

Civil Resistance and Military Dynamics: Examining Security Force Defections in the Arab Spring



Sharon Erickson Nepstad
University of New Mexico

Military Defections Matter

- When the military defects, civil resisters have a greater chance of overturning an unjust regime.
- Chenoweth and Stephan (2011) find that civil resistance struggles are 46 times more likely to usher in regime change if the military defects.
- But when, why, and how do defections occur?

Goals of this Presentation

1. Examine various responses troops can take when faced with civil resistance.
2. Present factors that contribute to defections.
3. Explore why security force defections occurred in some Arab Spring uprisings but not others.
4. Reflect on the consequences of defections for civil resistance struggles.

Types of Security Force Responses

Spectrum of Troop Responses



Regime Tactics for Maintaining Loyalty

1. *Punish* or threaten troops who are disloyal
2. *Patronage*: provide troops with economic incentives for maintaining the regime
3. *Ethnic or sectarian favoritism*: provide troops with political incentives for maintaining the regime

Civilian Tactics that Encourage Defections



- 4. Raise political costs of regime loyalty
- 5. Raise moral costs of regime loyalty
- 6. Raise the honor costs of regime loyalty
- 7. Lower personal costs of defecting

Structural/Macro Factors Affecting Defections

- 8. Structural design of the military
- 9. Natural resources and wealth
- 10. International ties and alliances

Egypt: The Military Shifts Allegiance



FEBUARY 11TH 2011, EGYPT

Together, The People Win Their Democracy And Freedom

Egyptian Military Financial Interests

Hosni Mubarak
enriched the military



Gamal Mubarak
threatened military
assets



Bahrain: The Military Remains Loyal



Bahrain's demographics

70% Shi'ite

30% Sunni

But the royal Khalifa family
is Sunni and engaged in
sectarian favoritism.



International Response to Bahrain

United Arab Emirates sent 500 police.

Saudi Arabia sent 1,000 troops.

U.S. wants to protect its military base.



Syria: The Military Splits



Syria's demographics

74% Sunnis

11% Alawites (off-shoot of Shi'ite Islam)

But ... over 90% of all security chiefs and military officers are Alawite and support the Alawite-dominated state.

Conclusions

1. Security forces will side with nonviolent resisters if it enables them to protect their financial and political interests.

Conclusions (cont.)

2. In highly stratified societies where one group dominates, individual soldiers are likely to remain loyal if they are members of the dominant group. If they are members of a subordinate group, they are less likely to be loyal.

Conclusions (cont.)

3. When soldiers from a subordinate ethnic or sectarian group are ordered to repress their own people, they face high moral costs for loyalty. These costs may override fears of punishment for defecting.

Conclusions (cont.)

4. The international community is less likely to impose sanctions on a nation that holds great strategic or economic importance. If no sanctions are imposed, or if foreign troops arrive to reinforce the regime, troops are unlikely to defect because they perceive the state as highly durable.

Challenges and Risks of Military Defections:

Transformation of a nonviolent conflict to a violent one



Challenges and Risks of Defections:

The Military May Usurp the Movement's Power and Credibility



During Egypt's recent turmoil ... one could argue that there was too much collusion between nonviolent people power and security forces. After several days of demonstrations and protests... the Egyptian military declared that it had no choice but to remove Morsi from power. Yet there are indications that organizers and military elites had coordinated their plan for months. As early as February of 2013, some senior Egyptian army officers were in private talks with liberal opposition groups, asking them whether they would approve of the military ousting Morsi. Such accounts indicate that this was less of a process of protest-induced defections than of a popularly backed coup....”

From Chenoweth's “Changing Sides Doesn't Always Make For Transformation – Just Look At Egypt”

What Can Civil Resisters Do?

1. Encourage “outright disobedience” instead of mutiny.
2. Be wary of too much collusion with the armed forces.

Civil resister-Security Force Relations Matter in Nonviolent Conflict



Questions and Discussion

Thank you!