1	4.33	5.7	4.58	15.9	5.31	2.6	5.45	−2.2	5.34	−0.2	5.33
Libya	~2.54	–	N/A	–	2.99	59.5	4.77	–	N/A	–	N/A	–	N/A
Morocco	3.16	5.6	3.34		3.41	2.0	3.72	0.8	3.75	−12.8	3.27	3.0	3.37
Tunisia	.532	–	N/A	–	.66	13.9	.759	19.3	.906	8.0	.979	0.0	.979

[a]Figures exclude foreign military aid, most prominently the US$1.3bn Egypt has received from the United States annually since 1978.
Source: Annual issues of *The Military Balance* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2010–2017).

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the political standing to exert a major influence on foreign policy decisions. This would not be a correct assumption because in this region that is so diverse in many other political, socioeconomic, and cultural aspects, the political influence of the armed forces is also highly variable. Only in two of the five armies discussed in this article are generals politically influential. In these two states, Algeria and Egypt, no institution enjoys more political power – and foreign policy influence – than the armed forces. In the other three countries the military plays a marginal political role, albeit for different reasons. In Morocco the army has been sidelined after it mounted coup attempts in the early 1970s. In Tunisia the armed forces have long been accepted as a true *national* institution. Since 2011 they have gained a political voice, that is important in domestic security debates, but they do not directly impact foreign policy decisions. And in Qaddafi's Libya the army was viewed with suspicion for decades; in the current chaotic iteration of that state the regular army has also not been a political force to reckon with.

Notes

1. In over 35 years, the article was cited 11 times (again, according to Google Scholar).
2. See, for instance, Fawcett 2013; Al-Akim 2011; and Korany and Dessouki 2010.
3. Within a month of becoming Tunisia's leader, Ben Ali fired 27 of his military academy classmates who presumably knew too much about him and appointed four as ambassadors to remove them from the country. Author's interviews with senior retired military officers (Tunis, December 2011.)
4. For the interior ministry figures I am grateful to Yezid Sayigh (e-mail communication, 21 February 2014).
5. Interviews with Badra Gaaloul and retired Tunisian senior officers (Tunis, 2-8 December 2011).
6. Author's interviews (Rabat and Ifrane, Morocco, April 2012).
7. I am grateful for this point to Jessica Noll. For a different interpretation, see Hussein (2012).

Disclosure statement

AQ5 No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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