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Source: *PRISM*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (2013), pp. 126-139

Published by: Institute for National Strategic Security, National Defense University

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26469832>

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A voter from Zam Zam Internally Displaced Persons Camp, North Darfur, submits her ballot on the first day of Sudan's national elections.

# Towards a Taxonomy of Militaries in Contemporary Africa

By Alan Doss, Jeffrey Herbst and Greg Mills<sup>1</sup>

*“What a society gets in its armed forces is exactly what it asks for, no more no less. What it asks for tends to be a reflection of what it is. When a country looks at its fighting forces, it is looking in a mirror; the mirror is a true one and the face that it sees will be its own.”*

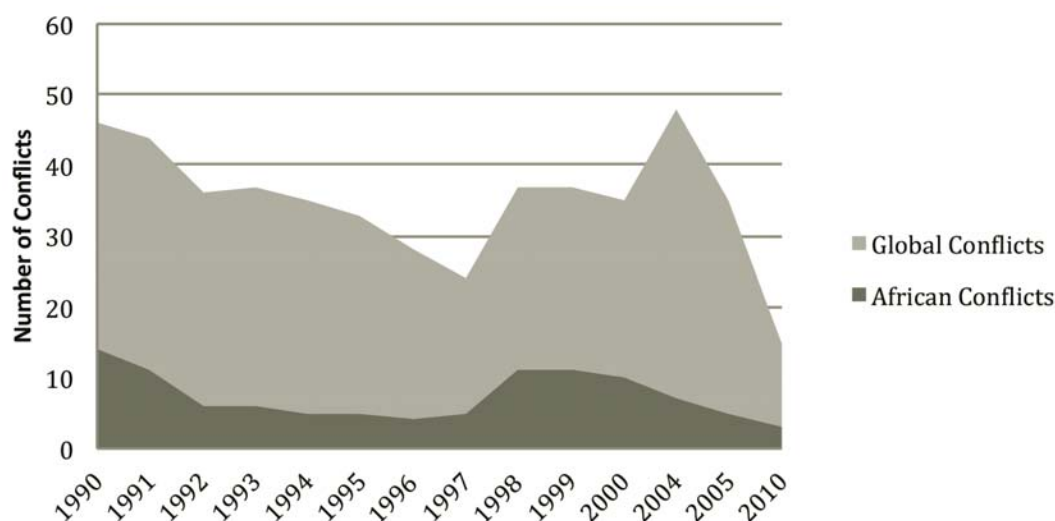
General Sir John Hackett<sup>2</sup>

The African development and governance picture is today highly differentiated with some countries developing successful democracies while riding a wave of growth, others facing outright institutional failure, and a great number in-between. Critical to understanding the different paths that countries have taken, and the likely even greater divergences in the future, is the relationship between civilians and soldiers. Starting soon after independence in the early 1960s, the seizure of power by soldiers was emblematic of the problems African states faced in promoting good governance. Now, at a time when most soldiers are back in their barracks, economic growth has accelerated and democratization has progressed. However, the picture varies greatly from country-to-country. In this paper, we develop a taxonomy of African militaries to understand why some countries have better civil-military relations than others, what is the likely path in the future, and the potential role, if any, for outsiders. African militaries are characterised, just as African states themselves, by different capacities and civil-military records.

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**Figure 1: Sub-Saharan and Global Conflicts**

While sub-Saharan Africa has enjoyed the best post-independence growth decade on record during the 2000s, at over 6%, it remains an exceedingly poor continent, with an annual per capita income level of just over US\$1,200 (in current terms). The patterns of growth have however been highly differentiated between states: some have got richer, while others have faltered or failed. This is, however, overall a positive phenomenon, showing that African countries no longer fall into a single category (if they ever did), but, as in other developing regions, there are all kinds: performers and failures; big and small (which usually perform much better in Africa); landlocked and littoral; autocratic and democratic (by now the overwhelming majority). In particular, Africa's larger and resource rich countries (the Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria, for example) have generally had a poor development record since independence, which in part is due to the extent of territory and the complex make-up of their societies, consisting of many groups within a single state, which has made effective governance that much harder.

The state of democracy is also healthier in Africa today than 20 years ago, with more than

40 countries regularly conducting multiparty elections although, again, across the region there are significant variations in the integrity of these elections. Extreme predatory warlordism, once evident in Sierra Leone and Liberia, is also apparently on the decline. However, there are, as will be argued, less obvious but no less insidious ways in which military actors engage in the political economy of African societies. Indeed, such a role is not only made possible by the liberation credentials of some militaries and by their relative monopoly on violence, but by the contemporary African trend towards state involvement in economies as evident for example in the resource nationalism debate.

Continued differentiation is therefore perhaps the most important "master narrative" in Africa. Accordingly, this paper considers the abovementioned taxonomy of African militaries, highlighting in turn where and how external parties might play a useful role. But, first, how has the role of African militaries changed and how does this relate to the overall governance record?

### **African Militaries and Security**

One consequence of the degeneration of politics during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s was the high



**Figure 2: Number of Coups (successful and attempted) by Sub-Region**

	1960-69	1970-89	1990-2010
West Africa	19	49	36
Central Africa	8	14	13
Eastern Africa	10	26	12
Southern Africa	0	10	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>67</b>

incidence of violence in Africa. The end of the Cold War enabled some conflicts (e.g. in Angola, Namibia and Mozambique) to eventually wind down, but there was also an intense period of strife after 1990, as the geopolitical cards were reshuffled. Wars in Central Africa, West Africa and Sudan, and between Ethiopia and Eritrea, signalled a continent in crisis. The failure of the United States and the United Nations in Somalia in 1993 and the Rwandan genocide in 1994 suggested that the continent could not count on external intervention to end conflict, even though at the same time the continent was host to several UN peacekeeping missions. And still, in the 1990s, Africa was shaking off the last of its colonial or liberation struggles with the advent of a multiracial democracy in South Africa in 1994.

Much has changed. Twenty years after the end of the Cold War, the wars in West and Southern Africa have wound down, although there is still conflict in the Horn and Central Africa. As the table below illustrates, Africa has seen a substantial decrease in the number of conflicts, from 15 in the 1990s to five between 2000 and 2010. Accordingly, there has been a decrease in the number of global battle deaths from 160,000 a year in the 1980s to 50,000 annually in the 2000s.<sup>3</sup>

The remaining conflicts appear to be concentrated in “hard cases,” such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, that have no immediate or obvious resolution. New conflicts will undoubtedly break out in sometimes surprising places, such as Mali, but it is hard to believe that the continental level of violence will revert to what was seen in the 1990s. The fall in the level of violence parallels the aforementioned change in democratic structures.

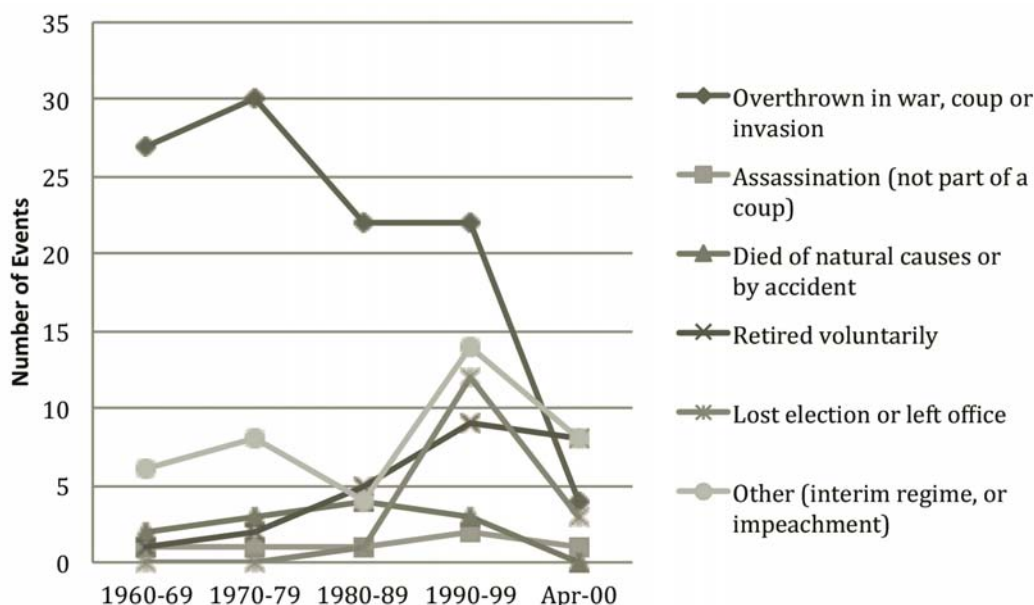
Throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, much of the African continent had become militarised. Relatively few states avoided military coups, and those that did had to find some accommodation with their armed forces.

As the table below<sup>4</sup> further illustrates, more than half the total of regime changes in this period comprised coups. But violent regime change has declined significantly as a percentage since 1990 and even further since 2000. The number of successful coups in Africa declined from a peak of 21 between 1960-69, to 20 in 1970-79, 20 again in 1980-89, 17 in the 1990s, and just seven between 2000-09.<sup>5</sup>

Aside from the implications of these military adventures for African civil-military relations, and their effect on democracy and accountability, the militarisation of society generated a culture of violence and stimulated the growth and proliferation of armed gangs, warlord formations, the contemporary surge in piracy, death squads, guerrilla armies and proxy forces of all kinds with truly devastating human consequences, especially for women and children.<sup>6</sup> Restoring civil governance, stability and the rule of law thus requires, as a first step, keeping the military in the barracks and putting armed non-state actors out of business.

### **Africa's Democratic and Governance Trajectory**

Ending conflict can have at least as large an impact on poverty as improved growth rates. Indeed, as the World Bank's argues, peace is likely to lead to increased growth. The opposite also holds true: as Paul Collier has shown, “Civil war is development in reverse.” Three-quarters of those people

**Figure 3: Reasons for Leaving African Office**

considered by Collier to be in the “Bottom Billion” (of those 58 states, most of which are in Africa, which are slipping behind) are or have recently been in civil war.<sup>7</sup>

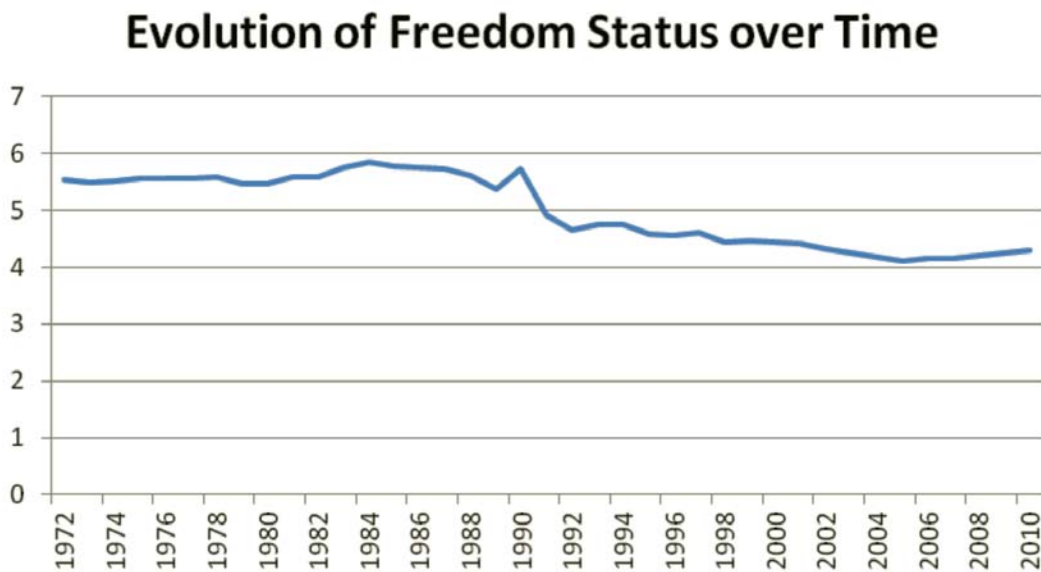
The 2011 World Bank report notes that Ethiopia, at peace now since the end of its devastating border war with Eritrea in 2000, has for example increased access to improved water from 13% of the population in 1990 to 66% in 2009, while Mozambique, once it ended its civil war, tripled the primary school completion rate from 14% in 1999 to 46% in 2007. By contrast, those countries affected by conflict are falling behind in reducing poverty. The report notes: “For every three years that a country is affected by major violence [...] poverty reduction lags behind by 2.7 percentage points. For some countries affected by violence, poverty has actually increased.”<sup>8</sup>

While African countries have been growing economically, albeit with a mix of trajectories and from different starting points, they have, to the surprise of many, at the same time liberalised their political systems. Indeed, one of the most stunning developments in Africa was the sudden outbreak of

multiparty elections and, to some extent, democracy after the Berlin Wall fell in 1989. Much has been written about why the one-party, no-party or military regimes that dominated Africa in the 1970s and 1980s fell. But the most interesting development is that, after roughly 50 years of independence, the democratic election, admittedly of radically varying quality, is today the norm in most African countries.<sup>9</sup>

Of course, it is very hard to measure how much freer countries have become over time. Freedom House measures of political and civil rights provide one useful indicator, especially as the organization has developed a long time series and has broad coverage in Africa and the rest of the world. The figure, below, presents the continental evolution of the average of the political rights and civil liberties scores over time. Freedom House uses a scale from 1 to 7, divided into three broad categories: “Free” (1 to 2.5), “Partly Free” (3 to 5.5), and “Not Free” (5.5 to 7). The data series, which averages the political rights and civil liberties scores, began in 1972, when many African countries had already lost the veneer of democracy roughly applied in the rush to

Figure 4: Evolution of Freedom Status over Time



decolonisation and had largely eliminated formal multiparty electoral competition – although, as always, there were variations across the continent.

The above figure graphically depicts the stagnation in the extension of freedom in Africa between the early 1970s and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Early in Africa's post-independence history, the grip of one-party or no-party states was strong and there were many intellectual arguments against democracy in Africa. In the 1960s, it was argued sincerely (and, of course, insincerely in many cases) that democracy was not appropriate for Africa, most notably by Julius Nyerere and other theoreticians of the one-party state. In the 1970s, there were those who made the case that solving Africa's economic problems required military men or benign authoritarians. At the same time, a number of countries adopted communism as their official ideology. Finally, the international community did not promote democracy. The strategic and ideological orientation of African countries, rather than their economic or democratic performance, often determined their international alliances and levels of aid.

Political liberties and civil rights in Africa generally began to improve in a dramatic fashion after 1989, and there were particularly important changes in the first five years of the post-Cold War era. Many of the one-party or no-party states simply collapsed because of poor economic management and the withdrawal of support from their erstwhile Cold War sponsors.

In contrast to the 1960s, today there is no intellectual alternative to democracy, even though the urge to democratise across Africa is far from uniform, and there are many who have used current political developments for their own ends. The Chinese "model" also seems to have some ideological attraction for Africa, especially among regimes that have authoritarian tendencies. The citizens of many African countries continue to support elections even when they are disappointed with the systems that have evolved. Now it is the norm in almost all of Africa to hold elections, and there has been a gradual evolution of other democratic institutions and consolidation of democratic practices. Of course, one can also argue, more cynically, that many African authoritarians have learned how to

**Figure 5: African Countries Ranked 'Free' by Freedom House**

1972	1975	1980	1985	1990
Gambia	Botswana	Botswana	Botswana	Botswana
Mauritius	Gambia	Gambia	Mauritius	Gambia
	Mauritius	Ghana		Mauritius
		Nigeria		Namibia
1995	2000	2005	2010	
Benin	Benin	Benin	Benin	
Botswana	Botswana	Botswana	Botswana	
Cape Verde	Cape Verde	Cape Verde	Cape Verde	
Malawi	Ghana	Ghana	Ghana	
Mali	Mali	Lesotho	Mali	
Mauritius	Mauritius	Mali	Mauritius	
Namibia	Namibia	Mauritius	Namibia	
São Tomé & Príncipe	São Tomé & Príncipe	Namibia	São Tomé & Príncipe	
South Africa	South Africa	São Tomé & Príncipe	South Africa	
		Senegal		
		South Africa		

keep a hold on power even in a more open environment and despite elections, as is perhaps best illustrated by President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe.

In part, the democratic improvement is also due to changes of attitude at the continental level. For the first few decades of independence, African countries, especially through the now defunct Organization for African Unity (OAU), claimed that it was no one's business who ruled sovereign nations. Now, the African Union (the OAU's successor) has taken relatively strong stands at least against those militaries overthrowing elected governments. Thus, the "red-card" sanctioning of African military coups from 1999 (through the Algiers Declaration on Unconstitutional Changes of Government in 1999 and the subsequent Lomé Declaration the following year) has helped consolidate democracies. Still, there have been efforts to usurp elected civilian order, for example; the Central African Republic (2003 and 2013), Chad (2006) Mauritania (2008), Guinea-Bissau (2008 and 2012), Guinea (2008), Madagascar (2009), Niger (2010), and Mali (2012).

The above figure also reflects some deterioration in freedom since the high-water mark in 2005. There have been setbacks in the form of military coups and contested elections, such as in Mali and Zimbabwe. Such reverses are to be expected, given the fragility of most liberalisation experiments and how hard it is to create the institutions and culture of a democracy. However, the movement backward is relatively slight in continental terms and does not detract from the conclusion that democracy is the preferred political regime for most people across the continent, no matter how difficult it is to institute in practice. Still, we need to understand clearly how complicated the environments of most African countries are for leaders and others to operate in, especially when they are trying to create pro-growth constituencies.

There are other dramatic signs of political opening across Africa, some caused by political developments and others driven by technology. For instance, in many African urban areas there are vibrant, almost riotous radio talk shows that allow listeners to call in and debate issues. This is



a sharp departure from the 1970s and 1980s, when most African capitals were starved of information and debate.

As impressive as African political progress has been, there is, again, considerable variation from country to country. This diversity is especially important to understand given that the average African country has moved from “Not Free” to “Partly Free” according to the Freedom House index. “Partly Free,” while obviously hard to define precisely as a category, does accurately describe the position of many African countries. They have elections, but they have not managed to consolidate democracy by developing a robust set of those institutions that normally support a free society. Thus, while electoral competition seems a given, the population cannot be certain that the next electoral cycle will be fair and, critically, that those elected will leave power peacefully at some future date. Of course, the willingness of those in power to leave office when voted out is the absolute bedrock of democracy, failing which people would be tempted to contest every election violently and illegally, fearing it is the last. Likewise, there is considerable uncertainty over the ability of other democratic institutions – including the parliament, the press, the armed forces, and the courts – to play a constructive and enduring role.

### **Towards a Military Taxonomy**

The general trend toward democratization across Africa implies some significant, albeit varied, gains in civilian control of the military. Today, in only a limited number of states is fear of an outright military coup palpable. Rather, the questions around military involvement in politics are now more subtle as the military becomes simply another group, albeit armed, jostling for power behind the scenes and competing for resources. Inevitably, the military seeks a share of the budget, bringing it into conflict with other priorities, although this can, up to a limit, be considered normal politics that also play out in Washington, London and Paris. Of greater importance to understand is the

military’s potential role in commercial activity as officers seek to enrich themselves through business now that they no longer directly control the state. Concerns about the military’s role in business coincide with debates across the continent about what roles the state should take on to promote development.

Given the significant, and increasing, variations in democratization and civilian control of the military, it should be useful to develop a taxonomy of armed forces across the continent. The following chart focuses mainly upon observed military actions and must therefore be considered tentative because the armed forces themselves are divided and very little is known about their internal dynamics. For instance, until the 2012 coup, the Malian military was seen as generally supportive of that country’s fledgling democracy. Some of the classifications involve judgement calls and should also therefore be seen as tentative.

The first and fourth categories are the easiest to understand: countries where soldiers currently rule and those that have never deviated from civilian supremacy, although permanent residence in either category is not guaranteed. Given the general drift toward democratization across Africa over the last twenty years, the “Red-Carders” will inevitably face domestic and international pressure to formally give up power and they are likely to do so at some point. The military may want to “civilianize” themselves, as many of the “Legitmitators” have done in order to stay at the top of the hill, but transition management is inherently difficult given the perquisites available to those who stay in power and their uncertain fate if they were to return to the barracks. Others in those countries will be opposed to any role for those who formerly ruled through the barrel of a gun, such as has been the case in Zimbabwe. The politics of this group will therefore be inherently fraught.

Speculating on the origins of “Red-Carders” is difficult given that this is a dynamic category and that democratic missteps resulting in a period of military rule are possible in many countries,

**Figure 6: An African Military Taxonomy**

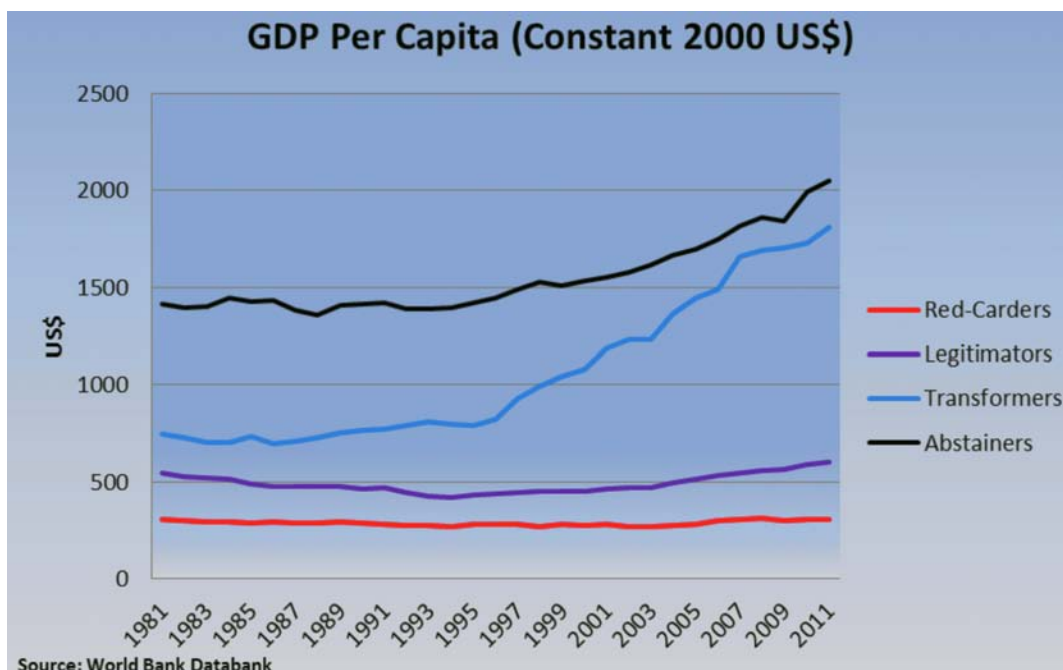
Red-Carders	Military or other regimes which have come to power unconstitutionally.	CAR, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania
Legitimizers	Military or armies which have morphed into civilian regimes through elections or otherwise	Angola, Burkina Faso, Chad, DRC, Congo-Brazzaville, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Sudan, South Sudan, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Gambia
Transformers	Countries with a history of military rule where civilians now rule.	Benin, Burundi, Cote d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Gambia, Guinea, Ghana, Lesotho, Liberia, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Seychelles, Niger
Abstainers	Countries with no history of formal rule by soldiers.	Botswana, Cape Verde, Cameroon, Djibouti, Gabon, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Senegal, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia

given the difficulty of establishing institutionalized democracy. The fact that civilian leadership in France – usually thought of as a well-institutionalized country – was threatened by military dissidents in the late 1950s gives some idea how hard it is to curtail the men with weapons and how perilous it is to predict the trajectory of any given country. What stands out now is that the countries in this category are mostly Francophone and, perhaps more important, generally poorer than the African average. The relative poverty of the group highlights, perhaps more than anything else, the exceptional nature of the African democratic project where an unprecedented number of poor countries are attempting to democratize at per capita incomes much lower than the level at which many in East Asia undertook political reform. It is therefore not surprising that some of the especially poor states have seen their political systems overthrown by soldiers. As the African Development Bank (AfDB) notes in this regard, “Sub-Saharan African countries with low, or negative, per capita GDP growth since independence have experienced more military coups than countries with higher per capita GDP growth rates. Outstanding examples include Burundi, the Central African Republic, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Niger, and Sierra Leone, among others.” It goes on to explain further this correlation in terms of recent coups that, “The very low performers in terms of real GDP (average

growth rate from 2000 to 2012) are Guinea-Bissau (2.2%), Madagascar (2.7%), and Mauritania (3.9%), and all these countries experienced more than one military coup and attempted coup during 2000-2012 (four in Guinea-Bissau and three each in Madagascar and Mauritania) [...]” The AfDB report goes on to observe that, “One interesting finding ... is that, in some instances, successful military coups occurred a year or two following a decline in GDP growth rate. For instance, in Guinea-Bissau, a successful military coup took place in 2003, a year after the country experienced a recession with a GDP rate of -7.1% in 2002. Similarly, in Chad, Mauritania, and Niger, military coups succeeded respectively in 2006, 2008, and 2010, following a year of declining GDP growth rate or very poor economic performance.”<sup>10</sup>

The longer soldiers stay out of power in those countries labelled “Abstainers”, the more likely it is that they have institutionalized civilian rule. Institution building is still necessary across this category, especially developing the norm that the inevitable losers in elections and resource contestation not turn to the military to redress their grievances. The refusal of the Malawian military to disrupt the transition that led to then Vice President Joyce Banda becoming president, despite pleadings from the deceased president’s family, is a good example of what has to occur across this group of countries. External military assistance to this

Figure 7: GDP Per Capita (Constant 2000 US\$)



group of countries can focus productively on further professionalization and war-fighting, as many of these countries will be called upon to undertake significant peacekeeping responsibilities.

While countries in this category vary (justifying our relatively weak label that describes their commonality in only what they have not done – seize power) – coming from different regions in Africa and in different sizes – there are some clear biases. First, many of the countries are from Southern Africa (at least as defined by the Southern African Development Community), suggesting an emerging norm in that area. Second, many of the countries have per capita incomes well above the African average. It is, of course, not completely clear if they are relatively richer because the military has stayed in the barracks or because they adopted relatively productive economic policies which soldiers were loath to disrupt.

The “Legitimators” are soldiers who came to power through the barrel of the gun via liberation armies or coups. They then transitioned

themselves through elections and are nominally civilians. Some (e.g., Mugabe, Museveni) have been in power many years as civilians. Some leaders and their parties (as in Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, and Zimbabwe) emerged out of national liberation struggles while others came from militaries that were established after independence. Despite their differences, their initial military background gives them an important constituency in the armed forces which they depend upon and manage. These countries (notably Angola, Rwanda and Uganda) are especially likely to foster significant involvement by the military in business as leaders seek to reward their former comrades and control society through the tentacles of the armed forces. The murkiness of such a transition to democratic rule is perhaps inevitable but, irrespective of their other nominal democratic achievements, civilian supremacy in these countries will be suspect because the military remains a bastion of power.

Africa is not the only place where militaries have an influence in the economy. In Latin America



U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Timothy L. Solano/Released

A fire team of Senegalese naval infantry commandos crouch beside a wall during a final training exercise during Africa Partnership (APS) 2011 in Toubakouta, Senegal, April 26, 2011.

(e.g. Brazil, Argentina) and Asia (e.g. Thailand, Indonesia, China, Vietnam), the military, directly or indirectly, has had an important role in business. The economies of some of these countries have grown dramatically, so it is not automatically a bad thing per se, especially if it gives the military a stake in economic growth and in so doing assists the process of demilitarization of politics. This is not the same as the militarisation of the economy along the lines of North Korea or Pakistan, where the state budget is heavily skewed to military expenditure largely outside of accountable political control. Ultimately, however, while such elite economic co-option may be a useful short-term expedient, it can quickly give way to predatory lawlessness and does not guarantee social cohesion. To the contrary, it risks institutionalising crony

capitalism, economic un-competitiveness, low growth and elite-focused development.

Moreover, outsiders who engage in these countries will have to be particularly careful of the domestic dynamics they face because the civilians still are very much tied with the armed forces and it may not be completely clear at all times who controls, and where the right of recourse to the rule of law is often subjective.

Finally, the “Transformers” have made an important break with the armed forces because those in power are not former soldiers and do not have a history of direct dependence on the armed forces for achievement of power. These countries can still experience the “revolving door” of civilian and military rule that characterized much of West Africa in particular in the past. However, their



prospects for civilian supremacy should be seen as higher than those countries in transition since the military have both formally and informally returned to their barracks. Indeed, the era of formal military rule in countries such as Ghana and Nigeria are now referred to as unfortunate eras in national history, an important legitimator of civilian rule. Of course, the Malian military would have previously been considered in this category, indicating again that classification should be done with caution.

Western (and other) governments that provide aid to the military will need to develop policies toward each of these categories. Policies toward the “Red-Carders” is relatively simple because the overall political situation in those countries will have to be resolved before significant re-engagement with the militaries can begin. Likewise, western powers should feel relatively sanguine about engaging with the “Abstainers” given their history. The focus with this group should be in professionalizing the armed forces so that they can carry out their responsibilities within their countries and also play a productive role in regional peace-keeping. Of course, many (with South Africa in the lead) are already playing important roles in a variety of countries but they do require additional support. The argument for even greater engagement, within current budget realities, can be strengthened because greater engagement will help the prowess of these nations’ militaries and their democratic prospects.

Policies toward the “Legitimizers” will necessarily be more complicated, not least because of their more limited democratic credentials. Western aid can certainly focus on the professionalization of the militaries, not least through exposure to foreign thinking and practices, including seminars and other outreach schemes designed to improve professional awareness and standards. Such assistance would, again, also improve the ultimate democratic prospects because the norm of civilian supremacy would be reinforced and because the military would see a brighter future for itself as

long as it hewed to its responsibilities to prepare for combat. Over time, western assistance could, if used with nuance, help separate the military from the structures of political power, especially as generational change occurs. There will also have to be an important focus on governance, especially on limiting, and ultimately reducing, the militaries’ ties to the economy. Such pressure would be consistent with the desire to develop more professional militaries.

*that only relatively dysfunctional armies engage in the direct overthrow of civilian regimes today says something about the evolving norms of military professionalism in Africa*

Western engagement will perhaps have the greatest impact with the “Transformers.” These militaries have demonstrated their democratic credentials yet operate in almost-by-definition difficult political situations. Greater assistance in promoting their military capabilities and professionalization may well pay very high dividends because Western aid could be critical in changing the calculus of those who might seek to derail their country’s democratic prospects.

A phenomenon somewhat at cross-purposes with the above analysis is absolute military capability. The most adept, well-funded, and coherent armies when it comes to actually fighting—a list that might reasonably include Angola, Nigeria, Kenya, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Uganda and Zimbabwe—are found across the different categories except, tellingly, in the “Red-card group.” That only relatively dysfunctional armies engage in the direct overthrow of civilian regimes today says something about the evolving norms of military professionalism in Africa. Western interests will necessarily be focussed, to some extent, on the absolute prowess of African militaries because few western powers are likely to be engaged in regional peacekeeping



in Africa in the near future and there will therefore be the continuing need to engage and promote the militaries that can fight. The impetus to engage these militaries means that western powers will have to be especially careful of the differences between these armed forces.

*while there are exceptions, attention has overall shifted towards improving operational standards and military professionalism*

Here a further, different taxonomy can be developed, a categorization of African military capabilities – distinguishing at least in terms of peacekeeping capacity between “enablers”, “providers” and “followers.” The reality is that the African military is generally under-resourced for the roles it is expected to assume, financially and in terms of available skills and equipment. Obviously, as with every area of government, hard choices will have to be made on capabilities. Inevitably the biggest African gaps exist, as in most areas of government, in management, logistics and, more controversially, in the way in which militaries can and should respond to emergencies, through humanitarian assistance, disaster relief and the delivery of logistical capabilities. One important principal stands out. While there are sometimes exceptional circumstances, the military generally cannot be stronger than the national economy can afford. A corollary is that it should not do anything to undermine the economy. This includes the furthering of military over national interests. All this raises questions about where and how external actors might assist African militaries as they continue their transition out of politics to traditional roles and capacities. External assistance should be guided in this regard by sustainability, cohesion and relevance. Changes that are instigated by outsiders but cannot endure without their support, have historically failed and should not be attempted.

Understanding thus why externally-directed solutions fail is essential. It usually goes beyond money, and to the heart of the design of the solution, and to the extent of local ownership. External assistance should also distinguish between explicit military support and strengthening the civil institutions in which militaries are located or those the military has to work with, including the police. Above all else, leadership mentoring, and especially training for local budgetary, procurement and logistics processes would help to reinforce the essence of a modern military. Teaching soldiers how to fight is not the principal problem. Rather it's the logistical and bureaucratic system that supports them which is lacking. Better systems can promote a positive cycle. Improved capacity and less stress over resources will in turn help to keep the military focused on national rather than partisan political interests.

### Conclusion

As the taxonomy above illustrates, the involvement of militaries in African politics is today highly differentiated. While aspirational in some cases and fraught with setbacks, their role has increasingly moved over the past quarter century to align with western-based norms of civil-military separation. While the military's role in African politics has reflected both historical tradition and contemporary circumstances, since 2000 it has been limited by a legacy of past military excesses, the expansion of African civil society, the African Union's moratorium on *coups d'état*, and by the reluctance of external powers to accept military take overs.

As a result, while there are exceptions, attention has overall shifted towards improving operational standards and military professionalism. While never an easy task for outsiders to encourage, nurture and institutionalize, and vulnerable to the extent (or not) of local will and resources, there have been notable successes. We argue that these efforts should acknowledge the differentiation of African militaries, notably their origins,

experience in power, and if they have devised a way of exiting from formal military rule. While there is no substitute for granular knowledge of a particular country, these general categories can serve as a useful framework.

We freely admit that countries will move from category-to-category and that these shifts, as in Mali, may come as a surprise. Still understanding the relative positions of an African military compared to their counterparts across the continent is valuable and can provide a guide to effective engagement.

At the most general level, in spite of the undoubted progress made in governance and democratisation over the past twenty years, the challenges facing African countries are formidable. A failure to meet the basics of political, economic and social security will, if the Arab Spring is anything to heed, result in social and political tensions and potentially a fruitful recruiting ground for extremist groups. Yet meeting these challenges is no small order, not least given the rise in population numbers, especially in cities, and the absent corollary of employment and education opportunities, especially for Africa's burgeoning youth. It is thus important for all institutions in African countries – notably including the militaries – to play productive roles. However, the military remains unique in its potential to utterly disrupt the trajectory of a country should either the soldiers become interested in seizing power or fail in their fundamental responsibility to provide security. Thus, cognizance of the differentiation of militaries, how they will evolve in the future and the options this implies for external supporters is especially important. **PRISM**

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The authors wish to express their appreciation for the input of a number of expert sources, including Professors Martin Edmonds and Deon Fourie, Colonel Hugh Blackman and Theresa Whelan. Thanks are also expressed to Anthony

Arnott for his role in generating statistical data. The views herein, however, remain solely those of the authors. Please note that “Africa” in this context is taken to refer to sub-Saharan Africa.

<sup>2</sup>John Hackett, *The Profession of Arms*, (London: Macmillan, 1983).

<sup>3</sup>“World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security, and Development,” *World Bank*, 51. The table is compiled from a variety of sources, including data accessed at [http://www.sipri.org/research/conflict/trends/sipri\\_publications/yearbook/yb0201a](http://www.sipri.org/research/conflict/trends/sipri_publications/yearbook/yb0201a).

<sup>4</sup>The table on coups and changes in government is sourced from Arthur Goldsmith, “Donors, Dictators, and Democrats,” *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 39 no.3 (2001). Adapted from Roger Southall and Henning Melber, eds. *Legacies of Power: Leadership Change and Former Presidents in African Politics* (Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council, 2006), 2.

<sup>5</sup>Economist Intelligence Unit, 2013. The two coup tables are sourced from Habiba Ben Barka & Mthuli Ncube, “Political Fragility in Africa: Are Military Coups d’Etat a Never-Ending Phenomenon?” *African Development Bank* (September 2012), available at <http://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/Economic%20Brief%20-%20Political%20Fragility%20in%20Africa%20Are%20Military%20Coups%20d%E2%80%99Etat%20a%20Never%20Ending%20Phenomenon.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup>Eboe Hutchful, “De-militarising the Political Process in Africa,” *African Security Review*, 6, no. 2 (1997), available at <http://www.issafrica.org/Pubs/ASR/6No2/Hutchful.html.p.3>.

<sup>7</sup>See also Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What Can Be Done About It*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>8</sup>World Development Report 2011, *World Bank*, *Op. Cit.*, 60.

<sup>9</sup>This paper draws, in part, on Jeffrey Herbst and Greg Mills, *Africa's Third Liberation*, (Johannesburg: Penguin, 2012).

<sup>10</sup>AfDB, 2012, *Op Cit.*