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A coercive conundrum

Analysis on the role of the Tunisian coercive apparatus in the Tunisian Revolution of 2011

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Abstract

The wave of protests in the Middle East, that started in Tunisia at the end of 2010 and brought about President Ben Ali's removal from power took the world by storm. The aim of this thesis is to examine the role of the coercive apparatus in the outcome of the uprising, by examining the factors that affected its will and capacity to repress popular mobilisation. The four factors outlined as affecting this are fiscal health, international support networks, level of institutionalisation and level of popular mobilisation. The analysis shows that while the paramilitary units under the command of the Interior Ministry proved willing to engage in lethal repression of protesters, which only stoked further outrage, they did not possess the capacity in numbers to contain protests. The Interior Ministry as a whole was well staffed, but the bulk of its capacity was in intelligence and police rather than in dealing with large crowds. The military, however, may have had the capacity to repress protesters, but it chose to defect from the regime, refusing to order its troops to fire at protesters. The Tunisian military was highly institutionalised and both economically and politically disenfranchised from the regime, and so its officers were not invested in the survival of the regime. The international attention brought on Tunisia by the WikiLeaks US diplomatic cables detailing the corruption of the regime and the large demographic representation of protesters likely made the decision easier. So, in conclusion, the will and capacity of the coercive apparatus to repress had a significant affect on the outcome of the uprising. While the units under the interior ministry largely had the will to repress, they did not possess the capacity to do so in the face of the large crowds. The military however, apparently had the capacity to repress, but chose not to, which further galvanised protesters. Both of these findings had a significant impact on the outcome of the uprising, which resulted in Ben Ali's removal from office.

Abbreviations

BMENA Broader Middle East and North Africa

BOP *Brigades d'Ordre Publique*

CPG *Compagnie de Phosphates de Gafsa*

EU European Union

IMF The International Monetary Fund

MEPI Middle East Partner Initiative

PSD *Parti Socialiste Déstourien*

RCD *Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique*

UGTT *Union Générale de Travailleurs Tunisiens*

US The United States

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1 Introduction

The wave of protests in the Arab world in 2011, now commonly known as the "Arab Spring", has taken the world, along with Middle Eastern scholars, by storm. The revolution in Tunisia managed to, mostly peacefully, topple its 24-year standing dictator in only 27 days.

Much of the discourse on the Arab Spring has centred on the underlying causes - socioeconomic, political, social - of the revolution. This assignment, however, will focus largely on the role of the coercive apparatus - ranging from security services to the military - played in the Tunisian uprising. On Habib Bourguiba Boulevard in Tunis, and the streets of Thala and Kasserine, police appeared unable to contain the flood of people, and shooting merely brought more people out in rage. When the army was called in to assist, it ultimately refused to shoot at protesters and, on 14 January, gave Ben Ali "the velvet shove" out of the country. What caused the military commanders to refuse president Ben Ali's orders to shoot at protesters, and why did the well-staffed and well-funded Interior Ministry fail to crush the uprising? These are some questions that will be examined in this study.

1.1 Purpose and Research Question

Based on Eva Bellin's theory that the stability of an authoritarian regime depends on the robustness of the coercive apparatus, this assignment will examine the different factors that may have influenced the will and capacity of Tunisia's coercive apparatus to repress the unprecedented popular mobilisation seen during the Tunisian uprisings of 2011. The aim is to operationalise Bellin's theory in the context of the Tunisian uprising.

Thus, my research question is:

In what way did the will and/or capacity of the Tunisian coercive apparatus to repress popular mobilisation affect the outcome of the 2011 uprisings?

1.2 Theory

The analytical framework is given by Eva Bellin in "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in a Comparative Perspective" and her 2012 article developing this theory, published after the 2011 Arab uprisings.¹ Using a comparative approach, Bellin suggests that the endurance of authoritarianism in the Middle East is not due to the lack of democratic prerequisites, which is also found in other areas where democracy has nonetheless managed to prosper, but due to the will and capacity of the coercive apparatuses of authoritarian regimes to repress popular mobilisation and dissent.² It is important to note, however, that it is not the whole concept of democratic prerequisites that is being jettisoned, merely that it is not sufficient in itself to explain the exceptional lack of democracy in the Middle East.³ Researcher Daniel Byman criticises Bellin for ignoring factors such as a weak civil society.⁴ However, her theory focuses on the success of a revolution in toppling an incumbent regime and system, not on the subsequent establishment of democracy.⁵ As Brownlee neatly puts it:

I treat moments of potential authoritarian breakdown as the first contest in a multistage process of breakdown, transition and consolidation. The end of a dictatorship is a necessary but insufficient condition for the inauguration of representative democracy.⁶

For a revolution to be successful, Bellin identifies four factors that influence the will and capacity of the coercive apparatus to suppress popular mobilisation. These are: the fiscal health of the coercive apparatus, international support networks, the level of institutionalisation of the coercive apparatus and the level of popular mobilisation.⁷

The fiscal health of the coercive apparatus may affect the ability to purchase necessary weapons and equipment, but prolonged fiscal crisis may also limit the ability to pay soldiers and police wages, which may decrease the will to repress in the name of the regime by, for example, causing men to desert.

¹ Eva Bellin, 'The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in a Comparative Perspective', *Comparativ Politics*, Vol. 36, No. 2, January 2004, pp. 139-157. A version of this article also appeared in 2005 under the title "Coercive Institutions and Coercive Leaders" in *Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Regimes and Resistance*, Marsha Pripstein Posusney and Michelle Penner Angrist (eds.), Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc, Colorado, 2005, pp. 21-41

Bellin, 'Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Arab Spring', *Comparative Politics*, vol. 44, no. 2, January 2012 pp. 127-149.

² Bellin, 'The Robustness of Authoritarianism', pp. 142-4

³ Bellin, 'Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism', p. 128

⁴ Byman, Daniel 'Why Mideast Tumult Caught Scholars by Surprise', *Chronicle Of Higher Education*, February 13, 2011, <<http://chronicle.com/article/Why-Mideast-Tumult-Caught/126307/>>, accessed 20 May 2012

⁵ Bellin, 'Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism', p. 143

⁶ Jason Brownlee, 'Political Crisis and Restabilisation: Iraq, Libya, Syria and Tunisia' in *Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Regimes and Resistance*, p. 47

⁷ Bellin, 'The Robustness of Authoritarianism', pp. 144-7

International support networks are international actors that actively or tacitly support the regime and the coercive apparatus. The loss of the support of these, or being actively sanctioned by the international community, may cripple the coercive apparatus financial capacity to sustain repression, but may also affect the willingness of the coercive apparatus to engage in repression in support of the regime.

The level of institutionalisation of the coercive apparatus is inversely related to the will of the coercive apparatus to repress popular mobilisation, meaning the less institutionalised it is, the more likely it is to stand by the regime.⁸ The level of institutionalisation is of particular interest since it is an internal factor, rather than an external one. Fiscal health, international support and level of popular mobilisation are all external factors relative to the coercive apparatus, whereas the level of institutionalisation of a coercive apparatus is integral in its very structure. This also makes it more resistant to rapid fluctuations, unlike most other components of a revolution - a highly institutionalised structure takes a long time to build, and likewise does not become de-institutionalised overnight.

Finally, the level of popular mobilisation in several ways affects the will and capacity of the coercive apparatus to repress, since it greatly increases the cost of repression. Repressing large crowds risks international attention, and may in turn jeopardise the international support networks of the regime, as well as the domestic legitimacy of the regime.⁹ It also increases the risk of desertion, a prominent feature in the uprisings of both Libya and Syria.¹⁰

Bellin's approach does not focus on the causes of the uprising, but rather on the factors, once it was happening, that led the coercive apparatus to be unable and unwilling to repress protesters, which in turn caused the collapse of the authoritarian regime. Indeed, some claim that though we can try to identify the causes of an uprising, they are inherently unpredictable and will never be fully understood.¹¹ Other researchers, such as Goldstone and Brownlee have proposed similar approaches, but identifying or categorising the factors differently. Goldstone's theory focuses on elite fragmentation and alienation from the regime, especially the military, rather than the fiscal health and institutionalisation of the coercive apparatus. He argues that for the military to abandon its regime, the regime must appear so unjust or inept that it is viewed as a threat to the country's future.¹² Brownlee lends supports to Bellin's argument about the importance of the repressive capacity of the coercive apparatus, but stresses the interplay between regime "hard-liners" and

⁸ Bellin, 'The Robustness of Authoritarianism', pp. 144-5

⁹ Bellin, 'The Robustness of Authoritarianism', p. 146

¹⁰ Bellin, 'Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism', pp. 130-1

¹¹ Katerina Dalacoura, 'The 2011 Uprisings in the Arab Middle East: Political Change and Geopolitical Implications' *International Affairs*, Vol. 88, 2012, p. 69

¹² Jack A. Goldstone, 'Understanding the Revolutions of 2011', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, 2011, pp. 8-9

”soft-liners” and the role of external states using their influence to restrain, or refraining from restraining, repression against opposition movements.¹³ However, both Goldstone’s and Brownlee’s approaches remain largely the same as Bellin’s, focusing on the process of regime destabilisation rather than the causes of the discontent, or existing prerequisites for democracy.

In the original theory, Bellin refers to the coercive apparatus as a whole, but in her 2012 article she claims that in cases of such mass mobilisation as seen in 2011, when the police and intelligence apparatuses are overwhelmed, one only needs to look at the will and capacity of the military to assess the potential fall of the regime.¹⁴ However, this argument is arguably a simplification of her own theory, as one cannot dismiss such a large part of the coercive apparatus based on its incapacity to repress the large mass of people, when this is in fact what the theory claims to assess. While, the military indeed played decisive role in determining the outcome of the uprising, the actions of the police and internal security paramilitary forces still affected the process. Therefore, this study will include all parts of the coercive apparatus in analysing its will and capacity to repress popular mobilisation.

1.2.1 Definitions

Coercive apparatus: By the coercive apparatus it is meant all parts of the military and internal security apparatus which are used by the regime to repress opposition and dissent.¹⁵ The use of the term coercive apparatus is sometimes problematic in literature, as it is often used indiscriminately, when actually referring to certain parts of the coercive apparatus, such as the military or intelligence services.¹⁶ Similarly, the terms ”security apparatus” or ”security establishment” are often used in such a way that it leaves confusion as to whether it refers to a country’s intelligence service, military establishment or other coercive institutions. The coercive apparatus of the state must also be distinguished from its regime. Despite a tendency in authoritarian regimes to blur the lines between the coercive apparatus and the regime, they must be regarded as separate bodies.¹⁷

¹³ Brownlee, pp. 57-60

¹⁴ Bellin, ‘Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism’, p. 132

¹⁵ Bellin, ‘The Robustness of Authoritarianism’, p. 130

¹⁶ Bellin, ‘Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism’, p. 130

¹⁷ Philippe Droz-Vincent, ‘Authoritarianism, Revolutions, Armies and Arab Regime Transitions’, *The International Spectator*, vol. 46, no. 2, 2011, p. 6

However, there may be different levels of connection to and hybridisation with the regime within different parts of the coercive apparatus, as will be evident from the following analysis.¹⁸

Level of institutionalisation: The definition of institutionalisation used here is the Weberian sense employed by Bellin, cited as following:

An institutionalized coercive apparatus is one that is rule-governed, predictable, and meritocratic. It has established paths of career advancement and recruitment; promotion is based on performance, not politics; there is a clear delineation between the public and private that forbids predatory behavior vis-à-vis society; and discipline is maintained through the inculcation of a service ethic and strict enforcement of a merit-based hierarchy.¹⁹

The term "professionalisation" has also been employed by researchers to suggest a similar and often overlapping significance. Researcher Mehran Kamrava's definition covers that of Bellin's while also including training and training facilities available, which goes outside the definition employed here.²⁰ Kamrava's definition, and others like it, would disrupt the balance of the analysis, since better training and equipment would increase the capacity to repress, while, following Bellin's logic, it would also decrease the will to repress in order to defend the incumbent regime. Therefore, Bellin's definition will be used in this study.

Patrimonialism and un-institutionalised structures: Bellin contrasts institutionalisation with a patrimonially organised structure, and defines this as a structure within which:

staffing decisions are ruled by cronyism; the distinction between public and Private mission is blurred, leading to widespread corruption and abuse of power; and discipline is maintained through the exploitation of primordial cleavage, often relying on balanced rivalry between different ethnic/sectarian groups.

Bellin's definition of patrimonialism, however, becomes constricting if it is to be the direct opposite of institutionalisation. Arguably, an organisational structure may lack institutionalisation without drawing on premordial ties. The term patrimonialism has also been the subject of some controversy, as its usage, and the use of the modern variant, neopatrimonialism, has varied greatly among scholars, with unclear definitions.²¹ Therefore, the term un-institutionalised will be employed as the opposite of an institutionalised structure, with its component characteristics directly opposing those

¹⁸ Bellin, 'The Robustness of Authoritarianism', p. 143

¹⁹ Bellin, 'The Robustness of Authoritarianism', p. 145

²⁰ Mehran Kamrava, 'Military Professionalization and Civil-Military Relations in the Middle East', *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 115, no. 1, 2000, pp. 67-68.

²¹ For a discussion on the use of patrimonialism and neopatrimonialism, see Gero Erdman and Ulf Engel, 'Neopatrimonialism Reconsidered, Critical Review and Elaboration of an Elusive Concept', *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, vol. 45, no. 1, pp. 95-119, February 2007

of Bellin's definition of institutionalisation; It does *not* have established paths of recruitment and advancement, promotion is based on politics, rather than performance and there is no clear distinction between the public and private, allowing for predatory behaviour vis-à-vis society. As is evident, this definition largely overlaps that of Bellin's definition of patrimonialism, but avoids the necessity of primordial ties as forming the basis of loyalties.

Will and capacity: As Bellin points out, will and capacity should not be employed as a single variable. The coercive apparatus may have the capacity to repress protests, but decide not to because it doesn't find it within its interest, or soldiers might defect when faced with firing at fellow countrymen. Likewise, a coercive apparatus might be willing to repress dissent, but find itself overpowered by popular mobilisation and civilian resistance.

I argue that all four factors mentioned above must be assessed for their effect on both the will and capacity. In Bellin's application of her previous theory on the Arab Spring, she categorises fiscal health and international support networks as affecting the capacity to repress, and level of institutionalisation and popular mobilisation as affecting the will of the coercive apparatus to repress.²² This, however, over-simplifies the argumentation in her 2004 article and would force one to disregard several important circumstances, such as the US diplomatic WikiLeaks cables (discussed below) and the relatively low funding of the military.²³ For that reason, this analysis will use the original application of the theory, and assess all factors as affecting both will and capacity.

1.3 Method and Material

While Bellin uses comparative analysis, drawing on instances of attempted revolutions and great popular mobilisation from all over the Middle East and other parts of the World, there is still room for a deeper analysis in every specific context to properly dissect and analyse the course of events through Bellin's analytical prism. As Barany points out when discussing prediction of the response of the military: "There is no substitute for detailed, particular knowledge of a country and its armed forces."²⁴ This must be considered to be equally true for other parts of the coercive apparatus, which is why the Tunisian uprising will be examined in the following as a qualitative case study. While a more comparative approach might be useful for further testing of the theory, the aim of this paper is to operationalise Bellin's theory in the Tunisian context.

²² Bellin, 'Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism', p. 129

²³ Bellin, 'The Robustness of Authoritarianism', pp. 144-7

²⁴ Zoltan Barany, 'The Role of the Military', *Journal of democracy*, vol. 22, no. 4, 2011, p. 26.

The research is cumulative and largely based on secondary sources and scientific literature, along with media reports from events. A strong inhibitor to the use of primary sources is the difficulty in finding reliable information on the military and intelligence and security services of authoritarian countries.²⁵ Thus, assessing to what extent a coercive apparatus, including its on-the-ground personnel as well as its top officials, was willing to engage in repression, largely becomes a matter of interpreting actions and events that have come to public knowledge, while the internal motivations and thoughts remain unknown. The same is true for the capacity, which becomes a difficult task indeed when, for example, assessments on the amount of security officials employed by the Tunisian Interior Ministry differ by a number of 50,000 men.²⁶ This does not mean, however, that useful deductions cannot be made from what is known to the outside world, simply that attention should be given to its limitations.

Another difficulty in analysing the Tunisian uprising is that it may be hard to understand the impact and significance of events, given that they occurred so recently. Much is also currently being produced on the subject, making the task of keeping abreast of the latest research of scholars and analysts difficult, and thus research shedding new light on events may be overlooked. It also means that much of the material used in the following has had little time to be scrutinised by other scholars, which might have otherwise brought to light argumentative flaws or theoretical criticism, adding depth to the analysis.

When recapitulating the events of the uprisings, some articles from news agencies, particularly al-Jazeera are referred to. Al-Jazeera was one of the networks with the most extensive coverage of the Arab uprisings, including Tunisia, which is why it is indeed a useful resource to find detailed reports on events. Some caution must be made, as the network has been criticised for overtly supporting the protests in Tunisia and Egypt. It has been accused of exaggerating the number of protesters on the ground, while largely ignoring to report on protests in other countries, such as Bahrain.²⁷

I will assess each of the four factors Bellin outlines as influencing the capacity and will of the coercive apparatus to repress popular mobilisation during the Arab spring. Focus will be on the contemporary context during the time of the uprising, while taking the historical background into consideration. Depending on their primacy in this particular context, some factors will be examined

²⁵ Roger Owen, *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*, 3rd ed, Routledge, Oxon, 2004, p. 179. Barany, p. 26

²⁶ Brieg Tomos Powel, 'The stability syndrome: US and EU democracy promotion in Tunisia', *Journal of North African Studies*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2009 pp. 70.

²⁷ Marc Lynch, *The Arab Uprisings: The Unfinished Revolutions of the Middle East*, Public Affairs, 2012, Kindle eBook, p. 20. Droz-Vincent, 'Authoritarianism, Revolutions, Armies and Arab Regime Transitions', p. 12

more thoroughly than others, such as the level of institutionalisation of the coercive apparatus and international support networks.

1.3.1 Previous Research

Eva Bellin provides the theoretical framework from which I start of my analysis, in her 2004 paper "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in a Comparative Perspective".²⁸ A follow-up assessment and analysis of this paper was published by Bellin in 2012, in which she discusses her earlier work in light of the event of the Arab Spring.²⁹ Bellin's approach has been criticised for ignoring the importance of civil society in democratisation.³⁰ However, one can argue that her theory focuses on the success of popular mobilisation in bringing about regime change, not on the subsequent establishment of democracy.³¹ There are also some discrepancies in the application of her own theory between the articles published in 2004 and 2012. The 2012 article assigns certain factors to affect the will and others the capacity, a distinction that was not made clear in the 2004 article. While I have chosen to apply the original theory, it does put into question the basis for Bellin's reasoning in amending the theory, as this is not clearly outlined, but presented in a way that gives the impression that this was the original reasoning.

There is much currently being written on the Arab Uprisings, new material being published every month, thus making it difficult to keep abreast with the latest research. One of the works which have been used extensively in this assignment is renowned French scholar Jean-Pierre Filiu's work, "The Arab Revolution, Ten Lessons from the Democratic Uprising". It gives a multifaceted analysis of the uprisings and what their impact has and will be, dividing it into ten main lessons to draw from the events. An issue with Filiu's work is its popular-scientific nature, as it seems to be aimed at the general public as much as other scholars. Consequently, Filiu allows himself to draw on his personal experience and scholarly knowledge in his analysis, rather than always backing up his statements with investigable sources. Time and further research will have to determine how accurate Filiu's analysis of the implications of these uprisings will turn out to be, a flaw that is inherent in any work on the Arab uprisings, due to the closeness of events.

Emma Murphy's work "Economic and Political change in Tunisia: From Bourguiba to Ben Ali" is employed in this assignment largely for historical reference, as it provides a thorough presentation

²⁸ Bellin, 'The Robustness of Authoritarianism'

²⁹ Bellin, 'Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism'

³⁰ Byman, 'Why Mideast Tumult Caught Scholars by Surprise'

³¹ Bellin, 'Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism', p. 143

of the developments of the Tunisian political elite. Though it has been criticised for being too optimistic about Bourguiba's and Ben Ali's achievements regarding economic liberalisation, it does provide a solid historical overview of the political development in addition to the economic one, which is the focus of this assignment.³²

1.4 Delimitations

Historically, the main focus of this essay will be the events of the Tunisian uprising, stretching from 17 December 2010 to 14 January 2011. The historical background, however, will extend as far back as the Tunisian independence, and some mentions will be made of events after 14 January 2011.

1.5 Disposition

The disposition of the paper will here be presented. The introduction will be followed by a background chapter outlining the relevant historical background of Bourguiba's and Ben Ali's presidencies and their relationship with the coercive apparatus. The chapter outlines three major incidences of social upheaval that preceded the 2011 uprising. The analysis section starts with a discussion on assessing the will and capacity of the coercive apparatus and is followed by an account of the events of the Tunisian uprising. Thereafter, each of the four factors outlined by Bellin are analysed in a section each. The analysis is followed by a conclusion of the findings of this assignment. The last section is a bibliography of the literature and sources used in this paper.

³²Larbi Sadiki, 'Bin Ali's Tunisia: Democracy by Non-Democratic Means', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2002, p. 69

2 Background

Before the Tunisian Uprising, Tunisia had only known two presidents since independence, Habib Bourguiba and Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali. This section will give a brief historical overview of the two presidencies, giving particular attention on their relations with the state's coercive apparatus. Furthermore, three incidents of popular mobilisation that were repressed by the country's coercive apparatus will be outlined, as points of reference to the 2011 Uprising.

2.1 Bourguiba and the Coercive Apparatus

In contrast to many other countries in the Middle East, Tunisia won its independence through negotiations rather than armed struggle. Popular mobilisation was achieved through the unions, in particular the *Union Générale de Travailleurs Tunisiens* (UGTT) and the Neo-Destour party, lead by Habib Bourguiba, who also became the country's first president after successfully negotiating for independence with the French colonial power. Though battles against the French were fought, notably in Bizerte in 1961, this was not the main factor in the power transfer. This, many believe, has had a strong effect on Tunisia's political development, which has, in a regional context, tended towards moderation rather than aggression.³³ Since a military coup was thwarted in 1962, Habib Bourguiba distrusted the military and routinely favoured the Interior Ministry over it, a trend which was later continued and was even more notable in the regime of Zine Abdine Ben Ali.³⁴ Even though the military has, to a large extent, been kept out of domestic affairs, it was on several occasions deployed to repress dissent and popular mobilisation.³⁵

In 1978, the UGTT strived to achieve greater independence from the ruling party, *Parti Socialiste Déstourien* (PSD), as resentment grew within its ranks over rising unemployment. The UGTT called for a general strike on 26 January. Bourguiba responded by declaring a state of emergency and calling in the military to suppress riots in Tunis, leaving 51 dead and hundreds of people injured.³⁶

The next episode of people taking to the streets in big numbers occurred in 1984. Following several years of economical hardships, reforms aiming at raising revenues through taxation of the middle

³³ Emma Murphy, *Economic and Political Change in Tunisia: From Bourguiba to Ben Ali*, Macmillian Press Ltd, Great Britain, 1999, pp. 48-59

³⁴ Jean-François Daguzan, "Les armées en politique: des trajectoires divergentes", *Confluences Méditerranée*, no. 29, 1999, p. 33

³⁵ Murphy, p. 66

³⁶ Murphy, p. 60

and upper classes were blocked by vested interests from within the PSD. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank pushed for cutting food subsidies, leading the government to strongly reduce wheat and cereal subsidies, causing bread prices to double overnight. The working class responded furiously, with nationwide riots raging for over a week.³⁷ A key difference to the riots in 1978 is that these were spontaneous protests in response to what was seen as the government using the working class to finance its policies for the benefit of the richer segments of society.³⁸ As in 1978, the army and police were brought in to quell protests, indicating an ever increasing reliance of Bourguiba's regime on its coercive apparatus.³⁹ In the end, Bourguiba blamed his prime minister, Muhammad Mzali for the policies, who in turn blamed the Interior Minister for the harsh response of the coercive apparatus, dismissing him and taking on the portfolio himself. The president had to give in to the demands of the protesters and cancelled the subsidy cuts, demanding the government replace the loss of revenue with increased taxes on luxury goods, international travel and alcohol, which would mostly affect the middle and upper classes. He thus distanced himself from the decision to cut subsidies and managed to reap popular approval from the crisis.⁴⁰

2.2 Ben Ali's Rise to Power

On november 7, 1987, Habib Bourguiba woke up to finding himself deposed as President of Tunisia. The previous night his Prime Minister, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, had ordered the Presidents palace surrounded by troops under his control, arrested key supporters of the president and brought in a team of doctors to sign papers declaring Bourguiba medically incapable of performing his duties as president. He thus deposed him in accordance with the Tunisian constitution.⁴¹ With age, Bourguiba's mental health had become more and more unreliable, with a struggling economy and increasing repression causing frustration among the people. Therefore, Ben Ali acted with support of several ministers, who had grown tired of their increasingly erratic boss.⁴² The issue of succession for their ageing president had long been a matter of concern for Tunisia's political establishment, with Bourguiba tending to dismiss his prime ministers and other people of high influence on a regular basis to avoid anyone building up a strong enough power base to challenge him. Once presented with the *fait accompli*, many Tunisians, as well as the international community, welcomed the coup, as it preempted political instability while seeming to provide hope

³⁷ Lynch, *The Arab Uprising*, p.45

³⁸ Murphy, p. 65

³⁹ Brownlee, p. 51

⁴⁰ Murphy, p. 66

⁴¹ Brownlee, p. 52

⁴² Murphy, p. 77

of an opening of the political sphere⁴³. Having been appointed Prime Minister earlier in October that year, Ben Ali acted swiftly, so as not to risk being dismissed before he could stage his coup. Ben Ali's background was in both the military and security services. He was an army General, and served as General Director of Security, thereby being in charge of the police forces during the 1978 riots, and was thus often blamed for the shooting of protesters during these events.⁴⁴ After independence, he was part of developing Tunisia's security services, and served for a lengthy period as Director of Military Security. In 1984 he was appointed Secretary of State for National Security and later Minister for the Interior in 1986.⁴⁵ In October 1987, after another cabinet reshuffle by the increasingly paranoid Bourguiba, he replaced Rachid Sfar as Prime Minister, and became Secretary-General of the PSD, while still keeping the Interior Ministry portfolio. He then found himself in a position of control over both the security forces and the party, while retaining a strong influence over the army, which he put to good use on November 6 1987.⁴⁶

2.3 The Regime of Ben Ali - Continued Coercion

Prior to Ben Ali's coup, fears had been raised that he would lead a military takeover of the state. The political climate became increasingly tenuous in the last years of Bourguiba's rule, which were the most repressive of his presidency, along with a looming economic crisis. However, even though Ben Ali did take over the reigns of power, his coup was rather political than military, that took great care to be perceived as constitutionally legitimate.⁴⁷ He did still, however, represent an intervention of the military in civilian governance, which was precisely what Bourguiba had been so wary of during his rule. Ben Ali soon proved to reason in the same way - disallowing the office corps of the army any political involvement - even membership in the ruling party.⁴⁸

Ben Ali initially appeared willing to open up the political system and liberalise the economy, releasing thousands of political prisoners, including some prominent members of the opposition. He also restructured the PSD, renaming it the *Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique* (RCD), to underline the democratic transition, and developed a "National Pact" together with the main opposition and social organisations. Despite these initial openings however, little real progress was made. The electoral system ensured the RCD won all seats in the National Assembly in the 1989, despite independent candidates from the Islamist party *Al-Nahda*, that was still refused legal

⁴³ Brownlee, p. 52

⁴⁴ Murphy, p. 67,

⁴⁵ Sadiki, p. 60. Murphy, p. 165

⁴⁶ Murphy, p. 76-77

⁴⁷ Murphy, p. 165

⁴⁸ Murphy, p. 164

recognition as a party, receiving 17% of the vote as independents. Ben Ali also won 99% of the vote in the presidential election.⁴⁹ Repression of Islamists and other oppositional groups increased soon after the election. Ben Ali used the threats of the Islamist and examples from Algeria and Iran to explain the increased focus on security.⁵⁰ The internal security apparatus was greatly expanded over the years, both within and outside of the Interior Ministry.⁵¹ In 1993, the security budget occupied 10% of all public spending.⁵² By 2011, though the Tunisian military retained a relatively small but professional force of around 27,000 men, the Interior Ministry employed, according to one estimate, 120 000 people, which translates into one security agent for every 85 Tunisians.⁵³

One major event of popular mobilisation which preceded the uprising in 2011 is what has been termed the 2008 "miner revolt" in the province of Gafsa, predominantly in the town of Rdeyef. Researcher James Gelvin even called this "the first arab uprising".⁵⁴ The region, highly reliant on its phosphate mining industry, had seen rising unemployment since the 1980's, as modernisation had allowed the companies to lay off workers. Frustration over unemployment, salaries and the corruption of the previously state-owned, but now privatised, mining company *Compagnie de Phosphates de Gafsa* (CPG) came to a tipping point on 6 January 2008. The results of a recruitment process of 380 new workers was revealed, in which friends and families of people in high positions in the UGTT had been selected over other more qualified unemployed people.⁵⁵ Protest, strikes by local unions and flares of unrest increased in intensity over the following months, until, when some masked youngsters attacked a police office, the security forces saw an excuse to intervene. Residential areas were attacked with tear gas and activists were arrested. However, as the protests continued over the next few weeks, police repeatedly being too outnumbered to break up crowds with tear gas and batons, harder measures were called for. On 6 June, police used live bullets against protesters, killing one and injuring 21. The following day, the army was deployed and took control over most of the city of Redeyef. In the ensuing weeks, scores of activists were arrested, with syndicate leaders and opposition activists being targeted. Many were given punishments of 10 years of imprisonment. Bereft of its leadership, the movement dies out, and fails to spread to other parts of the country.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ Fred Halliday, "Tunisia's Uncertain Future", *Middle East Report*, no. 163, Mars-April, 1990, p. 26

⁵⁰ Filiu, pp. 73-75

⁵¹ Christopher Alexander, "Back from the Democratic Brink: Authoritarianism and Civil Society in Tunisia", *Middle East Report*, no. 205, October-December, 1997, p. 36

⁵² Murphy, p. 200

⁵³ Filiu, p. 77

⁵⁴ James L. Gelvin, 'The Arab Uprisings: What Everyone Needs to Know', Oxford University Press, New York, Kindle eBook, 2012, p. 23

⁵⁵ Larbi Chouikha and Eric Gobe, 'La Tunisie entre la «révolte du Bassin minier de Gafsa» et l'échéance électorale de 2009', *L'année du Maghreb*, no. 5, 2009, s p. 390

⁵⁶ Chouikha and Gobe, pp. 393-394

3 Analysis

In this section, the four factors identified by Bellin as affecting the will and capacity will be discussed and analysed. The events during the uprising in late December 2010 and January 2011 will be briefly recapitulated to provide empirical material for the analysis. The four factors will then be discussed and analysed one by one, thereby operationalising Bellin's theory on the Tunisian uprising.

3.1 Assessing Will and Capacity of the Coercive Apparatus.

Bellin notes that it is the will and capacity of the coercive apparatus to repress popular mobilisation that determines the success of a revolution, and that these in turn are decided by four factors: fiscal health, International support networks, level of institutionalisation and level of popular mobilisation.

Fiscal health refers to the economic capacity of the state to finance its coercive apparatus. If the state is not able to pay security forces salaries, or pay for ammunition and other materiel, this seriously compromises the will and capacity of the coercive apparatus to face popular dissent.⁵⁷

The maintenance of international support networks is often linked to fiscal health, as international patrons often provide substantial economic support, withdrawal of which can lead to an acute financial crisis. Similarly, the imposition of heavy sanctions from the international community can also provoke a financial crisis. However, as Bellin notes, International criticism and scrutiny may also lead to an existential crisis for the coercive apparatus, especially if this is highly institutionalised, leading it to question the durability and legitimacy of the current regime.⁵⁸ Brownlee notes the impact of international patrons in using their influence to limit violent repression during crises, as refraining from putting pressure on coercive regimes may give the regime free reins to engage in bloody repression.⁵⁹

The third factor, level of institutionalisation, is inversely related to the will of the coercive apparatus to resist political change. An institutionalised structure, here used in the Weberian sense, has established paths of recruitment, follows bureaucratic procedures and is meritocratic. This is contrasted with an un-institutionalised structure, where staffing decisions are political rather than meritocratic, and in which there is no clear distinction between the public and the private, and rampant corruption is commonplace.⁶⁰ This is often the case in authoritarian and personalistic

⁵⁷ Bellin, 'The Robustness of Authoritarianism', pp. 144-146

⁵⁸ Bellin, 'The Robustness of Authoritarianism', pp. 144-145

⁵⁹ Brownlee, pp. 58-60

⁶⁰ Bellin, 'The Robustness of Authoritarianism', p. 145

regimes to ensure loyalty, both in society and the coercive apparatus.⁶¹ However, having an un-institutionalised structure can contribute to the resilience of an authoritarian regime, as the elite of the coercive apparatus will then perceive to be threatened by political change. If it is institutionalised however, it is more likely to see itself as separate from the state, and its positions might not be threatened by political change. An institutionalised coercive establishment is also more likely to perceive itself as having a national mission for the public good, such as national defence, rather than serving individual advancement.⁶² Droz-Vincent notes that while authoritarian regimes often build institutions, they often empty them of their value by entrenching themselves and their informal networks in the institutional grids.⁶³

Finally, the fourth factor affecting the will and capacity of the coercive apparatus is the level of popular mobilisation. Low levels of popular mobilisation means the cost of repression remains low, as smaller crowds are easier to forcibly disperse and will not involve as many casualties as when dealing with larger crowds. Commanding soldiers or police to shoot at a large mass of unarmed civilians risks causing a bloodbath.⁶⁴ A large mass of people also makes it difficult for regimes to dismiss it as a group of extremists or terrorists threatening security, making police and troops more likely to defect, especially if the crowd is relatively representative of the demographics of the troops or police themselves.⁶⁵ It is also more likely to attract international attention, as was well seen in Egypt, where the protests on Tahrir square had around-the-clock coverage from Al-Jazeera and other news networks.⁶⁶ In short, higher levels of popular mobilisation increases the cost of repression, and so might cause regime leaders and elites within the coercive apparatus to hesitate with the use of force.⁶⁷

Assessing the will and capacity of the coercive apparatus also requires a clear definition of what is meant by the coercive apparatus. In an authoritarian regime, this is often extensive and divided into multiple institutions and units of different functions and loyalties, often overlapping each other. In Tunisia, there was a clear difference between the military and the Interior Ministry, in charge of the police and intelligence services, as well as the National Guard - a paramilitary force of some 12,000 designed to counteract the military and employed for domestic security, rather than for protection against outside threats. Naturally, many details of the security services of the Interior Ministry are unknown and the line of commands are often unclear, but these may be considered the more

⁶¹ Goldstone, 'Understanding the Revolutions of 2011', p. 9

⁶² Bellin, 'The Robustness of Authoritarianism', p. 145. See 1.2.1 of this essay for definition of level of institutionalisation

⁶³ Droz-Vincent, p. 7

⁶⁴ Bellin, 'The Robustness of Authoritarianism', p.

⁶⁵ Barany, p. 28

⁶⁶ Lynch, *The Arab Uprising*, p. 90

⁶⁷ Bellin, 'The Robustness of Authoritarianism', pp. 150-151

important institutions playing a role in the Tunisian revolution. The military has always been kept relatively small and at arms length from the state, and consisted of 27,000 men, whereas the Interior Ministry employed as many as 120,000 people⁶⁸. The institutional character of the different parts of the coercive apparatus and how they interacted with each other during the events of 2010 and 2011 will be discussed in more detail below.

3.2 The Revolution

On 17 December 2010, fruit vendor Mohammed Bouazizi's protest of self-immolation in front of the local municipal office in Sidi Bouzid in response to being harassed by local police one time too many. His desperate demonstration sparked a wave of protest thitherto unseen in Tunisia. On the eve of Bouazizi's attempted suicide, some 50 of his friends and family, accompanied by other cart-vendors, demonstrate peacefully outside the Mayor's office.⁶⁹ The protest was recorded and posted on youtube, and subsequently got picked up by the web-team at Al-Jazeera, which aired it on its Mubashir channel the same evening.⁷⁰ The following day, Saturday, a bigger crowd gathered, and mid-afternoon, the police dispersed the protesters with tear gas and violence, following protesters into the residential areas. This was repeated over the next few days, as the protests continued to grow.

On 20 December, residents of the town of Mekkassi held a demonstration in support of protesters in Sidi Bouzid, and protests started in other cities around the region. On 22 December another young Sidi Bouzid-resident set himself on fire in protest and on 24 December, the first victims of the coercive apparatus was claimed, as police shot several protesters to death in the town of Menzel Bouzaiene in a protest of over 2000 people.⁷¹ The Interior Ministry defended itself, a spokesperson saying that the police were forced to shoot in self-defence since protesters hadn't dispersed after warning shots. In the following days, protests started flaring up in several cities. In some cases, protest are blocked or broken up peacefully, whereas in others, people were forcibly dispersed by the police.

⁶⁸ Filiu, p. 77. *The Military Balance 2012*, The International Institute for Strategic Studies, vol. 112, issue 1, 2012, p. 351-352

⁶⁹ Ayad, 'Sidi Bouzid, l'étincelle', *Libération*, 05 February 2011, <<http://www.liberation.fr/monde/01012318068-sidi-bouzid-l-etincelle>>, accessed 20 May 2012.

⁷⁰ Gelvin, p. 42. Y Ryan, 'How Tunisia's Revolution Began'. *Al-Jazeera*, 26 Jan 2011 <<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/01/2011126121815985483.html>>, accessed 20 May 2012

⁷¹ 'Tunisie: Retour sur un mois de révolte', *Le Monde*, 14 January 2011, <http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/infographie/2011/01/14/tunisie-retour-sur-un-mois-de-revolte_1465901_3212.html>, accessed 20 May 2012

On 27 December, the first major demonstration was held in Tunis, with around 1000 people gathering after a night of security crackdowns on protest rallies.⁷² In the following day, President Ben Ali made his first public appearance since the start of the protests, stating they were unacceptable and blaming extremists for the use of violence.⁷³ The protests continued to escalate after that, with bigger masses assembling in an increasing number of locations, intensifying pressure on security forces.

On 5 January, Mohammed Bouazizi was buried, and 5000 rallied at his funeral procession. It is the weekend of 8-10 January, however, that has been claimed to be "the tipping point of the revolution". In the central cities of Kasserine and Thala, the police anti-riot units, the *Brigades d'Ordre Publique* (BOP) and the presidential guard joined the local police. The presidential guard posted snipers all around the cities. Dozens of people were killed, but protests continued unabated, with more indignity than before. The army had been deployed in Kasserine on 8 January, first strictly protecting banks and government buildings.⁷⁴ However, on 9 January the Army Chief of Staff, Rachid Ammar, refused the order to fire at protesters, and his units followed through on his orders, even after he was dismissed. This has been called the fatal blow for the regime, as it broke the barrier of fear for Tunisians, and in the following days, the uprising truly became nationwide.⁷⁵ In a televised speech on 13 January, the President promised not to run for reelection in 2014, but the protesters were not satisfied with anything less than his departure.⁷⁶

On the following day, 14 January, Ali Seriati, Chief of Presidential Security and Ben Ali's foremost security officer, commander of the presidential guard and effectively in charge of the police and the Interior Ministry, intentionally exaggerated his security reports to Ben Ali, in order to get full support for indiscriminate repression of protesters.⁷⁷ This led Ben Ali to panic. A state of emergency was declared, and the president left the country for Saudi Arabia, confident that Ali Seriati will be able to restore order and bring him back.⁷⁸ Ammar and the Army quickly moved against Ali Seriati, surrounding the palace and other crucial buildings of the national guard, and arresting hardliners of the regime. Seriati still tried to provoke chaos, deploying street gangs that killed indiscriminately, leaving 31 people dead on 14 January and many more in the days following

⁷² 'Tunisia Protests Spread to Capital', *Al-Jazeera*, 27 December 2010, <<http://www.aljazeera.com/video/middleeast/2010/12/20101226225021489335.html>>, accessed 20 May 2012

⁷³ 'Tunisia President Warns Protesters', *Al-Jazeera*, 03 January 2011, <<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2010/12/2010122823238574209.html>>, accessed 20 May 2012

⁷⁴ Yasmine Ryan, 'The Massacre Behind the Revolution', *Al-Jazeera*, 16 February 2011, <<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/02/2011215123229922898.html>>, accessed 20 May 2012

⁷⁵ Filiu, p. 21

⁷⁶ 'Tunisians Cautious on Concessions', *Al-Jazeera*, 14 January 2011, <<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2011/01/201111441336340951.html>>, accessed 20 May 2012

⁷⁷ Filiu, p. 21

⁷⁸ Ayad, 'Carthage, la chute', *Libération*, 5 February 2011, <<http://www.liberation.fr/monde/01012318070-carthage-la-chute>>, accessed 20 May 2012

Ben Ali's departure.⁷⁹ However, he was arrested a few days after Ben Ali's departure while on his way to Libya. The military did not intend to stay in power, and a civilian national unity government was quickly formed, though not without its controversies and episodes of violent flares. Tunisia successfully held its first democratic elections in November 2011, voting in a new constituent assembly, with the task to draft a new constitution.⁸⁰

3.3 Fiscal Health

Though Tunisia was struggling with high youth unemployment and the global economic recession, which many researchers agree was part of the background causes of the uprising, it did not, in fact, face a financial crisis in which it would risk being unable to finance its coercive apparatus.⁸¹ Unlike the case in subsequent uprisings in Middle Eastern countries, Western states barely had time to understand what was happening before the president was deposed, and so had no time to impose economic sanctions against the regime.⁸² However, it is interesting to look at the fiscal health of different institutions within the coercive apparatus, as this may have affected the will of elites within the different institutions. The coercive apparatus governed by the Interior Ministry remained much better funded than the military - especially special paramilitary units such as the presidential guard and the anti-riot BOP units. Employees, conscripts and elites within the coercive apparatus that are better paid and better treated by the regime are more likely to go further to protect its regime.⁸³ The Tunisian military was kept very modestly funded, and its officers reportedly disliked widespread corruption of the civilian political elite.⁸⁴ Thus, the military had very few economic interests to protect, whereas the security establishment of the Interior Ministry had much more to lose from a regime change. The security and intelligence services of the Interior Ministry, however, were far more politically important and involved in the Ben Ali regime.⁸⁵

This is not necessarily true for the entire width of organisations and units covered by the Interior Ministry however. Regular local police forces might have been corrupt and abusive - but they also had very low salaries. After the fall of the regime, on 24 January, a demonstration of some 2,000 police officers took place in Tunis. They wanted to distance themselves from the regime and the repression, many being joined by their families, shouting "we are innocent of the blood of

⁷⁹ Filiu, pp. 78-79

⁸⁰ 'Final Tunisian Election Results Announced', *Al-Jazeera*, 14 November 2011, <<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2011/11/20111114171420907168.html>> accessed 20 May 2012

⁸¹ George Joffé, 'The Arab Spring in North Africa: Origins and Prospects', *The Journal of North African Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 4, 2011, p. 509

⁸² 'Following U.S. Sanctions, U.N. Security Council to Meet on Libya', *New York Times*, February 26 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/27/world/africa/27diplomacy.html?_r=1&scp=3&sq=sanctions+libya&st=nyt>, accessed 20 May 2012

⁸³ Barany, p. 25

⁸⁴ Barany, p. 27

⁸⁵ Robert Springborg and Henry Clement, 'Army Guys', *The American Interest*, May-June 2011, pp. 16-17

martyrs”. They also demanded the right to form a union and higher wages.⁸⁶ Even though many of the people participating in this demonstration may well have been a part of repressing protesters, it does suggest that a discontentment with their situation was present already before the uprising. While one should be careful about drawing conclusions from this demonstration regarding to the motivations and motives of police officers before and during the uprising, an existing discontentment with their situation can be assumed not to have further motivate police to violently repress protesters and it does seem that it was special units within the the police and presidential guard that was responsible for the worst repression and killing of protesters.⁸⁷

3.4 International Support Networks

Tunisia has long been hailed as an example of good economic development and political stability by Western nations and institutions such as the IMF. Bourguiba’s and Ben Ali’s secular policies have been welcomed as a protection against Islamism and terrorism and little pressure has been put on the government for real democratic change.⁸⁸ Yet, to understand the influence international support networks may have had on the coercive apparatus’ will and capacity to repress the popular uprising, in particular the military’s, we must look at the historic development of international support to Tunisia, especially from the two main international bodies involved in the region, the European Union (EU), Tunisia’s main trading partner, and the United States (US).

3.4.1 Security and Democracy Policies of the US and EU

Both the EU and the US connect security with democratisation. This notion has been particularly evident among policy makers in the US, especially post September 11. Democratisation has been put forward as a way of ”draining the swamp”, that is, diminishing the pool of discontent allegedly connected with political misrepresentation from which terrorist organisations get their recruits.⁸⁹ The prime example of this is the 2003 invasion of Iraq, fighting terrorism and establishing democracy was enough justification for the US to attack without the backing of the United Nations⁹⁰ The attacks of September 11 also led to a broadening of the definition of security threats, in which threats could also include non-state actors, such as terrorism. This meant that even though

⁸⁶ ’Thousands of Tunisian Police, Security Forces Protest’, *Reuters*, 22 January 2011, <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/01/22/us-Tunisia-protests-police-idUSTRE70L13520110122>>, accessed 20 May 2012

⁸⁷ Filiu, p. 78

⁸⁸ Augustus Richard Norton, ‘The Pussle of Political Reform in the Middle East’ in *International Relations of the Middle East*, Louise Fawcett (ed), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009, pp. 133-134

⁸⁹ Powel, p. 59

⁹⁰ F Gregory Gause III, ‘The International Politics of the Gulf’ in Fawcett, pp. 285-286

friendly undemocratic states might not be considered a threat, parts of their population might, which elevates the need to make the population feel less disenfranchised from its state, through increased welfare and political representation.⁹¹

The causal link between democracy and security is found amongst EU policy-makers as well. However, the EU definition of security extends to that of human security, meaning the safeguarding of each individual, as opposed to merely the state, which makes political rights and good governance of the citizens of other states central to its own security concerns, thus encompassing democratisation. A former French foreign minister declared, B. T. Powel points out: "When violence returns to the Middle East, sooner or later it shows up in Paris".⁹²

3.4.2 Conflicting Security Concerns

The US and EU democracy promotion in the region is funnelled mainly through their respective Middle East or Mediterranean cooperation programs, such as the Middle East Partner Initiative (MEPI) for the US, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) for the EU and the Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) Partnership Initiative, which is run by the G8 group of nations on the initiative of the US. Though all of these programs have an objective of increased political liberalisation and popular representation, they also include economic and security cooperations. Despite their often high-flying rhetorics, both the US and EU have far from universally applied the policies of pursuing democracy for the sake of long-term security, as can be seen in the case of Tunisia.⁹³

Both blocs have been reluctant to apply much political pressure at all on Tunisia for reform, even in the face of blatant abuses of human rights or refusal to keep up the pace of reforms within democratisation and liberalisation programs.⁹⁴ In 1995, Tunisia signed the Barcelona Agreement, a free-trade agreement with the EU that also encompasses political reforms in Tunisia and a conditionality clause in which it would accept any consequences if these requirements were not met. However, there were no specified procedures on how to investigate this progress, nor has this conditionality clause ever been invoked. Several theories for this apparent hypocrisy have been suggested by researchers, but most agree that it is the West's fear of Islamism which is central to the issue.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Powel, pp. 59-61

⁹² Powel, pp. 62-3

⁹³ Joffé, p. 513

⁹⁴ Marc LeVine, 'Tunisia: How the US got it wrong', *Al Jazeera English*, 16 January 2011, <<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/01/20111167156465567.html>>, accessed 20 May 2012.

⁹⁵ Powel, p. 64

Western nations have always been wary of Islamism in the region, a tendency that has been further amplified by events such as the Algerian civil war, bombings in Tunisia in the 1990s and the September 11 and Madrid bombing attacks. These fears have not been comforted by the fact that Tunisian Islamists have traditionally been very moderate. The main Islamic party, *Al-nahda*, early on accepted to play the rules of the game and denounced the use of violence.⁹⁶ Ben Ali was successfully able to stoke the West's fear of Islamist terrorists in order to secure Western support. Indeed, during 2002-2007, the US was spending far more on security and anti-terrorism related support in Tunisia than on democracy promotion programs, which were all region-wide and very few specific to Tunisia.⁹⁷ Researcher Alejandro Sanchez suggests that Western Nations have even contributed to upholding the authoritarian regime through its investment in the Tunisian economy, in particular in the energy sector.⁹⁸

It is evident that though democracy might be seen as a way of achieving long-term security objectives in the Middle East for Western nations, it has not been the only method. As long as the Ben Ali regime has successfully repressed Islamic movements and opposition, and cooperated with US and EU anti-terrorism schemes, policy-makers appear to have been quite content to allow Ben Ali to stay comfortably in power.⁹⁹ For the US, Ben Ali's amity towards Israel also provided a very good reason not to push for more reforms than the regime was willing to pass of its own accord.¹⁰⁰

3.4.3 Unconditional Support?

Western silent backing of Ben Ali's regime continued until the events of 2010 and 2011. Indeed, on 11 January 2011, French Foreign Minister Michèle Alliot-Marie proposed France offers Tunisia the "knowledge of its security forces".¹⁰¹ The proposal was stopped over public outrage, however, and Alliot-Marie was eventually forced to resign in the face of public criticism.¹⁰² This not to say that the Tunisian government has been immune from international criticism. Human rights groups such

⁹⁶ Gudrun Krämer, 'The Integration of Integrist: A Comparative Study of Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia' in *Democracy Without Democrats? The Renewal of Politics in the Arab World*, G Salamé (ed), I.B: Tauris & Co Ltd, London, 1994, p.216

⁹⁷ Powel, p. 69

⁹⁸ Alexander Sanchez, 'Tunisia: Trading Freedom for Stability May Not Last - An International Security Perspective', *Defence Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1, p. 87

⁹⁹ Sanchez, p. 88

¹⁰⁰ Francesco Cavatorta, 'Geopolitical Challenges to the Success of Democracy in North Africa: Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco', *Democratization*, Vol. 8, No. 4, 2001, p. 185

¹⁰¹ 'La diplomatie française a défendu jusqu'au bout le régime tunisien', *Le Monde*, 15 January 2011, <<http://abonnes.lemonde.fr/imprimer/article/2011/01/15/1466021.html>>, accessed 20 May 2012. Quote translated from French by the author.

¹⁰² 'French Foreign Minister Resigns', *The Guardian*, 27 February 2011, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/feb/27/french-foreign-minister-resigns>>, accessed 20 May 2012

as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have both released reports directing strong criticism against the Tunisian regime and its human rights abuses.¹⁰³

There have also been incidents where the Tunisian regime has been under fire from International media, and to some extent the international community. In 2000, Tunisian journalist and correspondent for French newspaper *La croix*, Tawfiq Bin Brik, staged a hunger strike after he and his family members had been severely harassed by the Tunisian security services after he published a series of regime-critical articles. Bin Brik's passport was confiscated and his brother was arrested after clashing with security police, who were surveilling their home. The affair drew a lot of unwanted international attention, as sympathetic journalists in France and around the world ensured wide media coverage.¹⁰⁴ The pressure forced the Ben Ali regime to make concessions to Bin Brik and his family and, though it may not have left any serious mark on the regime, it did serve to expose the regime and showed that it does not confine itself to repressing only Islamist dissidents, putting into question Franco-Tunisian security cooperation.¹⁰⁵

One incident that has been noted to have had a big impact on the Tunisian uprising is the WikiLeaks release of US diplomatic cables, in which the American ambassador in Tunisia described Ben Ali as ageing and his rule as "sclerotic". It also stated, in clear print, that Tunisia was a police state, that its government had lost touch with its people and the extent of the corruption of the Presidential family, notably that of Ben Ali's wife, the Trabelsi family.¹⁰⁶ The cables not only confirmed previously mentioned US security interests in Tunisia, combatting terrorism and support for Israel, it also demonstrated to the Tunisian people that even US officials were saying the same things they were saying.¹⁰⁷ Further more, the notion that the US would back the incumbent regime regardless of what happened was disputed.¹⁰⁸ The WikiLeaks cables may have influenced the actions of the outcome of the uprising in two ways: firstly, the release of the cables may have stoked people's will to take to the streets, thus increasing the level of popular mobilisation, the impact of which will be further discussed below. Secondly, one may discuss the influence the cables may have had on military leaders decision not to back the regime and give Ben Ali the "velvet shove" out of the country. Though this not possible to support by any documentation of the reasoning of military leaders, one may well draw some logic conclusions. The military was known

¹⁰³ *Tunisia : Continuing Abuses in the Name of Security*, Amnesty International Publications, England, 2009. *Tunisia's Repressive Laws - The Reform Agenda*, Human Rights Watch, New York, 2011

¹⁰⁴ Sadiki, pp. 69-70

¹⁰⁵ Sadiki, p. 75

¹⁰⁶ US embassy cables: Tunisia - a US Foreign Policy Conundrum', *The Guardian*, 7 December 2010, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/217138>>, accessed 20 May 2012

¹⁰⁷ Alexander Christopher, 'A Month Made for Drama' in *Revolution in the Arab World: Tunisia, Egypt and the Unmaking of an Era*, Marc Lynch, Susan B. Glasser and Blake Hounshell (eds), Foreign Policy, 2011, Kindle e-book, loc. 800

¹⁰⁸ T Malinowsky, 'Did WikiLeaks take down Tunisia's Government?' in Lynch, Glasser and Hounshell (eds), loc. 970

to dislike the widespread corruption of top regime officials, so the publication of the cables was likely perceived as just as shameful as for other Tunisians, further questioning the legitimacy of the regime.¹⁰⁹ The public knowledge that these views were present within the US administration also dramatically reduced the risk of their interference on the side of the regime, which would have caused international uproar. Zoltan Barany outlines both the legitimacy of the regime and the risk of foreign interventions as key factors in deciding whether or not top security officials would prop up the regime or defend the demonstrators in a revolution.¹¹⁰ French newspaper *Le Monde* also reported that Obama Administration notified Ben Ali on 13 January, the day before his departure, that the time had come to leave the country, which may have influenced the turn of events. However, this report remains unverified by the former and current Tunisian administrations as well as by the US administration.

3.4.4 The Impact of Media Coverage

There was an unusually comprehensive media coverage of the protests, which increased pressure both in the Tunisian regime and on international players, who would risk appearing hypocritical if speaking out in support of a dictator when people demonstrated for democracy, as was seen in the case of the French Foreign Minister mentioned earlier.¹¹¹ The protest of Bouazizi's friend's and family the day after his attempted suicide was aired on Al-Jazeera already at an early stage in the uprising, and the network heavily covered the protests. Researcher Marc Lynch suggests that the network may even have covered it more heavily than it would have otherwise, due previous clashes with the Tunisian authorities, the networks office in Tunis having been repeatedly closed down. Tensions had even led Tunisia to close down its embassy in Doha in protest of Al-Jazeera's reporting.¹¹²

3.5 Level of Institutionalisation

The level of Institutionalisation is of particular interest when assessing the will and capacity of the coercive apparatus to repress, since it is an internal factor, integral in the structure of the institutions of the coercive apparatus. This increases the importance of examining the different institutions existing within the coercive apparatus. In Tunisia's case, the main divide was between the military and the Interior Ministry. Under the command of the Interior Ministry there was, as mentioned previously, the National Guard, a para-military force that mostly dealt with domestic disturbances,

¹⁰⁹ Malinowsky, loc. 698. Barany, p. 27

¹¹⁰ Barany, p. 25

¹¹¹ 'French Foreign Minister Resigns', *The Guardian*, 27 February 2011

¹¹² Lynch, 'The Arab Uprising', p. 76-79

the Presidential Guard, under the command of Ali Seriati, the police and of course an extensive secret service and intelligence apparatus, of which, however, it remains very difficult for researchers to find reliable information on. This also true, though perhaps not to the same extent, of the other parts of the Interior Ministry and even the armed forces.¹¹³

If employing the Weberian definition of institutionalisation, this factor is perhaps the one the most clearly affects only one of the variables in employing coercion on protestors - the will to repress. However, if one considers Kamrava's definition of professionalisation, which includes the type of training received and the materiel accessible, this would also influence the capacity to repress popular mobilisation. Bellin, however, connects accessibility to materiel with the factors of international support networks (in this case meaning foreign supplies of arms materiel, and fiscal health, which gives the ability to purchase this).¹¹⁴ However, one must look at the strategic choices of the regime for its coercive apparatus to see how these means have been distributed. Even though the Tunisian regime did not lack for funds or materiel, the units most likely to protect the regime until the very end may not have been well-equipped enough, large enough or trained for crowd-control in a way that would have allowed them to counter the mass of people taking to the streets in 2011.¹¹⁵

3.5.1 The Military

The Tunisian armed forces are widely considered to be one of the most professional and institutionalised in the Middle East.¹¹⁶ While Tunisian security and intelligence officials were generally trained in France, the Tunisian military has one of the highest ratios of US-trained officers in the Middle East, where they have a good reputation.¹¹⁷ It was kept poorly funded relative to the Interior Ministry and other Middle Eastern militaries, and so had been left with using ageing equipment.¹¹⁸ Though the armed forces played an important role in the fight for independence, which contributed to making it a symbol of the state, it was largely excluded from political participation, especially by the Ben Ali regime. Thus, it had no vested political interests in the regime, nor any economic ones, as is the case with for example the Egyptian regime, which has vast economic interests and advantages that were protected by the regime.¹¹⁹

The purpose of the military has in Tunisia been connected to the protection of the state, mostly concerning border control and foreign threats. Though the military was deployed for domestic

¹¹³ Barany, p. 26

¹¹⁴ Bellin, 'Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism', p. 129. Kamrava, pp. 67-8

¹¹⁵ Sanchez, p. 89

¹¹⁶ Barany, p. 27

¹¹⁷ Springborg and Clement, pp. 16-17

¹¹⁸ *The Military Balance 2012*, p. 351

¹¹⁹ Bellin, 'Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism', p. 134

purposes in 1978-84, most prominently in the food riots in 1984, there was reportedly resentment for this among its officers corps and it had been eager to return to the barracks. The notion of firing at large crowds of unarmed protesters thus seriously challenged the institutional integrity of the military.¹²⁰

The extent to which the military had a sense of corporate identity and coherence within its ranks is also demonstrated by the fact that officers and soldiers still considered Rachid Ammar their Chief of Staff even after he was dismissed by Ben Ali for refusing to order soldiers to shoot at protesters. The sense of institutional integrity within the military elite is also demonstrated by the fact that it willingly stepped back and left the path clear for a new civilian government after Ben Ali had been ousted, again in contrast to its Egyptian counterpart.¹²¹ In fact, as researcher Philippe Droz-Vincent notes, the military was basically the only Tunisian institutional actor to remain coherent and intact in the face of the massive popular mobilisation.¹²²

3.5.2 The Interior Ministry

Though there were, as previously mentioned, many units and institutions under the command of the Interior Ministry, some estimates may be made in regards to the level of institutionalisation within its ranks, based on the actions of certain units during the uprising, as well as its top officials. There is also a much lower availability of reliable information on the structure of the Interior Ministry, where even estimates of the number of people employed within it range between 80,000 and some 130,000 security officials¹²³ It is evident that the Interior Ministry was much more entangled with the regime than the military. While military officers were excluded from political participation, the top intelligence and security officials were very much part of the political elite of the country.¹²⁴ The political bureau of the RCD in 2010 held both the current and the former Minister of Interior, Rafik Belhaj Kacem and Abdallah Kallel, demonstrating the prevalence of security officials in the corridors of power.¹²⁵ However, it is important to remember that the agencies of the Interior Ministry did not act as a single corps, but is rather a web of security agencies and units, with different objectives and purposes. The paramilitary capacity lies mainly in the 12,000-strong National Guard,¹²⁶ which took its orders directly from the Interior Ministry, and the 5,000-me n

¹²⁰ Barany, p. 27

¹²¹ Springborg and Clement, p. 18

¹²² Droz-Vincent, p. 17

¹²³ Powel, p. 70

¹²⁴ Droz-Vincent, p. 7

¹²⁵ 'RCD: Le président Ben Ali décide une nouvelle composition du Bureau politique, *Leaders*, 26 January 2010, <<http://www.leaders.com.tn/article/rcd-le-president-ben-ali-decide-une-nouvelle-composition-du-bureau-politique?id=1680>>, accessed 20 May 2012

¹²⁶ *The Military Balance 2012*, p. 351

strong Presidential Guard, commanded Chief of Presidential Security Ali Seriati. This unit may be considered professional and well funded in the sense that it is well trained and well equipped, but little is known about its internal structure, making it hard to assess the level of institutionalisation. However, the fact that Seriati inflated the number of protesters in his reports to Ben Ali in order to get clearance for harsher security measures strongly indicates he was acting in self-interest rather than within an institutional framework. This is enhanced by reports indicating Ali Seriati was in fact in charge of the entire crackdown on protesters, despite his formal position being Chief of Presidential Security, rather than Minister of Interior.¹²⁷ This is very indicative of the unclear power-structures of an un-institutional structure.¹²⁸

It is Ali Seriati's Presidential Guard that is believed to have been responsible for the bulk of deadly firing at protesters, mainly through snipers. Along with the anti-riot squad of the police, the BOP, these units showed willingness to brutally repress protesters, but simply did not have the manpower in the face of popular mobilisation.¹²⁹ Regular police forces attacked and even fired on protesters in the early stages of the uprising, but were not trained nor equipped for dealing with large crowds of unarmed protesters. In Kasserine, local police did little to disperse protesters, but waited for the reinforcement of the BOP and National Guard.¹³⁰ While the chaotic nature of events during the uprising makes it difficult to distinguish between the roles played by different sections of the police during the uprising, the fact that thousands of police officers took to the streets in a march of reconciliation with the revolution, chanting "we are innocent of the blood of the martyrs" and demanding higher wages and the right to form a union, suggests that not all police were hard core supporters of the regime, nor saw themselves as having been deployed for the legitimate purpose of the police institution.¹³¹

3.6 Level of Popular Mobilisation

There are several possible and useful approaches for analysing the popular mobilisation that occurred during the uprisings. The tendency, however, is to focus on the reasons and triggers that were able to bring about as high a level of popular mobilisation as was seen in Tunisia and other Arab countries in 2011, as does Bellin in her analysis of the Arab Spring, outlining underlying grievances, emotional triggers, impunity and social media as key factors in bringing people to the

¹²⁷ Ayad, 'Carthage, La Chute'

¹²⁸ Bellin, 'The Robustness of Authoritarianism', p. 145

¹²⁹ Filiu, pp. 77-78

¹³⁰ Ryan, 'The Massacre Behind the Revolution'

¹³¹ 'Thousands of Tunisian police, security forces protest', *Reuters*, 22 January 2011,

<<http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/01/22/us-Tunisia-protests-police-idUSTRE70L13520110122>

streets.¹³² For the purpose of this assignment, however, focus must lie on the effect the popular mobilisation had on the will and capacity of the coercive apparatus to repress it, regardless of what caused people to take to the streets. Along with the level of popular mobilisation, we must also look at the demographic composition of demonstrators and the nature of the protests.

There are some issues with using popular mobilisation as a factor, however. As Bellin points out, it brings a certain circularity into the argument, as the level of popular mobilisation is in many ways affected by the states coercive will and capacity.¹³³ However, there is no clear relation established between coercion and dissent, though many researchers have tried to solve this puzzle.¹³⁴ Turning the argument over, one could say that it is *the* factor that needs to be considered the most. Both the fiscal health, international support networks and level of institutionalisation of the Tunisian regime had not seen dramatic changes in the weeks before the uprising, but it was not until people took to the streets that the regime starting cracking and collapsed. However, neither should it be over-emphasised as, just as the theoretic framework of this essay suggests, it is not sufficient on its own to bring about regime change.

The first thing that stands out about the protests in Tunisia at the end of 2010 and start of 2011 is the high level of popular mobilisation, but not only at a single location but all over the country. This is significant because nationwide spread of protest greatly reduces the capacity of the coercive apparatus to repress, as it is forced to "spread thin" in to contain protests in all critical locations. The mere geographical spread of protests has been overlooked in most analyses of the protests, but is important since it may impact the capacity of the coercive apparatus to repress protests in all places, as it needs to prioritise between hotspots. Nationwide spread also raises the cost of repression, as firing at protesters in one place might cause outrage and increased demonstrations in other cities.¹³⁵ This is what happened in Kasserine and Thala, where riot police and national guards had to be brought in from other cities to quell protests, but the killing of protesters caused national outrage and was quickly followed by large demonstrations in other cities, including Tunis.¹³⁶

Another important factor of these events, as Bellin also points out, is the heterogenous composition of protesters. Though many of the protesters where young, people of all ages took to the streets, and they did not represent a certain ideology, political group, class or worker's union.¹³⁷ This bolstered

¹³² Bellin, 'Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism', pp. 136-9

¹³³ Bellin, 'Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism', p. 146

¹³⁴ Dipak K. Gupta, Harinder Singh and Tom Sprague, 'Government Coercion of Dissidents: Deterrence or Provocation?', *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 37, No. 2, 1993, p. 301

¹³⁵ Lynch, *The Arab Uprising*, p. 69

¹³⁶ Ryan, 'The Massacre Behind the Revolution'

¹³⁷ Goldstone, 'Understanding the Revolutions of 2011', p. 8

the legitimacy of the demonstrations, as they appeared to be representative of the people - and thus made police and soldiers more hesitant to fire at a group perceived as an "us" rather than a "them".¹³⁸ Had the protests, for example, had an Islamic appeal, the military might have felt it within its institutional framework to protect the secular character of the Tunisian state. The demographics of the country may play in, too. Tunisian population is largely homogenous in its Arab Sunni Muslim composition, and so police, security and military personnel came from the same ethnic and religious background as the protesters.¹³⁹

Thirdly, the methods of the protesters is likely to have affected the will of the military elite to fire at protesters. The demonstrations were largely peaceful, and thus did not threaten the national security of the state, a strong institutional imperative for any state's armed forces. Furthermore, ordering soldiers to fire at unarmed and peaceful protesters might increase the risk of defection.¹⁴⁰ In the Tunisian case, when the military leadership was ordered to shoot, it chose to defect in its entirety, not leaving the dilemma to the individual soldiers.¹⁴¹

In the end, however, there is no denying that the sheer mass of people taking to the street, especially towards the last days before the president departure, had a very big impact on its own. Police and security forces were not able to hold together in the face of tens of thousands of people marching down the Habib Bourguiba Boulevard, and subsequently the political system, having remained roughly the same since independence, crashed.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ Bellin, 'Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism', p. 135

¹³⁹ Gelvin, p. 35

¹⁴⁰ Bellin, 'Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism', p. 130

¹⁴¹ Filii, p. 21

¹⁴² Droz-Vincent, p. 18

4 Conclusion

The uprisings of 2011 were not the first incident of spontaneous protests in Tunisia. Similar scenes played out in 1978, 1984 and 2008. However, in all previous cases, demonstrators were repressed by the coercive apparatus - and in both 1978 and 1984 the army had taken part in crushing the unrest, albeit grudgingly. In 2011, the army refused Ben Ali's orders to fire at protesters, while police and security services were overwhelmed by the the number of people on the streets. Four factors were outlined to affect the will and capacity of the coercive apparatus: Fiscal health, international support networks, the level of institutionalisation and the level of popular mobilisation.

Though the Tunisian regime did not face a fiscal crisis, the financial policies in regards to the military may have affected the will of officers to stand by the regime. The Tunisian military was poorly funded relative to the Interior Ministry, and the officer corps was disenfranchised from the regime, thus holding no economic interests in its survival. While top officials of the Interior Ministry, and the paramilitary forces under their command were willing to stand by Ben Ali in the face of popular mobilisation, regular police were hesitant to fire at large crowds of protesters and preferred to wait for the reinforcements of the BOP and Presidential Guard, as was seen in Thala and Kasserine on 8-10 January. The protest march organised by police after the uprising, distancing themselves from repression of protesters and demanding higher salaries and the right to form a union, suggests significant discontentment. While this is not on its own conclusive evidence of the motivations and actions of police during the uprising, a discontentment with their financial status way have affected the extent to which they were ready to engage in repression of large crowds of people during the uprising.

Tunisia had long been an ally of Western International actors in the region, upheld as a model of political stability while playing on the West's fear of Islamism in order to maintain support for its repressive policies. Western backing continued all the way to the start of the protests, and both the US and the EU remained largely silent during the demonstrations. France even offered the support of its security expertise, though the move was stopped in the face of public outrage in France.

The WikiLeaks cables released in December 2010, which detailed the corruption of the Ben Ali regime and that of his wife's family, the Trabelsis, may have served to delegitimise the regime and shame it internationally in advance of the outbreak of protest. This in turn likely increased people's willingness to take to the streets, but also eroded the willingness of top military officials, known to be contemptuous of the rampant corruption of the ruling family, to stand by its regime.

Though we cannot confirm what happened behind the scenes in the last days of the uprisings, there are also reports that the US administration informed Ben Ali that it was time to go the day before he left for Saudi Arabia. The 2011 uprising also received a larger amount of international attention from media coverage of international networks, notably Al-Jazeera, which heavily covered the story already at an early stage in the demonstrations.

The level of institutionalisation of the Tunisian coercive apparatus differed greatly between the military and the Interior Ministry. The military was an important symbol of the state, and was mostly charged with national defence and was very rarely deployed for domestic purposes. The US-trained officers corps enjoyed a good international reputation and was known to be contemptuous of the corruption within the ruling family. Thusly, it had very little invested in the regime and its top officials would very likely even benefit from a regime change. It was also the only institutional actor to remain coherent throughout the uprising, and soldiers followed the command of their Chief of Staff Rachid Ammar even after he was dismissed by Ben Ali for refusing to order them to shoot at protesters.

The Interior Ministry, on the other hand, displayed all the signs indicative of a un-institutional structure. It was highly entangled with the regime, several of the ruling party's top officials coming from an Interior Ministry background, including Ben Ali himself. The command structures were also unclear, having several overlapping security and intelligence units with unclear objectives. Chief of Presidential Security Ali Serhati was seemingly in charge of the entire security crackdown on protesters during the uprising and intentionally exaggerated his reports to Ben Ali to get clearance for harsher measures.

The pattern identified largely coincides with Bellin's predictions, the institutionalised actors defected from the regime while the un-institutionally structured institutions stood by it longer.

The final factor, the level of popular mobilisation, was notably higher in the 2011 Uprising than in previous incidents in Tunisian history. Though Tunisia has seen high levels of popular mobilisation before, in particular in 1984, they did not quite compare to the extent of protests in 2011. An important factor is the fast spread of protests, which meant security forces equipped to deal with crowds had to be concentrated to hotspots, such as Thala, Kasserine and Tunis, while outrage over violence made demonstrations spread even faster. Such high levels of popular mobilisation that was seen in the 2011 Uprising undermined the legitimacy of the regime, especially since the protesters did not represent any particular political, ethnic or religious group. A broader demographic representation both increases the perceived legitimacy of protests and makes soldiers and police more likely to defect or refuse to shoot, since it increases their sense of identification with the

protest. Tunisia's largely homogenous demographic composition also meant protesters and personnel of the coercive apparatus largely came from the same ethnic and religious background. That type of reasoning is very likely to have influenced Chief of Staff Rachid Ammar's decision not to order his soldiers to fire, thus ensuring the entire military defecting from the regime, rather than leaving the decision to individual soldiers.

The above analyses shows that while the paramilitary forces under the command of the Interior Ministry and Ali Seriati proved willing to repress the uprising, they did not possess the capacity to do so, with an estimated paramilitary capacity of 15,000 men at its disposal when protests flared all across the country. This is interesting since even though the Interior Ministry was well-funded and well-staffed, estimates ranging between 80,000 and 120,000 personnel, the bulk of this was in police and intelligence, rather than paramilitary forces equipped to deal with large crowds. The lack of information of which units were involved in what during the uprising, to what extent ordinary police participated in violent repression, and to what point, hampers the investigation. However, the protest march carried out by police in the month after Ben Ali's departure suggests that not all parts of its ranks had been willing to fire at neighbours and family members taking to the streets, while not being conclusive evidence on its own. Further research on the role of the local police forces in the uprising would be of interest to further examine the impact of the will of individual members of the coercive apparatus to engage in repression in the face of mass protest.

While the military had the capacity to repress protests, it chose not to. It had a high sense of institutional integrity, while being economically and politically disenfranchised from the regime. While the Tunisian regime has long held the support of international actors, the circumstances before and during the uprising, such as the WikiLeaks cables and the extensive international media coverage of the protest movement, had started to erode that seemingly unconditional backing. In the face of the mass of peaceful protesters against a corrupt regime, Rachid Ammar's decision not to order his men to shoot seems logical. However, it is important to remain critical of the assessment, as the assumptions are based on the actions and events of the uprising, rather than any true knowledge of Rachid Ammar's real motives and intentions.

In conclusion, the incapacity of the police and paramilitary units of the Interior Ministry to repress the high level of popular mobilisation seen during the 2011 uprising, along with the decision of the military not to repress, had a crucial impact on the outcome of the uprising, which led to Ben Ali's removal from office and the introduction of a democratic process. Thus we can see that the will and capacity of different parts of the coercive apparatus strongly affected the outcome of events, however in different ways depending on the nature of the separate institutions.

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