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New Armies for a New Era
Decrypting post-2011 Arab Military Reform Trends

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The reaction of the Arab armies to the 2011 uprisings is a subject that has been frequently examined, but the evolution and reform of Arab armies is a neglected topic.[2] In times of *global interdependence*, the Atlantic Alliance must be ready to understand and interact with a changing Middle East, since NATO Arab partners' security is more and more NATO's security, in terms of shared objectives, common threats and cooperative security. Arab armies have entered a new era: traditional obstacles to military reform, mostly due to their politicization, persist; other variables emerge from the interaction of domestic, foreign and transnational threats.

Drawing upon multidisciplinary literature and day-by-day analysis, this paper examines the debate on the state of the Arab armies, decrypting trends in military reforms with a specific focus on two different, but prominent case studies: Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Both of these countries implemented military reform starting from different contexts and ambitions. Our aim is to shift the focus on how Arab security forces, in particular Arab armies, have been changing,

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[2] Two remarkable exceptions, both prior to the uprisings, are Oren Barak-David Assaf, "The Arab Security Sector: A New Research Agenda for a Neglected Topic," *Armed Forces & Society* 36 (5), pp. 804-824, 2010; and Yezid Sayigh, "Security Sector Reform in the Arab Region: Challenges to Developing an Indigenous Agenda," *Arab Reform Initiative*, Thematic Paper, 1 December 2007.

coping with emerging dynamics and actors. Beyond the theoretical debate on "democratization" and "authoritarian resilience," the concept of military reform is here the lens of investigation to frame current empirical trends in Arab armies. First of all, the paper highlights the post-uprisings context and the most important variables of change for the military. Then it isolates traditional and new obstacles to military reform in Arab states, providing insights from the cases of Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates. The last section synthesizes the main analytical findings, introducing the concept of "patchwork security."

Armies' New Context. Post-2011 variables of change

The current international system is characterized by multiple centers of power: besides the United States, Russia and China, different regional powers are becoming more actively engaged, leaving room for *ad hoc* cooperation as well as for indirect, proxy confrontation in many regions, including the Middle East. Barack Obama's "lead from behind" posture and then Donald Trump's "America first" rhetoric have geopolitically isolated the United States, ending global governance aspirations. As a matter of fact, security vacuums have been quickly filled by other state/non-state actors, willing to set their own parameters of security: this is why global security remains a positive-sum game, but is even more difficult to translate into policies than before. In this framework, *regionalization of security* is, at the same time, the product of a reshaped international system, as well as the first factor of change. If the management of security becomes a "regional matter," regional powers will enhance efforts to impose their own security agenda on neighboring territories, thereby fueling counter-alignments, arms races and intra-regional conflict. As a result of these developments, the military regains center stage. Regionalization of security has a deep impact on Arab armies, modifying requested tasks and expertise: but since it is the opposite of multilateralism, it increasingly serves security apparatus' national goals. What occurred among the Arab Gulf states is a perfect example of this kind of regionalization, which also masks rising nationalism in the Gulf region.

In March 2011, the intervention in Bahrain by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates police anticipated this trend, which was then openly unveiled by the 2015 Saudi-led military campaign in Yemen. In 2017, the Saudis and the Emiratis also opened the diplomatic crisis against Qatar. The Middle Eastern order is in fragments, shaken by the collapse of states, civil wars and unsustainable social pacts. The Arab uprisings emphasized *the crisis of the Arab state*,[3] the second factor of change. Sovereignty is constantly eroded, as state legitimacy is not only challenged by sub-/transnational actors but also weakened by states' persistent ineffectiveness. This contributes to a reduction in armies' available financial and human resources, while contesting agencies undermine their coherence and *esprit de corps*. The fragmentation of the social fabric affects many countries and allows for the resurgence of tribalism, as in Iraq and Libya. The Middle East's disorder and the widening of the nation-state crisis have bolstered new power

[3] Yezid Sayigh, "Militaries, Civilians and the Crisis of the Arab State," *The Washington Post*, The Monkey Cage Blog, 8 December 2014 https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/12/08/militaries-civilians-and-the-crisis-of-the-arab-state/?utm_term=.fb04e0c39fd0

relations and inter-state realignments, strengthening the competition for regional power and hegemony. The "Cold war" between Saudi Arabia and Iran,[4] as well as the intra-Sunni rivalry between Saudi Arabia-United Arab Emirates and Qatar have reshaped regional dynamics and given external actors (Russia in particular) room for maneuver, altering the balance of power in conflict-torn countries (Syria). The crisis of the Arab state model fosters *polarization and sectarianism*, also exacerbated by intra-regional struggles: it represents the third factor of change. Since material and immaterial national boundaries weaken, identity politics prevails and systemically becomes a tool of power politics: this paves the way for *transnational threats*, which are the fourth factor of change. Subnational, often regional-based loyalties, such as kinship and tribal lineages, acquire a prominent role, putting the proliferation of informal actors and alternative security providers into stark relief. Patron-client relations, also on a transnational basis, are able to spin regional events, consolidating asymmetric interdependence among states/non-state actors.

Moreover, political marginalization has affected disenfranchised populations, in particular ethnic and religious minorities already excluded by states' social pacts, leading to increased instability. Tribal and ethnic affiliations question both the usefulness of the colonial borders and the creation of new state entities (Kurdistan). In this vacuum, jihadism has proliferated, taking advantage of state fragmentation and making border areas in the Middle East and North Africa ungovernable. As a result, this redesigned context poses new challenges to the Arab armies, whether or not they are engaged in military reform. The growth of transnational threats such as jihadism also offers the opportunity for military reform in the Arab world, since Arab governments are faced with the problem of preventing and coping with these phenomena. The case of Tunisia provides an example of these dynamics. For Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, the regionalization of security is also a driver of military reform: Riyadh and Abu Dhabi increasingly perceive themselves as actors with military responsibilities (security providers) and regional ambitions (power projection). Such a geopolitical role requires a reshaped military.

Defying Arab Armies' Role. Traditional and New Obstacles to Military Reform

According to standard definitions of Security Sector Reform[5] (SSR), there are two core dimensions to such processes:

- effectiveness and efficiency;
- democratization and civilian control.

However, these very requirements are known to be the limitations of Arab armies, in republics as well as in monarchies: civil-military relations in the Middle East are characterized by undefined boundaries, and it is also more appropriate to talk about civil-security relations, given the variety of security providers. Following these coordinates, it is possible to isolate traditional and new obstacles to military reform in Arab Armies, shedding light on what impedes armies' effective adaptation to post-2011 challenges.

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[4] Gregory F. Gause III, "Beyond Sectarianism: The New Middle East Cold War," *The Brookings Institution*, Brookings Doha Center, Analysis paper, n. 11, July 2014.

[5] Timothy Edmunds, "Security Sector Reform: Concepts and Implementation," in Timothy Edmunds-Wilhem N. Germann (eds.), Towards SSR in Post-Cold War Europe: a Framework for Assessment, Baden-Baden, Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2003.

Traditional Obstacles to Military Reform

Political-military relations[6] shape the trajectory of the Arab states: a balanced relationship between political power and the military is vital not only for the survival of the regimes, but also for their resilience *vis-à-vis* multilayered challenges. The politicization of the military field and the economic role of the militaries are the main, traditional obstacles to military reform. Although every state presents peculiar features, these are fundamental macro-variables affecting the Arab military domain: they also encompass relevant sub-dimensions (state vs regime allegiance, lack of civilian oversight, welfare function), which contribute to frame the overall picture of Arab armies' resistance to reform.

Politicization, Factionalism and Economic Interests. According to classical definitions, professionalism is a combination of expertise, clientship (to the society or to the state), corporateness (group consciousness) and ideology (the military mindset).[7] Professionalism has traditionally been the weak point of the Arab armies. Interestingly, gradual military professionalization in the Middle East has not been followed by the military's depoliticization, since it has offered the military further opportunities to intervene in the political process.[8] Subgroups and microidentities, as in the cases of paramilitary forces or tribal/sectarian clans, often prevail in the construction of a military mindset; in "dual militaries" (as in Iraq, Libya and also in Iran), parallel military structures with ideological conformity openly counterbalance the armies.[9] Academia has often analyzed Arab armies through the dichotomy "institutionalization vs patrimonialism," although reality is often more nuanced than constructed categories.[10] For instance, the armies of Morocco, Jordan and the Arab Gulf states can be all considered "neo-patrimonial armies,"[11] even though their degree of effectiveness and professionalization varies widely: the Jordanian army has proved more efficient at managing border security (Jordanian-Syrian/Jordanian-Iraqi borders) than the Saudi army (Saudi-Yemeni border). The military security structure impacts on the armed forces' decision-making: they can be relatively well institutionalized or highly penetrated by non-military actors, apply universal conscription or voluntary recruitment, be focused on military affairs or have economic interests, and significantly contribute to the country political leadership or not.[12] As a matter of fact, states have attempted to build modern armies by mixing professionals (in the upper echelons) and cronies (in the lower ranks), conscripts and mercenaries, foreigners and locals, in order to maximize loyalty and short-term results, while diminishing political risks in the long-term. Since national security often overlaps with regime security, the armies' first objective is often regime protection rather than state protection. This is even more evident due to the decline of conventional

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[6] Risa A. Brooks, *Political-Military Relations and the Stability of Arab Regimes*, Adelphi Paper No.324, London, International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1998.

[7] Amos Perlmutter, *The Military and Politics in Modern Times: On Professionals, Praetorians and Revolutionary Soldiers*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1977.

[8] Mehran Kamrava, "Military Professionalization and Civil-Military Relations in the Middle East," *Political Science Quarterly*, 115, 1, Spring 2000.

[9] Mehran Kamrava, "Military Professionalization."

[10] Eva Bellin, "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East. Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective," *Comparative Politics*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2004, pp. 139–157.

[11] Jean-François Daguzan, "Armées et société dans le monde arabe: entre révolte et conservatisme », *Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique*, note n°05/13, février 2013.

[12] Fred H. Lawson, "Armed Forces, Internal Security Services, and Popular Contention in the Middle East and North Africa," in Holger Albrecht, Aurel Croissant and Fred H. Lawson (eds), *Armies and Insurgencies in the Arab Spring*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016, pp. 54-70.

inter-state wars: security and intelligence services rise in prominence, strengthening the Deep State. For instance, the military coup in Egypt on July 2013 highlighted the army's regime protection choice, thus favoring a return to authoritarian rule. The case of the Egyptian army can be explained by taking into account the lower degree of institutionalization and the stronger relationship with the regime if compared, for instance, to the Tunisian army.[13] Bahrain is a more debated case: scholars commonly define the Bahraini army as cohesive and professional, with allegiance to the regime rather than to the state,[14] while others underline that is the institutional design (and fragmentation) of security forces that bolsters military cohesion with respect to the non-material Sunni identity bond.[15] Certain armies are not cohesive, but attached to a specific regime, as in Libya and Yemen, thus fostering the crumbling of the monopoly of violence and then armed confrontation.[16] The lack of civilian oversight and accountability in the military paves the way for personalist centralization. "Tribally dependent monarchies"[17] like Morocco, Qatar and Oman do not have defense committees; in Jordan, the budget of the army is passed through parliament, even though committees and legislators are not allowed to examine expenditures. Among the Arab Gulf states, only Kuwait's parliament has formal oversight rights on the security sector, given its constitutional tradition. But political devices and filters disempower an effective civilian control on the Army. Notwithstanding formal checks and balances, former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki succeeded to build his personal military network, bypassing institutional bodies through regional command centers, so enhancing the dual military scheme. In Algeria, one of the clearest examples of *mukhabarat* (intelligence) states,[18] President Abdelaziz Bouteflika managed to complete the overhaul of the security services in 2016, after a long power struggle with the powerful *Département du reinsegnement et de la sécurité* (DRS), placing the new *Direction des services de sécurité* (DSS) under his authority.[19] In Saudi Arabia, the new Presidency of State Security will control several security bodies (such as the rapid intervention forces) formerly under the Interior ministry authority, thus further centralizing power on king Salman and his son, the crown prince Mohammed bin Salman. The role of the militaries in national economies is another obstacle to defense accountability and civilian oversight, as occurs in Algeria, Syria, Yemen and most of all Egypt, where the army has extensively diversified its activities, since the seventies, also beyond defense industry (infrastructure, agriculture, tourism and services). In these states, the military is the pillar of the regime, since it laid the foundations of the modern state. In many Arab states, the army, as well as the public sector, also has a welfare function: it alleviates poverty and social unbalances, providing salaried employments, especially in less developed areas. However, overstaffed armies, or the waste and misappropriation of defense funds, contribute

[13] Derek Lutterbeck, "Arab Uprisings and Armed Forces: Between Openness and Resistance," *DCAF-Center for Democratic Control of Armed Forces*, SSR Paper 2, 2011.

[14] Florence Gaub, "The Libyan Armed Forces Between Coup-Proofing and Repression," *Journal for Strategic Studies* 36, 2, pp. 221-44.

[15] Dorothy Ohl, "Bahrain ´Cohesive` Military and Regime Stability amid Unrest," in *Armies and Insurgencies*, pp. 145-67.

[16] Florence Gaub, "Arab Armies: Agents of Change? Before and After 2011," *Chaillot Papers* 131, EUISS, March 2014.

[17] Mehran Kamrava, "Military Professionalization."

[18] Mehran Kamrava, "Military Professionalization."

[19] Umberto Profazio, "The overhaul of the security services and the power struggle in Algeria," *NATO Defense College Foundation*, Maghreb Strategic Trends, November 2015.

not only to feed pockets of corruption, but also to diminish armies' performance. For instance, fictitious, "ghost" soldiers are widely present in Yemen and Iraq, where in 2014 an investigation into corruption following the occupation of Mosul by Daesh revealed that 50,000 false names were on the payroll.[20] In Libya, the Central Bank of Libya continues to pay the salaries of the country's warring militias, contributing to their proliferation and preventing any successful disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) program.[21] Therefore, armies' welfare function and, in some cases, corruption (when allocated resources are systematically distracted from military personnel to personal enrichment), resist military reform attempts, weakening defense effectiveness.

New Obstacles to Military Reform:

Beyond persistent obstacles, military reform in Arab states is also challenged by new issues, triggered by regional instability and domestic pressures.

More than counterbalancing: new gaps, tasks and balances between é*lite forces and armies.* Counterbalancing is a widespread coup-proofing strategy[22] to ensure regime security. Middle Eastern states have heavily invested in the institutional fragmentation of the security sector: élite forces (National/Presidential Guards, Special Forces) are better financed, trained and equipped than the armies. This has also resulted in fewer funds for the armies, increasing the risk of a lack of coordination between different security forces: for instance, Morocco's gendarmerie reportedly absorbs 22% of the military budget, while the army only receives 17%. Nowadays, the military's original *raison d'être* is overshadowed by the decline of inter-state wars and the rise of domestic challenges: it is no chance that the army and the police have increasingly overlapping functions. The importance of gendarmerie-type forces sheds light on the convergence between internal and external dimensions of security, synthesized by transnational threats; at the same time, the growth of the security sector fosters the expansion of agencies employing military personnel for domestic tasks.[23] Given their background and cohesion, élite forces are more effective at coping with internal dissent control than the armies: in Jordan, the gendarmerie (*darak*), a newly established rapid intervention force, carried out its first operation by cracking down on workers' protests in Aqaba (2010) and then was deployed to settle the 2011 demonstrations. Some of the grievances that Jordanian military veterans denounced in 2010-11 were also directed against Special Forces' rising benefits. Generally, counterbalancing strengthens the regimes, consolidating their system of power. In Algeria, the military-based power has enlarged the gendarmerie force since the nineteen-nineties to struggle against the Islamist insurgence, reportedly

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[20] Dominic Evans, "Iraq says it found 50,000 'ghost soldiers' on payroll," *Reuters*, 1 December 2014 https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-soldiers/iraq-says-it-found-50000-ghost-soldiers-on-payroll-idUSKCN0JF2RZ20141201

[21] Colin Freeman, "Libya's central bank causing 'civil war' by paying rival militias, says UK envoy," *The Telegraph*, 8 February 2016 http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/libya/12146453/Libyas-central-bank-causing-civil-war-by-paying-warring-militias-says-UK-envoy.html

[22] Quinlivan defines coup-proofing as the reliance on groups with special loyalties to the regime and the creation of parallel military organisations and multiple internal security agencies. James T. Quinlivan, "Coup-Proofing: Its Practice and Consequences in the Middle East," *International Security* 24, 2, 131-65.

[23] Derek Lutterbeck, "The Paradox of Gendarmeries: Between Expansion, Demilitarization and Dissolution," *DCAF Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces*, SSR Paper 8, 2013; Janowitz underlines that, in many developing countries and since the 1960s, the expansion of the security sector involved the rise of gendarmerie-type forces. Morris Janowitz, *Military Institutions and Coercion in the Developing Nations*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1977.

reaching 130,000 soldiers in 2010[24]: however, since the gendarmerie is here integrated into the armed forces, its presence does not alter established military balances. But in other cases, the rise of élite forces has been modifying the traditional status quo: in some Arab Gulf states, they are becoming more powerful than the armies, in terms of military capabilities and relationship with the political sphere. In Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the Saudi Arabia National Guard (SANG) and the Emirati Presidential Guard represent two growing pockets of military power: their deployment has risen in frequency, engagement and impact, also abroad (Yemen). The SANG, established in 1954 to counterbalance the army,[25] has traditionally had tasks of regime security, protection of the holy sites (Mecca and Medina), plus oil and gas infrastructures. But in contrast to the army (Royal Saudi Land Forces, RSLF), the SANG is a mobile force for rapid response[26] and intervention: looking at Riyadh's assertive regional policy, its deployment abroad is likely to rise in the near future. The Special Forces of the Emirati Presidential Guard are deeply engaged as land forces in Yemen; in late 2017, the new aviation wing of the Saudi National Guard mobilized in the south of the kingdom, with enhanced border security tasks. Increasing military capabilities have been coupled with strengthened links with political power: the UAE's Presidential Guard, established only in 2010, reports directly to the deputy supreme commander of the UAE forces, the Abu Dhabi crown prince Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan, while the Saudi crown prince and defense minister Mohammed bin Salman al-Saud is attempting to bring the SANG under his direct control (as minister of defense), after the removal of prince Mutaib bin Abdullah. Due to the expertise acquired on the ground, the capability gap between the élite forces and the armies widens. Moreover, their direct connection with royal leaders has been strengthened and élite forces' tasks are also extended from regime security to foreign projection. This alters consolidated checks and balances, undermining the counter-balance's original function.

Degrees of relationship between Armies and armed non-state actors: coexistence, cooperation, hybridization. Armies/élite forces and irregular forces are not always antithetical actors. After 2011, militaries and non-state fighters increasingly experienced coexistence and, in some areas, cooperation to achieve shared objectives. Since asymmetrical threats monopolize the scenario, regimes often lean on irregular forces (though asymmetrical too) as devices to manage highly fragmented societies, divided along identity lines. Three degrees of incremental relationship between the military and armed non-state actors can be empirically identified, from the less pronounced to the more evident: coexistence, cooperation, hybridization. If the army is weak and internally divided, the relationship with irregular forces is strong and recurrent. In the case of *coexistence*, the army and paramilitary forces are present on the same territory, can pursue the same goals, but do not work together on the ground, as occurs in Lebanon. The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and Hezbollah separately contributed to defend Lebanon's borders from jihadists and the Syrian war spillover: border security is a shared objective. On August 19, 2017,

[24] Derek Lutterbeck, "The Paradox of Gendarmeries."

[25] Stephanie Cronin, *Armies and State-Building in the Modern Middle East. Politics, Nationalism and Military Reform*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2014.

[26] Stratfor, "Saudi Arabia: A New National Guard for a New King?," Assessments, 8 May 2015.

the LAF announced the operation "Dawn of the Jurds" to clear the Bekaa valley (al-Qaa and Ras Baalbeck) of Daesh and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (the Syrian branch of al-Qaeda, former Jabhat al-Nusra). Simultaneously, Hezbollah carried out a military campaign to clear the Ersal area and the Syrian Qalamoun frontier of jihadists. LAF's successful performance against an asymmetric enemy revealed the Lebanese army's modernization, now able to combine special forces, armored vehicles and air support: in the words of a U.S. military officer, this was "21st century maneuver warfare by a modern military."[27] In case of *cooperation*, the military and the armed non-state actors opt for *ad hoc* pragmatic cooperation, choosing to work together, in the same operative theatre, to better achieve a common goal, as testified by Iraq. In the military campaign against the so-called Islamic State, the army, the Iraqi Counterterrorism Service ("Golden Divisions[28]") and the al-Hashd al-Shaabi (Popular Mobilization Forces, PMF[29]) managed to divide the job on the ground, taking into account local balance of forces and ethnic-sectarian concerns. For instance, in 2015, the PMF and army's units fought against jihadists in Diyala and Salahaddin governorates. Fallujah was regained by the Golden Divisions in 2016: the PMF could enter the city only after its liberation from Daesh. With regard to the key battle of Mosul in 2017, the Golden Divisions focused on the city, leaving to the PMF the battle for Tel Afar. In Syria, Hezbollah fights alongside Bashar al-Assad's army. The variety of security providers in the Arab states multiplies: it is difficult to classify them according to predefined categories: élite forces and non-state actors (as militias), as well as military (conscripts and/or volunteers) and private security agents. Trapped between pragmatic complementarity and enduring competition, armies/élite units and non-state actors are part of a scenario characterized by growing hybrid governance in the security domain: this hampers military reform. As a matter of fact, militias often receive informal legitimacy due to their work alongside the army or in replacement of regular forces: they often turn into institutional actors, formally affiliated to the Interior Ministry or the army, as the PMF in Iraq and the Libyan National Army (LNA). However, militias' institutionalization, but not disbandment, widens the "grey zone" between regular and irregular forces, also leaving unaccountable areas for justice. In case of *hybridization* of security actors, institutionalized militias work side by side or even replace regular military forces in a specific territory, as occurs in Yemen. The UAE-supported Yemeni tribal militias (Security Belt Forces/al-Hizam Brigades, Hadhrami and Shabwani Elite Forces) fight against Shia insurgents as well as against AQAP and its affiliates. In secured Southern areas, Emirati-backed militias run *de facto* large swaths of territories, vying for power with army's units still loyal to the recognized Yemeni president (which often had previously withdrawn from these territories) and in some cases replacing them, as in many of Aden's districts. According to president Abd Rabu Mansur Hadi's presidential decree (May 2016), the Security Belt Forces are under the technical control of the Yemeni interior minister, while the Hadhrami and

[27] Aram Nerguizian, "The Lebanese Armed Forces, Hezbollah and Military Legitimacy," *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (CSIS), 4 October 2017.

[28] Under the Prime Minister Office.

[29] Haider al-Abadi's executive order 91 (2016) establishes that "the PMF will be an independent military formation and a part of the Iraqi Armed Forces," even though not integrated into the army.

the Shabwani Elite Forces (from Hadhramaut and Shabwa governorates) are formally affiliated with the army. Since December 2016, Salafi and other "Southern Resistance" militias have technically been integrated into the Yemen's army, while remaining separated in reality.[30] In the South, the void left by the regular security sector was filled by local militias such as the popular committees (mostly in Abyan), who had previously fought alongside the army against AQAP.[31] The military's collaboration with asymmetrical forces does not hide the weaknesses and the inefficiency of the armies in countering complex threats. Furthermore, overreliance on non-state actors represents a gamble: common interests of both parties could suddenly become divided once a certain result has been achieved.

The sunset of hierarchical security: the horizontal network security model. Armies' traditional pattern presents clear leadership and organized chains of command. This structure, although frequently challenged and downplayed by sub-national kinships, was the "should-be" model for the Arab states so far, especially in Western eyes. In the Arab security domain, waning hierarchical structures are often complemented or entirely replaced by patronage circles, where 'money loyalty' wins over 'ideological loyalty' and the delivery of security takes priority over the nature of the security provider. The rapid growth of transnational identities, coupled with state sovereignty erosion, has also been redrawing security governance, shifting armies towards a *network security* model: states frequently craft a less vertical military approach than before, to better cope with the slippery context. As a result, armies often adopt a "horizontal model," forging ground cooperation with local actors (regional and/or tribal forces), in order to shape interdependent, adaptable security networks against asymmetrical threats: in Iraq, the cooperation between regular forces and armed non-state actors against Daesh is a clear example of network security. Given the LAF-Hezbollah coexistence, Lebanon too applies a horizontal security model: with regard to border security, LAF and Hezbollah act separately, but they share border protection tasks. In case of transnational patronage, network security also reduces local ownership, promotes the hybridization of security providers and maximizes external penetration: in Yemen, the Special Forces of the UAE Presidential Guard operate alongside Emirati-backed Yemeni militias.

Time for reform vs time for reaction: the Armies' chronological gap. In the Middle East, current multidimensional challenges need quick answers by the security sector to contain unmanageable consequences. But there's a "timing gap": military reform can be achieved only through long-term planning, training and incremental adjustments, this being the only way to acquire operative effectiveness and readiness. Therefore, armies' time for reaction is not armies' time for reform. As a result, regimes seek for alternative, sometimes problematic solutions, such as non-state fighters, to enhance timely response capabilities *vis-à-vis* challenges.

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[30] *International Crisis Group*, "Yemen's al-Qaeda: Expanding the Base," Middle East Report n° 174, 2 February 2017, p. 21; United Nations Security Council, *Final Report of the Panel of Experts on Yemen* (S/2017/81), 31 January 2017, p. 18, http://undocs.org/S/2017/81

[31] Yezid Sayigh, "Crumbling States. Security Sector Reform in Libya and Yemen," *Carnegie Middle East Center*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 2015, p. 20.

Military Reforms: Trends after 2011

Considering the list of traditional and new obstacles to the reform of the military, the Arab states have struggled to adapt their armies to the new security context. Some Arab countries decided to postpone any change to better times, focusing on rapid management of the existential threats posed to them. At the same time, other states tried to implement ambitious reforms of their security apparatus, in order to adequately respond to present challenges. With regard to military reform, Tunisia and the UAE are remarkable cases, since both opted for the restructuring of the military sector, but starting from different contexts: Tunis has chosen military reform to ensure the success of the political transition, while Abu Dhabi did the same in order to consolidate national balances and strengthen foreign projection.

Tunisia's Army in Transition: from agent of change to agent of coercion?

Compared with two regional heavyweights such as Egypt and Algeria, Tunisia's army is definitely less powerful. Historical reasons, such as the existence of a police state in Tunisia and the mistrust of the military by Presidents Habib Bourguiba and Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, help explain why the army and the Ministry of Defense were less favored than other security institutions. Nevertheless, the Tunisian army played a crucial role during the Jasmine Revolution. Even though it was deployed into the streets to contain popular discontent in January 2011, the army allegedly refused to crack down on protesters, gaining the confidence of the population.

Acting as an agent of change,[32] the Tunisian army paved the way for a peaceful transition in stark contrast with other countries that adopted a different approach, descending into internal turmoil and civil war (neighbouring Libya, for instance). At the same time, by siding with protesters, the military also promoted its corporate interests, raising in prominence among the different institutions of the state and recalibrating its relations with the internal security forces (ISFs). Considerably larger than the Tunisian armed forces,[33] the ISFs were the main instrument of repression and surveillance of the country, symbol of Ben Ali's police state. The Ministry of the Interior also had authority over the National Guard, an élite police force deployed in rural areas and along the borders, whose relationship with the military has always been considered problematic,[34] providing another example of institutional fragmentation of the security sector.

The adoption of the new constitution in 2014 offered the opportunity of a reset, allowing the Tunisian leaders to make a fresh start on all the most pressing issues facing their country, including SSR. Given the role played by the Tunisian army during the revolution, transitional authorities had a special consideration for the military, whose self-restraint in politics has often been remarked[35]: as a result, the defence budget was increased and the weapons

[32] Florence Gaub, Arab armies: agents of change? Before and after 2011, Chaillot Papers, N. 131 – March 2014, European Union Institute for Security Studies, https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Chaillot_Paper_131_Arab_armies.pdf

[33] In 2011 the Ministry of Interior had 200,000 security forces, while the army had 37,000 soldiers, the smallest military in North Africa. Moreover, the annual budget for military procurement was US$70 million, the lowest in the Arab world. William C. Taylor, *Military responses to the Arab Uprising and the Future of the Civil-Military relations in the Middle East, analysis from Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Syria*, p. 75 and ff., Palgrave MacMillan, 2014, New York.

[34] *Réforme et stratégie sécuritaire en Tunisie*, International Crisis Group, Rapport Moyen-Orient/Afrique du Nord, 161, 23/07/2015, pp. 21 and ff. , https://www.crisisgroup.org/fr/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/tunisia/reform-and-security-strategy-tunisia

system modernised.[36] Role and responsibilities were redefined, transforming the management of the military from the autocratic, personal rule of Ben Ali into an institutional governance, with shared responsibilities between the President and the Prime Minister.[37] Moreover, the government adopted measures of positive discrimination in order to ensure a fair representation of all the governorates of the country in the high military ranks, whereas in the recent past authorities had privileged officers from Tunis and the Sahel regions.

Attempts to reform the Tunisian military involved (and interested) partner countries. The need to protect and preserve the Tunisian democratic experiment from the dangers of regional turmoil led many governments to increase their offers of help. Tunis continued to rely on the traditional support of the United States and France. Washington, in particular, increased its economic and security assistance to Tunisia: according to the Security Assistance Monitor, from 2011 to 2014 the US government provided US$185 million to Tunisia through at least eight security aid programs, including US$42 million for efforts in the SSR. In July 2015, Washington also designated Tunisia as its sixteenth major non-NATO ally (MNNA), a status that offers tangible privileges, such as eligibility for training, loans of equipment for cooperative research and development or foreign military financing for commercial leasing of several defense articles.

Multilateral initiatives to cordon off the Tunisian success story from instability in Libya were also announced. For example, in 2016 NATO announced the establishment of an Intelligence Fusion Centre (IFC) in Tunisia, as part of its program to project stability's beyond its borders. The IFC would have involved military and civilian agencies, sharing intelligence and focusing on the phenomenon of the foreign fighters, which particularly affects Tunisia.[38] However, internal resistance to deepen the partnership with NATO is delaying the establishment of the IFC, while signs of increasing competition among Western countries to provide support to the Tunisian security forces emerged,[39] suggesting conflicting interests among external partners.

Despite all the internal efforts and external support to promote the reform of the military in Tunisia, the impression is that much work remains to be done. Comprehensive SSRs did not specifically target the Tunisian armed forces, but focused, albeit unsuccessfully, on ISFs. Such disinterest in promoting change together with the resistance of the Ministry of Interior to reforms produced dire consequences, as the string of terrorist attacks in 2015 showed the inability of the Tunisian security forces to mitigate

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[35] Moncef Kartas, *Foreign Aid and Security Sector Reform in Tunisia: Resistance and Autonomy of the Security Forces*, Mediterranean Politics, 19:3, 2014, p. 378.

[36] The defence budget doubled from €400 million in 2011 to €800 million in 2017, while the defence expenditures increased by 50% of the Gross Domestic Product between 2011 and 2015. Frida Dahmani, *Tunisie: comment l'armée est en train the changer*, Jeune Afrique, 01/07/2017, http://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/448527/politique/tunisie-larmee-train-de-changer/

[37] According to the 2014 constitution the President is the commander in chief of the armed forces, while the Prime Minister and the Minister of Defence manage more routine military and defence affairs. Sharan Grewal, *A Quiet Revolution: the Tunisian Military After Ben Ali*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 24/02/2016, http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/02/24/quiet-revolution-tunisian-military-after-ben-ali-pub-62780

[38] Terrorism still represents the main risk in the country, as an elevated number of foreign fighters are expected to come back home in the short term (2,926 Tunisian nationals are estimated to have gone fighting abroad). Richard Barret, Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the threat of returnees, October 2017, The Soufan Center, http://thesoufancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Beyond-the-Caliphate-Foreign-Fighters-and-the-Threat-of-Returnees-TSC-Report-October-2017.pdf

[39] Umberto Profazio, "Projecting stability beyond NATO's borders: an Intelligence Fusion Centre in Tunisia," *NATO Defense College Foundation*, Maghreb Strategic Trends, July 2016, http://www.natofoundation.org/maghreb-july-2016/

the jihadist threat. The wave of attacks, in turn, urged the Tunisian authorities to focus on the fight against terrorism with all the means available, further delaying SSRs and confirming the chronological gap between time for reform and time for reaction.

The delay is shedding light on the complex relations between the military and ISFs. The Ministry of the Interior is taking advantage of security challenges and changed political climate to reaffirm its privileged position in the Tunisian security sector. As calls increase for transforming the Tunisian military from a conventional army to a professional force able to fight against asymmetrical threats, the National Guard is still viewed as the most important bulwark against the jihadists, in particular along Tunisia's borders,[40] confirming the dysfunctional relationship with ISFs, as well as the emergence of the already mentioned 'horizontal model' of cooperation.

On the other hand, internal turmoil and widespread protests are forcing the military to adapt to a changing environment, in which their role is redefined by security threats that fall into the grey area between law enforcement and military activities.[41] This trend significantly affects the civil-security relationship. Recent political developments indicate a resumption of the army's law enforcement activities already carried out in the past, as well as a return to repressive policies after a hiatus of six years. In May 2016, internal turmoil forced the Tunisian President Béji Caïd Essebsi to adopt exceptional measures, ordering the Tunisian army to protect the critical infrastructure of the country, in particular the oil, gas and phosphate facilities. Escalating tensions and the accidental death of one of the protestors in Tataouine have not yet affected relations between the army and the people. However, the frequent involvement of the military in police or internal security operations could increase social tensions and remains highly controversial. At the same time the use of the military to protect strategic interests highlights the army's marginalisation in other most pressing issues, such as the fight against terrorism; and it could also indicate a reverse in trend for the Tunisian military, slipping back from agent of change to agent of coercion.

Not Only Foreign Projection: UAE Militaries as National Identity-Builders

Since the nineties, the UAE's armed forces have played the role of "late federation-builders." As a matter of fact, the modern integration of separated military systems into a unified, Abu Dhabi-led force allowed the al-Nahyan dynasty to centralize Abu Dhabi's rule over the other emirates, first of all the main competitor Dubai. This was possible due to the creation of a federal neo-patrimonial network linking the security sector with the royal family.[42] From that moment on, the military sector has become the United Arab Emirates' distinctive foreign policy vector. In 2011, the Arab uprisings and the consequent collapse of regional order gave the UAE and Qatar the possibility to translate Emirati and Qatari financial power, which skyrocketed in the

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[40] As an example, the former leader of the Okba Ibn Nafaa Brigade, the Algerian national Mourad Chaieb, was killed alongside another militant during an operation carried out by the National Guard in the Kasserine governorate in August 2017. *Tunisian security forces kill senior militant in ambush – sources*, Reuters, 09/08/2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-tunisia-security-idUSKBN1AP0RX

[41] Anour Boukhars, "Strengthen Tunisia's Army, But Keep It Out of Politics," *Carnegie Middle East Centre*, Diwan, 20 October 2015.

[42] Eleonora Ardemagni, "United Arab Emirates' Armed Forces in the Federation-Building Process: Seeking for Ambitious Engagement," *International Studies Journal 47*, Vol. 12, No.3, Winter 2016, pp. 43-62.

2000s, into regional power and, in the case of Abu Dhabi, military prestige. Therefore, the intra-Sunni rivalry openly started, driven by a mix of hard power (UAE) and soft power (Qatar).

In this evolving context, Emirati military reform pursues not only defense modernization (i.e. arms procurement), but also defense transformation (i.e. training, local expertise, operative intents, indigenous military industry). This has an impact on civil-military relations, gradually modifying the UAE pattern with respect to that of the traditional oil monarchies.[43] In the UAE, military reform has been currently following two main trajectories: the shift from 'hardware' to know-how building in the military field,[44] and the introduction of conscription in 2014 as a cultural tool of nation-building.[45]

Local expertise is the first driver of military reform. Certainly, military expenditures for equipment have constantly risen in the last decade: but the Emirati leadership realized, earlier than neighboring monarchies, that military capabilities are not only related to arms procurement. This occurred notwithstanding the special, 'comfortable' relationship with the United States, which provides an unmatched security umbrella to Abu Dhabi. As a result, Emirati rulers began to allocate more defense budget resources than before to enhance militaries' professionalization, focusing on local defense skills. Expertise also means the growth of the UAE defense manufacturing industry, fostered by economic diversification and direct offsets: this will contribute more and more to spin Emirati defense procurement choices. The establishment of EDIC (Emirates Defense Industry Companies) in 2014 underlines the intent to consolidate the military industrialization project in the eyes of foreign investors.

Emiratis' active participation in the US-led Global Coalition against Daesh (2014) allowed UAE combat pilots to further improve air power capabilities, among the most advanced in the Middle East: the UAE has been part of NATO's Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) since 2004. But in 2015, the UAE military intervention in Yemen (together with Saudi Arabia) was the real watershed for the Emirati armed forces, especially for the Presidential Guard Special Forces. First of all, Abu Dhabi led ground operations in Yemen, with a specific focus on the South of the country. The UAE military engagement was fundamental to recapture Aden from the insurgents: the amphibious operations from the new Emirati military base in Eritrea (Assab), to regain Red Sea islands (such as Perim) and parts of the Western Yemeni coast (al-Mokha), were an unprecedented success for the Emirati forces. Moreover, UAE Special Forces are front-line actors in counterterrorism against Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP): they secured Yemen's third city of Mukalla (Hadhramaut) and forced the jihadists to withdraw in April 2016, working alongside Yemeni security forces and Yemen's tribal militias, backed by Abu Dhabi and U.S. Special Forces. In the same way, UAE Special Forces have been fighting AQAP's fiefdoms in the Shabwa region since August 2017, also supporting the protection of critical oil and gas infrastructure.

[43] On the traditional oil monarchies' pattern, see Mehran Kamrava, "Military Professionalization"

[44] Shana Marshall, "Military Prestige, Defense-Industrial Production and the Rise of Gulf Military Activism," in Holger Albrecht-Aurel Croissant-Fred H. Lawson (eds), *Armies and Insurgencies,* pp. 241-263.

[45] Eleonora Ardemagni, "Emiratization of Identity: Conscription as a Cultural Tool of Nation-Building," *Gulf Affairs*, OxGAPS-Oxford Gulf & Arabian Peninsula Studies Forum, University of Oxford, St Antony's College, Autumn 2016, pp. 6-9 https://www.oxgaps.org/files/analysis_ardemagni.pdf

Conscription is the second driver of military reform for the UAE. In 2014, the Emirates introduced compulsory military service (like Qatar and later Kuwait in 2017[46]): all male citizens aged 18-30 must serve in the armed forces from nine months up to two years, depending on their educational level. In February 2016, the Emirati government also opened fast-track enrollment to volunteers aged 30-40. After a first phase of basic training (4 months), specialized training (3 months), plus study, exercises and lectures, recruits join the Presidential Guard for applied training[47]; some draft soldiers were also deployed in Yemen until September 2015. The 2015-17 Emirati Strategy for the National Service establishes three batches each year of between 5000 and 7000 recruits in all: nationals represent only 20% of the UAE's total inhabitants. For Abu Dhabi, the novelty has first of all a cultural meaning, but it also has a military impact that has still to be assessed, although the Emirati army remains a small force, directly controlled by Abu Dhabi's royal family, mixing *'assabiya*-based officers and foreign manpower. In the government's eyes, conscription is first of all a "top-down" measure to enhance the Emirati collective identity, still fragmented by different tribal affiliations, emirate-specific identities and the overwhelming numbers of expatriates. Identity is an incessant social construction: therefore, much of the "Emiratization of identity" project now passes through the army and the draft institution, with the purpose of awakening young Emiratis' patriotism and nationalist feeling, keeping them away from alternative identities which could harm national security, such as militant Islamism and jihadism. The intervention in Yemen is a real laboratory of national consciousness: on September 4, 2015, 45 UAE soldiers died in Yemen after a Houthi attack. This unprecedented loss of life was followed by a real moment of national mourning, closely covered by the Gulf media; more than 100 Emirati soldiers have died in Yemen so far.

In the UAE, these trajectories of military reform have been redrawing civil-military relations, shaping original, although still embryonic ties between the military and civil society. This emerging trend will be even more evident in the long term, and it will likely impact on the political sphere, given the rise of a "military élite" made up of Emirati officers. As a matter of fact, "national identity-builder militaries" mark a clear difference with respect to the classical Arab Gulf state pattern of civil-military relations, based on state-making without war-making,[48] definite boundaries between armed forces and society, and no conscription. In the current Emirati case, the security sector continues to depend on tribal communities as usual (obviously in the case of the upper echelons), but the royal political discourse is now constructed to overcome specific affiliations in order to transform the federation into a self-aware nation, able to cope with multidirectional threats to regime security. Such a cultural project, through military means, needs the active involvement of Emirati youth, corroborated by the UAE's military and maritime projection for regional prestige. For this purpose, an interventionist foreign policy remains a long-term objective for the Emirati leadership, as already occurred in Yemen and Libya.

[46] On the introduction of conscription in some Arab Gulf states, see Zoltan Barany, "Big News! Conscription in the Gulf," *Middle East Institute*, 25 January 2017 http://www.mei.edu/content/map/big-news-conscription-gulf

[47] John B. Alterman-Margo Balboni, *Citizens in Training: Conscription and Nation Building in the United Arab Emirates*, Washington, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 2017.

[48] Rolf Schwarz, *War and State-Building in the Middle East*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013.

Towards a 'patchwork security' model. Perspectives for NATO

In the Arab states, military reform faces traditional, persistent obstacles, centered on politicization and factionalism (such as a lack of accountability and regime allegiance) and, especially in post-colonial military-building, on conflicting interests among external partners. Given the evolving regional scenario, Arab armies' military reform attempts are also increasingly challenged by new obstacles, such as the waning of the counterbalancing relationship with the élite forces (especially in the Gulf), coexistence, cooperation or hybridization with armed non-state actors (with regard to land forces), and growing dependence on foreign military donors, which inevitably affects states' foreign policy.

The regionalization of security trends pushes some Middle Eastern states – and Arab states among them – to project power beyond their borders in order to create regional balances. In Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the armies become vectors of interventionist foreign policies, triggering dynamics of rivalry and conflict. The crisis of the Arab state, coupled with regional instability, has led to the re-emergence of local belongings, as protective umbrellas for militias and armed groups based on confessional/ethnic or tribal allegiances. Therefore, in the Middle Eastern region, security no longer has the meaning it used to have until a decade ago: the Arab states are dealing with a new kind of security, "*patchwork security*." Patchwork security means that fragmented states favor locally-based security agreements and not overall, national frameworks. Moreover, competing security providers also multiply on the territory, as cases of coexistence/cooperation between armies and armed non-state actors: this leaves room for hybrid security experiences of combat and, later, governance (Iraq, Lebanon, Libya and Yemen are prominent examples of this emerging trend). At the same time, this hybrid security model, seen by many Arab regimes as a short-term device to achieve security goals, is going to further challenge states' legitimacy in the long-term, thus hampering SSR projects.

Due to the presence of asymmetrical, armed non-state actors, the armies often redesign the organizational model 'on the ground', shifting progressively from a classical, vertical/hierarchical military scheme to a horizontal one, which also relies on networks with local security actors (with relations of coexistence, cooperation or hybridization with armed non-state groups) to re-establish/manage security.

The specific cases of Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates differ in their history and current political context: both opted for the restructuring of the military sector, but Tunis did so to ensure the success of the political transition, while Abu Dhabi aimed to consolidate federal balances, boost national identity and strengthen foreign projection. Arab armies are coping with challenges related to military reform: not only they are increasingly called on to perform internal security duties (the case of the intervention of the Tunisian Armed Forces in Tataouine in May 2017 perhaps reflects a return to law enforcement tasks), but they have lost their "primacy role" in the military domain, due to the shrinking of conventional wars and the surge of élite forces and security services. As a matter of fact, armies accomplish new tasks, such as police operations (for Tunisia), military interventions abroad (for the UAE), counterterrorism and protection of oil/gas facilities (for Tunisia and the UAE in Yemen). Therefore, armed forces' involvement in daily life is increased, as testified by the army's most recent intervention to protect critical infrastructure in Tunisia or the impact of conscription in the UAE.

This promotes the recalibration of consolidated civil-military relation models, whose political consequences have still to be assessed. The Arab states look increasingly like security states, given

the centrality of the securitization discourse in the interplay of domestic, transnational and foreign threats. Especially the Arab Gulf states (mostly the UAE and Saudi Arabia) show a nationalist security pattern, differing from their classic military model. In perspective, we see the gradual convergence of the monarchical military model with the republican one: the armies have been acquiring a prominent role within the system of power and in foreign policy-making, as tools of interventionist regional policies, also shaping the sense of national identity and belonging.

Given this framework, NATO's contribution is more and more critical to support the adaptation of the Arab armies to changing requirements and contexts, preserving and maximizing armies' military role. For this reason, security partnership and practical cooperation are fundamental ways to shape Arab armed forces' new resilience. This is why NATO can play a prominent and dynamic role in this sensitive juncture, deepening education and training initiatives with Arab partners, contributing to learning activities and military doctrine, and stressing the importance of accountability and civilian oversight in military reform. This would help Arab armies to re-invent themselves in a new geopolitical era, thus building concrete paths towards mutual understanding, and then military interoperability.