

Anarchy's Anatomy: Two-Tiered Security Systems and Libya's Civil Wars

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No issue deserves more scrutiny than the mechanisms whereby popular unrest unleashes civil wars. We argue that one institution—two-tiered security systems—are particularly pernicious in terms of the accompanying civil war risk. These systems' defining characteristic is the juxtaposition of small communally stacked units that protect regimes from internal adversaries with larger regular armed forces that deter external opponents. These systems aggravate civil war risks because stacked security units lack the size to repress widespread dissent, but inhibit rapid regime change through coup d'état. Regular militaries, meanwhile, fracture when ordered to employ force against populations from which they were recruited.

Keywords: coup proofing; civil-military relations; civil war; Libya; ethnic stacking

Introduction

Perhaps no security issue deserves more scrutiny than the risk of revolutions provoking civil wars. Liberal democracies normatively support, at least in principle, populations' efforts to unseat authoritarian rulers. Many revolutions, however, give way to civil wars rather than democratic consolidation. When protracted wars follow revolutions they kill more individuals and generate greater disruption than the revolutions themselves. Even once one side prevails, many post-revolutionary states succumb to further civil wars, which inflict additional damage.

A growing body of scholarship explores how civil-military institutions shape military responses to uprisings. Building on this literature, we argue that how pre-revolutionary governments institutionalize their monopolies on violence impacts both whether mass protests catalyze civil wars and whether post-revolutionary governments face further civil war risks. One particular institution—two-tiered security systems—is particularly poor at coping with transitions in power. Two-tiered systems juxtapose communally stacked units that protect regimes from internal adversaries with larger regular forces that recruit more broadly and defend states from external opponents.

We argue, however, that although two-tiered systems are a rational response to the threats many authoritarian regimes face, they create acute and recurrent civil war risks whenever popular contestation escalates beyond a certain threshold. Such is the case because two-tiered systems are difficult for revolutionaries to swiftly unseat, yet lack the force needed to repress widespread uprisings. Stacked units generally fight for their regimes and prevent regular units from supplanting governments by coup d'état. These forces, however, lack the size to repress massive dissent. Regular forces, meanwhile, are

likely to fracture when governments order them to employ indiscriminant violence against populations from which they were recruited.

Mass protests plunge two-tiered systems into civil war when regular units reassess their loyalties, yet regime protection units fight on. States with such systems are also prone to follow-on civil wars after anti-regime forces triumph because of the likely fragmentation of their post-revolutionary security environments. Within the victorious rebel coalition, defectors from the regular armed forces and civilian insurgents will vie for power and resist integration into a new national military. The remnants of the previous regime's stacked units will also likely challenge the new regime whenever they possess the requisite firepower.

The Military Loyalty *Problématique*

A monopoly on force within a territory has long been considered critical to modern states. Max Weber posited that an entity could only be defined as a state when it 'successfully upholds a claim to the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force in the enforcement of its order.'¹ While few disagree with Weber, there is no consensus as to what types of force states must possess. In principle, regimes need force for some combination of the following: 1) quelling domestic unrest; 2) defending against foreign adversaries; and 3) protecting the regime from a coup d'état.

Scholars since the 2011 Arab Spring have shed new light on when militaries loyally execute the first mission. One popular explanation attributes variations in behavior to whether armed forces are 'institutionalized' or 'patrimonial'. According to

¹ Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: Free Press 1964), 154.

Eva Bellin, institutionalized militaries exist independently from regimes and can therefore accept the latter's fall. By way of contrast, clientelistic ties connect patrimonial militaries to regimes to such a degree that the former cannot subsist without the latter.² Holger Albrecht extends this dichotomy to officers' self-enrichment, with institutional militaries providing revenues independent of the regime and patrimonial ones connecting officers to the regime via the executive's provision of rents.³

Despite its plausibility, the institutional/patrimonial dichotomy provides an imperfect metric. To begin with, the institutional/patrimonial dichotomy cannot account for the range of outcomes—including militaries obeying governments, turning against them, splintering and provoking post-revolutionary civil wars—observed during the Arab Spring. Michael Makara suggests that the dichotomy also over-simplifies a range of practices, such as communal stacking policies and the creation of parallel militaries.⁴ Many militaries, indeed, combine institutional and patrimonial characteristics. Patrimonialism can, for example, dictate senior appointments or determine elite units' recruitments even in militaries otherwise organized along institutional lines. Furthermore, as Alejandro Pachon demonstrates, states structure their militaries in response to particular threat matrices.⁵ To understand how any military will behave, scholars must therefore examine the historic processes by which the state developed security institutions.

² Eva Bellin, 'Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Arab Spring', *Comparative Politics* 44/2 (2012) 127-49.

³ Holger Albrecht, 'Does Coup-Proofing Work? Political-Military Relations in Authoritarian Regimes amid the Arab Uprisings', *Mediterranean Politics* 20/1 (2015) 36-54.

⁴ Michael Makara, 'Rethinking Military Behavior During the Arab Spring', *Defense & Security Analysis* 32/3 (2016) 209-223.

⁵ Alejandro Pachon, 'Loyalty and Defection: Misunderstanding Civil-Military Relations in Tunisia During the Arab Spring', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 37/4 (2014) 508-31.

Designing institutions appropriate to the precise threats that a state faces is, however, a fraught process. Modern bureaucratized militaries evolved broad-based forms of recruitment and functionally distinct branches in Western Europe for the primarily purpose of defending states against external threats.⁶ Such militaries are suboptimal, however, for suppressing uprisings or preventing coups. Fear of challenges such as these drive many regimes to depart from this model by offering expanded benefits to the officer corps in exchange for loyalty vis-à-vis domestic adversaries. Governments can increase the high command's contentedness by expanding its autonomy, allowing generals to determine promotions and determine defense-spending priorities.

Taken to an extreme, this can involve regimes sharing power with the military and according them formal seats in ruling councils.⁷ Material incentives—in the form of high defense budgets, elevated salaries and business opportunities—can further cement the military's loyalty.⁸ Governments can furthermore develop security services, ranging from riot police to secret police, to disengage the armed forces from domestic tasks that they dislike and for which they are unsuited.⁹ Authoritarians from Indonesia's Hajji Suharto to Egypt's Hosni Mubarak applied these techniques to ensure long periods of stable governance.¹⁰

⁶ Otto Hintze, 'Military Organization and the Organization of the State', in Felix Gilbert (ed.), *The Historical Essays of Otto Hintze* (New York: Oxford UP 1975), 175-215.

⁷ Terence Lee, *Defect or Defend: Military Responses to Popular Protests in Authoritarian Asia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2015), 22-59.

⁸ Zeinab Abul-Magd, *Militarizing the Nation: The Army, Business and Revolution in Egypt* (New York: Columbia UP 2016), 1-165.

⁹ Yezid Sayigh, 'Agencies of Coercion: Armies and Internal Security Forces', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43/3 (2011) 403-05.

¹⁰ Abul-Magd, *Militarizing the Nation*, 78-151; and Lee, *Defect or Defend*, 104-50.

Substantial drawbacks accompany such measures however. To secure a military's loyalty in this way requires governments to cede resources and make policy concessions such that the military dominates the state without governing it.¹¹ When such militaries repress discontent, they often exploit the occasions to expand their perquisites. Weber postulated this dynamic in his "paradox of the sultan" wherein an autocrat's reliance on force leads commanders to regard themselves as the real source of the regime's authority.¹² Even so, material incentives often prove insufficient guarantees of military loyalty in the face of uprisings since officers recognize that they will suffer retribution if they follow governmental orders, yet the regime nonetheless collapses. Displacing regimes will consequently often better serve armed forces' interests than supporting them.¹³

Many regimes resolve such problems by stacking their officer corps with members of the President's ethnic group.¹⁴ Prior studies demonstrate that stacking the officer corps' upper and middle ranks mitigates coup risk because officers are reluctant to overthrow regimes that benefit them disproportionately.¹⁵ This form of stacking is hardly a panacea though. For one thing, stacking the officer corps cannot guarantee enlisted personnel's obedience in repressing uprisings. As Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan demonstrate, uprisings overthrow regimes when rank-and-file soldiers defect rather than fire upon

¹¹ Steven Cook, *Ruling but Not Governing: The Military and Political Development in Egypt, Algeria and Turkey* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP 2007).

¹² Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology, Vol. 1* (Berkeley: University of California 1978), 231-32.

¹³ Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2010), 56-61.

¹⁴ Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California 2000 [second edition]), 443-562.

¹⁵ Philip Roessler, 'The Enemy Within: Personal Rule, Coups, and Civil War in Africa', *World Politics* 63/2 (2011) 300-46.

protestors.¹⁶ Worse still, stacking an officer corps' higher echelons increases the likelihood that resentful junior officers or non-commissioned officers will attempt coups. Although Naunihal Singh shows that such "coups from below" are less likely to succeed, they nonetheless account for one-sixth of coup attempts and nine percent of successful coups.¹⁷

Regimes can guard against these threats by adopting a more comprehensive form of stacking, wherein they fill the enlisted ranks as well with members of the President's community. In principle, this should reinforce the military's willingness to suppress unrest and reduce the incentives for any military faction to attempt a coup by aligning the interests of junior officers and rank-and-file personnel with those of the regime. Governments, such as André Kolingba's in the Central African Republic (1981-1993) and Paul Kagame's in Rwanda (1994-present), employed this form of stacking to insulate their minority governments. Jordan's stacking of combat units almost exclusively from trans-Jordanian Bedouin constitutes a prominent Middle Eastern example of this form of stacking.¹⁸

Comprehensively stacking militaries along these lines hinges, however, on armed forces remaining small relative to the state's population. Such stacking becomes problematic as militaries grow larger and is impossible for states that rely on conscription.¹⁹ Such is the case for many Middle Eastern and North African states, where

¹⁶ Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia UP 2011), 1-84.

¹⁷ Naunihal Singh, *Seizing Power: The Strategic Logic of Military Coups* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins 2014), 41-78.

¹⁸ Rolf Schwarz, *War and State Building in the Middle East* (Gainesville: Florida UP 2012), 58-74.

¹⁹ James Quinlivan, 'Coup-Proofing: Its Practice and Consequences in the Middle East', *International Security* 24/2 (1999) 131-65.

inter-state threats drive regimes to maintain large militaries.²⁰ Other factors can prevent less militarized states from embracing comprehensive stacking as well. Governments may fail to recruit enough personnel from the President's group in states where enlisted service enjoys little prestige, a condition prevalent in post-colonial Africa. External partners—whether states providing security assistance or organizations offering peacekeeping contracts—may also dissuade governments from such discrimination within the armed forces.

Two-Tiered Security Systems and Civil War

Many authoritarians therefore find themselves in a position where ordinary stacking offers insufficient protection against uprisings and comprehensive stacking is impractical. What we term two-tiered security systems constitute a pragmatic and oftentimes effective strategy for these states to meet their security needs. One component of such systems are communally stacked units designed to protect regimes against dissent. These well-resourced units possess the firepower to suppress modest uprisings and can thwart coups by preventing regular units from seizing important buildings and communications facilities.²¹ They are, however, too small to fight foreign wars. Governments therefore also maintain larger conventional forces. Although doubtfully reliable against domestic opponents, these forces reliably defend states from invasion.

Two-tiered systems are distinct from the related coup-proofing technique of “counterbalancing.”²² Whereas counterbalancing divides militaries into rival

²⁰ Jan Grebe and Max Mutschler (eds.), *Global Militarisation Index 2015* (Bonn: BICC, 2015) <<https://www.bicc.de/publications/publicationpage/publication/global-militarisation-index-2015-627/>>.

²¹ Theodore McLauchlin, ‘Loyalty Strategies and Military Defection in Rebellion’, *Comparative Politics* 42/3 (2010) 333-50.

²² Quinlivan, ‘Coup-Proofing’, 131-65.

organizations that check and balance one another, two-tiered systems rely on communal ties to ensure elite units' reliability. Therefore, while states from Brazil to Russia engage in counterbalancing, only regimes with an explicitly communal power base can develop two-tiered systems. Likewise, while counterbalancing reduces coups' success rates by incentivizing some soldiers to defend the regime, two-tiered systems leverage communal ties to further bolster stacked units' willingness to fight.²³

While two-tiered systems' ability to counter internal and external threats renders them attractive to many regimes, there are reasons for anticipating that such systems inhibit states from peacefully accommodating radical change. Prior scholarship, indeed, suggests that such regimes should be particularly vulnerable to recurrent civil wars. Since even less extensive forms of stacking augment civil war risks, two-tiered systems should further increase grievance-based civil wars' likelihood because they entail a higher degree of ethnic exclusion, with security units' enlisted ranks being stacked as well as the officer corps.²⁴ Mass protests, within this context, generate circumstances that plunge states into civil war by obliging governments to call upon regular forces once uprisings' scope exceed stacked units' repressive capacity. Ordering broadly recruited units to repress demonstrations is, however, risky because soldiers often defect and regular officers resent stacked units' privileges.²⁵ Two-tiered systems are therefore liable to disaggregate, with security units protecting the regime and the military fracturing.

²³ Erica De Bruin, 'Preventing Coups d'état: How Counterbalancing Works', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (2017) at: doi.org/10.1177/0022002717692652 (accessed February 2018).

²⁴ Lars-Erik Cederman et al., *Inequality, Grievances and Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2013), 57-92.

²⁵ Hicham Nassif, "'Second-Class': The Grievances of Sunni Officers in the Syrian Armed Forces", *Journal of Strategic Studies* 38/5 (2015) 626-49.

The civil war risk posed by two-tiered systems does not vanish, however, with successful revolutions. Three legacies of two-tiered systems—fragmented post-revolutionary security orders, the difficulty of integrating regular and irregular combatants, and the likelihood that stacked units’ remnants will contest the new regime— increase post-revolutionary civil wars’ probability.

To begin with, military defections to protestors under such systems leave multiple armed actors aspiring to dominate post-revolutionary regimes. Such is the case because regular forces fragment—with some joining protestors, others avoiding participation and others still obeying the government—rather than fighting cohesively for one side. Winning rebel coalitions therefore include both defected military units and other mobilized social groups. Such rebel fragmentation contributes in and of itself to civil war recurrence.²⁶

Caroline Hartzell and Matthew Hoddie demonstrate that governments can reduce post-revolutionary civil wars’ probability by integrating combatants into unified national militaries.²⁷ Integrating the regular and irregular combatants that co-exist in states that previously had two-tiered systems is more difficult than combining more intrinsically similar armed factions. The reason for this lies in how individuals acquire authority in each type of force. Whereas regular forces promote individuals based on educational qualifications, performance reviews and seniority, irregular leaders advance in authority due to their charisma and bravery. Fighters often elect their leaders and commanders seek consensus when making decisions. These distinct organizational logics render integration

²⁶ Michael Findley and Peter Rudloff, ‘Combattant Fragmentation and the Dynamics of Civil Wars’, *British Journal of Political Science* 42/4 (2012) 879-901.

²⁷ Caroline Hartzell and Matthew Hoddie, ‘Institutionalizing Peace: Power Sharing and Post-Civil War Conflict Management’, *American Journal of Political Science* 47/2 (2003) 318-32.

fraught. Irregular fighters often balk at military discipline and distrust officers who served previous regimes. Regular officers' devaluation and marginalization of irregulars, whom they deem underqualified, is according to David Latin an even greater obstacle to integration.²⁸ In the absence of integration, security sectors remain fragmented and civil wars probable.

Stacked units' remnants pose a third distinct civil war risk. According to Lars-Erik Cederman, Kristian Gleditsch and Halvard Buhaug, civil wars are most likely when hitherto privileged communities find themselves excluded from power.²⁹ Such is particularly the case when the groups that suffer status inversions are also heavily armed. Kristen Harkness demonstrates this hypothesis' plausibility by showing how militaries that have been stacked by one regime often attempt to overthrow succeeding governments.³⁰ We may therefore expect that stacked units' remnants will contest the new political order whenever they have the opportunity to do so.

Two-tiered systems are, in sum, a rational response to the threats that certain authoritarian regimes face. Such systems are resilient, providing adequate protection against foreign adversaries and domestic coups. There are powerful reasons for anticipating, however, that uprisings can plunge such systems into civil war and provoke further post-revolutionary conflicts. This study draws upon Libya's post-independence history to demonstrate two-tiered systems' heuristic value for assessing the challenges of political change in the Middle Eastern and African states with two-tiered systems. We

²⁸ David Latin, 'The Industrial Organization of Merged Armies', in Roy Licklider, (ed.), *New Armies From Old: Merging Competing Military Forces After Civil Wars* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown UP 2014), 231-43.

²⁹ Cederman et al., *Inequality, Grievances and Civil War*, 84-87.

³⁰ Kristen Harkness, 'The Ethnic Army and the State: Explaining Coup Traps and the Difficulties of Democratization in Africa', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 60/4 (2016) 587-616.

employ unique sources—British archival documents from the National Archives (TNA) and interviews conducted in Libya—to provide a more detailed account than hitherto possible of Libya’s systems’ emergence and impact.

Libya Between Internal and External Threats

The Libyan state’s creation in 1951 confronted its government with the dilemma of how to structure the state’s monopoly of force. King Idris I doubted his ability to control a national military. He therefore preferred to rely on his tribally stacked paramilitary force, the Cyrenaican Defense Force (CYDEF), and kept the regular military small and officered by foreigners. Mounting external threats broke down Idris’ initial model for controlling the military in 1956-58. He thereafter developed a two-tiered system, wherein an increasingly heavily armed CYDEF counterbalanced an ever-expanding military. Idris’ two-tiered system sustained his rule until 1969, but the coup that overthrew him nearly plunged Libya into civil war.

The territory known as Libya encompasses three distinct entities: Tripolitania in the northwest, Cyrenaica in the northeast and the Fezzan in Libya’s southern deserts. Mirroring these geographic divisions, distinct forces shaped each region. Tripolitania was deeply influenced by the Ottoman Turks, through the ruling Turkish Qaramanli dynasty (until 1835) and then by direct Ottoman rule (until 1911).³¹ The powerful Sanusiyya, meanwhile, eclipsed Turkish influences in Cyrenaica. Founded in the mid-19th century as an Islamic revivalist movement, the Sanusiyya built a monastic (*zuwaya*) network that

³¹ Ali Ahmida, *The Making of Modern Libya: State Formation, Colonization and Resistance, 1830-1932* (New York: SUNY UP 1994), 20-27.

became the chief loci for political authority.³² Finally, a dynasty with Moroccan origins controlled the Fezzan and eked out a living by taxing trans-Saharan caravans.³³

Libya's regions are themselves heterogeneous, each inhabited by multiple tribes and ethnic minorities. Libya, overall, counts over 140 tribes, belonging to 10 confederations as well as ethnic Amazigh (Berber), Tuareg and Goran minorities.³⁴ Libyans themselves view these affiliations as important, with 77 percent claiming that they identify with their tribe. Tribes' role has evolved though, with identities such as one's municipality assuming increased importance at tribes' expense.³⁵

Libyan statehood is a recent development compared with these long-standing regional and tribal divisions. Tripolitania only conquered Fezzan in 1812; shortly before Tripolitania itself fell under Ottoman rule.³⁶ Then, Italian imperialism attached Cyrenaica to the other provinces in a process stretching from 1911 until 1931.³⁷ The Italians resurrected the classical term *Libia* to describe these conquests, rendering Libya's boundaries and name legacies of 20th century imperialism. Libyans thus had no precedent for self-government within the vast territory bequeathed to them by the Ottoman and Italian empires. The customary leader of Cyrenaica's Sanusiyya—Idris al-Sanusi—therefore accepted the kingship over a united Libya only with great reluctance.³⁸

The Libyan monarchy's foundation in 1951 confronted the new state's government with the challenge of structuring its monopoly on force. Idris himself feared

³² Ibid, 73-102.

³³ Ibid, 28-31.

³⁴ Emmanuelle Paoletti, 'Libya: Roots of a Civil Conflict', *Mediterranean Politics* 16/2 (2011) 317.

³⁵ Peter Cole and Fiona Mangan, *Tribe, Security, Justice, and Peace in Libya Today* (Washington D.C.: USIP 2016), 8-17.

³⁶ Ahmida, *The Making of Modern Libya*, 27.

³⁷ Dirk Vandewalle, *A History of Modern Libya, Second Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012), 24-34.

³⁸ Ibid, 34-42.

that a military, recruited equitably from Libya's Tripolitanian majority, would orchestrate a coup. He therefore wanted to dispense with a national military and instead rely on paramilitary forces stacked with loyal Cyrenaican Bedouin. He depended for his personal protection on an 86 man Royal Guard, of whom he recruited 97 percent from these Bedouin tribes.³⁹ Idris also possessed a larger force, originally known as the Libyan Arab Forces and then renamed CYDEF, which the British organized for him in 1939 and which protected the monarchy from domestic opponents.⁴⁰

Libya's Parliament, as well as its British and American allies, pressured Idris into establishing an army to defend the country and symbolize its sovereignty.⁴¹ Idris mistrusted this force from its inception in 1952 since its open recruitment meant that half of its rank-and-file would necessarily consist of Tripolitarians. Idris consequently endeavored to keep the army small, limiting it to 1,200 personnel.⁴² Idris also feared Libyan officers' ability to overthrow him and pleaded with friendly powers to lend him commanders. Turkey loaned Libya its first Chief of Staff and Iraq then provided the four subsequent Chiefs of Staff. Idris privileged these foreigners because their lack of local connections disincentivized their interference in politics.⁴³ Idris, finally, secured British deployments to Tripoli and Tobruk, from whence the United Kingdom could intervene against a coup.⁴⁴

³⁹ TNA FO 1021/73 Proposed Future Development of the Libyan Royal Guard, 1952.

⁴⁰ Kenneth Pollack, *Arabs At War: Military Effectiveness 1948-1991* (Lincoln: Nebraska UP 2002), 358-59.

⁴¹ TNA FO 1021/73 Conversation between Ali Jerbi and Oriental Secretary, 6 March 1952.

⁴² TNA FO 1021/102 Libyan Army Progress Report No.4, 1953.

⁴³ TNA FO 371/131807 The Iraqi Contribution, May 1958.

⁴⁴ TNA PREM 13/2758 Anglo-Libyan Treaty Review, 1965.

Idris thus ensured that his small foreign-officered army posed little threat. Exterior events, however, progressively undermined Idris' coup-proofing. The 1958 Iraqi coup, for example, deprived Idris of his supply of foreign officers. The radical governments that followed the Iraqi monarchy's overthrow opposed Libya's monarchy on ideological grounds and Idris therefore balked at soliciting officers from them.⁴⁵ Idris therefore reluctantly replaced his foreign officers with Libyans drawn from loyal Bedouin tribes. The first Chief of Staff—Senussi Latawish—had fought the Italians as a pro-Sanusi guerrilla. Following Latawish, the extended Cyrenaican Shelhi clan came to dominate the high command.⁴⁶

At the same time as events forced Idris to libyanize his high command, they also obliged him to expand the army. Gamel Nasser's buildup of Egypt's armed forces from 1952 onwards and the 1956 destitution of neighboring Tunisia's Dey made Idris feel beleaguered in a changing region. Idris responded by expanding Libya's army to 5,000 personnel between 1956 and 1961.⁴⁷ Fresh pressures however obliged him to expand the army further within a decade. The United Kingdom withdrew its garrisons from Tripoli and Tobruk in 1965 and informed Idris that Libya would need to defend itself from 1973 onwards. The catastrophic Arab defeat during the 1967 Arab-Israeli War then drove Libyans to demand that their government develop a military capable of contributing to the common Arab cause. Idris responded by first authorizing the Army's expansion to 15,000 and then, in May 1969, by decreeing the forthcoming conscription of all able-bodied males.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ TNA FO 371/131807 Graham to Watson, 29 July 1958.

⁴⁶ TNA FCO 39/442 Military Mission Report, 30 June 1969.

⁴⁷ TNA FO 371/119763 Expansion of the Libyan Army, 1956.

⁴⁸ TNA FCO 39/442 British Military Mission Progress Report, 30 June 1969.

While Idris bowed to the necessity of expanding the army, he also strengthened his paramilitary forces as a means of coup-proofing himself. CYDEF, within this context, recruited more personnel and began acquiring heavy weaponry, including armored cars and artillery, to defeat a military coup.⁴⁹ Idris next established two specialized CYDEF counter-coup forces outside of Tripoli and Beida.⁵⁰ To provide himself with a final layer of defense, Idris then expanded his Royal Bodyguard to 500 personnel. Idris, thus, developed a two-tiered system, wherein communally-stacked paramilitaries constituted the primary obstacle to the national army orchestrating a coup.

The balance of power between the Army and CYDEF continued shifting in the former's favor, however, because of less tangible human factors and despite Idris' largess towards CYDEF. The cronyism endemic to CYDEF, where family background was more important than professional competence, undermined the force's efficiency even as it assimilated heavier weaponry. American intelligence remarked this decline, observing that 'throughout the 1950's CYDEF was "a competent and formidable organization"' but that a decade later 'the general level of morale, discipline, and training... is now low.'⁵¹

CYDEF's decline coincided with Idris' increasing inability to govern. Physical ailments drove Idris, who turned 79 in 1969, to spend months on end abroad receiving curative treatments. Idris' absences and contradictory statements that he might abdicate in favor of the Crown Prince or transform Libya into a Republic fostered a climate of intrigue that infected army factions as well. The Shelhi clan, who dominated the high command, allegedly planned a palace coup for late 1969.⁵² The officer corps' lower

⁴⁹ TNA FO 371/159169 Arms For Cydef, 23 August 1961.

⁵⁰ TNA FCO 39/442 British Military Mission Report, 30 September 1969.

⁵¹ CIA, The Fall of the Libyan Monarchy, 9 September 1969, available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/LOC-HAK-287-1-4-8.pdf> (accessed January 2018).

⁵² TNA FCO 39/442 Military Mission Report, 30 September 1969.

echelons, filled with resentful Tripolitarians, meanwhile became a hotbed of sedition. Soon five junior officer cabals, adhering to radical ideologies ranging from Ba'athism to Nasserism, were plotting coups. Twenty-seven year old Captain Gaddafi led one such group of 12 officers drawn from marginalized Tripolitanian tribes.⁵³

This group, termed the Free Officers in imitation of Nasser, struck while Idris was away in Turkey on 1 September 1969. The plotters first set upon the CYDEF strike force in Beida. Commandeering the 5th Infantry Regiment and arriving by surprise, they seized CYDEF's armored cars without a fight.⁵⁴ They then arrested senior officers, seized airfields and captured telephone exchanges. Surprised and with its leadership imprisoned, CYDEF initially failed to resist. Tardily, however, Idris' paramilitaries stirred. Major Abdullah Muftah and his 80 man force of CYDEF armored cars eluded the plotters' strike on Beida and escaped to Tobruk, where he joined up with the Royal Guard. Their consolidated force of 600 then thwarted the plotters' efforts to seize Tobruk.⁵⁵

Libya now teetered on the brink of civil war. The pro-Sanusi Barata tribe then began raising 5,000 warriors to fight alongside the Guard and CYDEF. Idris' advisor, Omar Shelhi, then met with British officials and requested that they intervene.⁵⁶ The monarchy's prospects for reversing the coup proved ephemeral though. The monarchy's supporters faced a dilemma in that the institution they hoped to defend already appeared doomed. Idris was old and unable to govern, and the plotters had arrested Crown Prince Hasan, whom they coerced into recording a speech supporting their revolution.⁵⁷ Even if

⁵³ Moncef Ouannes, *Militaires, Elites et Modernisation dans la Libye contemporaine* (Paris: Harmattan 2009), 84-102.

⁵⁴ TNA FCO 39/442 P.G.A. Wakefield, 29 October 1969.

⁵⁵ TNA FCO 39/442 British Military Mission Report, 30 September 1969.

⁵⁶ TNA PREM 13/2758 Draft Telegram, 2 September 1969.

⁵⁷ TNA FCO 39/381 Telegram 211, 1 September 1969.

pro-Sanusi forces defeated the plotters, the latter would likely execute Hasan, leaving the country without a king fit to govern.

These considerations, along with Britain's refusal to intervene, broke the paramilitaries' will. When three of the plotters' regiments advanced on 4 September—three days after the coup—they met no resistance, with CYDEF and the Guard melting into the population. Libya's monarchy thus fell after 18 years of striving to reconcile the regime's need for an army and that self-same regime's fear of coups. Idris' initial instinct to dispense with a national military and his subsequent efforts to make do with a miniscule one faltered because of Libya's increasingly fraught environment. Idris' security then depended for more than a decade upon a two-tiered system, wherein his communally-stacked paramilitaries counterbalanced his growing army.

The Rise of Libya's Centralized Armed Forces

Gaddafi and the officers who joined him in overthrowing Idris sought to remodel the state's security institutions. They endeavored to win the military's loyalty and garner public support by using an expanded military to pursue popular policy objectives. Despite the largess lavished on the armed forces, Gaddafi never fully trusted his military. He, therefore, even during this period, replicated elements of Idris' two-tiered system by creating a Revolutionary Guard as a countercoup force and Revolutionary Committees to quell dissent.

Gaddafi was convinced at his regime's outset that he needed to strengthen Libya's military. Having himself been propelled to power by officers' discontent, Gaddafi calculated that a military buildup would secure him the armed forces' loyalty. Moreover, Gaddafi and his colleagues in Libya's Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) feared an uprising in Cyrenaica, where the monarchy's supporters remained numerous and armed.

Finally, the regime's 'radical' foreign policy—combining militant opposition to Israel, anti-imperialism and pan-Arabism—necessitated the acquisition of powerful military capabilities. Ideally, Gaddafi reasoned, expanding Libya's military and then effectively using it to achieve popular objectives would secure both the military's loyalty and the population's support.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, having themselves achieved power through a coup, Gaddafi and the RCC recognized that the military posed a potential threat. Libya's new regime therefore refused to formally establish a Defense Ministry (except for one three-month period) and purged the officer corps.⁵⁹ Gaddafi considered Ba'athist officers his most likely opponents and imprisoned them. He then pushed pro-Sanusi Cyrenaicans from the officer corps, retiring 16 and transferring 160 from military to civil service positions. Gaddafi's culling of the officer corps resulted in the dismissal of every officer ranked above colonel and many more junior as well.⁶⁰

Gaddafi's regime vastly enhanced the military's size and firepower at the same time as purging Libya's officer corps. Gaddafi raised defense spending to an annual \$140 million, which fueled a 50 percent increase in the army's size during the regime's first year and the air forces' eleven-fold (from ten to 110 combat aircraft) over a slightly longer period. Libya, before long, was spending ten percent of its GNP on defense. Coupled with growing oil revenues, Gaddafi's high defense expenditures rendered the country a principal destination for arms exports.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Yehudit Ronen, *Qaddafi's Libya in World Politics* (Boulder: Lynn Reiner 2008), *passim*.

⁵⁹ Vandewalle, *A History of Modern Libya*, 149.

⁶⁰ Ouannes, *Militaires, Elites et Modernisation dans la Libye contemporaine*, 275.

⁶¹ Richard H. Sanger, 'Libya: Conclusions on an Unfinished Revolution', *Middle East Journal* 29/4 (1975) 411-412.

Idris' overthrow before his conscription decree's implementation meant that it fell upon Gaddafi to re-impose male conscription in 1977 and then authorize (but never implement) female conscription in 1984 to provide personnel to operate this weaponry.⁶² He also paid for support from a large cadre of Soviet and Warsaw Pact advisors to compensate for Libya's dearth of qualified instructors. Through these policies, Libya's armed forces expanded by 1988 to formidable proportions. With 85,000 personnel, 3,000 tanks and 555 combat aircraft, Gaddafi's military was 12 times larger than the monarchy's had been and much better equipped.⁶³ Libya arguably possessed forces as large and modern as the state could support at this point.

Nevertheless, despite Gaddafi's lavishing resources on the military, he never fully trusted the institution. Cabals of officers indeed conspired to overthrow Gaddafi on three occasions—1969, 1970 and 1975—during the regime's first years.⁶⁴ Gaddafi therefore sought to ensure himself against a coup even as he expanded the military.⁶⁵ He did this primarily by developing a tribal powerbase bound to the regime. Because Gaddafi's tribe, the Gaddafa, was too small to provide the requisite personnel, he orchestrated alliances with tribes that historically intermarried with the Gaddafa.

Senior members of the Gaddafa therefore concluded a formal inter-tribal covenant with Libya's largest tribe, the Warfallah, in late 1975. Gaddafi also privileged several additional tribes, such as the Maghariba.⁶⁶ Members of these tribes received preferential appointments within the military and dominated its most prestigious career paths, such as

⁶² Luis Martinez, *The Libyan Paradox* (London: Hurst 2007), 95.

⁶³ Pollack, *Arabs At War*, 362.

⁶⁴ Ouannes, *Militaires, Elites et Modernisation dans la Libye contemporaine*, 275-76.

⁶⁵ Florence Gaub, 'The Libyan Armed Forces between Coup-proofing and Repression', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36/2 (2013) 221-44.

⁶⁶ Martinez, *The Libyan Paradox*, 98-101.

air force pilots and special forces officers. Ambitious members of less privileged tribes nevertheless pursued military careers because the military's expansion created opportunities and tribally motivated discrimination remained less acute in the military than other state bureaucracies.⁶⁷

Gaddafi therefore instituted other coup-proofing practices to compensate for his limited ability to stack the regular officer corps. Gaddafi created paramilitary bodies, such as his Revolutionary Committees (established 1979), to suppress political discontent, and the 2,000-man Revolutionary Guards (established 1981) to prevent a military coup.⁶⁸ He also formed a People's Army—a part-time militia of 45,000 that received training from Cuban and Palestinian instructors—to serve as a counterweight to the army.⁶⁹ Gaddafi, likewise, rotated officers frequently between units and garrisons to prevent their developing connections with local leaders and developed his invasive Military Secret Service to root out sedition within the officer corps.⁷⁰

Gaddafi's foreign policy ambitions led him to send Libya's armed forces into harm's way after building them into the country's most professional and well-resourced institution. Libya's armed forces fought Israel during the 1973 Arab-Israeli War; faced off against Egypt in a limited conflict in 1977; defended Uganda's government against Tanzania in 1979; intervened in Chad between 1978 and 1987; and repeatedly confronted the United States in the Gulf of Sidra.⁷¹ Libyan forces accomplished notable feats,

⁶⁷ Vandewalle, *A History of Modern Libya*, 146.

⁶⁸ Alison Pargeter, *Libya: The Rise and Fall of Qaddafi* (New Haven: Yale UP 2012), 96-103; and Martinez, *The Libyan Paradox*, 94.

⁶⁹ Taoufik Monastiri, 'Chronique politique Libye', in *Annuaire de l'Afrique du Nord* (Paris: CRESM 1981) 559-62.

⁷⁰ Vandewalle, *A History of Modern Libya*, 145.

⁷¹ William Foltz, 'Libya's Military Power', in René Lemarchand (ed.), *The Green and the Black: Qadhafi's Policies in Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana UP 1988), 52-69.

including sustaining expeditionary forces far from Libya, defeating Tanzania at the battle of Lukuya, and launching offensives (1978, 1980-81 and 1983) that overwhelmed their Chadian opponents.⁷²

Libya's interventions, however, ended in strategic failure and military defeat. Libya's military was beaten by Egypt, its forces crushed in Uganda and Chad, and its air and naval forces humiliated in the Gulf of Sidra.⁷³ Gaddafi's ambitions led him to attempt impossible endeavors against superior adversaries, including Egypt, France and the United States. Gaddafi's foisting large quantities of cutting-edged weaponry on an expanding military—whose recruits lacked adequate training—likewise overburdened the military. British intelligence diagnosed this inability to assimilate weaponry, arguing 'on current performance the Libyans would in practice have great difficulty in assimilating and making use of the greater part of this equipment: whatever is supplied would be likely to suffer a high rate of unserviceability through misuse and neglect.'⁷⁴

Gaddafi's policy of buying loyalty with lavish resources and leading his military into popular wars thus miscarried because Gaddafi failed to forge a sufficiently efficient tool and committed his fledgling forces to conflicts for which they were inadequate.

The Decline of Libya's Centralized Armed Forces

Gaddafi's early model for securing the military's loyalty collapsed in the 1990s. Defeats abroad and economic decline at home halted Gaddafi's military buildup. Two challenges—an abortive military coup and a protracted Islamist insurgency—exacerbated his distrust of the military. Gaddafi responded by accentuating the two-tiered aspects of

⁷² Pollack, *Arabs At War*, 368-97.

⁷³ Ronen, *Qaddafi's Libya in World Politics*, 9-40, 145-79.

⁷⁴ TNA DEFE 24/1623 Defence Sales to Libya, 7 April 1978.

Libya's system. He simultaneously expanded his tribally stacked units and fragmented the regular military, which nonetheless remained large as a hedge against external aggression.

International sanctions, economic stagnation and the authoritarian nature of Libya's regime fueled discontent during the 1990s. The armed forces were susceptible to these social forces because they were one of the state's most representative bodies. Officers from the privileged Warfallah tribe therefore plotted to overthrow Gaddafi in 1993. Unlike earlier conspiracies, this plot struck at the core of Gaddafi's security apparatus. Gaddafi hitherto considered Warfallah loyal and they comprised a majority within the officer corps. This plot's existence therefore shocked Gaddafi even though his security services discovered and suppressed it.⁷⁵

An Islamist insurgency then erupted in 1995. Founded by Libyan veterans of the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) appealed to Cyrenaicans, who resented the government's discrimination against Eastern Libya.⁷⁶ Not coincidentally, LIFG personnel were older (approximately 30) and better educated (most university graduates) than members of other Islamist insurgencies. The LIFG's 2,500 members applied the lessons they had learned in Afghanistan to wage a guerrilla war around Benghazi, Derna and Jebel al-Akhdar. The military's broad recruitment meant that many soldiers had kin amongst the rebels and hailed from regions struck by governmental repression.⁷⁷

Gaddafi therefore suspected military personnel of sympathizing with the LIFG and consequently strengthened his paramilitaries at the armed forces' expense. He began

⁷⁵ Ouannes, *Militaires, Elites et Modernisation dans la Libye contemporaine*, 310-14.

⁷⁶ Interviews with anti-Gaddafi Militants, Derna, 23 February 2012.

⁷⁷ Martinez, *The Libyan Paradox*, 60-71.

by ordering his small Revolutionary Guard to disarm army units in Cyrenaica, which he then exiled to outposts in the Sahara.⁷⁸ Shortly, thereafter, Gaddafi ordered most of the armed forces' heavy weaponry and munitions to be relocated to Sirte, which was Gaddafi's birthplace and the city most devoted to the regime.⁷⁹ Gaddafi's policy of weakening the military reached its climax in 1995 when he proclaimed the armed forces' dissolution.⁸⁰

While Gaddafi did not actually abolish the military, he dissolved their higher organizational structures, including the divisional level of command and the general staff, leaving the military an amorphous collection of small units. Gaddafi consequently relegated generals with 30 years of experience to commanding derisory formations of 100 soldiers. He likewise restricted even these units from training with live ammunition, prohibited personnel from carrying side arms and imposed travel restrictions on off-duty officers.⁸¹ These measures proved vexatious to officers and inimical to efficiency, precipitating a decline in military morale and training.

Gaddafi reinforced his paramilitary forces at the same time as he weakened the regular military, accentuating Libya's two-tiered system. He began by expanding the Revolutionary Guard from 2,000 to 40,000 personnel, arming members of the Revolutionary Committees and developing para-military police units staffed by reliable Tripolitarians. He also bolstered these forces with foreign mercenaries.⁸² Together these pro-government forces quelled the LIFGs's rebellion by 1998.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Interview with General Ali, Benghazi, 22 February 2012.

⁸⁰ Martinez, *The Libyan Paradox*, 93.

⁸¹ Interview with General Yousef, Benghazi, 22 February 2012.

⁸² Martinez, *The Libyan Paradox*, 93.

Gaddafi's government began explicitly creating tribally stacked units after the LIFG's defeat. Gaddafi considered kinship the surest guarantee of loyalty and therefore gave three sons—Khamis, Moatassim and Saadi—brigades recruited from loyal tribes. The most formidable of these was Khamis' 32nd Brigade, which possessed 10,000 personnel and ample heavy weaponry. Moatassim, however, played an equally significant role presiding over Libya's National Security Commission.⁸³ Gaddafi granted a cousin, Barani Ishkal, command of a fourth brigade, the Al-Magarief Brigade, which maintained order in Libya's capital.⁸⁴ Other Gaddafi cousins, Ahmed Gadhaf al-Dam and Khalifa Hanaish, also played important roles.⁸⁵

Gaddafi employed matrimonial alliances to further this policy of leveraging kinship to protect his regime. Gaddafi, for example, married one of his sons to the daughter of his Revolutionary Committees' director, Khuwaylidi Hamidi.⁸⁶ Gaddafi also married his sister-in-law to his intelligence chief Abdallah al-Sanusi, and his daughter, Aisha, to a cousin, Ahmed al-Gaddafi al-Qahsi, who commanded another security brigade.⁸⁷ Gaddafi made further dispositions to hire mercenaries and arm loyal tribes to bolster these security brigades in the event of significant unrest.⁸⁸

Libya thus possessed a full-fledged two-tiered system by the 2011 revolution's eve. Small numbers of stacked units provided the regime's primary defense against domestic threats, while Libya's larger regular forces suffered from weak cohesion because of poor funding and Gaddafi's deliberate coup-proofing.

⁸³ Pargeter, *Libya*, 210-25.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 241.

⁸⁵ Alia Brahimi, 'Libya's Revolution', *The Journal of North African Studies* 16/4 (2011) 607-14.

⁸⁶ Martinez, *The Libyan Paradox*, 97.

⁸⁷ Nenevine Afiouni, 'Qaddafi's children as controversial as father', *Al Arabiya* (26 October 2011).

⁸⁸ Interview with Fawzi, militia leader, Benghazi, 22 February 2012.

Mass Protests and Security Sector Fragmentation

Although Gaddafi's two-tiered system enabled him to cling to power through the 1990s crises, it helped transform Libya's 2011 uprising into a civil war. Gaddafi's stacked units fought tenaciously, but lacked the size to repress nationwide uprisings. Gaddafi's two-decade policy of emasculating Libya's regular forces meanwhile rendered them incapable of playing a cohesive role either for or against the government. The military therefore fractured, with some joining the rebellion and others sitting out the conflict. Libya's civil war therefore devolved into a conflict between stacked security units and three categories of anti-regime militia—units led by military personnel, those raised without military participation, and those formed by Islamists—that rose up to oppose them.

Gaddafi's dividing and weakening of Libya's army led the latter to fracture once civil war broke out. Untrusted by the dictator, Gaddafi hesitated to provide the army with the ammunition needed to combat an insurrection. When he eventually ordered General Al Fatah Younes and the Army's non-stacked special forces—Al Sai'qa—to repress demonstrators on 20 February, military personnel prevaricated before defecting two days later.⁸⁹ Military personnel throughout Libya thereafter abandoned their barracks and individually decided what course of action to adopt. Many joined the rebellion in localities such as Zintan and Eastern Libya.⁹⁰ In other areas, such as Misrata, military personnel adopted a wait-and-see attitude, remaining at home while the war raged.

⁸⁹ Peter Bartu, 'The Corridor of Uncertainty: The National Transitional Council's Battle for Legitimacy and Recognition', in Peter Cole and Brian McQuinn (eds.), *The Libyan Revolution and its Aftermath* (London: Hurst 2015) 33-34.

⁹⁰ Interviews with Army Officers, Benghazi, 22 February 2012.

Military garrisons, finally, remained loyal in pro-regime strongholds such as Beni Walid and Sirte.⁹¹

This military fragmentation left the field clear for three categories of armed group—those directed by military officers, those dominated by civilians and those organized by Islamists—to combat Gaddafi’s security brigades. A host of militias emerged within each category, with as many as 1,700 groups existing by war’s end.⁹² Each of the revolt’s four foyers—Benghazi, Misrata, Derna and the Nafousa Mountains—produced, however, a different combination of armed groups.

Considering that opposition to Gaddafi was always most acute in Cyrenaica, which had been the monarchy’s powerbase, this region was first to rebel. The revolt began in January 2011 with discontented inhabitants seizing vacant apartment buildings. When the regime responded with brutality, anti-regime protests escalated to a full-scale rebellion. Cyrenaica’s elites and principal tribes rapidly joined this rebellion. Table 1, below, provides an illustration of Benghazi’s militias’ composition, based on data provided by Benghazi’s National Transitional Council on the 345 members of the city’s militias who were killed in action.⁹³

Professional Backgrounds	Numbers of Combatants	Percentage
Military and Security Forces	71	20.6
Businessmen, business owners and liberal professions	94	27.2
Employees	38	11.0
Unemployed	30	8.7
Civil servants	43	12.5
Student	54	15.7
Other	7	2.0

⁹¹ Interview with Air Force Colonel Ali Sadiq Duwi, Misrata, 27 February 2012.

⁹² Christopher Chivvis and Jeffrey Martini, *Libya After Qaddafi: Lessons and Implications for the Future* (Santa Monica: RAND 2014) 13.

⁹³ Data on Benghazi’s Martyrs (2011), Provided by the National Transitional Council, February 2012.

no information available	8	2.3
Total	345	100

Table 1. Socio-Economic Backgrounds of Benghazi Militiamen.

As may be seen, Benghazi’s militias featured large numbers of military personnel (21 percent) as well as societal elites, such as businesspersons (27 percent). Cyrenaica’s rebels likewise benefited from the most significant military defections, including Interior Minister General Younes, General Suleiman Mahmoud Obeidi and General Khalifa Haftar.⁹⁴ Entire garrisons near Benghazi—in Tobruk, the Jebal Akhdar and al-Marj—followed these generals into rebellion. More symbolically, two air force officers from Benghazi sacrificed themselves in mid-March to thwart the regime’s offensive, one crashing kamikaze-style into Gaddafi’s Tripoli residence and the other conducting suicidally brave ground attack missions.⁹⁵ Military professionals thus led many Benghazi militias and enabled them to organize two-week training sessions for volunteers.⁹⁶

While professionals directed most Benghazi militias, an opposing Islamist current emerged as well, tapping into the social networks that formerly sent Benghazi’s youth to fight for the LIFG and Al Qaeda Iraq. Benghazi previously sent more jihadists abroad than any African city besides Derna and now spawned redoubtable Islamist militias, such as Ismail al-Sallabi’s 17th Brigade and the Ansar al-Shariah movement. LIFG veterans themselves founded the more moderate Omar Mukhtar Brigade, whose rigorous training earned it a reputation for effectiveness.⁹⁷ Islamist and military dominated militias

⁹⁴ Lindsey Hilsum, *Sandstorm: Libya in the Time of Revolution* (New York: Penguin 2012) 20-25.

⁹⁵ Interview with General Yousef, Benghazi, 22 February 2012.

⁹⁶ Interview with Mohammed Hamid, Tripoli, 19 February 2012.

⁹⁷ Noman Benotman et al., *Islamists* in Jason Pack, ed., *The 2011 Uprisings and the Struggle for the Post-Qadhafi Future* (New York: Palgrave 2013) 213-14.

downplayed their antagonisms during the war, but they nonetheless erupted into violence when Islamists assassinated General Younes, Cyrenaica's senior rebel commander.⁹⁸

While Benghazi was the revolt's epicenter, the western Libyan city of Misrata proved more important to the revolution's victory. Erupting several days after Benghazi's uprising, Misrata evicted the regime's forces by 23 February. Gaddafi, however, made a more prolonged effort to retake Misrata than any other locale, plunging Misrata into six months of warfare, from 24 February to 20 August 2011. This period forged Misrata's militiamen into a force observers rated the 'most tenacious and effective of all' anti-Gaddafi forces.⁹⁹

Misrata's militias earned reputations as the Revolution's most effective despite their lacking Benghazi's leavening of military professionals. Misrata's affluence and even-handed treatment by Gaddafi led Misratan military personnel to retire into private life. Officers therefore neither commanded nor trained Misrata's militias even though 14,000 Misratans fought against Gaddafi during the Battle of Misrata and up to 40,000 joined by war's end.¹⁰⁰ Rather, training was haphazard and militias elected whichever leaders they considered bravest. Militia leaders then collectively negotiated agreements about where their groups would fight.¹⁰¹

While military personnel eschewed Misrata's militias, the city's underprivileged played a correspondingly greater role. According to data provided by Misrata's Shaheed Katiba, fully 36 percent of combatants were unemployed before the war, while less than one percent had military backgrounds.¹⁰² Misrata's dearth of defectors meant, moreover,

⁹⁸ Hilsum, *Sandstorm*, 265-67.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 214.

¹⁰⁰ Brian McQuinn, *Armed Groups in Libya: Typology and Roles* (Geneva: Small Arms Survey 2012) 1-4.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Commandant Lofti, Shaheed Katiba, 26 February 2012.

¹⁰² Membership Rosters, Shaheed Katiba, February 2012.

that weapons handling skills were in particular demand. Members of Misrata’s criminal underworld exploited this need to attain prominence in the city’s militias, eventually commanding three formations.¹⁰³

Other groups’ participation counterbalanced, however, the roles played by Misrata’s unemployed and criminals. An industrial engineer, Tahir Ba’ur, coordinated the city’s defense plan as Secretary of the Misratan Union of Revolutionaries.¹⁰⁴ Industrial workers likewise played consequential roles. Employees of Misrata’s metalworking factories, for example, joined militias and established workshops to modify captured weaponry, welding cannons to pickup trucks and adapting air-launched rockets to be fired from the ground.¹⁰⁵ Privileged groups also participated, leading one journalist to remark, ‘They are largely a white-collar army of teachers, mechanics, university professors, dentists, doctors, shopkeepers, and lots and lots of students.’¹⁰⁶

Table 2, below, illustrates Misrata’s combatants’ backgrounds, based on data provided by the city’s second largest militia.¹⁰⁷

Profession Backgrounds	No.	%
Military and Security Forces	1	0.3
Businessmen, business owners and liberal professions	93	32.5
Employees	26	9.1
Unemployed	103	36.0
Departments/Government/Administration	21	7.3
Student	27	9.4
no information available	0	0.0
Other	15	5.2

¹⁰³ Interview with Colonel Duwi, Misrata, 27 February 2012.

¹⁰⁴ Brian McQuinn, ‘History’s Warriors: The Emergence of Revolutionary Battalions in Misrata’, in Peter Cole and Brian McQuinn (eds.), *The Libyan Revolution and its Aftermath* (London: Hurst 2015) 237.

¹⁰⁵ Membership Rosters.

¹⁰⁶ Alex Crawford, *Colonel Gaddafi’s Hat* (London: Collins 2012) 133.

¹⁰⁷ McQuinn’s data set differs slightly from ours, with each employing different categories, but they are consistent on the uninvolved of military personnel and the level of civil servant involvement. McQuinn, ‘History’s Warriors’, 253.

Total	286	100
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Table 2. Socio-Economic Backgrounds of Misrata Militiamen.

Misrata’s dearth of military professionals prevented Misratans from developing institutions for providing volunteers with training before sending them to the front.¹⁰⁸ As one journalist remarked, ‘[n]ot one I talk to [in Misrata] has had any training.’¹⁰⁹ Despite their lack of professional cadres, Misrata’s militias nevertheless developed an esprit de corps that impressed observers.¹¹⁰

The eastern city of Derna, meanwhile, developed militias with a decidedly Islamist character. Derna was the LIFG’s epicenter and its disaffected youth later followed the path of foreign jihad. Derna, indeed, provided more foreign fighters to Al Qaeda Iraq than any other city in the Islamic world.¹¹¹ A trained cadre of leaders, moreover, existed ready to command once the civil war began since many LIFG cadres had either escaped into exile or been released in Gaddafi’s 2010 amnesty for Islamists. LIFG veterans, such as Sami al-Sa’idi and Abdul-Hakim al-Hasadi, therefore provided militias with seasoned leadership.¹¹²

The rebellion’s fourth foyer—the Nafousa Mountains—developed as a microcosm of the rebellion, with distinct militias dominated by military personnel, civilians and Islamists. The region’s largest city, Zintan, traditionally provided the army with large numbers of officers. That city’s revolt therefore assumed a military character. Special forces Colonel Muhammad al-Madani led the city’s council while Major Usama

¹⁰⁸ Interviews with Resistance Leaders, Misrata, 26 February 2012.

¹⁰⁹ Crawford, *Colonel Gaddafi’s Hat*, 133.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 132.

¹¹¹ Brian Fishman and Joseph Felter, *Al-Qa’ida’s Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records* (West Point: Counterterrorism Center 2007) 10-11.

¹¹² ‘In Libya, holy warriors put their faith in the ballot’, *The International Herald Tribune* (25 June 2012).

Juwaili presided over Zintan's Military Council.¹¹³ Zintan's officers organized volunteers into seven well-trained brigades, totaling 4,000 fighters.¹¹⁴

Outside Zintan, most of the Nafousa's inhabitants are Amazigh (or Berbers) who quickly rallied to the rebellion.¹¹⁵ Historic marginalization within the armed forces meant that Amazigh militias featured few soldiers and many civilians. Former LIFG leaders meanwhile established a presence in the Nafusa as well. Mahdi al-Hurrati, a Libyan Islamist residing in Ireland, infiltrated the Nafusa where he established the Tripoli Brigade and gradually assembled 1,500 fighters from returning exiles and Tripolitarians fleeing to the mountains.¹¹⁶

Although the 2011 rebellion developed as a series of more-or-less unconnected uprisings, Libya's regime lacked forces strong and flexible enough to conquer rebel foyers. Gaddafi's security units lacked the sheer size to quell widespread uprisings and they therefore arrived piecemeal and failed to deliver blows powerful enough to conquer rebel bastions. Gaddafi's forces, indeed, only retook one municipality—Zawiya—and they achieved this only by committing airpower and Khamis' elite 32nd Brigade.¹¹⁷ In Misrata's crucial case, the regime delayed its counteroffensive for three weeks, until Khamis finished retaking Zawiya and mercenaries had arrived, giving Misratans time to organize. Gaddafi even then lacked sufficient brigades for this battle and although he

¹¹³ Wolfram Lacher and Ahmed Labnouj, 'Factionalism Resurgent: The War in the Jabal Nafusa', in Peter Cole and Brian McQuinn (eds.), *The Libyan Revolution and its Aftermath* (London: Hurst 2015) 269.

¹¹⁴ Dario Cristiani, 'The Zintan Militia and the Fragmented Libyan State', The Jamestown Foundation (19 January 2012) at <
<https://jamestown.org/program/hot-issue-the-zintan-militia-and-the-fragmented-libyan-state/>> (accessed 1 April 2013).

¹¹⁵ Hilsum, *Sandstorm*, 36-37.

¹¹⁶ Benotman et al., 'Islamists', 213-14.

¹¹⁷ 'Qaddafi Forces Take Back Strategic Town', *The New York Times* (10 March 2011).

committed 11,000 combatants to the six-month struggle, only 400 were professional soldiers.¹¹⁸

Gaddafi's failure to crush the rebellion swiftly condemned him to lose slowly to it. Rebels grew in strength and NATO airpower prevented Gaddafi's security brigades from using heavy weapons. The regime forces' gradual exhaustion and the rebels' mounting strength then reached a tipping point, catalyzing the simultaneous collapse of pro-Gaddafi forces in Misrata, Cyrenaica and the Nafousa. Rebels from the Nafousa and an ad hoc flotilla of Misratans aboard small boats exploited the regime's disarray to swarm into Tripoli. Many too timorous to join the uprising so long as the war's issue was uncertain now swelled the rebellion's ranks in its hour of victory.¹¹⁹

Civil War Redux

Although the rebellion's triumph was total, Gaddafi's two-tiered system created the pre-conditions for the anarchy that later engulfed Libya. Post-revolutionary transitions are possible in states where some form of governmental monopoly on force persists. This monopoly can be provided either by revolutionary armies—as occurred in Communist China and Cuba—supplanting prior regimes' armed forces or by a state's existing military shifting its loyalties, as occurred in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011. Libya, however, belongs to a third category, wherein upheavals generate a security sector with multiple competing actors.

All three militia categories—military-led, civilian and Islamist—demanded a central role in the post-Gaddafi security sector. Regular officers emphasized their professional qualifications and wartime service. Military careerists presided over the

¹¹⁸ Interview with Lotfi, militia leader, Misrata, 26 February 2012.

¹¹⁹ Interviews with Militia Personnel, Libya, February 2012.

revolution's high command in Cyrenaica and their reconstituted armed forces counted 8,000 personnel immediately after the conflict.¹²⁰ Western Libya's Misratan and Amazigh militias, meanwhile, argued that they played greater roles in the war's denouement and that prior affiliation with Gaddafi tainted professional officers. Despite their small numbers—the LIFG numbered only 200 pre-war members—prior jihads and favorable media coverage burnished Islamists' military reputation.¹²¹

These three groups sought to consolidate their positions. Career officer and Zintani commander Usama Juwaili, for example, took over the Defense Ministry.¹²² Another career officer, Yusuf al-Mangush, won appointment as Chief of Staff. LIFG veteran Abdul-Hakim Bilhadj, meanwhile, finagled his appointment as chair of the Tripoli Military Council.¹²³ Finally, a Misratan, Fawzi 'Abdul'Aal, became Libya's Interior Minister and advanced his city's militias' cause.¹²⁴ Libya's three categories of armed actors thus legitimated their forces and state resources flowed to each. Libya's Defense Ministry financed the regular forces' reconstitution and employed Zintani militias. Libya's government, meanwhile, funded Misratan and Islamist militias, which federated into two structures: the Libyan Shield Forces and Libyan Revolutionary Operations Room.¹²⁵

Remnants of Gaddafi's stacked units complicated negotiations between these forces. Stacked units had withdrawn, with their weapons, to Bani Walid after Gaddafi's

¹²⁰ Gaub, 'The Libyan Armed Forces between Coup-proofing and Repression', 238-39.

¹²¹ Benotman et al., 'Islamists', 210-21.

¹²² Cristiani, 'The Zintan Militia and the Fragmented Libyan State', 3.

¹²³ "M. Belhaj: 'Nous voulons un Etat civil en Libye'", *Le Monde* (3 September 2011).

¹²⁴ John Hamilton, *North Africa Outlook: Time is Running Out for Libya's Interim Institutions* (London: Cross-Border Information 2013) 1.

¹²⁵ *Libya: Dealing with the Militias and Advancing Security Sector Reform* (Kitchener: CSG 2014) 1-10.

fall. The city's inhabitants sympathized with these units since they had recruited heavily there. In January 2012, these remnants struck the National Transition Council's (NTC) garrison, overrunning the base. Witnesses claim fighters unfurled Gaddafi-era flags and distributed pro-Gaddafi propaganda, but Bani Walid's elders claimed that their revolt merely asserted the city's self-governance. Anti-Gaddafi militias, rather than Libya's disorganized military, responded to this crisis and coerced Bani Walid into a ceasefire.¹²⁶ Former pro-Gaddafi fighters continued to strike out though, killing and capturing militia personnel. Misrata's militias retaliated, against Chief-of-Staff al-Mangush's orders, by besieging Bani Walid. A month-long battle ensued, during which militias disregarded the military chain-of-command and the military disingenuously claimed credit for Bani Walid's eventual fall.¹²⁷

Governments initially planned to undo this fragmented security order by integrating militias and the military into a single entity. Libya's NTC first sought to induct 50,000 militiamen into the military, creating a balance between regulars and ex-militia personnel. Military officers and militia leaders alike opposed this project however. Al-Mangush therefore pushed the government to revise its objective downwards to 6,000 militiamen, leaving the regular military essentially unaltered by militiamen.¹²⁸ A similar 2013 project to combine 20,000 regular personnel and militia fighters into a General Purpose Force (GPF) likewise failed. Half of the militiamen dropped out of the GPF

¹²⁶ Chris Stephen, 'Libya Militias Prepare to Retake Bani Walid', *The Guardian* (26 January 2012).

¹²⁷ Marie-Louise Gumuchian, 'Pro-Government Forces Seize Old Gaddafi Bastion', *Reuters* (24 October 2012).

¹²⁸ Frederic Wehery and Peter Cole, *Building Libya's Security Sector* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment 2013).

training program, prompting the military's Chief of Staff to lobby for the project's cancellation.¹²⁹

These integration projects' failure exposed Libya to security dilemmas, as each faction viewed others' actions in a zero-sum light. Juwaili's Zintan militias, for example, responded to Bilhadj's leadership over Tripoli's Militia Council by detaining and humiliating him in November 2011. Although Bilhadj remained in office until May 2012, this demonstration of his vulnerability degraded Bilhadj's authority. Bilhadj's declining role and Islamists' defeat in Libya's 2012 elections galvanized Islamists to challenge the state. Fifteen Islamist militias demonstrated their strength by parading heavy weapons through Benghazi in June 2012. Benghazi's Ansar al-Sharia Brigade, then attacked Benghazi's US Consulate in September and assassinated Benghazi's police chief in November.

The Islamist challenge in Benghazi drew Libya's other groups into the fray. Libya's government first ordered militias belonging to the Libyan Shield Forces (LSF) to suppress Ansar al-Sharia. Islamists, however, commanded certain LSF militias and preferred to collude with, rather than fight Ansar al-Sharia. Misrata's powerful civilian-based militias, meanwhile, coerced the legislature into signing a political isolation law in March 2013 that expelled Gaddafi-era officers from the armed forces.¹³⁰ Libya's

¹²⁹ Missy Ryan, 'Libyan force was lesson in limits of U.S. power', *The Washington Post* (5 August 2015).

¹³⁰ Philippe Droz-Vincent, 'Libya's Tentative State Rebuilding: Militia's "Moral Economy", Violence, and Financing (In)Security', in Zeinab Abul-Magd and Elke Grawert, *Businessmen in Arms: How the Military and Other Armed Groups Profit in the MENA Region* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield 2016) 187-88.

government then inflicted another blow on the military by pressuring Chief of Staff al-Mangush into resigning over Benghazi's growing anarchy.¹³¹

Militiamen belonging to the Libyan Revolutionary Operations Room (LROR) then exploited Libya's malaise to abduct Prime Minister Ali Zeidan in October 2013. Defense Minister Juwaili and his Zintan militias thwarted this alleged coup, surrounding Zeidan's captors and obliging them to release him.¹³² Zeidan then renewed his efforts to quell Ansar al-Sharia by dispatching army special forces—Al-Saiqa—in November 2013. Al-Saiqa, however, proved no more successful than the LSF, fueling perceptions of Libya's ungovernability.

The security dilemmas opposing Libya's armed groups escalated into civil war in 2014. General Khalifa Haftar, a high-level defector from Gaddafi's army, became convinced that Libya's armed forces and affiliated Zintani militias should take control of the country. His first coup attempt, however, turned to farce. Haftar commandeered a television station in February 2014 and proclaimed that he was dissolving the Libyan legislature and would oversee a caretaker government. No military units rallied to Haftar and the government rejected his demands. Haftar, however, counted enough sympathizers to avoid arrest.¹³³

Haftar proceeded to win the armed forces and Zintani militias to his cause through 'town hall meetings' with their commanders. He then proclaimed 'Operation Dignity' in May 2014 and his forces attacked in Benghazi and Tripoli. Despite successes, Operation Dignity faltered when Libya's other factions united against Haftar. Western Libya's civilian-based militias, including the powerful Misrata brigades and the Nafousa's

¹³¹ 'Libya Shield commander denies murder', *Libya Herald* (18 October 2013).

¹³² Nouredine Jebnoun, 'Beyond the mayhem: debating key dilemmas in Libya's statebuilding', *The Journal of North African Studies* 20/5 (2015) 842-43.

¹³³ Jon Lee Anderson, 'The Unravelling', *The New Yorker* (23 February 2015).

Amazigh militias, turned against the pro-Haftar army and Zintan brigades. In Benghazi, meanwhile, Ansar al-Sharia allied with the Libyan Shield Force militias to combat Haftar under the banner of the Revolutionaries' Shura Council. The loose Libya-wide alliance of anti-Haftar militias labelled their counteroffensive 'Operation Dawn.'¹³⁴

Neither the Dawn nor the Dignity coalition possessed the force to win. Dignity made inroads, but was then defeated in Benghazi and Tripoli. Dawn's counteroffensive then stalled after Misrata's militias evicted Zintan's brigades from Tripoli's Airport and the Benghazi Shura Council seized Al-Saiqa's headquarters, which left Haftar with Tobruk and Zintan. The three categories of armed group to emerge from the Libyan revolution—military affiliated groups, civilian militias and Islamist forces—thus partitioned Libya within three years of Gaddafi's overthrow.

Conclusion

Two-tiered systems provide a rational response to the challenges confronting many authoritarian leaders. That Idris and Gaddafi both eventually embraced two-tiered systems, despite initially favoring other practices, testifies to these systems' utility. While these systems protected regimes from modest domestic and international threats, they increased the likelihood of political change triggering civil war. Libya barely averted a first civil war, between CYDEF and the army, in 1969. The protests of 2011 then catalyzed a civil war wherein Gaddafi's stacked units fought for the regime and the regular military splintered. This war's conclusion bequeathed post-revolutionary Libya a fragmented security order. While regular officers and irregular militiamen mistrusted one another, stacked units' remnants challenged the new order whenever they could. These

¹³⁴ Jebnoun, *Beyond the mayhem*, 844.

dynamics, themselves legacies of Gaddafi's two-tiered system, plunged Libya into its 2014 civil war.

Although they differ as to their precise pathways, several Arab states—Iraq, Syria and Yemen—also adopted two-tiered systems and later succumbed to civil war due, in part, to these systems. In Syria and Iraq, it was imperial powers—France and the Ottoman Empire—that recruited minority communities that they anticipated would be particularly loyal into the military. Once members of these communities seized power—Alawites in Syria and Sunis from Salah al-Din province in Iraq—they stacked elite units (e.g. their Republican Guards and Special Forces) with their compatriots.¹³⁵ In Yemen, it was contrarily President 'Ali 'Abdullah Salih who built-up elite units, such as the Republican Guard, Presidential Guard and Special Forces, with members of his Sahani tribe, rather than the southern tribes that hitherto dominated Yemen's Army.¹³⁶

These systems, despite disparate origins, contributed to the wars that later wracked each state. Syria's civil war began, for example, in 2011 with the army fragmenting and stacked units fighting for the regime. In Yemen's case, stacked and regular units destabilized the state through their maneuvers following Salih's ouster. Iraq's stacked units, finally, acted as spoilers following Saddam Hussein's fall and regular officers followed them after John Bremer dissolved Iraq's regular army. Although many regimes with two-tiered systems, including Saudi Arabia and numerous African states, have not experienced civil wars, these states have also not experienced the mass protests and regime changes whereby two-tiered systems become vectors for civil war.

¹³⁵ Nikolaos Van Dam, *The Struggle for Power in Syria: Sectarianism, Regionalism and Tribalism in Politics, 1961-1978* (London: Croom Helm 1979) 31-97; and Amatzia Baram, 'Saddam's Power Structure: the Tikritis Before, During and After the War', *The Adelphi Papers* 43 (2003) 93-123.

¹³⁶ Michael Knights, 'The Military Role in Yemen's Protests: Civil-Military Relations in the Tribal Republic', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36/2 (2013) 261-88.

Two-tiered systems' provision of robust short-term security for regimes, yet negative long-term impact on states' ability to accommodate political change, renders them toxic for states' development. Discouraging governments from adopting such systems will be difficult, however, since regimes will likely discount the long-term civil war risks that their societies bare as an adequate price to pay for the comparatively high levels of regime security that two-tiered systems provide.

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