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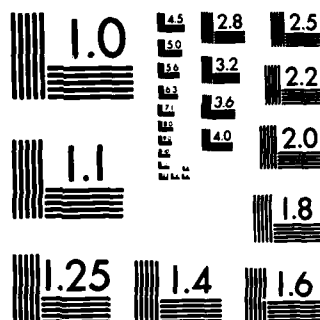
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POPULIST MILITARY REGIMES IN WEST AFRICA

A Paper Prepared for the Department of State

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I. Questions

Recent African military coups and military regimes have raised the question as to whether there is something new under the African sun. The 1979 Rawlings Armed Forces Revolutionary Council coup, the 1981 Rawlings second coup, the subsequent People's National Defense Council regime in Ghana, the 1980 Doe coup and People's Revolutionary Council regime in Liberia, the 1982 Sankara coup, the subsequent 1983 Sankara restoration and National Revolutionary Council regime in Upper Volta all lead us to ask whether there is something that can be called populist coups and regimes emerging in Africa. Has there been a change in the structure of military coups in Africa, and, if this is the case, will there be fundamentally different African military regimes than heretofore? Finally, what is the likelihood of the spread of populist military regimes in Africa?

2. Populist Coups

African leaders who portray themselves as populist are not new in Africa. The first wave of leaders who brought their countries to independence in the 1960s included a number who stressed the need for broad mobilization of their populations and who demanded equity and national independence. These themes were sounded by Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, Sekou Toure in Guinea, and Julius Nyerere in Tanzania among others. The early African socialist leaders did not emphasize the need to eliminate corruption because independent regimes had been recently installed. They stressed the themes of national reassertion as a response to colonialism and revival of traditional values, whereas current leaders who sound populist themes argue that national revival

means eliminating the corrupt practices and elitism of indigenous elites as well as breaking away from neo-colonialism and dependency.

The first "Fathers of the Nation" were party leaders, not military men. Since the 1960s, there have been many coups in Africa. Almost all coup leaders have come to power stating that civilians were corrupt, that the economy was in disorder, that the masses had to be mobilized for national reconstruction and development. It is often difficult to know the motives of coup leaders because different military actors involved in a coup have different values and try to garner support from various constituencies. Moreover the attitudes of leaders change in the process of making a coup or thereafter as they face the exigencies of rule. Furthermore, the problems of assuring support within the armed forces and the influence of external actors and the realities of international relations and economies influence leaders once they are in power.

Still, African politics have been heavily influenced by the idiosyncracies of individual leaders. The personalities and predilections of military (and civilian) leaders have been influential in determining policy outcomes, although leaders often have not had the ability to implement policies as they wished. For all these reasons -- shifts in coup leadership, changes in motives during and after coups, facing the realities of African political and economic life -- it has been difficult to attribute causes to specific coups. Nonetheless, analysts of African politics and of armed forces have conventionally distinguished referee coups in which the armed forces have stepped in when political conflict was intense between civilians or when power vacuums emerged and the armed forces took power without any clear program for social, political or economic change. Many West African coups of the

1960s have been put in this category: Upper Volta, 1966; Sierra Leone between 1966-1968; Togo, 1967; CongoKinshasha, 1960; Dahomey, 1963.

These examples by no means exhaust the category.

There are also coups where the armed forces have been prompted to act largely by their own interest group demands for better wages, housing, equipment and/or by the personal ambitions of soldiers: Togo, 1963; the East African mutinies, 1964; Central African Republic, 1966. Of course, it is extremely difficult and perhaps not very useful to separate out the ambitions of soldiers and interest group demands of the military from civilian conflicts and power vacuums. These all interact and overlap. And from the 1960s up to the present, African factional politics have been played out in the context of ethnic conflicts which exist in civilian society and in the armed forces and which have been powerful triggers for coups. Coups have also been carried out in the context of economic scarcity which heightens a struggle for spoils. But although scarcity has existed, the African coups of the 1960s and 1970s basically were not coups determined by class conflict. The social forces influencing coups were ethnic and communal rather than class.

This is not to say that there were no military coups in the 1960s in which armed forces personnel did not have radical programs in mind even if these programs were not clearly formulated. A forerunner of the populist coups of the late 1970s and early 1980s was the first Nigerian coup of January 1966. General Ironsi inherited this coup and altered its nature. But the original coup led by Majors Nzeogu, Ifeajuna, and Okafor sounded themes to be heard later: clean up a corrupt and feudal political system; restructure society and make it more egalitarian; and eliminate members of the senior military high command who were implicated

in the dirty system.¹ While this coup toppled the civilian regime, it was a failed coup and more senior officers wound up in control of the military for a time, until they were replaced by what is conventionally thought of as the second Nigerian coup of July, 1966, but should properly be thought of as the third coup. This coup, led by northern and middle belt soldiers, had a component of noncommissioned officers at the start, but its aim was to overthrow Ibo influence, not to restructure Nigeria society and economy.

Militancy and outraged puritanism were expressed in Dahomey by junior officers who set up a Military Vigilance Committee in 1967, when the regime was already a military one. This group had noncommissioned officers as well as junior officers on it. In December, 1967, Major Kouandete headed a Military Revolutionary Committee which replaced General Soglo. This Committee had junior ranks and noncoms. But this "radical" coup still was both pushed forward and enmeshed in Dahomey's ethnic and factional cleavages and added to them rank cleavages as well.²

It was not, however, until the 1972 coup led by Major Kerekou that the "Marxist-Leninist" alternative came to be raised in Dahomey. Even earlier, Captain Marien Ngouabi had taken over Congo-Brazzaville in 1968. In 1969, he declared Congo-Brazzaville to be a Peoples Republic. But Ngouabi during much of the Massemba-Debat period in the Congo was regarded as a moderate who had opposed moves to indoctrinate the army politically.³ And despite the rhetoric and the formal trappings of a scientific socialist state and the creation by the military and Ngouabi of a Marxist-Leninist party, Congo-Brazzaville has usually not been described as a revolutionary state.

As we move into the 1970s in this brief survey of African coups and regimes, we are struck by a number of things. Junior officer and noncommissioned officer coups did not start in Ghana, Liberia, and Upper Volta between 1979-1982. Indeed, in Upper Volta itself coups had proceeded from a general (Lamizana) to a colonel (Zerbo) to a major (Ouedraogo) to a Captain (Sankara). During the 1960s in West Africa, officers from captain to colonel levels had led coups in Nigeria (January, 1966), Congo-Brazzaville (1968), Mali (1968) and enlisted men, noncommissioned officers, and junior officers had been involved in coups in Sierra Leone (1966-68), Togo (1963), Dahomey (1967).

This pattern continued into the 1970s as well. Officers beneath general rank, sometimes in alliance with noncoms, rose against civilian regimes in Ghana (1972, 1979), Ethiopia (1974). However, as former noncoms and junior officers were promoted into senior ranks, and as armies expanded in size, junior officer coups became more difficult. The 1970s, as compared to the 1980s, were a period of relative consolidation within African armed forces.

Thus, the Rawlings, Doe, and Sankara coups, made by youthful and low ranking figures, raised the question as to whether the 1980s were ushering in a period of instability within African armies once again. This question was sharply posed because the Doe, Rawlings (1979) and Sankara coups were accompanied by violence, by indiscipline within the armed forces, with harrassment of senior officers, and by a difficulty in disciplining the armed forces' activities towards civilians. Once again, these problems were not new in Africa -- hardly so -- but the breakdown in chain of command seemed extreme. And in the Upper Volta and Ghana cases, there was a clear intention of the leaders not to rely on normal

chain of command within the armed forces. Indeed, it was the intentions of the leaders, their rhetoric, and their actions in society as much and more than the internal politics of the armed forces that seemed to call for a new typology of military coups and rule, that of the populist military regime.

The grievances and anger of coup leaders had been expressed in coups and mutinies in East and West Africa as early as 1963-64. But the Ghana, Liberia, and Upper Volta coups marked a sharp turning against established elites. And in the Ghana and Upper Volta cases, the coup makers clearly posed themselves against the established armed forces. Manifestations of this occurred in Sankara's statements against a bourgeois and neocolonialist army which could oppress the people and must be turned into a peoples armed forces. Political wings and cells had been created within or above African armed forces previously. Tanzania had TANU cells and political commissars in the military. Afro-Marxist military regimes had declared for Leninism which implied the supremacy of a party in a number of self-declared Marxist-Leninist states (Benin, Congo-Brazzaville, Malagasy, Somalia, but not Ethiopia which did not create such a party). In fact, parties were not Leninist in these Afro-Marxist military regimes but rather administrative vehicles and often empty ones at that.

In the past, when noncoms and junior officers formed revolutionary councils and utilized a radical rhetoric, much of what occurred in their countries was hardly transforming or revolutionary. This judgement can be applied even to most of the states that came to designate themselves as Marxist-Leninist.

In Black Africa, a number of military rulers claimed to install Marxist-Leninist regimes, although not all of them created parties that were even nominally Leninist. The army rulers of Somalia announced for Marxism-Leninism in 1970, one year after Congo-Brazzaville. Benin's proclamation took place in 1974; the Malagasy Republic's in 1975. These countries were already under military rule and had been for some time when Marxism-Leninism was announced. But in the Malagasy Republic the ideological installation waited upon the ascension to power of Captain Ratsiraka in 1975. It was not until 1977 that the regime created its own party (Avant-Garde de la Revolution Malagache) and other parties continued to exist. In Ethiopia, the military took over in 1974 but it did not announce its Marxist-Leninist nature until 1976. The Mengistu regime has dragged its heels in creating a Leninist party. But it also has not been interested in creating an amalgam of "front" organizations. It has wanted to maintain military autonomy.

The West African populist military regimes in Ghana and Upper Volta may move in an Ethiopian direction although so far they have not declared officially for Marxism-Leninism. But one critical difference between Ghana and Upper Volta on the one hand and Ethiopia on the other has been that for all the purges within the army, and all the factional dissidence that has persisted, the Ethiopian military under Mengistu has maintained its own autonomy and insularity.

It is necessary now to look at the differences among the Ghana, Liberia, and Upper Volta experiences and to try and state the defining characteristics of populist military regimes.

3. West African Populist Military Regimes

Some striking characteristics appear in common in the Ghana, Liberia, and Upper Volta Cases. It would be tempting to let these common characteristics define the subject under study and to create a typology of "populist military regimes" built up from descriptions of recent events in the three countries. However, problems appear in proceeding in this fashion. First, there are some patterns which are not similar as between Ghana, Liberia, and Upper Volta. Second, the coups in these countries share many characteristics with African coups which have not usually been given the label populist and their military regimes also share certain characteristics with the aforementioned Afro-Marxist military regimes. Third, contemporary Ghana, Liberia, and Upper Volta remain poor African countries, dependent on outsiders, with highly constrained economic choices and difficulties in imposing authority from a political center. Thus we must make a judgement as to whether these regimes mark significant departures from broad African patterns, and if so, in what ways.

In the three countries, coups were carried out (Liberia, April 1980; Ghana, 1979 and December 1981; Upper Volta, August 1983) by a master sergeant, a flight lieutenant, and a captain. In all three, the coups were as much against the senior officer corps as against civilian regimes. The first Rawlings coup led to the death of senior officers as did Sankara's coup in Upper Volta. In Liberia, senior officers were seen as being part of the old regime and while the executions fell heavily on Americo-Liberian civilians, the coup leaders replaced senior officers and promotions up were widespread and rapid. There was a willingness to engage in a far reaching destruction of authority within the armed

forces, and, to degrees which have differed among the three cases, within society as a whole.

To some extent, all militaries must try to restore rank hierarchy and order within their own forces if they are to govern at all. Thus, attempts have been made in the West African countries, as in Ethiopia before them, to reassert officer rank and discipline. But it is striking that in Ghana and Upper Volta especially, there has been less concern for reasserting rank and discipline within the armed forces as a value to be cherished than there has been concern to widen the authority and political base of individual leaders by appealing directly to rank and file soldiers and by establishing territorial and work place committees to bolster the authority of the leadership. In Liberia, new revolutionary committees have not been created but the leader continues to purge officers to maintain his own position.

The leaders of the Liberia, Ghana, and Upper Volta coups had grievances stemming from conditions internal to the armed forces but the coups were not "amenities coups" or coups largely driven by the internal politics of the armed forces (although Upper Volta had perhaps aspects of this) as much as they were reactions against social cleavages, the failure of economies, and the inability of elites to make connections with masses. In the Liberia case, class and ethnic cleavage fused, for although there were and are strong ethnic cleavages among so-called indigenous or tribal peoples, the great gap in Liberian society prior to 1980 was that between the Americo-Liberian elite and indigenous people. In the Ghana case, there has been more of a dispute about the importance of ethnicity in society. Ethnic cleavages have sometimes coincided with income and occupation. The north of Ghana is relatively poor; cocoa

farmers are mostly Akan speaking and predominantly Ashanti. The military has been seen by many as being Ewe dominated, at least at times. In Upper Volta, what is usually meant by ethnicity seems less salient than in many African countries.

Although class differentiations are perhaps more developed in Ghana than most African countries, it would be wrong to see the Rawlings regime as expressing clear class antagonisms. Indeed, the term "populist" is descriptive for Rawlings, as well as for Doe and Sankara, because all three leaders expressed a generalized discontent and rage against an established order. The old order was most sharply defined in Liberia. Once the old regime was fatally weakened and a number of its leaders executed, the Doe regime became more conservative than the others. Perhaps this has to do with relative regime age (regimes in Africa can age in terms of months) but it also has to do with having a more clear-cut enemy which once defeated could be accommodated. The U.S. connection played a role too in modifying the regime's radicalism.

In Ghana, relative wealth and privilege has continued to exist and income differentials remain large. But in Ghana, Upper Volta, and Liberia what has been striking are general economic failures and impoverishment rather than wealth leading to maldistribution of income. In the three countries, elites have tried to maintain their consumption standards on a narrowing economic base. However, while anti-elite politics can be organized, it is difficult to sustain a class based politics. Thus Doe, Rawlings, and Sankara have expressed the diffuse grievances that we associate with populism, singling out for attack corruption, privilege, and caste. And in Ghana and Upper Volta, caste included the military itself. In Upper Volta, and to some extent in

Ghana, attacks against traditional leaders have also occurred but there also have been attempts to coopt traditional leaders as Doe has done in Liberia. The attack against status and privilege has led Sankara to voice demands for greater equality of women. The most striking aspects of these regimes have been the institutional innovations designed to express populist grievances, especially in Ghana and Upper Volta. In fact, the institutional aspects have been more innovative than the actual economic policies promulgated.

Both Ghana and Liberia have been forced to do business with the World Bank and the IMF. Neither Rawlings nor Doe nor Sankara came to power with any clear ideas about how to restructure their economies. The Doe coup had been triggered by a rise in rice prices. But for all the reaction to deteriorating living standards, these regimes have been forced to adopt various policies of structural adjustment, including attacking inflated government budgets, subsidies, and exchange rates. They have done so in a stop-go fashion. Liberia first doubled minimum wages for public employees after the coup, then cut back. Ghana tried to attack corruption, set prices in the market place, increase workers' management roles. But in 1982 Ghana's real output had dipped 7% and was 17% less than it had been in 1974; on a per capita basis it had fallen by more than 30% since 1974. By 1983 Ghana had accumulated large external arrears in payments and transfers for current international transactions and on debt amortization. These had reached almost \$620 million by mid-1983. Thus Ghana had to reach agreement with the Fund and in 1983 it embarked on a conventional IMF adjustment program. Ghana committed itself to unify its exchange rate, to devalue, to maintain budgetary restrictions. In October, 1983 it devalued by almost 100%. The World

Bank commended Ghana for its austerity policies. Indeed, Ghana has now imposed one of the most austere programs of any of the developing countries.

Liberia has not had great success in the economic realm either but it too has embarked on conventional economic policies, although it has not fully implemented IMF stabilization programs. In Upper Volta, for all the rhetoric, the regime has tried to maintain its connections to western donors, as Liberia has with the U.S. This comes as no surprise for a regime which receives around \$250 million per year in foreign aid when the 1983 domestic budget was \$140 million in Upper Volta. In economic terms, these African countries do not look different than most others. They have faced deteriorating prices for their exports; they have had stagnant or worse performances in agriculture; and they have responded by off-again-on-again attempts to implement conventional IMF type packages while retaining access to loans on concessional terms.

However, in the institutional realms, business has not been as usual. In the beginning of the Rawlings second regime, Rawlings tried to give great scope to workers' management committees. Some takeovers of enterprises occurred. The idea was to increase participation from below. But there has been an unstable balance between implementing the IMF's macroeconomic policies and allowing for institutional innovation and worker participation. The trade unions have complained about austerity policies and government has had a hard time imposing discipline on workers. The same outcome is emerging in Upper Volta where radical trade unions opposed various of the regimes economic measures. Liberia has not even experimented very much with worker participation.

One problem for the populist military regimes has been that their political bases are diffuse. The military itself is a critical interest group, making the same demands for higher pay, more and better equipment, and a stake in economic enterprises that it makes everywhere in Africa. In Ghana, Rawlings has denied that his regime is a military one and Sankara too has made this denial, in part to avoid being captured by the armed forces. Both have attacked the idea of the armed forces as a privileged caste. These leaders want their autonomy. But this means also appealing directly to the masses, which is a hallmark of any populist regime, and working through already existing political groups while trying to establish new institutions and constituencies.

In Ghana and Upper Volta, the leaders had loose ties to various groups. Some of these groups were distinctly marginal in the old system; others had a broader constituency base. In Ghana, Rawlings had the support of the June Fourth Movement, the New Democratic Movement, the Peoples Revolutionary League, the Pan African Youth Movement, the African Youth Command and the Social Democratic Front. This last won only three seats in the 1979 elections. These groups were linked to Rawlings either directly or through individuals on the People's National Defense Council. The links were not tightly structured and the relationships have been unstable. When Rawlings had a falling out with one or another leader, the ties to the group were called into question. Furthermore, these fringe groups were not always in easy alliance with trade unions. Links to rural areas have been weak except for ethnic ones.

There is no strong evidence that the committees and institutions that have been established in Ghana and which are evolving in Upper Volta will prove particularly strong or durable. Still, it is important to

look at these vehicles because they are important innovations that define the populist regimes.

Ghana has created peoples and workers defense committees (PDCs and WDCs) with a territorial and place of work base. In Upper Volta committees for the defense of the revolution (CDRs) have emerged. Both countries have proliferated special tribunals and management committees. The aims in creating these structures are to by-pass existing parties, by-pass the military itself, create links to excluded social formations, and establish new bases for support of the leaders. These committees have wound up with multifaceted functions and with compositions that vary in political complexion depending on the areas where they are established. Chiefs achieved control of some CDRs in Upper Volta. Some CDRs have performed low level civil action functions and some have security functions. There has been a problem in both countries in getting committees not to work against centrally established policies.

The defense committees and revolutionary committees have looked like TANU party cells in Tanzania in the 1970s and like kebeles in Ethiopia in that powers are not well defined and local variation in functioning occurs. The idea is to hold local elections not through old local government structures or by having remnants of old parties compete but through these committees. And WDCs and CDRs to some extent by-pass trade unions which lead the latter to complain. In the armed forces, Upper Volta is establishing popular brigades for the revolution as military arms of the CDRs, at least where military camps exist. Civilians thus enter the barracks. A similar process has occurred in Ghana. But it is difficult to both discipline and professionalize a military while politicizing it and Ghana has hoped to do both. Senior officers have

tried to prevent defense committees from interfering with command. In Upper Volta, the Ministry of Defense has opposed giving arms to CDRs.

Politicization of the military in populist regimes does not mean primarily the armed forces' involvement in politics. This, of course, is not new in Africa. It refers to making the armed forces conscious of social and economic roles, undermining the military's prerogatives as a special institution, and imposing civilian controls within it. African armies have resisted these attempts and there will be resistance to them in Upper Volta and Ghana although the latter's military is already so fractured that is becoming as much a band of different groups with personal clique and ethnic connections as it is an army.

Populist regimes not only politicize the armed forces but they attempt to politicize all institutions in society-trade unions, associations, and educational groups, legal and judicial structures. Some of the most important developments in Ghana and Upper Volta have been the attempts to create new judicial institutions and to politicize the judicial process. Rawlings, however, already has taken some steps back from this path and has begun to restore elements of the old judicial process. One of the innovations in Ghana and Upper Volta, which also had an initial vogue in Liberia, was the creation of special tribunals, peoples courts, citizens vetting committees, workers defense councils. Military regimes have frequently been impatient with what they have sometimes deemed the technicalities of judicial process-appeals, lawyers, delays. Populist military regimes came into power in Liberia and Ghana with a bloodletting thinly legitimized by special military tribunals. In Ghana this took place after the first Rawlings coup. Subsequently, both

countries and Upper Volta did try tax evaders, former leaders, and opponents in special courts.⁴

There had been a checkered tradition of legalism in all three countries and political leaders had intervened in judicial processes. But attacks had usually been made on individual lawyers and judges, not on the whole legal system. One of the hallmarks of the populist regime is its attack on the legal system, made in the name of revolutionary justice and equality. The rage at corruption and also at the privileges of the middle classes and professionals is clearly expressed in the desire to set up peoples courts and to appeal directly to the justice of the people. Populism, in its antilegalistic guise, is meant to disarm the opposition, to intimidate opponents, and to be perceived by the masses as dealing directly with corruption and corrupt officials. Special courts and tribunals, often meeting with no appeals process, with no decent defense process for the accused, also mobilize class antagonisms. In Ghana and Upper Volta, strong opposition has been expressed by professionals and by the middle classes to these aspects of populism. The old legal system continues in Ghana parallel to the new and often influencing it and appeals have been reintroduced. In Upper Volta, General Lamizana was acquitted by one of the special courts which have not yet become hanging courts.

Special courts and the tampering with the judicial process, peoples militias, personalism and the attempt to rule charismatically, elimination of opponents by "legal" or direct means -- these are hardly new in Africa. Nor are the attempts new to control prices directly, to impose politics on markets, to invoke unity over ethnic and social cleavages while often exacerbating these cleavages by making ethnically

based appointments, and harranguing class opponents as agents of imperialism. Ad hoc policy making and reliance on outsiders are not exactly new phenomena either. The attempt to by-pass existing institutions by creating new ones has a long history in both colonial and independent Africa. In the end, the weaknesses and localisms of all institutions persist under populist regimes, as they have under most African regimes.

The populist regimes' reliance on personal leadership in Ghana is a strength in that it avoids the capture of the leader by any particular constituency. But the weakness lies in a failure to develop strong institutions which can discipline groups and frame and implement policies. In this sense, Ghana's populist military regime does not look very different from many other African regimes. The immediate groups that support the regime are urban workers, some students and intellectuals, along with an undisciplined military. This is not a new phenomenon either.

Upper Volta has shown similar patterns. Sankara has had ties to the League Patriotique Pour le Development (LIPAD) and to left wing ideologues and communist trade unions who struggle against each other. But Sankara's ties are hardly well developed and other officers, especially Blaise Compoare, also have such ties. The shifting groups that have supported Rawlings and Sankara also pressure them from the left. Trade union leaders already complain about being excluded from decision making and in Ghana and Upper Volta trade union leaders fear that workers defense councils and committees for the defense of the revolution will dilute their role. Populist leaders must also deal with technocrats in the ministries who have their own ties to international

and bilateral donors. Moreover, there have been military officers in Ghana and Upper Volta from the old professional army who neither want to see the army politicized and turned into a people's army nor want to see their countries pushed far to the left.

In Ghana, since the first Rawlings coup, there has been a tension between the need to reestablish order and discipline within the armed forces, a need recognized by military leaders Nunoo-Mensah and Quainoo, who stressed training and professionalization of the Ghanaian army as a high priority, and the desire of Rawlings and the junior officers, noncoms, and civilians around him to proliferate non-military institutions to protect themselves politically from the danger that the military itself would pose to their power. The non-military institutions also allow various individuals like Captain Kojo Tsikata in Ghana to look for bases of support when their own appeal is limited within the armed forces. Either a faction ridden military split by political commitments, personalities, and ethnic origins or a reestablished military with a viable chain of command and discipline could pose a threat to Ghana's current leaders. The professionalized army probably poses more of a threat than the disunified and chaotic one of present day Ghana. For in a situation of disorder, a band of ethnic affines (Ewes) and Rawlings' own guard units, bolstered by militia, defense committees, and mobilized bands of civilians may suffice to keep Rawlings in power as long as a small group does not get lucky and is able to assassinate him. Given his personal appeals to various Ghanaian audiences, and in the context of a divided military, Rawlings' power base is perhaps more secure than it would be with a coherent armed force. Since Ghana does not face the military threats that Ethiopia's leaders faced from Somalia and from

Eritrean and other dissidents, Rawlings has the luxury of allowing the military to remain disorganized.

One danger for Ghana is that the armed forces deteriorate to the Ugandan level where the military is little more than bands of warring units, linked by communal origin and loyalty to individual leaders. While Ghana has not historically suffered from the degree of ethnic conflict that has existed in Uganda, it is not impossible that latent and existing ethnic tensions become worse in Ghana and that the military disappears as an organized force.

Liberia too has faced a tension between reestablishing order within the military, as well as outside it, and allowing newly mobilized political groups to push the transformation of Liberian society to the left. In Liberia, the direction has been different from Ghana's. First, there has been an attempt to reestablish rank order by promoting noncoms and senior officers. The aim has been to restore order in the armed forces by coopting individuals from the lower ranks. Commander-in-Chief Doe has tried to consolidate his authority not by proliferating civilian defense committees and commissions and tribunals, but by winnowing out opponents on the People's Redemption Council, by establishing cabinet government, and by trying to create coherence within the armed forces. This has meant bringing back individuals from the Americo-Liberian elite. The Doe regime has gone so far as to promise restitution of assets and housing which were expropriated. Doe has tried to make his peace with the old elite while increasing the salience of his own Krahn ethnic group within the armed forces. He has also tried to win support from up-country chiefs and indigenous leaders.

Doe has also maintained close ties to the U.S., has gone so far as to reestablish diplomatic relations with Israel, and has turned his face resolutely away from Libyan blandishments after a very brief flirtation on assumption of power. Doe's Liberia now seems very much like many other African personalistic military regimes. Ghana, on the other hand, gave support to Sankara's coup; maintains ties with Libya (albeit the warmth of those ties have been variable); and maintains radical third world postures.

A good part of the explanation for the different evolution of Ghana and Liberia rests on the predilections of their leaders, just as events in Uganda, Central African Empire, or Tanzania have been so heavily influenced by the personal roles of Amin, Bokassa, and Nyerere. While African leaders cannot alter their economies easily, they can affect political events. They can try different experiments, even if they have a hard time sustaining these attempts. And they can determine foreign policy postures.

In Ghana and Liberia, major political tensions and cleavages have existed but within these social cleavages, politics was played out by certain rules until leadership change occurred. Of course, leaders are constrained in their choices by the nature of the society in which they live. Ghana has had economic stagnation and decline from independence onwards.⁵ Since Ghana's economy was a relatively strong one at independence, expectations have been high and performance low. As the effectiveness and efficiency of the state apparatus declined in Ghana, there was significant expansion of the politicization of social groups. Associational and occupational groups, ethnic and religious ones, and neighborhood territorial groups expressed themselves vigorously.

Decision making became increasingly fragmented in Ghana, authority was personalized, as elsewhere in Africa, and populism was expressed as discontent with authority. Direct action and civilian agitation preceded the first and second Rawlings coups. The state itself became increasingly irrelevant to economic decisions although the struggle for the spoils of the state did not weaken.

The military did not suppress politics in Ghana when it was in power prior to 1979. During military rule, there was a proliferation of groups who made political demands in Ghana. All commentators on Ghana stress the huge gap in the 1960s and 1970s between actual standards and expectations of consumption.⁶ And analysts point to a rising militancy, independence from government, plus radical discontent with the existing social order, prior to the Rawlings coups.⁷

It would not be quite accurate to see these trends in Ghana as a growing class polarization if class is understood in conventional terms as working class versus bourgeoisie, or large landowners and owners of capital versus those who have none. Rather, the feeling became widespread that "haves" including civil servants and military, were exploiters of "have nots." Indeed, the view became widely held that the elites of the state could not deliver goods, services, or justice.⁸ These feelings have been prevalent in large parts of Africa. But Ghana started off with a high degree of literacy and economic well-being compared to other African countries and all civilian and military regimes have been egregious failures. Also, military authority had been undermined by successive coups, especially by the first Rawlings coup and the executions and humiliations in its aftermath. Finally, a leader came

to power in Ghana who had populist commitments and who had enough rank and file support to build on those commitments.

The elements that were present in Ghana have existed before in Africa and will continue to exist. Both Ethiopia and Liberia had populist coups that took different directions from Ghana's and ones different from each other. What was striking in Ethiopia was an attempt to directly politicize masses of people, who, compared to Ghana's urban and rural population, had not been politically active. The leadership of the Derg remained shadowy for some time and Mengistu was able to consolidate his position only after difficult struggles. In 1974-75, the Ethiopian leaderships' policies remained ill-defined. The military leaders, of many different ranks, did not rely on trade unions and parties -- they battled against them -- but they did utilize direct election of peasants to their rural associations, created urban neighborhood groups to by-pass old institutions and to create security committees as watchdogs. The Ethiopian regime subsequently declared for Marxism-Leninism, tied itself to the USSR and Cuba, and embarked on radical domestic programs. However, at its inception it looked more like the proto-type for populist military regimes than either another of the military announced Afro-Marxist regimes such as Benin or Congo-Brazzaville or the guerrilla movements become Marxist-Leninist party regimes of Angola and Mozambique.

Ethiopia would be one possible evolution for Ghana, perhaps more than for Upper Volta which might become more like Afro-Marxist regimes where social change has been limited. Ghana has had deeper ethnic and social status cleavages as well as income ones compared to Upper Volta. This would be a bloody evolution indeed and it would mean relying on the

Soviet Union for economic and perhaps military support. The willingness of outside powers to play a supporting role does affect the domestic evolution of African states. When Libya would no longer make significant amounts of cheap oil available to Ghana, and the USSR has seemed uninterested picking up large bills, Rawlings had no alternative but to do business with the West.

Nor is the Ethiopian pattern the only one available to populist regimes. Liberia shows that the leader can move in a conservative direction. Doe was less tied to parties and to intellectual groups than his counterparts in Ghana and Upper Volta. There has been speculation about the links before the 1980 coup between Doe and the People's Progressive Party. Whether Doe had those links, whether he borrowed from Rawlings first Armed Forces Revolutionary Council coup, or simply improvised, he did bring in leading members of the PPP and also from the Movement for Justice in Africa. He aimed for a broad coalition and eventually brought back some leading lights of the old regime and the True Whig Party.

Doe moved more quickly and successfully to discipline soldiers than occurred in Ghana. Despite what was perhaps a calculated brief flirtation with Libya and the USSR, he kept his ties to the USA and foreign corporations and then strengthened them. Without letting go of his populist appeals, and while maintaining his regime as a highly personalistic one, he turned out to be conservative in foreign relations and domestic policies. How much of this can be attributed to the USA tie, how much to personal predilection, and how much to his fear of neighbors or domestic opponents is hard to say. The point is that in Africa, the leader often has leeway in foreign policy directions and is

able to maintain conventional economic policies if he so chooses and has the armed forces' support.

Liberia has shared a number of features with Ghana. In Liberia, few members of the original People's Redemption Council have remained in power. This has been true for Ghana's People's National Defense Council, too. Both countries have had numerous coup and assassinations over the last two years, and there have been executions of former compatriots within the military. Party leaders have been removed. In Liberia, Mathews and Tipoteh went into exile as did Chris Atim in Ghana. Liberia came to look not very different than many small African states: a military regime with highly personalistic and arbitrary rule which is reliant on outsiders. It is not impossible that Rawlings might move Ghana in this direction although his inclinations do not seem to lie that way. Rawlings could also be replaced by a coup or by assassination and the regime would lose the little glue that it has.

Conclusions

In important respects, then, the populist regimes ushered in by military coups are hardly new under the sun. They are characterized by many of the elements which existed in various one party systems in the 1960s and 1970s and which obtain in Afro-Marxist military regimes today. The lines also blur between purification regimes in Upper Volta and Ghana and a revolutionary one in Ethiopia. Rawlings has seemed serious about social transformation though he is highly constrained by Ghana's economy and dependence on outsiders. He has, however, less frontally assaulted the established classes than occurred in Ethiopia.

West African populist regimes have destroyed authority and proliferated tasks for overburdened and weak new institutions, thus duplicating patterns which have prevailed in many African countries since independence. What appears new, by degree at least, is that in Ghana and Upper Volta the armed forces have been less insulated from society. The leaders have deliberately eroded the armed forces' autonomy in a way that did not occur in most African military regimes, including Ethiopia, Somalia, Benin, Malagasy and Congo-Brazzaville. This was possible because Rawlings and Sankara had an heroic image from their early involvements, their activities against corruption, and their imprisonments. (In Sankara's case popularity also accrued from his role in military incursions against Mali.) Doe had no such historical role and thus was perhaps more reliant on balancing off elements in the armed forces.

For all the desire of the populist leaders to cut free from social forces, while manipulating them, they are not able to do so completely. Rawlings requires continued support from Ewe's in the armed forces and in

society at large, whatever his own inclinations concerning an ethnic constituency. Doe, too, requires Krahn support in the army. Both are forced to deal with the ethnic tensions of their societies via appointments, juggling of commands, dealings with traditional authorities and local government reorganizations. All three leaders must also face the constituency bases of their supporters as well as their opponents. Doe and Rawlings have made many compromises with former opponents. Doe brought many figures back from the Tolbert period into leading economic and political roles and Rawlings has spoken out against a politics of rhetoric and terror. He has tried to neutralize the opposition of lawyers and judges by modifying the role of special courts and allowing for an appeals process.

How vulnerable are other African regimes, military and non-military, to populist coups and regimes? African states are vulnerable to military coups. Wherever cleavages exist in the armed forces, there is the threat of breakdown of chain of command. The interaction between cleavages in society and internal cleavages within the military based on ethnic splits, rank, generation, education may produce outcomes similar to Ghana and Upper Volta. This is the more likely given the persistent failures in Africa to deal with economic problems, given growing populations, and given the weakening of those middle class structures and institutions that do exist. Where armed forces are large in size and relatively complex in terms of structure and technology, a junior officer coup or one led by noncoms is less likely. Thus the recent Nigerian coup was led by senior officers, not junior ones. But if the Buhari regime should fail and be discredited, splits will widen in the armed forces and pressures from below will increase. Still, Nigeria remains a country

with a middle class that is relatively consolidated by African standards. Such a middle class exists in Cameroon, Kenya, the Ivory Coast and Senegal.

Middle class formations have links by education and blood ties to senior officers and to civil servants. A populist coup in these countries would face real social opposition, as it has faced in Ghana where the middle classes have been weakened by more than two decades of economic decline. A populist coup would entail a bloody social struggle in Kenya, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Cameroon, or Senegal. If the Kenyan coup had succeeded in 1982, consolidation would have been difficult. In the Gambia, by contrast, a populist coup could have succeeded more easily but for Senegal's intervention, because as in many African countries, no social barriers really exist between the populist coup and the imposition of a populist military regime. Nor are the armed forces a bulwark against populism in many countries, for example, in Uganda, Togo or for that matter in Liberia which could move again in a different direction. And, this is true for the so-called Afro-Marxist military regimes too, or at least for Benin, Somalia or Congo-Brazzaville. Zaire is a candidate and if the Senegalese economy continues to erode, what has been a disciplined armed force might weaken under internal pressures. As long as the French presence persists, a populist military coup is not likely in Senegal, but Senegal has a weaker middle class than Ivory Coast or Kenya.

FOOTNOTES

1. See Billy Dudley, Instability and Political Order: Politics and Crisis in Nigeria (Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press, 1973) pp. 101-106 and Robin Luckham, The Nigerian Military (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).
2. See Samuel Decalo, Coups and Army Rule in Africa (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973) pp. 39-86.
3. Crawford Young, Ideology and Development in Africa (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982) p. 35.
4. See E. Gyimah Boadi and Donald Rothchild, "Rawlings, Populism and the Civil Liberties Tradition in Ghana," Issue, Vol. XII, Nos. 3-4, Fall-Winter, 1982, pp. 64-69.
5. Among the interesting recent political analyses of Ghana are: Naomi Chazen, An Anatomy of Ghanaian Politics: Managing Political Recession, 1969-1982 (Boulder: Westview Press, 1983); Eleanor Zeff, "New Directions in Understanding Military and Civilian Regimes in Ghana," African Studies Review, Vol. 24, No. 1, 1981, pp. 49-72. Donald Rothchild, "Military Regime Performance: An Appraisal of the Ghana Experience, 1977-78," Comparative Politics, Vol. 12, No. 4, 1980, pp. 459-479; Jon Kraus, "The Political Economy of Conflict in Ghana," Africa Report, Vol 25, No. 2, 1980, pp. 9-16 and "Rawlings Second Coming," Africa Report, Vol. 27, No. 3, 1982, pp. 59-66; Emmanuel Hansen and Paul Collins, "The Army, the State, and the 'Rawlings' Revolution," African Affairs, Vol. 79, No. 314, 1980, pp. 3-23; Fred Hayward

"Perceptions of Well-Being in Ghana 1970 and 1975," African Studies Review, Vol. 22, No. 1, 1979, pp. 109-126; David Brown, "Who Are The Tribalists? Social Pluralism and Political Ideology In Ghana, "African Affairs, Vol 81, No. 322, 1982. pp. 37-69; Austin and Robin Luckham, eds., Politicians and Soldiers in Ghana 1966-1972 (London: Frank Cass, 1976).

6. Chazen, op. cit., p. 162.
7. Richard Jeffries, Class, Power and Ideology in Ghana: The Railwaymen of Sekondi (London: Cambridge University Press, 1978) p. 198.
8. Chazen, op. cit., p. 142 says that the conceptual foundations of Rawlings political world view stem from Ghanaian populist roots and he has capitalized on widespread perceptions to gather support for his call to moral revolution.

Summary of "Populist Military Regimes in West Africa"

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1) Populism is not new in Africa. Attacks on established institutions and corruption, expressions of puritanism and the need for moral redemption have occurred prior to the populist coups carried out in Ghana in 1979 and 1981, Liberia in 1980 and Upper Volta in 1983. The emphasis on individual leadership and on direct ties between leader and people have occurred also. Nor are coups led by junior officers or noncommissioned officers new. However, the recent West African coups were ushered in with violence, were frontal assaults on established regimes and institutions, and do have features which are unusual in Africa.

2) Populist coups have included assaults on senior officers within the military. In Ghana and Upper Volta, the tendency has been to try to politicize the armed forces and to end the idea and functioning of the military as a special caste. However, tensions arise between the need for some restoration of chain of command and discipline within the military and the desires of the leaders to remain unconstrained by the armed forces. To accomplish this, they try to establish bases of power outside the military.

3) Tensions also arise from desire to gain support from left-wing parties, trade unions and intellectuals and the leaders' concerns to develop new institutions which compete not only with middle class and professional associations but also compete, at least potentially, with trade unions, student groups, and radical parties. These tensions get realized early because all West African countries have faced severe economic constraints and must retain economic ties to the West and implement IMF-type stabilization programs.

4) The patterns in Liberia on the one hand and Ghana and Upper Volta, on the other, have evolved differently. Differences are seen with respect to the reconstitution of armed forces, bringing back of elements of the old regime in Liberia, the establishment of workers and defense councils and committees in Ghana and Upper Volta, but not in Liberia, and foreign policy positions. Macroeconomic policies, however, have not been differentiated by political radicalism. Individual predilections of leaders and foreign policy ties seem more important than structures of social cleavage in explaining the different evolutions of Ghana and Upper Volta as compared to Liberia.

5) Disorder within African militaries, severe economic constraints facing African countries, social cleavages stemming from ethnic and generational splits, and the determination of elites to maintain their standards of living in the face of growing national impoverishment all open up the possibility for more populist coups in Africa.

6) The populist coup may evolve in a direction similar to Ethiopia's which has tried to establish a Marxist-Leninist regime. But it may also evolve in the direction of Liberia which looks like other personalistic African military regimes. Another outcome is simply more

chaos, multiple coup attempts, and an inability to reconstruct any kind of order. This is how Ghana has evolved.

7) Countries with established middle classes such as Nigeria, Kenya, Cameroon, Ivory Coast and possibly Senegal will resist populist coups and there would be more violence and social struggle than has occurred in Upper Volta so far if a populist military regime was installed after a coup. Such struggles continue in Ghana where the middle classes were already demoralized and in decline after years of a worsening economy and the failure of all regimes.

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