

## Abstract

Following the loss of Egypt as its primary ally in 1979, Syria went through a drastic build-up of its armed forces. By 1983, the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) had swelled to nearly 500,000 active duty personnel from 50,000 at the onset of the 1967 Israeli conflict, constituting one of the largest military forces in the region (Kurt:2016, pp.116). However, what may have appeared to external observers as a powerful regional military force, it was in fact an institution plagued with rampant paternalism, criminal business networks and various competing praetorian factions. While some would view this as simply another 'unavoidable' characteristic of a third world state, many of these factors were in fact created by the regime in power to insulate itself from potential military intrusion into the existing political status quo. With its weak civil society, low regime legitimacy, and rich history of past military putsches, Syria has always been prone to an elevated, theoretical risk of a coup d'état (Belkin & Schofer:2003, pp.595; Gasserbner & al.:2016, pp.302). It has since been proven that through various controls by the military command, no internal or domestic force would have the means nor the incentive to replace the regime, even during times of great political crisis (Luttwak:1969, pp.16). While this strategy of balancing civil-military relations has enabled the regime to survive for almost 47 years now, Holger Albrecht argues that this trend will be limited only to the medium term. His research demonstrates that despite previous claims, mechanisms that keep unpopular regimes alive eventually are pulled into a downwards spiral and become what he calls 'lame ducks' (Albrecht:2014, pp.665). The model holds that while a new regime initially faces the danger of a repeated coup d'état following taking power, the risk is considerably lowered over time as control eventually is cemented, only to render itself susceptible once again in the later years, as can be pictured using a U-shape curve. For example, in order to reduce the elevated risk of an additional military conspiracy against his 1970 ascension to power, Hafez al-Assad sought to insulate his position through the establishment of various elite praetorian bodyguards. While this measure maintained the fixed mechanisms to assure his grip on power and security of his regime over time, the current civil war nevertheless demonstrated that many units were steered away from their original defensive positions, rendering the regime deeply exposed to other potential conspirators and other factions seeking to gain the upper hand. While many forms of measures regarding political insulation still exist, this dissertation serves to answer just that: to determine to what extent coup proofing structures within Syria's military have been transformed and modified from their previous intended framework.