

African Wars in the **21st** Century

THE MILITARIZATION OF POLITICS AND

POLITICIZATION OF THE MILITARY

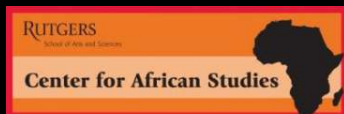
WORKSHOP REPORT

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Imprint

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Each year, the Center for African Studies at Rutgers University sponsors a variety of events on Rutgers' campuses in collaboration with multidisciplinary departments, centers, and programs. The events include conferences on the most pressing issues of our time, such as African Wars in the 21st Century. Held at Rutgers-Newark in February 2020, this workshop fostered critical dialogue among scholars and experts on the dialectics of the militarization of politics and the push for democracy in Africa. Through conversations such as these, we gain a deep understanding of the stakes of politicized militaries for civil society and the possible avenues towards strengthening democratic institutions.

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Table of Contents

| | |
|---------------------------------------|----|
| Introduction and Regional Observation | 06 |
| About the Workshop | 08 |
| Opening Discussion | 09 |
| Workshop Sessions | 10 |
| Conclusion: Ways Forward | 19 |

A CONVENING ON AFRICAN WARS AND ITS MILITARIES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Introduction and Regional Observation

Africa's political and security landscape continues to be characterized by the use of force as a means to gain access to and maintain power. Although the intent to develop and build strong democratic societies continues to be the political narrative of most leaders and is the basis upon which many constitutions today are founded, the practice of governance has shown very few cases of successful ruling without the use of force by political elites. Indeed, the years of political and military coups have long passed, with the African Union no longer legitimizing such access to power. In the last two decades, however, Africa has started to embark on a path leading to the militarization of politics and the politicization of the military.

This reality presents a very complex challenge. This is because the militarization of politics and the politicization of the military organically and systemically emerges from the manipulation of the pillars of democratic systems and their processes.

Political legitimacy is built upon the simultaneous use of certain democratic processes, such as elections and the progressive control of state institutions, along with political power through the use of force.¹ Unfortunately, this way of occupying the political landscape constitutes a threat to long term peace, development, and security in Africa.

On February 28th, 2020, Rutgers University-Newark in New Jersey held a workshop titled "African Wars in the 21st Century: Understanding the Militarization of Politics and the Politicization of the Military in the Region". Participants discussed the security landscape of Africa by focusing on issues of effectiveness along with performances of African armies in the context of the militarization of politics and the politicization of the military in the Lake Chad, Sahel, and the Great Lakes regions. The workshop was co-sponsored by the Center for African Studies, Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, and the Division of Global Affairs at Rutgers University, the Joint Civil-Military Interaction (JCMI) Research and Education Network, and the Center for Media and Peace Initiatives. This report will discuss the various presentations from each workshop session, along with the findings and gaps in the current study and practice of security assessment and analysis in the above regions. The findings of this report will be beneficial in informing the different roles that non-military actors can play in shaping security frameworks that promote stability in the region.

¹ *The authors of this report define the use of force in this context as the engagement of a state's security apparatus by state leaders, where security apparatus includes, but is not limited to, military, police, paramilitary, and private security forces. It can also be viewed as the use of policies that promote coercive measures as a means to maintain public order.*

About the Workshop

The workshop "African Wars in the 21st Century..." is part of a bigger project that focuses on understanding and assessing the effectiveness of African militaries and various civil-military interactions in the context of fragility and peace recovery. Thus, the workshop centered on bringing together scholars, policy analysts, and international organization representatives to discuss the current landscape surrounding African military studies, peace and security, and international relations. Workshop sessions were tailored around the historical role of African militaries and their role in understanding the evolving characteristics of African wars today, and in also rethinking frameworks used to assess the effectiveness of peace operations and security sector reform efforts in the region.

Opening Discussion

The session was opened and introduced by Dr. Yvan Yenda Ilunga who discussed the background of the project and presented an overview of issues pertaining to security and instability in Africa. Dr. Olajumoke (Jumo) Ayandele also led a group activity on security assessment and mapping in Africa. Within this opening conversation and discussion, the following observations were made:

- The use and the pursuit of power in Africa has been characterized by the employment of coercive strategies by those either in power or those aspiring to harness it. Those outside the circle of power, if unable to follow the democratic process, have continued to rely on armed groups to fuel their political ambitions.
- Considering that most African nations are led and influenced by former or current military leaders, it is important for scholars and policy practitioners to be aware of how this can affect domestic political legitimacy and peace-building efforts in fragile countries such as Mali, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and South Sudan.
- The continent experiences wars of governance and governance style. These wars are openly expressed by the role the military and has continued to play a critical role in the democratization of public spaces. Within local communities, the issue of governance is more related to the redistribution of resources rather than the desire for political positioning.
- Either seen from the lens of legitimacy or governance, the bottom line is that many African nations continue to experience unequal political representation, even with democratic processes like elections.
- It is impossible to discuss the performances of the military, the future of security and stability in Africa, and the strategies for strong and sustainable communities without taking the above factors into consideration when discussing and examining African security and its correlation to international stability.

Workshop Sessions

Workshop sessions were organized around several themes that examined governance processes as well as approaches to issues of security and peace from a theoretical and practical perspective.

Session 1

Militarization of Politics: Rationale, Impact, and Democracy

The first session began with a fundamental conversation as to why the continent continues to experience military interference in politics and subsequently highlights the various factors that continue to contribute to military intervention. Participants observed that:

- I Africa's military groups are not apolitical. There are domestic actors and blocs that continue to influence military institutions, dragging them into political spaces. Unfortunately, the continuous breach of the civil-military divide has led to the military as an institution losing its credibility and independence. With such an impact on the institution, the pending question that speaks to the future of the military in such a highly politicized environment continues to be centered around **the role of the military**.
- II **Domestic actors:** It is insufficient to think that domestic actors like traditional and religious leaders can be ignored when it comes to the restructuring of the security sector on the continent. They are critical actors who continue to hold ideological, religious, and cultural powers that can either conflict or be compatible with reform efforts. Their influence and presence should therefore be taken into consideration when reforming Africa's security sector.
- III The militarization of politics in the region may be partially influenced by the growing practice of the **securitization of development and foreign aid**. In this context, the increasing presence of foreign military troops and the legitimization of militarized humanitarian aid have encouraged political actors to militarize political and social spaces.

The session also debated **the issue of governance systems** in the region. Discussions centered on whether democracy and democratic institutions are inherently African and on political representation and accountability mechanisms within the context of state institutions and domestic legitimacy. Noting the abuse of democratic systems by opportunistic leaders, participants highlighted the need to research other governance models that are representative and inclusive--all of which African states can adopt.

Session 2

Civil-Military Interactions

In the second session, participants discussed the need for the development of collaborative civil-military interactions within fragile and highly militarized communities in Africa. Panelists argued that this issue requires a complex security approach, considering the increasing levels of political violence in regions such as the Sahel along with the use of asymmetrical warfare structures by armed groups that do not respect international humanitarian and human rights laws. Participants argued that:

- I This amalgam of security actors' involvements in and outside the formal security spaces comes with an urgent need for **defense oversight**. Doing so could progressively help promote an inclusive civilian controlled system that focuses on both military and political institutional accountability.
- II There is a need for coordinated regional leadership that encourages strong civilian oversight in defense matters so that state leaders can budget and effectively oversee the strategy of the military. To cement this strategy, panelists suggested that state leaders consider accountability structures from local self-defense groups along with the integration of regional stakeholders in supporting military efforts.

The session also covered the issue of **protecting civilians** in Africa. The strategic use of violence against civilians was identified as one of the contributing elements to more violence in the region and Africa's political instability. Participants asked critical questions centered around issues such as who is a civilian and who is a combatant, what are the conditions under which civilians turn into combatants, how "seasonal combatants" is defined, and how nonaffiliated civilians who pass intel to armed groups can reasonably be categorized.

Among many of the challenges associated with protecting civilians includes a weak national security/territorial integrity from state leaders. A result of poor integrity and a lack of political will fails to protect civilians. Moreover, even in cases where there is political will, a lack of resources, limited training on civil-military interactions, and state dependency on outside forces (regional or international) contribute to African states' inability to ensure protection for their civilians. As such it was agreed that:

When protecting civilians, policies and programs should be geared towards protecting with the community and not to a community.

There is a need for systematic systems that assess military effectiveness—particularly with respect to how to hold actors (military, civilian joint task forces) accountable, with the process public and transparent.

Regional bodies and African states must come to a consensus about the protection of civilians as well as definitions of what constitutes a civilian.

Civil-military interaction must rely on data driven strategies. It is sometimes difficult to measure success in civil-military interactions, but advocacy efforts may be measured.

Session 3

Peacekeeping Operations: Politics and Effectiveness

This session was based on a reflection of current peacekeeping operations conducted in Africa. Considering that there are several views concerning the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations, participants in the spirit of the project discussed bilateral and multilateral peace operations that involved African armies. Participants agreed that the literature and practice of peacekeeping operations continues to be influenced by the UN model even though operations on the continent should be informed by African armies, considering that they know the terrain and culture better. However, engagement from African armies continues to be highly informed by countries' political interests, which often constitutes an obstacle to the early deployment of troops as well as the fulfilment of their missions. Participants additionally focused on the following:

- I Questions concerning whether foreign troops deployed are in tune with a region's cultural nuances, along with the **need for appropriate cultural training and awareness**.
- II Why AU peace missions seem to be more geared towards peace enforcement. Certain participants, for example, highlighted that regional forces are more focused on counterinsurgency and terrorism operations, which may invoke the need for the redefinition of peacekeeping models in Africa.
- III **Issues of perception:** Peace operations cannot be assessed and comfortably written about if concerns related to citizens' perception are not addressed. One participant noted, for example, that citizens view UN Peacekeeping missions as solely peacekeepers and are not necessarily aware about missions' civilian functions and their roles in diplomacy. Here the question was 'How does this perception influence the protection of civilians and political engagement?'
- IV The urgent need to **empower** African security forces with the appropriate administrative, logistical, structural, and political tools for peacekeeping deployments and operations. Such empowerment initiatives would limit the region's dependence on individual contributing troop countries in cases where the urgent deployment of forces is necessary to protect civilians and prevent conflict. Additionally, peacekeepers would have a sense of independence and agency in fulfilling their mandates.
- V The development of **frameworks that measure citizens' levels of confidence and feelings of security** in assessing the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations.

Session 4

DDR Training and Logistics

The closing session reflects on global and regional efforts that have aimed to restore long lasting peace by strengthening the continent's security sector and by promoting the integration of ex-combatants in armies and civilian communities. Participants observed that current Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) policies are politically driven processes, and that policies being implemented should become increasingly less politicized. Participants also agreed that the integration of ex-combatants into the military may contribute to further political instability. Participants questioned if other alternative strategies exist to reintegrate ex-combatants in society without them posing a security risk or encountering social rejections. If so, who should be at the forefront of this effort?

Additionally, the session expanded on issues surrounding the protection of child soldiers. Participants contended that it was critical to define appropriate mechanisms and strategies the international community could standardize when dealing with combatants who are less than 18 years voluntarily surrendering. Additionally, certain participants argued that one man's freedom fighter is another's terrorist; this typology is critical in the context of internal asymmetric warfare where certain government entities have been unable to guarantee the security and prosperity of their citizens because of citizens' affiliations with armed groups. The session concluded with the following **recommendations** for scholars and policy practitioners:

- I The need for more research on past armed groups, with a focus on their transformations and political integration.
- II The importance of transitional justice in DDR processes and the need to acknowledge victims in any reintegration strategy.
- III Gendered DDR policies and processes geared towards women, an important factor albeit rarely taken into consideration.
- IV The promotion and engagement of the private sector, especially with reintegration strategies for DDR processes.
- V The need for inclusive justice for children below 18.

Way Forward

The authors of this report want to collaborate with as many African scholars as possible, as well as those interested in this subject. Central to future workshops will be to position a variety of perspectives highlighting how African governments view sovereignty, the effectiveness of security reform in various regions, and alternative frameworks that can holistically assess African militaries. Furthermore, we hope to investigate the various peace operations on the continent and how they may shape current regional and global dynamics that inform international relations, security studies, and global politics. We therefore make the call to institutions, scholars, policymakers and those interested in furthering this conversation to use our findings to inform future research and projects.

