

## BOOK REVIEW

***Military Responses to the Arab Uprisings and the Future of Civil-Military Relations in the Middle East: Analysis from Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Syria.* William C. Taylor. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. Pp. 252.**

William C. Taylor is a former Assistant Professor of American foreign policy at the United States Military Academy at West Point. He is a renowned expert in Arab military affairs and aims to enlighten his readers about how the militaries of different Arab countries responded to the civil uprisings in 2011. By comparing the military responses in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Syria, he has sought to shed light on the reasons why the military leadership in each of these countries played omnifarious roles. It is a very important book given the latest developments such as the conferring of a preliminary death sentence to Egyptian President, Mohamed Morsi, and the on-going conflict in Yemen. Furthermore, recent bomb attacks in Tunisia and Saudi Arabia have contributed to chaos in the region, while Syria has become a battleground for competing interests, in particular, between the Gulf monarchies and Iran and its allies. To top it all is the ever increasing threat of the Islamic State which is operating from captured territories in Syria and Iraq, attracting support from Muslims across the world and demanding that all should swear allegiance to its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

The activities of the Arab militia were of great significance during the rise of the 'Arab Spring'. The common storyline has always focused on the roles of young people and the social media, and the role of the military has not been given too much analysis. Thus, the meticulously made decisions of the army leadership have been parry to scrutiny. It is this aspect that William C. Taylor has tried to cover by separately examining the role of the military in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria and Libya. The militia leadership in each country had to pick one side - the people or the present rulers. It must be noted that this book has also been enriched and seasoned by the firsthand experience Taylor has had on Arab military thinking, having served as military advisor to an Iraqi infantry battalion.

The methodical approach he uses to explain the Arab militia's decision allows the reader to comprehend the events easily. He uses the concepts of 'interests' and 'restraints' to help silhouette Arab military leadership behaviour. This model showcases the questions that the leadership had to ask themselves of how capable were they of influencing the outcome of the struggle, and if so, should they undertake strong actions? No one wants to be at the receiving end of the gun. Arab militaries in each of the case study countries had different reactions. Tunisia was the stage from which the uprising took off. The Tunisian army had always been treated poorly by the dictator, Ben Ali, and so had little incentive to fight for the regime. Instead, they carefully gauged the progress of the revolution. When Ben Ali finally asked General Ammar to support the regime, the General refused to do so and told the dictator that the regime's days were numbered. Ali then had no choice but to seek asylum abroad. After the confrontation, the military fused itself within the government and General Ammar was declared the hero of the revolution.

In Egypt, the case was noticeably different. Before the revolution, the military had lost much of its political influence; however, it still maintained huge shares in economic assets across the country. Nevertheless, many military personnel were still unsatisfied with the regime especially with the idea that President Mubarak was grooming his son Gamal to carry the Mubarak legacy forward. Added to this was the fact that Gamal had never served in the military and was seen as merely a means for extending what was already a failed government. The Egyptian military stood the 'middle ground'; they sided with the people but also had a no-tolerance policy when it came to intrusion from political parties. In short, Taylor rationalizes, 'low restraints and low interests' involved best explain their decision, feigning a slow response and only removing Mubarak from office when the military felt its interests were being threatened.

Syria, Taylor explains, is different from its regional counterparts because it has endured increasing strife and unrest since the revolts started in 2011. The uprisings had little to do with sectarian divisions and more to do with a lifeless economy and limited freedom coupled with extreme police repression. The military response or the decision making process

has not been studied nor understood primarily because the regime is surrounded by much secrecy, little media coverage, and a highly controlled police state. All demonstrations are brutally stamped out, and even before 2011, the army was well-known for its internal clampdowns on protestors. In a nutshell, despite their falling status in Syrian society, the military have sided with the present regime. It sees little to gain by supporting the protestors because of its close association with the Al-Assad establishment; in fact upholding the present regime is their only means of survival.

Turning to Libya's case, Taylor asserts that President Gaddafi was a ruler who believed that the idea of his own people turning against him was inconceivable. If it was not for the UN and NATO interference, Gaddafi may very well have survived the revolt. Libya's story is one where "fractured support" was a major feature. Throughout most of the revolution, while the elite military had little incentive to turn against Gaddafi, contrastively, the regular militia had high interests in toppling the Gaddafi regime. Thus, a muddled overall response can be seen. Until the outcome of the revolt became clear, many individuals and military units engaged in slow-decision making and essentially abstained from partaking in the riots.

Taylor also talks about US influence on Arab decision-making. He points out that a common notion exists that the Arab militia, which had been educated in the US, were more likely to side with the people opposed to the regime. However, his results showed no such correlation. In fact, the results only served to point out that such conceptions should be removed from the US policy makers' mindsets. In conclusion, Taylor discusses about the future of Arab Civil-Military relations by presenting different scenarios that any military can choose to act upon. These range from a modern Arab state in which the common people, the state and the militia go hand in hand peacefully, to one where the military would execute a coup d'état and enforce emergency.

This book provides a comprehensive analysis of an aspect of the Arab Spring which has not previously been explored. With careful examination, using the methodological approach of 'interest' and 'restraint', it provides

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amazing insights, which not only cater to political scientists, but to a general audience as well. Even though at some points the details may become overwhelming, it is in short, a useful guide for policy makers, academics, students and the general audience alike.

Arhama Siddiqa, Research Fellow,  
*Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad.*

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