



## **POLICY ROUNDTABLE:**

# **The Military and Mass Protests in Africa**

*May 5, 2021*

We brought together a team of experts to discuss the role of the military in mass protests in Africa over the last several years and its involvement in the process of democratization.

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## 1. Introduction: The Military and Mass Protests in Africa

*Kristen A. Harkness*

Africa has recently witnessed a wave of mass protests, with tens of thousands of citizens pouring into the streets to resist authoritarianism. These protests continue a proud tradition of civil resistance against oppression, from the post-World War II social movements that ended colonialism to the end-of-Cold War opposition movements that brought the third wave of democratization to the continent.<sup>1</sup> Recent mass protests have placed severe pressure on longstanding dictators to abdicate power, toppling autocrats in countries as diverse as Algeria, Burkina Faso, Sudan, and Zimbabwe. They have also compelled prodigal elected leaders to implement major reforms and return to the path of liberalization — or resign — as in Malawi, Senegal, and South Africa.<sup>2</sup>

Strikingly, the military has played a conspicuous role in the outcomes of these protests, whether in the form of soldiers quickly and effectively silencing demonstrations or

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<sup>1</sup> See Lisa Mueller, *Political Protest in Contemporary Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 30–53.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Bettina Engels and Melanie Müller, “Northern Theories, Southern Movements? Contentious Politics in Africa through the Lens of Social Movement Theory,” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 37, no.1 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589001.2019.1607967>; E. Gyimah-Boadi, “Aspirations and Realities in Africa: Democratic Delivery Falls Short,” *Journal of Democracy* 30, no. 3 (2019), <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/729171>; Kristen A. Harkness, “Military Loyalty and the Failure of Democratization in Africa: How Ethnic Armies Shape the Capacity of Presidents to Defy Term Limits,” *Democratization* 24, no. 5 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2016.1241244>; and Peter VonDoepp, “Resisting Democratic Backsliding: Malawi’s Experience in Comparative Perspective,” *African Studies Review*, Online First (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2019.62>.

abandoning imperiled leaders. Failed uprisings have taken place in countries like Guinea, where thousands marched to prevent President Dadis Camara from consolidating his rule through rigged elections, having earlier seized power in a coup. But protests withered after presidential guard units were deployed to suppress the mounting opposition, culminating in the massacre of 157 people outside the football stadium in Conakry.<sup>3</sup> The military in Senegal chose differently. In 2012, President Abdoulaye Wade made an unconstitutional bid for a third term in office, having already displayed worrying authoritarian tendencies, including packing legislative and judiciary institutions with loyalists and increasingly violating civil liberties. Widespread protests, coupled with well-organized social movements, stopped Wade from further changing electoral laws and swept the opposition to victory at the polls. Having carefully monitored opinion surveys, the Senegalese military informed the president that, were he to defy the election results, he would lack their support. Wade conceded defeat.<sup>4</sup>

The military also significantly shapes what happens after leaders fall. Do the hopes and sacrifices of protesters translate into real social transformation and political gains? Or does power merely shift from one repressive autocrat to another? Militaries often hold substantial authority within transitional governments — stemming not merely from their firepower but also from the popularity and legitimacy they gained through their regime-ending defections. How they use this authority determines not just whether democratization takes place but also its long-term character and quality.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Cullen S. Hendrix and Idean Salehyan, "Ethnicity, Non-Violent Protest, and Lethal Repression in Africa," *Journal of Peace Research* 56, no. 4 (2019): 470, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0022343318820088>.

<sup>4</sup> Harkness, "Military Loyalty and the Failure of Democratization in Africa, 810-11.

<sup>5</sup> See Aurel Croissant, et al., "Beyond the Fallacy of Coupism: Conceptualizing Civilian Control of the Military in Emerging Democracies," *Democratization* 17, no. 5 (2010),

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2010.501180>; Kristen A. Harkness, "Militaires," in *Handbook of*

The contributors to this roundtable explore the role of the military in four recent cases where longstanding African dictators fell amid popular mobilization for change: Algeria in 2019 (Dalia Ghanem), Sudan in 2019 (Nathaniel Allen and Luka Kuol), Gambia in 2017 (Maggie Dwyer), and Zimbabwe in 2017 (Chipo Dendere). In each essay, the authors analyze the decisions made by military actors and why they ultimately defected from the regime. They then assess the transitional process, including the power of the military within that process, and the prospects for democratization, and including the dangers (or reality) of authoritarian retrenchment. The remainder of this introduction analyzes the four cases collectively, developing several overarching themes and shared trends. It then draws lessons for the international community on how to better support African civil resistance movements in these fragile revolutionary moments.

## Overarching Themes

The experiences of Algeria, Sudan, Gambia, and Zimbabwe illuminate three overarching themes concerning how mass protests and soldiers together can enable (or hinder) democratization. First, mass protests alone are insufficient to spark a democratic transition, even when they topple dictators. Second, military alliances with protesters present a challenging paradox: While often necessary to unseat powerful autocrats, overt military intervention can severely undermine long-term democratization processes. Third, protesters have learned to sustain pressure against transitional governments — which are often led by military generals — potentially increasing the chances of liberalization.

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*Democratization in Africa* ed. Gabrielle Lynch and Peter VonDoepp (London and New York: Routledge, 2019); and David Kuehn, “Midwives or Gravediggers of Democracy? The Military’s Impact on Democratic Development,” *Democratization* 24, no. 5 (2017): 783–800, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2017.1324421>.

### *Mass Protests Only Sometimes Lead to Democratization*

In all four cases, mass protests played an important role in toppling entrenched dictators. In Gambia, relatively modest protests for electoral reform sparked a liberalization process that ultimately led to the defeat of President Yahya Jammeh at the polls.<sup>6</sup> While his removal from power was enforced by the international community, with the deployment of 7,000 Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) troops,<sup>7</sup> it is difficult to imagine such intervention in the absence of Gambia's citizen-led movement for change. In Algeria, mass protests erupted when President Abdelaziz Bouteflika attempted to secure a fifth term in office.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, in Sudan, a severe economic crisis unleashed anti-regime demonstrations against President Omar al Bashir when the price of bread tripled.<sup>9</sup> These large-scale civil resistance campaigns provoked military intervention and the end of both dictatorships.

Zimbabwe presents a more ambiguous situation. President Robert Mugabe's age and impending retirement led to a succession crisis within his revolutionary political party,

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<sup>6</sup> "Gambia's Jammeh Loses to Adama Barrow in Shock Election Result," *BBC*, Dec. 2, 2016, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-38183906>.

<sup>7</sup> Abdul-Jalilu Ateku, "Regional Intervention in the Promotion of Democracy in West Africa: An Analysis of the Political Crisis in the Gambia and ECOWAS' Coercive Diplomacy," *Conflict, Security & Development* 20, no. 6 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2020.1854954>.

<sup>8</sup> Shannon van Sant, "Thousands Protest Against Algerian President's Bid for Fifth Term," *NPR*, March 3, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/03/03/699855429/thousands-protest-against-algerian-presidents-bid-for-fifth-term?t=1619882900166>.

<sup>9</sup> "Several Killed in Sudan as Protests over Rising Prices Continue," *Aljazeera*, Dec. 21, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/12/21/several-killed-in-sudan-as-protests-over-rising-prices-continue>.

ZANU-PF, between his wife, Grace Mugabe, and his vice president, Emmerson Mnangagwa. When Mugabe tried to fire Mnangagwa, the army — which has always been deeply intertwined with the ZANU-PF<sup>10</sup> — launched a coup. Mugabe then defiantly refused to acknowledge his own ousting, provoking the military into calling for a million-man march. Tens of thousands poured into the streets in what looked like a genuine mass uprising, conferring legitimacy on the coup and the political transition. While popular grievances surely ran deep, as Dendere argues in this roundtable, the military and its ZANU-PF allies had a heavy hand in orchestrating the demonstrations.

Yet, while mass protests were an important element of all four cases, they only sometimes encouraged a true democratic opening. Gambia and Sudan show the most promise. After Jammeh conceded electoral defeat, power was handed to the legitimately elected new president, Adama Barrow. Dwyer describes how democratization is now progressing. A truth and reconciliation commission has been established, press freedoms improved, and free and fair legislative elections held, among other reforms. Worryingly, however, police have arbitrarily arrested government critics and met some (but certainly not all) continuing protests with a heavy-handed response, including live fire.

Allen and Kuol similarly argue that Sudan now has a fraught yet hopeful opportunity for democratization. The transitional government, or Sovereign Council, includes genuine civilian influence and representation: Six of its 11 members are civilians. Currently led by Abdullah Hamdok, the government has embarked on an ambitious reform program and is preparing for competitive elections. However, the Sudanese military has a long history of

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<sup>10</sup> Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, “Nationalist-Military Alliance and the Fate of Democracy in Zimbabwe,” *African Journal of Conflict Resolution* 6, no. 1 (2006),

<https://www.ajol.info/index.php/ajcr/article/download/39398/59580>.

intervention in politics and has vested interests in ensuring continued political control. Indeed, Sudan has made three prior attempts at democratization, all of which ended in military coups.

The picture is far more bleak in both Algeria and Zimbabwe. Ghanem argues that the military continues to exert control over Algerian politics, despite the election of President Abdelmadjid Tebboune in December 2019. Indeed, those elections were rashly organized and deeply disputed, with millions of fresh protesters rejecting the results. Lacking popular legitimacy, Tebboune remains highly dependent on the military for support, undermining prospects for meaningful liberalization.

Zimbabwe has also experienced more continuity than change in transitioning to a post-Mugabe era. Dendere describes how the military has essentially run the government since its coup, with security force personnel directly placed in many key posts. The former vice president, Emmerson Mnangagwa, always the military's and party's favored successor, headed the "transitional" regime before winning rapidly organized and deeply contested presidential elections in July 2018. Formerly Mugabe's right-hand man, national security minister, and head of the Central Intelligence Organization, Mnangagwa is deeply implicated in past human rights abuses and repression, including both the Gukurahundi crackdown — in which an estimated 20,000 civilians were killed in Matabeleland in the early 1980s — and the election violence and repression of the 2000s.<sup>11</sup> Mnangagwa has yet to take any steps toward liberalization.

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<sup>11</sup> Godfrey Maringira, "Politicization and Resistance in the Zimbabwean National Army," *African Affairs* 116, no. 462 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adwo55>.

*The Paradox of Military Intervention*

These four cases also emphasize the paradox of soldiers intervening in mass protests that threaten autocracies. As other scholars have noted, militaries are often vital to overthrowing dictators — especially long-entrenched ones — who have closed down most other avenues for political change.<sup>12</sup> Security force defections cripple autocrats who rely on repression to rule.<sup>13</sup> In both Sudan and Zimbabwe, soldiers rather than protesters directly ended the decades-long reign of both al Bashir and Mugabe through overt military coups replete with tanks in the streets. Escalating protests similarly motivated the Algerian army to pressure Bouteflika to resign, albeit more subtly and behind semi-closed doors. Only in Gambia did the military play more of a minor (but still important) role in regime transition. After initially conceding electoral defeat, Jammeh backtracked and annulled the results. He retained the loyalty of the security forces until the ECOWAS contingent arrived at Gambia's borders. Dwyer describes how, at that stage, the military high command publicly announced the military's unwillingness to fight. Left defenseless in the face of both strong domestic opposition and an armed international intervention, Jammeh resigned. The army then immediately arrested Jammeh's paramilitary forces, paving the way for a peaceful transition.

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<sup>12</sup> See Nikolay Marinov and Hein Goemans, "Coups and Democracy," *British Journal of Political Science* 44, no. 4 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123413000264>; and Clayton L. Thyne and Jonathan M. Powell, "Coup d'État or Coup d'Autocracy? How Coups Impact Democratization, 1950-2008," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 12, no. 2 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1111/fpa.12046>.

<sup>13</sup> See Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); and Milan W. Svobik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).



Despite their critical influence in ending longstanding dictatorships and opening a window for change, such overt military interventions paradoxically lower the chances of real democratization. The coups in Algeria and Zimbabwe have resulted in continued military control over politics and the installation of new autocrats through flawed presidential elections. In both cases, democratization is unlikely. Ghanem argues that the Algerian military will not cede power for the same reasons it has historically maintained stewardship over the country. Military officers receive abundant financial perks that a democratically accountable government might rescind, from high salaries and private sector opportunities to privileged access to rare consumer goods and medical care. Perhaps even more concerning, Algerian soldiers believe themselves to be the ultimate judges of the national interest and that elected civilians should be subordinate to the army. Democracy would require the exact opposite civil-military relationship — : that the army be subordinate to elected civilians who have final authority over all policy choices — even when they are wrong.<sup>14</sup>

Dendere similarly argues that Zimbabwe’s soldiers will not voluntarily return to the barracks. Indeed, when protesters rallied following the 2018 election and tried to pressure the regime into real reforms, they were subdued with live ammunition, resulting in nearly a dozen fatalities. Protests are now routinely being met with military force. In all likelihood, we will continue to see single-party authoritarian rule in Zimbabwe with ZANU-PF and the military coordinating violence to suppress any opposition.

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<sup>14</sup> Croissant et al., “Beyond the Fallacy of Coupism,” 955; Peter D. Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 6; and Richard H. Kohn, “How Democracies Control the Military,” *Journal of Democracy* 8, no. 4 (1997): 2, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/16847>.

Sudan is a more complex case: The military was vital in overthrowing al Bashir and continues to exert strong influence during the transition. Yet, protesters successfully pressured the military into sharing power with civilians and organizing competitive elections. Despite the heavy hand of the generals — and facing long odds and a difficult road — democratization may indeed be underway in Sudan.

The Gambian experience, on the other hand, highlights how minimal military involvement in ending dictatorships can benefit democratization. By merely standing aside and not seizing power themselves, the Gambian armed forces enabled an already legitimate and elected opposition to form a new government. As Dwyer shows, the military had almost no role in the transition and is currently marginalized from politics. In its absence, Barrow’s government has taken some fairly significant steps toward democracy.

That democratic transitions have begun in Sudan and Gambia does not negate the threat that soldiers pose. The military can use its political power during transitions to block reform efforts and safeguard its future interests by institutionalizing special prerogatives (such as reserved seats in courts and legislatures).<sup>15</sup> This is perhaps the biggest fear in Sudan where, as Allen and Kuol argue, the armed forces wish to ensure their continued political influence in any new regime. And they have demonstrated their willingness to massacre protesters toward this end. Militaries also retain the latent threat of launching a coup. In Gambia, Barrow so fears Jammeh’s personally loyal, unreformed, and now sidelined military that he relies on foreign troops to protect him from coup attempts while building a new, personally dedicated presidential guard. In Sudan, one of the most

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<sup>15</sup> Croissant et al., “Beyond the Fallacy of Coupism,” 957–60; Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 238–41; and Kuehn, “Midwives or Gravediggers of Democracy?” 784.

coup-prone countries in Africa, missteps by the transitional authority, or by a future elected regime, could trigger another coup and the return of military dictatorship.

### *Protesters Have Learned to Maintain Pressure*

Finally, and perhaps more encouragingly, protesters in all of these cases have learned from the past, especially the Arab spring and its failed promises.<sup>16</sup> No longer do citizens trust the military or other transitional authorities to enact social and political changes without sustained pressure from below. Allen and Kuol show how Sudan's protesters did not ease up after al Bashir was sidelined, forcing negotiations with the military over transitional arrangements and the meaningful inclusion of civilian leaders. As Dwyer describes, citizens in Gambia have also continued exerting political pressure for liberalization, including with increasing numbers of demonstrations. Nor have protesters given up in Algeria and Zimbabwe, where they continue to organize and march in the streets despite repression and violence.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of the aftermath of the Arab Spring uprisings and the role of the military in them, see Zoltan Barany, *How Armies Respond to Revolutions and Why* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016); and Eva Bellin, "Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Arab Spring," *Comparative Politics* 44. no. 2 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.5129/001041512798838021>.

<sup>17</sup> "Crowds March in Algiers in Weekly Pro-Democracy Protest," *AP News Wire*, April 2, 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/crowds-march-in-algiers-in-weekly-prodemocracy-protest-algiers-algeria-abdelaziz-bouteflika-abdelmadjid-tebboune-b1826186.html>; and "Zimbabwe: Authorities Thwart Anti-Corruption Protests, Launch a Witch-Hunt against Activists," *Amnesty International*, July 31, 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/07/zimbabwe-authorities-thwart-anti-corruption-protests-launch-a-witchhunt-against-activists/>.

Such sustained civilian pressure offers, perhaps, the best hope for long-term democratization across the continent. Not only do mass civil resistance campaigns create opportunities for change when they threaten dictators, but they can potentially shape that change toward true social and political transformation by checking the power of presidents and militaries during transitions.

## Lessons for Policymakers

These mass uprisings in Africa, and the role of the military in them, highlight several important lessons for the international community to consider in future revolutionary moments, both in Africa and further afield. First and foremost, encouraging military coups to oust entrenched dictators has real drawbacks.<sup>18</sup> The international community should endorse other pathways to regime change that downplay the role of the military. An army that remains in its barracks, neither supporting the dictator nor stepping into the breach, may give opposition and civil society leaders the best chance to enact meaningful political change.

Second, sustained protests present an opportunity for international actors to promote democratization beyond simply ending a dictatorship. Financially and symbolically supporting pro-democracy movements, while simultaneously discouraging violent repression, enables domestic actors to continue fighting for durable reforms. Democratic gains can take many years to consolidate. The international community should stay

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<sup>18</sup> This stands in contrast to a growing literature on the virtues of “democratic coups.” See Paul Collier, “Let Us Now Praise Coups,” *Washington Post*, June 22, 2008, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/06/19/AR2008061901429.html>; and Ozan O. Varol, *The Democratic Coup d’État* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

engaged, while respecting that the struggle for a just and inclusive society is ultimately local.

Third, security sector reform must balance on a knife's edge, at once engendering meaningful reform without also alienating soldiers. Autocrats leave behind coup-proofed militaries — often both counterbalanced with paramilitary forces and ethnically stacked — that have deep histories of repression and violence. Moreover, by ending the very dictatorships they previously benefitted from, these militaries gain considerable power and legitimacy, which they use to influence or control transitional governments. Militaries must be encouraged to return to their barracks and then be restructured to create politically neutral, socially representative, and merit-based forces subject to democratic civilian control.

This is a daunting task. Militaries are reluctant to cede the power and privileges that were granted to them by dictators but are incommensurate with democracy. Reforms that threaten the lives and career prospects of soldiers — especially measures that prosecute soldiers for past human rights abuses or corruption, drastically downsize forces, slash pay and other perks, or end political appointments — can provoke further military coups that fragile new democracies fail to survive.<sup>19</sup> In other words, there are important trade-offs in the transitional period between placating military institutional interests (at least enough to quell potential violent backlashes) and creating socially representative, meritocratic, affordable, and effective armies compatible with democracy over the long term.

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<sup>19</sup> Harkness, “Militaires,” 2019.

To walk this tightrope, democratizing governments require innovative solutions — and often a great deal of outside assistance. The international community could help in a number of ways. As Allen and Kuol suggest for Sudan, popular support for transitional governments could be bolstered, and the military incentivized to step back from power, by lifting sanctions and relieving debt. Deploying military advisers can help governments gain the expertise to gradually restructure and retrain their military forces. Providing financial resources, especially direct budgetary support, can help ensure the financial well being of both demobilized and active duty soldiers, encouraging their depoliticization. And foreign troops can actively shield fledgling democratic regimes while those reforms take place, as in Gambia, where an ECOWAS detachment continues to protect the president and key government buildings.

Yet, a heavy external hand could be dangerous, especially if it mandates a one-size-fits-all solution or imposes drastic cuts in force personnel or budgets. Local context matters greatly. Which measures are most likely to anger soldiers, and how to properly sequence reforms to avert disaster, will vary from one case to the next. Gambia's experience, as Dwyer argues, also demonstrates the difficulty of coordinating the interests of too many international partners with the fears and concerns of the local government. This has led to the complete marginalization of the army in the country's reform processes while new counterbalancing forces (i.e., a presidential guard) are trained and funded — creating grievances, aggravating civil-military tensions, and increasing the future threat of military intervention.

In conclusion, recent African mass protests have successfully unseated longstanding dictators, usually by provoking the direct intervention of the military. This opens a window of opportunity for democratization but by no means guarantees real social or

political change. These complex transitions present many opportunities for the international community to engage with reformers and encourage democratization. However, not all international interventions — even if they are well meaning — result in good outcomes. Encouraging too great a role for the military in transitional politics will undermine democratic consolidation. On the other hand, sidelining or marginalizing the military entirely risks provoking backlash and the end of the democratic experiment. The potentially double-edged sword of international assistance must be wielded with care.

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## 2. Above the State: The General's Republic in Algeria

*Dalia Ghanem*

Algerians began massively and peacefully demonstrating every Friday starting on Feb. 22, 2019, until the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020.<sup>20</sup> They rejected the fifth term of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who has been debilitated by a longstanding illness, unable to walk or address the nation for several years. Many Algerians wanted Bouteflika's family, clan, and clients and all the political class to leave the political arena, identifying them as corrupt and responsible for plundering Algeria's wealth.<sup>21</sup> Although the overhaul of the regime that this leaderless popular movement — called the “Hirak” — has been asking for did not materialize, the Hirak has been able to achieve some tangible results. Among these achievements are the stepping down of several of the regime's apparatchiks, the incarceration of many top figures for corruption,<sup>22</sup> and the departure of the president after 20 years in office.

Bouteflika's departure was the Hirak's last victory. Indeed, the movement has been unable to avert a presidential election and push for a longer transition period. Why? Because in the absence of other influential institutional authorities, the army intervened, arbitrated the conflict, and imposed its agenda. In the first weeks of the protests, the

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<sup>20</sup> Dalia Ghanem, “A Protest Made in Algeria” (Phot Essay) Carnegie Middle East Center, April 2, 2019, <https://carnegie-mec.org/2019/04/02/protest-made-in-algeria-pub-78748>. The protests started back up again in February 2021, and have continued every Friday since that time.

<sup>21</sup> Dalia Ghanem, “Another Battle of Algiers,” *New York Times*, March 13, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/13/opinion/algeria-protests-president-military.html>.

<sup>22</sup> “Algeria: 5 Billionaires Arrested as Part of Anti-Corruption Drive,” *Al Jazeera*, April 22, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/4/22/algeria-5-billionaires-arrested-as-part-of-anti-corruption-drive>.



People's National Army intervened directly in Algerian politics, shifted its loyalty by abandoning Bouteflika, whom it pressured to step down, and appointed Abdelkader Bensalah as an interim president with a caretaker government. The military also imposed a presidential election and a referendum on a new constitution despite widespread protests all over the country against the election and the referendum.<sup>23</sup>

Since the presidential election in December 2019, Algeria has had a new president, Abdelmadjid Tebboune, a former prime minister, as well as a new chief of staff, Saïd Chengriha, who replaced Gaïd Salah after the latter's death on Dec. 23, 2019.<sup>24</sup> The organization of the election and Tebboune's victory — eight months after Bouteflika's resignation and the referendum on the new constitution on Nov. 1, 2020, despite the public's rejection of it — showed that the Algerian regime is particularly adept at securing the continuity of its rule. It also showed that the military, the real locus of power, will resist a transition to a more democratic system in which civilians actually rule and are not just a front. In other words, the military will continue to rule behind the scenes for the foreseeable future in Algeria.

## Ensuring Tebboune's Political Survival

Since Bouteflika's departure and Salah's death, the intra-regime balance of power has been upset and competition between politico-military factions inside the regime has

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<sup>23</sup> "A Civilian, Not Military State: Algerians Stage New Major Protest," *France 24*, July 12, 2019, <https://www.france24.com/en/20190712-algeria-protest-reform-democracy-elections-government-bouteflika>.

<sup>24</sup> Djamila Ould Khettab, "Algeria: 'Military Oligarch' Saïd Chengriha Replaces Ahmed Gaïd Salah as Top Military Chief," *The African Report*, Jan. 2, 2020, <https://www.theafricareport.com/21750/algeria-military-oligarch-said-chengriha-replaces-ahmed-gaid-salah-as-top-military-chief/>.

intensified. To restore equilibrium, preserve its cohesion, and above all ensure the regime's survival, the army has pursued a controlled change through a two-pronged approach.

First, it agreed that the president had to go, “sacrificing” Bouteflika while ensuring a replacement who would be “under [the army’s] control.” Under the guise of safeguarding the constitution, the military forced a presidential election to allow it to continue “ruling the country without governing.”<sup>25</sup> Remaining in the limelight would have meant inheriting the socio-economic crisis, providing long-term solutions to meet the demands of the people, and taking responsibility for the people. By choosing Tebboune and putting in place an elected government, the military reestablished the usual facade of democracy with its constitutionalism and pluralism and protected its national reputation and internal cohesion.

Second, once the civilian facade was reestablished, the army rehabilitated the intelligence services and reshuffled the security services to maintain its hold on power. The relationship between the presidency, which had grown stronger under Bouteflika, and the military shifted to the benefit of the military. Unlike Bouteflika, Tebboune does not have any animosity toward the army and has no scores to settle with it.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, his lack of

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<sup>25</sup> Steven Cook, *Ruling but not Governing: The Military and Political Development in Egypt, Algeria, and Turkey* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

<sup>26</sup> Between Bouteflika and the military, relations were confrontational, tinged with mistrust. Bouteflika was resentful of the military, which had stood in his way after the death of Boumédiène in 1979. On Tebboune's relations with the army, see Farid Alilat, “Algérie : Tebboune remanie l’armée à sa guise... et sans faire de vagues,” *Jeune Afrique*, June 5, 2020, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/989019/politique/algerie-tebboune-remanie-larmee-a-sa-guise-et-sans-faire-de-vagues/>.

legitimacy in the eyes of a population that largely rejects him puts him in a difficult situation where he needs the support of the military.<sup>27</sup>

The military's high command, with its intelligence branch, and the presidency are removing undesirable individuals to prevent internal conflicts and deter domestic unrest. These individuals are believed to have either opposed Tebboune's candidacy during the December 2019 presidential election or to have been in Salah's entourage. By ousting them, the military is trying to put an end to, and avoid the recurrence of, internal conflicts that have been going on for months and which have intensified since the death of Salah. Given that the Hirak wants a change of leadership, and with a deteriorating economic situation, due to a crash in oil prices, and the coronavirus pandemic,<sup>28</sup> high-ranking officers might be able to instigate and win popular support for a coup. This is why the military is taking advantage of these optimal conditions to coup-proof and eliminate threats against the new president.

## **The Military's Continued Involvement in Politics**

In the short and medium term, the Algerian military's involvement in politics is likely to continue for three reasons: historical precedence and the culture of the military, the military's corporate interests, and, finally, the weakness of the country's political institutions.

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<sup>27</sup> Dalia Ghanem and Ryad Benaidji, "In Search of Legitimacy," Carnegie Middle East Center, Jan. 22, 2020, <https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/80848>.

<sup>28</sup> Dalia Ghanem, "Algeria: Towards an Economic Collapse?" Middle East Institute, May 28, 2020, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/algeria-toward-economic-collapse>.

### *History and Culture*

The first reason that the military's outsized role in Algerian politics is likely to continue is that it has a history of doing so. The drive for the military to intervene in politics has always been present, especially during times of change and crisis. For instance, following the death of President Houari Boumédiène in 1978, the military arbitrated between the different civilian factions that were fighting to gain power. An intense rivalry was raging between Bouteflika, foreign minister at the time, and Mohamed Salah Yahiaoui, who was secretary-general of the ruling National Liberation Front. A faction within the military and the head of the *Sécurité Militaire* (intelligence services) intervened to resolve a crisis that they deemed dangerous to the stability of the regime. They chose a consensual candidate, Chadli Bendjedid, and eventually returned to their barracks.<sup>29</sup>

The six days of rioting in 1988 — referred to as “Black October” — and the institutional crisis that followed in 1991 and 1992 led once again to increased military intervention in politics. In 1992, the military canceled the second round of the legislative elections to prevent an overwhelming victory of the Islamic Salvation Front and took effective control of the country.<sup>30</sup> The dangerous political and security situation of the decade-long civil war prevented it from withdrawing. At the end of the civil war, and with the election of Bouteflika in 1999, civil-military relations were once again renegotiated. In exchange for its withdrawal from government affairs, the military was allowed to maintain full control

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<sup>29</sup> “Succession de Boumediene : comment l’armée avait disqualifié Yahiaoui et Bouteflika,” *Liberté*, Oct. 22, 2013, <https://www.liberte-algerie.com/contribution/succession-de-boumediene-comment-larmee-avait-disqualifie-yahiaoui-et-bouteflika-196358>.

<sup>30</sup> Robert Mortimer, “Islamists, Soldiers, and Democrats: The Second Algerian War,” *Middle East Journal* 50, no. 1 (1996): 18–39, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4328894>.

of its budget and was given immunity for all human rights violations that occurred during the civil war.<sup>31</sup>

The role of the military throughout history led to a messianic military ethos and, as such, a belief that political neutrality is impossible for the military — even inconceivable. Even though factions and intense rivalries exist within the military, it knows how to act cohesively because its members all have the same grandiose perception of themselves as the devoted guardians of the motherland — the custodians of Algerians. As such, the military thinks that Algerians should be grateful to the military-backed regime and for what it has done for them.<sup>32</sup> To those millions of protesters who have been claiming, “we want a civilian state and not a military one,” Salah, as much as his successor, Saïd Chengriha, insisted on the military’s vital mission to protect the supreme interest of the motherland.<sup>33</sup> By contrast, civilians, especially politicians, are viewed with suspicion. Several individuals, such as Louisa Hanoune, the head of the country’s Workers’ Party, have been jailed and accused of “conspiracy against the authority of the state” and “offense against the military,” a charge not found in the Penal Code or in the Code of Military Justice.<sup>34</sup> Members of the military, including the young generation of officers,

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<sup>31</sup> “Algeria: Violations of Civil and Political Rights: A Briefing Paper for the U.N. Human Rights Committee,” Human Rights Watch, Vol. 10, No. 3 (E), Aug. 1, 1998, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6a8508.html>.

<sup>32</sup> This is based on several interviews made with military personnel with different backgrounds, especially retired personnel. Interviews made in Algeria between 2008 and 2019.

<sup>33</sup> “Nouveau discours de Gaïd Salah / Mises en garde et accusations de trahison, le ton monte encore d’un cran !” *Algérie Focus*, July 2019, <https://www.algerie-focus.com/2019/07/nouveau-discours-de-gaid-salah-mises-en-garde-et-accusations-de-trahison-le-ton-monte-encore-dun-cran/?cn-reloaded=1>.

<sup>34</sup> Two Algerian lawyers based in Algeria, phone interview, June 2019.

have been educated to understand that the elected politicians are subordinate to the army and not the other way around.

### *Corporate and Economic Interests*

A second factor that makes continuing military intervention likely is the corporate and economic interests of the institution. By putting a civilian in the presidential palace, the military guaranteed that the civilian government would not pose a threat to the military's interests, including its budget, salaries, acquisitions, recruitment, and retirement funds. For instance, consider the officer corps' benefits, which include high salaries, bonuses, housing, transportation, education, medical care, and access to rare consumer goods. In addition, there is also the matter of protecting the private interests of certain ruling generals in the military. Many of these generals have been involved in the private sector for at least two decades and have built economic monopolies by utilizing their connections to prominent business tycoons, enriching themselves and their networks in the process.<sup>35</sup> As such, it is unlikely that the military would end its political involvement and put these interests at risk.

### *Weak Political Institutions*

A third factor that will make Algeria's military continue to be a dominant player in the country's politics is the weakness of the civilian sector, including political institutions and

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<sup>35</sup> More recently, the case of Chief of Staff Gaïd Salah made the headlines. For more details see Said Medjas, "Les enfants de Gaïd Salah détenteurs de nombreux biens : Les détails d'une fortune à l'ombre du général," *El Watan*, Aug. 31, 2020, <https://www.elwatan.com/a-la-une/les-enfants-de-gaid-salah-detenteurs-de-nombreux-biens-les-detaills-dune-fortune-a-lombre-du-general-31-08-2020>.

the presidency. Decades of repression, co-optation, patronage, and clientelism led to weak political and judicial institutions.<sup>36</sup> The courts, for instance, are powerless. While judges and lawyers have been participating in the popular movement, their hands are tied when it comes to pushing for a more robust and independent judicial system. Judges, public prosecutors, and lawyers are not fully independent as they are manipulated and harassed by the executive.<sup>37</sup>

As such, Algerians reject all of the officials, legislators, members of the government, political parties, and traditional leaders, which they see as corrupt, dishonest, and unfair. This has led to a deep participation crisis that encourages military interventionism. It is enlightening to see that while Algerian protestors have been calling for a civilian state, they also chanted, “the military and the people are brothers.”<sup>38</sup> When the situation was untenable in February 2019 due to Bouteflika’s refusal to leave, the people, along with several political figures, called for the army to intervene and apply Article 102 of the constitution to declare the ailing 82-year-old president unfit to exercise his duties.<sup>39</sup> In several instances of political crisis, the people, including opposition figures, have called

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<sup>36</sup> “Algeria: Attacks on Justice,” International Commission of Jurists, 11th edition, <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/48a3fo28o.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> International Commission of Jurists, “Algeria: Attacks on Justice.”

<sup>38</sup> Participant observation of the author during several demonstrations that took place in Algiers every Friday between February and March 2019.

<sup>39</sup> Mouloud Boumghar, “Algeria: Using Article 102 to Remove Bouteflika Would Be Unconstitutional,” *Middle East Eye*, March 28, 2019, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/algeria-using-article-102-remove-bouteflika-would-be-unconstitutional>.

for the army to intervene and resolve political disputes because the army is perceived as the most organized and capable institution in Algeria.<sup>40</sup>

## Conclusion

The lack of trust between citizens and their civilian institutions has led to a total inability of political institutions to respond to peoples' demands. Therefore, attempts to reform Algeria's civilian political sphere succumb to military intervention, a situation that is likely to continue in the short to medium term. For a majority of Algerians, the politico-military leadership brought to power a president whose job is to preserve those intertwined interests — and not to negotiate with the Hirak and move toward a more democratic Algeria. As a result, the military risks being seen more and more as an agent of stagnation and repression in the service of a repudiated leadership. Civil-military relations are being renegotiated in Algeria, and there is no one-size-fits-all model. What the country needs is to find a model that is suitable for both civilians and the military: a model that preserves the core capabilities of the People's National Army — one of the most modern and professional military forces in the region<sup>41</sup> — without allowing it to seize power or to continue controlling the civilian government.

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<sup>40</sup> Arab Barometer, "Algeria Five Years After the Arab Uprisings," *Arab Barometer*, 2017, [https://www.arabbarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/Algeria\\_Public\\_Opinion\\_Survey\\_2016.pdf](https://www.arabbarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/Algeria_Public_Opinion_Survey_2016.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> *Algeria Conflict Insight*, Institute for Peace and Security Studies, Peace and Security Report, no. 1, April 2020, <https://media.africaportal.org/documents/ALGERIA-Conflict-Insights-.pdf>.



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### 3. Civil-Military Relations and Sudan's Treacherous Path to Democracy

*Nathaniel Allen and Luka Kuol*

In April 2019, Sudanese security forces under pressure from a civilian uprising acted to remove President Omar al Bashir after nearly 30 years in power, ushering in a once-in-a-generation transition of political power and an opportunity to reshape the politics of Sudan. In the two years since, civilians and security forces have been cooperating to transform Sudan from a war-torn dictatorship to a peaceful democracy. Military rule has given way to a jointly led Sovereign Council and a civilian transitional government working to pursue reforms and create a conducive environment for elections by the end of the transition period in late 2022. Significant progress has been made in ending conflicts on Sudan's periphery, opening up the real possibility of putting Sudan on the path toward sustainable peace. Despite some differences, civil-military relations in Sudan have improved over the course of the transition period, with civilians in government and the security apparatus uniting to dismantle the old regime and defend their revolution from a coup from remnants of Bashir's government.

Nevertheless, patterns of military intervention and subsequent regime trajectories in Sudan and in Africa more broadly offer uncertain lessons. Unlike other transitions in Sudan, the people, rather than political parties and security forces, are driving the agenda of democratic transformation.<sup>42</sup> But, from a broader historical perspective, few African

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<sup>42</sup> Hassan el Haj Ali, "Military Coup as Political Transition: Army and Political Authority in Sudan," *Siyasat Arabia*, no. 24, (January 2017), <https://siyasatarabiya.dohainstitute.org/en/issue024/Pages/IssueHome.aspx>.

dictatorships with ethnically and tribally divided security forces such as Sudan's have become democracies.<sup>43</sup>

Sudan's path to sustained peace and democracy therefore remains a treacherous one. The country's people demand change on a scale commensurate with their sacrifice, but most have yet to see improvement in their everyday lives. On Dec. 19, 2020, massive demonstrations rocked the country once again, with demonstrators beseeching the government to do more to jump-start an ailing economy and grant justice for the lives lost during the uprising.<sup>44</sup> For a democratic regime to rise, civilians will have to balance elevated popular expectations with a powerful security apparatus with massive institutional interests at stake governing amid a crisis. For democracy to be sustained, the security apparatus will need to be reformed to align its interests with those of the Sudanese people.

### **Civil-Military Relations in Sudan Under Omar al Bashir**

Sudan has a long history of military intervention in politics, dating back to the pre-colonial times, when the Funj sultanate was overthrown in 1774 by a coup led by army leaders. During the colonial period, military officers served as governor generals invested

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<sup>43</sup> Nathaniel Allen, "Authoritarian Armies and Democratizing States: The Armed Forces and African Transitional Politics," *Democratization* 26, no. 2 (2019): 247-68; Kristen Harkness, "Military Loyalty and the Failure of Democratization in Africa: How Ethnic Armies Shape the Capacity of Presidents to Defy Term Limits," *Democratization* 25, no. 5 (2017): 801-18.

<sup>44</sup> "Thousands Protest in Call for Faster Reform," *Reuters*, Dec. 19, 2019, <https://www.voanews.com/africa/thousands-protest-sudan-call-faster-reform>.

with supreme military and civil command.<sup>45</sup> And, after independence, Sudan earned the dubious distinction of being the first sub-Saharan African country to suffer a coup d'état.<sup>46</sup> Since that time, the country has undergone no fewer than five additional coups and there has been only one instance in which a military government has peacefully left power.

Bashir's June 30, 1989, coup was the third time in Sudan's post-independence history that a democratically elected government ended in a military coup. Each of these coups was instigated by a political party that had been excluded from political power: the Umma party in 1958; the Communists in 1969; and the National Islamist Front, who sponsored Bashir's coup, in 1989.<sup>47</sup>

Bashir was a resilient leader. His tenure was by far the longest of any Sudanese dictator. Security forces stood by him not just in the face of popular unrest, but through international sanctions, interparty splits, and civil wars. Under his watch, the country was split in two after South Sudan gained independence in 2011. Why did Sudan's security forces stand by him for so long? Bashir used two common tactics to construct a loyal, repressive security apparatus: stacking and counterbalancing.

At one point or another, most African governments have relied on some form of stacking — the recruitment, promotion, or exclusion of security forces, or units within them, on the basis of tribal, political, ethnic, regional, or religious identity, rather than merit — as

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<sup>45</sup> M. Abdel-Rahim, "Changing Patterns of Civil-Military Relations in the Sudan," The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Research Paper no. 46, 1978.

<sup>46</sup> Abdel-Rahim, "Changing Patterns of Civil-Military Relations in the Sudan."

<sup>47</sup> Abdel-Rahim, "Changing Patterns of Civil-Military Relations in the Sudan."

an instrument of ensuring loyalty from the military.<sup>48</sup> Dating back to the days of British colonial rule, the officer corps of Sudan's military has been dominated by Arabs — in particular, northern “riverain Arab” or Muslim Jellaba tribes, which account for only 5 percent of Sudan's population.<sup>49</sup> When Bashir seized power, he relied on the loyalty of riverain Arabs in the army's senior levels, as well as his affiliation with the National Islamist Front, the Islamist political party that instigated the coup, to purge the military of thousands of non-Islamist officers, which made up nearly two-thirds of its men.<sup>50</sup> And, across numerous other parallel security forces and other militia groups, the regime exploited tribal or Arab ties in order to gain recruits.

Another central civil-military development during Bashir's time in power was the weakening of Sudan's regular military and the creation of powerful parallel security forces and militias. These groups complemented Sudan's regular armed forces by serving as comparatively cheap sources of recruits for the numerous wars Sudan fought during

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<sup>48</sup> Nathaniel Allen, “Authoritarian Armies”; Kristen A. Harkness, *When Soldiers Rebel: Ethnic Armies and Political Instability in Africa* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Kristen A. Harkness, “The Ethnic Army and the State Explaining Coup Traps and the Difficulties of Democratization in Africa,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 60, no. 4 (2016): 587–616, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0022002714545332>; and Paul Lorenzo Johnson and Ches Thurber, “The Security-Force Ethnicity (SFE) Project: Introducing a New Dataset,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 37, no. 1 (2020): 106–29, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0738894217709012>.

<sup>49</sup> Helen Chapin Metz, *Sudan: A Country Study*, vol. 550 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2015), 310.

<sup>50</sup> Roland Marchal, *Éléments d'une Sociologie Du Front National Islamique Soudanais. Les Etudes Du CERI*, Centres d'Etudes et de Recherches Internationales, 1995, 25.

Bashir's rule.<sup>51</sup> The more powerful of these forces, such as the Popular Defense Forces and the Rapid Support Forces,<sup>52</sup> counterbalanced the influence of the regular military.<sup>53</sup>

The result was the creation of a security apparatus that was complex, factionalized, and repressive. Tribally mobilized militias helped keep Sudan in a nearly constant state of war, preventing the formation of political groups that drew on constituencies outside of Khartoum from mounting a challenge to Bashir. Bound by ties of tribal and ethnic kinship to Bashir, but in a state of rivalry with one another, the leaders of Sudan's security forces were in no position to overthrow Bashir for most of his reign. The regime suffered from only one documented coup attempt in early 1990, only a few months after Bashir seized power and before he was able to establish himself.<sup>54</sup>

## Explaining Bashir's Demise

Nevertheless, the security apparatus that Bashir constructed during his tenure was not invulnerable. A rare, but not unheard-of, series of factors, closely resembling Sudan's 1985 revolution, led to a collective decision by the security apparatus to remove him from office.

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<sup>51</sup> Alex de Waal, "Counter-Insurgency on the Cheap," *Review of African Political Economy* 31, no. 102 (2004): 716-25, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4007044>.

<sup>52</sup> Jago Salmon, *A Paramilitary Revolution: The Popular Defence Forces* (Small Arms Survey, 2007).

<sup>53</sup> Erica De Bruin, "Preventing Coups d'état: How Counterbalancing Works," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 62, no. 7 (August 2018): 1433-58, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0022002717692652>.

<sup>54</sup> "Sudan Reports Blocking a Coup and Arresting over 30 Officers," *New York Times*, April 24, 1990, <https://www.nytimes.com/1990/04/24/world/sudan-reports-blocking-a-coup-and-arresting-over-30-officers.html>.

First was the scale and scope of the economic crisis, which began with the independence of South Sudan in 2011 and worsened in the latter half of the decade. The security apparatus had remained loyal to Bashir through similar crises before, but never one that really struck at the heart of the revenue from oil and other natural resources on which the regime depended. Due to the terms of the independence agreement with the oil-rich South Sudan, the Sudanese government's income from oil revenues shrank by 75 percent, Sudan devalued its currency, and inflation increased by 70 percent.<sup>55</sup>

A second factor was the intensity and organization of the protests, which began in earnest in December 2018, when the price of bread tripled. Only twice before in Sudan's history had civil society mobilized on such a scale.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, protests in Sudan were large and peaceful;<sup>57</sup> well organized and well led,<sup>58</sup> and represented a broad range of Sudanese society, particularly women.<sup>59</sup> These factors were critical in determining the success of the movement. Protestors were also extremely savvy in their dealings with the armed forces. They assumed, rightly, that not all security forces were predisposed to act

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<sup>55</sup> "Sudan Protests Biggest Threat yet to Bashir: Analysts," *France 24*, Jan. 4, 2019, <https://www.france24.com/en/20190104-sudan-protests-biggest-threat-yet-bashir-analysts>.

<sup>56</sup> Willow Berrige, "Sudan Uprising III: What 1964 and 1985 Tell Us About Today's Protests," *African Arguments*, Jan. 7, 2019, <https://africanarguments.org/2019/01/07/sudan-protests-learn-1964-1985/>.

<sup>57</sup> Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (Columbia, NY: Columbia University Press, 2012).

<sup>58</sup> Sharon Nepstad and Clifford Bob, "When Do Leaders Matter? Hypotheses on Leadership Dynamics in Social Movements," *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 11, no. 1 (February 1, 2006): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.17813/maiq.11.1.013313600164m727>.

<sup>59</sup> Sharan Grewal, "Military Defection During Localized Protests: The Case of Tataouine," *International Studies Quarterly* 63, no. 2 (June 1, 2019): 259–69, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqz003>; and Holger Albrecht, Aurel Croissant, and Fred H. Lawson, *Armies and Insurgencies in the Arab Spring* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

antagonistically toward them. Protestors deliberately organized sit-ins and protests in front of military headquarters to get the armed forces on their side.<sup>60</sup>

A final, and underappreciated, factor is that, in factionalizing Sudan's security forces, Bashir planted the seeds of his own destruction. The comparative scholarship has shown that, while counterbalancing is an effective coup-proofing mechanism,<sup>61</sup> it can inhibit unity in the face of popular protest.<sup>62</sup> There is strong evidence that Bashir's counterbalancing techniques created rivalries between intelligence services and militia groups that were more committed to authoritarianism and a somewhat more professional regular army, whose recruits were broadly representative of Sudanese society and resisted being used as instruments of mass repression. Immediately before Bashir's April ouster, soldiers from the regular army and even Rapid Support Forces defended protestors from attacks by the police and the intelligence services.<sup>63</sup> After Bashir left office, security forces were able to crack down on peaceful protestors only after the regular military was redeployed outside of Khartoum. There were also widespread reports that security forces feared a broader civil war if Bashir were to remain in office.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Kaamil Ahmed, "The Year that Changed Sudan Began with a Matchstick," *Middle East Eye*, Dec. 19, 2019, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/sudan-protests-year-changed-history-matchstick>.

<sup>61</sup> De Bruin, "Preventing Coups d'État."

<sup>62</sup> Julian Morency-LaFlamme, "A Question of Trust: Military Defection During Regime Crises in Benin and Togo," *Democratization* 25, no. 3 (2018): 464-80.

<sup>63</sup> Ahmed, "The Year that Changed Sudan Began with a Matchstick."

<sup>64</sup> "Sudan: Stopping a Spiral Into Civil War," International Crisis Group, June 7, 2019, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/sudan/sudan-stopping-spiral-civil-war>.



## **The Sovereign Council: A Post-Transition Innovation in Civil-Military Relations?**

In Sudanese politics, Bashir's exit most closely resembles that of Jafaar Numeiri, who was deposed in 1985 when a general strike and weeks of demonstrations over the country's political and economic situation led the military to oust him. It is the only other coup in Sudan's history that was not instigated by political parties, but was rather the result of a popular uprising.<sup>65</sup> The coup resulted in a brief period of military dictatorship, followed by a democracy that ended when Bashir seized power in 1989. If Sudan's history is any guide, then, the transition from Bashir's autocratic rule may well result in a democracy, but, if so, it would have highly uncertain long-term prospects for survival. It is worth noting that none of Sudan's democracies (1956-1958, 1964-1969, and 1986-1989) have endured longer than five years.

A broader historical perspective also suggests caution about Sudan's prospects for stable democratic rule. Few African countries have established democracy in the aftermath of rule by a personalist dictator with ethnically stacked security forces such as Sudan's. According to recent research, of the 40 such African dictatorships, only four have been succeeded by a democratic form of government.<sup>66</sup> More typically, mass popular protests are repressed, and, if the regime leaves power, it is replaced by another dictatorship.

That much of Sudan's security apparatus remains committed to ensuring the military's continued political influence was evident in the aftermath of Bashir's removal, when

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<sup>65</sup> Abdel-Rahim, "Changing Patterns."

<sup>66</sup> Allen, "Authoritarian Armies and Democratizing States."

security forces massacred over 100 protestors<sup>67</sup> Yet, civilian protestors and opposition groups responded to the crackdown with savvy and resolve. Protestors called for a general strike and, on June 30, 2019, weeks after the massacre, tens of thousands of citizens once again gathered in front of Sudan's military headquarters, banging drums and calling for civilian rule.<sup>68</sup> At the same time, they worked to strike a bargain that, while ultimately failing to establish a transition process that is genuinely civilian-led, most likely extracted the most that security forces were willing to concede.

The result — the jointly led Sovereign Council — defies categorization as either a civilian or a military government and is a unique arrangement that civilians hope will serve as a model for future transitions in difficult contexts. It is meant to oversee the country as it prepares for elections by the end of the transition period in late 2022. The council is composed of five military officers and six civilian leaders, who are representative of the opposition and the regions of Sudan. The military will be in charge for 21 months — ending in May 2021— and civilians for another 18 months after that. At that point, elections will take place. The council is overseeing a caretaker government composed mainly of civilian technocrats, except for the ministers of defense and interior, who are nominated by the military leadership.

The current government is led by Dr. Abdullah Hamdok, an economist with previous experience working with the United Nations and the African Development Bank. He has embarked on an ambitious reform program that would completely reshape Sudan,

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<sup>67</sup> Declan Walsh, "Power-Sharing Deal Reached by Military and Civilian Leaders," *New York Times*, July 4, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/04/world/africa/sudan-power-sharing-deal.html>.

<sup>68</sup> Declan Walsh, "Bouncing Back From Crackdown, Protesters Surge Through Sudan's Streets," *New York Times*, June 30, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/30/world/africa/sudan-protest-hamdan.html>.

including its civil-military relations, working toward the goals of the Sudanese revolution: freedom, peace, and justice.<sup>69</sup> In the near term, the regime has set its sights on ending Sudan's economic crisis with debt relief, investment, and aid packages from other countries. Essential to the government's economic reform plans is a recently reached agreement with the United States to remove Sudan from the State Department's state sponsors of terrorism list — Sudan's inclusion on the list had exposed it to crippling sanctions.<sup>70</sup> Another central plank in the government's reform efforts is to end simmering conflicts with South Sudan, in Darfur, and in the border provinces of South Kordofan and the Blue Nile, which would free up significant resources. With the recent signing of a peace agreement in Juba, the government appears to be making significant progress in achieving peace and demobilizing most of Sudan's major armed groups.<sup>71</sup>

Finally, the government has made comprehensive security sector reform a central goal. In remarks made in Washington, D.C. in December 2019, Hamdok promised not only to reduce the amount that the government spends on defense, which makes up a significant portion of Sudan's gross domestic product, but also to undertake reforms that would rebuild Sudan's army from the ground up, making it a truly national, representative

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<sup>69</sup> "Sudan Faces Staggering Challenges to Democracy Despite Significant Advances on Political Transition, Special Representative Tells Security Council," United Nations, Press Release, March 9, 2021, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sc14460.doc.htm>.

<sup>70</sup> "Sudan Takes Center Stage in U.S. Regional Strategy," *Al-Monitor*, April 1, 2021, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/04/sudan-takes-center-stage-us-regional-strategy>.

<sup>71</sup> See Jean-Baptiste Gallopin, "A Chance for Peace? The Impact of the Juba Peace Deal on Sudan's Fragile Transition," *War on the Rocks*, Sept. 22, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/09/a-chance-for-peace-the-impact-of-the-juba-peace-deal-on-sudans-fragile-transition/>.

institution.<sup>72</sup> This, perhaps, is the transitional government's most important task, but, as we have discussed here, it is also fraught with challenges.

## **Civil-Military Relations and the Future of Sudan's Transition**

To strengthen civil-military partnership, maximize the chances of a peaceful transition, diminish the military's political influence, and minimize the chance of an intervention by security forces in Sudan, several things need to happen. First, the international community and key regional actors should rally behind the current government by relieving debt and providing assistance to help the country recover from its economic crisis, which has been exacerbated by the outbreak of COVID-19. Sudan needs international and regional support to revive its economy and maintain popular support. The commitments made by Sudan's strategic partners during the Berlin Partnership Conference are very encouraging.<sup>73</sup> Such external assistance should aim at not only nurturing a civil-military partnership but also at ensuring national ownership of the transition process.

Second, an enduring civil-military partnership can be achieved only through an inclusive, participatory national dialogue to articulate a national security vision and develop a national security strategy consistent with the goals of the revolution. Such a strategy will help civilians and security sector actors in Sudan to agree on how security is perceived, planned, managed, overseen, and delivered; to prioritize security threats; to ensure

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<sup>72</sup> *Navigating Sudan's Transition: A Conversation with Prime Minister Abdallah Hamdok*, Atlantic Council, Washington, D.C., 2019), access on YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=46BHYP2AyE>.

<sup>73</sup> "\$1.8 Billion Pledged to Assist Sudan's People on the Road to Peace and Democracy," *U.N. News*, June 25, 2020, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/06/1067172>.

civilian oversight of the security sector; and to devise an appropriate division of labor among security agencies and institutions.<sup>74</sup> The national security strategy should guide the reform process and help civilian and military officials agree on force size, structure, chain of command, doctrine, coordination, decision-making, and oversight mechanisms. To reduce the likelihood of a coup, the major actors within the security sector — such as the army, the Rapid Support Forces, and the reformed General Intelligence Service — should remain independent of one another and be subject to strong civilian and parliamentary oversight.<sup>75</sup>

Third, while the security sector transformation process will determine the right size of the armed forces, the institutional interests of various forces and the soldiers ought to be carefully and consensually addressed through disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration. The political influence of security forces should be diminished, but not necessarily through mass purges that will prevent former soldiers from earning a living. Officers or leaders of various armed groups could be encouraged to enter politics, for example, but only if they retire from the military and relinquish their military leadership.<sup>76</sup> Soldiers who fail to be integrated into the new national army should be offered retirement packages or opportunities to earn a living comparable to what they would have earned as a fighter.

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<sup>74</sup> See Luka Kuol, “Reforming the Security Sector in Sudan: The Need for a Framework,” *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*, Nov. 2, 2020, <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/reforming-security-sector-sudan-need-framework/>.

<sup>75</sup> De Bruin, “Preventing Coups d’État.”

<sup>76</sup> Elwathig Kameir, “Security Arrangements in Sudan: Achilles Heels of Peace and Democratic Transformation,” *Sudan Tribune*, Dec. 9, 2019, <https://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article68671>.

Finally, to encourage the transformation of Sudan's security sector, international actors should offer security assistance to support the development of a people-centered national security strategy that will guide the security sector transformation and the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration effort. If such external security assistance is driven by the priorities of ordinary Sudanese citizens and guided by the country's national security strategy, it is likely to be effective in ensuring national ownership, professionalism, and civilian control and oversight of the security sector. This will help ensure the loyalty of the security forces to a civilian government and will keep their soldiers invested in the success of the revolution.

Only time will tell if the transition in Sudan will live up to the expectations of the Sudanese people. Judging from the remarkable progress of the revolution so far, achieving lasting peace and democracy in Sudan will be a difficult task — but not an impossible one.

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*The opinions in this article represent those of the authors.*



## 4. A Stalled Transformation: Gambian Security Forces and the 2017 Democratic Transition

*Maggie Dwyer*

The inauguration of President Adama Barrow in February 2017 marked the first-ever transition of presidential power by the ballot box in Gambia's history. Yet, the transition did not come from a routine election process. Instead, it took significant international pressure and, ultimately, a military intervention to convince the incumbent president to accept the election results and concede defeat. Gambia is undoubtedly more democratic following the 2017 transition than it was under the authoritarian rule of Yahya Jammeh, who was president from 1994 to 2017. Press freedoms have been improved, judicial reforms have taken place, and free and fair legislative elections have been held.<sup>77</sup> Despite the many advancements, there is one significant sector of the state that has remained largely resistant to change: the security services.

The case of Gambia's political transition highlights the challenges of democratic reforms outpacing security sector reform programs. The transition has empowered many Gambians to be more politically active, but the state security forces appear uncertain how to deal with growing demonstrations, at times allowing peaceful protests and at other times violently repressing them in a manner that appears similar to rule under the past regime. Their erratic responses are likely due to a lack of experience and a general uncertainty about their role in the newly democratic state. The security forces overall do

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<sup>77</sup> "Freedom in the World 2020: The Gambia," Freedom House, accessed April 13, 2021,

<https://freedomhouse.org/country/gambia/freedom-world/2020>.

not appear to want to subvert the democratic transition. Nonetheless, without reform and (re)training, they may threaten some of the recent democratic gains as well as civil-military relations more broadly.

## Jammeh's Downfall

The political transition of 2017 was the result of sustained domestic calls for change backed by international pressure and, ultimately, international forces. Local activities started nearly a year before the transition, when a couple hundred demonstrators came to the streets to call for electoral reforms ahead of the country's December 2016 general elections.<sup>78</sup> At the time, Jammeh had been in power for 22 years. His regime, which began following a military coup in 1994, was marked by brutality and a climate of fear from the start. His rule became increasingly isolationist over the years, as evidenced by severed diplomatic ties and the country's withdrawal from international agreements and organizations such as the Commonwealth and the International Criminal Court.<sup>79</sup> Gambia's security forces were seen as working directly for Jammeh and were marred with human rights violations — they responded violently to anyone the president deemed threatening.<sup>80</sup> Gambia held regular elections, but they were neither free nor fair.

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<sup>78</sup> Pap Saine, "Rights Groups Voice Concerns After a Rare Protest in Gambia," *Reuters*, April 15, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-gambia-protests-idUSKCN0XC25X>.

<sup>79</sup> "Gambia Announces Withdrawal from International Criminal Court," *Reuters*, Oct. 25, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-gambia-icc-idUKKCN12P333>.

<sup>80</sup> "State of Fear: Arbitrary Arrests, Torture, and Killings," Human Rights Watch, Sept. 16, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/09/16/state-fear/arbitrary-arrests-torture-and-killings>.



While a relatively small protest for electoral reform may not have even made the news in some African countries, in Gambia, it was a rare and dangerous event. Any criticism of the government came with high risks, and past protests had been dealt with brutally.<sup>81</sup>

Tragically, these initial protests in 2016 evoked a similar response to prior demonstrations. Police quickly arrived on the scene, beat protestors, and arrested many, including well-known members of opposition parties. One key figure arrested was Solo Sandeng, a prominent youth leader in the opposition United Democratic Party, who was tortured and killed by the security services while in custody.<sup>82</sup> Jammeh hoped the heavy-handed response to the protests would intimidate others from joining. Instead, it ignited further protests and led to an unprecedented alliance between the country's many opposition parties.

Despite international condemnation of the government's violent response to the protests and growing domestic support for the opposition coalition, Jammeh did not change tactics. Rather, at election campaign rallies, his rhetoric became increasingly hostile, especially toward the Mandinka ethnic group. The United Nations, among other international organization, denounced Jammeh for his threats against the Mandinka, calling the statements "irresponsible and extremely dangerous."<sup>83</sup> On the domestic front, the opposition saw a swelling of support at their rallies. Still, given Jammeh's authoritarian leadership style, many assumed that he would never allow himself to lose

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<sup>81</sup> "Opposition in Gambia: The Danger of Dissent," Amnesty International, September 2016, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AFR2747052016ENGLISH.PDF>.

<sup>82</sup> "Witness: Beaten to Death in Gambia, Family of Murdered Opposition Leader Speaks Out," Human Rights Watch, Nov. 2, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/11/02/witness-beaten-death-gambia>.

<sup>83</sup> "Gambia: UN Adviser Condemns President's Reported Threats Against Ethnic Group," *U.N. News*, June 10, 2016, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2016/06/531822-gambia-un-adviser-condemns-presidents-reported-threats-against-ethnic-group>.

an election, regardless of the vote count.<sup>84</sup> Therefore, most were astonished when, on Dec. 2, 2016, the Independent Electoral Commission chairman announced on state television that Barrow had won the elections. Even more surprising was that Jammeh immediately went on state television and accepted the loss.<sup>85</sup>

One week after conceding defeat, Jammeh backtracked, called the election “fraudulent and unacceptable,” and annulled the results.<sup>86</sup> This bold attempt to invalidate unfavorable election results quickly drew local and international criticism.<sup>87</sup> Opposition parties, professional organizations, and religious groups across Gambia publicly condemned the announcement. Furthermore, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union, the European Union, and the United Nations all criticized the move and publicly backed Barrow as the winner of the election. The international community, with ECOWAS taking the lead, attempted numerous rounds of negotiations and ultimately sent a 7,000-troop contingent to Gambia to force Jammeh to leave office. Faced with the threat of foreign forces, Jammeh finally agreed to concede and left the country for exile in Equatorial Guinea on Jan. 21, 2017.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> David Perfect, “The Gambian 2016 Presidential Election and Its Aftermath,” *The Round Table* 106, no. 3 (2017): 326, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2017.1326627>.

<sup>85</sup> Niklas Hultin, et al., “Autocracy, Migration, and The Gambia’s ‘Unprecedented’ 2016 Election,” *African Affairs* 116, no. 463 (2017): 321–40, <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adx007>.

<sup>86</sup> Ruth Maclean, “The Gambia’s President Urged to Accept Defeat by New Government” *The Guardian*, Dec. 12 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/12/the-gambias-president-urged-to-accept-defeat-by-new-government>.

<sup>87</sup> “Gambian President Yahya Jammeh Rejects Election Result,” *The Guardian*, Dec. 10 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/10/gambian-president-rejects-election-results-yahya-jammeh-adama-barrow>.

<sup>88</sup> “Equatorial Guinea Confirms Hosting Ousted Gambian Leader Jammeh,” *Reuters*, Jan. 24, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-gambia-politics-jammeh-idUSKBN1582X6>.

## Armed Forces Under Jammeh

Throughout the weeks of the tense election standoff, Gambia's armed forces began to waver in their loyalty to Jammeh. While the armed forces never directly sided with the civilians who were calling for Jammeh to leave, the chief of the defense staff publicly stated that commanders would not order their troops to counter ECOWAS forces in order to defend Jammeh.<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, some senior members of the armed forces were seen celebrating on the streets within hours of Jammeh's departure.<sup>90</sup> The armed forces arrested members of Jammeh's infamous paramilitary "Junglers" immediately after the president left office, suggesting the existence of a plan to apprehend the Junglers by military officers while Jammeh was still in office.<sup>91</sup> Other members of the Junglers defected and fled the country before Jammeh stood down.

In some ways, these reactions were surprising given the central role the armed forces played during Jammeh's repressive rule. Yet, they were also a highly fragmented force.<sup>92</sup> Testimonies at the Truth, Reconciliation, and Reparation Commission, which began in

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<sup>89</sup> "Gambia Army Chief Says Troops Will Not Fight Intervention," *News 24*, Jan. 19, 2017, <https://www.news24.com/news24/Africa/News/gambia-army-chief-says-troops-will-not-fight-intervention-20170119>

<sup>90</sup> "Gambian Army Chief Joins in President Barrow Celebrations," *BBC*, Jan. 20, 2017, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-africa-38688794/gambian-army-chief-joins-in-president-barrow-celebrations>.

<sup>91</sup> Author interview with Gambia's deputy chief of defense staff, Banjul, November 2019. Some accounts provided to the author state the arrests were made in the hours before Jammeh agreed to depart.

<sup>92</sup> Maggie Dwyer, "Fragmented Forces: The Development of the Gambian Military," *African Security Review* 26, no. 4 (2017): 362-77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2017.1353530>.

2019, along with dozens of interviews I conducted with members of the armed forces reveal how volatile life was for many in the armed forces under Jammeh.<sup>93</sup> Jammeh pursued classic “coup-proofing” strategies by creating parallel structures that would alert him to disloyalty or plots within the ranks.<sup>94</sup> The intelligence service and Junglers often operated out of uniform or, at times, with “regular” units to spy on them. Senior officer positions were stacked with members of Jammeh’s ethnic group and individuals from his home region, and opportunities in the armed forces were often heavily reliant on patronage networks in an environment where official regulations were less important.<sup>95</sup>

However, even with these tactics, Jammeh remained highly suspicious of the security services and actively undermined individuals who he felt could gain an independent following. As a result, leadership positions were rotated ad hoc. Positions in the armed forces were often insecure at all levels due to patterns of mass dismissals, sometimes followed by re-hirings. Demotions and promotions were also, at times, arbitrary, with a pattern involving individuals moving up or down multiple ranks. Accusations of disloyalty were brutally dealt with, regularly through detention, torture, or, in more severe cases,

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<sup>93</sup> Interviews with members of the armed forces conducted in March 2018 and November 2019 with funding from the Research Council of Norway under the Peace Research Institute Oslo project number 274645. Details of the TRRC can be found on the commission’s website: <http://www.trrc.gm/>.

<sup>94</sup> James T. Quinlivan, ‘Coup-Proofing: Its Practice and Consequences in the Middle East,’ *International Security* 24, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 131–65, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2539255>.

<sup>95</sup> “The Democratisation Process in The Gambia Remains Fragile,” Institute for Security Studies, July 24, 2019, <https://issafrica.org/pscreport/psc-insights/the-democratisation-process-in-the-gambia-remains-fragile>; “Gambia Country Report, 2020,” Bertelsmann Stiftung Transformation Index, <https://www.bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report-GMB-2020.html>; Dwyer, “Fragmented Forces”; and Abdoulaye Saine, ‘Commissioned Report to the Gambia’s Truth Reconciliation and Reparation Commission: 1994-2017,’ June 2020, <http://www.trrc.gm/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Professor-Saine-TRRC-FINAL-REPORT.pdf>.

execution.<sup>96</sup> Those closest to Jammeh were not above this suspicion and key military allies were often in a tenuous, if not dangerous, position. The Truth, Reconciliation, and Reparation Commission has revealed the unclear boundaries between victim and perpetrator within the Gambian armed forces. Many of the same individuals who were accused of human rights violations were later victims of these same practices when they too were accused of disloyalty. In addition to violations against the civilian population, the commission has documented dozens of cases of extrajudicial killing of members of the armed forces by other elements of the security services, as well as unlawful detention and torture.

The high degree of uncertainty in the security services, which affected all ranks and ethnicities, helps explain why many in the security services appeared unphased by Jammeh's departure. Nevertheless, although many may have grown disenchanted by Jammeh's ruling style, there is a strong sense of wariness about how the forces will fare under the new government.

## **Delayed Security Sector Reform**

Given the central role the armed forces played in the previous regime, there is consensus both domestically and internationally that security sector reform is needed to ensure a successful transition process. While Borrow has publicly stated on numerous occasions that reform of the security forces is a key priority, government rhetoric appears stronger

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<sup>96</sup> Records of these patterns regarding promotions and loyalty have come out strongly in dozens of testimonies by members of the armed forces at the TRRC in 2019 and 2020.

than its actions.<sup>97</sup> A security sector reform project was launched in September 2017 with assistance from a large number of international partners including the United Nations, African Union, ECOWAS, European Union, World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund.<sup>98</sup> The project is funded by a \$1.4 million Peacebuilding Fund grant from the United Nations. This money was earmarked to fund a senior security sector reform adviser, a security sector assessment exercise, and the establishment of the Office of National Security in Gambia.<sup>99</sup>

Despite numerous assessments and recommendations, minimal change has taken place since the reforms were launched. While a security sector reform program can take many years to complete, interviews with donors to the process and members of the Gambia Standing Committee on Defense and Security revealed frustration at the lack of a clear strategy from Barrow and his senior security colleagues thus far. For example, one donor representative argued that, while “the right words” are said at all the reform meetings, no tough decisions have been made about the way forward.<sup>100</sup> The toughest of these tough decisions involves deciding on the appropriate size for the armed forces — the structure, size, and personnel of the security services are largely the same as under Jammeh. The Public Expenditure Review revealed that the security services are much larger than most

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<sup>97</sup> “President Barrow Launches Gambia’s Security Sector Reform Project,” Republic of The Gambia, Office of the President, Sept. 13, 2017, <https://www.statehouse.gm/president-barrow-launches-gambia’s-security-sector-reform-project>.

<sup>98</sup> “Launch of the Security Sector Reform Process in The Gambia,” United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, Sept. 12, 2017, <https://unowas.unmissions.org/launch-security-sector-reform-process-gambia>.

<sup>99</sup> Details can be found at “The Peacebuilding Fund in Gambia,” United Nations Peacebuilding, <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/content/peacebuilding-fund-gambia>. Details of the fund to Gambia was released on June 27, 2018.

<sup>100</sup> Author interview with donor representative, November 2018.

anticipated, with over 18,000 personnel on the payroll (roughly evenly divided between the army, police, and special services).<sup>101</sup> Spending on security as a percentage of the national budget is considerably higher than other West African states that have similarly low external threat levels, and the cost is considered unsustainable. However, leadership in the armed forces have made it clear that they are against downsizing.<sup>102</sup> Beyond the sizing issue, there has not been a reallocation of resources aimed at building capacities with strategic goals in mind.<sup>103</sup> There has also not been a sustained or wide-scale (re)training effort. Instead, there have been small, short-term efforts by a range of diverse international donors.

Barrow's reluctance to tackle the difficulties of security sector reform is likely linked to his own weakened position. The alliance that helped bring him to power has broken down, with some former allies openly supporting calls for him to step down.<sup>104</sup> As the 2021 elections near, he is unlikely to make controversial decisions about the armed forces that could further jeopardize his political support. It is also possible that he fears a revolt from within the forces following an alleged plot discovered early in his presidency.<sup>105</sup> In

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<sup>101</sup> "Republic of The Gambia: Overcoming a No-Growth Legacy," Systematic Country Diagnostic, The World Bank, Report No. 148128-GM, May 2020.

<sup>102</sup> Author interviews with Gambian military leadership, including Chief of Defense Staff, November 2019. Confirmed through interviews with Gambian political leadership and diplomatic sources.

<sup>103</sup> Author interview with donor representative, November 2019. Similar observation also highlighted in Chido Mutangadura, "Security Sector Reform in The Gambia: What Is at Stake," Institute for Security Studies, 2020, <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/war-31-1.pdf>.

<sup>104</sup> Maggie Dwyer and Ismaila Ceesay, "The Gambia's President Said He'd Step Down After Three Years. Will he?" *African Arguments*, Dec. 12 2019, <https://africanarguments.org/2019/12/the-gambia-president-barrow-three-years-jotna/>

<sup>105</sup> "Eight Gambian Soldiers Sentenced Over Coup Plot," *Al Jazeera*, May 28, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/5/28/eight-gambian-soldiers-sentenced-over-coup-plot>.

light of these concerns, Barrow has put his trust in the foreign ECOWAS troops (under the mission titled ECOWAS Mission in The Gambia — ECOMIG) and a small number of presidential guards. The 500 ECOMIG troops, whose mandate has been extended several times at the request of Barrow, are responsible for the protection of the president, the state house, and most other major government facilities. They have an especially strong presence in the former president’s hometown but can also regularly be seen on patrol in the capital and in nearby areas. From 2020, they have been supplemented by a newly created presidential guard that has been trained by Mauritania, Turkey, Senegal, and Saudi Arabia.<sup>106</sup>

Based on testimonies at the Truth, Reconciliation, and Reparation Commission and my own interviews, it is clear that morale is low in the police and armed forces.<sup>107</sup> Many army interviewees were outspoken, making statements such as “When President Barrow came to power, he told us to go back to the barracks and he forgot us.”<sup>108</sup> These comments were often related to frustration with the perceived priority given to foreign ECOMIG forces over national forces. The sense of abandonment is further strengthened by continual rumors about pending downsizings of the forces, an idea many in the security services oppose given the lack of other formal job opportunities.

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<sup>106</sup> Tabora Bojang, “New Presidential Guards Return from Senegal Training,” *The Standard*, Jan. 16, 2020, <https://standard.gm/new-presidential-guards-return-from-senegal-training/>. Further details in Maggie Dwyer, “International Security Engagements in The Gambia Post 2017 Political Transition,” (forthcoming in the *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*).

<sup>107</sup> Interviews conducted in March 2018 and November 2019 in The Gambia. For testimonies from the Truth, Reconciliation, and Reparation Commission see the commissions website, <http://www.trrc.gm>; “Archives,” ANEKED, accessed April 29, 2021, <https://www.anekeed.org/archives>; and JusticeInfo.net at <https://www.justiceinfo.net/en/>.

<sup>108</sup> Author interview with enlisted soldiers, November 2019.



## Protests with Concerning Responses

Civilian protests have tested the Gambian security services and have generally found them to be ill-equipped to respond to the growing civic engagement. Overall, these protests have been dealt with inconsistently. Some demonstrations have been prohibited using the Public Order Act — controversial legislation that requires police to issue permits for protests. Yet, others, including ones directly calling for Barrow to step down, have been issued permits and allowed to proceed.<sup>109</sup> Still, there is overall a concerning pattern of excessive police force and mass arrests of demonstrators that harks back to the past regime. At a 2018 protest in Faraba Banta, where demonstrators were calling for an end to sand mining that would destroy local rice farms, the Police Intervention Unit fired live bullets at protestors, killing two and injuring others. The police inspector general stated that the forces were not authorized to use firearms and an investigation into the incident was opened.<sup>110</sup> Other cases of police violence have occurred since then and have resulted in tense situations between the police and civilian protestors. For example, hundreds of Gambians took to the streets in Serrekunda in July 2019 in protest of the death of a street vendor named Ousman Darboe at the hands of the police. The situation escalated with some protestors throwing rocks and police firing tear gas. Protestors responded by setting fire to the house of the head of the anti-crime unit and

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<sup>109</sup> Sheriff Bojang Jr. “Barrow’s Crackdown on Protesters Rolls Back Gambia’s Democratic Gains,” *World Politics Review*, March 12, 2020, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/28597/in-gambia-protests-mount-as-barrow-reneges-on-his-pledge-to-step-down>.

<sup>110</sup> “Gambia: Fully Probe Anti-Mining Protesters’ Death,” Human Rights Watch, June 20, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/06/20/gambia-fully-probe-anti-mining-protesters-deaths>.

around three dozen people were arrested.<sup>111</sup> In January 2020, 137 protestors calling for Barrow to step down were arrested after the demonstration veered from the approved route.<sup>112</sup> Dozens of injuries were reported — including both police and protestors — as police fired tear gas and beat civilians with batons.<sup>113</sup> Armed military units were used to support police units in this protest, raising concerns about the use of the army to counter civil demonstrations.<sup>114</sup>

This uneven response to demonstrations in Gambia is likely linked to the lack of any substantial reform of the security forces following the political transition. The Gambian security forces have limited experience with protests given their rarity under the past regime. Those that did occur were violently suppressed. While the political context has significantly transformed in recent years, corresponding change has not occurred in the security sector. Even senior police personnel appear uncertain as to how best to handle protests, as evidenced by the indecisive way they have issued or rejected permits to demonstrators. In some cases, it appears that police units countering protests were acting independently or even against the orders of their superiors, as suggested in the

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<sup>111</sup> Ruth Maclean and Saikou Jammeh, “Gambia’s Joy Gives Way to Sinking Distrust as Barrow Clings to Power,” *The Guardian*, Sept. 23, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/sep/23/gambia-joy-gives-way-to-sinking-distrust-adama-barrow-clings-to-power>.

<sup>112</sup> Pap Saine, “Protests Against Gambia President Bring 137 Arrests, Multiple Injuries,” *Reuters*, Jan. 27, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-gambia-politics/protests-against-gambia-president-bring-137-arrests-multiple-injuries-idUSKBN1ZQ19G>.

<sup>113</sup> Jason Burke, “Outcry Over Crackdown in the Gambia as President Refuses to Quit,” *The Guardian*, Jan. 28, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/28/outcry-over-crackdown-in-the-gambia-as-president-adama-barrow-refuses-to-quit>.

<sup>114</sup> “New Regime Crackdown a Chilling Reminder of 22 Years of Repression,” *Article 19*, Jan. 28, 2020, <https://www.article19.org/resources/gambia-new-regime-crackdown-a-chilling-reminder-of-22-years-of-repression/>.

inspector general's claim that force was not authorized against the Faraba Banta demonstrators. This indicates a weak chain of command and is consistent with the longstanding fragmented nature of the country's security forces.

## **Conclusion and Policy Responses**

The political transition in Gambia in 2016 and 2017 was a successful instance of a coordinated international response supporting domestic efforts toward democratization. ECOWAS led the international intervention, including the bold decision to send regional troops, and their involvement was supported politically and financially by international organizations further afield. This approach strengthened a regional initiative and likely increased the legitimacy of the intervention. While efforts were very focused when attempting to remove Jammeh, the international collaboration has become more diffuse since then. This is unsurprising given the massive scale of the reform that is needed to reverse the practices and structures that Jammeh put in place. Difficult decisions about priorities had to be made and, so far, security sector reform has not been a top priority under Barrow. Political sensitivities around the reform efforts are likely to deter any significant changes until after the 2021 presidential elections.

Despite some uncertainty within the security services about their fate under the new government, they do not appear to be against the transition to democracy. Heavy-handed approaches to demonstrations seem primarily related to a lack of training. Concerns about reform within the forces are largely linked to fears of job loss, rather than a widespread desire for the return of the previous regime. To make the security sector reform process palatable to the forces, the country will need to find innovative ways to secure jobs or compensation for those affected by potential downsizing efforts.

Widespread retraining programs will be needed to move away from a force that is focused on protecting the regime to one focused on the security of the country and the rights of its citizens. So far there have only been a variety of small-scale training efforts supported by international donor countries, which has resulted in a “piecemeal approach” to reform.<sup>115</sup> Without a focused and sustained plan, international training from various partners has the potential to further fragment Gambia’s security forces and introduce skills that are not cohesive or focused on a common goal.

Delaying the security sector reform process may miss an opportunity to build on the goodwill that many Gambians feel toward the armed forces following the transition. In polling done by Afrobarometer in 2018, the army was found to be one of the most trusted institutions in the country. Police ranked lower than the army, but still the majority of those polled stated that they trusted the police “a lot or somewhat.”<sup>116</sup> In some ways, this finding is counter-intuitive, given the role of the security services in Jammeh’s repressive regime. Yet, many Gambians felt relief that the armed forces did not counter ECOMIG forces, avoiding what could have been a violent situation. However, it is likely that these attitudes will change if the security services continue to use heavy-handed responses to civilian demonstrations. Further delaying the reform efforts threatens to make the armed forces an afterthought to the transition process rather than a central part of it.

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<sup>115</sup> Chido Mutangadura, “Security Sector Reform in The Gambia: What Is at Stake,” Institute for Security Studies, 2020, <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/war-31-1.pdf>.

<sup>116</sup> Sait Matty Jaw, “AD317: Gambians Trust the Armed Forces but Are Split Over the Presence of ECOMIG,” Afrobarometer, Dispatch No. 317, Aug. 22 2019, <https://afrobarometer.org/publications/ad317-gambians-trust-armed-forces-are-split-over-presence-ecomig>.

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## 5. The Military and Citizen Engagement: A Case of Zimbabwean Politics

*Chipo Dendere*

In 2017, after 38 years in power, Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe, who also served as commander-in-chief of the defense forces, was forced out of power. Mugabe's ouster occurred over the course of a week, starting on March 17, 2018. The military arrested Mugabe and his entire family, putting them under house arrest. The military also took control of the country's only state-controlled broadcasting center, which had, since independence, served as a mouthpiece for Mugabe and bolstered his authoritarian rule. And yet, a defiant Mugabe refused to relinquish power and instead called on the nation to work together.<sup>117</sup> Unlike in coups elsewhere, the military quickly realized that it could not forcefully oust Mugabe without civilian support and still maintain legitimacy among the people. Therefore, when it was clear that Mugabe was not stepping down, the military, together with the ruling party and others in civil society, orchestrated nationwide protests. Mugabe eventually stepped down, just minutes before a vote of no confidence in parliament.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> "Zimbabwe's Mugabe Ousted by Own Party, Refuses to Step Down," MPR News, Nov. 19, 2017, <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2017/11/19/zimbabwes-mugabe-ousted-by-own-party-refuses-to-step-down>.

<sup>118</sup> "Zimbabwe Parliament Starts Impeachment of Robert Mugabe 'for Falling Asleep in Meetings,'" *Telegraph*, Nov. 21, 2017, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/11/21/zimbabwe-parliament-starts-impeachment-hearing-against-robert/>.

2017 was Zimbabwe's first coup, but it was far from the only time the military in Zimbabwe played a decisive role in the country's politics. Since the days of the struggle for national independence from Britain, the military has always used cohesion and extreme violence against citizens to gain public support. This essay explores the military strategies that have been used to manipulate civilian politics and gain citizen support in Zimbabwean politics from the immediate pre-independence era to the present. Although some scholars take the narrow view that the military first entered politics in defense of the ruling party in the late 1990s to help Mugabe thwart the opposition,<sup>119</sup> this argument misses the long history of Zimbabwe's militarized politics that began prior to independence.

### **Military Engagement in Pre-Independence Zimbabwe**

In order for the liberation movement to succeed in its goal of attaining independence from the British, it needed the support of the rural peasants, whom they were dependent on for shelter, food, financial support, and logistical assistance. However, the liberation fighters often faced uncooperative rural residents who themselves were afraid of the Rhodesian government and the high chance that fraternizing with rebel leaders would earn them jail time — the white minority Rhodesian government was notorious for taking

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<sup>119</sup> Godfrey Maringira and Tyanai Masiya “When the Military Becomes a Security and Political Threat: Zimbabwean Army Generals in Electoral Politics,” *African Security Review* 26, no. 4 (2017), 399–412, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2017.1294090>; and Blessing-Miles Tendi, “Ideology, Civilian Authority and the Zimbabwean Military,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 39, no. 4 (2013): 829–43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070.2013.858543>.

black Zimbabweans to jail for lesser infractions. In some cases, villagers were forced by the Rhodesian army to betray the black liberation fighters.<sup>120</sup>

Early attempts by the freedom fighters to appeal to people's cultural nationalism and the dream of a better future after independence fell on deaf ears. Sometimes, to get the people's support, the liberation fighters used excessive violence, especially against those in rural areas. Norma Kriger refers to this tension between liberation fighters and the people they were fighting for as "the struggle within the struggle."<sup>121</sup> The rebel soldiers opted for the only solution available to them — violence.

The rebels knew that they would have to inflict more fear and pain than the Rhodesian military to make an impact. Guerrilla leader David Todlana argued that guerrillas had to be much more brutal if they were going to win the war, in part because they lacked the legitimate monopoly on state violence.<sup>122</sup> Moreover, they did not have jails, a judicial system, or a tax base to use as punishment. They had to execute both justice and terror simultaneously and efficiently, leaving no room for their authority to be questioned. Their words, which are all they had, had to be seen as a living promise and not as empty threats.

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<sup>120</sup> Edmund York, "African Exile Armies: ZANLA, ZIPRA and the Politics of Disunity," in *Exile Armies*, ed. Matthew Bennett and Paul Latawski (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

<sup>121</sup> Norma Kriger, "The Zimbabwean War of Liberation: Struggles Within the Struggle," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 14, no. 2 (1988): 304–322, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057078808708176>. See also Norma J. Kriger, *Zimbabwe's Guerrilla War: Peasant Voices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 303.

<sup>122</sup> David B. Moore, "The Ideological Formation of the Zimbabwean Ruling Class," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 17, no. 3 (1991): 472–95, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057079108708288>.



As the war continued, both the Zimbabwe African National Union (later changed to ZANU-PF after 1986) and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) were the two prominent, black-led, anti-Rhodesian minority rule political parties. ZANU was led by the Shona ethnic majority while ZAPU was led by the Ndebele ethnic minority. In their efforts to gain public support, both parties also used undemocratic means to guarantee discipline and loyalty. The two parties each had a military wing: The Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army was attached to ZANU, Robert Mugabe's party, and the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army comprised the military wing of Joshua Nkomo's opposition ZAPU party. The post-independence military structures included servicemen from ZANU's and ZAPU's military wings as well as from the Rhodesian army. Together, they became the Zimbabwe Defense Forces.

In the post-independence era, both the military and politicians have returned to this strategy whenever they have felt threatened by citizens who were demanding change. They will routinely use violence and intimidation against citizens, especially those who dare to speak up against authoritarian rule.

### **The Military-Led Massacres of the 1980s**

Zimbabwe, with ZANU at the helm, gained its independence in 1980, after a dual process of political negotiation between the black political elites, white minority rulers, and the British crown and protracted war between the military factions of the black paramilitary organizations and the Rhodesian army. Several African countries, particularly in southern Africa, gained independence after years of military struggle. Across the settler colonies, black political elites realized that the settler-colonial governments (led by a white minority) were unwilling to relinquish power through diplomatic means.

After gaining independence in 1980, the ruling party, ZANU, led by Mugabe, felt threatened by Nkomo's ZAPU opposition party, which was based in the southern region of Zimbabwe. In response, Mugabe sent a paramilitary organization called the 5th Brigade to massacre nearly 20,000 civilians. The government called the operation "Gukurahundi a Shona," a phrase meaning "cleaning out the filth." The 5th Brigade, whose members were drawn from the national army, was specifically tasked with eliminating opponents of the new government and anyone who showed support for Nkomo.<sup>123</sup> Mugabe's choice to use members of the national military in this way reinforced the notion that the military was to be feared and that it was only loyal to the ruling party. The Gukurahundi genocide forced the Nkomo-led opposition party to join Mugabe's ZANU party in 1986. Nkomo did not see any other option out of the crisis. The unification of the two major parties led to the formation of the oversized ZANU-PF coalition, which continues to hold power today. As Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni noted, the ruling elites' nation-building strategy relies on their abuse of the military, which has intensified hostile civilian-military relations.<sup>124</sup>

## A New Opposition Politics

Continuing into the 1990s, the military was used to campaign for ZANU-PF in almost every election. The militarization of politics made it very difficult for citizens to mobilize against ZANU-PF's authoritarian rule. For example, after the formation of the Movement

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<sup>123</sup> Richard Werbner, "Arguments of Accountability: Historical Narrative, Crisis and Social Biography in Zimbabwe," *Collected Seminar Papers. Institute of Commonwealth Studies*, no. 48, (1994): 172–81.

<sup>124</sup> Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Wendy Willems, "Making Sense of Cultural Nationalism and the Politics of Commemoration under the Third Chimurenga in Zimbabwe\*\*," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 35, no. 4 (2009): 945, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070903314226>.

for Democratic Change in the late 1990s, the party's members and its leadership were constantly harassed by the security forces, including the military. Political violence reached new heights during the 2008 elections.<sup>125</sup> A combination of skyrocketing inflation, a cholera epidemic, and civil unrest forced ZANU-PF to agree to a joint government with the Movement for Democratic Change and one other opposition party. After formation of the unity government in 2009, the Movement for Democratic Change tried to push reforms in the security sectors from within, but ZANU-PF pushed back.

The military has always been politicized, but Mugabe, in his prime, was successful at keeping the leadership of the army happy. However, as Mugabe aged and it became increasingly clear that his young wife was gaining more control, the security sector fissures between the military and intelligentsia became more apparent. By 2016, it was public knowledge that the military generals were not happy with the direction of the ruling party under the leadership of Grace Mugabe, who had, by this time, become more vocal in her criticism of army generals and other senior members in the party.

By 2017, the factionalism within ZANU-PF was negatively impacting all aspects of political life. A discussion of ZANU-PF factionalism is beyond the scope of this essay but suffice it to say that the Mugabe faction had the support of the intelligence unit and the police

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<sup>125</sup> Gift Mwonozora and Kirk Helliker, "Learning and Performing Political Violence: ZANU-PF Youth and the 2008 Presidential Run-Off Election in Zimbabwe," *African Studies* 79, no. 4 (2020): 367-86, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00020184.2020.1821351>.

while the anti-Mugabe factions had the support of the military. The divisions resulted in the 2017 ouster of Mugabe — what I have called a guardian coup.<sup>126</sup>

## Mugabe’s Ouster and the 2017 Citizen Protests

The global community only now, four years after Mugabe left office, seems to be reaching something of a consensus that what happened in Zimbabwe in November 2017 was indeed a coup.<sup>127</sup> For many months after the coup, diplomats, including officials at the United States embassy in Harare, refused to call it a coup.<sup>128</sup> Instead, most scholars and policy experts referred to the ouster as a citizen-led military intervention.<sup>129</sup> But what exactly is a citizen-led military intervention? Given the history of Zimbabwe, could one say with any real confidence that the Zimbabwean public could direct the military’s actions? Although it may seem unlikely, this is precisely how the military manipulated events: They concealed the strong role they played in removing Mugabe by making it

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<sup>126</sup> Chipo Dendere, “To Understand the Coup in Zimbabwe, You Need to Know More About Grace Mugabe,” *Washington Post*, Nov. 15, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/11/15/to-understand-the-coup-in-zimbabwe-you-need-to-know-more-about-grace-mugabe/>.

<sup>127</sup> In private conversations with diplomats, they are more willing to call what happened in Zimbabwe a coup.

<sup>128</sup> Lucky E. Asuelime, “A Coup or Not a Coup: That is the Question in Zimbabwe,” *Journal of African Foreign Affairs* 5, no. 1 (2018): 5–24, <https://journals.co.za/doi/10.10520/EJC-ea1e3c26b>.

<sup>129</sup> Nicole Beardsworth, Nic Cheeseman, and Simukai Tinhu, “Zimbabwe: The Coup that Never Was, and the Election that Could Have Been,” *African Affairs* 118, no. 472 (2019): 580–96, <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adz009>.

appear to be a citizen-led movement. This is a strategy that we would later see copied with varying degrees of success in countries like Sudan.<sup>130</sup>

A few days before the citizen protests that are credited with pushing Mugabe out of power, Vice President Constantine Chiwenga, who was then an army general, gave a live press statement on broadcast television warning the pro-Mugabe factions in the ruling party that the military would have to intervene if the political infighting continued.<sup>131</sup> This broadcast was the first time that the army general had ever directly addressed Zimbabwe's citizens. The pro-Mugabe youth faction widely mocked the press statement, responding with a statement telling the military to stick to "barrack-issues" and that they were ready to "die for Mugabe."<sup>132</sup> It is my sense that the military had hoped that the youth wing would be more contrite. Their response, which publicly humiliated the army generals, likely led to the military arrests of politicians linked to the president as well as the president and his family being put under house arrest.

The officials in the military and organizing wings of the ruling party realized that they could capitalize on Mugabe's unpopularity and a citizenry that was desperate for change. When Mugabe defiantly refused to step down, choosing instead to preside over a

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<sup>130</sup> David Kiwuwa, "Return of the Generals: Reflections on the Military Coups in Zimbabwe and Sudan," *The Zimbabwean*, 2019.

<sup>131</sup> Constantino Chiwenga, "Full Statement by General Chiwenga Before the Military Coup," *Nehanda Radio*, Nov. 16, 2017.

<sup>132</sup> Hamza Mohamed, "Zimbabwe- ZANU-PF Youth Wing Ready to Die for Mugabe," *Al Jazeera*, Nov. 14, 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/11/14/zimbabwe-zanu-pf-youth-wing-ready-to-die-for-mugabe>.

graduation ceremony two days after the military broadcast,<sup>133</sup> the ruling party's anti-Mugabe faction called for a one-million citizen protest across the country. The military left the organization of the march to civilians and only made its presence known in a highly orchestrated supportive role. During the march, prominent activists like Pastor Evan Mawarire, who had previously been charged with treason after organizing anti-regime protests, and prominent opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai were among those who delivered speeches in support of Mugabe's ouster.

The military mostly stayed quiet during the public November events. The generals did not issue statements or give speeches during the citizen march. However, their presence did not go unnoticed. The military deployed hundreds of military tankers across the country, along with handsome young soldiers who took selfies with citizens.<sup>134</sup> Also present at the march were thousands of posters featuring pictures of the two generals who led the Mugabe ouster. Citizens took pictures with life-size portraits of Chiwenga and Gen. Sibusiso Moyo, both affectionately nicknamed #generalbae. Within a week of Mugabe stepping down, the two top generals would resign their army posts and take up positions in the civilian government. Chiwenga is now President Emmerson Mnangagwa's vice president, while Moyo heads the critical Ministry of International Relations. (Mnangagwa formerly served as Mugabe's vice president before he was fired and was brought back into the country after Mugabe's ouster and installed as president.) The strategic positioning of Chiwenga and Moyo indicates that the military is running the government.

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<sup>133</sup> "Zimbabwe's Mugabe Appears in Public for First Time Since Coup," *Reuters*, Nov. 17, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-zimbabwe-politics-university/zimbabwes-mugabe-appears-in-public-for-first-time-since-coup-idUSKBN1DH143>.

<sup>134</sup> Anne Soy, "Zimbabwe Crowds Rejoice as They Demand End to Mugabe Rule," *BBC*, Nov. 18, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-42035981>.

## The Post-Coup Era

In the early days after the coup, there was some expectation that relations between the military and civilians would improve. However, this has not been the case. Shortly after the 2018 presidential election, the opposition took to the streets to protest the outcome.<sup>135</sup> Opposition protests following elections are not new in Zimbabwe or across the continent in general. In the past, the ZANU-PF government has responded to such protests by sending out riot police armed with tear gas, baton sticks, and water cannons. Now, the new norm is for the government to send out armed military in response to protests. On July 31, 2018, two days after the presidential election, the government responded to an otherwise peaceful protest with military force, resulting in the death of nearly a dozen people. The government has refused to take responsibility for sending out the military, and the military has been silent on the matter. Since the July shootings, the military has been the first responder to any civilian protest, indicating that it is unlikely that soldiers will ever return to their barracks. Citizens have already raised concerns that during the COVID-19 lockdown, the government unleashed soldiers in low-income areas to enforce lockdown regulations, using force against civilians.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Jefferey Moyo, "Zimbabwe Protests Turn Violent as Some Call Election a Sham," *New York Times*, Aug. 1, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/01/world/africa/zimbabwe-elections-protests.html>.

<sup>136</sup> Gibbs Dube, "Zimbabwe Police, Soldiers to enforce COVID19 Lockdown," *Voice of America*, Jan. 3, 2021, <https://www.voazimbabwe.com/a/zimbabwe-covid-19-regulations-measures-curb/5722977.html>.

## Conclusion

The coup in Zimbabwe shows that military involvement in civilian protests only occurs when the military stands to benefit. The military watched and participated in the mismanagement of national resources and only became offended by the corruption when its access to wealth was under threat. Although the generals claimed that they were only stepping in to deal with the criminals in the presidium, there have not been any real efforts to address corruption. Instead, the new president has rewarded army generals with government posts and various perks.

Moreover, the military in Zimbabwe, like militaries elsewhere, recognizes that the current geopolitics do not favor an outright coup and therefore they must strategize politically acceptable ways to intervene in civilian politics. If the 2017 intervention had been designated a coup, then Zimbabwe would have been punished by the regional bodies. However, the African Union did not want to do this. It remains unclear why that body chose to behave differently toward Zimbabwe than it did toward Sudan. One possibility is that the African Union was more invested in getting the Mugabes out than in protecting the democratic system and therefore it turned a blind eye to the coup. Another possibility is that the British ambassador to Zimbabwe supported the military intervening. The British position was that Zimbabwe needed change no matter what, but they were opposed to an opposition win. They felt that the Movement for Democratic Change was too weak to resolve the Zimbabwean crisis.

The main lesson of the 2017 coup, both for the opposition and for policymakers, is that when a political crisis is attributed to one individual, as was the case with Robert Mugabe,



it is easy for citizens to be convinced to work against their own interest as long as the person they blame for their misery is gone.

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