

11 | COERCION AND MILITARY INTERVENTION IN AFRICAN POLITICS

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Theoretical Explanations of Military Rule in Africa

Since the years of independence, Africa has experienced more than 200 military coups, counting both successful and failed coup attempts. The political and economic conditions prevailing in different African countries and the foreign influences at work during different periods (post-independence, Cold War, and post-Cold War eras) have all played a part in fueling conflicts and coups in the region. The destabilizing factors have been many and varied, depending on the national context: warring factions seeking to gain power in the aftermath of independence; established and stable states burdened by poor quality of governance and by corrupt officials; autocratic regimes repressing any form of opposition but with sociopolitical discontent and instability. Pervasive and persistently low levels of economic growth, associated with high levels of poverty, are symptomatic of the social grievances that may precipitate military coups in African countries (Nwankwo, 1996).

It can be further argue that, foreign powers' quest for geostrategic influence and security, has in the past translated into shadow participation in African inter- and intrastate conflicts and in support to African dictators, thereby fanning the flames of violent dissent.

Military involvement in politics is a political phenomenon that has characterizes many societies especially the Third World countries. While it is regarded as a political aberration across the globe in recent times, it has continued to threaten many societies mostly in Africa even at this era of global "democracy" (Badie, Berg-Schlosser & Morlino, 2011). However, the separation of military and civilian powers and the development of professional and bureaucratic armed forces in European states in the 18th and 19th centuries gave birth to the contemporary understanding of military rule (Badie et al. 2011). Consequently, military interventions in politics are very common both in democratic and totalitarian regimes. The function of the military makes it very powerful and sometimes unquestionable when it begins to exert an almost unrestrained influence in government: the height of which may involve direct takeover of the institutions of governance. Even in developed countries, although the military is restricted to national defense and obedience to the civil authority, it still exerts significant influence on the government policies (Gurgul & Lukasz, 2013).

The military in less developed societies have, for flimsy reasons and excuses, infiltrated the political administrative machineries of the states without correspondingly fulfilling their messianic propaganda embedded in their reasons for military takeover. The sudden overthrow of a democratically elected government in Mali in the spring of 2012 by a small group of military insurgents is symptomatic of the reemerging pattern of coups d'état which have hit Africa in recent years. But many other African countries have also succumbed to military forces over the past five years, including Mauritania (August 2008), Guinea (December 2008), Guinea-Bissau (December 2008 and April 2012), and Niger (February 2010), (Burkina Faso, January 24th, 2020), (Guinea, September 5, 2021) and (Chad, April 20th 2021). It is estimated that there have been at least 100 successful coups in Africa in the past four decades, with more than twice the number of coup attempts

Most military takeovers are started by disgruntled junior military officers, who are later supported by a few senior officers. Within days or hours, they capture power by detaining or forcing the leaders to step down – as in the case of Mali. As opined by Jackman (1978), attributed coups d'état that took place in the new states of Africa to three broad reasons, namely social mobilization or "modernization"; cultural pluralism; and political factors (i.e. political party systems and mass participation). According to Jackman, both social mobilization and the presence of a dominant ethnic group had destabilizing consequences for newly established states in sub-Saharan Africa. He further argued that a multiplicity of political parties can be destabilizing, whereas single-party dominance has had a stabilizing effect on post-independence governments. However, when in interaction with electoral turnout (political mobilization), Jackman found both multi party and the dominant ethnic group to have destabilizing effects.

However, drawing on Jackman's earlier analysis, Decalo (1989), found that "states with relatively dynamic economies whose societies were not very socially mobilized before independence and which have maintained or restored some degree of political participation and political pluralism have experienced fewer military coups, attempted coups, and coup plots than have states with the opposite set of characteristics." In other words, he concluded that some measures of positive economic performance are highly stabilizing, such as a high level of productive employment, robust economic growth, sound export performance (ratio of export-imports to GNP), and diversified commodity exports. In attempting to analyze the internal factors leading to a coup, Collier and Hoefler (2007), focused their analyses on the military itself. According to McBride (2004), the military intervene in political affairs mainly for reasons of personal greed, being motivated by the "rents" they hope to extract once they gain power or control over the state. Terrell (1971), highlighted the interdependence between the risks of a coup (plotted, attempted, or successful) and the level of military spending at the time. He found that in countries with a low coup risk, governments respond by reducing military spending, whereas in countries with a high coup risk, governments tend to increase military spending.

Another theory focuses on the colonial heritage of African countries, namely the disparate political systems inherited from Britain, France, and Portugal. Okibe (2000) has pointed out that the two West African countries most affected by successful coups (Nigeria and Niger) had in fact very different colonial pasts. And while Cape Verde has been coup free, Guinea-Bissau – the other Portuguese colony in West Africa – has experienced three successful coups. Okibe argument is supported by the fact that Liberia and Ethiopia, which were never colonies, have both witnessed military coups. Military intervention for humanitarian purposes has been contentious both when it has happened, as in Somalia, and when it failed to happen, as in Rwanda. This new activism for some has been a long overdue internationalization of the human conscience; for others it has been an alarming breach of an international system dependent upon the sovereignty of states as well as the sacrosanct nature of their territory. Yet again, for some, the only real issue center's on ensuring that coercive interventions are effective; for others, debates about the legality process as well as the possible misuse of precedent feature more prominently. This controversy has uncovered some fundamental divisions in the international community. It is therefore incumbent that these divisions be resolved in the interest of all those victims who suffer and die when leadership and institutions fail to protect them.

Reasons for Military Intervention in Politics in some African States

The constitutional functions of the military in any given democratic country are to purely defend the society against any internal and external aggressions. However, the military in most of the African countries since attainment of independence has deviated from their constitutional obligations and have severally intervene in politics with the following reasons:

- a. **Corruption and Inefficiency:** the military always intervened in African politics by given an impression that the inefficiency and corrupt nature of politicians in their countries are one of the reasons that prompt them to politics. Consequently, they claim "to correct the political incongruity." Such countries that claimed corruption and inefficiency as reasons for intervention include: Ghana, Congo Brazzaville, Mali and Nigeria. For example, the Nigeria's First Republic was described by Ojukwu (the Biafran leader) as wasted years of helplessness, incompetence, abuse of office and gross disregard for the interest of the common man. More so, it can be argue that the Guinean coup of September 5, 2021 led by colonel Mamady Doumbouya, was as a result of too much poverty and corruption in the country.
- b. **Political Opportunism:** political opportunism has to do with nepotism, favoritism and ascription of positions not based on merit but on privilege basis. This has been the case with Ghana as the major cause of military intervention. The reason for the coup of 24 February 1966 was clearly described by general Ankrah when he emphasized that, it was to: Banish privilege, overlordism, political opportunism, wasteful pompousness and incompetence, and thereby restore to the people of Ghana the blessings of liberty, justice and human dignity. By 13 January 1972, Ignatius Acheampong shared the regime of K.A Busia on the ground of economic basis such as in the areas of the level of Ghana's indebtedness, fall in the price of cocoa in the world market and the ban on the importation of cars. On 5th July 1978, Acheampong was evacuated from power in a bloodless coup by general Fred Akuffo who claimed to bring unity and integration among the people of Ghana. On 15th June, 1979, flight Lieutenant J.J. Rawlings shoved the regime of Akuffo, Rawlings claimed that Akuffo could not bring changes from the evils of his predecessors.
- c. **Fear of Disintegration:** when there is tendency for national disunity and disintegration, the military intervene to restore peace and stability. But the question remains, how stable are military regimes in Africa. The answer (though the question sounds rhetorical) is absolutely unstable. This factor of disintegration was peculiar to Sudan. The first military coup was engendered by the fear of domination expressed by the people of southern Sudan. Their fear, however, was that the Muslim northerners should not dominate them when independence was achieved. In 1958, similarly, there was a revolt of the army in the north, led by Ibrahim Abboud. In 1969, the army surfaced again under colonel Gaafar Mohammed Uimeiri.
- d. **Ethnicity:** the divergent nature of African people and the necessity of the impediment of leaving together despite differences in tribal affiliation, religion, history and culture, it made it inevitable the consideration of ethnic affiliation before loyalty to the state. One ethnic group struggled to dominate the rest of others in the society by capitalizing on the level of military support it has in the country. Dahomey (Benin Republic) has been one of the epitomes of this primitive barbarism. The political tribulation characterized by ethnic rivalry resulted into social disequilibrium.
- e. **Economic Stagnation:** another reason advanced by the military as a cause of intervention is economic stagnation. But sometimes the reason given for intervention is not always cogent or vivid. In Uganda, the regime of Mitton Obote (the Ugandan prime

minister) was removed by Idi Amin, by accusing the regime of depressed economy, ethnic unrest and official corruption. The decadent nature of military welfarism in Zaire, having to do with long years of service without promotion or a reliable increase in salary has gravitated Mobutu Sese Seko to intervene as a military dictator and a bureaucratic head. Also in Mali Keita came into power in 2013 and was criticized for failing law and order, and mismanagement of the economy by the coup plotters on August, 18, 2020.

- f. **Ideology:** the question of ideology is not to be answered by the military personnel in Africa. But this has taken another dimension in the armed forces of the Maghreb (North Africa). The ideological movement was basically on Arab socialism as carried out by colonel Ghaddafi of Libya. Such ideology was revolutionary in nature due to the desire for change, by destroying the monarchy. King Idris was overthrown in 1969 by colonel Ghaddafi who mobilized for Arab socialism modeled from Algeria and Egypt. The same ideology had motivated the unsuccessful overthrow of the regime of King Hassan of Morocco in 1971.

Consequences of Military Intervention in Politics in Africa

Military dictatorship not only in Nigeria, but in the whole of Africa, has instigated many evils and negative impact on the country in particular and the continent in general. Military rule has brought about the following negative impact:

- (a) **Corruption:** The military as institutions that came into power on the premise of correcting the wrong doing of politicians in the act of governance have become more corrupt than the politicians. For instance, in Nigeria we have clear cases of military lootings of public funds where the Abacha loot is yet to be recovered by the federal government.
- (b) **Abuse of Human Rights:** Military rule is unconstitutional and unacceptable in any given ramifications, why because the process is mark by several human right violations raging from suspensions of constitutions, absence of fundamental human right, and lack of freedom of press etc.
- (c) **Devaluation of Currencies:** Military rule in Africa have pause a lot of danger to Africa development by accepting the imperialist policy of Structural Adjustment programmed which seriously devalue our national currencies. In Nigeria for instance the genesis of our currency devaluation was when general Ibrahim Babamasi Babangida accepted the IMF loan conditionalities of devaluation of national currency, and that is a reduction in the exchange value of a country's currency in relations with international monetary and exchange regime.
- (d) **It has Tarnished Africa's Image in International Community:** There is no doubt that military intervention in Africa has tarnished the image of Africa's in international arena as a continent that is always abuses democratic culture.
- (e) **They have Frustrated Efforts for Democratic Rule:** For several years of military interventions in Africa they have frustrated reasonable socio-economic development in Africa.

Above all these negative consequences of military rule, one can deduce the fact that the military have also created positive impact in Africa. For instance, in Nigeria the military created most impact such as establishment of federal universities, polytechnics, unity schools and federal colleges of education. The NYSC program was established to reduce tension and ignorance of Nigerian people of their fellow Nigerians living in other parts of the country.

Recommendations on Keeping the Military out of Politics

There are numbers of recommendations which can be taken into cognizance to be able to keep military out of politics if explored, this will help keep the army in the barracks, make them loyal to the civilians and maintain their veritable constitutional function of protecting the state from any internal and external aggressions.

- (a) The military must be taught how to really discharge their function effectively and restrain from interventionist move towards state's politics. The military must be disciplined in respecting the civilians and protecting them, not to acquire political power through the barrels of a gun. Improving military capacity will not truncate democracy but an effort to improve military professionalization by enhancing the capacity of the armed forces to commit and manage violence is unlikely to pay democratic dividends. Too often it is assumed, mostly by policymakers and military officers but also at times by scholars, that efforts to improve the capacity of the armed forces under the general rubric of "professionalism" will somehow reduce a soldier's appetite for power or lessen her willingness to kill civilians on behalf of the regime.
- (b) Civilian democratic leaders must allow for proper participation of the citizenry in their political affairs. Electoral institutions must conduct free, fair and periodic elections as at when due, and avoid election rigging, as this, invites the military to intervene. In fact, one can deduce the fact that most of the military interventions in most of the Africa's state is due to the attitude of politicians and electoral institutions of lack of conducting free, fair and credible elections. For instance, the 1964 elections crises in Nigeria which was one of the reasons that make military to intervene.
- (c) Civilian government must provide maximum security to members of the public, as failure to secure the lives of the people may also attract the military to take over power.
- (d) The economy must grow and make some progress, to avoid inflationary or deflationary trend. Economic collapse and institutional decay may attract the military to power in Africa states.
- (e) International Community: The international community should not by any means recognize any military government that takeover power from any elected democratic government not only in Africa but in the world at large. The united nation, economic community of west Africa state, European union and Africa union should be able to sanction any country that military junta takeover power.
- (f) Conditions of service: There should be good conditions of service for the military as this will go a long way of keeping the military out of politics in Africa. Good conditions of service in terms of salaries and others remunerations.

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