

AN ANALYSIS OF THE GAMBIA COUP OF 1994

by

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ABSTRACT

On July 22nd 1994, a bloodless military coup d'état took place in The Gambia. The coup ended the democratic rule of President Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara and his People's Progressive Party (PPP), which had been in power since independence in 1965. At a period when much of the rest of the African continent was returning to democracy, the Gambian coup represented a significant reversal, and posed a big puzzle. If one of Africa's oldest democracies could fail, then what were the prospects for the newer democracies on the rest of the continent? The objective of this thesis is to explain why the Gambian coup took place. The explanation for the coup rests on two factors: (1) the legitimacy failure of the civilian regime, which was the primary cause of the coup, and (2) feelings of deprivation by the Gambian army, which were a secondary cause for the coup. The thesis ends by exploring the significance of the Gambian coup and its implications for The Gambia and for democracy in Africa.

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*To my wife, Jojo Loum
And my mother, Haja Kumba Sey*

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ACRONYMS

AFPRC	Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council
AMRC	Assets Management and Recovery Corporation
CDP	Christian Democratic Party
CFA	Communauté Financière Africaine
ECOMOG	Economic Community of West African States Cease-Fire Monitoring Group
ERP	Economic Recovery Program
GCDB	Gambia Commercial and Development Bank
GCU	Gambia Co-operative Union
GFF	Gambia Field Force
GMC	Gambia Muslim Congress
GNA	Gambia National Army
GNG	Gambia National Gendarmerie
GPP	Gambia Peoples Party
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NCP	National Convention Party
OAU	Organization of African Unity
PDOIS	Peoples Democratic Organization for Independence and Socialism
PPS	Protectorate Peoples Society
PSD	Program for Sustainable Development
RWAFF	Royal West Africa Frontier Force

SAP	Structural Adjustment Program
TSG	Tactical Support Group
UMOA	Union Monétaire Pour l'Afrique de l'Ouest
UP	United Party

INTRODUCTION

Military coups in Africa have been an ever present threat since the winds of change swept across the continent in the late 1950s. The earlier coups took place in the period following independence and included General Ibrahim Aboud's overthrow of the civilian Sudanese government in November 1958 and the 1966 Ghana coup in which Kwame Nkrumah was toppled. In the decade of the 1970s, the pervasiveness of military coups in Africa was such that over half of the countries on the continent were under the tutelage of military dictatorships (McGowan and Johnson, 1984: 633). In the late 1980s, some African countries began to make transitions from dictatorial to democratic forms of governance, prompting scholars such as Samuel Huntington to talk about democracy's "third wave" of expansion in world history (the first two waves took place in the 1820s and 1940s).¹ In the case of Africa, this third wave of democracy (often referred to as Africa's 'second independence') began in 1989 and was prompted by the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of "communism" in the former Soviet Union. The various democratic transitions which occurred in Africa in this period were viewed with a great sense of optimism by Africanist democrats (Schraeder, 1994: 69). However, during the 1990s, in West Africa alone, we have witnessed the annulment of a democratic election in Nigeria and the overthrow of the democratically elected government of Sierra Leone. These events illustrate two of the most noticeable realities of contemporary African

¹ For a fuller discussion of the "third wave" concept, see Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

politics: (1) African democratic institutions are not yet strongly consolidated and (2) military interventions continue to be a major impediment to the democratic process in Africa (Onwumechili, 1998: XI).

On July 22, 1994, a bloodless coup d'état took place in The Gambia². The coup was perpetrated by a few junior army officers calling themselves the Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council (AFPRC). The coup leaders were Lieutenants Yahya Jammeh, Sana Sabally, Edward Singateh and Sadibou Hydara. The coup was met with very little resistance and, as a consequence, it swiftly succeeded.

One of the smallest countries in West Africa, with a population of roughly 1.4 million people, Gambia was internationally renowned before the coup for its domestic tranquillity, respect for human rights and political pluralism. During the previous three decades, at a time when most of the African continent was mired in bloody coups and flagrant human rights violations, Gambia was considered a success case for liberal democracy in Africa (Saine, 1996: 97). The Gambia's reputation for adherence to the principles of respect for human rights and political tolerance was highly commended by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the United Nations (UN). As a result of its good record of respect for human rights, it was rewarded by the OAU, which decided in 1986 to make the Gambian capital, Banjul, the location of the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights.³ Gambia was further rewarded in 1989 with the

² According to David P. Gamble, Gambia became a separate entity of Britain in 1888 and became known as "The Colony of the Gambia". When Gambia attained independence the Colony and Protectorate areas were to be considered united without distinctions between them. Hence, The Gambia, with a capital T, was to be the official name of independent Gambia (1988: XII).

³ For more on democracy and human rights in The Gambia, see Claude E. Welch, "The Organization of

establishment in Banjul of the African Center for Democracy and Human Rights Studies, intended then as a human rights think tank. For similar reasons the African Society for International and Comparative Law moved their headquarters to Banjul. In furtherance of these objectives of respect for and protection of human rights, the Gambian government also ratified a number of international human rights treaties, often without any reservation. For instance, Gambia was one of the few African countries which ratified the Second Optional Protocol on Civil and Political Rights abolishing the death penalty. Gambian President Sir Dawda Jawara made the Commonwealth a platform for the promotion of human rights issues in Africa.⁴

In addition to its good human rights record, The Gambia was in many ways a shining example of multiparty democracy. All the institutions and traits of a liberal democracy were in place. There was a multiparty system which permitted several political parties to contest elections; there was a parliament in which political debates were conducted; the judiciary was independent and the press was free to criticize the government at will. There was also a written constitution with an entrenched Bill of Rights. The state generally operated within the context of the rule of law.

Notwithstanding all of these positive attributes, a few semi-educated, ill-armed, junior lieutenants were able to overthrow the democratically elected government of The Gambia, without any significant resistance. The objective of this thesis is to try to explain

African Unity and the promotion of human rights", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Volume 29, No 4, (1991), pp.535-555.

⁴ See also Alhaji Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara, "The Commonwealth and human rights", *The Round Table*, (1992), No 321, pp.37-42. This article is based on a speech given by president Jawara on the joint platform of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative and the Commonwealth Trust.

this puzzle.

The thesis argues that performance and legitimacy failures of the Gambian civilian government were the primary cause of the coup. It was easy for a group of poorly armed and inexperienced junior lieutenants to end abruptly nearly thirty years of democratic rule in The Gambia because when they struck there was nobody left to support the system. However, a secondary but also relatively important cause of the coup can be attributed to the internal dynamics of the military. A feeling of deprivation among the Gambian army officers, who were headed by Nigerians, generated a lot of resentment, thereby prompting them to intervene when the opportunity arose.

Chapter 1 of the thesis presents an analysis of the two main schools of thought on military coups. These look at the external and internal dynamics of the military respectively. The legitimacy failure of civilian governments, compounded by corruption, bad economic performance, the inability to handle a political crisis and illegal and unconstitutional acts, have contributed to military intervention according to the external school. The internal school, on the other hand, suggests that factors internal to the military such as its nationalistic attributes, threats to the military's corporate interests as an institution, and intra-military rivalries (which lead to ethnic rivalry and personal fear) are the main reasons for coups.⁵

Chapter 2 introduces The Gambia in its pre-and post-independence politics. It

⁵ There is a broad literature explaining coups in Africa, however, most students of the military agree on these general perspectives. See Samuel Decalo, *Coups and Army Rule in Africa: Studies in Military* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976; Chuka Onwumechili, *African Democratization and Military Coups*, Conn: Praeger, 1998; Pat McGowan and Thomas H. Johnson, "Military Coups d'état and Underdevelopment: A Quantitative Historical Analysis", *Journal of Modern African Studies* Vol 22, No.4,

describes the major actors involved and discusses their interrelationships. It attributes the ability of the ruling party to stay in power for almost thirty years to a number of factors: the President's ethnic background, his leadership style, the weakness of opposition parties, Gambian culture and a favorable standing within the international community.

Chapter 3 contributes to the primary objective of the thesis by presenting an analysis of the political context for the 1994 coup. It discusses the conditions which made it possible for the army to grab power. It argues that the coup succeeded primarily because of the legitimacy failure of the Gambian civilian government.

In chapter 4 it will be argued that a lack of a proper mission for the army, compounded by feelings of deprivation among army officers and their resentment of senior Nigerian officers who controlled the army, was the secondary reason for the coup. In addition, it will be argued that turbulence in the West African sub-region, such as the civil war in Liberia, the coming to power of junior officers in Sierra Leone, and the Gambian government's poor relations with the government of Senegal, all encouraged the junior soldiers to orchestrate a coup.

Chapter 5 looks at the significance of the Gambian coup. What are the lessons of the coup for The Gambia, for Africa and for democracy? In The Gambia's case, the legitimacy failure of the civilian regime was the primary cause of the coup. Therefore, one of the lessons to be learned is that democratic institutions ought to be strengthened to prevent that legitimacy failure. However, a secondary but also important reason for the coup was a lack of proper mission for the Gambian army, compounded by a feeling of

deprivation by army officers. As long as the army of a small country like The Gambia does not have a proper mission, and feelings of deprivation are allowed to develop, then opportunistic individuals like the junior soldiers who took over in The Gambia will try to do what they did. Therefore, it is imperative for democratic governments in Africa to play the democratic and military game properly to discourage military coups.

CHAPTER I

EXPLANATIONS FOR MILITARY COUPS

Numerous explanations exist for military coups (Huntington, 1968; Welch, 1970; Nordlinger, 1977; Decalo, 1990). Some scholars have suggested that these explanations can be broken down into two categories, namely, the external and internal schools. In *Coups And Army Rule In Africa* (1990), Samuel Decalo describes how these two schools of thought have been developed to explain the causes of military coups in Africa. The external thesis postulates that "social, economic, and political problems and weaknesses are the magnet that pulls the armed forces into a power and legitimacy vacuum" (Decalo, 1990: 3). The second interpretation of military coups, as described by Samuel Decalo, is centered on factors internal to the military. This internal school contends that the reasons why the army stages coups are to be found inside the army itself. These reasons include the nationalistic attributes of the military, ethnic rivalry within the military, the impact of budgetary or other constraints on the military's corporate interest, and the personal interests of the officer corps (Decalo, 1990: 3). This chapter will examine these two schools of thought.

The External School

It is the contention of the external school of thought that the propensity of soldiers to stage coups is explained by the performance failures of civilian governments (Nordlinger, 1977: 65). Scholar Samuel Huntington, who shares this view, has suggested

that “the most important causes of military intervention in politics are not military but political and reflect not the social and organizational characteristics of the military establishment but the political and institutional structure of society” (Huntington, 1968: 194). Furthermore, the external school suggests that coups are a manifestation of how much legitimacy a civilian regime enjoys in the eyes of the people. The supposition is that military intervention is inconceivable in situations where civilian regimes enjoy widespread popular legitimacy. However, anytime there is public disenchantment with the civilian regime, be it due to economic failure, corruption, nepotism, ethnicity or other political malfeasance inimical to the state, the possibility of coups will arise. In such situations, when soldiers intervene, they perceive themselves as saviours whose actions are solely motivated by a desire to rescue the state from the ineptitude or malfeasance of the civilians they overthrow (Nordlinger, 1977: 64-68; Wiking, 1983: 19).

Major performance failures by civilian governments have invariably been the cause of military intervention, according to the external school theory on coups. What are the causes of civilian performance failure? The literature cites many, such as: (1) corruption, (2) a down-swing in economic performance, (3) an inability to handle a political crisis, or (4) illegal and unconstitutional ways and means of getting things done (Nordlinger, 1977: 85). The rest of this section will examine each of these causes in turn.

Corruption by civilian regimes has been identified by the external school as a major reason for military coups. In the case of most African countries, the illiteracy rate is high, and the ruling civilian elites have often exploited this problem to full advantage to personally enrich themselves and their cronies. Such government-centered corruption

creates wide economic disparity between the rulers and the ruled. This disparity, in turn, provokes a reaction from the military, which can use public disaffection to its advantage and stage a coup (Babatope, 1981: 3). Under such circumstances, soldiers can claim that their coup is inspired by “the goal of political regeneration” and “guaranteeing adherence to high standards of public honesty”(Nordlinger, 1977: 87).

An analysis of several African coups in the 1960s and 1970 supports the contention that civilian corruption is a causal factor in military takeovers. In each of these coups, army officers defended their intervention on the grounds that the civilian regimes they overthrew had become inept, self-serving and corrupt. Whenever these faults are present, civilians are seen by the military as self-serving individuals who are more concerned with the trappings of a luxuriant life style than with the well-being of the society (Babatope, 1981: 2-8). This facilitates a decision by the military to take over through unconstitutional means. Anytime a civilian government is seen to be engaged in or contemplating an unconstitutional act, it encourages the military to also act unconstitutionally. Moreover, the loss of legitimacy factor almost always makes it easy for the military. Incumbent civilians who are deemed corrupt are often disrespected, which often generates resentment from the populace, which in turn provides an advantageous avenue for the military to implement illegal acts (Nordlinger, 1977: 86-88).

A number of writers on the military, such as Janowitz and Luckham, have pointed to its supposed “Puritanism” and “ascetic standards.” In their view, the “puritanical” nature of the military is an embodiment of how much dedication the military has to the

state as well as a reflection of the high standards the military sets for itself (Janowitz, 1964:64; Luckham 1971: 282-283). This Puritanism then helps explain its overthrow of corrupt regimes. Luckham is of the view, for instance, that it was the "puritan" ethic of the military which motivated the Majors to stage the first coup in Nigeria (Luckham, 1971: 282-283). However, Nordlinger has a pessimistic view of the "puritan" ethic. It is his belief that while corruption does crop up from time to time, as was the case under the civilian regime that the Majors overthrew in the first Nigerian coup of 1966, it was not so egregious as to warrant the coup (Nordlinger, 1977: 87). Nordlinger's argument is echoed by Gutteridge, who notes that:

The charge of corruption and misappropriation is frequently made to justify military coups in Africa as elsewhere. The question is not whether it exists... it is clearly in many states rampant--but whether it is of any great importance in promoting such events. But reading the reports of the various commissions of inquiry into these matters in Ghana [after the 1966 coup], one is left with an impression that, though the revelations are scandalous, this is almost a ritual exercise of justifying in another and conventionally accepted way an act which to most Ghanaians did not need any elaborate apologia (Gutteridge, 1969: 150-151).

As this last quotation suggests, accusations of corruption against the civilian government have a tendency to win coup makers much needed support for their actions, but not to root out corruption. In fact, several coup makers have engaged in the most despicable acts of corruption in Africa. The most notorious examples are Jean-Bedel Bokassa in Central African Republic and Mobutu Sese Seko in Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo). In Central African Republic, Bokassa, after seizing power from David Dako in 1965, immediately promoted himself to the rank of General in 1967 and Marshall in 1974. The following year he crowned himself Emperor and awarded himself twelve ministerial portfolios. He shuffled his ministers with impunity, which undermined

effective governance and bureaucratic competence. By the end of his thirteen year reign of terror, the economy of his country was in a complete shambles (Decalo, 1989: 144-152; Onwumechili, 1998: 39-40).

How well the civilian government deals with the economy is a second factor explaining whether the military will intervene, according to the external school. Ensuring better economic performance is almost always expected from civilian governments (Gutteridge, 1969: 145; Nordlinger, 1977 89). Although a country's economic downturn can be due to causes beyond the control of its government (for example a swift drop in commodity prices on the international market), the government is still likely to be blamed. Since governments typically make a commitment towards improving economic growth, the economy takes on a further significance as a measure of their performance.

The notion that there may be a correlation between economic performance and military coups has been recognized for some time in the study of African politics. In their study of military coups in Africa in the 1970s, Welch and Smith hypothesized that "the likelihood of military intervention rises with a perceived deterioration of economic conditions, especially if accompanied by a belief that the government cannot resolve, or is responsible for, this deterioration" (Welch and Smith, 1974: 26). Military coups, under such circumstances, offer some actors an apparently swift and easy way to reverse unfavorable economic trends (O'Kane, 1981: 293-294).

Johnson et al. (1984), have argued that when a country's economy deteriorates, the military may be motivated to act for two reasons:

First, the military itself can have its position threatened by worsening economic conditions. Cuts in military budgets necessitated by austerity programs are seldom

welcome and can directly impact upon the military's lifestyle, size of equipment and training programs. Second, if economic downturns result in social dislocation in the form of labor unrest and strikes, heightened class antagonisms, and anomie violence, this can be perceived by the military as threatening the national interest and thus prompt them to act to save the situation (Johnson et al, 1984: 633)

Today, one problem which has affected economic performance in Africa involves the harsh, externally enforced, structural adjustment policies of international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund. During the Cold War, Western donor countries funneled billions of dollars in aid to Africa for the purpose of containing "communist" expansion. With the Cold War over these same agencies began to attach conditions to the aid money given to African countries (Harsch, 1993 8-10). Such demands have created great economic hardships, which are not conducive to democracy, as they can lead to massive unemployment, wage freezes, and higher prices for consumer goods and services. All of these problems open the door for military takeovers. Intervention in times of good economic performance is less likely than when the economy of a country is in a down-ward spiral.

Fossum presents an analysis of the interrelationship between economic performance and coups. In Latin America, between 1951 and 1963, he found that coups were 60 percent more common in "deterioration" years (when GNP had fallen relative to the preceding year) than in "improvement" years (when GNP had improved relative to the preceding year) (Fossum, 1967: 236-237). Why is there a connection between intervention and bad economic performance? According to Fossum and Nordlinger, poor economic performance generally affects the middle class as well as the military. It also affects their commercial and industrial enterprises. Because the military often has

connections and ties to this middle class, they intervene for the purpose of safeguarding their own class interests (Nordlinger, 1977: 88-90).

A third type of civilian performance failure, the inability to handle a political crisis, with resulting lack of law and order, is often cited as one of the identifiable causes of military coups. When a civilian government is unable to maintain order, it often results in the military being used as policemen for the specific purpose of restoring order. Such a course of action by the government triggers the military's decision to intervene, for it points to the extent of a government's vulnerability in terms of having to rely on the military for the purpose of maintaining order (Nordlinger, 1977: 86). When governments face a degree of disorder and violence, which can arise from a number of factors, the military can justify intervention with the argument that the government has failed to fulfill its most basic responsibility, the preservation of public order and the protection of life and property. As a result, once the military decides to intervene, it exploits this situation to full advantage, by promising to do better than the civilian governments in its endeavor to maintain order.

Significant evidence in the literature on coups suggests that there is a connection between the above mentioned performance failure and military coups. A study of 105 successful coups in Latin America between 1907 and 1966 found that two-thirds of them took place during periods of public disorder (Fossum, 1967: 234-236). The use of the military to restore order in instances where security forces such as the police are unable to do so is one connection between the above mentioned performance failure and coup attempts. For the military comes to the realization that without their involvement the

government could easily collapse, thereby giving them an interventionist motive (Fossum, 1967: 237).

A fourth reason often cited for civilian performance failure is illegal or unconstitutional acts by the civilian government. In his book, *African Democratization and Military Coups*, Chuka Onwumechili (1998: 39) argues that "lack of democracy" has often been used by the military as one of its justifications for staging coups. Several civilian governments in Africa have been accused of this practice. For example in the recent December 24, 1999 coup in the Ivory Coast, the coup leader, General Robert Guei, accused ousted president Henri Konan Bedie of being undemocratic.⁶ But Onwumechili doubts whether this is a valid argument. He alludes to the 1968 coup in Mali as an example for his pessimism. In that coup, he argues, the plotters had accused president Modibo Keita of being dictatorial and undemocratic. However, the subsequent military Junta was no better in being able to implement reforms conducive to the democratic process. The military did not swiftly organize elections to restore the democratic rights of the Malian people (Onwumechili, 1998: 39).

Students of the military have argued that few military governments have been successful in redressing governmental performance failures (Nordlinger, 1977; Onwumechili, 1998). According to the external school, the performance failure of civilian regimes increases the military's resolve for intervention. In actuality, however, other

⁶ Ivory Coast was considered a model of stability in a turbulent African continent. However, its ousted president Henrie Konan Bedie was seen to be more and more autocratic. Bedie was accused of making ethnicity a big issue in Ivorian politics. His decision to ban Alasanane Ouattara, a former official of the IMF, from contesting the October 2000 elections was widely condemned in the Ivory Coast and played an important role in the military's decision to intervene.

motives might also be behind the military's action. The actual motives of the military's decision to intervene may be less altruistic. This perspective is shared and well put by Samuel Decalo:

The specific army faction that initiates the coup and the officer corps in general are neither more cohesive, nationalist, progressive, nor self-denying than the civilian clique being toppled. Although there is no reason to doubt the sincerity and good intentions of some military leaders, their motives for intervention have always been complex and include personal considerations. Once in power military leaders have not been able to resolve the socioeconomic and political issues facing them (Decalo, 1990: 29).

The aforementioned observation suggests that soldiers may be motivated by greed, inordinate ambition or loss of human values when they decide to orchestrate a coup. This sentiment is also echoed by the internal school, which contends that the protection of the military's corporate interest is almost always present in every coup. It is to the argument of this school that we now turn.

The Internal School

The second interpretation of military coups, as described by Samuel Decalo, is centered on factors internal to the military. This internal school presupposes that the reasons why the army stages coups are to be found inside the army itself. It attributes to African armies certain characteristics such as professionalism, nationalism, cohesion, and austerity. When these characteristics are threatened, according to this school, the army is impelled to move into the political arena to protect its own interests (Decalo, 1990: 3).

What are some of the reasons internal to the military that can cause it to intervene? The

literature cites various reasons, but the most common ones are: (1) nationalism, (2) a threat to the military's corporate interest, and (3) ethnic rivalries and personal fear (Decalo, 1990; Nordlinger, 1977; Wiking: 1983).

The first argument of the internal school as to why soldiers stage coups is centered around the military's nationalistic attributes. The internal theory asserts that, because of the army's perceived role as defender of the state, it develops a nationalistic tendency which allows it to justify intervention. This situation is compounded by the fact that the military in developing countries identifies itself first and foremost with the state, unlike the politicians who tend to rely on regional and ethnic support to further political objectives (Wiking, 1983: 19). However, this is not always the case, for in many African countries the military is made up of majorities from the same ethnic groups and coup leaders rely on their ethnic kin for support. In other words, African military governments can be as guilty of manipulating ethnic cleavages as their civilian counterparts. Decalo has persuasively argued that:

Many African armies...are...a coterie of armed camps owing primary clientelist allegiance to a handful of mutually competitive officers of different ranks ...seething with a variety of corporate, ethnic, and personal grievances that divide their loyalties.... One direct corollary is that when the military assumes political power, its own internal cleavages and competitions constrain its efforts and achievements over and beyond the immensity of the task and other considerations. Where cleavages are especially intense, military regimes may devote considerably more effort to consolidating their power and warding off challenges to their authority than to providing the country with leadership (Decalo, 1990: 6).

This pessimistic perspective notwithstanding, because of the perceived nationalist attributes of the military, they have the propensity to justify their actions as being in the interests of the nation. The identification of the military with the state, and the state with

the military, gives it the tools to rationalize that what is good for the military is also good for the nation. One scholar of the military sums up this assumption as follows:

the generals are not capricious ogres whose only interests are destroying democracy and raiding the national treasury...armed forces officers view themselves as sincere patriots. Their intervention, they believe, is always in the national interest...to save the country or to protect their institution, which they consider the very embodiment of nationhood. In sum, the armed forces are an organization with an independent position on all the major political issues (Lieuwen, 1964: 98).

Students of the military, such as Lucian Pye in the 1960s, characterized military rule as the best means towards the creation of a "dynamic leadership committed to progress and the task of modernizing transnational societies that have been subverted by the corrupted practices of elite politicians".

Pye's analysis of the military hypothesized that the key to progress lay in the creation of modern organizations, and in his view the most modern organization in developing countries was the military (Pye, 1966: 184-185).

The second explanation for military intervention, according to the internal school, is centered around how the military views its corporate interest, both as an institution and as a conception of itself. The military's corporate interest can take several forms. Nordlinger's synthesis of the literature lists several, which include but are not limited to the military's budgets and organizational autonomy. Nordlinger has argued that the most important motive for military intervention is for the defense and enhancement of the military's corporate interest as an institution. He emphasizes that:

public institutions that are highly cohesive, imbued with an esprit de corps, and endowed with considerable power resources pursue their corporate interests in a determined and effective fashion. They are energized and able to do so with

relatively little risk of internal disunity. The military differs from most public institutions in its cohesiveness and esprit de corps; it differs from all others in the enormous power derived from its hierarchical structure and force of arms. The military has consequently been remarkably successful in protecting or enhancing its corporate interest through the coup d'état (Nordlinger, 1977: 65).

The threat to the military's corporate interest can take several forms. For example, drastic reduction of the military's budget can be an invitation for a coup. Budgetary allocations fundamentally determine the quality of the military in terms of the amenities it enjoys such as housing facilities, salary scales and retirement benefits. Moreover, an increase in money allocated to the military budget represents a demonstration of the prestige accorded to the military, whereas a reduction of budgetary expenditure signals a loss of influence and standing. The perception of the army as a modern and professional institution is based in part on how much money the civilian government puts into it.

That a reduction in the military's budgetary allotment can be a recipe for a coup was demonstrated in the 1966 overthrow of Nkrumah of Ghana. General A.K. Ocran, one of the architects of the coup, in his memoirs justified the coup on that ground. "By late 1965" he wrote, "the going was getting tough for most senior officers. The salaries introduced in 1957 meant little in 1965; they were worth only a third of their value". He pointed out the amenities the soldiers were losing under the leadership of Nkrumah. "One day the officers were to pay for their electricity; the next day they were to lose their training allowances; the following day, they were to lose their traveling facilities. We all wondered what was happening to us"(Ocran, 1968 43). Consequently, when they took over, the first course of action they embarked upon was to increase the military's budget during the period in which they controlled the government. Expenditure on the military

can impact on its self perception as a professional, well-trained, disciplined and modern institution. The quality of arms, uniforms, housing, etc., are all indicators of the military's professionalism. When these amenities are lacking then pride is wounded and morale impaired. The impact of military expenditures on military pride seems to have been an important cause of the 1966 and 1972 coups in Ghana. This sentiment is echoed in General Afrifra's description of the military situation under Nkrumah's government:

Because of bad planning, economic mismanagement, and political interference, this army was rendered incapable, ill-equipped, having virtually been reduced to a rabble. By Christmas 1965 a number of our troops were without equipment and clothing, things essential for the pride, morale, and efficiency of the soldier. There was an acute accommodation problem due to the rash military expansion scheme that Kwame Nkrumah had launched. It was shameful to see a Ghanaian soldier in a tattered and ragged uniform, sometimes without boots during his training period (Afifra, 1967: 103-104).

A similar explanation was proffered by General Ocran in justifying his motivation for overthrowing the government of Nkrumah.

The commanders were really hard put to it. They had known and had been accustomed to a high standard of turnout and cleanliness. What then could they do to soldiers who turned out on parade in torn uniforms; with the underwear showing underneath their shorts or trousers? Soldiers with no polish or shine on their boots or with their toes showing through their canvas shoes?.. Even the officers went about in very unpresentable uniforms (Ocran, 1968: 44-46).

From the above statements it can be ascertained that many coups are a product of the connection between the army's interest in sufficient budgetary support and the inability or unwillingness of civilian governments to satisfy these needs. The failure to satisfy the military's needs always engenders the possibility of a coup, because, second to the civilian government, the military is the strongest institution in many developing countries. As a consequence, failing the military can be given as a rationale of justifying

illegitimate coups.

Apart from the failure to satisfy the military's budgetary needs, civilian interference in the internal affairs of the military can be an impetus for coups. In other words, any time the military feels that its autonomy is being threatened the likelihood of a coup arises. The 1952 coup, which overthrew Egypt's King Farouk, was motivated by his interference with the autonomy of the military. Against the advice of senior army officers, the king ordered his ill-prepared army to attack Israel in 1948, which led to the defeat of Egypt in that war. The king compounded his action with the appointment of incompetent officers to high ranking military posts for the purpose of maintaining control. His actions drew a swift response and led to Gamal Abdal Nasser overthrowing him (Nordlinger, 1977: 72).⁷

A second example of how civilian interference can lead to a coup was the situation in Ghana under Nkrumah. Before the 1966 coup which ousted him, he set about interfering with the autonomy of the army. His interference entailed a concerted attempt to control the army through the manipulation of promotions and specific responsibilities given to officers (Nordlinger, 1977: 74).⁸ For example, in early 1965, he prematurely

⁷ The recent October 12, 1999 coup in Pakistan is another example of how the army acts if it deems its autonomy is threatened. Relations between the government of Nawaz Sharif and the army had been tense. The New York Times, 13 Oct. 1999 reported on the coup in which the leader, General Pervez Musharaf, justified his action and argued that the ineptitude of Sharif's government and its self-serving brand of management made it necessary for the military to act. He accused Prime Minister Sharif's government of systematically destroying Pakistan's institutions. "Despite all my advice" the general said, "they tried to interfere with the armed forces, the last remaining viable institution in which all of you take so much pride and look up to at all times for stability, unity and integrity of our beloved country." He said Pakistan was in a state of "turmoil and uncertainty, and the economy in a state of collapse. The armed forces had taken over as a last resort to restore stability.... I have done so with all sincerity, loyalty and selfless devotion to the country... and the armed forces are firmly behind me."

⁸ Nkrumah extensively relied on his Convention People's Party to gain political control of the army and to

retired the two highest ranking officers in the Ghanaian military on the basis of their objection to the removal of the Presidential Guard Regiment from the army's chain of command. The consequence of his actions on the officers is echoed in comments made by General Afrifa. "This was not the way to treat Generals...As a result of this action the Ghanaian officers and men felt that the profession of men-at arms had been disgraced and that their Generals as well as they themselves had been humiliated." The primary reason for the coup was attributed to the dismissals (Afrifa, 1967: 99-102). Afrifa went on to comment that "Nkrumah was beginning to manipulate certain officers for the purpose of undermining the authority of the military command. The policy of divide and rule was actively pursued among all ranks of the armed forces. It had become difficult to trust one's colleagues" (Afrifa, 1967: 100). A further challenge of the autonomy principle which Nkrumah orchestrated was his creation of his own private army within the military. For example, he detached the Presidential Guard from the army and made it directly accountable to the command of the president. He lavishly rewarded this regiment in order to buy its loyalty. This act of favoritism generated deep resentment within the army command structure. Officers and rank and file of the army perceived this as a major challenge to the autonomy principle of the military. This, more than anything else, motivated the coup which overthrew him.

entice army officers into conforming with his own political ideals. This conviction was echoed by Afrifa: "For a long time, the Convention People's Party had made a steady assault on the Army with a determined programme to indoctrinate it with the ideology of Nkrumahism . I remember that a branch of the Convention People's Party was even opened at the Teshie Military Academy for this purpose. There was an occasion when officers were made to join the Party by force. Forms were sent out from the Minister of Defense, Mr. Kofi Baako's office, to be completed. I refused to complete this form on the principle that the army must be above party politics" (Afrifa: 99).

A final reason suggested by the internal school as to why soldiers stage coups is centered on personal gain and is often mirrored by ethnic rivalries and personal fear (Decalo, 1990; Onwumechili, 1998). Ethnic rivalries or factionalism can result in intra-military quarrels, which generate fear. The above view is shared by Onwumechili, who theorizes that numerous coups in Africa have resulted from personal factors. He cites as examples the failed coup attempts in Nigeria in 1976 and 1990, which have been linked to ethnic rivalries. The 1976 coup was an attempt by soldiers from the middle belt of Nigeria to reinstate General Yakubu Gowon, who had been deposed by Northern Officers in 1975. Similarly, the 1990 coup attempt against General Ibrahim Babangida was carried out by officers from the middle belt. In that attempt the officers explicitly indicated that their plot was directed against officers from the North, specifically the Hausa-Fulani group (Onwumechili, 1998: 40-41).

Two classic examples of military intervention triggered by personal fear were those by Idi Amin of Uganda in 1971 and Lieutenant General Gnassingbe Eyadema of Togo in 1967. Before instigating the coup, Amin was fearful that President Milton Obote would sack him as head of the Ugandan Army. He had had a falling out with Obote, who accused him of corruption and favoritism in recruitment of members of his own ethnic group. The end result was Amin's successful overthrow of the president. Similarly, Lieutenant General Gnassingbe Eyadema's 1967 coup was also a consequence of personal fear. Strong pressures were mounting from his Southern countrymen who wanted him tried for the murder of President Sylvanus Olympio, who had been killed in the military coup of 1963. Eyadema preempted any trial by removing President Nicholas

Grunitzky, all the while claiming that the coup was justified because of an internal power struggle between the president and his vice president, Antoine Meatchi (Onwumechili, 1998: 42).

Summary

This chapter has explored the two main schools of thought on military coups. The external school has noted that military motivations to stage a coup are likely when a civilian government is perceived to have failed. This failure can be evidenced by corruption, bad economic performance, an inability to handle a political crisis, and illegal and unconstitutional ways and means of getting things done. This loss of legitimacy occurs anytime the government fails in its performance. The legitimacy of the government is diminished when the populace loses respect for the incumbents and begins to think that a government is corrupt and self-serving. Bad economic performance also engenders the likelihood of a coup, because good economic performance is held to be one of the primary responsibilities of a government. The ability to maintain and preserve order is also held in high regard in every effectively functioning society. Hence, violence and political turbulence diminishes a government's legitimacy since it is seen as a failure to fulfill one of its basic responsibilities. When the government is also seen to be arbitrarily contravening the law, it increases the military's propensity to intervene because it knows it can justify and sell a coup to the populace.

The internal school, on the other hand, argues that nationalism, threats to the military's corporate interest, ethnic rivalries and personal fears are the main motivations

for coups. According to the internal school's litany of explanations for coups, the nationalist attribute of the military plays a very important role. Because of the army's perceived identification with the state, it is not uncommon for the army to be seen as savior whose sole objective is to rescue the state from the grip of corrupt and ineffective civilian leaders. How the military perceives its corporate interest is also an important element in the military's decision to intervene. The most important motivation for military interventions is for the defense and enhancement of its corporate interest. The military's corporate interests include budgetary allocation and the organizational autonomy of the military. Whenever the military's corporate interest is threatened, the internal school argues, then there is bound to be a coup. The final motivation for the military's decision to intervene is personal and is often mirrored in ethnic rivalry and personal fear. Military officers have relied on their ethnic kin to stage a coup.

In my view, the external school provides a better fundamental explanation for coups, but the internal school cannot be ignored. The rest of this thesis will attempt to support this argument in the case of the 1994 Gambian coup. Chapter 2 begins the argument by looking at Gambian politics in the post-independence era.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND: POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD TO 1994 COUP

In order to analyze the Gambian coup of 1994, we need some understanding of the forces and events shaping Gambian political development between independence and 1994. The objective of this chapter is to provide this understanding.

Gambia was born as an independent nation from Britain on 18 February, 1965, amidst serious doubt about its viability in both political and economic terms. With an area of only 4, 361 square miles, it is continental Africa's smallest state. Except for a short coastline on the Atlantic, it is entirely surrounded by its much larger neighbor, the Republic of Senegal. The separate existence of the two countries is rooted in the colonial rivalry between British and French slave traders. The British, in 1618, established a fort at the mouth of the river Gambia, while the French occupied the Senegalese coast. Hence, the official language of Gambia is English and that of Senegal French. Apart from this different colonial legacy, the two countries share a substantial unity of people ethnically, culturally and linguistically. The economies of both countries' also depend heavily on groundnuts as a primary cash crop (Saine, 1996: 98; Wiseman, 1990: 51).

Despite its small population of approximately 1.4 million, The Gambia has six major ethnic groups: Mandinka, Fula, Wolof, Jola, Serehule and Aku, as well as a number of smaller ones. The Mandinka constitute the largest ethnic group in the country, accounting for more than 40 percent of the population. The rural areas of the country

contain traditional chiefs known as "seyfolu",⁹ who have historically played major roles in Gambian politics. Most areas of the country are ethnically mixed and intermarriages between the various ethnic groups are quite common. The dominant religion of the country is Islam, with 90 percent of the population being Muslim. The rest are Christian, with a very small percentage being traditional animists (Wiseman, 1990:51).

Pre-Independence Political Activity

Prior to its independence, there were doubts as to whether Gambia could exist as an independent, viable, state given its small population and size. As a consequence, a number of alternatives to independence were proposed by the British colonial authority and Gambian political activists. There was talk of a permanent association with Britain. However, this idea was not popular with the majority of Gambians, and Britain, feeling that Gambia would be a burden on its treasury, was not too keen on the idea. A second conceivable option was for Gambia to be united with Sierra Leone. This was not popular at all as most Gambians felt neither a cultural nor a linguistic connection with the people of Sierra Leone. The most widely canvassed option was for Gambia to be integrated with Senegal. This seemed more realistic, since the two countries had a lot in common in ethno-linguistic terms. However, the legacy of colonialism had implanted different philosophies of life in the two peoples. Many Gambians were fearful of an unequal partnership, in which Senegal would dominate them. Similarly, some Senegalese also held pessimistic views about union with Gambians (Gamble, 1988: XXXI). As a result,

⁹ Seyfolu means chief in the Mandinka vernacular language.

Gambia became independent despite doubts about its viability.

Political party activity during the colonial period in the Gambia was confined to the urban areas, and was fairly limited. In the early 1950s, three parties emerged in the colony. Until the 1960s, these parties merely exercised the functions of pressure groups, trying to force the pace of political change. The colonial division of The Gambia into "Crown Colony" (Banjul and its environs) and "Protectorate" (the rest of the rural areas) had a significant impact in shaping political developments. It was not until 1960 that the franchise was extended to the rural people of the Protectorate (Gailey, 1964: 193).

The first Gambian party was the Democratic Party (DP), founded in February 1951, by a Christian, Reverend John C. Faye. The party was established to allow the Reverend to contest a seat in Bathurst¹⁰ under the revised constitution of that year. The party's activities were confined to the urban areas, with a few influential Bathurst citizens at the helm; hence, it had limited appeal at the national level.

The second Gambian political party was The Gambia Muslim Congress (GMC), formed in January 1952, by Ibrahima M. Garba-Jahumpa. This party differed in nature from the Democratic Party by being a fusion of the Bathurst Young Muslim Society with a number of such organizations throughout the Protectorate. The Muslim Congress Party was designed to specifically link religious affiliation with political party activity. With a majority of the Gambian population being Muslim, if the new party could successfully appeal to this sectarian feeling, future political control of the Gambia would be a realistic

¹⁰ Bathurst was the name of the colonial administrative capital. At independence, the name was changed to Banjul, which became Gambia's capital city.

objective. However, the Muslim Congress Party was to some extent weakened by its dependence upon the personality of its leader (Gailey, 1964: 194-195).

The third political party in The Gambia was the United Party, formed by a Banjul lawyer, Pierre S. Njie. However, it too was an organization built around one man. Under Mr. Njie's leadership the UP was nevertheless able to emerge as the dominant party in the urban areas and tried to form some organizational links with the rural hinterland.

In this latter endeavor, however, the UP was completely upstaged, in 1959, by the formation of The Gambia's fourth political party, the Protectorate People's Party (PPP) under the leadership of Dawda Jawara, a veterinary officer. The party took advantage of the extension of the franchise to the Protectorate, and its leader's Protectorate origins, to quickly become the dominant party in The Gambia. Moreover, while it was rigidly controlled by Jawara, it was less dependent on its leader than the other parties, at least in the early stage of the party's creation. The PPP was formed specifically to counteract the political dominance of the urban based parties through mass mobilization of the people in the Protectorate and of Protectorate origins in the urban areas".

With a later change of name to the People's Progressive Party, the PPP emerged as the dominant party in the pre-independence era. The extension of the franchise to the rural areas made it easy for the PPP to emerge as the dominant party, as the majority of the population were rural dwellers. As a result, in the first election in 1960, it won eight

" On April 24, 1999 in an interview I had with the Gambian former president Sir Dawda Jawara, he told me that the PPP was formed by people of protectorate origin living in Banjul. He told me that his party was able to gather more supporters than all the other parties. "This was because the other parties did their politics in Banjul and the colony areas only and did not extend their activities to the rest of the country which our party did... so by 1960, one could see that the PPP was a front runner in politics" (Interviewed in London).

of the twelve elected seats. In the pre-independence election of May 1962, the PPP (garnering heavy support from Mandinka areas) won a clear overall majority with nineteen of thirty four seats, seventeen of which were based in the Protectorate. The UP on the other hand, won thirteen seats, five of which were from the Colony and eight from the Protectorate, largely from non-Mandinka areas. The GMC drew only one seat and subsequently established an alliance with the PPP.¹² The Democratic Party did not win any seats and hence forth did not have an impact (Hughes, 1972: 66).

Until the 1962 election, tribalism was not a major factor in Gambian politics. However, it became a campaign platform for the PPP in the 1962 election, and the results showed a clear division along ethnic lines. This was understandable, to some degree, since all politics prior to the extension of the franchise were Colony centered and the leading politicians had been Wolof. Hence, the PPP campaigned in the 1962 elections on tribal lines, stressing that the Colony had been given everything and the Protectorate, particularly the Mandinka population, had been neglected. Ethnic tensions led to incidents in which PPP militants burnt down houses of people who were opposed to their party (Gailey, 1964: 201; Hughes, 1972: 61-74).

As a result of the PPP's success in securing a majority of the votes in the 1962 elections, Jawara was called on to form a government and become Premier. Around this time also, the PPP secured the support of UP defectors, thus further increasing the ethnic support base of the party. Jawara also embarked upon turning his party into a more truly

¹² The Gambian House of Representatives provided for thirty four seats in the House. Of these, there were four ex-officio members, three nominated members by the colonial governor, and nineteen elected

national party, by reaching out with a message of conciliation. In addition, he established alliances, shrewdly working with the Wolof and Aku elites in Banjul. For example, he married the daughter of one of the main financial backers of the UP, who subsequently shifted support to the PPP (Wiseman, 1990: 52-52)

Early Relations with Senegal

As was mentioned earlier, before The Gambia's attainment of independence in 1965, the British colonial government favored a voluntary integration with Senegal as the answer to Gambia's lack of economic viability. The United Party (UP) leader Pierre Njie, who headed the first internal self-rule Gambian administration, had initiated contacts on a frequent basis with Senegal's leader, Leopold Senghor (1960-1980). Under Jawara's leadership following the 1962 general election, Gambia and Senegal requested the United Nations to send a mission to dispense advice on future relations between the two countries. The UN mission made its recommendations in 1964, which were published as the "Report on the Alternatives for Association between The Gambia and Senegal". The report proposed three options in this regard, namely, the total integration of Gambia into an enlarged Senegal, favored by Dakar; a loose federation, favored by The Gambia; and a compromise association in which integration would be promoted gradually. Around the time the UN report was submitted, the Senegalese were recovering from the collapse of their previous union with Mali and were not enthusiastic about the

members. The remaining eight members were designated for chiefs who were to elect their own representatives.

foot dragging. The Gambia, for its part, was not too excited with the idea of swiftly abandoning its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Hence, it opted for outright independence (Hughes, 1992: 201-202).

Despite these obstacles, the two countries between 1965 and 1982 went on to sign 30 treaties of collaboration. The most significant ones were the defense and external representation agreements of 1965; the 1967 "Treaty of Association" which established a Senegalese-Gambian Permanent Secretariat to promote technical cooperation; an economic treaty in 1970; and the creation in 1978 of the Gambia River Basin Development Organization (Griffiths, 1995: 167-168).

Independence and Republic Status

The first significant political development in Jawara's post-independence Gambia was his move to make The Gambia a republic. After independence, Jawara indicated his desire for The Gambia to become a republic, so that the Queen of England would no longer be recognized as Gambia's head of state. A national referendum on the issue was held in November 1965. It was rejected, having failed to secure the necessary two thirds majority of the vote. Jawara accepted defeat and shelved the idea for another five years. He reintroduced the idea in another referendum in April 1970, and this time gained the necessary majority for a republic. The Gambia thus became a republic with a president replacing the Queen of England as head of state. Since Jawara was leader of the majority in parliament, he became the first executive president of the republic, combining both functions of head of state and head of government. The Gambian constitution was later

amended to allow for a direct election of the president in a separate presidential election, thereby increasing the distinction between the executive and legislature (Wiseman, 1990:53-54).

The Senegambia Confederation

A second significant political development of the post-independence era was the Jawara government's creation of a confederation with the government of Senegal in 1982. The confederation was established after a failed putsch in The Gambia during which Senegal intervened and helped restore political order. Under the terms of the agreement, both countries' retained their sovereignty, but a series of institutions were set up to facilitate closer cooperation (Wiseman, 1990 :54).

The event which precipitated the confederation occurred in July 1981, while Jawara was on an official visit to the United Kingdom. A coup was plotted and executed by urban civilians who opposed the government, in alliance with disaffected elements of the security force. The coup was led by Kukoi Samba Sanyang, who established a National Revolutionary Council and proclaimed himself head of state. The coup was quelled only with the help of Senegal, which sent in a large number of its soldiers under the provisions of the 1965 defense treaty between the two countries. Constitutional order was restored, but at the cost of almost 500 lives¹³ (Hughes, 1983: 70). The attempted coup

¹³ For a more complete analysis of the 1981 abortive coup see Arnold Hughes, "The attempted coup d'état 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 analysis Hughes concluded with a question which turned out to become a reality a few years later . In seeking to protect itself from a future coup attempt, "did the fledgling Gambian democracy narrowly overcome one danger only to expose itself to a future challenge

undermined Gambia's sovereignty and stained its reputation as one of the few stable democratic countries in Africa.

Following this restoration of order, President Jawara and his Senegalese counterpart, President Abdou Diouf, decided to establish a confederation between the two countries to be called the "Senegambia Confederation". The confederation was inaugurated at Kaur in the Gambian hinterland during a tour of the countryside by Jawara in the aftermath of the coup. The "Kaur Declaration" was ratified by the countries' parliaments and officially came into effect on February 1, 1982 (Hughes 1992: 201).

The Confederation agreement called for the establishment of a presidency and vice presidency, a council of ministers, and a confederal assembly indirectly elected by the two national parliaments, as well as a confederal secretariat. All of this was to be funded from an annual budget provided by the two countries (two thirds by Senegal and one-third by The Gambia). The agreement also required the partial integration of the armed forces of the two countries to create a confederal army and a gendarmerie to be stationed anywhere within the confederation; the formation of an economic and monetary union between the two countries; and the co-ordination of policy in external affairs and technical fields. However, the absolute sovereignty of the two countries was clearly stated and reaffirmed in the text of the agreement. (Hughes 1991: 92; Hughes 1992:203).

The Senegambia Confederation ended unceremoniously in 1989, when Senegal abruptly withdrew its forces from the territory of The Gambia. The withdrawal was due to a deterioration in relations between the two countries amid Senegalese accusations that

from those very instruments created to counter that danger?" (p.106).

Gambia was dragging its feet on the issue of full integration. Gambia, on the other hand, accused Senegal of blocking its application for UMOA (West African Monetary Union) membership, which would have allowed The Gambia to adopt the CFA and abandon its national currency, the Dalasi.¹⁴

The swift withdrawal of the Senegalese army created a vacuum in terms of the national security of the Gambia. To fill this vacuum, the government quickly put together the Gambia National Army.

The Gambia National Army

The roots of the Gambia National Army (GNA) can be traced to the Royal West Africa Frontier Force (RWAFF), which was a colonial army created by the British. When Gambia attained independence, the Jawara government decided against creating an army. However, what was left of The Gambia section of the West Africa Frontier Force was turned into a paramilitary body called The Gambia Field Force (GFF), to be specifically responsible for performing police duties.¹⁵ After the 1981 coup attempt, the creation of the Senegambia confederation required The Gambia to form an army and a national police force (gendarmerie). The GFF was disbanded, but those officers who had remained loyal to the Jawara government during the 1981 failed putsch were allowed to re-apply

¹⁴ This information is based on my April 24, 1999 interview with Gambia's former president, Sir Dawda Jawara.

¹⁵ In my April 24, 1999 interview with ex-president Jawara, he stated : "at independence we decided not to have an army. Then came the 1981 coup and unfortunately some members of the Gambia Field Force took part in the coup. In 1982 we decided to join the Senegambia Confederation. The institutions of this confederation included a confederate army, a confederal gendarmerie, and a confederal security service. We were obliged as a member of the confederation to contribute to these institutions. Consequently, we decided

for the newly created army and gendarmerie (Wiseman and Vidler, 1995: 54-55).

During the period that the Gambian army was being created, Gambia had to rely on Senegalese forces for internal security. Senegal provided a training team within the framework of the Senegambia confederation. However, notwithstanding the confederal title, Senegalese forces dominated the framework not only in terms of the rank and file but also with respect to budgetary contributions. Gambia was not able to make its full contribution to the confederal army until 1985. When the confederation fell apart in 1989 and the confederal forces were disbanded, it left a vacuum in terms of internal security in the Gambia which had to be filled. This was the first time that Gambian army officers had the opportunity of being in charge of national security. But by this time, also, the Gambia gendarmerie was fully established and the army had for the first time reached battalion strength.

After Senegal's withdrawal in 1989, the Jawara administration looked to Nigeria to fill the vacuum created by the withdrawal of Senegalese military protection. Hence, the appointment of several Nigerian officers at the head of The Gambia national army was considered a way of ensuring the regime's security. It was against this background that President Jawara brought in a Nigerian training team of 69 officers to assist in the command, training and development of the Gambian army. A Nigerian, Colonel Abubakar Dada (subsequently elevated to the rank of Brigadier General), was appointed commander of the Gambian army. These events, especially the appointment of Dada, provoked widespread discussion and comment in the Gambian press, and various motives

to create an army, this was the logic of it".

were ascribed to the government. It also created disaffection within elements of the Gambian army. The Gambian soldiers not only found it difficult to identify with their Nigerian superiors, but saw them as impediments to their own career advancement (Wiseman and Vidler, 1995: 55).

Events in the early 1990s heightened concern about disaffection in the army. In 1990, President Jawara decided to send Gambian troops to Liberia as part of ECOMOG, the West African regional peace-keeping force. This was the first time that Gambian army officers had the opportunity to see combat action. Before the soldiers' departure to Liberia, there had been some problems involving non-payment of salaries and bad living conditions in the army barracks. When they came back from Liberia, these problems were still unresolved. In addition, after having been exposed to combat action, they returned to idleness in The Gambia. As a result, in June 1991, soldiers who had served in Liberia marched to the presidential residence to register their dissatisfaction over the late payment of bonuses for their service in Liberia, as well as the lack of action concerning conditions of service in their barracks. They managed to see the president and air their grievances.¹⁶

In 1992, soldiers attempted a repeat performance of their 1991 protest. This protest was launched by the second contingent of troops returning from Liberia. They were stopped at the Denton Bridge check point a few kilometers from the capital, by the

¹⁶ This information was given to me on April 28, 1999, in an interview with Ebriima Chongan. He was Deputy Inspector General of The Gambia Police at the time of the 1994 coup. According to Chongan, as a consequence of the soldiers' protests, the Gambian army commander resigned, which set a dangerous precedent. In addition, according to Mr. Chongan, a vacuum was left since there was no substantive commander appointed to replace the retired Gambian commander (Interviewed in London April 28, 1999).

then acting commander of the army, Major Maba Jobe, and senior officers of The Gambia National Gendarmerie.¹⁷ A settlement was negotiated by Major Jobe, because he could easily identify with the soldiers, having served in Liberia himself (West Africa, 8-14 August, 1994: 1502). As a result of this repeat protest, structural changes were implemented within the army and gendarmerie. In late 1992, the gendarmerie was amalgamated with the police.¹⁸ This new police force was charged with the task of carrying out normal police duties, as well as the paramilitary security duties of the former gendarmerie. A segment of this force was also given the task of working as a Tactical Support Group (TSG), with the responsibility to patrol the borders, as well as to give special support to the rest of the police force in the event of a serious public disorder. These were the arrangements which were in place until the day of the coup (Wiseman and Vidler, 1995: 56).

Post-Independence Opposition Parties

After Gambia attained independence in 1965, despite its multiparty framework, it virtually became a de-facto one party state as the ruling PPP did not encounter any serious challenge from the opposition parties. Only the UP remained into the 1980s, but it represented an insignificant threat. All the old parties became virtually extinct due to the

¹⁷ The Gendarmerie was a separate branch of the Security Service responsible for the security of the president. However, when it was amalgamated with the police, the army took charge of presidential security.

¹⁸ According to Chongan, the amalgamation of the gendarmerie with the police was the biggest mistake of the Jawara government. "When the Gendarmerie, which was supposed to be the balancing power in preventing any coup, was all of a sudden amalgamated with the police...we became left with an army and there was nobody to stop them."

perception by the rural majority that they reflected urban interests. Moreover, Jawara's co-option of the urban elites into his party eroded their support base (Wiseman 1990:55).

However, this situation changed in 1975, with the emergence of a new opposition party, the National Convention Party (NCP), founded by Sherif Mustapha Dibba, also a Mandinka. Dibba had been Jawara's vice president but was demoted in 1973 following a scandal involving his brother. As a result, according to Hughes, "Dibba came to be seen among some Mandinka as a victim of the President Jawara's policy of favoring non-Mandinka" (Hughes, 1982: 65). Dibba's party was stained by the propaganda of PPP stalwarts, who characterized it as a tribalist party interested in representing only the interests of the Mandinka. This was a favorite propaganda ploy for those who saw enough of a political threat in Dibba to brand him a tribalist and an opportunist whose political ascension would threaten the unity of the state (Hughes, 1983: 66). However, the ability of the NCP to win votes in the urban areas of Banjul, mainly dominated by Wolofs, suggests that there was more to NCP support than ethnicity (Wiseman, 1990:50).

During the post-1981 coup period, two other new political parties emerged. The first was The Gambia People's Party (GPP), formed by Assan Musa Camara, who had also been vice-president. He was removed from the vice presidency following the 1982 election, amidst PPP accusations that he was covertly supporting some of the independent opposition candidates. Joining the NCP was not an option as relations with Dibba were not cordial. The GPP initially had success in attracting a number of Gambian political heavyweights into its ranks, including two former senior PPP cabinet ministers. Camara was believed to have a considerable personal following and, as a Fula, he was the only

non-Mandinka party leader. However, lack of funds and weak organization proved to be a formidable challenge to the new party. It performed dismally in the 1987 elections, drawing only thirteen percent of the presidential vote and sixteen percent of the parliamentary votes. In fact, it failed to win any seats in the 1987 general election, though it did run a close second to the PPP in a number of constituencies (Wiseman, 1990: 59)

The second new party, established in 1986, was the People's Democratic Organization for Independence and Socialism (PDOIS), established by Halifa Sallah, Sedia Jatta and Samuel Sarr. This party was seen to have political credibility in the eyes of disgruntled Gambians. It had a distinctive socialist approach and a clear ideological message which the other parties did not have. (From an ideological perspective there was not a lot of difference among the PPP, NCP and GPP.) However, PDOIS's socialist message and the perception that it was too intellectually remote from the masses of the population made it unattractive for many voters (Wiseman, 1990: 59).

Political Longevity

Having examined Gambian political trends and developments after independence, it would be useful to explain the one-party nature of Gambian democracy prior to the 1994 coup. The ability of Jawara and his PPP to dominate party politics in the Gambia for almost three decades can be attributed to a number of factors: (1) Jawara's rural Mandinka background (the largest ethnic group in the Gambia), (2) his style of leadership, (3) weak opposition parties, (4) Gambian culture, and (5) Jawara's standing in the international community.

The first factor which enabled Jawara to gain and maintain power was the use of tribalism, or the “ethnic card,” to generate support from rural Mandinka people. Jawara came from the rural Protectorate areas of Gambia and established what Samuel Huntington calls a “green uprising” to become the leader of post-independent Gambia.¹⁹ Before the establishment of the PPP, party politics was mostly confined to the urban areas of The Gambia and headed by Banjul Wolofs. However, in the mid fifties a charitable organization was founded in Banjul by an unlettered but prosperous Mandinka elder, Alhaji Sanjally Bojang. The association was called the Protectorate People’s Society and was mainly concerned with making funeral arrangements for Mandinkas who died in the city. Jawara, as one of a very few rural Mandinka graduates, was an early member of the society. This society was subsequently transformed into a political party, and Jawara became its leader. While the resources of the party were limited, the party exploited rural discontent to garner support. Jawara’s political strategy of espousing a stronger Mandinka cause shifted following his party’s victory in the 1962 general elections (Hughes, 1972: 61-66). The United Party consistently branded the PPP as a tribalist party and Jawara knew that was dangerous for his party. Moreover, at 40 percent of the population, the Mandinka were only a majority when the other four major ethnic groups were divided. This was far too small a base to secure power. Furthermore, Jawara himself did not feel too secure as his position of party leader was not unanimously approved. While he was highly educated by Gambian standards, he was of a low caste, whereas others in his

¹⁹ Samuel P. Huntington notes that a “green uprising” takes place in a colonial or post colonial state when a political movement or party based in the countryside and opposed to urban based political parties aims to gain control of government. For a fuller discussion of green uprisings, see Samuel P. Huntington, *Political*

party's hierarchy were less educated but of high caste.²⁰ Jawara also had to rely on the more educated urban Wolofs and Akus to enable him to run an effective and functional administration (Hughes, 1972: 66-76).

However, once Jawara was fully established in power, he downplayed ethnicity by shrewdly maintaining a balance of ethnic support. Arnold Hughes made an astute observation of this situation when he stated:

Numbers were not the only consideration--skilled man power was even more important and this was the one commodity in short supply among the Mandinka. Education and highly skilled positions in public service and the professions were a near monopoly of the Aku and urban Wolofs. [While] the original leadership group in the PPP had a very modest educational background...[they had] no previous experience in government and parliamentary procedures. To "Mandinkaize" the bureaucracy overnight would have been a disaster, leading to administrative chaos and the real possibility of large-scale communal strife (Hughes, 1972: 67).

Jawara's leadership style is the second major factor contributing to his political survival. Analysts of African politics have paid a lot of attention to the roles played by individual national leaders and the huge personal influence they generate in national politics. Notions such as "personal rule"²¹ and "patrimonialism" are advanced to explain the source of this influence. In the case of The Gambia, the nature of Jawara's dominance of the political system can be characterized as quasi-patrimonial rule. How does this characterization apply to Jawara? He cynically played the role of a shrewd and

²⁰ *Order in Changing Societies*, New Haven and Con.: Yale University Press, 1968, p433-61.

²¹ The caste system still means a great deal in The Gambia. A number of Mandinka chiefs opposed Jawara's leadership of the PPP because of his caste as a cobbler, which is at the lower echelon of Gambian society. These people traditionally were not highly regarded (Hughes, 1972: 69).

²² See for example R.H. Jackson and C.G. Roseberg, "*Personal rule in Black Africa: Prince, Autocrat, Prophet and Tyrant*" (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982).

calculating politician. Like a godfather, he used his political power and patronage to carefully balance the divergent social and economic interests of the various ethnic groups. In so doing, these group interests came to regard Jawara and the PPP as their ultimate savior in a continent that was politically turbulent.

Zeeya Yeebo, an observer of West African politics, echoed the aforementioned sentiment well. Under Jawara's rule he lamented, "Gambia was ruled like a family ranch with the Pa (Jawara) as the patriarch. Prodigal sons were always welcomed back once they realized the errors of their ways" (1995: 19-20). Opposition leaders had a similar outlook about Jawara: "In the Gambia, the parliament does not matter, the political party does not matter, the civil service does not matter, the only person who matters is the president of the Republic" (Radelet, 1992:1093).

While the maintenance of domestic stability through ethnic compromise and bargaining was an important element in the political process, the personality of Jawara was also very significant. Personal relationships with the president played a crucial role in the rise and decline of the political elites. Most fundamentally, however, Jawara was a highly skilled political leader. Pragmatic by nature, he had tremendous skill in being able to balance various interest groups and designate jobs to the different ethnic groups without appearing to favor one particular group over others (Wiseman, 1990: 60). This characteristic of political shrewdness was augmented by his capacity to forgive and forget when reconciliation seemed an appropriate course of action. An example of this can be demonstrated in his release of prisoners on special occasions such as Ramadan (the Muslim holy month of fasting). Sometimes prisoners serving very long prison sentences

also had their time reduced.

The weakness of the political opposition was a third important factor contributing to Jawara's and his party's ability to remain in power. Some of this weakness arose from the close affinity opposition leaders had with Jawara and the PPP. Both Sherif Dibba of the NCP and Assan Musa Camara of the GPP had served as Jawara's vice presidents before leaving to form their own parties. The NCP and GPP were also weaker parties in terms of resources, funding and intellect compared to the ruling PPP. But mostly they were clones of the ruling party in the sense that their leaders had broken with the PPP more for personal differences than principles. The only opposition party with the credibility to challenge the government was the PDOIS. However, its ability to make an impact on the political process was limited by lack of resources, and an overly intellectual message that was hardly understood by an undereducated populace.²²

The PPP's containment of political opposition must also be accounted for by positive as well as negative factors. Jawara's policy of political conciliation, which he followed from independence, succeeded in winning over much, if not all, potential opposition. He succeeded mostly through the use of political patronage to persuade opposition elements to defect to the PPP. Moreover, the ruling party's need, as a party with its roots among the educationally deprived rural populace, to obtain the support of the urban elite, created a coalition of interests across a broad range of social and ethnic groups (Cook and Hughes, 1997: 104).

²² The Gambia does not have a university, there are still only a few high schools and a teacher training college. However, a University program that offered some courses at the undergraduate level was inaugurated in 1995.

The fourth factor which enabled Jawara to stay in power has to do with Gambian cultural attitudes. The lack of an effective means to undermine the PPP can be attributed to the cultural attitudes and religious beliefs of most Gambians, which are highly entrenched in the villages. Faith in one "icon", President Jawara, remained very strong among the older generation, cultivated since independence by "meet the farmers" tours, an annual event which brought the president into contact with ordinary Gambians in the rural areas. These tours enabled him to keep in touch with grassroots feeling and also enabled him to react to problems before they become too serious. To many of these rural people, Jawara was synonymous with the proudest national achievement--the winning of independence for the country.

P. Sutton has hypothesized that, in developing states, the pre-eminence given to the political leader where the party system is not strongly entrenched is exacerbated by the "exaggerated personalism"²³ characteristic of the small state. This kind of pre-eminence is supplemented by the respect accorded to founding fathers in any state. Most Gambian rural people were proud that "one of theirs" had become a leader admired and respected at home and abroad.²⁴ With a Muslim population of almost 90 percent and a large number of heads of rural households having received an Islamic education, the impact of religious beliefs should not be underestimated. Islam encouraged a sense of acceptance among local Gambians that it was Allah's will for Jawara to be in power and

²³ See for example P. Sutton, "Political Aspects", in C. Clark and T. Payne (eds.), *Politics, Security and Development in Small States* (London: Unwin Hayman, 1987), 15

²⁴ Jawara is from Barajally, a small village in McCarthy Island (now Central River) Division.

that it was only Allah who could remove him²⁵.

The last factor which supported Jawara and the PPP's retention of power was the favorable reputation that the Gambian democratic system enjoyed in the wider international community. This positive image was reinforced by Jawara's willingness to work with international financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank. During the Structural Adjustment Programs of the 1980s, Gambia was declared by the IMF as a success story.²⁶ The head of state since independence promulgated a high level of political tolerance and respect for human rights which was widely praised in the international arena. This in turn gave him a strong sense of achievement which he did not fail to point out at political rallies. Moreover, his conscious assertion of his country's Islamic identity brought him personal standing in Islamic diplomatic circles, which no doubt would have also impressed elderly Muslim Gambians.

Summary

This chapter has examined the forces and events that shaped Gambian political development between independence and 1994. It explored pre-independence political

²⁵ Many Gambians, especially in the rural areas, were very supportive of Jawara. Their beliefs were based on traditional reluctance to challenge authority, reinforced by religion. It was not unusual to hear elderly Gambians say "Jawara leadership is God's will and if it is good enough for God it is good enough for me."

²⁶ In the interview I had with Jawara on April 24, 1999, he told me that: "having been struck with the Sahelian drought in the late 1960s and 1970, we embarked on an economic recovery program in 1985 and made quite a success of it... and after a five year period in 1990, it was succeeded by the program for sustainable development....Towards the end we had made such a success of it that the World Bank held a week long seminar in the Gambia and had discussions with the government, parliamentarians and civil society as a whole. From that seminar emerged the gateway project... in which the World Bank had earmarked \$20 million as seed money for this project. The aim of the project was to take our re-export trade one step further. Instead of actually simply importing, we can receive goods from all over the world and re-

activities in The Gambia which started with the emergence of elite political parties in Gambian urban areas. This phenomenon of urban political dominance changed in the late 1950s with the creation of the People's Progressive Party (PPP) under the leadership of Dawda Jawara. The chapter looked at how the PPP dominated the political landscape so much so that Gambia had almost become a de facto one party state, as there was no formidable opposition to threaten PPP political hegemony. Two major significant developments in Gambian politics were examined. The first was the attainment of republican status with the president as the head of state. The second was the establishment of the Senegambia Confederation of Gambia and Senegal.

The last part of this chapter explored the factors which kept Jawara and the People's Progressive Party (PPP) in power for nearly three decades. The first factor was Jawara's exploitation of the "ethnic card". Coming from the rural areas where the majority of the Gambian population lived, he was shrewdly able to secure Mandinka support. Having securely entrenched his power, he also accommodated the urban Wolofs and Akus to enable him to run his administration. In that regard, his dominance of the political system was quasi-patrimonial in nature. It was based on rewards to co-opt potential opponents, reinforced by a willingness to reconcile when doing so appeared to be the best course of action.

The weakness of the opposition also contributed to Jawara's longevity. The opposition parties were weakened by their leaders past association with the PPP leadership and a lack of effective organizational structures. Another factor which

export them to other countries in the region" (Interviewed in London April 24, 1999).

enhanced Jawara's longevity can be attributed to Gambian culture. Jawara cultivated a positive image with Gambian elders and religious leaders. In the rural areas, elders saw him as a symbol of pride (father of the nation and a rural man who had their interests at heart). A final factor was his ability to cultivate a positive image in the international community, especially as a champion of human rights. All of these positive attributes made it seem that the system was working and stable, especially to outsiders.

The big puzzle for observers of Gambian politics is to explain why this apparently successful system failed. Despite the existence of elections, despite the leadership ability displayed by Jawara, the 1994 coup still took place. This thesis argues that, despite appearances of success, the system was in fact hollow. While Jawara's personal popularity was strong, his government was seen by many Gambians, especially in the urban areas, and within the military, to be dominated by corrupt officials who manipulated the system to their own advantage, leading to the continued underdevelopment of the country. In other words, the Jawara government was seen by most Gambians to have been contaminated with legitimacy failure. It was this legitimacy failure which was the primary reason for the coup and is the subject of our discussion in chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

PRIMARY CAUSE OF THE 1994 COUP: LEGITIMACY FAILURE

The objective of this chapter is to explain the root cause of the Gambian coup d'état of July 22, 1994, which toppled the Jawara regime and brought to power the Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council (AFPRC). In chapter 1 the theories of military coups were explored. Chapter 2 set up the Gambian problem by showing how its civilian democratic system worked; how The Gambia appeared to be stable (at least to outsiders); and why the coup was such a surprise. This chapter will argue that legitimacy failure of the civilian government (the perspective of the external school) was the main cause of the 1994 Gambian coup d'état. To prove this contention, an analysis of the coup will be centered on the principal elements that caused the Gambian civilian regime to be weak. This chapter will explore the character and composition of the ruling PPP regime, and how, in trying to articulate its various interests, divisions emerged. The chapter will then look at how the PPP government lost its legitimacy by examining the following: (1) the clientelistic networks in the ruling PPP government, (2) the corruption scandals that swirled around the PPP in the run-up to the coup, (3) the implementation of structural adjustment programs, and (4) the role of exogenous shocks in the economic performance of the country. Before turning to the analysis, however, we will look at the events of the 1994 Gambian coup itself.

Events of the 1994 Coup

The July 1994 Gambian coup came as a complete surprise to Gambians, not

because The Gambia was necessarily immune to coup attempts, but because Gambians had become used to PPP rule. To many Gambians, the coup was a reminder of the 1981 putsch which failed as a result of Senegalese intervention. This time, however, the coup succeeded. Another difference is that, unlike the 1981 coup, which was partly executed by civilians and involved loss of life, no civilians were involved in the 1994 coup and it was bloodless. It was planned and executed by junior lieutenants of the Gambia National Army (GNA) (Saine, 1996: 100).

The soldiers took only a few hours to capture strategic locations, including the army depot, the national airport, the radio station, and the State House (the residence of President Jawara). The coup coincided with joint military exercises which were planned between Gambian army officers and US marines who were visiting with the US warship, *La Moure County*. This coincidence facilitated the coup in that it allowed the coup-makers unrestricted access to the armory and to vehicles, both essential to the success of their operations. This was the view of former president Jawara, who put his perspectives on the coup as follows: "Having access to adequate transport and access to the armory, instead of going for the naval exercises, they went for the State House."²⁷ As the coup progressed, many Gambians assumed the military action was part of the joint exercises

²⁷ During my April 24, 1999, interview with ex-President Jawara, he told me that there were certain coincidences which facilitated the coup's success. "I was preparing to go to office when I was warned by my security adviser Kebba Ceesay, who was the Director of the National Security Service, that there had been rumors of a coup circulating about three weeks before. While he was giving me this briefing, my Vice-President and Minister of Defense arrived to tell me that the US Ambassador, Andrew Winter, was waiting for me. I asked what for? I was not expecting him. He replied well, the coup is already under way, and felt that it was better to deal with the situation on the ship." Jawara did not say the US participated directly in the coup, but he did say that certain coincidences were questionable (Interviewed in London, April 24, 1999).

(Saine, 1996:100). The presence of the US vessel also played into the hands of the coup plotters, because President Jawara, together with his family, vice-president and several of his closest senior political colleagues, were taken on board the ship. This move was decided by Jawara's security advisers, with the participation of the US Ambassador to The Gambia, Andrew Winter.²⁸ While on board the ship, Jawara unsuccessfully tried to convince the soldiers to return to their barracks. When his appeal went unheeded, Jawara requested the assistance of the US marines to crush the coup. The US government turned down his request for direct intervention, but allowed the *La Moure County* to transport him and his entourage to safety in Senegal. After failing to convince the Senegalese to support him, the ousted president moved on to the United Kingdom, where he sought exile.

Around dusk on the 22nd of July, it was announced on Radio Gambia that the country was in the hands of the Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council.²⁹ It was also revealed that the AFPRC was chaired by an obscure, 28 year old Lieutenant, Yahya Jammeh. The council announced the dissolution of the PPP government, the suspension of the constitution, the banning of all political party activities and the imposition of a curfew from dawn to dusk (West Africa, 1-7 August, 1994: 1346).

Gambian reaction to the coup varied from cautious support to a wait and see

²⁸In my interview with Sir Dawda on April 24, 1999, he told me that leaving the State House and boarding the ship was, in retrospect, a mistake. This sentiment was echoed by the former Deputy Inspector General of the Gambian police, Ebrima Chongan, who said that Jawara's leaving the State House facilitated the coup (Interviewed in London April 28, 1999).

²⁹ For early accounts of the 1994 coup, see Baboucar Gaye, "Ousted Jawara Flees", *West Africa*, 1-7 August 1994; 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.

approach. Perhaps the memories of the 1981 coup attempt, in which there was widespread violence, and the fact it had been avoided this time, may have been the reason for caution. In any event there was no major opposition to the new rulers. Gambia's religious leaders gave their blessing to the military regime. Sherif Dibba, the leader of the National Convention Party (NCP), the main opposition party, affirmed his support and endorsement of the coup. The leader of The Gambia People's Party (GPP), Assan Musa Camara, did not officially react to the coup, whereas the People's Democratic Organization for Independence and Socialism (PDOIS) leaders, Halifa Sallah and Sedia Jatta, condemned the coup and urged a quick return to civilian constitutional rule (Wiseman and Vidler, 1995: 61-62; Saine, 1996: 110). How could the coup succeed so swiftly and easily? We will begin our examination of the causes of the Jawara government's legitimacy failure by looking at the nature of Gambian democracy.

The Nature of Gambian Democracy

Until the 1994 coup, The Gambia was Africa's oldest multiparty democracy. Presidential and Parliamentary elections had been held five times since the attainment of independence in 1965 and, for this reason, it was regarded as a model for the rest of Africa (Radelet, 1992: 1093). However, when one closely examines the results of these elections, it soon becomes clear that, despite the outward appearance of a vibrant multiparty democracy, The Gambia could be characterized as having a de-facto single

party system³⁰.

Even though Gambia's post-independence politics witnessed a proliferation of political parties, the PPP managed to continuously dominate the political landscape. In every election since 1965, the PPP never failed to win less than 24 of the 34 contested seats. The main reason for the success of the PPP was a strong presidential system that heavily favored the incumbent president and his party. While Gambian opposition political parties were able to organize and compete in national elections, it was impossible for them to break the PPP's monopoly of power (Radelet, 1992: 1093-1094)

The consequence of such dominance of Gambian politics by a single party, the PPP, made The Gambia an example of "democratic disempowerment"-- a process in which new multiparty systems merely allow rotating and competing portions of the ruling elites to exploit the vast majority of Africa's largely rural areas, which continue to remain disempowered from their respective political systems (Schraeder, 1994: 70). Peter Schraeder has expounded on this perspective about how ruling elites in Africa, under the guise of democracy, have sometimes become a nuisance. He notes "that the successful holding of multiparty elections does not ensure that democratic practices have become institutionalized in countries still marked by democratic fragility" (Schraeder, 1994: 76).

The Gambian example highlights the caution one must adopt when considering the possibilities of regime change via multiparty elections, and the role of ruling elites in either facilitating or impeding that process. In the Gambian situation, PPP dominance

³⁰ For a detailed discussion of de-facto one party systems, see Peter J. Schraeder, "Elites as Facilitators or Impediments to Political Development? Some Lessons from the 'Third Wave' of Democratization in

and the fact that the other parties were headed by former PPP ministers, who had had a falling out with Jawara, made this process of regime change even more dubious. However, the process of "democratic disempowerment" may be inevitable in a small state like The Gambia, as a result of the poverty and lack of education of the majority of Gambians and the complexities of trying to run a modern government.

When analyzing the performance failure in The Gambia we need to look at the domestic achievements of its democratic regime. Jimmy D. Kandeh has noted that: "the Gambian coup was internally popular because the Jawara government had become complacent and had lost touch with the people" (Kandeh, 1996: 387-389). How did the PPP regime lose touch and become complacent? It used its image as a stable, democratic government, with a good record of respect for human rights, to gain international respect and development assistance, while ignoring the economic and social well-being of the Gambian people. The rights of the Gambian people to education and health care were seriously violated by the government. For example, at the time of the coup in 1994, about 61 per cent of school aged children did not have access to formal education, and there was not even a university in the country (The Commonwealth Yearbook, 1999: 120). The infant mortality rate was 140 per 1000 live births, while child mortality stood at 292 per 1000, and as many as 10 women died for every 1000 births. In addition, less than 40 percent of the population had access to safe drinking water. Moreover, life expectancy was as low as 40 years for both men and women, and as much as 75 percent of the people lived in absolute poverty (West Africa, 30 October-5 November, 1995: 1683).

The above problems are all indication of the continued underdevelopment of the country.

Despite all of these shortcomings, the Gambian people seemed generally tolerant of the PPP leadership. The government, however, continued to take the people for granted and did not put too much effort into trying to provide the basic socioeconomic and human development that the country needed. On the surface, the Gambian political and economic set-up seemed like a success story. But in reality, it was hollow and dominated by a small elite that monopolized the system to its own advantage. One consequence of PPP dominance was that it generated resentment from a majority of Gambians, who felt economically and politically marginalized. It also generated the same resentment within the army, especially among the junior and non-commissioned officers.³¹ This combination of political and social marginalization formed the backdrop to the decision by elements of Gambia's poorly paid junior officers to seize power (Kandeh, 1996: 391). It also led to internal factionalism and division within the PPP.

Divisions Within the PPP

Since 1992, when President Jawara had to be persuaded to seek re-election for another term, the PPP could be said to have been struggling with a leadership problem. Before the 1992 election, President Jawara had expressed his desire to retire from politics and not seek re-election. It was only after strong protest from his party and the

³¹ For details on how political and social marginalization of the military in the Gambia led to the coup, see Jimmy Kandeh, "What does the 'Militariat' Do When it Rules? Military Regimes: The Gambia, Sierra Leone and Liberia", *Review of Africa Political Economy*, 69 (1996). Kandeh notes that the 1994 Gambian coup was internally popular not only because it replaced a floundering regime, but also on account of the

Banjul elites that he agreed to stand for one last time. After winning the election, President Jawara reshuffled his Cabinet, demoting his former Vice-President, Bakary Dabo, and promoting the former Finance Minister, Saihou Sabally, to the post. The appointment of Sabally did not go down well with the majority of Gambians because Jawara was seen to be paving the way to the Presidency for Sabally, who was perceived to be dishonest (West Africa, 1-7 August 1994: 1347). The appointment of Sabally also divided the ruling PPP into factions--those in the camp of Bakary Dabo, who was generally considered by Gambians to be honest, and those in the camp of Sabally, who was commonly believed to be only interested in personal self aggrandizement (Saine, 1996: 100). This PPP factionalism and division also began the process of de-legitimizing the regime. The factors involved in this process are detailed in the rest of this chapter.

Patrimonialism

Political analysts have highlighted the prevalence of neopatrimonial regimes throughout sub-Saharan Africa, so called because they reflect the outward features of institutionalized administrative states while operating essentially along patrimonial lines (Lewis, 1996: 99). According to Peter M. Lewis,

Although neopatrimonial rule is rooted in historical patterns of authority and social solidarity, it emerged in the post-independence era as African leaders consolidated their fledgling regimes through an array of personal linkages and patron-client networks. Beneath the veneer of formal bureaucracy, legal procedure, and constitutional order inherited from the colonial state, neopatrimonial states have been organized by kinship, faction, and clientage. Power in such regimes is concentrated and personalized, entailing discretionary

populist posturing of the youthful leaders (Kandeh, 1996: 387).

control over broad realms of public life. The personal prerogatives of the ruler typically eclipse the authority of laws and organizations, fostering a weak and unstable institutional arena (Lewis, 1996:99).

Taking up Lewis's characterization of neopatrimonialism, it can be said that PPP hegemony for over 29 years had resulted in a neopatrimonial regime accessible only through the party and top echelons of the ruling elite. Jimmy Kandeh made an explicit observation of the situation when he noted that "Gambia seemed the quintessence of domestic tranquillity and political stability in Africa...this stability however, masked a corrupt political system mired in patronage, cronyism and nepotism" (Kandeh, 1996: 391).

In the Gambian case, political and social elites used democracy, respect for human rights, and stability in the country as a cover for their exploitation of the patron-client networks. Loyalty to the PPP or to President Jawara was generously rewarded by access to the state's meager resources. Members of the PPP elite became the primary beneficiaries of the state in both the public and private sectors. Nepotism and favoritism were common practices in The Gambia. The elite did not hesitate to use personal connections with functionaries in the government bureaucracy to gain undeserved favors, such as untendered contract awards, employment and the awarding of undeserved scholarships to their family members (Yeebo, 1995:23). Prominent PPP ministers, senior civil servants, and major figures in the Gambian business community were engaged in orchestrating this behavior. As John Wiseman noted, included in the modes 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 party 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,"¹² and straight forward theft (Wiseman, 1996: 391).

Agbese has observed that the struggles for access to the state by various factions and interest groups can have serious ramifications for the economy of the state. These struggles, he argues, "assume life and death dimensions" in that they engender class cleavages, which impede the development process of the state. They also create "primordial identities" in which "ethnicity, religion and region of birth all become mobilization tools" for the advancement of political objectives (Agbese, 1990: 28). The consequence is that factions pay more attention to the advancement of their own interests than to the interests of the state. Within the aforementioned context, also, the ordinary people do not have a stake in the politics of the dominant class. These problems provide the basis or rationale for the military to intervene. As a majority of the people are already alienated from politics, the military does not face much opposition when it overthrows elected governments. In fact, its intervention may be initially welcomed by the majority

¹² John Wiseman (p.931) noted that the payment of "ghost workers" and "ghost pensioners" was a *modus operandi* of the bureaucratic machinery in the Gambia. Many senior civil servants in the government used this dubious act to transfer large sums of money to themselves by pretending to make official payments of wages and pensions to people who did not exist or who had previously died. The Commission of Inquiry established in October 1995 to look into the activities of officials in the PPP regime produced evidence which suggested that senior Gambian civil servants received large sums of money through "ghost payments to pensioners" while junior civil servants received a smaller amount.

of the population (Agbese, 1990: 28).

In The Gambia both patrimonialism and clientelism were evident in the *modus operandi* of the PPP regime. Jawara presided over power and resources, which he distributed to favorites and potential adversaries. While this method provided a resilient mechanism for stability in the country, it created a weak vessel for economic growth (Yeebo, 1995: 20). The resultant impact was the alienation of a majority of the Gambian people, which gave disaffected elements within the Gambian army officer corps the opportunity to intervene.

Corruption

Apart from the neopatrimonial nature of the PPP regime, the Jawara government's reputation among Gambians was further damaged by continuing allegations of corruption by Cabinet Ministers and civil servants in the government. The most publicized allegation was that against Vice- President Sabally, when he was Minister of Agriculture. This promotion was given after Sabally lost a libel suit which he brought against Sana Manneh, the editor of the newspaper, *The Torch*, who had accused him of corruption. The judge who presided over the case acquitted the editor of all the charges on the grounds that the plaintiff had not shown himself innocent of corruption. Amidst the acquittals of the editor, and Sabally's subsequent promotion, many Gambians began to think that Jawara was grooming a notoriously corrupt man for the presidency (Wiseman and Vidler, 1995: 57-58).

Another famous scandal involved senior managers at The Gambia Co-operative

Union, who were put on indefinite leave as a consequence. However, rather than rendering swift justice against the alleged perpetrators, to restore confidence and minimize resentment, President Jawara ordered an audit of the Union. When the final report was released, rather than fire the discredited officials, the President chose to set up a commission of inquiry to study the report, interview people connected with it and make recommendations.³³ This lack of action was not welcomed by many Gambians, who thought that the findings of the audit should have been enough for the President to have taken action against the named officials. In fact, even police investigations which had begun were suspended (West Africa, 1-7 August 1994: 1347). Condemnation by religious leaders in civil society, both Christian and Muslim, highlighted the problematic nature of the corruption situation within the Gambian government³⁴

Revealing evidence of the level of corruption in the PPP government and the financial activities of the regime also surfaced during the restructuring of The Gambia

³³ Ex- President Jawara defended his decision to set up a commission of inquiry on the grounds that he felt it was the right thing to do. He said: "in every government, corruption springs up from time to time. In our case, there was alleged misappropriation of funds within the Gambia Cooperative Union, and we had accepted a judicial inquiry. A report was submitted to us a few weeks before the coup and when the junta took over, they simply implemented what was in that report". Jawara felt that the criticism against him with regards to not punishing corrupt officials was unfair. He said: "if we are going by the rule of law, it is not the president who hears all sorts of things and goes and catches this man, throws him in jail or beats him up, because it is complex. If it is a straight forward thing, you can hand them over to the police, to be dealt with according to the law. But if people tend to think if anybody is accused of corruption, the president or whoever is the head of government actually pounces on him and punishes him, that would be a dictatorship, that is not the rule of law. It is not human rights either" (London, England April 24, 1999).

³⁴ *The Point* newspaper (Banjul) 8 November, 1993, reported on a sermon delivered by the Imam of Dippa Kunda Central Mosque, condemning what he characterized as the "big thieves of the nation" who steal "millions of public money". A similar sentiment was echoed by Bishop Joseph Cleary, the Roman Catholic Bishop of the Gambia. *The Daily Observer* newspaper (Banjul) 8 December, 1993, reported on a speech in which the Bishop condemned bribery, corruption, and "the appalling lack of accountability for sizable funds intended for human development". He pointed out that while financial scandal "is becoming very prevalent in this country at all levels of society.... The big fish are getting away and the small fry are being caught" (Wiseman and Vidler, 1995: 64-65).

Commercial and Development Bank (Saine, 1996: 100). The bank was established by an Act of Parliament (The GCDB Act No.13, 1972) “to assist in the economic development of the Gambia...by promoting trade, industry, agriculture, fisheries, mining and tourism in the country” (Yeebo, 1995: 26). However, the bank failed, in large measure, in the implementation of these specific tasks. It had become a bank for PPP stalwarts and elites, who benefited from massive loans which they were either unwilling or unable to pay back (Yeebo, 1995: 26). At the behest of the IMF and World Bank, as part of the structural adjustment programs, The Gambia Commercial and Development Bank was privatized. The government conceded that a considerable amount of public funds had been loaned to the Bank’s customers, some of whom had defaulted in their payments (Yeebo, 1995: 26-27; West Africa, 1-7 August 1994: 1347).

It was against this background that the Assets Management and Recovery Corporation (AMRC) was established to try and recover the loans. Most of the loans had been given to top ranking supporters of the PPP. The two most notable beneficiaries of these loans were Saihou Ceesay, who owed Gambian Dalasi 100 million (equivalent to US\$10 million), and O.B. Conateh, who owed D24 million (US\$2.4 million). Although the establishment of the AMRC was a positive development, its efforts to recover loans were not very successful (West Africa, 1-7 August 1994: 1347).

The pervasiveness of corruption had undermined the Jawara regime to such an extent that it faced what Chris Allen has characterized as a “crisis of legitimacy” (Kandeh, 1996: 391). This legitimacy failure is confirmed by the fact that Lieutenant Jammeh made combating corruption the primary goal of his new government and

established a commission of inquiry to probe the assets and activities of his predecessor. He characterized the AFPRC coup as a necessary sacrifice “to respond to the early warnings of a potential political turbulence emanating from social injustice and human rights violations inflicted upon the majority of Gambians for 30 years by the ousted government of the PPP under the leadership of Alhaji Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara”. He continued, “these malpractices were exacerbated by crime, drug trafficking and rampant corruption.”

He promised remedial measures which would ensure “compliance with the principles of accountability, transparency and probity” (West Africa, 13-19 February, 1995: 218). Apart from the corruption controversy, the implementation of a policy of structural adjustment did also lead to a de-legitimization of the Jawara regime.

The Legacy of Structural Adjustment

As chapter 1 points out, poor economic performance is a key component of legitimacy failure, often used by the external school to explain coups. Eric Nordlinger has argued that the failures of civilian governments to promote economic growth can lead to military intervention (Nordlinger, 1977: 85-91) In an article entitled “*Explaining African Military Coups D'état, 1960-1982*” Thomas H. Johnson et al. echoed this sentiment when they observed that there is a relationship between economic performance and military intervention in Africa. In developing this argument they studied coups in different countries in Africa and concluded that:

Economic trends and patterns are seen as affecting political behavior such as coups d'état. All Sub-Saharan African states are economically underdeveloped,

and therefore all African governments claim that economic development is one of the major objectives against which their performance in office can be assessed, both locally and internationally. One does not have to be a vulgar Marxist to recognize that a stagnating economy in conjunction with rising unemployment and underdevelopment, recurrent balance of payments crises, and flagrant corruption create an environment in which military coups become highly probable events (Johnson et al. 1984: 633).

In the mid-1980s, a number of African economies, including The Gambia's, were in crisis owing to internal economic decline. The economic decline of these African states was partly due to the world recession, droughts in the West African sub-region, and deteriorating terms of trade (Radelet, 1992: 1087). In addition, the economic decline was heightened by bloated bureaucracies that were corrupt, inefficient, and increasingly incapable of responding to the basic needs of their populations (Schraeder, 1994:75). It was due to the continued decline in the economies of these African states that structural adjustment programs (SAPs) were instituted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. These programs were aimed at getting the economies back on their feet, as it was becoming difficult for the African states to meet the day to day needs of their respective populations.³⁵

Although the absence of sufficient data prevents a detailed analysis of the economic impact of structural adjustment on The Gambia, one can provisionally argue that the policies of reform instituted by the IMF did very little to alleviate The Gambia's economic situation, at least in the short term. The Gambian economy had encountered serious troubles in the mid-1980s. This misfortune was caused by the Sahelian drought

³⁵ See for example Richard Sandbrook, "The Politics of Africa's Economic Recovery" (Cambridge:

which struck the West Africa sub-region, the world recession, and a decline in the price of groundnuts, Gambia's main traditional export (Parfit, 1995: 63). The above problems were compounded by an expansion of public and government expenditures which led to fiscal deficit, inflation, and overvaluation of the currency. Parfit notes that:

The latter problem boosted demand for imports, while rendering exports even less competitive, leading to a balance of payments deficit and the growth of external indebtedness. These economic problems resulted in a major crisis that matured in 1985/ 86. Gross official reserves fell to the equivalent of less than one week of imports, external indebtedness rose to 113 per cent of GDP, and external payment arrears peaked at SDR 88.2 million, nearly one and a half times export earnings in 1985/ 96 (Parfit, 1995:63).

In response to these problems, the IMF was called to The Gambia in 1985 to help put in place a stabilization program known as the Economic Recovery Program (ERP). The principal objectives of the ERP were: (1) to reduce state control and participation in the economic life of the country by selling or transferring control of a number of state industries to private enterprise and (2) to create a climate favorable for productive investment through the elimination of exchange-rate and price distortions and the provision of selective incentives (Cook and Hughes, 1997:98). To realize these goals, the government had to put in place a broad and comprehensive set of reforms affecting virtually every area of the Gambian economy. The government retrenched the civil service, reducing the number of employees from 16, 332 to 13, 257. This action was compounded by freezing public sector salaries and floating the Gambian national currency, leading to its depreciation by 120 per cent over six months (Radelet,

1992:1088).

The Economic Recovery Program (ERP) did not have the support of PPP politicians, but they lacked any credible alternatives. Additionally, the conditions put forward by international financial institutions meant that the government would either have to adopt the recovery program or risk being denied loans. As Steven Radelet put it: "The Gambia Chamber of Commerce, the commercial banks, the Central Bank, many parastatals, civil servants, and most of the cabinet were all against major reforms. There were no major interest groups or government sectors that supported the ERP" (Radelet, 1992: 1094).

The above problems notwithstanding, devaluation of the currency did have a positive impact on the tourism sector. It made The Gambia a highly competitive tourist destination. In addition, the country's foreign exchange earnings increased impressively. The number employed in the tourist sector, either directly or indirectly, doubled between 1985 and 1990, to an estimated 10,000 people. In addition, demand for labour in horticulture, fisheries and the re-export trade also rose (Cook and Hughes, 1997: 99). These positive achievements notwithstanding, the ERP had a number of negative impacts which contributed to the regime's legitimacy failure. The urban Gambian population (especially unskilled and casual workers) was hit hard by the retrenchment in the civil service and the increased price of basic commodities due to the adjustment transition. Adjustment also failed to increase living standards for the majority of the rural poor. The government, in the wake of adjustment, relegated their welfare to non-governmental organizations who could not do much to alleviate their suffering. Most rural families

continued to rely on the Gambian informal sector system of mutual support known as the "F connection" (family, friends), supplemented by remittances from urban based Gambians and those living abroad (Cook and Hughes, 1997: 99).

David Cook and Arnold Hughes, in an article entitled; *The Politics of Economic Recovery: The Gambia's Experience of Structural Adjustment, 1985-94*, offer a very insightful analysis of the pitfalls of structural adjustment. They argue that while the implementation of structural adjustment did help rescue The Gambia from the brink of economic collapse, it also exposed the limits of structural adjustment in a small state like The Gambia, which had low administrative capacity and low economic viability (Cook and Hughes, 1997: 93)

The Gambia's implementation of the structural adjustment programs had some unintended effects, which, in the long term, contributed to the 1994 coup. As Gerald Scott has noted, the objectives of IMF programs in Africa were to streamline bloated bureaucracies, strengthen institutional capacity, encourage the participation of the private sector in the national economy and promote macroeconomic stability (Scott, 1998: 268). All of these objectives remove the opportunities for corruption and cronyism, thereby marginalizing and excluding the urban elites by restricting their avenues for wealth accumulation. In the case of The Gambia, an additional unintended effect of the implementation of SAP reform programs unfolded in the urban areas of Banjul and its environs. As a result of devaluation and retrenchment of the civil service, a large number of unskilled workers and urban youths lost their jobs, causing them to feel excluded and marginalized from the economic, social and political set up. This crisis of urban youth

and elite marginalization, combined with a few publicized cases of corruption in 1993, helped lead to the eventual coup of 1994.

Adopting the painful process of SAP reforms meant that the government could not do much in terms of socioeconomic development, which in any case had been lacking since independence. As Zaya Yeebo has pointed out, after almost 30 years of PPP government rule, the Gambian infrastructural system was in very bad shape. The only two hospitals in the country, which dated from the British colonial era, were in crisis. In addition, there were only a few high schools in the country and they could only accommodate a small minority of school children. Also, there was complete underdevelopment of the rural areas (Yeebo, 1995: 1-3). Yeebo's observation is shared by Trevor Parfit, who has pointed out that SAP programs in The Gambia affected the PPP government's efforts towards national development. Even though the Gambian government made road development a priority, it succeeded in only nominal expansion and upgrading of a few roads in Banjul and its environs. However, the government's effort in this endeavor was constrained by a lack of proper road equipment, as well as the absence of skilled labor for the construction and maintenance of roads (Parfit, 1995:65).

The shortcomings of national socioeconomic development, combined with urban elite and youth marginalization, contributed to the 1994 coup. As scholars have noted, urban elites in developing countries tend to have diverse economic interests. In most African countries the urban population is usually more politically powerful and its views have been the barometer used to measure or assess the political climate (Scott, 1998: 269). The 1994 Gambian coup succeeded in part because the urban elites were an

important source of support for the PPP, and their support was contingent upon what they could gain. When the structural adjustment adjustment programs reduced the opportunities for graft and personal enrichment, they were no longer prepared to continue supporting the regime. This fall-off in elite support reinforced the military's decision to stage a coup, because they would have known that as long as the Gambian elite's economic interests were safeguarded there would be little opposition. This supposition is consistent with the theory, mentioned in chapter 1, that a government's poor economic performance can engender military interference. As Nordlinger pointed out, economic performance in developing countries generally affects the middle class, and in most developing countries the military has connections with the middle class (Nordlinger, 1977: 88-89).

Why then was the PPP able to maintain its hold on power in the elections of 1992, despite the ERP? The majority of Gambians live in the rural areas and are virtually untouched by modernity. Most of them are subsistence farmers, who have limited participation in the modern economy, and limited access to the basic social services that the government was providing. However, because the PPP had its roots in the rural areas, it continued to generate support from rural farmers. As chapter 2 has observed, approximately 75 per cent of the Gambian population living in the rural areas, mainly Mandinka and Fula farmers, and they formed the backbone of the PPP constituency. The country's small size and the accessibility of rural villages also contributes to the rural power base. Reforms which tended to hurt mainly the urban dwellers--the floating of the dalasi and increases in bank interest rates, petroleum prices, utility rates and transport

fares--did little to erode the party's historic base of rural electoral support (Radelet, 1992: 1095). This shifted in the early 1990s when a series of exogenous shocks began to deeply affect the rural majority.

Exogenous Shocks

The Gambia's structural adjustment reform program began to falter in the early 1990s. This was caused by four exogenous shocks. The first occurred in August 1993, in what came to be known as the "CFA crisis", when 14 members of the Communauté Financière Africaine (CFA) banned the repurchase of CFA-franc notes outside member countries. The action was designed to curb the smuggling of notes by traders of the overvalued currency into non-CFA countries (The Economist, September 11, 1993: 79). This move had a severe repercussion on the Gambian economy, because the CFA franc was, at the time, a popularly employed trading currency in The Gambia. In addition, most Gambian farmers sold their groundnut produce in Senegal, because of its stronger currency, and when the CFA was devalued, this action curtailed a valuable source of income for most of these farmers. This shock created some measure of discontent among rural voters, but not to the extent that it undermined PPP support.

However, the farmers' frustrations were worsened by Senegal's decision, in 1993, to close its borders to all transit trade. The Gambia's existence has long created economic difficulties for Senegal. The Gambia effectively divides Senegal into two regions, making it inconvenient and costly to transport goods from the north to the south. The two sections of Senegal differ ethnically, economically and politically, and a

secessionist conflict has emerged in the south (Radelet, 1992: 1094). Senegal's justification for the border restriction was that Gambia's largely unregulated re-export trade was harming its volatile economy. Senegal's anger over the collapse of the Senegambia Confederation, which it blamed on Gambian unwillingness for a quicker economic and political integration, was also an important factor in the "trade war" (West Africa, 29 Aug.- 4 Sept. 1994: 1503). The trade crisis reduced the amount of imports destined for re-exportation from The Gambia by half. Government revenue, which was mostly derived from custom duties, was also reduced by 20 percent. The Gambia's projected growth in GDP for 1993/94 was also revised downwards to zero (Cook and Hughes, 1997: 111).

The Gambia's re-export trade was dealt another serious blow on January 11, 1994, when member countries of the CFA devalued their common currency by 50 percent. The devaluation was brought about by France's decision not to bridge the budget deficits of CFA member countries or service their debts unless they instituted the stern economic reform programs of the IMF (The Economist, Jan 15 1994: 45). Because a large part of The Gambia's comparative advantage in trade, since the mid 1980s, had been due to an overvalued CFA franc, which increased the profitability of exporting to Senegal and neighboring countries, the devaluation of the CFA franc hurt the Gambian economy substantially (Cook and Hughes, 1997:111-112).

A final exogenous factor which undermined efforts at consolidating reform, and therefore weakened the government's legitimacy, was the high level of refugees arriving in the country. In the late 1980s to early 1990s, with civil wars in Liberia and Sierra

Leone, The Gambia was a haven of stability in a turbulent sub-region. This led to a sharp increase in immigration levels into the country. A 1993 census reported a 113 per cent increase between 1983 and 1993 in the number of non-Gambians living in the country. This was a sharp increase compared to the 17 percent increase between 1973 and 1983 (Cook and Hughes, 1997: 112). Additionally, a continued secessionist war in the Casamance region of southern Senegal exacerbated the situation. A 1993 estimate put the number of Casamance refugees on Gambian soil at 10,000 and continuing to increase.³⁶ This large inflow of refugees no doubt engendered a big strain on The Gambia's weak economy. Areas most likely to have been affected were health, education and the level of unemployment, all of which had a potential for social unrest.

Summary

This chapter has argued that the primary cause of the Gambian coup was the legitimacy failure of the PPP regime. In making this argument, PPP programs were examined from an economic and political perspective. The legitimacy failure was exacerbated by the fact that, on the surface, the Gambian economic and political system seemed like a success story. In reality, however, the country was dominated by a small elite, which monopolized the system to its advantage at the expense of continued underdevelopment. The average Gambian had seen few benefits from nearly thirty years of PPP rule. Therefore, the legitimacy of the system collapsed because of clientelism,

³⁶ The region of Casamance has been waging a secessionist war in Senegal since 1983. This southern region of Senegal is predominantly inhabited by the Jola tribe, who have accused Senegalese authorities of neglect.

corruption and economic failure.

The most devastating blows to the PPP regime were probably the corruption scandals, especially the one at The Gambia Cooperative Union. The widespread coverage generated by this scandal increased public awareness and resentment of the PPP government. In addition, efforts by the AMRC to recover loans given by the defunct Gambia Commercial and Development Bank to prominent PPP supporters were bogged down in difficulties (Saine, 1996: 100). All of the above problems enabled the AFPRC junta to seize on corruption as a justification for the coup.

At the time of the coup, government malfeasance was seen to be endemic and condemning it was a means of delegitimizing the PPP regime, especially in the context of the severe economic difficulties which The Gambia had to endure as a result of the structural adjustment programs which had been in place since the mid-1980s. In particular, the effects of a devalued CFA franc, and Senegal's restriction of Gambia's re-export trade, both served to undermine the legitimacy of President Jawara's regime and served as an important justification for the coup (Saine, 1996: 101).

Ultimately, then, the PPP's legitimacy failure supports the external theory on coups, which asserts that civilian regimes stand more firmly when they are broadly supported by the populace and are seen to be legitimate. When widespread support is entrenched the likelihood of military intervention is greatly diminished. On the other hand, if the broader political environment in which the civilian regime operates is weak, then a coup occurs. This is consistent with Huntington's perspective that "the most important causes of military intervention in politics are not military but political, and

reflect, not the social and organizational characteristics of the military establishment, but the political and institutional structure of society". In The Gambia case, this legitimacy failure formed the background to the seizure of power by its junior military officers. However, factors internal to the Gambian National Army (primarily a feeling of deprivation by the junior officers) cannot be ignored and these will be the focus of analysis in chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

SECONDARY REASONS FOR THE COUP: FEELINGS OF DEPRIVATION AND REGIONAL TURBULENCE

The previous chapter focused on the shortcomings of the PPP regime that led to a legitimacy failure and how this, in turn, facilitated the 1994 Gambian coup. The PPP's failure to deal with economic and social problems was not taken lightly by junior officers in the Gambian army because it happened at a time when they had personal grievances against the government. The most obvious one was the general feeling of deprivation among junior army officers. In addition, one other stimulus of the 1994 Gambian coup, which neither the external nor the internal theories on coups touch upon, was regional relations. This chapter will focus on how the feeling of deprivation among the Gambian army officers was a factor in their decision to stage a coup. It will do so by first exploring the Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council's justification for the coup. Second it will look at the nature and lifestyle of the AFPRC regime. Finally, it will look at how turbulence in the West African sub-region and the Jawara government's poor relations with the government of Senegal emboldened the soldiers to perpetrate a coup.

The Military's Justification

Military coups can be difficult and complicated to explain, not only because of the confusion and secrecy that accompanies the events, but also because of the efforts of participants to justify their actions after the fact as part of the process of garnering legitimacy. The latter is definitely the case in the Gambian coup of 1994. In the aftermath of the coup, Lieutenant Jammeh embarked upon a public relations campaign to reassure

both Gambians and the international community that the AFPRC regime deserved their support and should not be shunned. Most of his justifications were similar to the standard reasons given by military officers when they seek to achieve international acceptance. Jammeh presented the junta's actions as necessary to safeguard his country from despoliation by the PPP government, which he accused of "rampant outrageous corruption" as well as "random plundering of the country's assets to benefit a few people" (Wiseman, 1996: 919).

Jammeh promised to resolve the country's problems by creating a political system that would permit "a new era of freedom, progress, democracy and accountability." In the early days following the coup, Jammeh also adopted a conciliatory stance towards the ousted president, saying:

We all know that we owe it to him that the name of the Gambia has reached the international level and we respect him. But the people who were behind him misled him, were corrupt, did whatever they wanted to do because he was too lenient. We have no intention of harming him...we want to treat him as an elderly man. He is free to come to the country as a Gambian citizen and we can provide for his security if he needs it, and from time to time we would need to consult him for advice. We have nothing against him, but the people behind him were doing whatever they wanted, uncontrolled (West Africa, 1-7 August 1994: 1348).

Jammeh even assured members of the former president's government that his criticism did not apply to everyone:

We are not painting every member of the PPP as bad or corrupt. Whoever is clean is welcome to be part of the government because we want advice. We want people who have contributed positively to the development of the country under constraints, we want them in the new government. We are not sidelining anyone who is clean. We are not out to wipe out the entire PPP. There are some good guys in the PPP. They are free to come forward and we will sit together and work in the interest of the country (West Africa, 1-7 August 1994: 1348).

Consistent with his comments about the mixed qualities of the ousted PPP

government, Jammeh appointed two former PPP cabinet ministers to his government. Bakary Dabo was made Minister of Finance and Fafa Mbye was appointed Attorney General and Minister of Justice. These accommodations were very brief and accompanied by much harsher condemnation of the ousted regime. Dabo was sacked in October of 1994 and fled to England shortly after.¹⁷ In March of 1995, Fafa Mbye was also kicked out of the government and, shortly after, arrested and charged with corruption.

Feelings of Deprivation

The AFPRC's justification of the 1994 coup was to rescue The Gambia from the avarice and inordinate ambition of some members in the PPP government. However, experience in other African countries suggests that one should be wary of these arguments. In fact, in the case of the AFPRC, when we look at their real motivations we realize that their intentions were not too noble. This will be further elaborated on in the course of this chapter. As Jimmy Kandeh argues, when it comes to military coups in Africa, several intra-military factors need to be taken into consideration. According to Jimmy Kandeh:

Cleavages among soldiers--both hierarchical (between senior and junior officers) and vertical (between officers and non-officers)--are embedded in the structural division of labour between management (officers) and workers (militariat). This division, especially the differential access to public resources it furnishes, is often implicated in coups led by elements of the militariat (Kandeh, 1996: 388).¹⁸

¹⁷ Dabo was accused of involvement in a November 1994 failed coup attempt against Jammeh. As many as 20 soldiers were alleged to have died in that coup attempt; Jammeh used it to wipe out most of his fellow officers whom he perceived as a threat to his reign (Wiseman, 1996 :922).

¹⁸ According to Jimmy Kandeh, "the term Militariat refers to the lower rungs of the military hierarchy, from the rank of lieutenant down to that of private, although it is not uncommon for the political leadership of this substratum to include captains and other junior officers. While the militariat's location in the class structure is as part of the working class, it is differentiated from other subordinate strata by its access to, and operation of, the means of destruction in society. As a constitutive element of the repressive apparatuses of

In the case of The Gambia, the fact that junior officers within the army grabbed power highlights the degree of disaffection within what Kandeh calls the ‘militariat’. When the Gambian army was formed in the 1980s, most of the senior officers within the army were Senegalese. While the denationalization of the senior officer corps negated the possibility of a coup led by senior officers, it also contributed to a feeling of resentment by junior Gambian army officers, who regarded the foreign commanders as a major impediment to their careers. It also showed a lack of trust in the army by the civilian government and this grated on the Gambian officer corps.³⁹ The success of the 1994 Gambian coup can be attributed, in part, to the lack of strong resistance by loyal army officers.

While there was considerable resentment against Senegalese officers commanding the Gambian army, their presence was within the framework of the Senegambia confederation. In addition, the Gambian army was small and there was a sizable number of Senegalese troops stationed in The Gambia. Cognizance of the substantial Senegalese military might over the border, and how it might react to trouble, was enough to deter a coup (Wiseman 1996: 920). However, when the confederation was nullified in 1989, the Senegalese were replaced by a smaller number of Nigerians (about 60 officers). These Nigerian officers were appointed to the most senior command positions of the Gambian army. This move on the part of the Gambian government generated a lot of resentment amongst the soldiers, and this resentment provided a motivation for the 1994 coup

³⁹ the state, the militariat, more than any other subordinate group, is strategically positioned to play a central role in the deinstitutionalised politics of African states.”

³⁹ This was the view of Ebrima Chongan, former Deputy Inspector General of the Gambia Police Force in

(Wiseman, 1996: 920). The presence of a smaller number of Nigerian officers was not a deterrent, as the Gambian army numbered 800 by 1994. In retrospect, it appears that the appointment of Nigerian officers helped generate the very events it was meant to prevent. The fact that the Nigerian officers were all kicked out following the coup suggests that the coup was as much directed against them as it was against the Jawara government (Kandeh, 1996: 392).

Internal explanations for the intervention of the military in The Gambia, however, cannot be limited solely to disaffection due to the presence of foreigners as commanders. The coup unmasked a class cleavage that existed within the army similar to that which exists in African civilian regimes. There was, in the Gambian junior ranks, a general feeling of antipathy against senior Gambian officers, who they felt did not have their interests at heart.⁴⁰ Following the coup, the AFPRC not only arrested and detained some Gambian army officers, but it subsequently retired a number of them (Kandeh, 1996: 392). The non-payment of salaries and bad living conditions in the army barracks was also a factor in the coup. As was described in chapter 2, in both 1991 and 1992 there had been army demonstrations against the government over the late payment of special allowances for Gambian soldiers who had served in Liberia as part of the regional West African peacekeeping force (ECOMOG).

Jammeh also had personal grievances against the ousted president. In 1989, he had been assigned to the presidential guard and was reported to be furious at being

⁴⁰ my interview with him on April 28, 1999.

⁴⁰ A former Gambian army officer who fled with Jawara's entourage to the U.K told me that "those of us who were beyond the rank of captain were doomed. Our Gambian officers did not have our interests at heart. They were given nice cars and followed beautiful women around town. They had no idea of what was going on in the camps or what the well being of soldiers were" (Interviewed in London, April 26, 1999).

transferred from the job, after barely four months (Wiseman, 1996:920). Also, the day before the coup, Jammeh was among the group of officers who were sent to welcome President Jawara back from his annual leave in the United Kingdom. At the airport, they were disarmed by Nigerian officers, amidst rumors that a coup was pending. Statements made by Jammeh in the aftermath of the coup suggest that he was humiliated by the experience of being searched in public and that this was a factor in the army's decision to stage a coup. In one of his interviews, Jammeh said:

when we went to welcome the president from his annual leave, we were humiliated publicly...the politicians accused us of plotting to overthrow the government, and we were searched in public. All soldiers were searched... and that was the last straw. I myself was disarmed even though most of the time I'm armed, but on that day I was disarmed for no apparent reason (West Africa, 1-7 August 1994: 1348).

In addition to feelings of disaffection and deprivation, one of the most likely reasons for the coup was the simple desire on the part of the coup plotters to gain access to the considerable benefits that emerge from controlling the state. Using the state as an instrument for personal enrichment and self-aggrandizement has, sadly, been a common phenomenon for African military and civilian rulers⁴¹ (Agbese, 1990: 28-29). As Abdoulaye Saine has pointed out, the construction by Jammeh of a monumental arch at the main entrance to the capital city, Banjul, to commemorate the coup, was a classic example of the excessiveness and desire for grandeur that are generally exhibited by military regimes in Africa. Furthermore, Jammeh and his cronies quickly adopted the flamboyant lifestyle that he had personally criticized about the regime of his predecessor-

⁴¹ See for example John Mukum Mbaku, "Military coups as rent-seeking behaviour", *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, Vol. 22, Winter 1994, pp241-284.

-“the three vehicles per minister, residence in the most affluent areas, frequent foreign trips and improved social and economic status” engendered suspicion and skepticism against “the soldiers with a difference” (Saine, 1999: 15).

The Nature of the AFPRC Regime

To demonstrate that one reason for the 1994 Gambian coup was lust for power among the junior officers, it is helpful to examine the nature of AFPRC rule after the coup. Following the 1994 coup, the relationships within the AFPRC became a key element in Gambian politics, albeit a difficult one to fathom, given the secretive nature of the military government. The nature of the relationships within the AFPRC and the lifestyles which the AFPRC leaders adopted suggest two things: that AFPRC leaders were capable of ruthless actions to hold on to power and that they used their power to enjoy ostentatious lifestyles (Wiseman, 1996: 921-922) .

Military rule in Africa has shown the tendency for the army to be divided into factions based on personal loyalty, to the extent that it affects the military's ability to govern effectively (Bienen, 1993: 273). In the case of The Gambia, events which have transpired since the coup have exposed a high degree of factional division within the army as well as the AFPRC. With the coup's success, several of the most senior army officers were arrested. Although some were eventually released, others were detained in jail for two years, without being charged. In addition, there was the arrest of two military members of the AFPRC's first cabinet. Captain Mamat Cham, the Minister of Information and Tourism, and Captain Samsudeen Sarr, the Minister of Trade, Industry and Employment within the newly appointed AFPRC administration, were sacked after being suspected by Jammeh of being sympathetic to the deposed Jawara regime

(Wiseman 1996: 921).

The seriousness of the split within the Gambian army between AFPRC and non-AFPRC supporters became evident in November 1994 and January 1995, with the occurrence of what were characterized by the Jammeh military regime as counter coup attempts. The first of these incidents took place on November 11, 1994. There was large-scale fighting in the Gambian military barracks. The government described the incident as a counter coup attempt, orchestrated by Lieutenants Basiru Barrow, Abdoulaye Dot Faal and Gibril Saye. Barrow, then Commander of the First Infantry Battalion, was widely believed to have been a conspirator in the July 1994 coup, who backed out at the last minute. The alleged coup leaders, together with 40 other soldiers, were liquidated (Saine, 1996: 106). The AFPRC released a statement accusing the dead soldiers of being linked to senior figures in the deposed PPP regime (Saine, 1996: 106; Wiseman, 1996: 922).

The second incident took place on January 27, 1995 and indicated a more serious level of conflict within the Gambian army. This particular incident involved Jammeh's two closest associates. It was alleged by the AFPRC junta that Captains Sana Sabally (Vice-Chairman) and Sadibou Hydara (Interior Minister) were conspiring to assassinate Jammeh. Following the alleged coup's failure, both Sabally and Hydara were accused by the government of being motivated by personal greed and the desire to maintain military rule indefinitely. Hydara died while in prison on June 5, 1995, before he could be brought to trial. The official explanation for Hydara's death was that he suffered acute pulmonary oedema, a condition caused by high blood pressure. However, his wife's denial of any such medical condition fueled rumors of foul play by the government (Kandeh, 1996:

396). In the aftermath of Hydara's death, the other accused, Sana Sabally, was quickly tried by a secretive military tribunal and sentenced to nine years imprisonment.

Subsequent to the coup incident involving Hydara and Sabally, the death of Ousman "Koro" Ceesay, the Finance Minister, whose burnt remains were discovered in his car, raised strong suspicion of the AFPRC junta's involvement. The circumstances of Minister Ceesay's death were even more mysterious. A charismatic young man, he was seen at the Gambian international airport where he went to see Chairman Jammeh off on a trip to Ethiopia. The AFPRC's Spokesman, Captain Ebou Jallow, who subsequently defected to the United States, pointed the finger of responsibility for Ceesay's death at Jammeh and Edward Singateh, who later became Vice-Chairman after the removal of Sabally⁴² (Saine, 1996: 106).

The Lifestyle of the AFPRC Junta

Evidence that a lust for power was a motivating factor in the 1994 coup can also be seen in Jammeh's lifestyle and the manner in which he attempted to garner support from potential opponents within the army. As Wiseman has pointed out:

Jammeh has attempted to strengthen his support within the armed forces through the distribution of material benefits to the troops, but, at the same time, has also dealt ruthlessly with opponents, real or imaginary, 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 countries. The greatest threat from any military regime comes from within the military and Jammeh's use of both reward and fear reproduces a common pattern among

⁴² For details regarding 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 accused the government of corruption and provided details of personal accounts allegedly held by Jammeh in a Swiss Bank. I am grateful to ex-president Jawara for supplying me with a copy of this, and other documents.

African military rulers, recognizing both a shared set of military interests and a division of interests within the military elite (Wiseman, 1996: 937).

As discussed above, Jammeh did not hesitate to purge those he thought to be a threat, but he also rewarded those who appeared to be loyal. For example, in the aftermath of the coup, Jammeh's first move was to renovate the army barracks at Yundum military head-quarters. In February 1996, Jammeh announced a new package of measures designed to garner support from his soldiers. Approximately 8 million Dalasis (US \$ 800,000) were designated for improving accommodations for soldiers and their families. It was also announced that soldiers would be provided with low interest loans under The Gambia Army Revolving Loan Scheme. Some members of the army were also enrolled in the newly created Gambia University extension program. It was also stated that, in future allocations of land for residential purposes, members of the security forces would be given special treatment (Wiseman, 1996, 923). As part of his strategy to further garner the support of his army, Jammeh moved to establish a diplomatic relationship with Taiwan. In recognition of this act, the Taiwanese government gave a loan of US \$ 35 million to the AFPRC. In addition, the government of Taiwan agreed to donate 5000 sets of military uniforms and boots to the Gambian army (more than six uniforms and six pairs of boots per soldier) (Wiseman, 1996, 933).

Jammeh's own lifestyle supports the hypothesis that a major explanation for coups in Africa is simply to use the state as a means to get rich. In Jammeh's case, this was exposed after the former spokesman of the AFPRC junta, Captain Ebou Jallow, defected to the US, in October of 1995, and accused Jammeh and his cronies of corruption. He alleged that Jammeh pocketed US\$ 5 million of the \$35 million loan from

Taiwan. Jallow further alleged that the remaining US \$30 million was diverted into the private bank accounts of Jammeh and his colleagues.⁴³ The view that Jammeh staged the coup for his own personal enrichment was shared by ex-president Jawara.

Everybody sees the type of lifestyle that Jammeh is living. He always moves around in chartered planes going all over the place. I think the last example was when he decided to go to Morocco to celebrate his recent marriage to a Moroccan woman. He took from Banjul to Morocco three chartered planes full of people to do the celebrations. I don't know how much that cost, but he would charge all this to the Gambian treasury (Interview with Jawara, London, April 24, 1999).

Regional Dynamics and the 1994 Gambian Coup

Apart from the factors internal to the Gambian military, it is also possible to link the Gambian coup to regional relations in the West African sub-region. This regional angle is not covered by either the external or internal school on coups, but cannot be ignored in the case of the 1994 Gambian coup.

As was described in chapter 2, Gambian soldiers participated in the ECOMOG peacekeeping operation in Liberia. The Gambia government sent a contingent of 150 peacekeepers to Liberia. It was the first time that the army officers had been exposed to war since the creation of the army in 1985. While in Liberia, they saw action and upon their return they had nothing to do. As Yeebo has emphasized, "by the time the Gambian soldiers returned from Liberia on April 13, 1991, they were a disgruntled lot full of venom and hatred for the Sir Dawda government" (Yeebo, 1995: 50) It was then that they started to complain about low salaries, unpaid bonuses for their service in Liberia and non-compensation for soldiers injured during their time in Liberia (Yeebo,

⁴³ A letter released by Jallow "To the Gambian Press and the International media" revealed details of a private Swiss bank account allegedly held by Jammeh including the account number. (I am grateful to ex-

1995: 50).

It is also possible to link the 1994 Gambian coup to the seizing of power by junior soldiers in Sierra Leone in 1992. Soldiers from Sierra Leone had also participated in the peacekeeping force in Liberia. When they returned, angry over lack of pay and aware of how weak the Joseph Momoh civilian government was, they took power (Yeebo, 1995: 50). It is not inconceivable that Gambian soldiers were motivated by this action and felt that, if the young soldiers in Sierra Leone could successfully execute a coup, then Gambian soldiers could also do the same. The above perspective is consistent with John Wiseman and Elizabeth Vidler's observation that similarities between Gambian and Sierra Leonean military coups included the low ranks and relative youth of the coup leaders (Wiseman and Vidler, 1995: 60).

Why were junior Gambian soldiers so easily tempted by the examples of coup makers in Sierra Leone? Why did their experience in Liberia have such an impact upon them? One hypothesis is that they did not have a proper mission. As was mentioned in chapter 2, the Gambian government only decided to have an army within the framework of the Senegambia confederation. When the confederation fell apart, the army had nothing to do and no specific mission was spelled out for it. One *raison d'être* for an army is the protection of a country's territorial borders. However, an important military reality for the Gambian army is the overwhelming presence of its much bigger neighbor, the Republic of Senegal. The Gambia's military force, which until the 1994 coup numbered a mere 800 soldiers, would not have been able to protect The Gambia from Senegal, which has one of the strongest and most professional armies in West Africa

president Jawara for providing me with a copy of the document on April 24, 1999).

(Yeebo, 1995: 54).

The Gambia has never faced a genuine military threat across its borders. Therefore, the army had no mission until some of it went to Liberia in a peacekeeping capacity. This experience opened their eyes. With the military back and nothing to do, it was easily tempted to turn its attention to domestic politics. When the Senegambia confederation dissolved, the political decision by President Jawara to maintain the Gambian army without defining any proper role for it meant sowing the seeds for future trouble.⁴⁴ The army was created within the framework of the confederation. However, after the dissolution of the confederation the Gambian government's decision to keep the army was more for its internal security than for any external threat. President Jawara had the experience of the 1981 coup attempt, and therefore he did not seem to trust the Gambian soldiers. And because he did not trust the Gambian soldiers, he brought in Nigerian officers to lead them. By so doing, he alienated them, making them more likely to overthrow him.

A final regional factor that contributed to the Gambian army's decision to supplant President Jawara's civilian government was the fact that Senegal, Gambia's powerful neighbor, was unlikely to intervene this time. As was mentioned earlier, Senegal was instrumental in restoring President Jawara to power after the July 1981 coup attempt by radical elements of the Gambian citizenry and security service. This intervention led to the subsequent establishment of the ill-fated Senegambia

⁴⁴ See for instance Tijan M. Sallah, who observed 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 tranquillity". See Sallah, "Economics and Politics in The Gambia", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 4, 1990, p. 639.

confederation. However, after the collapse of the confederation, relations between the two countries were strained. Despite the fact that President Jawara signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with his Senegalese counterpart, President Abdou Diouf, in 1991, relations between the two countries remained cool, for a number of reasons. The main irritant was Gambia's flourishing re-export trade, which caused a great deal of smuggling, mainly by the Senegalese, and led to Senegal's decision, in 1993, to close the border to all transit trade routes (Wiseman and Vidler, 1995: 61; Saine, 1996: 104). However, there was also the fact that the Senegalese had never forgiven President Jawara for the break-up of the Senegambia Confederation in 1989. Moreover, around the time of the coup, many refugees from southern Senegal, fleeing the protracted secessionist conflict there, were given sanctuary in The Gambia on humanitarian grounds. However, this gesture was seen by Senegal as a sign of Gambian sympathy for the Cassamance secessionist rebels. As a result, Senegal's attitude towards the Jawara government became hostile and resentful (Yeebo, 1995: 60). Senegal's reaction to the coup suggests that they were happy to see the downfall of President Jawara. While they accorded him asylum, they ruled out intervention and soon developed relations with the new military junta (West Africa, 26 December 1994-8 January 1995: 2196).

Summary

This chapter has elaborated on secondary, but also significant, reasons for the 1994 coup in The Gambia. Junior lieutenants, led by Yahya Jammeh, had personal frustrations shared by many officers of the same rank. They were unhappy with the non-payment of bonuses for their peacekeeping role in Liberia. Poor living conditions at the

Yundum Army Barracks, together with low salaries, deeply affected the morale of junior army officers as well as the rank and file. The resentment against senior Nigerian officers by the junior Gambian army officers and their rank-and-file was also an important source of discontent within the Gambian army. In addition, individual resentment arose among junior officers, who saw their opportunities for promotions limited by the appointment of Nigerian officers to senior positions. These feelings of deprivation appeared to have been widespread within the army and the resentment they generated was directed at both Nigerian officers and the Gambian civilian regime.

The chapter has buttressed the argument that a feeling of deprivation among junior army officers precipitated the coup with an analysis of the events that transpired following the coup. The subsequent arrest and imprisonment of senior army officers, as well as AFPRC members, suggests a lust for power by the coup leaders. Samuel Decalo has hypothesized⁴⁵ that personal motivation and the self-interest of a small group of plotters-- in the form of their desire for personal enrichment and aggrandizement within the officer corps-- are often the primary reasons for intervention (Decalo, 1976: 22). In The Gambia, the personal lifestyle of Jammeh and his cronies supports the above hypothesis. Jammeh now lives at the State House and enjoys all the privileges of power-- fancy cars, frequent travel abroad, and traffic interruption to allow his huge convoy to move around Banjul. The fact that Jammeh claimed to have been motivated by the desire to stamp out the corruption and flamboyance of the Jawara government, and the fact that he failed to live up to that promise, supports the argument that a feeling of deprivation was an important element for the 1994 coup.

It is important to point out that there are factors from the internal school on coups which make sense. But one common phenomenon for military coups in African countries, ethnicity, does not apply to the Gambian coup of 1994. Ethnic animosity has never been a very serious issue in Gambian politics. In the case of the Gambian 1994 coup, the plotters came from different ethnic backgrounds: Jammeh was a Jola, Sabally was Fula, Hydara was of Mauritanian ancestry (Moor), Touray was a Mandinka, and Singhateh was a Christian Mandinka with an English mother (Wiseman, 1996: 920-921).

Finally, the 1994 Gambian coup can also be explained with reference to regional relations in the West African sub-region. The coming to power of junior officers in Sierra Leone, coupled with the exposure of the Gambian army officers to the brutal civil war in Liberia, caused a spill-over effect, which ultimately contributed to the coup. A final fundamental factor to the 1994 coup's success was the lack of intervention by Senegal.

⁴⁵ Decalo, *Coups and Army Rule in Africa*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976, p. 22.

CHAPTER 5

LESSONS OF THE 1994 GAMBIAN COUP

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the significance of the 1994 Gambian coup. What are the lessons to be learned from the failure of the democratic experiment in one of Africa's longest surviving democracies? An attempt will be made to answer this question by pulling together the main arguments of the previous chapters. In addition, several recommendations that hold some promise of deterring future coups in The Gambia will be put forward.

Summary of Arguments

It was noted in chapter 1 that there are two main theoretical schools of thought on the causes of military coups, namely, the internal and external schools. The external school contends that factors external to the military, mainly performance and legitimacy failures by civilian governments, prompt the military to intervene. These performance failures may be characterized by corruption, poor economic performance, unconstitutional behavior and political crises. The internal school, on the other hand, argues that to explain military coups one has to look beyond the legitimacy failure of civilian regimes. It argues that factors internal to the military cause it to intervene. These factors include nationalistic attributes of the military, threats to the military's corporate interest, intra-military quarrels and personal fear.

Chapter 2 showed how the Gambian political development was shaped and how

the People's Progressive Party (PPP) was able to dominate the political scene, so much so that The Gambia had become a de-facto one-party state. The chapter attributed the PPP's success to a number of factors: Jawara's ethnic background, the weaknesses of Gambian opposition parties, Gambian culture and a positive image abroad. The chapter noted that these factors ultimately contributed to the regime's demise. While the Gambian political system seemed like a success story (at least to outsiders) this impression was deceiving and, as a result, when the army struck, it succeeded because there was nobody left to support the system.

In chapter 3, the argument that legitimacy failure of the Gambian civilian regime was the primary cause of the coup was developed. This legitimacy failure emanated from the factionalism and division that characterized the PPP, especially since 1992, when President Jawara won re-election in what was perceived to be his last campaign. By 1993, allegations of endemic corruption and nepotism plagued the Jawara government. The media attention generated by these allegations, and the growing loss of public confidence in the Jawara government's ability to halt the trend, de-legitimized the regime. Moreover, the regime's inability to address the deepening economic crisis brought about by the implementation of its Economic Reform Program, as well as the CFA crisis, all served to set the stage for the 1994 coup.

It can be argued that legitimacy failure was the main cause of the coup because the government had failed in its social contract with the Gambian people. In the Gambian case, even though the presidency of Jawara was characterized by the development of a democratic system of government that respected human rights and the rule of law, it failed miserably in the areas of socioeconomic development (Saine, 2000:24).

Furthermore, as Saine asserts, President Jawara also “manipulated the state apparatus to concentrate wealth and power in the presidency and cultivated clientelist relationships that served him well. Jawara’s failure to deal effectively with corruption throughout his tenure led to political decay in both the state and within the PPP government” (Saine, 2000:24). All of the aforementioned failures created a loss of respect and support for the government by a large segment of the civilian population. Consequently, when the 1994 coup was executed, it was greeted with little hostility or dismay.

Even though there was considerable reluctance on the part of Western governments, such as the United Kingdom and the United States, to endorse the coup, within The Gambia it quickly generated support from many civil servants and religious leaders. As Saine has argued, from an institutional perspective, civilian regimes stand more solidly when they are supported broadly by the populace. When widespread support is entrenched and mustered by any civilian government, then the possibility of a military coup is greatly diminished (Saine, 1996:104). Further evidence that loss of legitimacy was the main cause of the coup was displayed in the rhetoric of the coup-makers, who promised the Gambian populace real democracy through their self-portrayal as “soldiers with a difference” and the use of slogans such as accountability, transparency and probity and a promise that they were going to abide by these principles.

Peter M. Lewis’s article, “Economic Reform and Political Transition: Africa” outlines a framework for conceptualizing and analyzing good governance in Africa. According to Lewis, it “entails strengthening state authority, increasing public confidence in political institutions, and fortifying lateral bonds of solidarity within civil society” (Lewis, 1996: 118). It can be argued that, if the PPP had governed better, there would

have been less disaffection within the Gambian populace and the junior ranks of the military. Hence, a coup might not have arisen in the first place. Moreover, even if the military did take action, it would have been greeted with considerably more hostility.

Chapter 4 pointed out that a secondary, but still significant, reason for the Gambian coup was a feeling of deprivation by junior army officers. In both 1991 and 1992, there had been demonstrations by elements of the army over the issue of non payment of salaries, actions which did not result in a coup. However, unlike these earlier actions, the 1994 coup happened against a backdrop of public disaffection with corruption and other malfeasance in the government. The combination of personal frustrations, and continuing public expectations for improved conditions, served to strengthen the army's resolve when it staged the coup.

The Gambian coup's success also has a geo-political dimension which is not explained from the perspective of either the external or internal schools on coups. The explanations for coups by the two schools are confined to domestic factors; they need to be supplemented by geo-political perspectives. In the case of the Gambian coup of 1994, the specific forms geo-political influences took were the civil war in Liberia and the seizure of power by junior soldiers in neighboring Sierra Leone, both of which had a spill-over effect. Moreover, the chilling of Senegalese-Gambian relations also provided additional inducements for the Gambian soldiers to act. The rest of this chapter will explore the lessons learned from the Gambian experience and propose measures to deter future coups.

Lessons Learned

The are three main lesson learned from the 1994 Gambian coup. The primary lesson of the 1994 Gambian coup is that a government which is democratic in form, respectful of human rights and enjoying a favorable international reputation, can still lose the confidence of its citizens. This can happen if it monopolizes power and political discourse, turns a blind eye to corruption, and fails to meet the economic and social needs of its population. In the Gambian case, an established system of democratic government, under a domestically and internationally respected leader, was overthrown in a day by a group of young military officers with no grasp of the complexities involved in the administration of a state (Wiseman and Vidler, 1995: 63). This coup was feasible because the legitimacy of the government had collapsed. The de-legitimization of the government was due to its failure to tackle corruption and its poor socioeconomic performance, the effects of which were worsened by the implementation of strict structural adjustment programs and regional exogenous factors.

A secondary lesson of the 1994 Gambian coup is that a disaffected military in a state with a discredited civilian regime is a recipe for trouble. As Pita Agbese has observed, a political context in which ordinary people no longer have a stake in the politics of the dominant class gives the military a decisive advantage over the civilian factions: "With its monopoly over the instruments of coercion, the military easily overthrows civilian governments. As the majority of the people have already been alienated from politics, the military does not face much opposition when it overthrows elected governments. In fact, its intervention in politics may be initially welcomed by the majority of the population" (Agbese, 1990: 28). The condition of the state not enjoying

broad entrenched support also makes it easier for the army to supplant the regime and legitimize its seizure of power, by its drawing attention to the malfeasance of civilian politicians.

A last lesson is that, in a small country like The Gambia, without significant economic or geo-political weight, the answers to the threat of military coups have to be found internally. As was mentioned in chapter 2, the relative smallness of The Gambia's population and land size has always been a disadvantage. The country is not endowed with significant natural resources, and is not sufficiently geo-strategically important to any of her neighbors (with the exception of Senegal) to warrant outside intervention in a coup. This was demonstrated by the refusal of the United States government to assist in stopping the coup, in spite of pleas from President Jawara. If the US had deemed it a national interest to intervene, it is highly conceivable that the coup would not have taken place.

In the case of the first coup attempt in 1981, The Gambia had some geo-political significance, in that it was a pro-Western country during the Cold War. This factor, coupled with Senegal's wariness about Libyan subversive intentions in the region, led to the decision of the Senegalese government to send in its army (Hughes, in Cohen, 1983: 68). Senegal was also of the view that its intervention would facilitate the political unification of the two countries. Once the Cold War ended and The Gambia and Senegal had failed to achieve political unification, the situation was totally different, because Senegal saw no other reason to intervene. With reference to the above lessons we will now focus on some possible ways to deter a recurrence of the 1994 Gambian experience.

Policy Prescription

Four policy prescriptions are offered for the deterrence of future coups in The Gambia. These are: (1) furthering the socioeconomic development of The Gambia, (2) strengthening political discourse to maximize public participation in the political process, (3) building more competition into the democratic process and (4) professionalization of the Gambian army. These four prescriptions are discussed in detail below.

(1) Furthering the Socioeconomic Development of The Gambia

As was noted in chapter 3, Jawara's government religiously cooperated with the IMF in the implementation of economic reform for the Gambian economy. While the reform generated some success in economic terms, there was little benefit to the majority of Gambians due to two factors. First, the majority of Gambians are subsistence farmers and don't participate in the formal economy. Second, under the Presidency of Jawara, corruption and other malfeasances allowed the urban elites to siphon off most of the economic benefits at the expense of national development. While there was a strong emphasis by President Jawara on civil and political rights, and an open market economy, the government failed miserably in the fulfillment of economic rights. This economic failure in the long run proved damaging and made President Jawara vulnerable to adverse criticism. As was pointed out in chapter 3, despite nearly thirty years of continuous PPP rule, and generous development assistance from the international community, the majority of the Gambian people were mired in absolute poverty.

To address this problem, stronger measures to end corruption and cronyism should be a core objective. An attempt to divert more external economic assistance to

programs that directly benefit the majority of Gambians would go a long way towards entrenching civilian legitimacy, thereby discouraging the possibility for military intervention in Gambian politics. Improvement of a country's economic situation is necessary because failure to do so corrodes the legitimacy of the government, as was the case in The Gambia. The Jawara government's economic failures may explain why the AFPRC under Jammeh moved quickly to embark upon public spending projects, which included the construction of five high schools, numerous middle (secondary) schools, a new international airport and The Gambia's first television station. These accomplishments, in a relatively short period of time, endeared the AFPRC to some Gambians, who felt that these achievements were much more impressive than what the PPP had accomplished in thirty years of rule (Saine, 1999: 13).

(2) Strengthen Political Discourse

The lack of effective political discourse has been an impediment to the democratization process in Africa. After the attainment of independence, the state apparatus in many African countries was formed along ethnic lines which allowed interest groups to subvert the rules for their own benefit. In addition, constitutions often concentrated power in the hands of the central governments, with little or no autonomy being granted to local and regional political jurisdictions. This concentration of power allowed African governments to intrude into all aspects of political and economic life, to the detriment of the majority of people in these societies (Mbaku, 1996: 46). Political discourse in Africa has been manipulated by a few politically dominant groups, which has led to the inefficiency of the social contract.

In The Gambia, the political discourse was completely dominated by the PPP government for almost thirty years. While the political opposition groups were allowed to contest elections, they were uncompetitive and hence unable to effect any political change. Although this lack of political competitiveness from opposition parties strengthened the PPP as a party, in the long term it undermined the PPP government's legitimacy. Under President Jawara, the political environment had become uncompetitive, because opposition parties had no chance of defeating his government through the ballot box. This problem was intensified by corruption and the failure of the government to improve the quality of life for the Gambian populace (Yeebo, 1995: 1-7). Political discourse in The Gambia can be strengthened by providing more space for mass political participation in the democratic processes. In The Gambia, political discourse is largely limited to educated urban elites. This problem is compounded by the fact that the media has been small and ineffectual and often dominated by the government. This perspective is shared by Abdoulaye Saine, who has argued that in order to strengthen democracy in The Gambia these institutions of civil society needs to be strengthened. He was of the view that:

success in building a genuine participatory democracy, based on the rule of law, will depend upon a broad range of factors. These include participation of The Gambia's collective leadership, an active civil society, a reasonably free mass media and the existence of a supportive international political and economic environment (Saine, 1999: 4).

The Gambian populace must have the trust that those in power are seen to be transparent and accountable. Political discourse can also be strengthened if the Gambian government, together with leaders of the opposition parties, religious organizations, trade unions, students organizations, women organizations, and elders engage in a dialogue

whose aim would be dedicated to ensuring that the voices of the Gambian people are heard. This is because success in building a genuine participatory process, based on the rule of law and respect for human rights, requires collective participation.

(3) Build More Competition Into The Democratic Process

Guarding against de-facto one-party types of "democratic" regimes might go a long way towards ensuring a more efficient and functional democratic system. For democracy to work well, the institutions of government must be respected and be seen to represent the interests of the citizenry. The populace must not only have trust and confidence in the government, they must also have the power to change it through constitutional means. As ex-President Jawara noted, in order for democracy to garner strength in The Gambia;

not only should the government be committed to the principle of democracy, but the opposition also has to be fully committed to the principle of democracy. In Africa, there are problems on both sides. There are problems with the government using too much power and being intolerant of the opposition and the opposition not too content with its proper role. So there has to be lots of tolerance and commitment to the principles of the system (Interviewed in London, April 24, 1999).

The recent March 19, 2000 electoral defeat of the Socialist Party in Senegal, which had been in power since independence in 1960, shows what could happen if there is more competition in the political process. The acceptance of defeat by the incumbent, President Abdou Diouf, constitutes an excellent phenomenon for the consolidation of democracy, worthy of emulation by other emerging democracies in Africa. Establishing term limits for the presidency should be a central element among the reforms that need to be effected to discourage coups in The Gambia. In addition, having a government that is

transparent and accountable could discourage the military from interfering in politics. If there are strong institutions that are respected and supported by the people, the military would be aware that the populace would be hostile to any act of illegally taking power.

(4) The Need To Professionalize The Gambian Military

It was pointed out in the lessons learned from the Gambian coup that disaffection in the military, at a period when the credibility of a civilian government is low, increases the likelihood of a coup. As was shown in chapter 3, when soldiers went to receive President Jawara, they were publicly disarmed. Such humiliation and disregard for the military's professionalism was the last straw and, within twenty-four hours, a coup was successfully staged (Saine, 1999: 6). It is important that the professionalism and corporate interest of the military is always respected and protected by the civilian government. In addition to better training, conditions of service and pay should be adequate for all ranks. If the professionalism of the military is respected then its role in African politics can be drastically scaled back. Peter Agbese believes "that the inculcation of adequate professionalism among military officers secures civilian supremacy over the armed forces" (Agbese, 1996: 93).

Agbese's perspective is consistent with Samuel Huntington's argument that "politics is beyond the scope of military competence, and the participation of military officers in politics undermines their professionalism, curtailing their professional competence, dividing the profession against itself, and substituting extraneous values for professional values" (Huntington, 1985: 71). A similar view was shared by Kwame Nkrumah:

It is not the duty of the army to rule or govern, because it has no political mandate and its duty is not to seek a political mandate. The army only operates under the mandate of a civil government. If the national interest compels the armed forces to intervene, then immediately after intervention, the army must hand over to a new civilian government elected by the people and enjoying the people's mandate under a constitution accepted by them. If the army does not do this then the position of the army becomes dubious and anomalous and involves a betrayal of the people and the national interest (cited in Yeebo, 1995: 125).

In the Gambian case, one can argue that the army was not professional enough, both by the training and comportment of its officers and by the level of support and confidence given to it by the Jawara government. That was the main reason why a training team headed by Nigerian officers was brought to The Gambia after the withdrawal of Senegalese assistance in 1989.

Proper professionalism of the military requires time and training. The Gambian army was still relatively young at the time of the coup and could not be characterized as professional. This was evident in the army's behavior following the coup. When the Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council (AFPRC) came to power in 1994, they claimed that they were "soldiers with a difference." In the words of Lieutenant Edward Singateh, "all we wanted to do was come to State House, take over and put in place a new government that would rule with real democracy and not apparent democracy" (Kandeh, 1996: 399). With the success of the coup, however, the AFPRC decided not to hand over power voluntarily to a democratically elected government; instead, Jammeh dismissed democracy as an imported concept and was ambivalent about when he would return the country back to civilian rule. It was only after strong international pressure that the army agreed to hold elections in 1996. The elections were deeply flawed and left Jammeh still in charge as a nominally civilianized head of state (Wiseman, 1996: 64). A more

professional army would probably not have staged the coup in the first place; but once having deposed the Jawara government, would have handed power to an interim civilian government and returned to the barracks.

The single most significant way to achieve military professionalism in the Gambian army is for it to have a properly spelled out mission. As was noted in chapter 2, the Gambian government decided against having an army at independence. However, after the attempted coup of 1981 and the subsequent establishment of the Senegambia confederation, an army was established. Once the confederation fell apart, no clear reason was articulated to justify the need to maintain an army. The existence of the Gambian army should have been revisited. Such a course of action would have helped soldiers understand the significance of the army as an institution responsible for preserving Gambia's territorial integrity. A new mission for the Gambian army can be found by broadening the mandate of the army to include participation in UN peacekeeping missions, assistance in disaster relief and other tasks of significance to The Gambia's national interest.

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