

## *Original Paper*

# “Defection-Proofing” the Military and Authoritarian Regime Survival

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### **Abstract**

*The question of loyalty in autocratic regimes has drawn a sustained scholarly interest, especially as autocratic leaders need to secure the support of their militaries to survive in office and to minimize the risk of a coup. Among the commonly employed mechanisms in this regard is the extension of extra-budgetary financial rewards, including “Military-Owned Businesses (MOBs)”. Nevertheless, under the increasingly significant threat of an uprising from below, military defection remains the key for the success of the revolution. The question then becomes: under what conditions would a military defect from an autocratic ruling alliance? This paper presents one novel answer to this question, which is: militaries are “defection-proofed” in the face of mass uprisings when they develop financial dependency on the regime. This hypothesis is tested comparatively against the cases of mass protests in China (1989), Indonesia (1998), Thailand (2006), and Iran (2009).*

### **Keywords**

*autocracy, military-owned businesses, repression, mass protest, defection*

### **1. Introduction**

This paper engages the question of why it did not take militaries that have shown little signs of protest in their relationship with a durable autocrat, as in Suharto’s Indonesia, long before they decided to defect when the regime was faced with mass protests. It also answers to the question of what would have happened had the People’s Liberation Army of China or the Revolutionary Guard Corps in Iran grown more financially independent from the regime and defected during the political crises of 1989 and 2009 respectively. Put differently, the issue at hand in what follows is what is the effect of the

financial independence of the military on its political behavior during political crises?

While a growing body of literature has engaged the question of military defection, very few studies tackled the issue of financial independence of the military. As this body of research remains inconclusive about the size of financial rewards that may trigger defection, this paper moves beyond the question of “how much” to the questions of “what” and “how” in treating regime patronage for the military. The paper’s focus is on the question of “what” is made through identifying the extra-budgetary resources for the military. The example of these resources employed below is Military-Owned Businesses (MOBs). The paper also engages the question of “how” by differentiating between two different modes of military control over this particular resource: regime-dependent and regime-independent MOBs.

The argument proposed here is that the chances for military’s defection from an authoritarian regime faced with a mass protest are much higher when it controls its own extra-budgetary resources, i.e., MOBs, independent from the regime. The rationale for this argument is that when militaries secure their financial independence from the regime, they become less motivated to defend it given that their independent financial resources can help the institution seal itself off against the rising pressures during the crisis and boost its capacity for action during and post the transition. Given that much has been done on the techniques for coup-proofing in authoritarian regimes, this argument establishes the case for the need to consider the risk of defection from autocratic leaders. As much as they need to minimize the risk of a military uprising, i.e., coup-proofing, autocrats need also to consider ways to minimize the risk of a military defection, i.e., defection-proofing.

Therefore, delving into the question of financial autonomy of the military in authoritarian regimes, this paper aims to initiate a discussion on the different types of financial resources, other than the budgetary ones, and how they are controlled by the military and/or the regime. To make a case for the impact of extra-budgetary resources on the decision of the military to defect, this paper will investigate four case studies where the military institution controlled sizable MOBs at the time of mass protests that were aimed at changing the undemocratic regime. Two of the four cases, China in 1989 and Iran in 2009, followed the regime-dependent, and eventually repression, causal mechanism; while the remaining cases represent the regime-independent, and eventually defection, path of the hypothesis. While these cases have been investigated much in the literature, their treatment excluded a systematic examination of the impact of the degree of financial autonomy on the military’s decision during the crisis.

## **2. Abandoning the Prince: MOBs and Autocratic Regime Survival**

Maintaining the loyalty of the military, the repressive tool of last resort, has usually been a key challenge in autocracies. One common strategy employed to accomplish this goal is the provision of private goods or rents to the military, both as an institution as well as to some of its individual officers.

The purpose is, at least, twofold: to secure its loyalty in the face of challenges from the opposition and/or from the masses, and to coup-proof the military, itself a source of threat to the dictator. While these private goods have arguably worked quite well towards the second goal, the record has been mixed regarding the first, especially considering the recent experiences of the Arab Spring. One specific type of private goods and extra-budgetary resources of concern here is Military-Owned Businesses (MOBs). As will be detailed below, the management of economic assets by the military, while securing an additional financial resource for the institution, may put their protection during political upheavals in conflict with that of the incumbent's presence in office. In addition, these resources can also enable the institution to provide for itself and for its own members during these times of unrest.

### *2.1 Autocratic Rents and Regime Survival*

While it remains one of the bureaucratic pillars of the state, the military institution occupies a unique position due to its "relationship to violence" given its assignment of protecting the state and society from external aggression and domestic disorder. This makes political interventions by the military in autocracies as the norm, rather than the exception, and, therefore, should be framed in terms of their degree and not their presence or absence (Welch, 1987). The political, social, and economic roles the military plays in domestic politics can also be motivated by a perception to a privilege (or prerogatives according to Stepan (1987)) that it should control and maintain (Kramer, 1998).

According to Bueno de Mesquita and Smith (2011), typical components of a polity are: the nominal selectorate (interchangeables), those with a de jure say in the selection of leaders; the real selectorate (influentials): those with a de-facto say in choosing the leader; and the winning coalition (essentials): core group of powerful allies. The difference in their relative combinations is what makes different regime types. In dictatorships, leaders aim at maintaining the loyalty of the tiny but indispensable group of essentials. Dictators need the elite, and especially the military, as they cannot rule by themselves, but they try not to over-power them so that they do not eventually turn against them, as they will have a motivation to overtake his position or to cooperate with the opposition (Lee, 2015).

Weak dictators tend to selectively co-opt the most powerful in the polity, while stronger ones would diversify their base of support and get cheaper agents in the coalition, i.e., random cooptation, all with the aim of accumulating more power for the cost of rewards to the co-opted. While these rewards should remain higher than offers from challengers, they would go down the more loyal these agents become and/or as the offers they receive from the opposition get smaller in number and/or value (Sekeris, 2011). That is why dictators work to establish a "loyalty norm", i.e., affinity between the incumbent and the members of the winning coalition that grows with "learning" about their secure position in the regime and whose strength depends on the "relative value" of rewards and "probability of inclusion [and] exclusion" from the coalition. The affinity gets stronger in "small-winning coalitions

and large-selectorate systems” (De Mesquita et al., 2003), a situation that eventually develops as winning coalitions accumulate more power and control—known as the “narrowing effect” (Geddes, 2006). The dictator aims at keeping the number of the essentials small and that of the interchangeable large to control who gets what and to be always aware of the risk of getting replaced “if their reliability [becomes] in doubt” (De Mesquita & Smith, 2011).

In other words, dictators need to assure their allies that they will stay in the alliance in return for their continued loyalty, a challenge that is hard to live with in authoritarian settings given the dearth of information about actors’ intentions and the absence of an external arbiter (De Mesquita & Smith, 2011). Perceiving that the main threat may also come from within their main clique; dictators raise the stakes for the members of the ruling coalition for defecting from the coalition through threats of punishment in addition to incentivizing staying aboard, increasing the members’ commitment towards the power-sharing arrangement in the autocratic regime (Magaloni & Wallace, 2008). Challengers will always try to convince the members of the winning coalition to defect in return for increased private goods in the future. This promise, however, suffers from credibility problem, making defection less attractive as an option, especially, again, where the size of the winning coalition is small relative to that of the selectorate (De Mesquita et al., 2003). Similarly, members of the coalition also cannot make a promise not to turn against their fellow coalition members, who together decide on the distribution of resources in the society (Acemoglu et al., 2008). The risk of the essentials “deserting”, or defecting materializes when they expect better rewards from another competitor, or when the incumbent is no longer capable of or needed for providing them with the rewards they expect (Feaver, 1999). This is especially true for stronger members, or agents, who are aware of their significant position in the ruling alliance that makes them of particular interest for the opposition (Sekeris, 2011). That is why Svobik (2012) distinguishes between established and contested autocrats with the autocratic leader in the latter much less capable of accumulating power to counterbalance the threat of rebellion from his allies and/or the public. In addition, non-personalistic dictators are often more successful at nurturing the loyalty of their militaries, while defection and splits happen under personalist ones as they are more dichotomous for the military officers in terms of competition for patronage and other benefits (Lee, 2015).

Coups or defections, therefore, can take place to advance the interests of members of the winning coalition (De Mesquita et al., 2003). Defection can also take place as a result of the accountability of the dictator by his coalition, rather than the failure of loyalty nurtured by the dictator (Marcum & Brown, 2014). Boix and Svobik (2013) define the threat of rebellion that it holds the dictator, who has an incentive to break his promises, accountable to the promise of power sharing. As the dictator tries to become more powerful relative to the ruling coalition, the latter may retaliate by removing him from power, yet such a move may fail, especially in light of their imperfect information about the political

game. That is why the move against “established” autocrats would take place in the midst of some extra-ordinary event, such as mass protests (Svolik, 2009). This is especially the case for the dictators with smaller coalitions, given their large share in private goods as well as their monitoring of the dictator due to their fear of replacement by other members of the selectorate. Therefore, the coalition in this case, and not the dictator, acts as the principal and it is the policy competency of the dictator for the coalition that keeps him in office. This becomes more evident the more the dictator relies on security institutions, making the regime his regime more vulnerable to them, considering that their loyalty to the dictator does not take away their self-interests (Marcum & Brown, 2014).

While dictators try to nurture the loyalty of the elites and repressive institutions, they try also to create a sense of loyalty among the citizens realizing that repression cannot be applied all the time. It might also be the fact that nurturing a sense of loyalty might seem less costly than the creation and maintenance of a repressive institution(s). Therefore, it can be said that both the military and the citizens move along a continuum of loyalty and disobedience regarding their relationship with the dictator. Defection by the citizens, i.e., protest, may trigger a defection by the military to follow (Magaloni & Wallace, 2008).

This foregone survey highlights the fact securing the loyalty of the military is no guarantees that it is “defection-proofed”, especially in light of domestic political contestation and economic downturns. Defection is more likely during times of crises, especially when the incumbent is no longer able to provide for or seen competent by his officers. For example, the pressures to economically liberalize autocracies in economic crisis situations usually come at the expense of payments and other forms of patronage extended to members of the ruling coalition in return for loyalty. That is why there is a strong motivation for the regime to try to safeguard the military and to maintain its support by allowing it to undertake commercial activities to make up for the cuts in allotted budget (Mora & Wiktorowicz, 2003).

## *2.2. Military-Owned Businesses as an Extra-Budgetary Resource*

Militaries are typically expected to act in defense of the nation against external aggression and in some cases to maintain internal control during times of unrest and/or crises as well as for repression in non-democracies. There are, however, some atypical roles that include an economic one, especially that that falls outside the scope of strategic military industries. While theories on military-owned businesses remain underdeveloped (Singh et al., 2001), they fall largely under the title of “military entrepreneurship”, a term that denotes “the innovative creation of resources and new means of production by commissioned military officers acting in an institutional capacity as formal owners, managers, and stakeholders of enterprises that generate financial resources or goods directly benefiting the military” (Mani, 2011).

In this paper, the type of businesses of interest is military civilian-oriented industries undertaken by active duty officers. This type generally includes non-defense military businesses originally developed as a result of the insufficiency of the military budgetary allocations in many of the developing countries and the use of the military institution towards infrastructure projects during times of peace. The engagement of the military in such business activities results in an additional source of revenue for the institution. Autocratic regimes varied in their degree of control over this resource ranging from sponsoring its development and growth to controlling the way it functions in as concerns access to market and business opportunities. While the military is entitled to the provision of defense as a public good, its involvement in civilian businesses results, however, in the creation of a private good that it works to maintain (Brömmelhörster & Paes, 2003). This turns the military, in a sense, into an economic actor, concerned with maintaining a favorable business environment, making it more dependent on the market and quite less on the regime and/or state budget (Mani, 2010).

It is usually difficult to track the businesses owned or run by the militaries due to the secretive nature of the military institution and weakness of civilian oversight in developing countries in general. This is also because the economic role of the military was thought for long to be primarily into military industries (Hunter, 2000). However, the limited available information on MOBs reveal that they vary across countries in terms of their existence and type by the level of economic and political participation by the military in civilian affairs, structure of the armed forces, the capacity of the state, and changes in the security environment of given countries (Mani, 2007).

### *2.3. Military Defection and Regime Change*

Military defection is located somewhere in the middle between total subordination (loyalty) and total insubordination (rebellion or coup). It is a function of the degree of military autonomy, i.e., the degree of independence in the political behavior of the military (David, 1995). This independence ranges from defensive, i.e., protecting the immediate interests of the institution and its individual officers, observing its legally assigned roles and doctrine, and maintaining the organization integrity of the corps—and therefore the military “stay[s] quartered”; to offensive, i.e., expanding the zone of its prerogatives, inducing a coup at the extreme (Pion-Berlin et al., 2012). In Feaver’s (1999) analysis of military coups, defection may be a sign of both military strength and weakness, with the latter reflecting its inability to achieve its interests using normal channels. Amegashie (2015) differentiates between the loyalty and the no-coup constraints on the military; whereas the first works towards suppressing the dictator’s competitors and the masses, the second is about the cost of abandoning the dictator, which can be mitigated during civil wars and civil protests.

Military defection is increasingly taken as the most significant factor in autocratic breakdown (Lee, 2015). McLauchlin (2010) and Nepstad (2013) define autocratic regime collapse as a function of military defection and alignment with rebellions against the incumbent. This is because the chances for

military defection are believed to be highest during mass protests against the regime and with the lack of a clear constitutional exit for the political crisis faced (Pion-Berlin & Trinkunas, 2010). Put differently, military defection is a key factor in the success of protest campaigns and is increasingly taken as the main reason behind the dictator's departure from office (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011) and (Barany, 2016). This come in line with the logic that for military's political interventions to happen, they require not only a "motive" or interest and/or grievance as a push factor, but also an "opportunity", or as a pull factor. The opportunity in this case comes especially during times of "social unrest", providing a needed cover for intervention against an increasingly perceived illegitimate civilian government (Ezrow & Frantz, 2011) and (Belkin & Schofer, 2003). Even in the absence of immediate threat from the elite, the opening up/opportunity by the threat from below may instigate the elite, particularly the military, to defect, especially in personalist regimes (Nepstad, 2013) and (Casper & Tyson, 2014). Therefore, mass demonstrations are increasingly recognized as significant factors in bringing down dictators and have set the pretext for political interventions by the military since WWII (Lee, 2015). Even in the cases where the military would like to stand by the regime, repression will come at higher costs for the institution (Kricheli & Livne, 2009). While "accommodations signal weakness" on the dictator's side, enforcing repression depends on the move of the military, who in this case is better positioned to decide what steps are to be taken (Ginkel & Smith, 1999).

While Svolik (2012) sees that coup-proofing is effective when applied before militaries turn into powerful agents only, Lee (2008) and Makara (2013) argue that coup-proofing strategies, while minimizing the risk of a coup, increase the chances for military defection and disobedience in the face of mass protests. The chances for defection are highest where the military is fragmented (as a result of the dictator's divide and rule policy), not ethnically engineered, and where the regime is more personalistic. Defection, Dahl (2016) concludes, irrespective of the conditions under which it takes place, usually sets the military in a weaker position. Lee (2008), by contrast, argues that the recurrence of defections under successive autocratic leaders establishes the military as a major holder of political power in the system. This echoes the "military centrality theory", which implies that militaries with sufficient resources and higher levels of professionalism and organization are more politically engaged, and once an interventionist military, it is likely to stay so—the "coup trap" (Ezrow & Frantz, 2011).

### **3. Independent Financial Resources (MOBs) as a Defection Mechanism**

Taken together, the literature, however limited it is on military defection (McLauchlin, 2010), offers a diverse list of explanations for whether and why the military may defect in an autocracy. For example, it is less likely for ethnically-engineered or ideologically-indoctrinated militaries to defect from a regime they consider legitimate. Also, fragmented militaries are more expected to defect especially when faced with mass protests that are costly to quell. Militaries with fewer material incentives or

private goods may defect out of grievance. The literature remains short, however, of providing plausible explanations for why would a military decline to defend a dictator while receiving sizable private goods under him. This paper aims at adding to this growing literature by considering the dynamic through which these private goods or resources extended to the military are managed. The resource used to establish this case is military-owned businesses. This resource is claimed in what follows as a “contributing condition” or factor in the military’s calculation on defection (Mahoney, 2015).

With two militaries, that are both institutionalized and are receiving sizable rewards from the regime are expected, the literature suggests, to repress the protests and to stand by the regime (as was the case in China (1989) and Iran (2009) for example), reality may suggest otherwise, as was the case in Indonesia (1998). This paper, henceforth, suggests that the difference between these two groups of cases can be accounted for by factoring in the style of managing the extra-budgetary resources of the military. If these resources are managed by the military *independently* from other regime institutions, their protection will more likely come in conflict with the protection of the regime itself. They will also provide the institution with a resource for action beyond the life of the regime. Therefore, the *independent* management, i.e., the governing boards and operations of MOBs are exclusively staffed with active-duty officers, of the resources by the military institution contributes to the decision to defect as there is no financial dependency of the military on the regime. Conversely, when the military is financially dependent on the regime for its management of these extra-budgetary resources, the military will be more inclined not to defend the ruling coalition.

Despite all what may differentiate military officers, one thing they generally share is a “corporate” interest in the survival of the institution itself. This interest may be implanted during “socialization” or due to rational calculations and generally demands political stability. Institutionalization, or corporateness or professionalism, can be translated into maintaining the organization with “hierarchy, discipline, and cohesiveness”, independence from “civilian interventions”, and securing “sufficient budgets to acquire weapons, trainings, and recruits” (Geddes, 2003); (Geddes et al., 2014). “Professionalized” militaries are also rule-bound (Geddes, 2006), making them more “predictable and meritocratic” (Bellin, 2005). Although these interests provide a motivation for intervention in politics in cases where the civilian government is seen inefficient or going against the interests of the institution (Geddes, 2003), they can also lead to defection when the protection of the regime can come for the price of protecting the institution and its resources and/or interests.

While it is difficult to find clearly define pure types of the different analytical categories used in what follows, some operational definitions can be guiding for analysis. In this paper, a military is *institutionalized* when it acts as a bureaucratic organization that has a clear corporate identity, that is merit-based with regard to appointments and promotions, and that observes the chain of command. By



extension, MOBs are *institutionally-owned* when they are managed by the military as an institution, i.e., controlled through the military's headquarters or through the ministry of defense either directly or indirectly through some affiliated foundations. They are managed by active-duty officers and their proceeds are channeled directly to the military.

By extension, MOBs are *regime-dependent* when the regime is involved in the management of these MOBs, e.g., through assigning non-military representatives on the boards of the MOBs. This type is usually found in cases where the military is penetrated by or in the cases where the military leadership is part of the regime, i.e., the decision-making in the military involves civilian regime elements. Institutionalized and regime-dependent MOBs tie the power of the purse to the presence of the regime in power as opposed to institutionalized and regime-independent MOBs which, along with other factors identified in the literature, are left with much more to protect and to survive on beyond the regime. The military in the latter case, therefore, has a little motivation to stand by the regime while also being able to act in an independent manner during the crisis. *Defection* by the military means its disobedience to orders to shoot protesters, or the military's declaration of neutrality and distancing itself from the president during the crisis. By contrast, *repression* means the military's intervention during the crisis to the defense of the dictator and against the protesters.

In line with the pacted or strategic transitions approach (O'Donnell, 1986), looking into the mechanisms of autocratic regime collapse should focus on the calculations of risks and gains by the members of the autocratic elite. In addition, the study of loyalty, defection or insubordination, while ultimately tested during popular uprisings, can also be seen as a dynamic process that slides along the continuum of both loyalty and accountability. The accountability of the military plays out towards its twin principals, the dictator and the people. Such intra-elite splits are especially expected when faced with a threat, with each member of the alliance concerned with not only maximizing its interests given its capabilities, but also minimizing its punishment, considering the goals and capabilities of the other side(s). The military would weigh in its punishment by the dictator if she survives or her lack of legitimacy post the protest against protecting its interests if it abandons her. The military, especially professional large-sized ones, realizes that the dictator cannot survive the challenge without its backing. The military may come out as a soft-liner in the game when it decides not to repress, while the dictator as a hardliner when he presses for punishing the protesters and is concerned about his own fate (Scharpf, 1997; Kuehn, 2016). The more the military accumulates resources and power, the more protective it gets. In opposition to Huntington's the professional soldier, "corporate autonomy and submission to civilian control may be inversely related to one another" (Pion-Berlin, 1992). That is why institutionalized militaries may not resist moves of political liberalization in autocracies and may even tolerate regime change (Campbell, 2009).

The significance of widening our scope of investigation to include the question of military budget can be established in light on the fact that, even though in cases where the military can develop its own autonomous capacity against the ruling regime, i.e., push for its own agenda, can be greatly undermined it does not have sufficient funds to support this agenda. Therefore, the capacity of the regime is not only a function of its institutional autonomy, which is key, but also of its financial independence.

#### 4. Methodology

Analysis of this hypothesized relationship will be done using comparative case study. This choice can be justified on theoretical grounds since this paper is concerned with tracing how the causal factor of interest (management of MOBAs as a proxy for financial autonomy) can be linked to the expected outcome (defection) in the autocratic regimes that experienced mass protests. This choice comes not only because case studies “are the major source of evidence” in comparative politics (Geddes, 2003) but also because the in-depth knowledge of the cases can bolster our understanding, if not predicting, of the specific courses of action in which such critical situations eventually unfold (Barany, 2016).

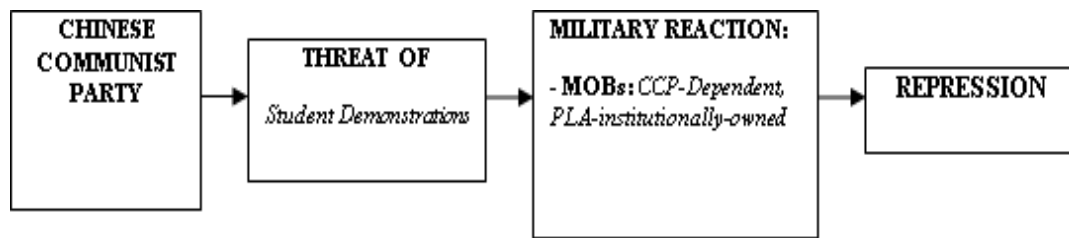
The universe of cases for this study is drawn from the pool of post-WWII countries that both experienced mass protests demanding the ouster of a dictator and had a professional military endowed with *institutionally-owned* MOBAs (independent variable). According to Thelen and Mahoney (2015), it is significant in cross-case comparisons to clearly specify the scope conditions where the proposed causal dynamic is considered valid. In line with this, the starting point for this paper is located in transitional moments or critical threats for authoritarian regimes, operationalized here as mass protests, compiled using the “Nonviolent and Violent Campaigns and Outcomes (NAVCO) 2.0” dataset (Chenoweth & Lewis, 2013) which surveys the incidents of mass protests in the world since 1946 through 2006, classifying them by regime type, campaign target and size, and the defection behavior of the repressive institutions of the regime, among other factors. In addition, the paper supplements the first dataset using the world protests report (Ortiz et al., 2013) which lists the occurrences of mass protests by type of grievance, size of protests, and reaction of the government. The paper excludes military governments since it is hard to decide on the scope of MOBAs under the military’s control over the state. The remaining cases were individually surveyed against the MOBAs literature to decide on which is reported to have MOBAs. The four case studies that fit the criteria and are the focus in what follows are China (1989), Indonesia (1998), Thailand (2006) and Iran (2009). With such a small number of cases, the use of the comparative method becomes more recommended on empirical grounds since cross-case comparisons help maintain a clear focus on the hypothesized casual explanation given that diversity in both the context of each case as well as in the weight of the other relevant causal factors in each (Rueschemeyer, 2003; Porta, 2008).

## 5. Case Studies

### 5.1. China: The “People’s” Army in Defense of the “Party”

Militaries in communist regimes are generally expected to undertake civilian economic roles out of pragmatism, ideological role modeling, and/or fiscal necessities (Scobell & Center, 2000). Such an involvement, however, may bring about negative effects on the civilian, or party, control over the military, leaving it more vulnerable in the face of threats, particularly mass protests (Scobell & Center, 2000). The dual controls of the party over the military, the power to appoint and the power of the purse, may get much weakened, especially the second, as making profits can become a priority for the military, eventually increasing the chances for disobedience to orders from the political establishment and/or the top leadership of the military (Scobell & Center, 2000). The Chinese military (People’s Liberation Army-PLA) is a case in point with its control of a large business empire that lasted up until the late 1990s. These MOBs developed starting the late 1970s for the aim of self-sufficiency and as a survival strategy given the dire economic situation and the inadequacy of defense appropriations with the onset of the economic reform program. This came also at a time when a pressing need was felt to modernize the PLA, which meant that the defense burden was expected to go even higher. This economic involvement, however, negatively affected the readiness of the military and made the PLA less “politically reliable” in the eyes of the leadership of the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (Cheung, 2003). That is why, especially following the 1989 crisis, the CCP aimed to restructure this empire and divested it from PLA’s control into a few holding State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) (Lee, 2006; Brömmelhörster & Paes, 2003). Though criticized for being slow, the CCP’s extended process to de-commercialize the PLA has been maintained even under the pressures of the 1997 financial crisis (Cheung, 2001).

This section aims at highlighting the impact of the presence of PLA-MOBs, as an extra-budgetary resource, on the PLA’s relationship to the CCP, especially around the time of the Tiananmen Square crisis in 1989. The argument is that with the PLA institutionally and financially subordinate to the CCP, it acted along the party’s orders and repressed the protests. Although MOBs gave the PLA some degree of financial autonomy, which was paralleled by a weakness in political indoctrination by the CCP, the CCP was quick in re-centralizing its institutional oversight over and revitalized its ideological penetration of the PLA. This left the PLA, as an institution, dependent on the CCP for their “intertwined” survival.



**Figure 1. MOBs in PLA's Repression of Tiananmen Square Protests**

The PLA as an institution enjoys a high degree of corporate identity despite its penetration by party membership and means of ideological control. While the relationship has been largely marked by the supremacy of the CCP, there were incidents of the PLA taking the lead in the relationship as well. PLA-MOBs were largely owned by the institution in addition to some businesses that were owned at the unit level. The centrally owned PLA-MOBs were the most profitable as they were the ones able to achieve economies of scale and provided up to two thirds of the military budget by 1990. Despite owned and run by the military, the presence of the party in different forms along the chain of command granted it a role in the management and supervision over MOBs as well. Over the first few decades of the republic, PLA's loyalty was also directed towards its revolutionary leadership. Nevertheless, as the expansion and growth of MOBs resulted in some financial empowerment for the PLA vis-à-vis the CCP, the latter imposed some restrictions on the economic behavior and performance of MOBs to keep the PLA firmly under control. The protests in 1989 came as these restrictions were loosely implemented (which, if where not present, might have led to cases of defection, at least on a limited scale) and were eventually tightened and firmly applied through the mid-1990s until the complete divestment of PLA-MOBs was announced in 1997. Therefore, it can be said that given that the PLA had no independent control over its finances and with a dual identity, i.e., the "communist" soldier; it was forced to intervene and to repress the enemies of the regime.

During the protests, the loyalist PLA followed Deng Xiao Peng's orders to interfere in 1989 to the rescue of the CCP, repressing the demonstrations, despite the initial resistance some military leaders expressed regarding the nature and timing of such intervention (Mulvenon, 2004). Although the PLA claims to act in defense of both the people and the party, such a claim came to test during its intervention in Tiananmen Square, with loyalty to the party clearly winning over that to the people, or at least to the demonstrators who were portrayed as perpetrators and enemies of the revolution (Blasko, 2006). That is why the PLA can be generally seen as loyal to the CCP, taking away from its professionalism as an institution, having its prime client the party and its leadership, neither the state nor the people (Bickford, 2001).

In communist regimes, militaries are geared toward targeting both external as well as internal enemies and they may, therefore, employ repression occasionally. That is why Communist militaries are rarely

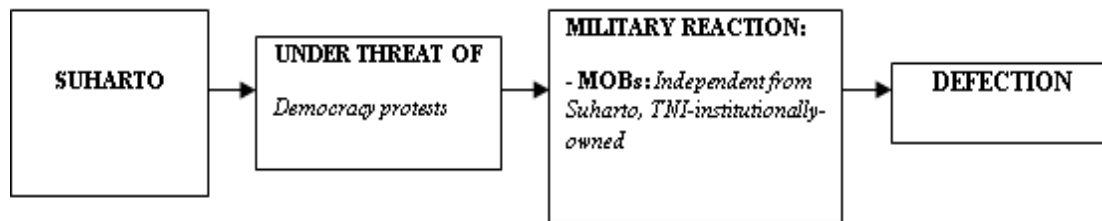
expected to defect, let alone to stage a coup, against the party. This proved to be the case in China, especially with the top leadership of the regime working as an “interlocking directorate” between both the political and the military (Shambaugh, 2002). The PLA was penetrated through a package of loyalty-maintenance-tools and the compliance of the PLA during the 1989 crisis was a clear sign of this deep penetration. In addition, the fact that the military was continuously used as an experimentation site reflected the political reliability of the institution and its loyalty to the regime. The centralist penetrative approach of the CCP vis-à-vis the PLA can therefore be claimed the main cause in explaining the repression of the protests in 1989. This penetrative approach was implemented through different means, one of which was economic using MOBs. In fact, with a history of subordination and following orders, PLA’s suppression of the protests can be taken as an act by the regime, executed by the PLA (Joffe, 1997).

### 5.2. *Indonesia*

For long, the Indonesian military (TNI) occupied a special place in the study of authoritarianism, democratization, and MOBs. This is not only because it has been an interventionist military since its very creation but also because this extra-military intervention has been legalized over most of Indonesia’s modern history. Since 1957, the military undertook both political interventions and economic interventions as it was used to control a sizable portion of the public sector as well as expanded on its independent MOBs. This intervention expanded over time to include a quota in the legislative assemblies as well as undertaking economic activities for financial self-sufficiency. While stepping outside of the defense domain by the TNI has changed over time, it remained a constant fact of political life in authoritarian (1957-1998) and to a lesser extent in democratizing (post-1998) Indonesia.

TNI’s MOBs came into existence out of necessity and for financial self-sufficiency during the war of independence and later against the insufficiency of the defense appropriations by the state. Suharto (1966-1998), with experience in founding and running MOBs while on active duty, manipulated the logic behind TNI’s MOBs by adding a patronage component to them and expanded the range and scale of economic opportunities available for the military while tying their very presence to his own stay in power. In addition, Suharto, while allowing these MOBs to be run by the TNI as an institution which remained underfunded by the state, his personalist style of patronage and manipulation of the command structure accorded him considerable leverage over who runs and manages these MOBs. That said, TNI’s defection from Suharto in the face of the democracy protests in 1998 took only a few by surprise. This is because Suharto has increasingly alienated the TNI from his “political” power-sharing arrangement starting the end of the 1980s, lowering the stakes for the military in the survival of his regime. That is why the TNI intervened to convince Suharto to resign on the heat of the crisis while offering him a safe exit, a position that accorded the military a higher degree of political legitimacy

during and following the transition. Being autonomous and financially independent from the regime (with up to 75% estimated contribution of MOBs revenues to TNI's budget), it had little interest in defending the status quo and sided with the democracy protesters during the 1998 crisis. It was only after its political defeat in managing the crisis of East Timor and the stabilization of civilian politics by 2004 that the TNI did come under increased civilian control and a process of divestment of its MOBs was launched. The aim of MOBs' divestment was to re-establish TNI's financial dependency on the state as well as redesigning its role, keeping it exclusively within the defense zone.



**Figure 2. MOBs in TNI's Defection from Suharto**

TNI's MOBs can be seen as a means for financial survival for the military especially considering the process of historic development for both the Indonesian state and military. This inseparable link to civilian life was established by the military's control over the police force and involvement in internal security (Sukma, 2010). In this light, TNI-MOBs can be seen as a "functional" resource that provides for the institution to operate. This was true during the financial crisis in 1997 when TNI's MOBs helped seal off the military even while they themselves were hard hit as a result of the crisis (Singh et al., 2001). In addition, post the transition, TNI's leadership expressed its willingness to divest the MOBs as soon as the allocated defense budget grows to cover all TNI's operational needs (Kingsbury, 2003). It can be said, therefore, that Suharto, while developing different methods to establish patronage networks with his officers, TNI's MOBs remained not part of such a network. They, by contrast, contributed to the military's autonomy under his regime. As the military leadership was turning towards less political and social involvement (partly due to its increased professionalization and partly due to Suharto's downplay of the military's role in politics) coupled with its concern with institutional integrity against the threat of the uprising and the cost of applying repression and the accountability of its officers, being financially autonomous contributed positively to the military's decision to defect. While its involvement in internal repression, through the control of the police as well as alleged human rights violations, and the presence of a group of Suharto-loyalists in the ranks may have made a case for repression and defense of the status quo, the institutional interest in and ability (through MOBs) to survive beyond Suharto tilted the balance in favor of defection.

### 5.3. Thailand

There are two major centers of power in the Thai political system: the monarch who enjoys several formal and informal powers and the military which ruled the country over most of its modern history and turned the monarchy from absolute into constitutional in 1932. Civilian politicians and the parliament consistently dominated the political system following the end of military rule in 1992 (and effectively until 2006) while enjoying varying degrees of influence and control under military rule. In addition, state bureaucracy, the media, and business associations enjoy a significant amount of influence in the political system.

The concern of this section is with the military in its relationship with the rest of political powers. This relationship has varied from cooperation to confrontation over time. In 1932, the increasingly professionalized military and the rising modern state bureaucracy joined ranks to protest the absolute power of the king and the arrangements of the royal family that monopolized access to top posts. Shortly after limiting the power of the palace, the military turned against the civilian bureaucracy and aimed to exclusively dominate the political arena. With increased challenges from the bureaucracy and the rising middle class, the military re-oriented itself towards cooperation/subordination to the king starting 1957. In fact, the military remained subordinate and loyal to the king since then, identifying the protection of the monarch to be part of the institution's definition of national security. The king, on his part, accumulated a range of moral and informal as well as formal powers, most of which come into force through its powerful Privy Council, which is mostly staffed by retired and active-duty military officers. The Privy Council also oversees the immense royal wealth through the "autonomous" Crown Property Bureau (CPB). While the influence of the monarchy extends beyond the political system to business circles, the palace occasionally mediates military's connections with civilian government (McCargo, 2005). The military, with its interventionist legacy, developed a massive empire of independent MOBs that ranged from banking services to control over media and security services.

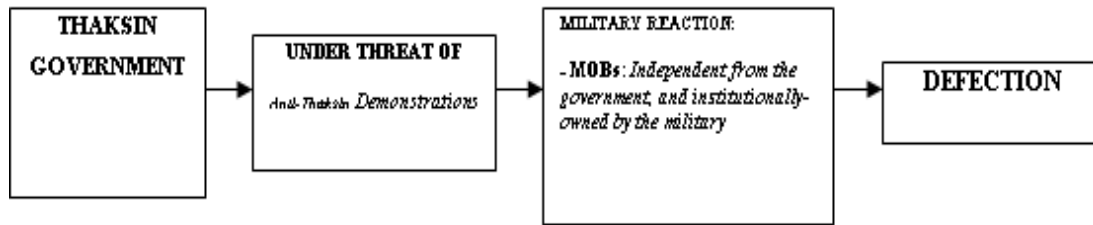
Following the democratization and civilianization, as opposed to militarization, of the political system in 1992, the roots of an alternative type of legitimacy started taking roots, i.e., electoral legitimacy. The uninterrupted survival of civilian governments for more than a decade (1992-2006) was unprecedented in the modern history of the country and Thaksin Shinawatra (2001-2006) became the first civilian prime minister to complete his full 4-year term in office and to win a re-election. Up until the 1990s, civilian governments did not last for more than a year as a result of some sort of a military intervention, early election, or a coup. The transition to democracy was codified in a constitution promulgated in 1997 that strengthened both political parties and the executive branch. The relatively unsuccessful record of managing the 1998 economic crisis cost the traditionally dominant Democrat's Party power to the newly-taken-over Thais love Thais (TRT) party by the ex-police colonel and business tycoon, Thaksin Shinawatra. While praised for his delicate mix of promising to provide for the vulnerable

while opening up the market and modernizing state bureaucracy, his reign in office was also charged with corruption, power abuse, wealth accumulation, and increased authoritarianism. This has led to a political crisis that polarized the country and still does for more than a decade after its outbreak in 2006.

Thaksin's opponents, especially after his landslide victory for a second term in 2005, joined ranks together to maximize their opposition to his regime. His attempts to control of the media and to manipulate the electoral process brought democracy advocates to the streets protesting his policies, especially in the central urban and southern regions of the country. The movement, or the yellow camp, reflected also the concern that the political rise of Thaksin represented a direct threat to the power of the palace as well as to traditional power centers. The protesters petitioned to the king to intervene to support democracy and he did by referring the electoral results to the justice system which annulled them. The opposition, acknowledging its electoral weakness, boycotted the new election that was rescheduled in October 2006. With the growing "mess", as per the description of the king, the military intervened to restore order and to "give democracy back to the people." As a result, this intervention reinforced the role of the military in the political system becoming, however, a protector of the status quo as opposed to an agent of change (as it was once in 1932).

In a country with a long history of military coups (a total of 19 as of 2006), this incident of military intervention has been described as a good coup, coup de grace or a royalist coup, among other titles. Nevertheless, it remains puzzling as far as defection/coup dichotomy is concerned given the fact that there were two competing centers of loyalty in the system, namely the King and the Prime Minister, both of which claim the legitimate representation of the people. As a matter of fact, the military's siding with the king came as no surprise given the fact that the king has already won in the battle of securing the loyalty of and control over the military through the Privy Council. The palace, for example, pushed for confirming its nominee for Army chief in 2005 against Thaksin's nominee. In addition, the military, as an institution, saw in Thaksin's efforts to subordinate it a threat to its institutional integrity and financial autonomy. In fact, the Thai military was becoming increasingly corporate since the transition to civilian rule in 1992. It remained autonomous, however, from civilian control, except for the influence of the king through his Privy Council. The military inherited some MOB's from the six decades of intermittent military rule (1932-1992), which it controlled independent from civilian governments. Thaksin was trying to establish his domination over the military through manipulating finances of the institution and re-establishing them on the budget, and through selective appointments. Some of the MOB's were either privatized or aimed to be put under the control of Prime Minister's office. With a high anti-Thaksin political tide, the military found its interests, MOB's included, better secured by reasserting its loyalty to the king and against Thaksin.





**Figure 3. MOBs in the Monarchy-induced Defection**

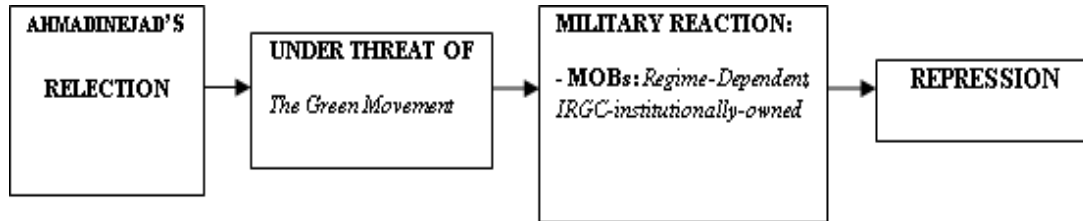
It can be said that the military during the 2006 political crisis, instead of the playing the role of the arbitrator, it was actually used by the ultimate arbitrator in the regime, i.e., the king, in what can be termed as a “monarchy-induced defection”. While unseating Thaksin Shinawatra through the use of force technically qualifies as a military coup, the reality of it requires delving a little deeper into the roots of the crisis and the wider processes of political change that were taking place in Thailand. The military, acting upon the orders of the king raises questions regarding to whom political authority ultimately belongs in the regime. Unless the debate on whether legitimacy flows from the top or the bottom of the political structure in settled, the political intervention of the Thai military in 2006 should be placed in the grey area falling between the two extreme cases of active (coup) and passive (defection) political interventions by the military.

#### 5.4. Iran

However challenging it is to understand the politics of the Iranian regime, the political crisis and the legitimacy challenge posed by the mass protests following the 2009 presidential election came to add an additional layer of difficulty. This is because the regime of the Islamic Republic has been marked, since its creation in 1979, by a duality in terms of the structures of power and sources of legitimacy. Parallel to the typical branches of a modern political system, which are directly elected by the people, there is a parallel clerical structure that checks on the power of the elected offices, controls the range of choices people have, and it is where ultimate power in the system is located. At the top of the power pyramid is the office of the Supreme Guide (or Leader), the highest authoritative office in the system. The representatives of the divine authority are not directly elected and act in accordance with religious teachings (Eisenstadt, 2001).

When the protesters took to the streets to denounce what was considered a fraudulent result of an unfair and un-free presidential election against the incumbent, President Mahmod Ahmadinejad (2005-2013), who enjoyed the support of the Supreme Guide, they were challenging also the authority of the Supreme Guide himself. Yet, the leadership of the protest movement, the green movement, made it clear that they were not challenging the regime of the Islamic Republic as founded by Ayatollah Khomeini (1979-1989), but were rather opposing what they saw as a deviation from the path envisioned by the “founding Ayatollah” by the current Supreme Guide, Ayatollah Khamenei

(1989-present). To suppress the protests, the president called on, with the blessing of the Supreme Guide, *the military of the regime*, i.e., the Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) and its affiliated militia (Basij), to repress the protests.



**Figure 4. MOBs in IRGC's Repression of the Green Movement Protests**

While the IRGC is institutionalized and corporate, it is penetrated by the Grand Leader's control through indoctrination and religious commissars as well as his steering of the public policies to the endorsement of the political, social and economic roles of the IRGC and other revolutionary institutions. Therefore, while IRGC-MOBs are owned and run by the institution, the Islamic regime enjoys a high degree of control over what and how to do business, e.g., the grand leader sponsors the cooperatives', including IRGC's, rise to a commanding role in the Iranian economy. The expansion and growth of MOBs empowered the IRGC and introduced a new political class of militant clerics to the political scene, distinct from the traditional conservative core of the regime. By defending Ahmadinejad during the crisis, the IRGC defended by extension both the supreme leader as well as its key position in the regime, to which it is politically and financially tied. IRGC's accumulation of power can eventually lead to taking over the regime and not only defending it.

It can be also said that the IRGC works as the Trojan horse to infiltrate and take over the "non-clerical institutions" of the regime (Forozan, 2016). Assuming the presidency by one of its own gave the corps the chance to gain access to additional economic and political resources. With personalities, informal relations, and networks dominating over the formal structures, there are little chances to witness a reverse in this trend (Lim, 2015; Wehrey, 2009). The ever-increased power of the revolutionary institutions, at the core of which is the IRGC, and the establishment of new channels of elite recruitment and promotion makes the next competition to be within the principalist camp. The rising tensions between the traditional conservatives and the neo-radicals seem to be imminent, especially with the worsening health condition of Ayatollah Khamenei and the upcoming selection of a new Supreme Guide. This also may justify the expansion in the size of IRGC's MOBs even after the departure of Ahmadinejad from office (Note 1). This became clear when the current president Hassan Rouhani tried to put some restrictions on IRGC's national economic role, the corps were able to go around this restriction and worked alternatively at the local level, making use, to cite only one example,

of their connection to the mayor of Tehran, one of their veterans, who granted them an estimated 7 billion-dollar worth of projects instead (Forozan & Shahi, 2017).

While the IRGC makes use of its connection to the Supreme Guide, the question that remains is what would happen in case such a neo-radical current managed to control the choice of the new Supreme Guide and combine both the de-jure and de-facto powers in the regime. The financial self-sufficiency achieved as a result of the extra-budgetary allocations of the IRGC and the Basij can, it can be hypothesized, empower them well enough to have a final say in the political game. This may raise another question regarding the willingness of the IRGC to defend a conservative, let alone a reformist, president had a similar scenario is to materialize. Even a more important question is what would the position of the IRGC be, as far as the defense of the revolution is concerned, vis-à-vis the new Supreme Leader in case he comes from either the traditional or reformist camps, or in case he intends to divest their MOB's.

## **6. Conclusion: MOB's and the Political Role of the Military**

This survey of the influence of the way in which MOB's of institutionalized militaries are owned and run in these four cases has been largely confirming to the hypothesis. In the cases where the regime secured control over the management of its military's MOB's, the military defended the regime's presence in power and repressed the protests (as in the regime-dependent cases of China and Iran). In the cases where the military kept MOB's as part of its exclusive domain, even though it occasionally depended on the regime for protecting these MOB's against competition and to dominate over some strategic sectors of the economy, it had a higher degree of freedom of action and eventually defected from the regime, leading to its collapse (the regime-independent cases of Indonesia and Thailand (Note 2)). While in all these cases the development of MOB's did not come only as a result of patronage by the regime but also due to the insufficiency of budgetary allocations (except in the case of Thailand), the absence of regime efforts to divest these MOB's or to expand the defense budgets can be taken as an attempt by the regime to turn these MOB's into tools of patronage over the military institution.

While challenge was operationalized as mass protests in all four cases, the context has varied from one case to the other. Iran and Thailand shared some similarity in terms of the rise of a new class of political actors, i.e., "militarized clerics" in Iran and businesspeople in Thailand, as a precipitating factor for the protests, the challenge in the Chinese case came as one of the outcome of the modernization process in the Chinese society. The challenge in the Indonesian case was fueled by the impact of the Asian financial crisis. With regards to the causal pathways for "loyalty", with the Indonesian cases in mind, it can be concluded that regime's control over the power of the purse matters much more than maintaining only the power of the appointments, as in both cases the leader gave up on the first while maintaining the second.

Post defection, the cases of Indonesia and Thailand undertook different routes in the post-authoritarian/democratization phase, yet all were marked with, at least initially, a heavy political role for the military. Thailand witnessed two other military takeovers in 2008 and in 2014 so as to block the political comeback of the “Shinawatrass”. Not only that its MOBs are expanding, but also the defense budget grew under the military, or military-backed, governments.

It is interesting to see also that in the two cases of repression, China and Iran, MOBs took divergent paths afterwards. In China, an immediate crack down on the MOBs followed the crisis, and the strict party control culminated in the eventual divestment of PLA-MOBs’ in 1998. This is while in Iran, IRGC-MOBs show no signs of decline but to the opposite they are growing at a faster pace, adding to the Guards’ political power and influence with the blessing of the Supreme Leader. Taken as such, the IRGC is expected to undertake a role similar to TNI’s “middle way’ in Indonesia, rather than staying strictly under the command of the civilian leadership in the regime as was seen in the Chinese case.

It is also worth noting that the development process of both the military and its MOBs varied across the different cases. In China, Iran, and Indonesia, the roots of the military can be taken back to a war of independence, where in the first two the struggle was for the establishment of the regime while in the third it was for the declaration of the independence of the state. Following the successful end of the struggle, the military generally remained subordinate to the civilian government in all three cases with selective interventions in political and economic life. It remains that in the Chinese and Iranian cases, the military was indoctrinated by the regime. This is while the creation of a professionalized military in the Thai cases was done by the state itself. The military took over political power in both cases, a move that provided it with considerable economic and administrative experiences. Upon regime civilianization, the military remained autonomous against civilian politicians, with a strong attachment to the king in the Thai case. This can lead one to conclude that MOBs can be categorized by nature, i.e., growing out of necessity and as part of the evolutionary development of the military institution itself as in the cases of China and Indonesia; or nurture, i.e., the cases where the military upon assuming power or being drawn to the orbit of power became involved in business activities, as can be seen in the cases of Thailand and Iran. There seems also to be a lot of cross-country cooperation and exchange of learning and experiences during the process of MOBs development, which took place largely during the Cold War, except for Iran. For example, the parallel economic and political re-orientation of China away from the Soviet Union and towards improved relations with the US, adoption of market economics, and the development of MOBs can be indicative of this cooperation. Iran also seems to have borrowed a lot from the Chinese military’s experience in developing civilian technologies and industries.

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### Note(s)

Note 1.

<http://www.mei.edu/content/io/irgcs-involvement-agricultural-industry-signals-growing-militarization-iran-s-economy>

Note 2. The Thai military took over the government in defection from the Prime Minister, but also in defense of the King.