



The Emerging Realities in Military Coups in Africa: An Explanation

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Abstract. The need to defend common interests necessitates the presence of the military in any state, including Africa. But the assumption of executive roles by the same military, through coup d'état, was a strange phenomenon till massive enlistment of Africans for the First and Second World Wars exposed these fledgling military groups to enhanced military operations worldwide, including intervening in the governance of a state, especially as they have all that is required: the military might, and gun. This study examines the constitutional role of the military and their penchant to meddle in African politics. We also assess the rules of disengagement within the context of civil-military relations. The methodology adopted in this study is descriptive in nature through secondary method of data retrieval, newspapers, journals and magazines. This is with a view to extract the emerging patterns of coup d'état across the continent, and the approaches in handling transitions from year 2000 to January 2022. The study reveals a recurring factor - failure in leadership, mass protests in reaction to bad governance, flawed elections – as basic causes for the new wave of coup d'état across Africa. We also recommend that the administration of a state is a sole role of the civilian, and the military should be confined to their role, being security.

Keywords: Coup d'état, Military Intervention, Military Organizations

1. Introduction

Between the 1950's and 1980's, as the Cold War raged among the Superpowers, a distinguishing feature of many of the Third World countries were coups and counter coups targeted at removing elected leaders from power. These incessant coups moved scholars on military studies to introduce new

theoretical frameworks to explain military intervention. Among these scholars are Sam Huntington, Morris Janowitz, S. N. Finer, Lucian Pye, Ali Mazrui, Robin Moore, Bing West, Zhuge Liang, Carl Von Clausewitz, J. F. C. Fuller, Sun Tzu, Rafiu Adeshina. Recurring themes in their works include military history, military intervention, military strategies and war. They were also all agreed on the fact that there are both internal and external issues in the explanation of military coups and the role of a professional or praetorian soldier.

Military formation is not new to Africa; Akhaine (2021) notes that:

African societies were patterned on the band, segmentary, acephalous, and centralised formations. It reveals that the military forces in the pre-colonial African societies had different organisational forms corresponding to the social organisation of each society. There were citizens' army, professional army, and evolutionary army. The citizens' army was more or less the type in which able-bodied men were mobilized for war in times of emergency, and thereafter disbanded. The professional army existed in more centralized societies such as Benin Dahomey, Oyo, and Sokoto Caliphate among others. The evolutionary army was identified with nomadic tribes which had to constantly adapt to the objective realities of their situation (Guardian March21, 2021)

What is new is the introduction of sophisticated weapons and training into African political system. Constitutionally, armed forces are to defend the territory of any state and it is an aberration when few military officers with ambition plot coups to remove an elected president from office.

The fact that Africa, in this instance, is the focal point prompts the crucial question: Can African military be judged professional in a democratic state? Democracy in Africa has been viewed to be weak by commentators following the manner the politicians failed to respect the rule of law, paving way for the resurgence of military coups. Coup d'état means a forceful removal of an elected leader from the seat of power. Jonathan Powell writes that "coup leaders almost invariably deny their action in an effort to appear legitimate" (Mwak, 2022).

Rafiu Adeshina (1999) analyzes in percentile the coups in Africa starting from 1961 when, according to his findings, 12 percent of all independent states of the world were under military rule. As at 1966, the figure rose to 19 percent and in 1973 it was 27 percent. These assertions are corroborated by Rabiou (1999) where he claims that a look at the Third World countries in 1968 alone showed that fifty six percent of the countries so identified had experienced military rule. Also, Rabiou lists countries ranging from Brazil, Venezuela, Argentina, France, Germany, Italy and in Spain, Greece and Portugal as having experienced this phenomenon. In the Middle East, Rabiou (1999) stresses that the frequency of military coups between 1936 and 1970 increased tremendously. Coming to the Asia countries, the military struck eight times between 1932 and 1962, in South Korea in 1961, Pakistan in 1956 and 1962 (Rabiou, 1999).

Africa witnessed its first coup in Egypt in 1952, followed by military uprising and the eventual overthrow of a monarch in Sudan in 1958. Other countries in the continent followed suit. The few countries that have been exempted from this social malaise include Kenya, Botswana, Tanzania, Malawi, and South Africa. The spate of military take-overs on the African continent became so overwhelming that concerns were raised, expressed in the form of the following questions: why are there incessant military coups in Africa? What are the causes of military coups globally? Can the military serve as a third force of intervention in Africa politics? We will attempt to answer these questions in the course of this paper.

2. Theoretical Discourse On Military Intervention

There are many theories of military intervention propounded by scholars like Samuel Huntington, Morris Janowitz, Ali Mazrui, Edward Luttwak, Lucien Pye, Rafiu Adeshina to mention a few. The

theories revolve on the following variables – military-inclined factors, cultural pluralism, personal interests, corruption, socio-economic structure, contagion theory and external influence or aggression. The purpose of examining these theories of military intervention is to view the implications of a military take-over in a society and why some military personnel are inclined to making policies and implementing them whenever they take over power in developed and developing countries.

Samuel Huntington, in *Soldier and the State: The Theory And Politics Of Civil-Military Relations*, explores the relationship between the military and civilians in a democratic state on the idea of civil control over the military. To S. E. Finer, military institutions are characterized by hierarchical, centralized decision making structure where commands flow from top to the bottom. In a situation when the military become praetorian, Huntington mentions four types of coups- the guardian coup, the veto coup, the anticipatory vetoes coup and the reforming coups

Another theoretical discourse is the position of Morris Janowitz who introduces the theory of convergence into the study of military intervention by saying that the military worldwide retain certain essentials different from the civilian as a professional group in combat. Janowitz argues that in spite of the tremendously slow swiftness of change in the society the military still change without external pressure. Commenting on these views of Huntington and Janowitz, Gautam (2013:131) identifies two dichotomies: first, that the "concept of politics has drastically changed in recent years and, secondly, politics in the Third World countries has not moved in a uni-linear pattern; thereby liberal democracy is automatically accepted either by the ruling class or civil society as the only model to address political problem".

Conclusively, the search for new contributions to study of military intervention has resulted in the introduction of academic disciplines named The Military And Politics or Civil-Military Relations in the universities and military institutions.

3. Military Organisation: A Sociological and Constitutional Approach

Military organization refers to the way the armed forces are structured to use their capability to defend the nation. In other words, it refers to an organisation or a group of people recruited collectively to work together to achieve a common goal by securing the territory of the state. In all organizations there is division of responsibility under a ranking system with

different function. First we need to understand that the military role is to provide force and to support the wider policies of the state and as such it becomes clear that the civil society might have difficulty to understand the military because of the role to control and manage violence (Chuter, 2011).

From the sociological perspective, Ashley (2009: 1) writes that sociologists were and still are interested in how change in the military affects the society. This pertains to such factors as who are the individuals recruited into the military, who among them entered the military voluntarily and why, and whether the military change would affect the representativeness of the military in a particular society. Ashley stresses that those sociologists that study the military choose to show interest in issues like military recruitment, race and gender representation, combat, military families, military social organization, war and peace, and military welfare.

Adekanye (2008) hinges his argument on the multi-ethnic and segmented state by presenting the typology of military organization classified into three separate approaches. These are the Ethnic Pluralizing approach, the Ethnic Dominant approach, and the Individual nationalizing approaches.

Constitutionally, the military is placed under the command of the president of the federation, who fronts as the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces. Using Nigerian experience, as stated in 1999 constitution, chapter 41 part III (c) section 197, the armed forces are concerned with:

“i. Defending Nigeria from external aggression. ii. Maintaining its territorial integrity and securing its border from violation on land, sea or air. iii. Suppressing insurrection and acting in aid of civil authorities to restore order when called upon to do so by the president, but subject to such conditions as may be prescribed by an act of the national assembly section 198 specify the power of the president as the commander in chief of the armed forces (cited in Okereke 1997: 152).

For the power of the president over the military, section 218 of Nigerian 1999 Constitution states as follows:

i. The power of the President as Commander –in-Chief of the Armed Force of the federation shall include power to determine the operational use of the Armed Forces of the federation. ii. The powers conferred on the president by sub-section (1) of the section shall include power to appoint the Chief of Defence Staff, the Chief of Army Staff, Chief of Naval Staff, the Chief of Air Staff... iii. The President may

by direction in writing and subject to such condition as he may think fit, delegate to any member of the Armed Forces of the federation his power relating to the operational use of the armed forces of the federation(Olorunfemi, 2006: 22)

The essence of using the Nigerian constitution is to reiterate that the armed forces are bound to obey all legitimate operational directives and order of the president in both developed and developing countries. The military by their professional training and organisation is a regimented and disciplined force drawn into divisions, brigades, battalions, companies and platoons. These are the major units that form the traditional backbone of the armed forces.

For the civil-military relations, Okereke (1997) acknowledges Plato’s contribution, that military rule is an aberration because the society is conceived as a coordinated system of roles in which every member is assigned an appropriate function. The categories of functionaries are three: the artisan, the guardian and the philosopher king. The guardian is assigned the responsibility of protecting the state (which is where the soldiers fall into) and not to seize power from the elected leaders. For civilian supremacy to be achievable in any society civilians should not interfere in professional military affairs or interject political consideration into the armed forces, by promoting political loyalists or use the army for domestic political advantages. In the same manner, the military at any time must respect civilian order and control. .

4. Military Coups in Africa

Military coup or military intervention means a situation where the sovereignty of a nation is threatened directly through the removal of an incumbent government, or indirectly through the subversion of the government by force or coercive instrument (Ering 2005: 61). Scholars of military intervention have tried to develop theories to explain military interference in politics in both developing and developed countries. The theories range from contagion theory to convergence theory, socio-political and economic theories, and personal theory.

No single theory has been accepted as adequate in the explanation of military intervention. Janowitz has put forward what is now labeled the Internal Characteristics model. In this model, he suggests that one can explain military intervention in politics mainly from the angle of the “internal structure of the military, that is the social background of the officer, the skill structure and career lines, internal social cohesion and cleavages, professional and political

ideology within the military as important factors which help to explain direct military intervention in politics” (Oyediran 1984: 1)

In the counter argument, Samuel Huntington bases his argument on the contention “that the most important causes of military intervention in politics are not military but political”. In Huntington’s view, one specific manifestation of general politicization of the military is the politicization of social forces and institutions like politicized bureaucracies, politicized labour union, political institutions, and of course, politicized armed forces. All these groups tend to be involved in politicking which affect the society as a whole.

Other scholars base their argument on military intervention or take-over from the impact of

maladministration, mismanagement and corruption on the socio- economic development of the society. Either way, all the three debates or areas of arguments are meaningful to our understanding of military coups in Africa.

Adekanye (2008) uses conceptualization of multi-ethnic and segmented state in explaining military coup. He asserts that “i. A coup in a dispersed multi-ethnically segmented society is much easier to plan and execute, but once executed most difficult to succeed militarily as a state wide phenomena ii. A coup in a centralized society multi ethnic society more difficult to organize and effectual, but once effected also easy to succeed as a state phenomena” (Adekanye 2008:32)

Table 1: Coups in Africa from 1950-1999

S/N	NAME OF COUNTRY	YEAR OF COUP	CAUSES OF COUP
1.	Benin	1963, 1972, 1977.	i. Economic decline ii. To prevent civil war
2.	Burkina Faso	1966,1974,1980, 1982,1983, 1983, 1987	i. Demonstration against austerity, ii. Economic decline iii revolution introducing a leftist programme. iv. Officers' personal grievances.
3.	Gambia	1981, 1994	i. failed coup ii. decline in government legitimacy.
4.	Ghana	1966,1972,1975, 1978,1981	i. Economic decline incurred by high foreign debt ii. Ethnic and class differences iii corruption iv mal-administration v.. Military attitudinal cohesiveness.
5.	Guinea	1984	i. power struggle between Conte and members of his party.
6.	Guinea Bissau	1980	i. power struggle between Viera and members of his cabinet.
7.	Ivory coast	None	None
8.	Liberia	1980	i. Corruption ii. economic decline.
9.	Mail	1968, 1991.	i Economic decline ii. Domestic problem.
10.	Niger	1974,1995.	1974- i. political crisis in the single party system ii. Civil disorder iii. Misappropriation 1995- i. social and economic crisis ii. Conflict between the president and prime minister.
11.	Mauritania	1977, 1979,1980.	i. accusation of president Daddah’s participation in Western Sahara war ii. Economic decline.
12.	Nigeria	1966,1967,1976, 1983,1985,Nov 1990, 1993.	i. <i>Wetie</i> crisis in western Nigeria ii. Marginalization iii. Counter coup due to the first coup tagged Igbo officer organised coup ii Economic decline iv. domestic political crisis v. Officers' personal grievances vi. Corruption.
13.	Senegal	None	None
14.	Sierra Leone	1967, 1992, 1993, 1995,1997	i. armed forces dissatisfied with their low wages ii. Officers' personal grievances iii. corruption, mismanagement conspiracy leading to arrest of officers.
15.	Togo	1963, 1973	i. Officers' personal grievances, president Olympio rejected the plea of Sergeant Eyadema Etieme from the French army to join the Togolese army ii. Military attitudinal cohesiveness.
16.	Central African	1963	i. Corruption, slow economic growth, political rebels at the border.
17.	Burundi	1966,1993 abortive and 1996	i. Accusation of Ethnic cleansing due to assassination of the prime minister.
18.	Cameroon	1984	Abortive attempt.
19	Gabon	1964	Military uprising.
20.	Chad	1975	i. army mutiny, accusing president Tombalbaye of tribalism and disregard for the military.
21.	Congo	1963, 1986, 1977, 1979 and 1997	i. Congolese soldiers against their white Belgian commander at the Thysvillie military base for high pay ii. Economic decline iii. Political crisis.
22.	Equatorial Guinea	1979	i. fighting between loyalist and rebel ii accusation of genocide against Budi people ii External influence.
23	Rwanda	1979	i. Betrayal between the chief of army staff who is a friend to the president

			Kayibanda ii genocide.
24.	Zaire	1960, 1965, 1997	1960- i. division of power between the president and Parliament ii. Political instability 1965 - Popular uprising 1997- ii. Destabilization of the eastern part of the country.
25	Djibouti	None	None
26.	Ethiopia	1960, 1974	1960- i. attempted coup 1974- ideology, a non-ideological middle ranking officers abolished monarchy and adopted Marxism and Leninism.
27.	Kenya	1981	i. failed attempt.
28.	Somalia	1969, 1991	i. Economic decline ii Domestic political crisis iii. Officers' personal grievances.
29	Tanzania Zanzibar	1964	Failed coup.
30.	Uganda	1971, 1980	i. Officers' personal grievances- Idi Amin afraid that president Obote would dismiss him from the army. ii. Class action by the military.
31.	Angola	None	None
32.	Botswana	None	None
33	Lesotho	1970, 1986, 1991	1970- i. Coup was triggered by the victory of the opposition Bastoland congress party 1986 and 1990 Power struggle between General Lekhanya and the King Moshoehoe II iii. Military grievances.
34.	Malawi	None	None
35	Mozambique	1975	Failed attempt.
36	Namibia	None	None
37.	Swaziland	None	None
38.	South African	None	None
39.	Zambia	1997	Abortive attempt.
40.	Zimbabwe	None	None
41.	Cape Verde	1980,	i. Guinea Bissau coup led to the abandonment of the unification with Cape Verde.
42.	Comoro Island	1995	i. due to rotational presidency ii impoverished country.
43.	Madagascar	1972, 1975, 1992	i. political transition crisis ii popular unrest iii. abuse of power over the killing of hundred people.
44.	Mauritius	None	None
45.	Sao tome & Principe	1995	i. Military attitudinal cohesiveness due to six months delay in their salary ii. poor living condition of the soldier.
46.	Seychelles	1977,1980,1986,1995	1980 failed attempt ii external influence iii political crisis
47.	Egypt	1952	i. for political, economic and social change ii. Military attitudinal cohesiveness.
48.	Libya	1969	i. . Officers' personal grievances- al-fateh revolution carried out by 70 free unionist officers led by Col Gaddafi ii. Abolished the Libyan monarchy.
49.	Tunisia	None	None
50.	Morocco	None	None
51.	Algeria	1965	i. bad governance ii revolutionary army iii. Military attitudinal cohesiveness.
52.	Sudan	1958, 1968, 1990	i. Contagion from other regional coups, ii. Economic decline iv. Domestic political crisis v. Officers' personal grievances.
53.	Southern Sudan	None	None

Source: Column 2 and 3 was adopted from Adeshina 1999, Wikipedia. Time, Feb 2022, Africanews, Feb. 2022.

Powell and Thyne list the names of countries with the highest number of coups in Africa as follow - Sudan (17), Burundi (11), Ghana (10), Comoro (9), Burkina Faso (8), Benin (8), Guinea Bissau (8), Mali (8), Niger (8), Chad(8) and Nigeria (8) (cited in Mwai, 2021). This shows that African countries from 1950 to 1999 have conditions common for coups like poverty and poor socio-political and economic performance which reflect that ‘once a country has one coup, that’s often a forerunner of more coups’ (BBC News, October, 2021).

From the 53 states in table 1 there are different reasons advanced by the military for staging coups. Some are influenced externally and others are

sponsored by domestic bourgeoisie to topple the elected government. Dudley (1982) writes that the military will likely take over the civilian reign when the role of the political leadership falls short of expectations. Here we see the military feel that they are custodians of the constitution as the custodian theorist would want us to believe.

5. Emerging Issues and Realities in Coups in Africa from 2000- January 2022.

We in ECOWAS have experienced in just under a year, four coups d'état including attempts and it is disturbing because we felt we had put those things

coup] behind us, and now they seem to be coming back (Osinbajo, 2022).

Africa was to experience a period of calmness, up till February 2003 when the next military coup hit Guinea Bissau, Sao Tome and Principe and Central African Republic. This was closely by series of other military take-overs to the point that the African Union, ECOWAS and the international community felt deeply concerned. In the face of the assumed tremendous gains of democracy as championed by the West, what could be the issues in the reappearance of coups? Following the collapse of the bipolar system, African states gradually moved on from the military incursions into leadership, to fledgling democracies, and promises of a better future. It is a known fact that a sustained democracy is the harbinger of prosperity and positive international relations. What could then explain this relapse into the coups as sprout up across the African continent, including Sudan, Zimbabwe, Mali, Chad and Burkina Faso? Adekoya (2021) proffers “poor socio-political and economic performance”, stressing that sub-Saharan Africa experienced 80 successful coups and 108 failed coups attempts between 1956 and 2001. Adekoya points at the attitude of the leaders as a cause of incessant coups. He writes: “African people no longer believe that election can remove non-performing leader because their “political system is gamed”. Another instance is Conde of Guinea who allegedly engineered constitutional change in 2020 to enable a third term as president.

This spate of military take-over that suddenly engulfed Africa compelled ECOWAS and the African Union to outrightly declare them as illegal, and placed sanctions to compel the coup plotters to surrender power to the civilians. The Lomé Declaration of 2000 and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance of 2007 both

define aspects of unconstitutional change of government. These include: a military coup against a democratically elected government; mercenary intervention to replace a democratically elected government; replacing a democratically elected government by dissident armed groups and rebel movements; or refusal of an outgoing government to relinquish power following defeat in free, fair and regular elections.

In addition, Article 23(5) of the African Union’s African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG) prohibits “Any amendment or revision of the constitution or legal instruments, which is an infringement on the principles of democratic change of government”.(Ndubushi, 2021:1). ECOWAS reaffirms its resolute commitment to upholding the zero tolerance for acceding power through unconstitutional means as enshrined in the 2001 ECOWAS supplementary protocol on democracy and good governance. This tells us that the military in Africa in as much they are professional in their duty they are praetorian in their action and service to the state.

The question is what is the new issue in military intervention in Africa? It is observed that majority of the recent coups in Africa are centred on democratic regression that fails to provide good governance. This has led to uprisings in Egypt (2011) and Libya, Burkina Faso (2014), Zimbabwe (2017), Sudan (2019), Mali, and Niger. In Adekoya (2021), the author laments that incessant coups in Africa in the 21st century threaten a reversal of the democratization process in Africa. Another issue is that the armed forces in Africa knowing full well that they would be condemned adopt a ‘barefaced approach’. By this I mean a daredevil attitude towards the frowning international community, seeing themselves as the third force.

Table 2: Records of Coup Resurgences in Africa, 2000 TO JANUARY 2022.

S/N	NAME OF COUNTRY	MONTH OF COUP	LEADER REMOVED BY THE COUP JUNTA
1.	Guinea Bissau	Sept 2021, Dec 2008	Overthrow of Alpha Conde Lansana due to corruption and criminality of the whole system
2.	Mali	August 2020	Overthrow of Ibrahim Boubakar due to militancy and insecurity
3.	Sudan	April 2019	Overthrow of Omer al – Bashir due to inflation
4.	Zimbabwe	Nov 2017	Overthrow of Robert Mugabe due to “treacherous shenanigans” of the politician and the military interests.
5.	Burkina Faso	Sept 2014, Oct 2014 January, 2022	i) Overthrow of President Blaise Compaore due to abuse of office by trying to change the constitution to favour another term in office ii) Overthrow of Paul –Henri Sandaogo Damiba was due to the fact that the military want their interests to protected
6.	Egypt	July 2013	Mohammed Morsi due to popular protest against the president that lasted for days
7.	Central African Republic	March 2012	Francois Bozize was accused of causing hardship for the population
8.	Mali	March 2012 July 2020	i) Amadou Toumani Toure due to promotion issue in the military, Tuareg insurgency in north of Mali ii) mass protest resulting in counter coup

9.	Niger	Feb 2010	Overthrow of Mamadou Tandja was due to his change of the constitution to allow him stay beyond his legal term.
10.	Madagascar	March 2009	President Marc Ravalomanana and the opposition leader Andry Rajoelina were in disagreement that caused political crisis in the country
11.	Mauritania	June 2003, August 2008	i) Failed attempt against Colonel Maaouya Ould Sid Ahmed Taga ii Overthrow of president Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi due to dismissal of high ranking Generals for the office
12.	Togo	Feb 2005	Etienne Eyadime Deceased and the military put his son Faure Gnassingbe in power and the Africa Union condemned the move.

Source: w.w.w opsow.ton , Aljazeera news, Turkish news, Wikipedia, Dailythrust, 2022, Guardian, 2021

The new issues in Africa coup can be determined from the attitudinal approach of the military professionals that see themselves as custodian of the means of violence. The African soldiers believe that the civilians at any point in time are subordinate to them even when the constitutions stipulate their roles clearly as the defendants of the territorial integrity of the state. This attitude of the military at any time moves them to challenge the civilians basing their argument on national interest.

6. Conclusion

The ceaseless military coups that have ravaged the African continent have been attributed to many factors from disenchantment with the policies of a sitting president to sheer resolve to suppress an ethnic component of a country's population, these military coups have never expressed regard for any political leaning or form of government but have constantly swept across the continent with always one agenda in mind: to oust the incumbent government, and take over the reins of power. A look at tables 1 and 2 above shows clearly the states under military rule and also the states in the 21st century that the military force has forcefully seized power from them. Within the argument and counter argument for the results of staging coups among scholars there is a general position that the coup must be either through the internal characteristics of the military or the political interpretation of staging coups. This has raised the question of professionalism in the military in Africa.

It is the stand of this paper that military coups in their entirety are an aberration. It is more like an attitude problem which is unconstitutional. To curb this recurrent feature of Third-World politics, the following suggestions could be strongly considered in relation to anyone involved in a coup, military and civilian alike:

- Denying them the opportunity to contest election
- Stopping their retirement rights, including gratuities from being paid for committing an act against the constitution
- Subjecting them to public executions if need be.

On the other hand, the citizenry should stop applauding military incursions in politics. The worst civilian regime is better than a great military dictatorship. All that is needed is firm trust in the Constitution, and willingness to work with this document towards national interest and cohesion.

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