

FINAL REPORT: RESEARCH SCHEME R6633

**CAN AFRICA'S MILITARY ESTABLISHMENTS BE BROUGHT UNDER
DEMOCRATIC CONTROL?**

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Goals of the Research

This project was formulated after an apparent transformation of Africa's political landscape by the 'Third Wave' of democratic transitions, which swept away many military and authoritarian regimes between the late 1980s and the mid-1990s. It had a mixture of empirical, theoretical and policy objectives.

The project has aimed to increase **empirical understanding** of how and in what conditions democratic governance and in particular democratic control over African military and security establishments has been consolidated. It has examined the lessons of earlier African transitions, and why they failed to prevent military re-intervention. It has delineated the very diverse historical trajectories followed by African states in moving, or attempting to move, from military or authoritarian to democratic governance. It has analysed recent military and security sector reform initiatives, and the main obstacles facing them, including the legacies of authoritarianism, and the new perils arising from disintegrating states and armies and from spreading armed conflict. And finally, it has made a detailed scrutiny of existing mechanisms of accountability and control over military and security establishments, and of how they have changed during transitions to democratic governance.

To properly understand these developments has required more appropriate **theoretical tools** than those in the existing civil-military relations literature. The latter has had a number of obvious blind spots. First, by focussing on 'civilian' control of the military, it has ignored non-democratic civilian regimes, which have sometimes been as coercive and dependent on military support as military dictatorships. Second, by concentrating on the Armed Forces, it has left out other coercive state apparatuses, like the intelligence services, police, presidential guards and paramilitary bodies, not to speak of non-state armed formations, like warlord armies, guerrilla forces, militias or criminal mafias. These have often been as problematic for democratic governance as the official military establishment itself. Third, it has disregarded the possibility that the demise of military regimes might, rather than facilitating democratic governance, instead weaken the state, making it vulnerable to other forms of political violence.

In sum, the project has re-focussed analysis upon **democratic** and not just civilian control; extended it to the ensemble of Africa's military and security establishments, and not just the Armed Forces; and explored the links between the analysis of the military and the burgeoning literature on armed conflict¹.

These empirical and theoretical objectives have also had **implications for policy**. These are closely linked to conceptions of good governance and 'security sector reform'. For re-authoritarianisation and armed conflict have been the product, not only of political and development crises, but also of failures of

¹ See Kaldor and Luckham (2001).

governance (Cliffe and Luckham 1999), including the policy choices made about the control and management of military and security bureaucracies. Conversely, democratic control of military and security establishments can be ‘crafted’, despite the fragile and incomplete nature of many African transitions. Much depends on how decision-makers resolve the policy dilemmas typifying the security sector (Luckham 1995).

The research has tried to clarify the policy choices in three main ways. First, by asking why previous (and some recent) transitions have gone wrong – and whether **different** political and policy choices by African governments, donors and civil society bodies might have changed the outcome. Second, by identifying and analysing case studies of ‘good practice’. Third, by spelling out the main mechanisms of democratic control available to elected governments, Ministries of Defence, legislatures and their committees, political parties, the media and civil society organisations etc, and how these can be strengthened.

Approach and Methods

The research has made use of detailed case studies of particular African countries either making transitions from military or authoritarian rule (Ghana, Mali, Benin and Nigeria), or emerging from armed conflicts, or both (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Uganda and South Africa). As well as these, the cases have included two countries, which neither experienced military rule, nor faced major armed conflicts, namely Senegal and Tanzania². The latter were included both as possible examples of good practise, and because they too have made important political transitions (from dominant-party and one-party rule to multi-party democratic governance), requiring corresponding adjustments in their security sectors.

The emphasis throughout has been as much on focussed comparisons between different national experiences as upon detailed scrutiny of individual cases. Only through such comparison can one address the crucial counterfactual questions. One example is why Ghana’s and Mali’s transitions have succeeded in averting the danger of military re-intervention, where others have failed. Another is what ‘lessons’ Nigeria and other SSA countries can learn from South Africa’s success in institutionalising democratic accountability in the security sector (Cawthra, Fayemi and Luckham, forthcoming).

Methods of data collection have included:

- extensive bibliographic searches for Africa as a whole and for each individual country studied, creating large computer-based bibliography

² Although Senegal faces a protracted low-intensity rebellion in Casamance.

- collection of ‘grey literature’ – official reports, military and staff college magazines, cuttings from press libraries etc – during field visits
- interviews with Ministries of Defence, military staffs, members of parliamentary defence committees, newspaper editors, foreign military attaches and police advisers and local academics.

Between 1995 and 2000 field visits of between one and five weeks each were made to Ghana, South Africa, Namibia, Senegal, Mali, Benin, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Uganda, Tanzania and Nigeria – as well as to France in the early stages of the research. In some countries (Ghana, South Africa, Senegal, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Nigeria) there were shorter follow-up visits, using the opportunity of conference and teaching invitations. Despite the political sensitivity of the research topic, in depth interviews were obtained with key decision-makers in almost all countries - though this took much time and effort to arrange, and the accessibility of interviewees varied³.

The research has benefited greatly from co-operation with a network of African scholars concerned with security sector transformation. Among other things this has involved work on two extra research and writing projects, namely an edited book on Democracy and Security in Nigeria and South Africa (Cawthra, Fayemi and Luckham forthcoming), and another more comparative edited book on Governing Security in Democratic Transitions (Cawthra and Luckham, forthcoming).

Findings

The findings can be grouped under three main headings:

(1) Lessons of Earlier Failures to Resolve the Military Question:

Among the countries studied, Ghana, Nigeria, Benin, Uganda, Mali and Ethiopia experienced protracted military rule. In the first four, moreover, returns to civilian rule were terminated through military re-intervention. The lessons that can be extracted from their difficulties in controlling military establishments, and from comparisons with countries with more stabled civil-military relations, like Senegal and Tanzania, include the following:

- The inability of civilian governments to provide accountable and effective governance was a major factor in cycles of military intervention and re-

³ Not always in the expected ways: Senegal with its well-established democratic traditions, proved one of the most difficult countries in which to obtain military interviews.

intervention. The military question could not then and cannot now be separated from the broader issues of governance.

- Neither after independence, nor after returns to civilian rule, was much serious thought given to restructuring military and security apparatuses, building working partnerships between soldiers and elected politicians, or creating effective frameworks to ensure democratic accountability and control.
- Deep institutional and professional crises tended to develop in the Armed Forces. These both caused military intervention, and were aggravated by military rule itself.
- Indeed an interesting findings of the research is that members of the military elite interviewed in countries like Nigeria, Ghana or Mali saw the Armed Forces themselves as among the main victims of military intervention and rule.
- A common feature of military-institutional crises was the emergence of subaltern military revolts by NCOs and junior officers. In some countries, like Ghana and Ethiopia, these contributed to a tradition of military radicalism or populism; but in others they merely accelerated the disintegration of military establishments and the privatisation of violence.
- But even when military interventionism was at its peak, there were significant exceptions, like Tanzania and Senegal. The former indeed was the only country to undertake root and branch military reforms, after the 1964 mutiny. Although these politicised the TPDF in a single-party framework, they also helped (with President Nyerere's personal legitimacy) to assure political stability.
- Yet important as they are, the lessons that can be drawn from earlier 'success stories' may not be reproducible in the altered circumstances of present-day Africa, since they depended on close army-ruling elite links in single- and dominant-party democracies.

(2) Varying Contexts of and Obstacles to Democratic Control and Military Reform:

Recent transitions arguably differ from earlier 'returns to the barracks', being rooted in more far-reaching political changes than the latter. Since the end of the Cold War, moreover, there is greater international support for both political and security sector reform. Yet recent reversals, some linked to renewed military interventions, others to armed conflicts, suggest the need for a more cautious and differentiated appraisal of reform. The tendency to force all African states into a single analytical mould – military dominance in the 1970s/80s, transitions to democracy in the late 80s/early 90s, state collapse and armed conflict from the 1990s etc – is both misleading and unhelpful to policy-makers.

Although each country should be studied in the light of its own history (viz Luckham 2001a on Ethiopia and Eritrea), certain broad trajectories of transition

may be distinguished. Each of these have opened political spaces for reform, and each has generated its own problems and constraints. Though all these trajectories cannot be described here (see Luckham 2001b), four are especially pertinent and have varying implications for reform:

- **First**, there are ‘pacted’ transitions, more or less on the lines of the standard models of the transitions literature, as in Nigeria and arguably Ghana and South Africa. Even in such cases military retreat from power by itself has not been enough, and has had to be complemented by specific mechanisms for democratic accountability and control.
- **Second**, some recent transitions have arisen from popular revolt against existing state and military authority. These may be subdivided between those stemming from military or urban uprisings, as in Ghana and Mali, and those resulting from protracted armed struggles against authoritarian regimes, as in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Uganda and South Africa.
- An initial working hypothesis of the research was that the new model democracies, which arose from such popular struggles, were relatively well equipped to undertake military reforms, as part of their broader transformative agenda. In contrast to the revolutionary regimes of the Cold War era they also seemed to demonstrate a salutary realism and commitment to democracy and market-oriented economic reform. However, recent events in Ethiopia, Eritrea and Uganda, including the stifling of democratic changes, and the involvement of all three countries in wars across their borders, suggest this assessment may have been over-optimistic.
- **Third**, some transitions have involved little more than the reconfiguration of military regimes – or even warlords, like Charles Taylor in Liberia - as elected ‘democratic’ governments.⁴ In such cases there has clearly been much less opportunity for or interest in military reform.
- Yet the political spaces for change in these reconfigured regimes, and the capacity of democratic groups to use them, have varied. Ghana is a case in point, where an initially constrained democratisation process opened the way for more far-reaching changes.
- **Fourth**, in a number of cases military and security sector reform has been ‘pacted’ through international agreements after conflicts, as an integral aspect of conflict-resolution and the reconstitution of political authority, as in Mozambique and Sierra Leone.
- Finally in a continent, where military coups, armed conflicts and regional peacekeeping efforts have interconnected across national boundaries, the

⁴ In West Africa, eleven of the sixteen heads of state are former military men, although some (like President Obasanjo) opposed the outgoing authoritarian regimes and have genuine credentials as democrats.

regional and international dimensions of reform have become increasingly important.⁵

(3) Military and Security Sector Reforms, Processes and Outcomes:

Democratic control and military reform have been most needed precisely where they have been most difficult, i.e. where prolonged authoritarian rule and/or armed conflict has undermined the state's legitimacy, its capacity to implement reform and (in conflict-torn societies) its monopoly of violence. Nevertheless, the research has identified a number of important examples of 'good practice' in SSA. These counteract prevailing stereotypes about Africa's descent into anarchy. They also provide lessons other African states may be able to draw upon:

- Some countries have been able to reverse previous cycles of political and economic decline (Ghana, Benin), armed conflict (South Africa) or both (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Uganda, Mali), which would have had catastrophic consequences had they continued unchecked.
- The **policy choices** made at decisive turning points in the transitions from non-democratic to more democratic government and from war to peace have been of cardinal importance. The choices have often been as much political as technical, and have been associated more broadly with the restoration of functioning states and national economies (see case studies of Ethiopia and Eritrea).
- These policy choices have concerned two principle matters. First, the rebuilding and re-disciplining of national armies, police forces and security bureaucracies, in some cases almost from scratch. Linked to this have been the demobilisation and resettlement of former combatants, and the transformation of former guerrilla forces into professional armies (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Uganda), or their absorption by the latter (South Africa).
- The second set of policy choices has dealt with specific mechanisms to assure civilian and democratic control over military, police and security bureaucracies, and has formed part of a broader process of constitutional and institutional change, aiming to democratise and re-legitimise the state.
- These policy choices have usually been mutually reinforcing. However, their relative priority has varied according to national circumstances. The emphasis in Ethiopia, Eritrea and Uganda has been on state and military reconstruction (though this does not mean questions of democratic accountability and control were entirely neglected). That in Ghana, Benin and Tanzania has been mostly on new mechanisms of democratic control. In South Africa and Mali both have been emphasised.

⁵ It must be admitted that not enough attention was paid in the original research design to these international dimensions, although they are considered in Luckham et al 2001 and Kaldor and Luckham 2001.

- The political context of reform has been decisive. Democratic control of South Africa's military and security establishments has been facilitated by an assertive legislature and a strong party system, in turn the product of the ANC's capacity to mobilise popular support for its programmes.
- The mechanisms of democratic control in South Africa are indeed in advance of most western democracies. They are based on (a) a Ministry of Defence, restructured to ensure strong policy direction by the executive (b) effective parliamentary committees (c) an active and informed civil society and media.
- The case studies reinforce the conclusion that a **democratic strategy** toward the military and security sector is crucial. Examples of where strategic thinking about the goals and processes of change have made a major difference are South Africa's defence transformation, Ethiopia's demobilisation programme and Mali's conflict-settlement and micro-disarmament programmes.
- The **process** of reform, how it has given citizens a sense of ownership and the ways it has involved stakeholders has also been vital. The broad-based constitution-making exercises in Eritrea, Uganda and South Africa, and the latter's Defence White Paper and Defence Review consultations are examples of process-driven reforms.
- Reforms have worked best when they have been based on sufficient understanding of military and security organisations themselves, and have attempted to make them partners in the process of change.
- Donor-promoted military and security sector reform initiatives have only worked where there have been real domestic constituencies for reform, including the Armed Forces etc themselves. Lack of such support has for instance undermined US efforts to sponsor military reform in Nigeria.
- Nevertheless reform in all the cases studied has been contested, giving rise to tensions between soldiers and civilians and among soldiers themselves (e.g. in South Africa between ex-guerrillas and former members of the SADF).
- Reform has also necessitated the resolution of conflicting political claims with deep societal roots, e.g. over the ethnic and racial balance of the Armed Forces. What matters is that potential conflicts have been managed through the political process, rather than through political violence.

Dissemination

Throughout the research an effort has been made to address policy issues, engage with networks of African researchers, policy-makers and military personnel, and disseminate findings, to maximise their policy impact.

The most important avenues for dissemination have been:

- Two Nigeria-South Africa Roundtables on Democratic Transition and Military Reform (December 1999 and September 2000), co-organised with Dr Kayode Fayemi of the Centre for Democracy and Development (Lagos and London) and Professor Gavin Cawthra of the Centre for Defence and Security

Management (CSDM), University of Witwatersrand (see attached Roundtable Report). These brought together military officers, civil servants, parliamentarians⁶, researchers and civil society groups from both countries, to consider the policy lessons each country has to offer the other. We are preparing an edited book on Democracy and Security in Nigeria and South Africa (Cawthra, Fayemi and Luckham: see book proposal), based on papers presented at the Roundtables.

- Another more comparative book on Governing Security in Transitional Democracies is in preparation (Cawthra and Luckham: see book proposal), and includes several African case studies⁷.
- The Africa Leadership Forum (ALF) has recruited me to a five-person Expert Group (I am the only non-African) to prepare a policy-focussed report on Demilitarisation and Security Sector Transformation (in effect an African White Paper), for consideration at a joint ALF/Global Coalition for Africa (GCA) forum this autumn. Drawing on my research and that of my colleagues, it aims to generate an Africa-wide debate.
- Besides these, I have contributed to three GCA colloquia on security issues; taught civil-military relations modules at three CSDM courses for Southern African defence decision-makers; gave a keynote address at the first African Centre for Security Studies (ACSS) high-level seminar for defence decision-makers; joined the Board of African Security Dialogue and Research (ASDR); and have participated in UK security sector reform fora. My IDS Working Paper on Poverty and Conflict in Africa was drawn on by the new UK government Consultation Document on The Causes of Conflict in Africa.
- I have drawn on my research for the articles and book chapters listed below in the Appendix, although I have not yet finished the book envisaged in the project proposal⁸.

Appendix: Bibliography

⁶ Including the Chairman of the UK's Select Committee on Defence

⁷ The seminar, from which it originated, in Johannesburg, September 2000, was funded in conjunction with another DFID-funded IDS research programme – on Democratic Governance in Conflict-torn Societies - and ran back to back with the Nigeria-South Africa Roundtable. Funding from the present programme, and a considerable input of my time, was used to solicit additional African contributions, and turn the seminar proceedings into a book (not originally envisaged under the Democratic Governance programme).

⁸ As explained in previous correspondence with ESCOR, this is in part because I have been delayed by illness (recurrence of heart disease, two operations to remove a tumour), and the fact that I was obliged to take over managerial and academic responsibilities for two DFID-funded research programmes from colleagues who died/left the IDS. It is partly self-imposed, in that I have added two edited books to my original brief. It is also because not enough time was budgeted into the project to finish the writing as well as do the fieldwork, since I had (over-optimistically) hoped to invest some of my own 'retirement' time in the book. I'm currently not taking on further commitments, and hope to get back to the book when the edited volumes and the DFID Democratic Governance research programme are out of the way by the end of the year.

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