

## Chapter Eight

# Conclusion

Daniel G. Zirker

Two critical points are highlighted in this examination of what we have chosen to call “quasi-ethnic identities” in military establishments: First, that although the emergence of this phenomenon has been, at best, gradual and incomplete, it has been increasingly aided by a global learning curve; and second, that its goal or strategy, the strengthening of military autonomy and bargaining power, includes the further isolation and alienation of the military from mainstream society, and hence from democratic practices. As to the first point, information exchange is now so rapid and so pervasive that even a relatively remote military establishment such as that of Guinea or Suriname can be fully aware within hours of developments in “military organizational engineering” across the globe. Of the cases in this volume, only Guinea, Tanzania and Algeria have fully established independently “invented” military cultures, the “quasi-ethnicities” that are the subject of this book. Of those, only Guinea has thus far been able to use its development to establish a largely *separate, autonomous and independent* military organization for purposes of bargaining, and maintaining a unified military position, and been able to maintain a relatively healthy budget and avoid the civil wars, albeit through a protracted military dictatorship, that have beset all of its West African neighbors.

The invention of a quasi-ethnic identity in the Tanzanian People’s Defence Force (TPDF), while rapid and impressive, served primarily as a vanguard model for the implanting of a national ethnic identity such that, by the 1990s, it became *the* single national, and apparently enduring, ethnic identity of Tanzania.<sup>1</sup> The Algerian military quasi-ethnic invention, on the other hand, has primarily served the interests of a narrow, civil-military elite, rather than as the quasi-ethnic identity of a relatively autonomous and independent corporate military establishment. Each of the other examples—Kenya,

Nigeria, Suriname and Uganda—has evinced contrasting manifestations of traditional, or semi-traditional, and periodically changing ethnic balancing of one sort or another, and these military establishments have struggled to move into the next paradigm, the era of quasi-ethnic identities, as much as they have periodically seemed to strive to do so.

Second, in the so-called “third wave of democratization,”<sup>2</sup> military conscription is rapidly disappearing, and increased professionalization and the isolation of military institutions is increasingly the norm. In deeply divided societies in the developing world, the recruitment of qualified officer candidates often implies the exclusion, and hence social marginalization, of selected, “less developed” traditional ethnic groups, and when this is coupled with the concentration in a national officer corps of nationally scarce expertise, this may intensify the privation of those underdeveloped ethnic groups from one of the key concomitants of national development in many deeply divided countries, the benefits of civic action projects<sup>3</sup> conducted by the “national” military establishment. With the common absence of one or more of the major traditional ethnic groups among the officer corps, charges of bias and neglect of those ethnic regions necessarily follows. An independent military culture, one that is verifiably and demonstrably “national,” if only because it is not linked to a traditional ethnic interest, is the only possible inoculation to this kind of predictable crisis.

Even with a careful blend of traditional ethnic groups in the officer corps and enlisted ranks, the lot of most military establishments in deeply plural societies seems to be one of political and social isolation. An examination of African military establishments, for example, almost immediately points to their isolation based upon recent colonial heritage, persisting colonial military customs, internal ethnic struggles within the military, and the frequent manipulation of the armed forces by civilian elites. Again, the only potential antidote to these maladies, although not without its threat to civil society, involves the development within the military institution of an independent cultural identity, and the transformation of the military institution into a kind of cultural “melting pot,” where officers, in particular, are able “to lose some of their regional or tribal characteristics.”<sup>4</sup> In this interpretation, the officers’ mess might be used to encourage “a sense of exclusiveness.” As William Gutteridge notes, the threat of this close identification among officers is immediately apparent. It involves fostering a “club-like atmosphere . . . in which conspiracy can flourish.”<sup>5</sup> One can easily see how this would begin to overcome traditional ethnic barriers within the officer corps, at a potentially drastic cost.

Conspiracies are legion among junior officers in deeply divided societies, however. The basis of “conspiracy” in such cases tends to be either traditional ethnic attachments, or rank-on-rank, where the higher ranks have been carefully selected by political elites, and the lower ranks are desperately

seeking alliances. The traditional bases of most of these rank-based alliances, in turn, are . . . traditionally ethnic. Traditional ethnic attachments, in fact, hold the key to most successful coup conspiracies and, later, to their downfall. The development of a single quasi-ethnic military identity could begin to attenuate at least these bases of critical alliances. Inter-rank conspiracies would remain a possibility, of course, but one critical and potentially debilitating source of such alliances might be replaced. It is a prospect that no modernizing military establishment can afford to ignore.

What of the long-term threats that are posed to civil society by military establishments in deeply plural societies that are able to adopt their own unique quasi-ethnic identities and thereby set themselves apart from the vagaries of traditional ethnic identities? These appear to be significant. A new ethnic, or quasi-ethnic, group with the legitimate exercise of force, heavily armed, endowed with a sense of corporate unity and a mission to guard national security, *according to their own definition*, would appear to trump all other players in an ethno-political competition for resources and power. If one were to add a relatively low regard for democratic practices and human rights, the prospect of a newly developed military quasi-ethnic identity is a frightening one indeed. Nevertheless, its development in many military establishments would be linked to institutional survival, particularly as the orthodox military *raison d'être*, defense of the borders against a foreign military incursion, gradually disappeared, and civilian authorities increasingly questioned the need to have a military establishment in the first place.<sup>6</sup> These arguments are commonplace in the neo-liberal "new world order," and countries like Panama and Costa Rica have existed for decades without the threat or cost of military establishments. Will military institutions in deeply divided societies continue to tolerate this lightly veiled threat to their survival?

The case studies in this volume have compared and contrasted military establishments at various stages in the recognition and development of their own institutional identities. Some of them, Guinea, Tanzania, Algeria, and perhaps Suriname, have manifested quasi-ethnic identities that have put them at odds, at least initially and in different ways, with traditional ethnic groups in their countries. The Ugandan, Kenyan and Nigerian military establishments have experienced varying forms of traditional ethnic balancing in their respective officer corps. In each case, however, the national military institution was pressured by the changing ethno-politics of a newly independent country and, except in the cases of Kenya and Tanzania, responded with intervention and/or violence.

Mamadou Bah's chapter on Guinea is an exploration of a rich question: Why has Guinea not suffered from the bloody civil wars that have affected virtually all of its West African neighbors? His analysis points to Guinea's separate military identity as a primary, if not exclusive, explanation. Ibikunle

Adeakin examines Nigeria, one of Guinea's neighbors and a strongly contrasting case study. Nigeria is a survivor of sub-Saharan Africa's first major ethnically-based civil war, the Biafran conflict. He traces the coups of 1966, the removal of the Igbo officers, the accession to, and retention of power by the Hausa-Fulani generals, and the isolation and eventual defeat of the Igbo secession attempt. He explores the military handover of power to civilians in 1999 and their surprising difficulties in dealing with Boko Haram, a northern-based (Hausa-Fulani) Muslim terrorist group, and speculates as to the possible ethnic and political motives.

My own chapter contrasting the cases of Tanzania and Uganda, and Thomas Stubbs's chapter on Kenya take these three very closely linked East African cases and underscore their vastly different outcomes. Uganda and Kenya, British East Africa, have had relatively few, highly competitive ethnic groups, while Tanganyika (mainland Tanzania), German East Africa prior to WWI, and a British protectorate thereafter, had over 120 mostly non-competitive groups. All three countries experienced a military mutiny at the dawn of their independence, the East African mutiny of December 1963, and each of these countries handled it differently. Kenya was not quite independent, and allowed British military units to step in. Later it would carefully balance its officer corps with the ruling (usually Kikuyu) ethnicity, while keeping the military out of politics. Uganda, rotating and balancing traditional ethnic identities in the officer corps, acceded to the pay and promotion demands of the mutineers, and experienced a violent coup and disastrous military dictatorship seven years later. The military has long played a key role in maintaining the power of presidents, always via the ethnic balancing of senior officers. Tanzania completely disestablished its branch of the neo-colonial army, implanting a new military force based on a *lingua franca*, Swahili, and a strong commitment to a socialist view of national development, with a view to using it as a vanguard agency to promote a new, unified national culture. Today, none of the three countries can be described as having established a quasi-ethnic military identity for the purpose of establishing an independent and autonomous institution, although Tanzania came the closest.

Algeria created perhaps the purest independent military identity based upon a faulty image of its revolution. In reality, as Yassine Belkamel's chapter illustrates, a profound Thermidor in the Algerian revolution had led to the assassination or exile of most of its radical revolutionary leaders, and a group of opportunistic, reactionary, French-trained officers who had spent most of the revolution fighting on the side of the French, and only crossed over in the waning hours of the fight to take up leadership positions on the margins of the revolutionary struggle, were able very gradually to "Arabize" and secularize the military culture by capturing key politicians and maintaining the military institution in power in their own interests. After the first democratic

elections in the late 1980s, it was this group, the “French Officers,” that launched their bid for absolute power via a bloody coup, and a civil war that has cost as many as two hundred thousand lives. They have subsequently ruled Algeria through the military establishment and its quasi-ethnic culture, using figurehead presidents and reportedly rigged elections. Suriname, on a much smaller scale, has maintained a unique military culture based loosely of Dutch military culture and governed by the criminal mentality of a charismatic leader, Dési Bouterse. As Paulo Gustavo Pellegrino Correa notes in his chapter, the development of an independent and autonomous military identity can serve as a shield for criminal activity in this new, neo-liberal global environment. Again, opportunism and instrumentalism are the best explanations of the development of a quasi-ethnic military identity in Suriname.

At the heart of this book is a basic question common to all institutions, one that was perhaps best phrased in the title of Herbert Kaufman’s now-classic work, *Are Government Organizations Immortal?*<sup>7</sup> Kaufman’s work did demonstrate that most government institutions, at least in the United States, tend to adapt to survive, that is, when facing a loss of mission and government support, they tend to change their clientele and their mission precisely in order to maintain a budget and . . . survive. This is reminiscent of the motives discussed in this volume for the development of a military quasi-ethnic identity, particularly when placed in a contemporary historical context.

With the end of the Cold War, and the phantasmagoric concept of the “peace dividend,” attention turned to the hundreds of national armies that continued to draw scarce national resources in a world of debt and hunger . . . and the relatively few cases of “orthodox” military missions, that is, of invasions of national borders by neighboring countries. Indeed, when Tanzania invaded Uganda in 1979, it was said to have been the first time in modern African history that one independent African country had invaded and occupied another. While Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) have increased dramatically in this new world of cultural conflict, this fundamental question remains: Are military establishments really necessary in their current numbers and distribution?

Our book does not address this question. Rather, it examines the way in which military establishments are increasingly dodging it, removing themselves from civilian pressures, the internal disputes of traditional ethnic antagonisms, the external disputes of national ethno-politics, and even budgetary disputes to which a divided and dependent institution is so vulnerable. An ethnically homogeneous army in an age of ethno-politics will always be a formidable bargaining agent, however. In the final analysis, armies have a legitimate monopoly of violence, and they have guns, a powerful combination.

## NOTES

1. A possible caveat here involves the separate culture of the tiny "country" of Zanzibar, a late addition to Tanzania, and still accorded a separate culture as part of its "confederal" structure.
2. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993).
3. Engineering and technology projects, medical assistance, disaster relief, etc.
4. William Gutteridge, "Military Elites in Ghana and Nigeria," *African Forum* 2 (1966): 40.
5. Gutteridge, "Military Elites," 40.
6. Costa Rica disestablished its military by constitutional provision in 1953 after a bloody civil war, and Panama did so in the 1990s. Julius Nyerere, of Tanzania, pressed unsuccessfully for an African military force to replace African national armies in the 1960s and 1970s.
7. Herbert Kaufman. *Are Government Organizations Immortal?* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1976).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Gutteridge, William. "Military Elites in Ghana and Nigeria." *African Forum* 2 (1966), 31-41.
- Huntington, Samuel P. *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993.
- Kaufman, Herbert. *Are Government Organizations Immortal?* Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1976.