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Military rule in The Gambia: an interim assessment

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On 22 July 1994 the political system of the small West African state of The Gambia was subjected to an abrupt and dislocative change. On that day a group of very young junior officers from the Gambia National Army (GNA) staged a *coup d"etat* which succeeded in overthrowing the government of Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara and his People's Progressive Party (PPP) which had ruled the country since independence in 1965.[1] Before the coup Jawara had enjoyed the distinction of being the very last of that generation of African leaders who had led their countries to independence in the 1960s to remain in power.[2] Since independence the Gambian political system had exhibited a level of continuity which was unique in the region. Although control of government had remained continuously in the hands of Jawara and his party, the country had experienced an unbroken run of multiparty politics in which opposition parties competed (rather unsuccessfully) for power in a regular series of free and relatively fair elections. While the operation of Gambian democracy was certainly not without flaws, it was real enough, and President Jawara had established an international reputation as a defender of human and civil rights.[3] With the exception of a failed coup attempt by members of the paramilitary Field Force (this was before the creation of the army) in 1981, in conjunction with discounted urban elements, which had been defeated with the assistance of troops from neighbouring Senegal,[4] the Gambian political system had also been markedly stable. It was thus rather ironic that, at a time when the regional trend was away from authoritarianism and towards the restoration of multiparty civilian rule, the Gambian political system was moving in the opposite direction and experiencing military rule for the first time.

The army and the coup

The GNA is a relatively recent creation and a short examination of its brief history is highly relevant for any explanation of the new role of the army in Gambian politics. Before independence it was decided that the very small size of The Gambia, coupled with its economic backwardness and poverty, made the establishment of an army an expensive irrelevance. It was accepted that perennial Gambian fears of domination by Senegal, which, apart from the coastal strip, completely surrounds the smaller country, could best be dealt with through diplomatic rather than military means, if only because the Senegalese armed

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forces would inevitably be vastly superior to anything The Gambia could create. Internal security was left in the hands of the Gambian Police, including a paramilitary wing known as the Field Force.

Following the 1981 coup attempt the Gambian security forces were restructured. The participation of elements of the Field Force in the attempted overthrow of the Jawara government led to it being disbanded, although loyalist members were co-opted into the new structures. Another closely related outcome of the events of 1981, and armed Senegalese participation in sustaining the government, was the creation in 1982 of the Senegambian Confederation.[5] The initial development of the GNA was as a component of a confederal army which was dominated by the Senegalese. At the same time a Gambian gendarmerie was also created.

In the period of its existence the Confederation failed to resolve the tensions inherent in its unbalanced composition. The Senegalese sought to establish greater unity but this was resisted by the Gambians seeking to protect their sovereignty *vis-à-vis* their more powerful neighbours. For the Gambian government there was always a fine dividing line between the inescapable need for cooperation with Senegal and the constant fear of being totally overwhelmed by the latter, and in effect being reduced to the status of a provincial administration in a greater Senegal. In December 1989 the Senegambian Confederation was formally dissolved. The end of the Confederation meant the end of the confederal army and the withdrawal of Senegalese troops based in The Gambia. This left the GNA as an independent force for the first time. The Jawara government then turned to Nigeria to replace the Senegalese training and command functions. By the time of the 1994 coup the GNA was 800 strong but the senior commanders were seconded Nigerians. In 1992 the gendarmerie were integrated with the police and given the title of Tactical Support Group (TSG).

On 22 July 1994 soldiers from the GNA took control of key installations, including the airport and radio station, and marched on government centres in Banjul. Coincidentally a US warship, the *La Moure County*, was moored off the coast in preparation for joint training exercises with the GNA. President Jawara and several of his senior government colleagues, including Vice-President Saihou Sabally, boarded the ship, from where Jawara appealed to the rebellious troops to return to barracks. When this appeal was rejected by the rebels Jawara requested the assistance of the US marines to crush the coup. The US government turned down the request for direct intervention but allowed the *La Moure County* to transport Jawara and his ministers to safety in Senegal, from where the ousted president moved on to the UK.[6] By the evening of 22 July, Radio Gambia announced that government was in the hands of the Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council (AFPRC) led by Lt Yahya Abdul Aziz Jamus Junkung Jammeh. A subsequent announcement named the rest of the AFPRC as Lts Sana Sabally, Sadibou Hydara, Edward Singhateh and Yankuba Touray (all were later promoted to the rank of Captain).

The seizure of power was achieved without apparent bloodshed, in spite of the fact that Jammeh claimed that he and his supporters had 'encountered a lot of resistance from the TSG' and that 'we came under fire … but we never returned any fire because we did not want to shed any Gambian blood'.[7] Certainly there

were widespread reports of gunshots being heard from within the army barracks and around State House but it is difficult to reconcile AFPRC claims of significant armed resistance with the lack of any serious injury. It is not impossible that Jammeh might have exaggerated the level of resistance to put his own actions in a more heroic light: he has subsequently repeatedly stressed how he risked his life to 'save the country'. One alternative explanation which is widely believed in The Gambia is that Jammeh was protected by 'Jola magic medicine', which caused bullets to bounce off him or to turn to water in mid-air.[8]

The apparent absence of bloodshed is also explained by the fact that, unlike in 1981, Senegalese forces did not intervene to support the Jawara regime. In 1981 over 30 Senegalese soldiers had been killed in The Gambia. No doubt this weighed heavily in Senegalese decision making in 1994, but it was primarily the earlier collapse of the Senegambian Confederation which made Senegalese military intervention unlikely. Although Gambian civilians had mixed feelings about the coup it is certainly true that they were extremely relieved by the fact that the high levels of death and violence which occurred during the 1981 coup attempt were not repeated in 1994.

Although the absence of significant armed resistance to the 1994 coup-makers helps to explain why the attempt succeeded, it does not explain why the coup occurred. Explanations of military intervention are always complicated by the secrecy and confusion surrounding the actual events, and by the inevitability of participants seeking to present their actions in the most favourable light possible as part of the process of attempting to legitimise the seizure of power. This is certainly the case with the 1994 coup in The Gambia. In the days following the coup Yahya Jammeh made a number of speeches in which he sought to justify the actions of the military and to persuade both internal and external audiences that the new AFPRC regime was worthy of support, or at least should not be opposed. Predictably his reasoning was similar to that presented by many other coup leaders in other African states where military intervention had occurred in the post-independence period. Jammeh's principal line of vindication was to present the action of the military as having been necessary to protect the national interest, which had been subverted by the previous regime, whom he accused of 'rampant outrageous corruption' and 'random plundering of the country's assets to benefit a few people'.[9] In its place he promised 'a new era of freedom, progress, democracy and accountability'. At this stage Jammeh adopted a fairly conciliatory attitude towards the ousted president, saying that 'we all know that we owe it to him that the name of The Gambia has reached the international level and we respect him' and that 'we have nothing against him … from time to time we will need to consult him'. The problem at that stage, according to Jammeh, was that 'the people who were behind him misled him, were corrupt, did whatever they wanted to do because he was too lenient'. Jammeh even emphasised that his harsh criticism of members of the Jawara government was not universally applicable when he said that 'there are some good guys in the PPP … we are not painting all members of the PPP government as bad or corrupt'. Shortly afterwards Jammeh appeared to underline this perception of the mixed qualities of the ousted government when he appointed two ex-PPP ministers to his cabinet: Bakary Dabo became Minister of Finance and Fafa M'bai Minister of

Justice and Attorney General. Subsequently the attitude of Jammeh and the AFPRC towards the ousted government took on a much harsher and less nuanced tone. In October 1994 Dabo was sacked from the cabinet and shortly afterwards fled the country and in March 1995 M'bai was also sacked and subsequently arrested and charged with corruption.[10]

While censure of the previous regime, whether in its initial moderated form or in the later more strident and all-encompassing version, and the desire of the AFPRC to rescue the country were presented by Jammeh as the justifications for military intervention, experience elsewhere in Africa suggests that it is unwise to accept such altruistic and selfless accounts of the motivations lying behind the coup phenomenon uncritically. Several intra-army factors also need to be taken into consideration. Evidence suggests that the appointment by Jawara of Nigerian officers to the senior command positions within the GNA caused considerable resentment among Gambian soldiers and that this resentment provided a significant motivation for the coup. In retrospect these appointments appear less than politically astute. In the 1980s the presence of Senegalese commanders caused resentment but the size of the Senegalese presence in The Gambia (around 300 troops before the break-up of the Confederation), coupled with substantial military might just over the border, was enough to deter political ambitions among Gambian troops. The much smaller Nigerian presence combined maximum irritation with minimum deterrence. Discontent within the GNA went beyond the question of the role of the Nigerians. In 1991 and 1992 there had been serious army demonstrations against the late payment of special allowances for Gambian troops who had been involved in Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) operations in Liberia.[11] Dissatisfaction with living conditions in the barracks and the quality of army food had been frequently voiced.

In addition to the general grievances of the military Jammeh also had his own personal grievances against Jawara. In 1989 Jammeh had served as Commander of the Presidential Guard and was known to be resentful of the fact that he had been transferred from this position after around four months. Just 24 hours before the coup, Jammeh had been one of a group of junior officers who had been disarmed and sent back to barracks after arriving at Yundum airport as part of a welcoming group when Jawara returned from his annual leave. From statements made by Jammeh in the aftermath of the coup it was clear that he felt bitterly humiliated by this experience.

In many ways the most obvious possible motivation for the coup was the simple desire on the part of the plotters to seize power in order to gain access to the considerable gains which accrue from controlling the state, and the 'rent-seeking' opportunities that such control includes.[12] Personal self-enrichment by African military rulers has been an unfortunately common occurrence.

Two common explanations of military intervention in other African states would appear not to be applicable in the Gambian case. In the past many coups in Africa have exhibited a distinctive ethnic dimension. This feature would not appear to be present in July 1994 in The Gambia. Ethnicity has never played a significant role in Gambian politics and in this case the coup leaders, and subsequently the membership of the AFPRC had a varied ethnic background.

Jammeh was a Jola, Sabally was Fula, Hydara was a 'Moor' (of Mauritanian ancestry), Touray was Mandinka, and Singhateh was a Christian Mandinka with an English mother. Nor can the coup be explained by reference to problems caused by economic structural adjustment. The latter took place in The Gambia in the mid-1980s and was conducted in such a way as to avoid a political backlash.[13]

Post-coup intra-military conflicts

With the establishment of military rule relationships within the army became a key factor in Gambian political life, albeit a difficult one to examine given the wall of secrecy surrounding the inner workings of the military elite. The experience of military rule in other parts of Africa had clearly demonstrated the potential for the development of factional and personal conflicts within the military to prejudice the prospects for stable and effective government under a military regime. Developments since the coup suggest a highly conflictual set of relationships within the army and, more particularly, within the AFPRC.

At the time of the coup most of the senior Gambian officers within the GNA were placed in detention along with senior figures from the police force. Although some of the detainees were subsequently released a number remained in jail two years later without any form of charge being brought against them. Within a couple of days of the coup two military members of Jammeh's first cabinet were also arrested. Captains Mamat Omar Cham and Sherriff Samsudeen Sarr, who had been appointed Minister of Information and Tourism and Minister of Trade, Industry and Employment at the time of the coup were sacked and imprisoned after Jammeh became suspicious that they might be sympathetic to deposed President Jawara.

Evidence of more serious conflicts within the military came in November 1994 and January 1995 in the form of what were presented as two separate attempts at a counter-coup. In neither case is it absolutely clear that a real attempt to oust Jammeh occurred. Both cases were surrounded by assertion and counter-assertion and the evidence is inconclusive and contradictory. Broadly speaking there are three alternative versions of what happened in these two cases. First, there is the 'official' version, propounded by Jammeh, that in both November and January there were actual attempts by armed factions within the army violently to overthrow his government. A second interpretation is that the attempts never took place but that Jammeh believed that plots were underway to oust him and acted in a pre-emptive manner to keep himself in power. The other interpretation of events is that Jammeh simply used the spurious pretext of an attempted coup to eliminate possible future rivals within the army to ensure his own dominance. Publicly the 'official' version of events is accepted in The Gambia but privately many Gambians believe one or other of the alternative explanations.

On 14 November 1994 there was large scale fighting in the military barracks at Yundum and Bakau (local residents testify to hearing a great deal of shooting). According to the government a coup attempt was launched under the leadership of Lieutenants Bashiru Barrow, Abdoulie Dot Faal and Gibril Saye. Barrow, then Commander First Infantry Battalion, was widely believed to have

been a conspirator in the July coup who decided at the last moment not to participate at that time. In November the purported coup leaders, along with around 20 other soldiers, were killed. Rather strangely, in the light of the extensive gunfire, it was reported that there were no casualties among troops loyal to Jammeh. Subsequently the family of Gibril Saye testified that he had been visiting his parents' compound after the fighting had taken place.[14] Although AFPRC member Sadibou Hydara dismissed Saye's family as 'inconsistent, foolish and irresponsible' and denied that summary executions had occurred their version of events raises questions over what actually took place.[15]

Whichever version of events is correct the existence of severe tensions amongst the junior officers within the GNA seems apparent: the 'coup makers' were of the same lieutenant rank as the members of the AFPRC, although the latter were subsequently promoted to the rank of Captain. Following these events the AFPRC claimed that the rebels were linked to senior figures in the PPP. It was also claimed that they had planned to destroy a substantial part of Banjul by blowing up the Shell fuel storage tanks in Half Die in the port area of the city:[16] quite what purpose such action would have served remains a mystery.

The events of January 1995 indicated an even more serious level of conflict within the military because on this occasion the antagonisms exposed were right at the heart of the AFPRC itself. On 27 January it was claimed that a further attempt at a counter-coup had taken place and had included an assassination attempt on Jammeh. The leaders of this coup 'attempt' were said to be Captains Sana Sabally and Sadibou Hydara who were key figures in the AFPRC: Sabally was Vice Chairman and Hydara was Minister of the Interior; respectively they had ranked second and third in the AFPRC. It was claimed that as part of the coup attempt the two had gone to Jammeh's office to kill him but had been overpowered and arrested. Subsequently there was an orchestrated campaign to denigrate the two, particularly Sabally, who was accused of launching a 'campaign of terror' against the civilian population.[17] Both were accused of being motivated by personal greed and the desire to maintain military rule indefinitely. In June 1995 Hydara died in jail, supposedly of complications arising from high blood pressure, although his family denied any knowledge of this particular medical condition. Sabally was later court martialled and in December 1995 was sentenced to nine years imprisonment (a comparatively lenient sentence in the circumstances). All the court martials arising from the coup attempts were held in secret, even their location being strictly confidential. Because of this there is no reliable way of knowing what took place at the court martial, thus precluding the possibility of an examination of any evidence relating to the events.

Following the removal of Sabally and Hydara from the AFPRC Captain Edward Singhateh was promoted to Vice Chairman and second in command within the regime. In order to restore the membership of the AFPRC to its full complement of five, two new members were included. Captain Lamin Bajo, a Mandinka who had previously served as Commissioner in Western Division and as Commander of the Presidential Guard, became Minister of the Interior. Captain Ebou Jallow, a Fula who had previously served as the Commander of the GNA Marines, became AFPRC Spokesman (Singhateh's old position). Harmony within the AFPRC

was relatively short-lived. In October 1995 Ebou Jallow fled the country amid accusations that he had stolen $3 million of government money and was plotting with members of the outlawed PPP. Jallow denied the theft and claimed he had been forced into exile by Jammeh's tyranny and corruption.[18] According to the official (ie government) version of events, Jallow had simply gone to the Central Bank and ordered them to transfer the $3 million from the AFPRC Special Development Account to a Swiss bank account in Geneva. It was claimed that this had been done on 4 September but that nobody had noticed until over a month later. If this version of events is accurate it says remarkably little in favour of AFPRC accounting procedures when a young soldier can, without any further checks, simply order the Central Bank to hand over what is by Gambian standards an enormous amount of money. In December 1995 two further senior figures, but not AFPRC members, fled the country. These were Captain Pa Sanneh, head of the Gambian contingent in ECOMOG, and Major David Coker, third in command in the GNA.[19]

Whether the true picture be of Chairman Jammeh beset by disloyalty and plotting against him from within the GNA and the AFPRC, or of Jammeh ruthlessly purging real and/or imagined military opponents in an attempt to consolidate his own power, the prospects for unity and stability within the Gambian military appear less than promising. The consequences for the whole Gambian political system of intra-military conflict and factionalism could be severe. In an attempt to consolidate his support in the army more generally Jammeh has increased national spending on perks and conditions for the troops. Shortly after the coup the rehabilitation of barracks became a spending priority for the AFPRC. In February 1996 Jammeh announced a new package of measures designed to appeal to his soldiers.[20] Around Dalasi (D)8 million (£1 = D15 approx.) was to be spent on improving accommodation for soldiers and their families in the Yundum barracks. Cheap loans were made available to the troops under the Gambia Army Revolving Loan Scheme. Some members of the army were enrolled in the new University Extension Programme.[21] It was also stated that, in the future, members of the security forces would receive special treatment over the allocation of land for residential purposes. In December 1995 Jammeh announced his intention of establishing a Gambia Navy.

Military authoritarianism and civil society

Although military regimes do not have a monopoly on authoritarian rule it is clear that in The Gambia there has been a significant erosion of civil and human rights following the onset of military rule. Although the AFPRC have not been notably more abusive of human rights than most other military regimes in Africa, their period of rule stands in marked contrast to the relatively liberal and tolerant style of government in the Jawara era. Gambians are less free than they were.

A clear and important example of the development of authoritarianism, and the decline of liberty, has been the relationship between the government and the press. In spite of the immense problems posed by mass illiteracy, poverty and the absence of modern printing technology, the Gambian press has a long and

honourable tradition.[22] In the past many of the independent newspapers resulted from the labours of a small number of Gambian journalists working hard, in some cases single-handedly, to bring out their newspapers on a fairly regular basis. Many of these newspapers were of a poor technical quality, often no more than a few cyclostyled pages stapled together by hand, but they made an important contribution to free political debate in the country. In the years leading up to the coup there had been a significant expansion of the press, particularly with the establishment in May 1992 of the *Daily Observer* as the first independent newspaper to publish on a daily basis. During the Jawara period the government attitude to the press was one of laissez-faire: while little was done to encourage the independent press equally little was done to impede its operation.

From the very day of the coup it was evident that a more hostile government attitude to the press was inevitable. In a fascinating account of his attempt to discover what was taking place on the day, the *Daily Observer* journalist Alieu Badara N'Jie reported how soldiers screamed at him 'you are from *The Observer* but today we will be observing you' before marching him off at gunpoint and detaining him for several hours.[23] In spite of the obvious danger, several newspapers adopted a critical stance towards the AFPRC in the following days. Most prominent among the critical press was *Foroyaa* (meaning 'freedom') the paper of the small but influential radical party the, People's Democratic Organization for Independence and Socialism (PDOIS), hitherto among the harshest critics of the Jawara government. In a demonstration of impressive political integrity the PDOIS leaders rejected the offer of cabinet posts in the new military government and openly criticised the AFPRC. In August the editors of *Foroyaa*, Halifa Sallah and Sidia Jatta, were arrested and charged under Decree No 4 with publishing illegally, on the grounds that their newspaper was associated with a banned political party. Other newspapers rallied around those arrested: the independent bi-weekly newspaper *The Point* carried a petition entitled 'Stop Military Terror: Free Halifa and Sidia'.[24] The trial was held in a civilian court. Although the verdict of 'guilty' was inevitable since the military decree had been, quite deliberately, flouted by the accused, it was obvious that the magistrate was sympathetically disposed towards the defendants. In the event the two were placed on probation and required to pay D1000 costs. In November 1994 *Foroyaa* was relaunched as a non-party publication with the PDIOS logo missing from the masthead.

In late October 1994 intimidation of the press was stepped up. The Liberian managing director and editor of *The Observer*, Kenneth Best, was deported.[25] Although the AFPRC claimed that this was the result of some unspecified, technical infringement of immigration requirements (Best had lived and worked in The Gambia for several years with no problem), this event proved to be no more than an opening shot in a new campaign against journalists. Over the next few weeks several journalists were beaten up by the military. In the most serious case Abdullah Savage of *The Observer* was hospitalised after a particularly violent attack by soldiers who kicked, punched and stamped on him as well as stealing his tape recorder and cassettes. Other journalists, including Ebrima Sankareh of *The Point*, were arrested and held in detention for various periods

without any formal charges being brought against them. At the same time leading figures in the AFPRC were issuing statements and making speeches which were extremely hostile to the press. When Ebrima Ceesay wrote an article in *The Observer* which mildly queried the rectitude of AFPRC members awarding themselves promotions, he was rounded on by Captain Sadibou Hydara (who himself later died in jail following the January 1995 'coup') and accused of being a 'liar', a 'propaganda tool' of the previous government, and of 'misinforming the people like the former Jawara government'.[26]

In late March 1995 a new round of arrests of journalists began after *The Point*, carried a report of a riot at the jail where most of the regime's political prisoners were being detained. Three journalists from the paper, Pap Saine, Alieu Badara and Brima Ernest, were taken into custody and charged with 'publication of false news with intent to cause fear and alarm the public'. A fourth journalist from the same newspaper was also arrested at the same time on unconnected charges. The legislation under which Saine and his colleagues were charged had been introduced by the colonial government during the Second World War but had remained completely unused for over 50 years. The arrests were criticised by the Gambia Press Union (GPU) who expressed 'grave concern over this unnecessary harassment of journalists in pursuit of their profession', with similar criticisms being voiced by the West African Journalists Association (WAJA). Following a six month trial the three journalists were acquitted by the court but the next day Saine's passport was seized and Brima Ernest (a Sierra Leonean) was forced to flee the country to avoid deportation to Sierra Leone. At the same time another Sierra Leonean journalist working for the *Daily Observer*, Cherno Ojuku-Ceesay, was deported to his home country where he was arrested on arrival. Since that time arrests and general harassment of journalists have continued on a regular basis.

In March 1996 a new orchestrated campaign against the independent press began which involved several different tactics employed simultaneously. The regime ordered the Government Printing Department to stop printing independent newspapers. For many years some small-scale newspaper publishers lacking their own equipment had been able to have their papers printed by the government printers at commercial rates. This arrangement had benefited both parties, making newspaper production possible without vast expenditure on equipment and providing a government department with a useful source of revenue. The main victim of this change of policy was Baboucarr Gaye, the publisher and editor of the weekly *New Citizen*, who had used the Government Printing Department for a number of years. Both *The Point* and the *Daily Observer* possess their own printing equipment and were unaffected by the change.

At the same time the AFPRC issued two new decrees, 70 and 71, which increased the bond required from any independent newspaper publisher from D1000 to D100 000. This arbitrary hundred-fold increase was clearly designed to discourage the press. A couple of days later the editors of the *Daily Observer*, *The Point*, *New Citizen* and *Foroyaa* were taken to court and charged with a technical breach of an obscure provision in the Newspaper Act (the state subsequently dropped its case when the charges failed to stand up in court). At

the same time the advertising manager of the *Daily Observer*, Lorraine Forster, was detained and charged with distributing a 'seditious publication' relating to Ebou Jallow's defection. In May it was announced that Forster's trial would be held in camera because it 'was going to raise very sensitive issues that touch on the buoyancy of the state'.[27] At the same time as Forster's arrest a young student journalist Baboucarr Sankanu was detained after he filed a report with the BBC *Focus on Africa* programme and a Nigerian journalist working in The Gambia, Chikeluba Kenechuku, was arrested and beaten up.[28]

The independent Gambian press has clearly led a precarious existence since the July 1994 coup. During this period it has walked a tightrope in trying to avoid total subservience to the regime on the one side and an even more repressive clamp-down on the other. It has faced enormous obstacles ranging from official 'legal' challenges (from which, it must be said, it has received some protection from the judiciary) and unofficial pressure from random acts of violence against journalists by military personnel. Rather than risk international condemnation with an outright ban on the independent press the regime clearly hoped to frighten the journalists into self-censorship. In addition the Gambian press has been harmed by the deportation of Liberian and Sierra Leonean journalists working in the country. In spite of these severe difficulties the independent Gambian press has continued to operate as a critical voice even though its critical comment has perforce become increasingly subtle, subdued and coded. An example of the latter tactic has been the reporting of the worldwide criticisms of the Abacha military regime in Nigeria in such a way as to present obvious but unstated parallels with the situation in The Gambia. Another tactic has been to remind the regime constantly of its grand rhetorical statements on open government, democracy, accountability, transparency and free discussion, to provide cover for criticisms of regime behaviour. Aside from the independent press the government controlled *Gambia Daily* is totally supportive of the regime while the less regular *Upfront* (sub-titled *The Voice of the AFPRC*) resembles a Yahya Jammeh fanzine.

The professional association of Gambian journalists, the GPU, has attempted to maintain its autonomy and independence. Other Gambian groups and associations have likewise tried to act as a constraint on military authoritarianism. Gambian trade unions have never played a key role in political life:[29] no group of workers has the political clout of, for example, copper miners in Zambia or oil workers in Nigeria. Shortly after the coup Pa Modou Faal, the Secretary-General of the Gambia Workers' Confederation (GWC), which is the most important group in the organised labour sector, issued a statement which welcomed the bloodless nature of the coup but which warned the AFPRC not to repeat the mistakes of other military regimes in the region.[30] In early October Faal published an article[31] expressing concern over the arbitrary sackings taking place in the public sector and concluding that 'people just don't want military rule … play your provisional role and hand over.'[31] Two weeks later[32] Faal again attacked the government, this time over the question of arbitrary arrests, complaining that 'people are still being held without any attempt to let us know what their crimes are, let alone allow even their relatives to visit them'.[32] At the same time he bitterly criticised the AFPRC decision (subsequently changed) to

stay in power for four years (the issue of the timetable of military rule is discussed in detail below). Shortly afterwards a statement by the Secretary General of the Gambia Workers Union (GWU), Amadou Araba Bah, appeared to indicate disagreement in the labour movement when he offered backing to the AFPRC and supported the four year period.[33] Further developments suggested that Bah was isolated in the labour movement. The Deputy Secretary General of the GWU, Mahtar Ceesay, stated that Bah's statement had been issued without any consultation with the union executive and did not represent the views of anybody else in the GWU.[34] Further to this Modou Ceesay, Secretary General of the Gambia Labour Union (GLU), expressed the opposition of his union to Bah's pro-AFPRC statements. Both Mahtar Ceesay and Modou Ceesay made much of the fact that Bah had been a nominated (by Jawara) MP in the previous regime. Mahtar Ceesay described him as a 'praise-singer of Jawara',[35] while Modou Ceesay called him, not without some justification, a 'chameleon'.[36] Since then the union movement has continued to campaign for fair treatment of sacked workers and over the transition programme.

The Gambia Medical and Dental Association (GMDA) has been the most unequivocal in its condemnation of military rule of any of The Gambia's professional associations. In an open letter to the AFPRC its current president, Dr S A L Ceesay and two past presidents unreservedly condemned the coup and called, perhaps unrealistically, for an immediate return to civilian rule.[37] The medics also criticised the human rights abuses of the regime, particularly the denial of medical care to detainees, in no uncertain terms.

Gambian lawyers, both individually and through the Gambia Bar Association (GBA), have continued to act as a constraint on military authoritarianism. Like their medical colleagues they strongly opposed the seizure of power by the military. In a statement signed by its President and Vice-President, Surahata Semega-Janneh and Ousainou Darboe, the GBA said that it 'unequivocally condemns the usurpation of the reign of power by unconstitutional means by the military' and went on to attack the 'spate of unlawful arrests and detentions, wrongful dismissals, and unwarranted interference with the freedom of expression'.[38] Subsequently the judiciary continued to push for as rapid a demilitarisation as possible and worked, where possible, to defend the legal rights of those detained by the regime. Initially the AFPRC seemed reluctant to interfere directly with the administration of justice but by late 1995 the situation appeared to be changing. Following the enforced 'retirement' of Chief Justice Braimah Omosun the AFPRC appointed a Sierra Leonean lawyer, Omar Alghali, to the post of Chief Justice. At his swearing in ceremony Alghali was told by Jammeh that 'you have an enormous task ahead of you because the administration of justice is not satisfactory'.[39] A few weeks later four Gambian lawyers attached to the Supreme Court were 'retired prematurely' by the AFPRC.[40] Even more ominously Ousainou Darboe, the GBA Vice-President and a prominent defence lawyer of those accused by the regime, was placed in detention without charge. Simultaneously the regime introduced a new piece of legislation, Decree 57, which was backdated to the date of the coup, and gave the Minister of the Interior unlimited power to order the arrest and detention without charge of any person 'in the interest of the security, peace, and stability of The Gambia'.[41] Under this

decree applications for a writ of *habeas corpus* were not permitted, as had previously been the case in the Gambian legal system.

The above developments exacerbated the climate of fear which had been promoted in June 1995 by the establishment, under Decree 45, of a new secret police organisation, the National Intelligence Agency (NIA), and, in August, by the reintroduction, under Decree 52, of the death penalty. While, in truth, the latter move did not lack a level of popular support, the establishment of the NIA, with virtually unlimited powers of surveillance and arrest was seen as a major change in the Gambian way of life. The overtly political character of the NIA was clear from the wording of the decree, which stipulated that the new body was designed to 'obtain and provide the Government with information relating to actions or intentions of persons which may be a threat to state security' and to 'take adequate precautions to protect the state against actions which may undermine the Government'.[42] Since its establishment the NIA has significantly changed the climate of political discussion in the country, which in the past had been remarkably free and open. The death penalty had been abolished as recently as April 1993, largely as a result of the personal initiative of Dawda Jawara in the face of considerable popular support for capital punishment in cases of homicide.[43] In justifying the need for the reintroduction of the death penalty the AFPRC cited 'a phenomenal rise in … *treasonable offences*'.[44] The view that 'treasonable offences' have increased reflects a sense of insecurity on the part of the government leaders and, quite possibly, an expanded view of what might constitute treason.

Since the coup there have been widespread arrests of perceived political opponents of the regime. Although many of those arrested have been released following a period in detention (and, in many cases, rearrested on a number of subsequent occasions), the number in prison at any given time has been on the increase. In October 1995 large numbers of supposed PPP sympathisers were detained following claims that they had been planning an anti-government demonstration. Rather disturbingly there have been increasing allegations regarding the use of torture on political detainees.

During its time in office AFPRC rule has become increasingly authoritarian, although the levels of oppression have not reached those set by some of Africa's more notorious military dictatorships. This authoritarianism has not gone unchallenged by Gambian civil society although the ability of the latter to act as a constraint on regime behaviour has been limited by an increasing willingness on the part of the AFPRC to curtail the extent of civil liberties which existed for three decades under the Jawara regime. In a period when the political situation in most African states has been characterised by a resurgent civil society, with the latter on the offensive against authoritarian regimes in a quest for democratisation, the reverse appears to have been taking place in The Gambia, where civil society is very much on the defensive.

Government and administration

Since the coup government decision making has been located firmly within the five-man AFPRC. Since the fall from power of Sana Sabally and Sadibou Hydara

it has been increasingly focussed on Yahya Jammeh himself, who has personally dominated the AFPRC: his second in command Edward Singhateh is not regarded as having an independent power base and has retained his position (until now) by means of personal loyalty to Jammeh. The Council rules through the mechanism of military decrees, of which there have been over 70 so far and which cannot be challenged by the Gambian courts. During the Jawara period provincial administration lay in the hands of the Divisional Commissioners operating in each of The Gambia's five Divisions, which represent the administrative demarcation of the up-river rural areas away from the Bajul/Serekunda urban coastal areas. Under civilian rule Divisional Commissioners were civil servants appointed by the president. The AFPRC has retained the basic structure of provincial administration but has replaced the civilian administrators with military personnel in an attempt to establish tight control of the rural areas. The 'traditional' rural administration of chiefs and village headmen (*seyfolu* and *alkalo*) has been retained. Gambian traditional leaders have not enjoyed any significant political autonomy in the post-independence era and the AFPRC have followed the practice of the Jawara regime in suspending and sacking chiefs and headmen they disapprove of.[45]

As with many other military regimes in Africa a majority of appointments to ministerial rank within the cabinet have gone to civilians. Members of the AFPRC have monopolised sensitive security-related cabinet portfolios such as Defence, Local Government and the Interior but Jammeh's cabinets have been predominantly composed of civilians. In the immediate aftermath of the coup (following the arrest or escape into exile of many of Jawara's ministers) most cabinet positions were filled by promoting permanent secretaries to ministerial rank, while deputy permanent secretaries became permanent secretaries. Since then cabinet membership has been subject to rapid turnover and change with Jammeh appointing and sacking ministers at will on a frequent basis. While a majority of cabinet appointments have gone to technocrats, a small number have gone to political figures from the Jawara regime. As noted earlier, senior cabinet positions went to PPP heavyweights Bakary Dabo and Fafa M'bai, although both were subsequently sacked and M'bai was arrested, while Dabo fled the country. In July 1996 Mrs Nyimasata Sanneh-Bojang, formerly a significant member of Jawara's government and a PPP MP, was sacked from her position as Minister of Health, Social Welfare and Women's Affairs and was arrested and accused of misappropriation of $100 000 and other offences.[46] Mrs Sanneh-Bojang had been appointed in November 1995 when she had replaced another woman minister, Mrs Coumba Ceesay-Marenah, who had been sacked for 'sabotage and foot dragging'.[47] Ceesay-Marenah had originally been appointed to replace Mrs Fatoumatta Tambajang who had close kinship links with Sana Sabally and who was sacked following the January 1995 'coup'. Yahya Jammeh has shown a marked propensity to appoint women to ministerial posts and there have usually been about four or five women in the cabinet, which is considerably more than in the previous administration. While it is possible that this may represent a belief in the desirability of womens' advancement on Jammeh's part, a more likely explanation would be that he sees women as less of a potential challenge.

For both men and women cabinet ministers their hold on office has often proved to be ephemeral. One of the main features of cabinet membership under military rule is that it has been subject to frequent abrupt change, with dismissal usually being followed by a torrent of abuse and accusation (and, frequently, arrest) from Jammeh. A similar pattern can be seen in senior civil service appointments. Indeed, few positions in public life in The Gambia are secure from instant arbitrary dismissal. In March 1996 Pa Modou N'jie, the Principal of the Muslim High School, was sacked after some of his students were involved in a minor riot in Serekunda. The previous month the committee of the Gambia Football Association (GFA) were dismissed by the AFPRC following a rather disappointing performance by the national soccer team (the Scorpions) in a tournament in Mauritania.

Much more disturbing to many Gambians was the unexplained murder of Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs Ousman Koro Ceesay in June 1995. Ceesay had been in office since March and had been given the unique status of 'honorary member of the AFPRC'. His battered body was discovered in a burnt-out car near the village of Jambur, which is situated close to the Yundum barracks. While official investigations into the death have produced nothing (six months after the murder Ceesay's family denied government claims that an investigation was actually taking place), many Gambians believe that Koro Ceesay was murdered personally by a member of the AFPRC after he discovered dubious financial dealings by members of the regime. Although the case of Koro Ceesay is extreme it is symptomatic of the way in which government and civil service appointments have been made and unmade. The pattern has been one of arbitrary and frequent change dependent upon the whim of the Chairman of the AFPRC. With the legislative branch of government (previously the elected House of Representatives) being replaced by the issuing of unchallengeable military decrees the executive branch has been reduced to a confused and insecure arena in which unpredictability dominates the participants.

Legitimising the present: deligitimising the past

Having seized power Jammeh and his AFPRC faced an immediate problem of trying to establish some form of legitimacy. While this problem is faced by all incoming military regimes in Africa it was particularly acute in The Gambia, where the population had experienced nearly 30 years of unbroken, relatively democratic civilian rule and took a certain pride in being one of the few states in the West African region to have avoided military government. One of the main ways in which the new regime attempted to legitimise itself was to deligitimise the previous regime, retrospectively by establishing a series of commissions of inquiry to investigate government malpractice and corruption in the Jawara era. Deligitimisation of the Jawara period was not the sole purpose of the commissions but it was an important one.

Before examining the findings of these commissions several factors related to their functioning need to be outlined. Unsurprisingly, individuals summoned to appear before the commissions have been those perceived as being members of, or having close connections with, the ousted regime. Although rumours (some

well substantiated) of corruption within the current membership of the AFPRC circulate widely in Banjul and further afield, it would be out of the question for these rumours to be investigated in the current period. Many of those being investigated by the commissions are presently in exile and unable to appear in person to answer the charges made against them directly. This applies in particular to senior figures in the ousted regime such as Saihou Sabally, Bakary Darbo, Lamin Kitty Jabang and, of course, Jawara himself. In spite of the above qualifications and having witnessed a number of the sessions of the proceedings of several of the commissions (and I have no reason to believe that these were exceptional), I would conclude that they were conducted in a calm manner with a strong emphasis on the due process of law. Sittings are held in public with no restrictions (other than limits of space) on who can attend. I did not witness any soldiers present at any session. The proceedings have been presided over by civilian lawyers with defence lawyers present, including several recruited from Sierra Leone and Ghana,[48] and were calm and non-intimidatory in style. Sessions are conducted through the medium of the English language with translation into indigenous African languages when required: because most cases involved elites who tend to be fluent in English little translation was actually required. There were many cases of individuals attempting to shift responsibility to others, for example ministers and civil servants blaming each other for dubious decisions. Given the traditionally rather chaotic nature of the Gambian bureaucracy and the poor state of much record keeping, the presentation of evidence based on departmental files was often rather confused and inconclusive.

In spite of the above reservations and qualifications it would have to be concluded that the commissions did unearth considerable evidence of corruption and maladministration during the Jawara period. Most of the malpractice involved various combinations of prominent PPP politicians and ministers, senior civil servants and major figures in the Gambian business community; a grouping which in the past had been commonly referred to as the 'Banjul Mafia'.[49] Among the methods used for personal enrichment were:

(1) non-payment of taxes and duties by members of the regime and their associates over long periods and involving large sums;
(2) non-repayment of government loans;
(3) serious irregularities over the allocation of valuable plots of land in the greater Banjul area, including multiple allocations to important individuals and their families and a selective failure to enforce regulations on land use;
(4) government employees working for regime members in a personal capacity;
(5) serious overpayment of travel expenses for government members on overseas trips;
(6) the widespread existence of 'ghost workers' and 'ghost pensioners',[50]
(7) straightforward theft of state funds.

Although in some cases it is difficult to assess the culpability of particular individuals it is apparent that there was a high incidence of personal enrichment by elites at the expense of the public purse during the Jawara period. The effect of the evidence produced by the commissions of inquiry has retrospectively reduced the perceptions of legitimacy accorded to the Jawara regime: in common

parlance 'they chop all the money'. Clearly the mechanisms of government accountability were deficient in the pre-coup period. However, under military rule mechanisms of accountability have all but vanished.

Foreign and economic policy

Since the end of the colonial period Gambian foreign policy has exhibited two major goals. First has been the desire to maintain independent sovereign statehood for the territory within the context of a perceived potential threat of assimilation by the relatively powerful (by Gambian standards) neighbouring state of Senegal. Second has been the attempt to manipulate the external environment by using The Gambia's status as an independent state in the global community to gain funding from foreign sources to finance 'development projects' and, in reality in some cases, personal enrichment by government elites. In terms of operating this creative usage of dependency, President Jawara was extremely adept and enjoyed considerable success. Considerable funding was obtained from Western states, especially during the Cold War, as a result of Jawara's identification of The Gambia as a pro-Western state. His anti-Soviet stance also produced considerable development aid from the PRC. In addition finance from the more conservative Gulf states was obtained through the projection of the Islamic identity of The Gambia despite the maintenance of a secular state.

The change from relatively democratic civilian rule to military rule posed obstacles to the operation of this policy especially in the context of the post-cold war world. Western powers reacted negatively to the coup and finance from this source was dramatically reduced. The EU halved its financial assistance programme while there were also massive reductions in aid from the USA and the UK, although some funding through NGOs did continue. In September 1994 Japan completely stopped its aid to The Gambia. The AFPRC regime faced the problem of finding alternative sources of external funding following reductions from its traditional 'development partners'. In November 1994 full diplomatic relations with Libya were restored after 15 years of hostile relations (according to a well placed informant this 'cost' the Libyans £10 million). Financial aid from the Gulf states was little affected by the coup and both Kuwait and Saudi Arabia announced that they would continue to assist The Gambia. Probably the most significant development in external relations since the coup has been the establishment of close ties with Taiwan. In the middle of 1995 full diplomatic ties were formally established and early in 1996 the Taiwanese opened an embassy in The Gambia for the first time. Because of its current difficulties in its relationship with the PRC Taiwan appears extremely anxious to expand its international diplomatic support network: it recently also established diplomatic relations with Senegal. (Taiwan has no significant economic interests in the region.) The development of friendly relations with Taiwan inevitably led to a corresponding deterioration of The Gambia's long-term ties with the PRC, with the latter withdrawing all its assistance. The new relationship with Taiwan has proved to be financially rewarding for The Gambia (and, according to unofficial reports, for individual members of the AFPRC). In an agreement signed in August

1995 by the two governments the Taiwanese made a loan of US $35 million available to the AFPRC and also agreed to assist in rice production projects, to provide security training programmes and to donate 5 000 sets of military uniforms and boots to the GNA. The latter amounts to more than six uniforms and pairs of boots per soldier! Since 1995 relations with Nigeria have become more cordial, with The Gambia standing in almost complete isolation in voting against the suspension of Nigeria from the Commonwealth at the Auckland summit in November 1995.

In terms of domestic economic policy the AFPRC has announced no significant change and members of the regime have constantly pledged their support for 'free-market capitalism'.The major negative economic impact of military rule has been on the tourist industry which, after groundnut growing, is the most important sector in the Gambian economy and a major earner of foreign exchange.[51] Following the November 1994 'attempted coup' the British government advised travellers that The Gambia was an 'unsafe' destination and, as a result of this, most of the major British tour operators withdrew from the country. The Danish and Swedish governments offered similar advice. Although the official advice was changed in March 1995, tourist numbers for 1994–95 fell to around one third of 1993–94 numbers causing the closure of many of the hotels and mass unemployment among hotel staff and workers in tourist-associated occupations (woodcarvers, taxi drivers, shop workers, guides, tailors, etc). For the 1995–96 season some of the main foreign operators decided to recommence operations in The Gambia but some decided to stay out until the political situation became clearer: early figures for 1995–96 suggested a partial recovery of the tourist industry but arrivals were still considerably below pre-coup numbers.

In the light of the economic problems facing The Gambia the decision taken in December 1995 by the AFPRC to build a huge arch in Banjul, Arch 22, in commemoration of the coup which brought them to power (at a cost of $1 million or $6 million depending on which source one believes) must be regarded as, at least, economically irresponsible (some might say obscene). Jammeh suggested, totally ingenuously, that the arch would be a major tourist attraction. The idea that European tourists deciding on the destination for their 'winter sun' holidays would be positively influenced by the prospects of viewing an arch built to celebrate a military coup is as improbable a notion as one could imagine.

Return to democracy?

Since the coup the major public issue in The Gambia has been the question of a return to democratic civilian rule as promised from the beginning by the AFPRC. Much public debate has been focused on the timing of the restoration. At a press conference in Senegal in late September 1994 Jammeh was quoted as saying that military rule would be retained for 'four years' but, following an outcry, he later claimed that he had been misquoted and that he had really said 'for years'. In late October the AFPRC announced its Programme of Rectification and Transition to Democratic Constitutional Rule, which outlined a four year transition period ending in 1998. This proposal was heavily criticised both domestically and

internationally. Within The Gambia the civil society groups discussed earlier united to condemn the period as too long. Internationally the proposed period of military rule was denounced by Britain, the USA, the EU, the Commonwealth, the Africa Commission for Human and People's Rights and many others. In response to this universally negative reaction Jammeh then announced in late November that he was establishing a National Consultative Committee (NCC) to examine the timetable and indicated that he was willing to reconsider the question. The NCC consisted of 23 members appointed by the AFPRC: it was chaired by Dr Lenrie Peters, the renowned Gambian writer and medical doctor, and included representatives from the trade unions, religious groups, women's groups, professional associations and leading traditional chiefs. In December 1994 the NCC began a five week period of national consultation which involved holding meetings in all parts of the country. For the most part this process ran smoothly, although in Upper River Division the Divisional Commissioner, Captain Musa Baldeh, expelled the NCC representatives because he thought they were being openly critical of the existing four year proposal. In late January 1995 the NCC reported to the AFPRC and recommended that the transition period be reduced to two years from the time of the coup because this had majority support within the country and in the international community.[52] In February Jammeh accepted the reduced timetable but rejected the further suggestion that an interim civilian government be established in the intervening period. Although many Gambians viewed the two year period as overlong, the solution appears to have enjoyed popular support.

The arrangements for a return to democratic rule continued but they did so very slowly. In April 1995 a Constitutional Review Commission (CRC) was established under the chairmanship of a Ghanaian lawyer, Justice Gilbert Mensah Quaye, and began open public hearings. The Canadian government provided the CRC with computer technology (additional funding and technical assistance for the transition has been supplied by the British and US governments and foreign NGOs, although Jammeh has persistently claimed that more funding is needed[53]). An important subtext in much of the public debate was the question of a legal minimum age for presidential candidates. This issue was of interest because many believed that Jammeh might wish to stand in a presidential election, and those who advocated a minimum age of 40 clearly had this in mind. In the event a minimum age of 30 for presidential candidates was adopted! The CRC submitted its recommendations to the AFPRC in December 1995 but none its findings was made public until March 1996. In the intervening period the AFPRC had given itself a free hand to accept, amend or reject the CRC recommendations without any public consultation. The following month the AFPRC announced that the elections were postponed indefinitely and then in May announced that they would take place in September (presidential) and December (legislative).

As the details of the new constitution and the electoral arrangements were slowly announced in a piecemeal fashion many aspects of both caused concern among the Gambian population. Many features appeared to have been designed to make participation as difficult as possible. The deposit required from parliamentary candidates had been raised from D200 to D2 500 and for presidential

candidates from D2 500 to D7 500. Furthermore, to 'save' one's deposit it was now necessary to gain at least 40% of the vote: this raised the bizarre prospect of even some winning candidates losing their deposits in tightly contested constituencies with more than two candidates. Taken in combination these measures meant that to participate in an election on a national basis would cost a political party well over D100 000: by Gambian standards this is a huge sum of money which could preclude all but the wealthiest from participating. The new demarcation of constituency boundaries appeared to be blatantly rigged: for example, while Fuladu East contained an estimated 40 000 voters, five constituencies in the Fonis (Jammeh's home area) had around 14 000 voters between them. One very odd omission from the constitution was any reference to a limitation on the number of terms that a president could legally serve. In all the prior public debate over the constitution, perhaps the only issue on which there had been virtually total consensus was that in the future no individual should be allowed to remain in office for more than two terms, as Jawara had done under the 1970 constitution which contained no such limitations. Many Gambian commentators also expressed grave doubts over the impartiality of the Provisional Independent Electoral Commission established by the AFPRC.

In addition to the continuing problems and delays concerned with the timing of the election and the details of constitutional electoral arrangements, further doubts concerning the attitudes of the AFPRC leaders towards the meaning and content of democracy were created by various public statements made by the young soldiers. As far back as September 1994 Jammeh launched a generalised attack on the role of politicians who he said 'could not be allowed to interfere and divide the people, thereby creating confusion'.[54] On many occasions AFPRC members asserted that former PPP 'militants' could not be permitted to form a future government. Subsequently these attacks on politicians from the pre-coup period were extended to include the former opposition parties and their MPS, who were described by Yankuba Touray as 'opportunists who were never interested in serving their constituents'.[55] Jammeh also asserted that, if the military were not satisfied with any future government, then 'the soldiers would return to rescue the population'.[56] These sorts of statements suggest that, at very least, the AFPRC expected to have an unchallenged veto over which individuals and groups might contest an election and that, whatever the outcome of the election, the military reserved the right to reintervene if they felt disposed to do so. The arrogance of these views is difficult to square with any notions of freely contested elections which determine the composition of the national government on the basis of the expressed choices of the electorate. On numerous occasions statements by Jammeh and his supporters continued to cast doubt on whether even controlled elections would take place. In February 1996 Jammeh argued that 'it is up to the people to say whether or not they want elections'.[57] this was in spite of the fact that he had agreed over a year earlier to hold the elections and that considerable preparation had already been undertaken. In casting doubt on the desirability of elections Jammeh was constantly supported by the July 22 Movement. The latter purported to be an 'apolitical development NGO' but in practice it represented a group of civilian supporters of Jammeh and the AFPRC whose members had benefited from military rule. In many ways it can be seen

as a Gambian equivelant of the notorious Association for a Better Nigeria (ABN).[58] The view of the July 22 Movement was encapsulated at one of its meetings by the statement that 'the aim of conducting an election is to choose the right person but since we've already had such a person as the Head of State … we are no longer interested in elections that would create conflicts'.[59] In a published statement the Movement suggested that 'the main yardstick to use at this juncture to allow Jammeh to remain in power in the absence of elections which I am sure he would have won if he was interested is to form a massive combined, conclusive, consolidated force of unflinching and unsurreptious {sic} solidarity to say no to elections for a period of five years'.[60]

Conclusion: soldiers without a difference

Since coming to power the members of the AFPRC have announced with endless monotony that they are 'soldiers with a difference'. No public statement or speech is complete without several repetitions of this phrase. Given the disrepute into which military rule has fallen in Africa it is hardly surprising that Yahya Jammeh and his colleagues would seek to distance themselves from other military regimes in the eyes of their fellow Gambians. The days when military rule was thought by some to be conducive to political stability and economic development are long gone. To what extent does AFPRC rule in The Gambia replicate patterns observable in other African states which have experienced military rule?

Military rule in Africa is not a uniform phenomenon. Military regimes do not follow a single trajectory which can be easily demarcated from civilian rule, but exhibit significant differences from state to state and, in some cases, from one regime to another within the same state.[61] Nevertheless, it has been possible to observe widespread common features of military rule even though these are not replicated exactly in all cases. In a significant number of ways the rule of the AFPRC reflects broader commonalities of military rule.

With very few exceptions military government in Africa has not been totally militarised and civilians have continued to play a prominent role, but not a dominant one. In the Gambian case this can be observed in two ways. First, the regime has made considerable use of the technocratic and administrative skills of civilians within government: most cabinet positions have been held by civilians with only the key security-related posts being reserved exclusively for soldiers. Although there has been a rapid turnover of civilian cabinet members, those sacked tend to have been replaced by other civilians. Second, in common with other African military rulers, the AFPRC have tried to encourage and construct support groups among the civilian population as a way of buttressing their rule and making it appear less overtly militaristic. In The Gambia the July 22 Movement represents a typical example of this essentially clientelist phenomenon. In return for state patronage the Movement gives the impression of a popular public (civilian) support base for the regime which camouflages the latter's reliance on coercive power.

In common with most other African military regimes, AFPRC rule in The Gambia demonstrates the promotion of the corporate interests of the army in a

context of evident factionalism within the military elite. As shown earlier Jammeh has attempted to strengthen his support within the armed forces through the distribution of a variety of material benefits to the troops but, at the same time, has also dealt ruthlessly with opponents, real or imaginery, within the officer corps. Both tactics can be seen as parts of a two-pronged attempt to reduce the prospects of a successful counter-coup such as has occurred in many other African states. The greatest threat to any military regime comes from within the military and Jammeh's use of both reward and fear (carrot and stick) reproduces a common pattern among African military rulers, recognising both a shared set of military interests and a division of interests within the military elite.

Despite the occasional use of radical rhetoric, military regimes in Africa have a record of economic conservatism and the AFPRC is no exception to this fairly general pattern. Although Jammeh expressed his desire for 'The Gambia to be counted among the first three most modern countries in the world'[62] (the country is currently placed in 162 nd place, out of 174, in the UNDP's Human Development Index) the regime has not developed any macroeconomic policy aimed at improving Gambian economic performance or ensuring a more egalitarian distribution of wealth and resources within the country. Members of the regime have routinely expressed their support for 'capitalist free enterprise' but have not elaborated on the relevance of this doctrine for the large majority of Gambians who are engaged in small-scale peasant agriculture. Although the hostility of most Western donors to military rule has resulted in a downturn in external funding from those sources, the response of the regime has been to seek to secure new external patrons (principally Libya and Taiwan) rather than question the fundamental structures of Gambian dependency. In all fairness one would have to recognise that the weakness of the Gambian economy places severe restrictions on the range of options available to any government but increased military spending and the building of triumphal arches seem a less than appropriate response to the problems of economic underdevelopment. As indicated earlier the one decisive impact of the introduction of military rule was to bring about a sharp downturn in the tourist industry which was the sole successful example of economic diversification achieved in recent decades.

An all too familiar feature of military rule in Africa which can clearly be seen in The Gambia is the intensification and expansion of the authoritarian aspects of the state. At an official level this has included severe and repeated attacks on the independent press and other critical segments of Gambian civil society, the establishment of the NIA and the re-introduction of the death penalty (to deal with 'treasonable offences'), and the widespread use of torture and imprisonment without trial of suspected regime opponents. Legislation rests solely on the promulgation of military decrees which cannot be challenged by the courts. At an unofficial level the new authoritarianism is seen in the growth of arbitrary violence and petty predation inflicted on civilians by members of the armed forces. Specific regional cases of military rule increase fears of escalating authoritarianism. The disastrous experiences of rule by very young soldiers in Liberia (under Samuel Doe) and Sierra Leone (under Valentine Strasser) are too close to home for The Gambia.

While it would be unduly pessimistic to predict a repeat of the Liberian and

Sierra Leonean experiences in The Gambia the conclusion of this examination of military rule there is that, rather than being 'soldiers with a difference', the AFPRC in The Gambia is, to a large extent, replicating the pattern of military rule observable in the rest of Africa. It remains to be seen whether or not The Gambia has moved from being the most stable and democratic state in West Africa to an extended era of instability and oppressive rule.

Notes

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[1] For early accounts of the coup see John A Wiseman & Elizabeth Vidler, 'The July 1994 coup d'etat in The Gambia: the end of an era', *Round Table*, no 333, 1995, pp 53–65; Ebrima Sall, 'Gambie: le Coup d'Etat de juillet 1994' *L'Afrique Politique*, 1995, pp 181–192; Peter da Costa, 'The Gambia: out with the old', *Africa Report*, Vol 40, No 1, 1995, pp 48–51; Zaya Yeebo, *State of Fear in Paradise: The Military Coup in The Gambia and its Implications for Democracy*, London; Africa Research and Information Bureau, 1995.

[2] Jawara had acquired this status following the death of President Felix Houphouet-Boigny of Côte d'Ivoire in December 1993 and the peaceful ousting through the ballot box of President Hastings Kamuzu Banda of Malawi in May 1994.

[3] For a statement of Jawara's position see Alhaji Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara, 'The Commonwealth and Human rights', *The Round Table*, No 321, 1992, pp 37–42.

[4] For the fullest account of the 1981 coup attempt, see Arnold Hughes, 'The attempted coup d'etat of 27 July 1981', in Hughes (ed), *The Gambia: Studies in Society and Politics*, Birmingham University African Studies Series, 3, 1991, pp 92–106. In his introduction to the volume Hughes shows considerable prescience when he concludes by asking 'in seeking to protect itself from further subversion by the creation, for the first time, of a regular army, has the Gambian government created the instrument of its future overthrow?' (p 5). The view that the creation of the army was, at the time, designed precisely to prevent what it ironically eventually produced was shared by other writers. Tijan M Sallah, for example, wrote that 'the decision to create an army for the first time in The Gambia's history can only be interpreted as an attempt to adopt measures to curb any future breach of domestic tranquility'. See Sallah, 'Economics and politics in The Gambia', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol 28, No 4, 1990, p 639.

[5] For a discussion of the Senegambian Confederation and its eventual dissolution, see Arnold Hughes, 'The collapse of the Senegambian Confederation', *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, Vol 30, No 2, July 1992, pp 200–222.

[6] It is likely that the US marines could have defeated the coup with little difficulty. However, events in The Gambia occurred just as US troops were invading Haiti to oust the military regime there. It was clearly thought in Washington that The Gambia was too marginal to US interests to justify concurrent armed intervention.

[7] Public statement by Jammeh, reported in the *Daily Observer* (Banjul), 25 July 1994.

[8] These explanations were reported to the author by many informants in The Gambia in April 1995.

[9] *Daily Observer*, 25 July 1994.

[10] Dabo was subsequently accused of participation in the October 1994 coup attempt. *Gambia Weekly* (Banjul), 18 November 1994. M'bai was accused of corrupt practices during his tenure of office in both the Jawara and the AFPRC governments. *Daily Observer*, 24 April 1995.

[11] It is possible to speculate on a possible connection between experience in the ECOMOG force in Liberia and subsequent coups in both Sierra Leone and The Gambia. Max A Sesay makes the point that both the coup in Sierra Leone, led by Valentine Strasser in April 1992, and the subsequent Gambian coup involved soldiers who shared this experience. See Sesay, 'Civil war and collective intervention in Liberia,' *Review of African Political Economy*, No 67, 1996, pp 35–52.

[12] See John Mukum Mbaku, 'Military coups as rent-seeking behaviour', *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, Vol 22, Winter 1994, pp 241–284.

[13] For details see Steven Radelet, 'Reform without revolt: the political economy of economic reform in The Gambia', *World Development*, Vol 20, No 8, 1992, pp 1087–1099.

[14] *The Point* (Banjul), 28 November 1994.

[15] *Daily Observer*, 7 December 1994.
[16] *Gambia Weekly*, 18 November 1994.
[17] *New Citizen* (Banjul), 3 February 1995.
[18] For a discussion of Ebou Jallow's accusations see *Focus on Africa*, Vol 7, No 1, January–March 1996, p 18. Jallow also released an open letter 'To the Gambian Press and the international media' in which he gave his version of the affair and provided details of a personal account allegedly held by Jammeh in a Swiss bank, including the account number. (I am grateful to Arnold Hughes for supplying me with a copy of this, and other, documents.)
[19] *Daily Observer*, 19 December 1995.
[20] *Gambia Daily* (Banjul), 10 February 1996.
[21] Jammeh originally announced that a university would be established in The Gambia for the first time. This scheme was abandoned and replaced with a more modest arrangement whereby St Mary's University in Halifax, Canada, agreed to run a university extension programme in The Gambia. When the programme began in November 1995 many places remained unfilled because of a lack of government funding. See *Daily Observer*, 14 November 1995.
[22] For a useful account of the Gambian press see Adewale Maja-Pearce, 'The press in West Africa', *Index on Censorship*, No 6, June/July 1990, pp 44–91.
[23] Alieu Badara N'Jie, 'A journalist's personal experience of the army takeover', *Daily Observer*, 25 July 1994, p 15.
[24] *The Point*, 19 September 1994. The events surrounding the *Foroyaa* trial were confirmed by the author in interviews in The Gambia in April 1995.
[25] For details of the deportation see the published interview with Kenneth Best in *Africa Report*, January–February 1995, pp 8–10.
[26] *Weekend Observer* (Banjul), 30 December 1994–1 January 1995.
[27] *Daily Observer*, 14 May 1996.
[28] *Index on Censorship*, No 3, 1996, p 107.
[29] For accounts of Gambian trade unions, see David Perfect, 'Organized labour and politics in The Gambia: 1960–85', *Labour, Capital and Society*, Vol 19, No 2, 1986, pp 168–199; and Arnold Hughes & David Perfect, 'Trade unionism in The Gambia', *African Affairs*, Vol 88, No 353, 1989, pp 549–572.
[30] *Daily Observer*, 28 July 1994.
[31] *Daily Observer*, 12 October 1994.
[32] *Daily Observer*, 27 October 1994.
[33] *The Point*, 31 October 1994.
[34] *The Point*, 7 November 1994.
[35] *Ibid.*
[36] *The Point*, 3 November 1994.
[37] Published in *The Point*, 10 November 1994.
[38] *The Point*, 3 November 1994.
[39] *Gambia Daily*, 20 October 1995.
[40] *Daily Observer*, 9 November 1995.
[41] Decree 57, text published in *Ibid.*
[42] *Weekend Observer*, 14–16 July 1995.
[43] Since independence 87 death sentences had been imposed by the courts but Jawara had used his presidential powers of clemency in all but one case.
[44] *Weekend Observer*, 18–20 August 1995 (emphasis added).
[45] In January 1966, for example, the AFPRC sacked three *seyfolu*, compulsorily retired three more and reinstated one who had previously been suspended by the PPP government.
[46] *West Africa* (London), No 4110, 29 July–4 August 1996, p 1172.
[47] *Gambia Daily*, 11 October, 1995.
[48] The recruitment of significant numbers of lawyers from other West African states had previously taken place during the trials of those accused of participating in the 1981 attempted coup.
[49] The term 'Banjul Mafia' appears to have been borrowed and adapted from Nigeria, where frequent reference is made to the supposed 'Kaduna Mafia'. For a discussion of the 'Banjul Mafia' see John A Wiseman, 'The role of the House of Representatives in the Gambian political system', in Hughes *The Gambia*, pp 80–91.
[50] Payment to 'ghost workers' and 'ghost pensioners' is a common form of bureaucratic corruption in a number of African states. Under this contrivance corrupt officials divert considerable sums of money to themselves by pretending to make official payments of wages and pensions to people who do not exist or who have previously died. Evidence produced before the Commission in Banjul in October 1995 indicated that senior civil servants had received huge sums of money through 'ghost payments of pensioners' while more junior civil servants had received smaller amounts.
[51] For discussions of the Gambian tourist industry see, Naomi Brown, 'Beachboys as culture brokers in Bakau Town, The Gambia', *Community Development Journal*, Vol 27, No 4, 1992, pp 361–370; Peter U C Dieke,

'Tourism in The Gambia: some issues in development policy', *World Development*, Vol 21, No 2, 1993, pp 277–289; and Dieke, 'The political economy of tourism in The Gambia', *Review of African Political Economy*, No 62, 1994, pp 611–627.

[52] A full description of the activities of NCC, its recommendations and Jammeh's response can be found in *Report of the National Consultative Committee on the Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council's Programme of Rectification and Timetable for the Transition to Democratic Constitutional Rule in The Gambia*, Banjul, 1995. The report indicates a clear majority in favour of a longer period of military rule in Western Division, which is Jammeh's home area.

[53] Without tight controls there is a real danger that foreign assistance for elections can simply become a new avenue for personal accumulation by state elites; in practice a new type of 'rent'.

[54] *Daily Observer*, 29 September 1994.

[55] *Gambia Daily*, 5 January 1996.

[56] *Gambia Daily*, 29 March 1996.

[57] *Gambia Daily*, 5 February 1996.

[58] For discussions of the ABN, see Ajayi Ola Rotimi & Julius O Ihonvbere, 'Democratic impasse: remilitarisation in Nigeria', *Third World Quarterly*, Vol 15, No 4, 1994, pp 669–689; Peter M Lewis, 'Endgame in Nigeria? The politics of a failed democratic transition', *African Affairs*, Vol 93, No 372, 1994; Emeka Nwokedi, 'Nigeria's democratic transition: explaining the annulled 1993 presidential election', *Round Table*, No 330, 1994; and Ian Campbell, *Nigeria's Continuing Crisis: The Quest for a Democratic Order*, London: Research Institute for the Study of Conflict and Terrorism, 1995.

[59] *Gambia Daily*, 12 April 1996.

[60] *The Point*, 29 April 1996.

[61] For example, the Rawlings regime in Ghana has been quite different from that of Acheampong, just as in Nigeria the Abacha regime is quite unlike that of Obasanjo.

[62] *Gambia Daily*, 2 February 1996.