Authoritarian Breakdown in the Arab World: Linkages, Leverage and Regime Type

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ABSTRACT: Scholars (see Levitsky and Way, 2005) have highlighted the importance of linkages and leverage in facilitating authoritarian breakdown. By linkages, we are referring to the ties that authoritarian regimes have to the United States, the European Union and other Western dominated international institutions and leverage refers to how vulnerable authoritarian regimes are to external pressure from these actors. But what previous scholars have failed to emphasize is that the type of authoritarian regime (i.e., personalist, military and single party) affects how much power international actors have in facilitating the ousting of an autocrat. With the recent events of the Arab Spring, applying linkages and leverage in combination with Barbara Geddes' typology of authoritarian regimes can help improve our understanding of the role that the international community can play in these events. We differentiate between the various types of authoritarian regimes in Egypt, Syria, Yemen and Libya, and apply the concepts of linkages and leverage in order to explain the events of the Arab Spring. By combining linkage, leverage, and regime type, this paper highlights the circumstances under which some policy tools will be effective in inducing authoritarian breakdown. The paper emphasizes that *removing autocrats will be most difficult in military regimes that have few linkages or incentives to step down*.

Authoritarian Breakdown in the Arab World: Linkages, Leverage and Regime Type

Scholars have emphasized the importance of linkages and leverage in facilitating authoritarian breakdown (Levitsky and Way 2005).[1][2] Leverage is defined as the vulnerability of authoritarian regimes to external pressures and intervention and linkages are defined as the density of ties that authoritarian regimes have to the United States, the European Union, and to other Western dominated international institutions.[3] This paper aims to demonstrate that applying linkage and leverage to the recent events of the Arab Spring, in combination with Barbara Geddes' typology of authoritarian regimes (i.e., personalist, military, and single party), will greatly enhance our understanding of these events.[4] We differentiate between the various types of authoritarian regimes in Egypt, Syria, Yemen and Libya, and apply the concepts of linkages and leverage in order to explain the role, if any, that the international community can play in the events of the Arab Spring. By combining linkage, leverage, and regime type, it highlights the circumstances under which some policy tools will be effective in inducing authoritarian breakdown. *Removing autocrats will be most difficult in military regimes that have few linkages with the international community.* Additionally, the process will be particularly protracted if the military regime is not professionalized. The implication of this paper also demonstrates that isolating authoritarian regimes and their leaders makes it nearly impossible for the West to make an impact when it is clear that the public would like to see their ouster.[5]

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[1] Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, "International Linkage and Democratization" *Journal of Democracy* 16, no. 3 (July 2005).

[2] It's important to make the distinction between authoritarian breakdown and democratization. The paper is not looking at the international community's role in

[3] The term, "the West" will be used to refer to the US, European powers and other Western dominated institutions. The UN is not included since the UN Security Council includes China and Russia. The term "international community" includes the role of the UN.

[4] Barbara Geddes, "The Effect of Regime Type on Authoritarian Breakdown: Empirical Test of a Game Theoretic Argument." Paper read at American Political Science Association, 1999.

[5] The paper is not arguing that the West has always pushed for authoritarian breakdown or causes authoritarian regimes to step down. The paper explores when the international community has power to be effective in expediting authoritarian breakdown in countries where the domestic audience is clearly pushing for change.

Arab Spring

The Arab Spring which began in early 2011 drew the world's attention to major changes taking place first in Tunisia, followed by Egypt and then Libya. In all three of these cases, authoritarian breakdown took place--with Zine el Abadine Ben Ali (1987-2011) being quickly ousted first in Tunisia, followed by Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011) stepping down in Egypt. Not surprisingly, Muammar Qaddafi (1969-2012) in Libya clung to power until the very end with international involvement a necessity to ensure his exit. Yemen's long standing leader, Ali Abdullah Saleh (1978-2012) also refused to step down in spite of over a year of protests and conflict. Many Syrians, taking advantage of an unprecedented democratic opening in the Arab world peacefully protested the Baath party regime led by Syrian leader Bashar Assad (2000-) in March of 2011. The reaction to these protests in Syria grew more and more violent, eventually spiralling the country into a brutal and protracted civil war. Though Egypt's transition has not been smooth, why did Mubarak exit relatively quickly in comparison? Moreover, what explains why Qaddafi's exit was both bloody, yet achievable and Saleh's exit was lengthy yet negotiable? Why does the international community have little ability to affect the outcome in Syria and why does the conflict appear to have no end in sight?

The Type of Authoritarian Regime Matters

Before explaining the importance of linkages and leverage it is important to note that not all authoritarian regimes are the same and this affects how successful the international community will be in pushing for regime change. The structure of authoritarian regimes varies considerably. Drawing from the work of Barbara Geddes, regimes can be categorized based on which group holds power, whether it be a ruling family (monarchy such as Saudi Arabia), a military junta (military regimes such as Myanmar for decades), a single party (single-party regimes such as China) or a single person (personalist dictatorships such as Belarus under Alexander Lukashenko)- or some combination of these four.[6] This structure has important implications for not only the chances for democratization but also for the mode of the transition. We focus on the main types of authoritarian regimes in the Arab Spring: personalist dictatorships (Yemen and Libya) and military regimes (Egypt and Syria).[7]

Personalist Dictatorships

Personalist dictatorships pose the biggest problems for policy makers hoping to encourage a ***peaceful*** move towards authoritarian breakdown. Personalist dictators have a high concentration of power in their own hands. The military is deliberately weakened and not professionalized in efforts to coup-proof the regime. The legislature is often impotent or non-existent. Political parties are often banned or only serve as an organization to prop up the leader. Civil society is usually oppressed. A small entourage of sycophants surrounds the leader and provides him with inaccurate intelligence about the international threats to the regime. This makes it all the more difficult to ease these types of leaders from power. The leader is constantly being fed misinformation about the strength of his own regime vis-à-vis foreign forces (as Saddam Hussein was in the US's 2003 invasion of Iraq) which leads to more defiance. Second, there is no alternative institution to nudge the leader out of power, such as the military or a strong political party. The leader often believes he is one with the state, that there is no life after politics and that the only option is to hold on to power until the very end.

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[6] Barbara Geddes, "The Effect of Regime Type on Authoritarian Breakdown: Empirical Test of a Game Theoretic Argument." Paper read at American Political Science Association, 1999.

[7] Tunisia was categorized by Barbara Geddes as a single party regime, led by the Constitutional Democratic Rally Party (RDC). The RDC had ruled Tunisia since independence in 1956 until it was dissolved in 2011.The case of Ben Ali in Tunisia demonstrates the importance of a strong political party that can serve as a potential counterweight to the personalist style leader. Though Ben Ali had personalized a great degree of power in his own hands by weakening the military and the legislature, Tunisians had a long history of parliamentary politics and had an institutionalized ruling party. Because of this, Tunisia is widely accepted as having the most successful transition during the Arab Spring. In both Egypt and Syria, Geddes acknowledges that the military shares power with a powerful leader.

This poses a unique situation for the international community in instances when it becomes clear that the domestic audience has had enough of a particular dictator.[8] On the one hand, there are often very few tools of negotiation that are effective in dealing with leaders such as Qaddafi and convincing him to negotiate or step down voluntarily. On the other hand, because Qaddafi had coup-proofed his regime, the military was virtually powerless, making a military intervention more feasible.[9] In the case of Yemen, Saleh's personalist rule led to a severely weakened military that was unable to maintain control over its own territory and had great difficulty fighting off a highly fractured opposition. The only loyal groups to Saleh came from a special forces' unit led by one of Saleh's sons and a presidential guards unit, also led by one of Saleh's sons.[10] Qaddafi's military had also been significantly weakened. His main forces fighting for him were mercenaries along with a ragtag group of loyalists that were paid well to do so. Thus, though it is very difficult to negotiate with a personalist dictator, an international intervention against a personalist dictatorship is likely to be much more feasible than against a regime that has a strong military.[11]

Military Regimes
The regimes of Syria and Egypt differ in structure compared to Libya and Yemen. Though both Mubarak and Assad are powerful leaders, they also share power with a *powerful military*.[12] Therefore, we refer to these regimes as military regimes versus purely personalist. When the military holds power, even if this power is shared with a leader, the military still holds the key to the transition. The crucial factor in these transitions is the level of *military professionalism* and the *leverage and linkages* that the international community has on the military.

Militaries vary in terms of their level of professionalism, even in cases where the military is in power directly. Not all militaries are professionalized and many countries in the developing world are led by militaries that are more praetorian than professional.[13] [14] A professionalized military is centralized in that it does not compete against a private militia tasked with protecting the leader and his entourage. Libya under Qaddafi, Yemen under Saleh and Iraq under Saddam Hussein are illustrative of this. In all of these cases, Qaddafi, Saleh and Hussein prioritized a revolutionary force or a parallel militia to counter the strength of the regular army. As a result, in both cases the regular army possessed little power and most of the power was directly in the hands of the leader.

Professionalized militaries also utilize a more merit based criteria for recruitment and promotion rather than basing these on communal ties or loyalty. In Libya and Yemen, promotions in the military were based on loyalty instead of qualifications.[15] In Iraq, military commanders are chosen based on their

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[8] It's important to note that the paper is not arguing that the international community and the US in particular has always advocated authoritarian breakdown when it has a stable autocratic ally. Rather the paper is pointing out the factors that are most conducive to removing an autocrat once it becomes clear that there is a domestic audience that may be in favour of this—or when it becomes clear that removing the autocrat is necessary for stability. Like Realist paradigms that assume that states are self-interested, this paper does not argue that the West has had a history of supporting democratization. However, unlike realists, the paper argues that economic linkages can give the West more leverage in the case that the West wants to encourage an autocrat to step down, compared to cases where the West has no linkages at all. The paper is also not arguing that economic linkages will *cause* the West to want an autocrat to step down.

[9] Coup-proofing refers to a strategy of purposely weakening the military in order to undermine its ability to threaten the leader.

[10] See Michael Knights, "The Military Role in Yemen's Protests: Civil-Military Relations in the Tribal Republic," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36, no. 2 (2013): 261-288.

[11] See Mark Peceny and Caroline C. Beer, "Peaceful parties and puzzling personalists," *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 02 (2003): 339-342.

[12] Barbara Geddes classifies these two regimes as the same because they are similar in structure.

[13] Amos Perlmutter, "The Praetorian State and the Praetorian Army: Toward a Taxonomy of Civil-military Relations in Developing Polities," *Comparative Politics* 1, no. 3 (1969).

[14] In personalist dictatorships, the military is rarely professionalized since the leader fears that a professionalized force may stage a coup (See Geddes 1999).

[15] Mehran Kamrava, "Military Professionalization and Civil-Military Relations in the Middle East," *Political Science Quarterly* 115, no. 1 (2000): 83.

loyalty to Hussein rather than their merit. They are also routinely rotated to prevent them from gaining an independent power base.[16] [17]

Professionalized militaries are more committed to their corporate survival over lucrative entrepreneurial activities. Finally professionalized militaries are well paid and well trained.[18]

A professionalized military prioritizes the hierarchy, discipline, cohesiveness and effectiveness of its organization.[19] A more professionalized military will usually step down even before the international community steps in if the military thinks that any one of these goals is being threatened.[20] As Eric Nordlinger claims, most officers "would probably have much preferred to remain in the barracks if their objectives, particularly the defence or enhancement of the military's corporate interests, could have been realized from that vantage point."[21] Thus, military officers often do not want to hold direct power indefinitely. Military regimes in Turkey, Ecuador, Honduras, Peru and Bolivia to name a few have, have all stepped down from power after short periods of time.

In addition to effectiveness and cohesiveness, military regimes care about their budgets. When leaders tamper with military budgets, this has often resulted in a coup d'état by disgruntled officers (such as in Thailand). This also means that militaries that are dependent on foreign countries for their budgets are likely to step down if pressured to do so. If they feel that a source of their income will be affected by staying in power, they prefer to go back to the barracks. In these instances, the international community may exercise more leverage.

The military regimes in Chile, Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil were all relatively well linked up to the international community and professionalized. In spite of the human rights abuses, they continued to receive support from many countries, most notably the United States. Once this support was withdrawn, the militaries all chose to negotiate their exits. This is the most common mode of exit for military regimes with professionalized militaries. Research has demonstrated that professionalized military regimes prefer to leave before they completely tarnish their reputation and are often receptive to pressure to step down when they are linked up with the international community.[22]

The Importance of Leverage
According to Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, leverage refers to authoritarian governments' vulnerability to external pressures (including a military intervention) and consists of three factors.[23] When authoritarian regimes are poor, powerless and militarily and/or financially dependent on the international community, the West exercises leverage over them. Competing foreign policy agendas also affect leverage. For example when Western governments are in disagreement about the importance of supporting authoritarian breakdown, this decreases the leverage they hold over them. However, when Western governments have important economic and security interests at stake, this increases their leverage. Finally, leverage is affected by whether or not autocrats have access to alternative sources of political, economic or military support. Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe has

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[16] Kamrava, "Military Professionalization and Civil-Military," 83.

[17] Though Hussein's military was large and had access to many weapons, it was not as effective in battle as it should have been- such as in the long war at

[18] For more on professionalized militaries see Natasha Ezrow and Erica Frantz, *Failed States and Institutional Decay* (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2013).

[19] Barbara Geddes, "Authoritarian Breakdown." Manuscript. Department of Political Science, UCLA (2004).

[20] See Geddes 1999; Janowitz 1960; Janowitz 1977

[21] Eric Nordlinger, *Soldiers in Politics: Military Coups and Governments* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977): 142.

[22] See Barbara Geddes 2004

[23] The paper acknowledges that a military intervention is a tool of last resort by the international community. Being able to effectively remove a leader by force is not a given. Therefore leverage also consists of the ability to forcibly remove a leader. There is no leverage when there are no feasible options for removing a leader.

benefited from support from Russia and has benefited in the past from Libya. North Korea still benefits from support from China, though this has abated in recent years.

Referring to the West's leverage over many of the developing countries that were democratizing during the 1990s, Levitsky and Way commented that intervention helped stop military coups from taking place in Ecuador, Haiti and Guatemala while external pressure made a difference in forcing dictators to cede power or hold multi-party elections in countries such as Benin, Ivory Coast, Malawi, Serbia and Georgia. Some of the sticks that could be applied as leverage include: political conditionality, punitive sanctions, diplomatic pressure, military intervention, and threats to cut foreign aid. Levitsky and Way comment that though leverage is important and can determine whether or not a successful intervention will take place, *leverage on its own* is often not sufficient to convince leaders to step down.

The Number of Linkages Matter As Well

Levitsky and Way argue that authoritarian regimes are more vulnerable to pressures to step down when more linkages exist between the international community and the authoritarian regime in question. Linkages are defined as the density of ties that authoritarian regimes had to the United States, the European Union and to other Western dominated international institutions. Linkages include tourism, migration, diaspora communities, education in the West, cross-border telecommunications, internet connections, Western media penetration, civil society ties and ties to NGOs.[24]

The number of linkages that exist between the international community and authoritarian regimes is therefore important also because these *shape the preference of domestic actors in the West*. The more dense and frequent the linkages, the more likely that "government abuses will reverberate in Western capitals." This will lead to more lobbying on behalf of Western pro-democracy groups to push for action from Western governments. More lobbying may lead to greater media coverage of human rights abuses by authoritarian regimes which may result in increased pressure for action by Western governments. Linkages may also *raise the prestige of domestic groups within authoritarian regimes*. Ties to influential foreign actors such as Western governments, parties, international organizations and NGOs also may help protect opposition groups from repression. Linkages may also help domestic groups within authoritarian regimes gain valuable information about worldwide events, democratization movements and best strategies in pressuring for authoritarian breakdown. Thus in the age of globalization and the mass media, linkages play an important role in encouraging and coordinating the protests of the Arab Spring.

Do increased linkages and leverage make a difference in personalist dictatorships?

With personalist dictatorships, the international community does not need to influence the military but must convince the leader that there is no choice available to them other than stepping down from power. The international community often has leverage over personalist dictatorships simply because their militaries are very weak, and threats are credible and interventions more feasible.

Anecdotal evidence shows that personalist dictatorships that are well linked to the international community are more vulnerable to pressure from the international community. Many personalist dictatorships intentionally choose to isolate themselves from the international community because it constrains their behaviour too much. However, some personalist dictators have been well linked to the international community, providing more opportunities to push for reform.

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[24] Levitsky and Way, "International Linkage and Democratization," 22-23.

During Jerry Rawlings' rule (1981-2000) Ghana was heavily aided by Western governments and donors and was well linked to international financial institutions, such as the IMF.[25] Ghana was also involved in many international and regional organizations. Ghana also has had a large NGO presence. Many student exchanges took place between Ghanaian students and Western students. Jerry Rawlings finally stepped down after significant pressure was placed on him by the international community in 2000, including a visit from President Clinton, who put pressure on states in Africa that they needed to democratize.

Didier Ratsiraka of Madagascar (1975-1993) stepped down in 1993 amidst international condemnation and protest from civil society groups including the Catholic Church, as well as threats to withhold foreign aid.[26] Madagascar was very well linked to the international community through the vast number of environmental NGOs present in the country. It was a recipient of a record number of IMF assistance programmes. It was also a huge recipient of foreign aid from France. Dependent on the West and threatened by protests, Ratsiraka had little choice but to leave Madagascar.

In Malawi, the combination of damning Amnesty International reports on human rights abuses under Hastings Banda (1966-1994), student protests, the threat of sanctions and constant pressure to withhold foreign aid forced Banda to hold a referendum that would eventually lead to him agreeing to step down in 1993.[27] Banda was almost entirely dependent upon Western donors to prop up his regime. NGOs and human rights groups were able to connect with the media to highlight the repression committed by the regime, and emphasize the urgency for change.

In the case of Libya, the international community had the power and resolve to overthrow the Qaddafi regime once it became clear that ousting him was the only way forward to re-stabilize the country. There were several factors that facilitated the decision for the West to offer military support. First, the Libyan military was not a formidable foe. Second, Libya was one of the most politically isolated states in the Arab world. Qaddafi having invaded five out of six of his neighbours, few states in the Arab world were likely to come to his defence after the West offered air support to the rebels.

Though the international community had leverage, linkages were few. Educational exchanges primarily took place amongst the elite, not the population at large. Though the relationship between Qaddafi and the West had improved dramatically, Libya was not a consistent member of many regional or international organizations, and never joined the World Trade Organization. Internet access was highly regulated. Travel links were few if any. There was little Western media penetration and relatively few NGOs present. Therefore, pressure to step down from domestic and foreign sources was likely to reap few rewards. The regime was very isolated, out of touch and increasingly delusional.

In the case of Yemen, the international community also exercised some leverage over its leadership. First, the international community was in full agreement that Saleh's time was up. Its former allies such as the United States and Saudi Arabia put pressure on Saleh to resign and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) produced an initiative which called on Saleh to relinquish power. Though these efforts were initially spurned numerous times, Saleh eventually stepped down in February of 2012. It was Saudi Arabia in particular that orchestrated the GCC peace deal by offering its capital as a venue

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[25] Jerry Rawlings is categorized as a personalist dictatorship according to Geddes' dataset.
[26] Didier Ratsiraka is also categorized as a personalist dictatorship according to Geddes' dataset.
[27] Hastings Banda is categorized as a personalist dictatorship according to Geddes' dataset.

to sign the deal and inviting Saleh and other top officials that had been injured in an attack to undergo treatment in Riyadh. By June of 2011, Saudi officials had made it clear to Saleh that he was not allowed to return to Yemen.

Though linkages with Yemen are few, it is still better connected than Libya was. Yemen is one of the poorest countries in the world and is highly dependent on the international community. It is a member of the United Nations, the Arab League, the International Atomic Energy Agency and it is currently a partial observer to the Gulf Cooperation Council, hoping to become a member. Yemen receives billions in aid from many countries in the Gulf and the US also provided it with millions (some $25 million annually) due to its cooperation during the War on Terror. Yemen also receives substantial aid from the Middle East Partnership Initiative, the World Bank and USAID. Though the regime clung to power for as long as it could, it was ultimately too dependent on the Gulf States and the international community.

How do linkages and leverage matter in the case of Syria and Egypt?
While the West has developed substantial links with Egypt, few links were ever established with Syria. Compounding this, the West lacks leverage with Syria as well. Before explaining why this is the case it's important to highlight several differences that exist between the Egyptian and Syrian militaries, in terms of their level of professionalism—and how this has impacted the motivation of the Egyptian and Syrian militaries.

Military professionalism
As stated before, military regimes are often motivated by maintaining unity and legitimacy in the eyes of the public. They have the option of retaining indirect power and widespread support if they force an unpopular leader out of power. In most cases, military regimes are amenable to international and domestic pressure to force a leader to step down (for example the military has stepped down many times in Thailand, Pakistan and Nigeria). Why has the military in Syria been so resistant to domestic and international pressure?

Though both Egypt and Syria are military regimes, there are differences in their level of professionalism, with the Egyptian military being more professionalized than the Syrian military. At the onset, they share some common characteristics. Neither military has had to compete with a parallel organization charged with guarding the elites, draining resources away from the regular armed forces. Both military regimes also have had access to a plethora of lucrative entrepreneurial activities.[28] Additionally, in both cases, the military elites have been well paid. In the case of Syria, the upper ranks have had direct access to the oil revenues the country produces and are well compensated for their loyalty, lessening the likelihood that Syrian officials would stage a coup.

Nevertheless, the Egyptian military is both better trained than the Syrian military and uses more professional and merit-based methods of recruitment and promotion.[29] Though the recruitment process of the Egyptian military is by no means entirely merit based, the composition of the Egyptian military is not based on religious or kinship ties. After the disastrous 1967 war with Israel, Egypt's military was revamped to become more professional.[30] Most commanders that were considered to be incompetent were purged or retired. The command structures were revised and improved upon. Military training was also strengthened.[31]

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[28] The Egyptian military controls 50% of manufacturing.
[29] Thomas C. Bruneau and Florina Cristiana Matei. The Routledge Handbook of Civil-military Relations (London: Routledge, 2012).
[30] Kamrava, Military Professionalization and Civil-Military," 81.
[31] Kamrava, Military Professionalization and Civil-Military," 81.

This differs markedly from the case of Syria. More notably after Hafez Assad (Bashar's father) took power in Syria in 1970 (but also during the French Mandate period) Syria has engaged in communal recruitment methods for its security institutions. While in a professionalized military, recruitment patterns are based on merit more than kinship or religious ties, the Syrian military is composed mostly of Alawites (12% of the population), the same religious sect as Assad and his family with only the lower ranks filled by Sunnis. Recruitment patterns and promotions are mostly based on sectarian ties (roughly 70% of the armed forces are Alawite). It's worth noting that in addition to the military, the police and intelligence services are also almost entirely recruited from the Alawite community. Communal military recruitment is one strategy used by dictators to ensure that the military is completely loyal. It also means that the military is more cohesive and less prone to splits since they all share the same kinship background. Many of those in command are tied to the Assad family by blood.

A more professionalized military should be better trained with a stronger commitment to defending the national interest, defending its legitimacy in the eyes of the nation and going "back to the barracks" if necessary. In the Syrian military most of the elite consist of a minority group and it was therefore never considered to be a legitimate institution. Because the Syrian military lacks legitimacy, the Alawite military leadership has no exit strategy. Moreover, in contrast to Egypt, the military does not view exiting power (stepping down from its leadership role) as crucial to maintaining legitimacy and corporate cohesiveness. With the notable exception of former Colonel Riad al-Assad (who left the Syrian armed forces to join the Free Syrian army), military defections of higher ranks are unlikely. The Syrian military is mostly concerned with defending itself at any cost, even if this directly conflicts with minimizing the number of Syrian casualties.

It's also important to note that because the military is not completely professionalized it has not been as effective as it should be (given Syria's military spending, size, and access to weapons) in fighting off the rebels, leading to a stalemate. Communal recruitment patterns often result in militaries that are loyal to the leadership, but not as successful as they should be in battle. Recruitment and promotions patterns in Syria have been based on loyalty more so than merit. For example, a trusted friend of Hafez Assad was appointed to be the Syrian Air Force commander though he was not even a pilot.[32] Non-merit based promotions have continued under Bashar Assad. It's therefore not surprising that loosely organized groups of possibly 150,000 rebels have managed a stalemate with a fighting force that was supposedly 200,000 strong and equipped with more modern weapons. The military's lack of professionalism has resulted in a conflict that is more protracted and drawn-out.

Egypt's military is better trained, uses professional methods of promotion and recruitment, and has a stronger commitment to defending the national interest. It is (was) one of the most revered institutions in Egypt. During Egypt's revolution, the military exercised restraint against protesters when the revolution was underway. Because it was seen as legitimate, it did not see exiting as a zero sum game. The military was able to nudge Mubarak out of power, instead of firing on protesters and clinging to power until the bitter end. In addition, the desire to maintain its legitimacy and corporate character (as holding on to power would have led to major splits in the military) trumped any interest in overstaying its welcome and ruling directly.

Linkages and Leverage

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[32] Ezrow and Frantz, *Failed States and Institutional Decay*, chapter 6.

The ethnic composition of the military in Syria shapes its preference for defending the status quo at any cost. However, a bigger problem is that there are so few linkages between Syria and the West, and in particular between the Syrian military and the West. The West lacks both leverage and linkages with the Syrian government. This was not the case in Egypt.

In Egypt, internet connections are not blocked, students from Egypt are free to study in the West and vice versa. Tourism is one of the most important industries in Egypt. Many also have access to social networking sites and Western media outlets. The internet is not as regulated as in other authoritarian regimes. Many NGOs are based in Egypt and Egypt is well linked to the international and regional communities. Egypt is engaged in many different trading relationships around the globe. Egypt has also been the second biggest recipient of foreign aid from the US.[33] Therefore, the military is highly dependent on the West to maintain itself. Public protest on a world stage gave the Western supported regime little room to manoeuvre. Suppressing the protests could have led to negative repercussions for the Egyptian military, such as serious cuts in its military budget.[34] Though Egypt's military is more powerful and professionalized than Syria's, the number of linkages that exist between not only the Egyptian government but the Egyptian military and the West gave the military little choice than to push for Mubarak's removal once it became clear that the public had had enough.

In contrast to Egypt, the West has few linkages with Syria. Syria's military is not dependent upon the West for the bulk of its military aid. Ties between Syria and the West are few. Brief interludes have allowed for cooperation, but for the most part Syria has been the recipient of sanctions and has been labelled by the U.S. a rogue nation, or part of the "axis of evil." Internet access is mostly blocked. The tourism industry in Syria is underdeveloped. Few students study abroad in the West and even fewer non-Arabs choose to study in Syria. Syria participates in some international and regional organizations but it trades very little with the West. Its primary trading partners are Iraq and Lebanon. It is not a current member of the World Trade Organization. It generally lacks access to international money and capital markets. Thus any linkages with the West are few.

The other issue is that the West has little leverage with Syria. Though the Syrian military is nowhere near as powerful compared to the US or NATO, fighting against the Syrian military would be much more difficult than it was against the Libyan forces under Qaddafi. Another problem is that there is little Western consensus on what to do regarding Syria. Invading could lead to a huge backlash from Arab countries and Russia, and would divide much of the West.[35] This contrasts with Libya where intervention was tacitly agreed upon.[36] The other problem is that Syria receives aid from alternative sources. It still enjoys a relatively close relationship with and support from Iran and Russia. This enables Syria to continue its policies of terrible atrocities, unconcerned that aid or support would be cut from Iran and Russia.

Both leverage and linkages are important in understanding the tools at the disposal of the West in pushing autocrats to step down. But it is also important to understand *who* exactly holds power and what their motivations are. The military in Syria has no reason to step down. They are committed to defending the status quo and unconcerned about their legitimacy. If Syria was run only by Assad and his family, forcing them out would be an easier undertaking. If Syria was better linked up to the international community, the regime would also have much more to lose by isolating itself and

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[33] Egypt had also established a cold peace with Israel for many years.
[34] The US gives Egypt $1.3 billion annually in military aid.
[35] This is especially true given the West's invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan.
[36] For more on this, see Ivo H. Daalder and James G. Stavridis. "NATO's victory in Libya: the right way to run an intervention," *Foreign Affairs* 91, no. 2 (2012): 1-7

refusing to negotiate early on. All of these factors make it difficult for the international community to impact the outcome in Syria.

Bashar al-Assad's isolation and delusions
In addition to the military, a final problem extending the crisis is the ruling family in Syria. Because few linkages have been established with Syria, the Assad family is very isolated from the West. And isolated leaders and their entourage tend to become more delusional with time. Qaddafi' family and tribal style of rule led to behaviour that could hardly be considered rational. His intent on clinging to power was encouraged by the constant support he received from the yes-men he surrounded himself with. The close connection between tribal and family members who ruled the regime reinforced their feelings of defiance in the face of their demise. Saddam Hussein of Iraq faced a similar downfall. Rarely travelling outside of Iraq and surrounding himself with a small circle of key advisors, mostly from his same religious sect, tribe and hometown, Hussein was the recipient of false reporting and bad intelligence. Facing his certain defeat, he was delusional and defiant until the very end.

Unlike Hussein and Qaddafi, Assad does not exclusively hold power in his own hands. The Assad family holds tremendous influence. One of the more powerful members of the inner circle, Bashar's younger brother Maher is a commander of the Republican Guard and is noted for his brutality. Maher responded to the initial protests in Syria with a massive display of force. He has also been accused of forcing his troops to fire on unarmed protesters. Other members of the inner circle are equally out of touch. The Assad inner circle is a tight-knit group but like the regimes of Qaddafi and Saddam, their lack of interaction with objective experts affects the quality of their intelligence and guidance about what is the most rational course of action. The Assad family will be delusional and defiant until the very end.

Assad's isolation in Syria contrasts with Mubarak in Egypt.[37] Mubarak and his elite group were well linked with the international community. Mubarak had met countless times with leaders from the US, Europe, Russia, Asia and Latin America. Mubarak's close aide and Vice President, Omar Suleiman was also involved closely with the West, enjoying a close relationship with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in the US.[38] Many of the key members of the Armed Forces in Egypt were also closely connected to Western powers.

Few Choices Remain
While other dictatorships have been toppled, in Syria the Assad clan is still in power and the Syrian conflict rages on. Several factors have made the conflict in Syria enduring and difficult. The West usually has high levels of *leverage* on personalist regimes because their militaries are very weak. Because military regimes tend to have a large fighting force (though not always professionalized and effective), this makes ousting a military dictatorship by force much more difficult (especially if they are supported by an outside power unconcerned about democracy). However, military regimes often have incentives to leave power (because they are professionalized or are dependent on Western foreign aid for their budget). When this is the case, pressuring the dictator in charge to leave power should be a more peaceful process, relatively speaking.

Military regimes that are not well linked to the West are the most difficult to force out, however. This is especially the case if communal recruitment methods are used, which enhances the military's commitment to the regime rather than the nation. For the Syrian military, there appears to be no

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[37] Assad's primary allies are Iran, Hezbollah and Russia.
[38] Rod Nordland, "Omar Suleiman, Powerful Egypt Spy Chief, Dies at 76," *New York Times*, July 19, 2012.

attractive option of life after politics. The other problem is that the military elite and Bashar's inner circle are such a tight knit group, gelled together by family and sectarian ties. They have little access to sage guidance from more rational perspectives and the quality of their information and advice is poor. As they see it, they also have little to lose and everything to gain by staying in power indefinitely, which severely limits the policy choices of the West.

At this point there are few choices available for the West. It has been estimated that as many as 25,000 members of the Syrian armed forces have defected to the Free Syrian Army.[39] These defectors are mostly lower rank Sunnis (the Free Syrian Army officially claims to not be a sectarian group), who have been lured to fight for the Free Syrian Army or at least give up the arms and flee. Thousands more have been recruited to join other militias, insurgencies and terrorist groups. Yet, the Syrian Army still has the advantage in numbers and fire power. Moreover, the opposition remains very divided and fragmented.

The only countries with much leverage over Syria are Russia and Iran, and both are committed to supporting the Assad-led regime indefinitely. Because the West has no leverage and no linkages to Syria, it's unreasonable to believe that diplomacy will have any impact in getting the Assad-led regime to step down. A long stalemate is now likely to stretch on for years. The case of Syria illustrates the downside to isolating a "rogue" regime with a large communally recruited military force. Though policies of engagement don't always lead to the preferred outcome, the alternative gives policymakers few options (if any) in the event that they want to push unpopular dictatorships to step down. The case of Syria has important implications for how to deal with other rogue military regimes. Isolation reduces the number of available options to policymakers.

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[39] Basma Atassi, "Free Syrian Army grows in influence" Al Jazeera, Nov 16, 2011.

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