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Louis Wataka and Prof. Samuel A. Nyanhoga



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Louis Wataka

Researcher, Tangaza University

Prof. Samuel A. Nyanchoga

Lecturer, Tangaza University

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Abstract:

Purpose: This study examines the militarisation of politics and the politicisation of the military in Africa, focusing on their underlying drivers, consequences, and potential reform strategies. It seeks to understand how structural and institutional weaknesses contribute to military involvement in political governance across the continent.

Methodology: The research adopts a qualitative case study approach, drawing on contemporary examples from Sudan, Somalia, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Egypt, Nigeria, and Mali. It analyses historical legacies and evolving political dynamics

shaping civil-military relations, guided by Realist and Liberal theoretical frameworks.

Findings: The study finds that weak political institutions, governance deficits, elite competition, economic interests, and security threats drive military engagement in politics. Militarisation and politicisation are mutually reinforcing, undermining democratic governance, weakening state institutions, and violating human rights. Case evidence shows that in Sudan, rivalry between armed factions led to civil conflict; in Somalia, clan militias influenced federal tensions; and in Zimbabwe and Uganda, the military shaped political succession and economic control. These dynamics create both domestic instability and regional security challenges.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: The study integrates Realist and Liberal perspectives to explain civil-military interactions, revealing both security imperatives and institutional constraints. It contributes to policy by emphasising the need for professional, accountable, and apolitical militaries supported by strong institutions, civilian oversight, and regional cooperation frameworks to enhance governance and sustainable development.

Keywords: *Militarisation, Politicisation, Civil-Military Relations, Governance, Africa*

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1. Introduction

The role of the military in ensuring stability in the state and democracy is an issue that the political leadership and security control in Africa have always struggled with. The major question is how far can military involvement be able to maintain order, uphold sovereignty and encourage national building without destabilizing the democratic government. In his essay *On War*, Carl von Clausewitz (1832/1976) once said: “*War is nothing but the policy by other means*”: He emphasized the political character of the armed action. This philosophical approach is the way of seeing the military not as detached instruments but active subjects in the overall political system. In *The Soldier and the State* (1957), Samuel Huntington advocated the radical division of the military and politics, arguing that professional armies should be apolitical so as to protect the democratic institutions. On the contrary, Robinson and Matisek (2020) disagrees with the dogma of Huntington by claiming that all war is political and the military cannot be separated with the political process without perverting its primary mission. In this theoretical discussion, the essence of the debate between the military professionalism and political engagement is summed up, the debate that continues to shape civil-military relationships in Africa.

In some African countries, the history of colonial rule and post-independent rule fostered the situation whereby the military became a political and developmental institution. The militarisation of politics refers to the increasing influence of the military on the decision-making process, the change of leaders, and policy implementation, and the politicisation of the military is the situation when the military organizations pursue political objectives without their constitutional right (Clapham & Philip, 2021). The interplay between the two processes has had a great effect on the African government course. The question here is not only about the question of the military encroachment into politics but also about whether given some conditions the encroachment can bring in stability, order and developmental outcomes.

In certain situations, the politicization of the military has backfired to bring stability and social-economic development. After the genocide, Rwanda, under the leadership of a disciplined military-political elite, institutionalized security as a developmental resource, thus turning the country into a model of post-conflict reconstruction (Korkor, 2024). Uganda was experiencing turmoil, but with several years of conflict, the National Resistance Army was admitted into the state administration under President Museveni, which led to the stabilization of the situation in the Republic and the formation of institutions (Bereebe, 2020). The existing military leadership in Burkina Faso has gained the internal legitimacy of the army through combating terrorism and corruption, and some citizens believe that army can be a solution to the failures of the civilian leadership (Okereke & Okereke, 2025). This situation is also evident in Burkina Faso, Mali and

Niger, where military interventions have sometimes been accepted by civilian populations as realistic solutions to insecurity and elite corruption due to the weakness of democratic legitimacy in providing basic security and services to populations (Wing, 2023; Thurston, 2023).

This predicament goes past the political stability, even the socio-economic growth. In other African countries, the military has become an active participant in the national development that blurs the traditional boundaries between the national defense strategy and the development one. The Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) have also been undertaking nation-building efforts in Kenya, such as Kenyas Meat Commission (KMC) revival, building of dams and schools in conflict zones like the West Pokot and Boni Forest, and infrastructural development in the Nairobi Metropolitan region (Marigat, 2012). Such actions, despite their apparent emerging nature, raise serious questions regarding militarization of the civilian space, accountability, and long-term implications of the same on the democratic governance and civilian control.

The African experience demonstrates a complex duality in that, on the one hand, the military can be a stabilizing and developing institution in the weak regimes, on the other hand, its politicization is likely to undermine the principles of democracy and professionalism of the military. To understand this contradiction, it is important to reconcile the realist persistence of power and its existence as a state with the liberal perspectives of the institution of governance and the civilian power. Suggested in this paper is the argument that militarization of politics and politicization of the military must be viewed not just as an anomaly but even an adaptive response to structural and governance shortcomings within African governments (Bashir & Jibril, 2025). This study seeks to explain the role played by the armed forces in affecting the opportunities of stability, democracy, and sustainable governance across the continent through reflection, theory, and practical study.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

An in-depth understanding of national security, militarisation, politicisation, and civil-military relationships is essential to study the process of military involvement in African politics. National security is defined as the ability of a state to protect its political institutions, maintain its integrity as a state, guarantee the welfare of its people, and the maintenance of its societal values against internal and external invasions (Wu, 2024). National security goes beyond the mere lack of violence, into the protection of political independence, economic stability, environmental sustainability, and quality of life (Williams, 2017). National security in the African context does not only entail defending the borders but also includes maintaining social coherence within the multi-ethnic, diverse nations and ensuring the legitimacy of the government.

Militarisation refers to the increasing influence of military organisation and principles on political, economic and social life. This includes the preference of military power in policy making, application of armed force to solve social and political conflicts, and the application of military principles, traditions, and culture to the civilian governance (Kaucz, 2022). Military institutions are prone to dominate within the state structures or have political leaders overrely on the military to maintain their own positions, particularly in non-security matters.

Politicisation of the military occurs when the military services actively engage themselves into political affairs, which happens mostly as independent political entities instead of the objective state institutions (Self, 2022). This can be done through the staging of coups, alteration of election outcomes or participation in the government by acting outside the legal boundaries. Militarisation undermines civilian control, negates democratic consolidation and can trigger a history of instability in the case where the military services seek to fulfill their interests or ideologies. The civil-military relations refer to a relationship between military and civilians i.e. interaction of the military institutions with the state, political entities and society. Civilian primacy, professionalization of the military, and institutions that ensure that the military is loyal to the state over and above political goals are the features of proper civil-military relations. This relationship in Africa has been a point of debate where historical legacies, weak institutions, and insecurity challenges have confused the two realms of the military and political spheres (Luckham, 2018).

The Realist Perspective

The Realist theory of international relations and security provides the critical insight into the militarisation of the politics and politicisation of the military. According to realists, states act in anarchic international system and the major currency of security is power (Andersen, 2025). In this regard, armies play a critical role in maintaining state sovereignty, territoriality and regime survival. The idea of realism holds that political actors can reinvest in the military or military action to maintain the power especially in environments that are defined insecurity or weak institutions (Baylis et al., 2019). The realism theories in African nations tend to apply the fact that nations have both internal and external threats, such as civil wars, insurgencies, and cross-border conflicts that require the active participation of the military in governance (Wells, 2023). Emerging from the cases of political instability in Nigeria or Uganda, the ruling elites have justified the use of the military as the only way of maintaining national unity and survival of the state. As a realist, militarisation does not necessarily represent a sign of institutional weaknesses, but it is a strategic measure of preserving political power and national safety in the conditions when threats are structural.

Realists emphasize also self-preservation motives of the military organisations. Under the regimes with weak political systems, the military can step in to ensure it protects its interests, acquires resources, and is able to remain institutionally autonomous (Chan, 2024).

The Liberal Perspective

The Liberal approach promotes the role of strong institutions, the rule of law and civilian dominance in reducing the militarisation of politics as well as the politicisation of the military. Liberals argue that responsible institutions and open political processes and democratic government restrain the involvement of the military in politics (Brooks & Pion-Berlin, 2022). In this perspective, militarisation, as well as politicisation, is mainly occasioned by institutional shortcomings, incompetent governance and the absence of mechanisms of exercising civilian control. According to liberal theorists in the African context, the relevance of constitutional frameworks, civil-military ethics, and democratic consolidation are important to ensure military professionalism and political neutrality (Edeh & Ugwueze, 2024). The coups that recur in West Africa would be described by liberal theory as a result of poor institutional architecture and poor civilian supervision, and not just as rational power-maximising behaviour. The liberal approaches argue that the potential of military intervention to politics can be reduced by increasing parliamentary control and codifying the military accountability and promoting political inclusivity.

Comparing Realist and Liberal Approaches in Africa

The realist and the liberal approaches offer much information about African civil-military interactions, but they show different causal processes. Realists focus on the politics of power and the need to be secure, and the use of military intervention is, in their opinion, a rational response to threats and systemic instability (Adebajo, 2024). Liberals focus on the institutional design and quality of governance arguing that militarization and politicization is a sign of a weak system and poor civilian checks. In practice, the African governments tend to have a confluence of these forces. The Sudanese case is the presence of both elite and institutional interests (realist perspective) and insufficiencies of the civilian government and insufficient constitutional protection (liberal perspective) that rationalise military intervention. The frequent coups in Nigeria demonstrated security problems caused by the ethnic and regional conflicts (realism) and absence of proper procedures of civilian control and political participation (liberal). It is important to understand these two perspectives so that strategies can be developed to address structural shortcomings and at the same time meet security demands. Integrating realist and liberal views, the policymakers can develop the

actions to professionalise the military, improve relations between civilians and military, and reduce political instability, as well as acknowledging the impact of security threats on the military behaviour.

Historical Context in Africa

Historical basis of militarisation of politics and the politicisation of the military in Africa has a deep-seated history that has developed the structure, role and orientation of the armed forces based on colonial legacies. Military institutions of the colonial times were mainly the instruments of coercion, used by European powers like Britain, France, Belgium, and Portugal to suppress the rebels and impose the rule, instead of serving or protecting the civilian populations (Kohn, 2024). Consequently, the African armies were designed on strong hierarchies, discipline and blind obedience to authority with little focus on constitutional political governance or checks and balances by the civilians (Nathan, 2004; Omotola, 2019). Also, the colonial powers established ethnic and regional cleavages in the military by only recruiting specific martial groups, such as in Nigeria, Uganda, and Ghana, and so on, and this created a cleavage that would be felt in the post-independent politics (Andersen, 2025). Most African states at independence had received comparatively strong military organizations and a weak civilian entity that created an imbalance that made the military become a powerful political force.

Post-independence period also strengthened militarisation whereby the newly independent states were having difficulties in governing themselves, institutional instability and socio-economic instability. The absence of political power in colonial withdrawal, as well as poor governance structures, corruption, and ethnic conflict eroded the legitimacy of the civilian regimes (Decalo, 1990; Luckham, 2018). At this point, the military began to establish itself as a hegemonic unit to maintain stability and defend the interests of the country. The case of early military coups in Ghana, Nigeria, and Uganda was an example of this trend, as military forces explained their actions by the need to provide remedies to the inability of governments to behave (Adebajo, 2020). As an example, the 1966 Ghana coup and several coups that followed in Nigeria were part of a larger trend where militaries emerged as political judge, justified by the virtue of national stability and survival of the state (Omotola, 2019; Basedau, 2020). These events set the pattern of further military interventions in government putting the use of force as the method of political change in the order of things.

In addition to coups at an early age, the lack of a resolution to the civil wars, insurgencies, and internal conflicts further cemented the influence of the military in African politics. The long-term wars also led to the growth of the armed forces as the main source of survival of the state, which expanded its influence

outside the normal scope of security functions to governance and policy making (Waltz, 1979; Mearsheimer, 2001). In unstable countries, the military tended to be the best organised and the most effective body that could manage the territorial integrity and respond to the threats, which enhanced its level of political legitimacy (Adebajo, 2020). Nonetheless, this broadened role also diverted civilian and military power boundaries, which strengthened militarisation and politicisation. Altogether, the historical process, i.e. the roots in colonialism down to the instability and civil war in post-independent democracies, proves the entrenched nature of structural and political variables influencing civil-military affairs and the core of the military in the African politics (Luckham, 2018; Williams, 2017).

Effects of Civil Wars and Insurgencies on Civil-Military Relations

The politicisation of the military in Africa has had a great influence by civil wars and insurgencies. The instability of the internal conflicts tends to add in the role of the military in the governing and policy making since the governments tend to use the armed forces to create order and wipe out opposition (Nathan, 2004; Williams, 2017). As an example, the civil war in Sudan not just politicised the military but disintegrated it based on ethnic and regional lines so that the military loyalty was also a key determinant of political survival (Adebajo, 2020). In 69 years of independence since 1956, 56 years were under military regimes with a tendency of militarisation of politics and marketisation of institutions of violence (Hoffmann and Lanfranchi 2023). Likewise, in Liberia and Sierra Leone, military groups were central to playing effective political roles during and after civil wars whereby they were mostly interested in factional interests as opposed to national interests.

The security-centric form of governance due to civil wars as well results in the military gaining power in both political decision-making and resource distribution (Omotola, 2019). The military in such context is not just an institution of defense, but a political institution that determines the national agendas, dominates the economy sectors of the country, and the politics of succession. This can be observed in the Democratic Republic of Congo, as various armed organizations, some of which are part of organized militaries, have shaped political results over decades (Williams, 2017). Military expansion and professionalisation is a common result of insurgencies and internal conflict making it more powerful politically. States that are contending with threats on a regular basis spend a lot of money on the military power giving the military forces assets, autonomy, and legitimacy (Luckham, 2018). Although it is meant to improve the national security, in most cases, it will blur the line between the military and political power and this situation will create opportunities to politicise the military and even deeper institute it as part of the government.

Synthesis: Historical Legacies and Contemporary Implications

The history of African armies shows us that the modern civil-military relations cannot be explained without references to the past colonial experiences, the internal organizational vulnerabilities, and the impact of the civil wars. The colonial armies were not established to govern, protect the citizens, but to coerce and control people, and established the imbalance of structures in favor of the military power over the civil ones. The political position of military was strengthened by post-independence coups and resulted in the culture where armed forces are considered legitimate political players (Adebajo, 2020; Omotola, 2019). This trend has been enhanced by civil wars and insurgencies that have expanded military power in political, economic and social arenas. All these historical dynamics have established a path-dependent course according to which African armies are still central figures in the process of governance, at the cost of democratic consolidation and civil control (Williams, 2017; Luckham, 2018). It is hence an important history to understand in order to come up with strategies aimed at professionalising the military, enhancing institutions as well as civil-military relations throughout the continent. Africa has been affected by the Militarisation of politics driven by various factors as discussed below.

The structural and governance-related factors that cause militarisation of politics in Africa are mainly weak political institutions and governance shortages. A lot of the African states had been left with weak institutional structures by the colonial governments and this hindered their ability to govern multi-ethnic populations and multi-layered socio-political needs. Consequently, the military tends to become a better-structured and more competent body that can fill the gaps in governance created by weak leadership of the ruling government (Omotola, 2019). This interplay may be observed in the examples of Mali and Sudan as the fragile accountability systems, lack of trust in civilian authorities, and political instability have enabled a series of military actions. There is a lack of effective electoral systems, institutional checks and balances, and rule of law structures legitimizing military intervention in such situations as a corrective action towards the failure of governance.

Militarisation of politics is also worsened by elite competition and factionalism that provides the climate within which the military takes a decisive role in political battles. Political environments are disintegrated on ethnic, regional, and partisan levels in most African states as the elites struggle to gain control of state resources and power. This rivalry frequently results in politicisation of the military where different groups aim at winning the support of the military to outmanoeuvre the other. Nigeria coups of 1966-1979 and 2013 military intervention in Egypt indicate that elite conflicts motivate the role of the armed forces in power (John, 2021). Furthermore, even the internal factionalism of the military, which frequently relies on ethnic

or ideological differences, further fixes it in politics, with various forces being associated with rival civilian forces (Williams, 2017). These processes make the military an adjudicator and a player in the political game.

The other key factors that help to maintain militarisation are economic incentives and threats to national security. The possession of valuable resources, oil, minerals, and state enterprises, creates a great incentive to political participation by the military actors because control of such resources benefits not only institutional power but also individual enrichment. This has strengthened the role of the military in economic activities and patronage networks in such countries as Sudan and Nigeria in shaping governance and policy decisions. Meanwhile, the military intervention in the political life should be justified with reference to the security threats, as the insurgencies, civil conflicts and the outside pressure can be discussed, with the reference to the survival of the state. Some examples of cases when governments used military in times of crisis to increase their role in politics can be Mali, Egypt, or Sudan. Although seen as a necessity, this dependency ends up institutionalising the military inside the political structures, which cycles around militarisation in Africa (Luckham, 2018).

2. Case Studies and Comparative Insights

Many African countries represent an example of the convergence of the factors of militarisation to inform the political role of the military. The Egyptian military has never been irrelevant in terms of administration owing to the role that it has played in terms of securing national security, as well as state stability. Besides security, the military controls vital parts of the economy like land, agriculture, industry, and so its independence and strength is augmented. A shift in politics when President Mohamed Morsi was ousted in 2013 is an example of how elite conflicting and divided make it possible and tantamount to military intervention in the country as a means to stabilize it (Brooks & Pion-Berlin, 2022). Sudan is an example of the atrocities of politicizing the military. Under the rule of Omar al-Bashir, the setup of Rapid Support Forces (RSF) reinforced a parallel military structure at the expense of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF). The hostility between the RSF and SAF erupted into the civil war in 2023, when both military entities deployed force to address political disagreements to increase their political presence. Institutional ineffectiveness, failures of good governance, financial interests, and power struggles formed a combined force to legitimize military hegemony in Sudan, giving it a strong root in a political and economic state.

In Zimbabwe and Somalia, militarization affects the politics of succession and local politics. In Somalia, the Somali National Army (SNA) is deployed to strengthen the federal power over the Jubaland

government, and clan militias, such as the Maawisley soldiers of the MAREH, are pursuing their political and cultural goals through armed activities (Robinson & Matissek, 2020). The military facilitated the rise of Emmerson Mnangagwa in Zimbabwe at a time of uncertainty surrounding the health of Robert Mugabe and it still fortifies political and economic authority through efforts to support military personnel and independence war veterans (Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Ruhanya, 2020). These two examples show how militarization can stabilize regimes, and at the same time strengthen the military power and patronage systems.

Uganda is one example of the combination of politics and the military and development. The Uganda people defence force (UPDF) has a seat in parliament and it is involved in national development projects such as infrastructure and regional stability missions which are representative of the revolutionary political philosophy of Uganda. The comparative analysis of Egypt, Sudan, Somalia, Zimbabwe and Uganda has shown that militarization is a result of institutions being weak, elite rivalry, economic incentives, security dilemmas and local politics. The military intervention may bring stability to countries and help them develop, but very often it strengthens the autonomy, weakens the civil powers, and makes the consolidation of the democratic processes more complicated, which is why the institutional transformations, professionalism, and the increased supervision become necessary.

Drivers of Politicisation of the Military in Africa

Politicisation of the military in Africa is due to a confluence of structural, institutional and ideological factors, which change the armed forces into passive protectors of the state to players in politics. A large percentage of it is motivated by the individual ambition of military leaders who tend to perceive the possession of political power as an avenue of influence, a source of state assets, and individual progress (Edeh & Ugwueze, 2024). When civilian institutions are weak or ineffective, the military officers may defend their political actions as needed within the context of defending their national interests or restoring the order, despite acting on their own self-interest (Williams, 2017). The cases of Zimbabwe and Ethiopia show how the military elites have influenced the governance of the countries by putting themselves in a strategic position to act as the major decision-makers in the countries and in many instances, they fail to demarcate national service and political leadership. This process is also supported by a lack of accountability mechanisms and a poor civil-military relationship, which leads to a situation whereby the military becomes normalised and self-sustaining in its involvement in politics.

Along with the personal ambition, military ideology and nationalist values are also very important in justifying political involvement. In most African states, armed forces have a culture of acting as guardians and depicting themselves as a defender of national cohesion, independence, and stability especially during crisis or institutional frailty (Chan, 2024). This ideological context enables military executives to present their participation in the governance process as a national sacrifice, which frequently becomes popular among the population and overtaking the powers of the civilians and the democratic state (Adebajo, 2020). The example of Somalia under the rule of Siad Barre and Ethiopia under the Derg shows how the ideologies of nationalism and revolution were employed to justify the extended military governance. They are even more effective in weak or post-conflict areas, where the divide is sharp, and the governmental institutions are weak, which helps the military to become embedded within political procedures (Williams, 2017; Omotola, 2019). A combination of these drivers underlines the complicated nature of the interaction between ambition, institutional weakness, and ideology in affecting civil-military relations and reinforcing the politicisation of the military in Africa.

Civil-Military Relations Deficits

Inadequacy in the civil-military relations are a potent structural driving force behind politicisation of armed forces in Africa. The weak institutions, lack of legal control and professionalisation of the armed services have been an issue in terms of civilian authorities establishing dominance over the military in a number of countries (Kamrava, 2020). The presence of suboptimal stringent supervision procedures, is what provides the conditions under which soldiers tend to view themselves as the ultimate decision makers in the affairs of the state and security, justifying their direct involvement in politics. Weak civil-military relationship offers a favorable environment where officers feel that it is their privilege to participate in governance either to correct the perceived civic inadequacies or to protect institutional and individual interests (Kamrava, 2020). This systemic weakness is compounded in the cases where the civilian authorities are not competent, credible, or powerful to make the military comply with the constitutional and legal provisions that guide military conduct. This can lead to a situation where the military operates without accountability to the democratically elected government, which strengthens the foundation of the militarised government.

In Zimbabwe, the absence of civil-military relations enabled the armed forces to gain a leading political position which was able to control presidential decisions and election outcomes in an effort to defend institutional prerogatives and individual interests. The intervention of the military in the political succession process depicts how lack of proper civilian control can allow the military to operate as kingmakers in the political arena of the country. In Ethiopia, there is lack of civilian control over the Imperial regime and the

Derg regime, which allowed the military to acquire power and exercise political authority without any accountability and often faction and ideological interests were advanced at the expense of national democratic aspirations (Tadesse, 2023). The effect of the long-term bad governance, the collapse of the state, the absence of strong civil control in Somalia created a situation in which the military dominated the political sphere and continued the cycle of the authoritarian regime and civil wars (Menkhaus, 2014). These examples indicate that the shortcomings in civil-military relations are not a phenomenon, specific to one country but are a prevalent feature on the continent and mostly in the states where the institutional instability is the order of the day.

Constitutional anomalies, ambiguous legal systems and inconsistent enforcement of military principles of conduct can make the lack of civil-military relations in some cases. Such loopholes undermine the very concept of civilian supremacy, and the military is being left to play political games with minimal accountability (Williams, 2017). In the cases where constitutions and laws do not provide sufficiently the duties and responsibilities of armed forces, the military commanders can exploit these ambiguities to enhance their political strength in the name of national security or state preservation. Lack of professionalisation and institutionalisation of the military and civilian security oversight systems further increases the problem, creating a vicious circle of militarised politics. Fixing such gaps would demand a lot of reform, such as formal legislative demands, improved supervision frameworks, and the professional training programmes, which strengthen the subordination of the military to the civilian.

External Threats and Internal Security Challenges

The politicisation of the military in Africa is a major issue that is affected by external threats and internal security. Civil wars, insurgencies, terrorism and regional conflicts are the states that tend to grant the military substantial powers to maintain the state of affairs which over time evolves into a lasting political force (Wu, 2024). The perception that the military is the main guarantor of the state being is what ensures that both the governments and the military officials defend their participation in politics. When a given regime has weak institutions of the civilian branch, the military usually becomes the de facto decision-maker who shapes policy and administration in the name of safeguarding national security. The trend is worsened when crises take prolonged periods thus making the involvement of the military in politics a norm. So what may at first be a provisional fix to the security issue may find its way into the institutionalization of the military in politics creating structural conditions that allows politicisation.

Somalia The country faces a series of internal security problems, such as clan-based insurgency, civil war, and Islamist extremism, which facilitated securitisation and militarisation of socio-economic and political issues to gain control over the political affairs in the name of maintaining national unity and integration. Militarisation efforts were justified by the unstable and fragile environment as necessary to recover the state and prevent the disintegration of the state and it was the stabilising element in the face of fragmentation of the society (Wells, 2023). In Ethiopia, the military has been increasing its role in administration because of continuous ethnic wars, border conflicts as well as internal insurgencies in the country. The military agencies performed two roles involving monitoring security activities as well as vital policy decisions thus consolidating political authority on top of their conventional role of defence (Self, 2022). In Zimbabwe the military has cemented its self-image into the national interests of protecting the interests and therefore facilitated the military to become entrenched in political and governance structures in response to external pressures of destabilization in the region and the view that the military was under threat to sovereignty.

Some security issues may justify exceptional powers of the military, such as emergency governance, control of vital resources, and influence on civilian policymaking. Though these measures are supposed to reduce short-term risks, they tend to keep going after the crisis, making the military a political institution and becoming a long-term political entrapment (Robinson & Matisek, 2020). Moreover, it is also possible that the increased authority of the military can suppress the oversight of the civilians, reduce the accountability, and promote additional political intrusion. These patterns in a number of African countries illustrate how foreign and domestic security problems, state weakness, and elite politics interact to cause cycles of militarised rule. It is important to understand how issues of security and military politicisation are intertwined in order to develop some reforms aimed at improving civilian control, professionalisation of the military, and ensuring that exceptional powers are only transitional.

Case Studies: Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, and Somalia

Politicisation of the military in Zimbabwe was fuelled by personal ambitions of commanders, inefficiencies in the relationship between the military and the civil and effects of nationalistic ideology. Since 1980, when Zimbabwe achieved independence, the Zimbabwe Defence Forces has been one of the key players supporting the executive power, political succession, and policy implications. The military has overtime established its position in governance and revealed its role in 2017, when it intervened to oust Robert Mugabe, which was in its institutional and political interests (Okereke & Okereke, 2025). This engagement was further reinforced through the military control over major economic resources such as land, business and patronage systems which increased its political influence and independence. The smaller competency

of the civilian oversight and accountability mechanisms enabled the military to operate freely, which led to a cycle of institutionalised militarised political power.

The example of the Derge regime (1974-1991) in Ethiopia demonstrated how the ambitions of the military, the revolutionary ideology, and the internal security issues were a combination of factors that politicised the armed forces. After the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie, the Derg leaders gained absolute power in the state, and their actions were justified by the necessity to enhance the national unity and socialist reformation (Nystrand & Yawe, 2024). The lack of proper civil-military institutions allowed the military to consolidate political power, have wide-ranging political and economic objectives and quash dissent which is usually done by mass violation of human rights, political purging and social upheaval. The experience of Ethiopia demonstrates that when administrative tasks and responsibilities are transferred to the military and the latter internalises ideological demands, then politicisation is institutionalised that compromises the principles of democracy and oversight on the part of the civilians.

The military role in Somalia was determined by a long period of civil war and collapse of the state that provided grounds to easily use military in politics. The military occupied a central role as the political force in the country as a result of nationalist agendas, clan politics, and survival needs as the alternative political institutions failed to emerge (Menkhaus, 2014). Military interventions were frequently explained as the need to defend the territorial borders, preserve the order, and protect the sovereignty but these interventions resulted in the military becoming a political entity that prevented the peaceful ruling and the dominance of the civilian decision-making. The case of Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, and Somalia, together, show that politicisation of the military is a result of an overlapping of individual ambitions, ideological models, institutional failures, and security dilemmas, which create repetitive patterns of militarised politics that do not allow democratic consolidation in Africa.

Consequences of Militarisation and Politicisation

Africa has been severely affected by the militarisation of politics and politicisation of the military which have seriously compromised democracy, human rights and governance. Political interventions supported by military interventions usually undermined the democratic institutions, the rule of law, and the sovereignty of the civilian population (Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Ruhanya, 2020). Elections were often manipulated or postponed, political dissent suppressed and legislative and judicial checks and balances were limited so as to support military interests. These interventions in countries like Zimbabwe and Mali resulted in the creation of transitional governments which were not legitimate and did not represent the

interests of the citizens (Korkor, 2020). Human rights abuses were also entrenched in militarised politics with regimes justifying oppressive actions, such as arbitrary arrests, censorship, curfews, and oppressed protests, under the pretext of national security (Williams, 2017). Examples of the impact of military rule on political culture, mistrust, and social standards include Ethiopia under the Derg, Nigeria, and Sudan, where the military rule institutionalised political repression, extrajudicial killings, and forced displacement.

Other impacts of militarisation included the governance, social, and economic effects which were equally important. Governments dominated by military put security and preserving the institutions above the inclusive development and, as such, were inefficient, corrupt with ineffective resource allocation (Kaucz, 2022). Militarisation slowed down economic progress, deterred investments, and exerted a strain on state budgets, as can be seen in Mali, where a series of coups deterred development and access to basic services (International Crisis Group, 2021). Social inequalities, ethnic and regional divisions, and recurrent stabilisation, displacement, and social division were aggravated by militarised politics. Such dynamics produced spillovers on security in the region destabilising neighbouring states and disrupting collective frameworks of African security. Though the ECOWAS and the African Union have intervened in cases such as that of Mali to restore constitutional order, the fact that alternative regional alliances such as the recent Mali-Burkina Faso-Niger collaboration has formed against ECOWAS sanctions is a sign of the evolving resistance to the traditional mechanisms and the complex nature of aiming to resolve entrenched militarisation. Comprehensively, all these impacts reveal the necessity to give militaries a more professional character and enhance civilian control as well as introduce some accountability at both country and regional levels to alleviate the long-term impacts of militarised politics.

Strategies for Reform and Policy Proposals

The fundamental approach in solving the militarisation of politics and politicisation of the military in Africa includes fortification of civil institutions and enhancing the democratic control. The presence of efficient legislature, judiciary, and executive bodies is fundamental towards the civilian dominance and keeping the military under the constraints of the constitution. Parliaments must be equipped to direct defence budgets, procurement procedures and military activities towards a greater degree of transparency and accountability but at the same time protecting the national security. An independent judiciary is also necessary to impose legal limits on military activities to address lawful interventions and hold the perpetrators of human rights abuse accountable according to the international humanitarian law. Moreover, the media and the civil society are also instrumental in checking the actions of the military, encouraging the democratization of the populace, and supporting institutional changes that restrict inappropriate military power in the government.

The enhancement of these checks and balances enhances a democratic culture based on the rule of law, accountability and proper checks and balances.

Simultaneously, to minimise military participation in politics, the military needs to be professionalised and strengthen the accountability systems at the regional and international levels. Professionalisation implies recruitment based on merit, constant training, moral orientation and the observance of the clear code of conduct, which serves the loyalty to the constitution instead of political actors. Further isolation of the military-economic and military-political interests eliminates the sources of political interference. Parallel with this, regional organizations and international partners have avenues of deterring unconstitutional alterations of government by imposing sanctions, diplomatic measures and institutionalized assistance provided by regional organizations like the African Union (AU), ECOWAS and international partners like the United Nations. Combined with civic education and involvement of the populace, these efforts provide a multi-level and comprehensive change strategy that fosters sustainable civil-military relations, democratic governance, and political stability and development in Africa.

3. Conclusion

The militarisation of the political arena and politicisation of the military in Africa illustrates that these two trends have developed as a complex interaction of historical legacies, weak institutions, deficits of governance, elite competition, and economic incentives which have been strengthened by the ambitions to attain military power, nationalistic ideologies, fragile civil-military relations, and inescapable security threats. The situation in the former Yugoslavia, especially in Bosnia as indicated by evidence in Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, and Somalia, revealed how these factors in combination brought the military to the centre stage of politics, frequently uncunningly at the cost of democratic governance, civilian control, and human rights concerns. Their impact had far-reaching effects that encompassed weakening of the democratic institutions, perverse electoral systems, deep-rooted human rights abuse, bad governance performance, and underdevelopment of the socio-economic condition as well as instability in the region that led to interventions by organisations like ECOWAS and African Union. These results pointed to the lasting influence of colonial and post-independent military systems which still continued to affect political processes on the continent. Finally, the analysis found that consolidation of civilian institutions, establishment of professional and apolitical armies and accountability systems were necessary to bring about stable and democratic governance in Africa, with both Realist and Liberal ideas playing off to ensure that the needs of security and constitutionalism, as well as civilian supremacy, were balanced.

4. References

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