

Introduction



President Barack Obama's censure of the US intelligence community for its failure to foresee the spreading unrest in the Arab world sparked this book. Obama voiced his displeasure that analysts misjudged the Tunisian military's actions and the speedy collapse of President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali's regime in early 2011.¹ A sitting president's public criticism of America's spy agencies is a rare event, and it caught my attention. I started to read whatever I could find on Tunisian politics and military affairs and came to the conclusion that Obama was right. For a number of reasons it seemed quite likely that the Tunisian army would not come to Ben Ali's rescue. For starters, he was an astonishingly corrupt and widely detested dictator who marginalized the army while showering funds and privileges on the interior ministry troops instead. The Tunisian military's highly cohesive officer corps had no history of political involvement. The demonstrations they were asked to suppress were large, peaceful, and representative of all Tunisian society, which, given that the armed forces' manpower was based on mandatory conscription, was where the soldiers came from. In light of these and other factors, then, it did not seem all that surprising that Tunisian commanders decided to protect rather than shoot the protesters and, consequently, precipitated Ben Ali's exit from the country.

To be sure, virtually all experts were surprised by the Arab uprisings even though, as two prominent journalists argued a year later, "There is much to suggest that the Arab Spring should have been predictable."² Prior to the upheavals many observers believed that these regimes were so well entrenched and their armed forces so dedicated that, as one expert put it slightly over a decade before the revolts, "Even the most professional militaries of the region would not hesitate to intervene in politics to try to maintain the status quo."³ In the winter of 2012–13, I visited Washington to meet with a number of intelligence analysts specializing in the Arab world to find out what went wrong.⁴ Not surprisingly, they were all fluent Arabic speakers and extraordinarily knowledgeable both about the countries of their specialization and about the Middle East and North Africa more generally. One thing several of them said that struck me was that while they were well aware of the underlying political and socioeconomic problems in the region—"Egypt was on the verge of revolution," a recent analysis contends, "as it had been for as long as modern

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history had been recorded”⁵—they were less appreciative of just how close to the surface societal dissatisfaction was simmering. But most revelatory was the admission of a veteran Middle East specialist who told me, “We kept asking the wrong question, which was ‘Why now?’ when the question we should have asked all along was ‘What’s taking so long?’”

As I watched the subsequent revolts of the “Arab Spring” unfold, I could not help noticing the armed forces’ pivotal role. The military’s stance, certainly at first glance, seemed to be the key to many of the puzzles regarding the uprisings. Why were the demonstrators at Cairo’s Tahrir Square ultimately more successful than their counterparts at Manama’s Pearl Roundabout? Why were the young rebels able to oust Ben Ali so swiftly, while the Syrian opposition failed to do more than loosen Bashar al-Assad’s grip on the reins of power? The results of these upheavals, more often than not, hinged on each military’s reaction to them. But how could one explain the behavior of the troops themselves and their varying responses to the revolts? Why did soldiers in Tunisia and Egypt back the uprising that culminated in the fall of Ben Ali’s regime and the overthrow of Mubarak? Conversely, why did the troops in Bahrain support the state and turn against the demonstrators? And why did the divisions within the armed forces in Libya and Yemen result in civil wars?

The military, the institution that, by definition, plays a critical role in revolutions, frequently does not receive sufficient attention from experts. In the case of the recent Arab revolts, the academic community seems to have assumed that the generals would stand by the authoritarian regimes in a potential upheaval because during the preceding decades they had regularly confirmed their loyalties—which, to be sure, were seldom tested.⁶ Few scholars studied the Arab armies, and no one, to my knowledge, speculated in writing about their generals’ probable responses to mass demonstrations because few experts believed that mass protests were likely to occur. For two decades prior to 2011, I had taught comparative military politics, but my colleagues studying the Arab world were unable to assist me when I asked for their recommendations for up-to-date readings to assign my students: “You are asking for what does not exist,” as Robert Springborg, one of the most knowledgeable American experts on the Egyptian military told me.⁷ The reason certainly was not ignorance of the literature; they could not help me because, as a recent article concluded, the Arab armed forces were an issue that had

received inadequate scholarly attention in recent years, and the (very few) available works on this topic are only rarely informed by significant

theoretical and comparative advances in the study of the security sector in general and the military in particular.⁸

The Arab armies were difficult to study given that the entire Arab world was composed of authoritarian states that did their best to control information and shroud their security sectors in secrecy. Learning about the armies of other repressive regimes—such as those of the communist states during the Cold War—was similarly challenging owing to the lack of transparency in their public affairs.

Lest we be unduly critical of scholars and intelligence analysts focusing on the Arab world, it is useful to remind ourselves that their inability to foresee the Arab Spring was hardly unique. Iran's Islamic revolution in 1979 and the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe a decade later equally confounded area studies experts and spy agencies in the United States and abroad.⁹ The failure to foresee the fall of East European regimes like so many dominoes is particularly perplexing considering the extensive resources devoted to studying them. Researchers scrutinizing communist regimes perfectly well understood their profound economic vulnerability, their lack of legitimacy, and the corruptness of their political elites, yet they did not anticipate their downfalls. I worked at an American research institute at the end of the Cold War in Munich, West Germany, and I will not forget my colleague, a noted expert on Romania, who, in early December 1989, publicly contended that Romania was different from the other states of the region and Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime was in no serious danger. (Within three weeks Romanian communism, along with Ceaușescu, was dead.)

Why do the vast majority of experts time and time again miss the warning signs of coming mass uprisings and fail to forecast these momentous events?¹⁰ Rebellions nearly always overthrow authoritarian regimes of one hue or another. Two defining characteristics of modern autocracies are directly relevant here. First, they suppress information, particularly information regarding political and socioeconomic matters they consider sensitive. Second, they tend to be relatively stable and propped up by a coercive apparatus whose main function is regime preservation. Studying these regimes presents special obstacles to researchers, owing to the dearth of reliable information and the ostensible political stagnation that, at times, obscure noteworthy changes underneath the surface. Therefore, many experts focus on explaining the reasons for the persistence of authoritarian rule rather than the challenges—however modest they may be—to it. Another reason is that in most institutional

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environments questioning the conventional wisdom—in our case, the stability and durability of this or that authoritarian regime—is seldom a good career move, and intelligence analysts tend to withstand the temptation to express whatever doubts they might entertain.¹¹ The ideological orientations of analysts might also be a contributing factor to their failure to recognize significant trends. For instance, the left-liberal political stance of many Soviet and East European affairs researchers “undermined their capacity to accept the view that economic statism, planning, socialist incentives, would not work.”¹² Others have claimed that many analysts’ excessive reliance on various social science methodologies, statistics, and pseudoscientific models caused them to “[lose] contact with the subject of their inquiries—the messy, contradictory, unpredictable *homo sapiens*.”¹³

Revolutions and popular uprisings tend to surprise just about all of us.¹⁴ After all, they “break out” and “erupt,” not “develop” or “evolve.” At the same time, politicians, policy makers, and foreign-, defense-, and security-policy elites are perfectly reasonable in expecting from analysts careful assessments of revolutionary environments, appraisals of the probable outcome of uprisings, and a range of potential alternative responses to the situation. Given the decisive role military establishments play in uprisings, the ability to understand and anticipate what an army is likely to do in a specific popular upheaval is invaluable. My hope is to offer a framework—that will permit us to intelligently and knowledgeably speculate about the generals’ role in revolutions—as an improvement over the informal methods of forecasting on which researchers and policy makers have tended to base their judgments.

ARGUMENTS, DEFINITION, LITERATURE

What role does the state’s coercive apparatus—more specifically, its regular armed forces—play in uprisings that threaten the regime? In other words, how do militaries react to revolutions and why? Under what circumstances do they remain loyal to the regime? When do they side with the rebels? What factors cause them to split their support and end up fighting one another? What compels them to sit on the fence and not take sides at all? What are the main concerns that influence the army’s behavior? These questions are essential to the understanding of revolutions, and yet they are surprisingly under-studied. I seek to set forth a comprehensive explanation for these fundamental problems.

No institution matters more to a state's survival than its military, and no major uprising within a state can succeed without the support or at least the acquiescence of the armed forces. This is not to say that the army's backing is *sufficient* to make a successful revolution; indeed, revolutions require so many political, social, and economic forces to line up just right, and at just the right moment, that revolutions rarely succeed. But support from a preponderance of the armed forces is a *necessary* condition for revolutionary success.

I make two central arguments. The first is that *the response of the regime's regular armed forces to an uprising is critical to the success or failure of that uprising*. This is a contention that is by now largely, but not universally, accepted as one of the cardinal tenets of revolutions: they cannot succeed without the support of the regime's coercive apparatus, most particularly the regular army. Lenin remarked, "No revolution of the masses can triumph without the help of a portion of the armed forces that sustained the old regime."¹⁵ The sociologist Stanislaw Andrzejewski was similarly categorical in his contention, "So long as the government retains the loyalty of the armed forces, no revolt can succeed."¹⁶ There is no full consensus on this key point, though. Dissenters—prominent "practitioners" such as Mao Tse-tung and Che Guevara, and scholars like Eric Hobsbawm and C. Wright Mills—held that guerrilla bands "led by determined men, with peasants alongside them, and a mountain nearby, can defeat organized battalions of the tyrants equipped with everything up to the atom bomb."¹⁷ I disagree with them for the reasons Diana Russell, Charles Tilly, James Rule, and others did: they advanced inconsistent and illogical arguments, ignored contradictory evidence (all), discounted outside powers (Hobsbawm), and were hampered by ideological bias (all): as Tilly noted, their theorizing was "remarkably weak."¹⁸ Perhaps Katherine Chorley put it best: "No revolution will be won against a modern army when that army is *putting out its full strength* against the insurrection."¹⁹ My contribution here is to offer additional evidence to confirm this contention.

Once we recognize that without the army's support uprisings cannot succeed, we must turn our attention to figuring out *how* and *why* militaries respond the way they do to popular upheavals challenging regime survival. The second major argument of this book, one that has not been made before, is that *we can make a highly educated guess about—and in some cases even confidently predict—the army's response to a revolution or popular uprising* if we have in-depth knowledge about a particular army, its relationship to state and society, and the external environment.

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The crucial question is, then, what factors influence the military's stance in times of upheaval? Put differently, if the army is *not* "putting out its full strength against the insurrection," why is it not? In this book, I hope to convince the reader that familiarity with political and military elites, the armed forces, and some key information regarding the state, society, and the external environment will both help explain the military's behavior in response to past upheavals and anticipate its response to future revolutions. Once we are able to forecast the position of the armed forces vis-à-vis the revolutionary upheaval, we ought to be able to speculate with increased assurance about the likely fate of the revolution, as well.

I aim to explain a set of three possible principal outcomes in which the military either (1) supports the revolution, (2) opposes the rebellion, or (3) is divided, meaning that some parts of the armed forces support the uprising while others oppose it. As we will see, even when the army backs or suppresses an uprising, the entire organization seldom does so without the hesitation, disagreement, and occasionally, defection of some of its members. Therefore, I will also discuss how generals endeavor to minimize and root out various forms of dissent in ways that range from personal persuasion and institutional indoctrination to imprisonment and summary execution. The central institution in this book is the regular military that, for stylistic convenience, I also call the armed forces, or more simply, the army. In my usage the military includes all services: the army, air force, and navy; in cases where I specifically refer to the army as a land-based force, I make that clear.

Before proceeding further, I ought to say a few words about how I think of revolutions, the other main subject of this study. Even though it is one of the most elementary concepts of social science, scholars have not agreed on what "revolution" actually means, let alone accepted a general theory of revolutions. In fact, academics have thought of revolutions in starkly different terms. Barrington Moore, Jr., the eminent political sociologist, recognized only four revolutions—the English (1640), the French (1789), the Russian (1917), and the Chinese (1949)—while his colleague and the founder of Harvard's Department of Sociology, Pitirim Sorokin, counted over one thousand.²⁰ The English historian Lawrence Stone defined revolution as "the seizure of power that leads to a major restructuring of government or society and the replacement of the former elite by a new one" or "a coup d'état involving no more than a change of ruling personnel by violence or threat of violence."²¹ For Samuel P. Huntington, it was "a rapid, fundamental, and violent domestic change in the dominant values and myths of society, in its political institutions, social

structure, leadership and government activity,” in other words events that others have called “great revolutions, grand revolutions, or social revolutions.”²² Theda Skocpol thinks of social revolutions as “rapid, basic transformations of a society’s state and class structures; and they are accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below.”²³ Stephen Walt considers revolution as “the destruction of an existing state by members of its own society, followed by the creation of a new political order.”²⁴

Any definition of revolution is likely to be contested, so I want to lay out, up front, how I use the concept. I define revolution simply as *a bottom-up mass popular challenge to the established political regime and/or its ruler(s)*. My main concern here is not the origins of or reasons for the revolution but the armed forces’ response to what they perceive as a threat to the stability and survival of the regime and its leadership. That threat is usually manifested by large demonstrations, violent or not, mobilizing thousands of protesters in settings where such events have no or few precedents. This expansive definition allows me to use the concept of revolution precisely as I intend to for the purposes of this study: as synonymous with “uprising,” “rebellion,” “revolt,” and “upheaval.”

What is most interesting about societies and their political lives is how and why they change, and, of course, there is no more spectacular change than a revolution. So it is hardly surprising that the literature on revolutions and mass uprisings is remarkably wide and deep; indeed, thousands of books have been written on the subject, and many of them are profoundly thoughtful and full of insight about the causes, courses, participants, motivations, and outcomes of mass upheavals. It would take a hefty tome just to summarize this massive body of work with its evolving theoretical sophistication, trenchant debates, and myriad case studies, not to mention the fact that several scholars have already accomplished this task.²⁵ What I want to do here is merely to call attention to a shortcoming of that literature: in many studies on the subject, authors discount or disregard the role of the armed forces.²⁶

As others before me have noted, although military affairs should be a central concern for those studying revolutions, it has been a largely and consistently overlooked subject.²⁷ This point is even more germane for theoretically inclined scholars: “For the most part the army, despite its massive size and manifest power, is an institution that is regularly omitted from discussions of macro theory.”²⁸ But why is this the case? How could such a seemingly obvious part of the resolution of uprisings be largely ignored? Most social scientists, including Karl Marx and Max Weber, were

primarily interested in understanding the forces propelling revolutionary change in their studies of political and societal upheavals. They put little emphasis on studying the ancien régime's coercive apparatus, although Marx was certainly concerned with Bonapartism—that is, military counterrevolution—and understood why and how the Paris Commune, in which he had invested such high hopes, was put down.²⁹ The voluminous literature on social movements and contentious politics has remarkably little to say about the potential or expected behavior of the armed forces as well, even though the military is usually *the* key institution demonstrators face and, optimally, should win over to their cause.³⁰ More generally, as social scientists working on various aspects of the armed forces have long noticed, military-related variables are quite unpopular with historians and sociologists who study rebellions, revolutions, and social change.³¹ Furthermore, many intellectuals and academics harbor an antimilitary bias, a predisposition that is manifested through their neglect of the subject matter. As one prominent international relations scholar noticed, even though the “literature on revolution is enormous, virtually all of it focuses either on the *causes* of revolution or on the *domestic* consequences of revolutionary change.”³²

In sum, though the outcome of a rebellion is nearly always determined by the state's coercive agencies—whether they defend the state or support the rebels—few writers on revolutions give the military its due and treat its part in this or that revolution with the attention and sensitivity to nuance it deserves. The main exceptions to this rule are, perhaps not surprisingly, the most prominent contributors to the literature. Let me first mention Vincenzo Cuoco (1770–1823), one of the great eighteenth- and nineteenth-century political theorists, whose recently republished principal work, *Historical Essay on the Neapolitan Revolution of 1799* (1801), reminds us that some of the insightful treatments of this subject originated long ago. Cuoco synthesized what Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) and Giambattista Vico (1668–1744) thought about uprisings, carefully considered the French Revolution, and also showed keen awareness of the importance of and different roles played by various types of forces (army, militias, national guard, navy, etc.) maintained by the state.³³ Among more contemporary writers, Tilly recognized the fundamental role of the armed forces in a number of major works on revolutions. He demonstrated a close understanding of the internal workings of the military; in this respect, his writings on European revolutions are particularly insightful.³⁴ Skocpol's classic study, *States and Social Revolutions*, is also a discerning comparative analysis of the armed forces of

the old regimes and of the rebels in the French, Russian, and Chinese revolutions. She argues that there is no institution more important for a regime's survival than its armed forces and, therefore, maintaining the unquestioned loyalty of those forces ought to be a priority of ruling elites. In his *No Other Way Out*, Jeff Goodwin exhibits his nuanced knowledge of the various types of armed groups—insurgents, guerrillas, paramilitary organizations, death squads, regular armies—that played such key roles in the outcomes of popular uprisings in Southeast Asia and Central America.³⁵ And Jack Goldstone is one of the few scholars whose writings on the subject—including his essays on the Arab uprisings—are consistently mindful of the military's position.³⁶

The primary focus of an important recent book, Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan's *Why Civil Resistance Works*, is the societal side of revolutionary upheavals, but it is informed by a keen understanding of the military's behavior.³⁷ The Chenoweth/Stephan volume's key interest is collective *action*, but it emphasizes military *reaction*. In contrast, my study's main focus is the generals' *reactions* to uprisings (i.e., collective actions), but I will also explain how the army integrates societal factors into their decision-making process and how different types of revolts tend to elicit different types of military response. Thus, my book's approach might be considered as the reverse side of or a counterpart to Chenoweth and Stephan's volume.

Several students of international relations have examined revolutions from the perspective of the wars that often follow them. The most important recent contribution to this literature is Walt's *Revolution and War*, in which he convincingly argues that states affected by revolutionary regime change are far more likely to be involved in a war than states that emerge from a more evolutionary political process.³⁸ The reason, Walt contends, is that revolutions encourage states to view their external environment in ways that intensify their security competition and make war appear as an attractive option. An earlier book, Jonathan Adelman's *Revolution, Armies, and War*, is a political history primarily concerned with revolutions spurring social change and impacting state power.³⁹ Nevertheless, neither Walt nor Adelman deals with the question of the military's behavior during revolutionary upheaval, let alone what explains that behavior. Because of its title, I was excited to find John Ellis's *Armies in Revolution*, but it is essentially a series of well-informed but entirely descriptive case studies of revolutionary war, focusing on the rebel forces in the American, French, and Russian revolutions, concluding with a case study on the Chinese Civil War (1926–49).⁴⁰ Ellis's emphasis is on the social and

political factors that influence military affairs. He is refreshingly aware of the importance of geography in revolutionary wars and of the impact of technology on the adoption of different modes of armed struggle and in helping to explain the performance of the warring sides. Ellis does not, however, question the status quo armies' response to revolts, let alone the motivations behind it.

Only two English-language books are devoted specifically to the role of armed forces in revolutions. Chorley's 1943 classic, *Armies and the Art of Revolution*, convincingly shows that a successful revolution must involve winning over at least part of the military.⁴¹ Chorley analyzes several major revolutions—the English (1688), the French (1789), the Irish (1916–21), and two in Russia (1905 and 1917), among others—and distills pertinent lessons from them. Russell's *Rebellion, Revolution, and Armed Force* is a very different book. She focuses primarily on her native South Africa with complementary vignettes on numerous other cases, Cuba (1959) being the most recent.⁴² Both of these books are seminal contributions to the study of revolutions, and the decades since their publication have not dulled their insights. Chorley's work is rich in historical detail and calls attention to a number of critical factors—such as the effect of defeat in war, fraternization, and discontent within the armed forces—that explain the armies' behavior during revolutions. Russell's book features a brief but valuable conceptual component, and it is filled with perceptive observations regarding the causes of mass rebellions. Although it does not explain the reasons why armies react to revolutions the way they do, she does list a number of possible factors that might be responsible and need to be investigated.⁴³ Russell, and especially Chorley, understood and brilliantly explained the critical importance of the armies' reactions to rebellions, but they did not seek to systematically analyze the variables that explain those responses. That is the task I strive to accomplish in this study.

CASE SELECTION AND PURPOSE

This book centers on the question “Why do armies respond to revolutions the way they do?” As we will see, the generals' decisions regarding their reactions to any given revolution are driven by a large number of factors. Moreover, some factors—for instance, ethnic or sectarian division within the armed forces—might be of decisive importance in some cases but trivial or irrelevant in others. Determining the comparative weight of factors

is a methodological challenge, particularly when one studies relatively few cases. Because the number of cases is too small for statistical analysis and the number of factors (the independent variables) that affect what I want to explain is too large, assigning values and weights to each of the predictor variables is somewhere between extraordinarily daunting and impossible. Therefore, I will use the process-tracing method to identify causal mechanisms. More specifically, I will offer detailed narratives of the cases to illuminate how formative decisions were made.⁴⁴

The contrasting of cases will follow the method and logic of structured-focused comparison: in each case, the same questions are asked, and the narrative will focus on the main concern of the study, the military's reaction to revolutions.⁴⁵ Consequently, I will not investigate the cause of the revolution in question, how it came about, or what happens after the revolution, but restrict the analysis to my core concern. The task of chapter 1 is to propose the key variables and suggest a way to rank order them in terms of their power to affect the armies' responses to revolutions (the dependent variable). At the end of each of the four case study chapters, a table summarizes the relevance and, as far as can be determined, significance of individual factors and deals with the question of how difficult it would have been to forecast the generals' behavior vis-à-vis the upheaval. In addition, the conclusion will feature integrated tables assembling the data from all case study chapters.

The four case study chapters that illustrate the arguments make up the bulk of this book. When I selected the cases, my guiding principle was to pick cases that allow me to say something directly relevant to contemporary audiences and to construct a tool for those who wish to conjecture about the military's likely reaction to uprisings in the future. A number of issues then, affect the choice of cases. First and foremost, my central concern is, strictly speaking, the military's response to uprisings. While all revolutions want to alter the status quo and overturn the prevailing regime, they can be quite different as to their desired outcomes. Some revolutionaries seek to establish democracies, others Islamic republics, communist dictatorships, or constitutional monarchies. The question of what kind of regime rebels aspire to create, however, is beyond the scope of this endeavor. Another weighty issue is the role of the armed forces following the revolt. Will the army move back to the barracks, establish military rule, or become a trusted servant of the emerging postrevolutionary state? It is an intriguing problem but, it too lies outside the parameters of my inquiry. In other words, my case studies terminate with the fall of the old ruler and/or the ancien régime.

Second, I am interested in the reaction of the armed forces to uprisings directed against the prevailing *local* rulers. Therefore, the revolutions of 1848 in the Italian states or the 1991 Baltic revolutions do not satisfy my selection criteria because they set out to gain independence from foreign/imperial powers. Third, the army whose response I want to learn about must be a domestic army maintained by and serving the ruling regime and not that of an invading power. So England's Glorious Revolution (1688–89), in which King James II was overthrown by a union of English Parliamentarians with an *invading* army led by the Dutch William of Orange, does not satisfy the condition that both the army and the revolutionaries must be based domestically. Fourth, the armed forces must play a significant role in the events; smooth transitions of power—such as those that occurred in Poland and Hungary in 1988–89—do not qualify. Fifth, the military cannot be the institution that starts the revolution (as in Ethiopia in 1974, for instance) as, again, the matter I want to study is its *reaction* to the revolution. Sixth, the state must have a regular military force; consequently, the 1964 Zanzibar Revolution in which the insurgents fought against the Sultan's mostly untrained police detachments does not fit the bill. Seventh, the uprisings I am interested in studying must have a direct impact upon the entire state and society; in other words, they have to be *national* revolutions. Consequently, the 1932 Constitutionalist Revolution in the Brazilian state of São Paulo, triggered by federal policies that diminished state autonomy, does not meet this condition.

Moreover, as I noted above, relevance to the contemporary world is an overriding concern of this book. For this reason, I decided to consider uprisings from the post-World War II era. At the end of the day, from the available pool of cases that satisfy these criteria, I wanted to select a manageable number that were drawn from different world regions, were relatively well known, and also included clusters of revolutions. These are the reasons for my choice of the 1978–79 Islamic Revolution in Iran, the Burmese “People Power Uprising” of 1988 (with a complementary section on the 2007 “Saffron Revolution”), the revolutions of 1989 in China and Eastern Europe, and the “Arab Spring” upheavals of 2011.⁴⁶ The latter two case study chapters examine groups of upheavals providing an appealing opportunity to assess the generals' reactions to the spread or diffusion of the revolutionary spirit from abroad. Although many observers, analysts, and writers describe or refer to all of these cases as “revolutions,” only Iran's Islamic Revolution and perhaps the Romanian Revolution would satisfy the most exacting definitions of the concept.⁴⁷ The other cases could be described as “revolutions” only in a more broad

sense, that is, as massive popular challenges to the established political regime and its ruling elites.

Successful vis-à-vis failed uprisings is one way to distinguish between the cases. I view the cases from the revolutionary side because most upheavals are directed against autocrats, even if they do not necessarily result in the eventual establishment of democracies or, indeed, in better regimes than they replaced. Therefore, the Iranian, Romanian, Tunisian, and Egyptian uprisings may be thought of as “positive cases,” given that the revolts succeeded both in overthrowing the regimes or their ruling elites and obtaining the support of the armed forces. Believing that nothing teaches lessons as well as failure does, I will also analyze a number of unsuccessful revolts—they might be called “negative cases”—to explain why they came up short: what did the armed forces “do right” to repel the protesters’ challenge, and what did their opponents do or not do that prevented them from overthrowing the regime. This notion lies behind the decision to study the uprisings in Burma and China, as well as in Bahrain and Syria.

I strongly believe that social science should seek to engage, inform, and, if possible, propose suggestions, answers, and solutions to real-world questions.⁴⁸ My intent is far more modest than to endeavor to offer some grand theory of armies and revolutions; I have always been deeply suspicious of grand theories and their real-life usefulness. If Albert O. Hirschman, one of the few authentic giants of twentieth-century social science, “never trusted himself sufficiently to indulge in grand theorizing,” how could I?⁴⁹ My ambition is merely to pursue what Hirschman called the *petite idée*, an attempt “to come to an understanding of reality in portions, admitting that the angle may be subjective.”⁵⁰

My aim here could not be more practical: to offer a concise, policy-relevant book devoid of social science jargon that asks a simple but fundamental question and advances a straightforward argument illustrated by a manageable number of targeted case studies. I do not aspire to offer a treatise on the causes of revolutionary upheavals or to recount the origins of this revolution or that, let alone to retell the stories of the revolutions themselves in intricate detail. Neither do I wish to present comprehensive analyses of social movements and contentious politics in various contexts. What I want to show political and military experts, area studies scholars, and others interested in public affairs is that familiarity with the political and military elites, the armed forces at large, and some key social data will help them make an educated guess, and, in some cases, perhaps even a confident prediction regarding the action the army is likely to take

in a popular uprising. If the analytical framework I set out will enhance their ability to make that guess, then I will have succeeded.

A ROADMAP OF THE BOOK

Chapter 1 is the conceptual “meat” of the book, where I lay out the analytical framework and outline in detail the internal and external variables that, I argue, affect the armed forces’ responses to revolutions. In the remaining four chapters, I will demonstrate how these factors actually operate; how they influence the behavior of generals, officers, and soldiers in a variety of contexts; and how individual factors assume greater or lesser importance in different historical, political, and societal settings. Chapters 2 and 3 focus on single case studies, those of the Islamic Revolution of Iran (1979) and Burma’s 1988 “Four Eight Uprising,” complemented by a shorter section on the 2007 “Saffron Revolution.” Chapter 2 will explain why Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi’s Imperial Armed Forces (IAF) were unwilling or unable—the distinction itself is significant—to prop up the crumbling edifice of his regime. At first glance, the outcome would have been difficult to have anticipated; after all, the Shah built a large and modern army and treated his officers extremely well. In chapter 3, we will see the generals’ responses to the attempt to depose a different kind of regime, a military dictatorship, in the case of Burma. Military regimes are very difficult to unseat unless their rulers evidence some willingness to give up power. In Burma they did not, either in response to the student-led revolution in 1988, or, nearly two decades later, in the series of large demonstrations led by Buddhist monks that is now customarily referred to as the “Saffron Revolution.” Looking at Burma could not be more timely, given its ongoing but still nascent, still hesitant, and still easily reversible democratization process that began in late 2010.

In chapters 4 and 5, the focus shifts to two clusters of revolutions that occurred in 1989 and 2011. I made the decision to trade some nuance about the militaries in question for comprehensiveness and the chance to compare cases, particularly in chapter 5. I am confident that we have much to learn from contrasting the military’s role in and general approach toward the distinct revolutions in China and Romania and the Arab uprisings, and the insights yielded by these comparison are an acceptable trade-off for the detail we have to sacrifice in order to keep the length of these sections manageable. In chapter 4, I explain why politicians and generals in the six East European Warsaw Pact member states

(i.e., Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania) and in China reacted to the upheavals and revolutions so differently. In particular, I will briefly explain why senior officers in Poland and Hungary remained inactive during the transitions there, why the Bulgarian army leadership supported the “elite transfer” in Sofia, and how the top brass in Czechoslovakia and East Germany reacted to the mass demonstrations in their principal cities. I will devote the bulk of the chapter to China and Romania, however, where bona fide uprisings—one failed, one successful—took place, and the armed forces did turn their guns against the people, albeit reluctantly and in very different circumstances.

In chapter 5, I analyze the armies’ roles in the 2011 upheavals in the Middle East and North Africa, concentrating on the six countries where considerable bloodshed occurred: Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen. As we shall see, the regular military forces assumed roles that followed one of three distinctive patterns: they either supported or opposed the uprising or split because they disagreed about how to respond to it. I will explain that once one is reasonably familiar with these countries’ political dynamics, societies, and civil-military relations, the reactions of the armed forces to the revolts should not have been all that unexpected. Looking only at cases where the military did play an important role constitutes something of a selection bias, so I will also briefly survey two Arab kingdoms, Morocco and Oman, where the armed forces’ involvement in controlling the unrest was far more subdued. In the conclusion, I sum up what we learned with the help of tables that comparatively evaluate the usefulness of the different factors I follow throughout the study to explain the behavior of the armed forces in various political settings.

In sum, my ambition is no more than to satisfactorily answer the deceptively simple questions implicit on the cover of this volume. No subtitle was needed because its title could not reflect more accurately what it is about. That said, I vacillated about using the subtitle, “A Framework for Analysis,” to underscore my commitment to make this study valuable in a very practical sense to professionals whose job it is to think about rapid political change and to try to anticipate its result. The military’s behavior is not a perfect indicator of how revolutions will play out. Nevertheless, I hope that with our improved ability to intelligently speculate about that behavior we might also increase our capacity to anticipate revolutionary outcomes.