During the Arab uprisings of 2011, the Arab militarists played a crucial role in determining the outcomes of the protests. Philippe Droz-Vincent introduces the talk with a caveat, that before the Arab Spring, there were only a few academics studying the military as an essential pillar of the Arab regimes. After 2011, there has been a surge in academic interest on the military. He believes that the upsurge in literature on the subject comes with the cost of losing sense of what is on the ground. He cites the example of Egypt, which is presented as a case of military institutionalism, and of Syria, which is defined as a patrimonial system. He contends that when examining the two cases more closely there are more nuances. In Egypt, cronyism and predatory behavior existed even in the institutionalized military. The Syrian regime after 2011, lost control of a large part of its military and was unable to use it as a tool of repression. The Assad regime, in order to transform its military as a tool of repression, has brutalized its officer corps as much as it has brutalized its citizens. He argues for adopting a more grounded approach to understand the nature and role the Arab military, and thereby its reaction to the Arab protests.

Professor Droz-Vincent describes that relationship between the state and the military, and relates that military is considered as an essential pillar of the state with a special mission of integrating and developing the state. Most rulers in the Arab world came from the army through a coup d’etat, but after the 1970s, the regimes become demilitarized. This ambiguous term, he explains, refers to the less visible role of the military; this is because rulers coming from the military build regimes on an expanded security sector. These regimes cultivated a political czarism using various coup-proofing strategies, and the military in turn adapted itself into the regime.

He discusses that the main engine for reform within the states was endogenous, stemming from mass social mobilization in public spaces and resilient protests. He describes the regimes as being driven by the executive, which were steered by a small clique, that became the component of the state targeted by mass protests. The military and the will of the officer corps were decisive in determining the course of the events. In some cases, they decided to refrain, and automatically eased the end of the regime and in other cases the military persisted in oppressing. He highlighted three determinants in choosing one path over the other. The first determinant was whether the military was fully distinguished from the security services. In Syria, he cites, the security services were deeply intertwined with the military. Second, was how developed the military was; in Egypt
the military displayed a high degree of corporatism, while in Libya, there was no army. The last factor, he stipulates was whether the military harbored some sense of legitimacy. The last theme Droz-Vincent discusses is the weakness of the military in the current political scenario. In Egypt, after 2013, the military was able to position itself in the center of economic and political decisions, however, this he believes has led to tensions within the military. He argues that General Sisi’s administration has no real program, except a ‘follow me’ mantra. This has created an atmosphere of polarization in the country.

Droz-Vincent in his conclusion articulates that five years after the 2011 uprisings the harvest is modest in terms of democratic transition because the upheaval left bedrock of armored forces intact with empowered militias. There is a resurgence of Arab militarism, and the paradox of the Arab uprisings is they transformed the state, but they reinforced the role of the military as a stakeholder in the system, with the exception of Tunisia. However, he does not believe that this is a return to the era of military politics of the fifties and sixties, because the military has no coherent programme or mission. This is why, he reiterates, the military is building a weak regime and to further understand the contextual factors that have reinforced the rebalancing civil military relations we need to shift from comparative politics to international relations.