



UNIVERSITY  
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JOHANNESBURG

**SARCHI**  
AFRICAN DIPLOMACY AND  
FOREIGN POLICY

# Bouts de Papier



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## Editorial Note

On behalf of the editorial team, may I present our first issue of **Bouts de Papier** giving user-friendly diplomatic briefs and political analysis of national, regional, and international events pertinent to foreign policy, African diplomacy, national and maritime security.

For this inaugural issue we present some key debates and important highlights from previous webinars and conferences held by University of Johannesburg's SARCHI Chair: African Diplomacy and Foreign Policy and Centre for African Development and Leadership with collaborating partners. These webinar reports give a background to current debates and research findings on hotspots in foreign relations and security which subsequent issues shall build upon.

May I take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude as the editorial team to all those whose work forms part of this inaugural release. Some participated in our webinars as presenters and discussants while others contributed to discussions as part of the audience; we are profoundly indebted to you all. Without your insightful presentations, debates, and questions it would be impossible to make sense of the seemingly incomprehensible international political and security landscape.

Enjoy reading our briefs in this inaugural issue and in subsequent ones. Together let us grow our newsletter through your contributions and feedback.

**Dr Samukele Hadebe**

**Our Future  
Reimagined**

# INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Prof Lisa Otto

Deputy Director: SARCHI African Diplomacy and Foreign Policy

This in-house publication by the *SARCHI Chair: African Diplomacy and Foreign Policy* aptly named *Bouts de Papier* seeks to avail user-friendly briefs on African diplomacy, foreign policy, national, international, and maritime security issues. This newsletter comes at an opportune moment as South Africa celebrates 30 years of democracy and hence a time to review its foreign relations since.

The attainment of democracy in South Africa in 1994 came against the backdrop of the fall of Soviet Union and hence the end of the Cold War giving way to a unipolar world. Of course, the anticipated peaceful coexistence in a post-Cold War and post-Apartheid era turned out to be a mirage. Indeed, South Africa made strides in transforming its regional and international relations as it re-joined the community of nations without the blight of the Apartheid tag. With its renewed embrace and goodwill from the international community, South Africa pursued a human-rights based foreign policy. As would be expected, there were successes and limitations to South African foreign policy.

A unipolar world dominated by the United States of America has not given rise to amicable inter-state relations characterised more by diplomacy than warfare. Security threats, political uncertainty and even armed violence continue to characterise international relations and with violent conflicts prevalent in many parts of the world including in Africa, with SADC being no exception. Even the democratisation wave that brought about political changes in many developing countries, unfortunately it did not yield the hoped-for entrenchment of democratic rule and the supposed economic development associated with it.

In addition, the post-Cold War era coincided with the massive spread of social media in the age of disinformation and fake news consequently creating information overload that impacts negatively on the ability of the public, academia, and policymakers in making sense of the fast-changing foreign relations and its security implications. It is expected that *Bouts de Papier* would facilitate the understanding of the otherwise complex issues relating to international relations and their impact on national and international security.

Diplomatic work within institutional frameworks like the UN, AU, SADC or ECOWAS should foreground the analysis but also the analysis of historical geopolitical and strategic factors influencing the actions or inactions of both state and non-state actors. With increasing trade wars and the use of sanctions, the briefs in this newsletter would of necessity explore the role of economic blocs like BRICS in the foreign relations conundrum. South Africa's foreign policy options remain a topical subject for many reasons. Will South Africa maintain its seemingly soft power approach in a changing world that may likely threaten her interests? Africa in general has recently been tested on conflicts outside the continent where she is coerced to take sides. The on-going Palestinian and Israel conflict is one case in point while the Russian invasion of Ukraine is another. Africa cannot be neutral in the Chinese posture against Taiwan nor the USA against Venezuela. African statesmen and women should balance between their desired independence in foreign relations and external pressure. For example, South Africa took a stand on Israel war in Gaza.

In Africa, there is a resurgence of military coups and hence the shrinking democratic space. Economically the continent continues with extractive industries and less value addition hence the failure to create jobs locally. Within SADC the DRC remains politically unstable and while SADC forces withdraw from Mozambique, Rwandan forces come in as replacement. The situation remains unstable.

These are some of the pertinent questions that we hope could better understood from the briefs presented in the *Bouts de Papier*. Issues of national security are a concern for all not just a coterie of practitioners in the military, security or political science hence the production of simplified and accessible briefs for general readership.



# ON THE SCOURGE OF COUPS IN AFRICA

**Dr Ayabulela Dlakavu**

This article summarises the points by Dr Dlakavu as a discussant to the webinar panellists; Dr Moses Khanyile, Prof Ronney Ncwadi, Prof John Mark Iyi and Prof Lisa Otto on 'The resurgence of the military (coups and juntas) in African politics: what are the strategic implications for Southern Africa?' held on 17 April 2024.



Explaining what could be driving the resurgence of the military in African politics, Dr Dlakavu highlighted the role of external factors such as foreign powers and multinational corporations, in exacerbating these conflicts. There is therefore a need for a more nuanced and comprehensive approach to addressing the rise of coups in Africa, including addressing socio-economic causes.

He also argued that the rise of coups in Africa could be regarded as a direct consequence of the failures of democratic political systems to inspire positive development and societal change in Africa. The following are some of the socio-economic drivers of coups in the Sahel:

- i. According to the United Nations (2017), 80% of people in the Sahel (Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad) live on less than US\$2 a day, poverty is more widespread in the Sahel than in most other parts of Africa.
- ii. Population growth, widespread unemployment and limited public services (education, healthcare, infrastructure etc.) and leave more young people without job opportunities. Already unemployment afflicts half of all youths in Mali.
- iii. Most governments in the Sahel are formally democratic, but for many ordinary citizens, elections have not yielded tangible improvements (socio-economic development), while bureaucratic corruption and favouritism remain common
- iv. Such circumstances, in turn, contribute to the risks of crime and violence.
- v. Scramble for Africa 2.0 as an international driver of coups and armed opposition in Africa?
- vi. Is Southern Africa insulated from the development and political challenges that have resulted in coups and military juntas in the Sahel?
- vii. According to the World Bank (2020), approximately 55.5% (30.3 million people) of the population is living in poverty in South Africa. Correlation with high crime rates and the rise of private security and "protection fee" demands in vulnerable areas and certain industries.
- viii. Relatively weak military influence over politics in South Africa. But what about fertile ground for potential rise of militia groups given law enforcement challenges?
- ix. Zimbabwe: military intervention to overthrow Mugabe regime in November 2017
- x. Mozambique: non-state armed groups revolting in northern Cabo Delgado (gas rich area) since 2017 (former security forces, ISIS and Al Shabaab involved). Poverty rate: beyond 60% (2019 World Bank statistics)
- xi. DRC: M23, other armed groups and foreign forces in eastern region

A common denominator in the diagnosis provided by Dr Dlakavu is poverty manifesting in inequalities, poor living standards, and the battle over natural resources as key drivers of political instability and coups. A possible solution is to improve on governance and to deliver public services. This is of course easier said than done in countries where the state has no monopoly over the use of force nor is it able to reach the entire territory.

## Bouts de Papier



For democracy to remain a system of choice in Africa, there needs to be an equal focus on both regular and free elections, as well as a focus on the economic rights of populations to live better lives free of want, poverty and economic deprivation. People do not eat ballot papers, they eat food, they need shelter, and they need jobs. Good healthcare and education need money and voting regularly without seeing meaningful change in material conditions could be counterproductive.

# WEBINAR REPORT

## The resurgence of the military (coups and juntas) in African politics: what are the strategic implications for Southern Africa?

Webinar held on: 17 April 2024

### Collaborating institutions

Centre for African Development and Leadership (CADL), South African Research Chair: African Diplomacy and Foreign Policy (University of Johannesburg), Centre for Military Studies (Stellenbosch University), and Nelson Mandela University.

### Objective of the joint webinar

The collaborating institutions sought to reflect on the rise of the military in African politics and what it means for the Southern African sub-region more specifically going forward. The Chairperson of the Session, Professor Chris Landsberg, provided an overview of key continental initiatives and institutions that have been established to ensure the prevention and/or management of unconstitutional changes in government, as well as to ensure the establishment of sustainable peace and security in Africa. These include the Africa Peace and Security Architecture, The Constitutive Act of the African Union and its condemnation of unconstitutional changes of government (Article 4), the AU Peace and Security Council, the Africa Governance Architecture, and the African Peer Review Mechanism.

### Key Panellists

Keynote panellists at the webinar included Dr Moses Khanyile, Director of the Centre for Military Studies (CEMIS, Stellenbosch University); Prof Ronney Ncwadi, Director of School of Economics, Nelson Mandela University; Prof John Mark Iyi, Director of the African Centre for Transnational Criminal Justice, University of the Western Cape; and Prof Lisa Otto, Senior Researcher and Lecturer, University of Johannesburg. Dr Ayabulela Dlakavu was the Discussant.

### Socio-economic factors that drive coups

Key insights from the Prof Ronney Ncwadi presentation with a theme, 'The economic impact of political instability in Africa: Evidence from Selected SADC Countries,' included making a case for the correlation between the impact of political coups on foreign direct investment and economic growth. An overview of 1960 to 1980s epoch of waves of coups in Africa was provided, with military juntas positioning the coups as a preventive measure to curb civilian government corruption and weak state institutions. Another important nuance with the role of the military in African politics was that of the close relationship between governing parties and the armed forces post-liberation, ties that were forged during the armed struggle for liberation. Examples of such close relations between the armed forces and governing parties are found in Zimbabwe, Angola and Mozambique. Further structural causes that drive coups in Africa are socio-economic factors such as inequality, poverty, and natural resources dependence, also known as the resource curse. The key argument made is that economic growth and foreign direct investment (FDI) often plummet after coups, with key examples being the cases of Sudan and Mali post-coups. Inversely, when the political situation stabilises, FDI flows increase and create an enabling environment for economic growth.





This interface between coups and regressing economic indicators is a key lesson for Southern African governments, who need to strengthen governance capacity to deliver basic services and enable development, invest in healthcare and education, infrastructure development and the need to diversify their economies to move away from single sector reliance (mining). Such governance and economic reforms can reduce the likelihood of coups. Governments also need to work with Development Partners to ensure sound governance and development, and to capitalise on the unleashed export/import markets provided by the Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA).

### Debunking myths about democracy

Key insights from the Prof John Mark Iyi presentation included salient remarks about the lack of correlation between the operation of democratic political systems and economic development. This is a debunking of the myth that democracy breeds economic development. Points were made that political stability can also be achieved in non-democratic political systems. In essence, the argument raised is that the developmental performance of a government is what sustains its rule and legitimises it to its population, regardless of whether the government is democratic or otherwise. The People's Republic of China was given as an example. Essentially, the efficient and effective developmental performance of government prevents coups. For democracy to survive as a political system in Africa, democratic political systems need to produce socio-economic development.

### Is the military the last line of defence?

Dr Moses Khanyile gave insights into an exploratory study of the legislated mandates of the armed forces as state institutions in Africa and beyond. The study is titled 'Revisiting the Notion of the Military as the last line of Defence'. In this study, Dr Khanyile asserts that society is liable for the role of the armed forces in politics through constitutions that recognise the role of the military in public administration and security. By positioning the military as 'the last line of defence', most African constitutions therefore legislate military involvement in African politics. While the role of the military in African politics dates to the armed struggles for independence, this role was not eradicated post-independence, and was even legally recognised through the ambiguous phrase of 'last line of defence', which is also a contingency call to action.

A key challenge to solve is the regulated versus the unregulated role of the military in politics, a grey area to which former Zimbabwe president, Robert Mugabe, contributed by asserting that 'politics should rule the gun' and not vice-versa. Essentially, the role of the military in African politics is not new nor taboo, but the key question seems to be around the regulation thereof. There is therefore a need to improve jurisprudence around the role of the military within African constitutional-legal frameworks, to address the ambiguity vis-à-vis the mandates of the military in politics. This ambiguity often leads to the military using such loopholes to stage coups to further particular objectives far divorced from socio-economic challenges facing society.

### Rise in maritime terrorism

Prof Lisa Otto added the dimension of the increasing role of naval forces and non-state armed groups at sea. A key example is the Houthis blocking shipping in the Red Sea in 2024 during the Israel-Hamas-Palestinian war. There is therefore an increased naval involvement in Middle Eastern Security situation. The rise of maritime



terrorism (including Al-Shabaab) in Northern Mozambique and the rise of maritime border disputes are further examples of the rising role of the armed forces in African politics. Maritime disputes are resulting in inter-state warfare.

### Lessons from South Korean military

The discussant Dr Ayabulela Dlakavu commented on the various presentations proffered by the panellists. On the political economy of coups, Dr Dlakavu agreed with Prof Ncwadi on the catastrophic effects of coups on FDI and economic growth, as coups often cause panic among investors, while also disrupting economic activity. This results in capital flight, resulting in industries closing and loss of jobs. Dlakavu did, however, agree with Prof John Mark Iyi that military governments, such as that of Park Chung-Hee in South Korea, had developmental vision and ideology, achieved political instability, all of which resulted in an enabling environment for rapid socio-economic development. South Korea's military government from the 1960s to the 1980s devised policies that supported strategic industries such as manufacturing, leading to the rise of manufacturing multinational corporations originating from South Korea such as Samsung, LG and Hyundai. This South Korean case study shows that non-democratic political systems can be legitimate when they facilitate positive socio-economic development and transformation.

### Key questions raised in the webinar to panellists were as follows:

- i. Is democracy a one-size fits all political system to be exported and consumed by all nation-states worldwide?
- ii. What economic benefits and social rights has democracy provided for historically and currently marginalised Africans? Is there empirical evidence that highlights this correlation?
- iii. Is there a tangible correlation between democracy and development in Africa?
- iv. Should underdeveloped African states persist with a political system [democracy] that has proven incapable of facilitating meaningful social change and economic empowerment?
- v. Is democracy the best form of political organisation in Africa? And have we emphasised economic rights as much as political rights in these African democracies?
- vii. What is the role of international actors in African coups?
- viii. Is the military a modernising motive force in society or an instrument for securing access to state resources?
- ix. What is the nature of relationship between armed forces and governing/ruling parties in Africa?

### A call for a research agenda

In concluding the webinar discussions, it was noted that the collaborating institutions at the 17 April 2024 webinar needed to collectively define, adopt and pursue a joint applied research agenda regarding the role of the armed forces in the political economy of sub-Saharan Africa.