U.S. Air Force (Jeremy T. Lock)

Soldier examines patient during medical civil action project in Djibouti

Sub-Saharan African Military and Development Activities

BY BIRAME DIOP

For the last two decades, African states have been facing more internal threats than external ones. In fact, the African continent is now dealing with ethnic-based conflicts, poverty, health issues, hunger, and, most recently, radicalization and violent extremism.

In summary, security challenges throughout Africa have evolved in nature and are a lot more complex. In the health domain, for example, Africa has been decimated by multiple epidemics and pandemics, notably tuberculosis, malaria, and HIV/AIDS. For HIV/AIDS, sub-Saharan Africa

Colonel Birame Diop, Senegalese Air Force, is seconded as the Director of the African Institute for Security Sector Transformation based in Dakar.

alone is home to more than 22.5 million people infected with the disease, which is two-thirds of the total for the entire planet. Not only is the rate of infection high, but the quality of treatment has been woefully low. In 2009, 1.3 million Africans died from AIDS, while another 1.8 million became infected. Even though the rate of infection has been steadily declining in recent years, the situation remains dire, and its impact is felt throughout all sectors of African life, from education and agriculture to the general economic well-being of the African states.

Well publicized as the AIDS pandemic has been, it is not, of course, the only health threat facing the continent. High patient-to-doctor ratios, poor facilities, and lack of access to medicine are some of the most significant health concerns, even though new problems are arising here and there.

Perhaps the most troubling health threat is the prevalence of counterfeit drug distribution. Throughout West Africa, recent estimates indicate that as much as 40 percent of the prescription medicine for sale is counterfeit.

> people are abducted, often from vulnerable places of war or other hardship, and forced into labor or sexual enslavement

Food security is also a major challenge. Shortages are commonplace in many areas, and malnutrition runs rampant. Currently, East Africa is suffering from a drought that is arguably the worst in 60 years. The United Nations (UN) estimates that 10 to 12 million people are affected and could lose their lives if swift and bold actions are not taken.

The continent is also facing a range of cross-border criminality issues. Drugs, arms, and human trafficking are increasingly significant problems. West Africa in particular has become a hub in international drug smuggling. In 2008, the UN released a report explaining how every country in the region is being affected by a highly lucrative cocaine industry. Recent estimates suggest that $2 billion worth of cocaine is being trafficked from South America to Europe through West Africa every year. This is a startling figure when compared with the gross domestic product (GDP) of countries within the region. Guinea-Bissau, one of the countries most deeply affected by drug trafficking, has a GDP of just $304 million.[1] The UN notes that the problem is so severe that it poses the number one risk to reconstruction in countries such as Sierra Leone because of the corruption invited by such a lucrative trade.[2]

Sierra Leone has also become a central player in a growing arms trade on the continent, along with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Somalia, Sudan, and others. Estimates place the value of the arms trade in Africa at $1 billion annually and include everything from handguns and assault rifles to rocket-propelled grenades and even antitank and anti-air missiles. In some countries, AK–47 automatic assault rifles are available for only $6. This trade fuels conflict in many places throughout the continent and has contributed to violence on a dramatic scale. In South Africa, for example, small arms have become the leading cause of unnatural deaths in the country.[3] An additional facet of this problem is the increasing rate of arms trafficking that originates on the continent. Some have argued that Eastern European arms such as the AK–47 no longer constitute the bulk of trafficking. They point instead to a growing arms production industry on the continent in countries such as Egypt, Nigeria, and South Africa.[4]

Unfortunately, cross-border trafficking in Africa has not been limited to commodities such as drugs, fake medicines, and weapons, but increasingly involves the smuggling and enslavement of human beings. These people are abducted, often from vulnerable places of war or other hardship, and forced into labor or sexual enslavement.[5] While at least 130,000 people in sub-Saharan Africa alone have been captured and exploited in this manner, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime argues that few countries on the continent have begun to adopt measures to address the problem.[6]

The increase in various forms of trafficking in Africa points to a larger and more endemic problem. Organized crime in general, and terrorism in particular, has become a serious matter. The Mombasa region of Kenya and neighboring Somalia have long struggled with connections to Middle East terrorist organizations such as al Qaeda. However, this problem has now spread to other regions of the continent. Nigeria, for instance, has seen a recent increase in attacks from the radical group Boko Haram, which has devastated the security in much of the country. The radical group has also claimed responsibility for the attack on a UN office in Abuja that killed more than 20 people in August 2011. Mauritania, Mali, Niger, and Chad are also facing terrorist activities with the presence of al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.

This list of new challenges facing the continent is unfortunately far from exhaustive. Africa is facing several other security concerns such as high rates of infant mortality, urban violence related to youth unemployment and overpopulation, desert advancement, political divergences, and corruption.

African states need to find ways to confront these serious threats directly and more efficiently, but also to mobilize resources, including militaries, to fight underdevelopment. Failing to do so could worsen the security situation of the continent for the next several years or even decades due to the fact that the majority of African states, as well as their public and private sectors, have not been able to create the conditions for sustainable development.

State, Public, and Private Sectors Cannot Solve the Problems Independently

The lives of millions of Africans are being threatened daily by security challenges. Unfortunately, African states and the sectors that have typically been charged with addressing these challenges are not working together. Whether due to operational failures or resource limitations, these parties have simply not been able to solve the challenges independently, and the gap between the needs and what the states and sectors are able to provide is too wide for the situation to greatly improve in the near future.

After more than 50 years of independence, many African states are still relatively weak. In fact, the majority are largely dependent on foreign aid, with a large percentage of their budgets emanating from the international community. African states are indeed struggling with limited resources while their challenges are exponentially increasing. The World Bank's most recent publication of *Africa Development Indicators* highlighted the increasingly abstract nature of issues facing the continent. Using the phrase *quiet corruption*, the World Bank explored a range of issues facing African development that are less overt than well-publicized incidences of so-called big-time corruption; nonetheless, all of these issues are severely undermining the continent's development potential.

The World Bank defines this *quiet corruption* as occurring "when public servants fail to deliver services or inputs that have been paid for by the government." The bank highlights a number of examples from a wide range of areas within the public sector. The *Africa Development Indicators* report explains that in several African countries, between 15 and 25 percent of salaried school teachers are not showing up for work. This also holds true for doctor absenteeism from primary care facilities. The bank further notes that a high percentage of the fertilizer available to farms is diluted of the nutrients that it is intended to supply. This can have severe consequences on a region that already faces perennial food shortages.

> all sectors of African society need to work collaboratively to begin solving these problems

In addition to these shortcomings of states and their administrations, the African private sector is simply too stunted to fill the gap needed to provide the services and employment. Though lack of education continues to be a major problem, students who are able to complete a high school education or achieve higher degrees are often unable to find employment. The continent is thus stuck in a serious catch-22. The private sector, for example, needs more educated people so it can grow and develop, but cannot provide these people with jobs until after it gains strength. Unfortunately, it is not gaining strength in many African countries due to lack of state assistance as well as insufficient and decreasing foreign direct investment (FDI). In fact, FDI in Africa represents no more than 10 percent of the entire FDI in underdeveloped countries and decreased by 9 percent in 2010.

This conundrum highlights the nature of many of the problems now facing Africa. The problems and solutions are often too intricately connected for the situation to improve without outside assistance. Furthermore, many of these challenges have a compounding effect: they worsen over time as they go unaddressed. Thus, rather than improving, the situation is likely to worsen and place more strain on the sectors that are already unable to keep up. There exists a gap between the needs of the population and the resources that states and public and private sectors are able to provide.

The most important response to this situation is to improve states' capacities and invest in the public and private sectors in order to build capacity to fulfill societal roles in the future. In the meantime, however, filling the gap that currently exists requires a response that uses all available resources. All sectors of African society need to work collaboratively to begin solving these problems; it is simply not responsible to allow any available resources to go unused while people are suffering.

During times of peace, African militaries have a great many resources available to them that can be used to help address many of the challenges already outlined. Among other things, they have planes for delivering the food, medicine, and doctors needed to fight health problems, as well as manpower and expertise to assist in building infrastructure. When available, these resources must be used to contribute to the positive development of the continent and to save lives. In certain countries such as South Sudan and Zimbabwe, the situation in the public and private sectors is so delicate that for several years to come, the military will remain the only functioning

organization capable of dealing with certain national challenges.

While it is clear that militaries in sub-Saharan Africa have a role to play to improve the situation, many African observers are not in favor of the inclusion of military personnel in development activities and would prefer that they intervene only in emergency situations. The reasons these observers invoke are many.

Perceived Risks of Mobilizing the Military

Despite the reality that the public and private sectors are struggling and often failing to provide required services, some of the resources available to the military to assist in this situation are often unused because, at least in part, academics and members of civil society have warned against augmenting the military role especially in domestic matters. They argue that to do so exposes the civilian population, state, and possibly even the continent to a variety of risks.

First, they argue that the military is meant to address traditional security challenges to state sovereignty. Expanding their role to deal with more abstract issues, especially those within domestic politics, is simply not what the military is intended for. Doing so detracts from the military's main operational goal of protecting the state.

Second, and perhaps more prominently, scholars and members of African civil society argue that allowing the military to play a role in a broader range on nontraditional tasks can lead to the "militarization" of society. Due to the relative strength of the military when compared with African public and private sectors, it can quickly become a dominating force when it enters these other domains. Politicians loo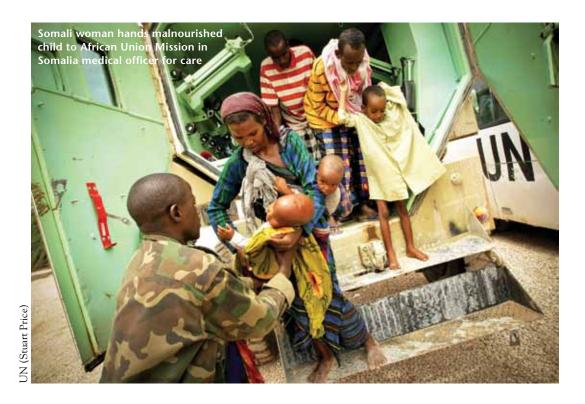king for quick solutions to the grievances of their constituents could keep mobilizing the military as an easy answer rather than investing time and resources in the other sectors. Overreliance on the military can lead to the withering of the public and private sectors rather than helping them to gain the strength to eventually be the sustainable solution.

Third, this reliance on the military can lead to its intrusion into state politics. As the military gains power within the domestic sphere with politicians—and as populations increasingly depend on it to provide needed services—it can manipulate this dependence in order to serve its own interests. Civilians and their elected leaders run the risk of losing control of the military, in whole or in part.

Unfortunately, fear of these risks does not rest in the theoretical realm. Instead, it is well grounded in the history of the African continent. Even a brief look at the history of many of the militaries in Africa reveals the potential consequences of a powerful and uncontrollable military.

Since independence movements began in 1956, coups have been a constant problem throughout Africa. In less than 50 years, African countries saw an astonishing 80 successful coups, to say nothing of nearly 250 additional coup attempts or plots.[7] This trend has continued throughout the start of the 21st century, with an additional six successful coups in the first 8 years of the new millennium.[8] Recent events in Burkina Faso and Guinea further highlight the continuing instability of some of Africa's security sectors.

While the highest numbers of coups have been in Francophone West Africa, the problem has not been confined to any one region. Most countries of the continent have been victims of coups. Indeed, a full 30 sub-Saharan African countries were victims of successful coups by 2001, and another 11 experienced unsuccessful attempts.

Somali woman hands malnourished child to African Union Mission in Somalia medical officer for care

UN (Stuart Price)

The effects of these successful and attempted coups reach beyond the physical damage and loss of life that often accompanies them. The destabilizing effect of a coup impairs a country's economic development as domestic infrastructure is disturbed and international actors become hesitant to invest. A coup or coup attempt often impairs a country for many years following the cessation of violence.

Of course, coups are far from being the only problem caused by some African security sectors. Human rights abuses by many militaries have been well documented. Many of these forces have been implicated in pillaging, rape, mutilation, and other forms of torture as well as in murder and genocide. Dictatorial regimes in the Central African Republic, Chad, Ethiopia, Liberia, Nigeria South Africa, Uganda, and Zaire have used their militaries to undertake all kinds of atrocities against their people. The hesitation of many to see the role of the military expanded in any fashion is understandable. On the other hand, perhaps it is more helpful to conceive the assistance of the military in nontraditional, development-type activities as a change in rather than an expansion of the military's role. By creating programs from this perspective, changing the practices of the military and its relationship with the civilian population can be an integral part of project design. Given the benefits (outlined below), it is simply too critical not to use the resources available to the military to alleviate suffering on the continent and move African countries toward sustainable development.

Mobilizing the Military

Countries such as the United States, even though they recognize that the military is not the most efficient organization to undertake certain categories of activity, plan to call upon their

militaries when agencies are not capable of gathering necessary resources. For instance, Department of Defense Directive 3000.05, dated November 2005, states that the U.S. military is ultimately responsible to prosecute missions when agencies are not able to do so.

Regarding food security, corruption, and health issues, the role for the military may not be immediately evident. Ideally, addressing these challenges means empowering public and private entities that are already tasked with solving these problems. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, the sectors that are supposed to address these concerns have been unable to adequately do so. This might be due to the quiet corruption noted by the World Bank, or it might simply be the result of insufficient resources or lack of expertise and will. Whatever the reason, it is clear that additional measures must be taken to address the gap between what is currently being done and what needs to be done for African states to stabilize and prosper.

Mobilizing the military to become involved in this new range of societal challenges is not meant to replace or circumvent other sectors. On the contrary, using the resources already available to the military can alleviate pressure from other entities while they reform and develop new strategies and capacities. For reform of these sectors to take place in a realistic and effective manner, careful planning over time is needed. The military can lighten the strain placed on these other groups during this period.

In terms of health care, African countries nearly uniformly suffer from inadequate health facilities and an insufficient number of doctors. The military in many countries possesses the capacities necessary to at least begin addressing this problem. In many countries, important efforts have been made

recently, but up until now, most of this capacity often remains inadequately used during times of peace. Failing to use these resources means that illnesses go untreated, and people lose their lives.

Apart from health challenges, Africa is facing serious youth unemployment. Figures often highlight the fact that 70 percent of the continent's population is under the age of 25. Unfortunately, the same figures underline the fact that these young Africans represent no more than 25 percent of the active population.

Youth idleness is far from being the only potential risk of unrest throughout the continent but undoubtedly represents an important factor that can contribute, under certain circumstances, to instability and insecurity. The military, while being the major employer of the public sector in many African states, is limited in terms of job provision. Nonetheless, it can participate in the civic education of the youth many observers consider the most vulnerable group in African societies.

> youth idleness is far from being the only potential risk of unrest throughout the continent but undoubtedly represents an important factor that can contribute to instability and insecurity

Africa, like the other continents, is experiencing frequent natural disasters due to climate change, such as flooding, coastal erosion, desert advancement, and so forth. Typically well organized, relatively easy to mobilize, and disciplined, militaries can play a crucial role in states' efforts to tackle these issues efficiently. Militaries can also be mobilized to fight the increasing number of wildfires across the

continent as well as the alarming deforestation witnessed lately.

Drought is currently devastating people throughout eastern Africa. More than 10 million people are affected by what has become perhaps the worst drought in more than 60 years. Rather than waiting for the international community to send assistance—while lives are lost—militaries across the region and perhaps even the continent as a whole could have been mobilized to begin relieving the strain caused by the food shortage.[9]

Finally, African countries are badly lacking sound infrastructures. Most of the continent's infrastructure, if it even existed, has been destroyed by years of conflict. African militaries could help states in their efforts to build or rehabilitate infrastructures.

In reality, mobilizing the military in this manner and in these different domains benefits civilian populations, the sectors that generally provide these services, and the military itself. It allows the military and its resources to remain more consistently active while allowing the traditional public and private sectors to reform in a more controlled environment instead of constantly operating under crisis or emergency conditions.

These benefits can be found in a consistent list of other areas as well. This list, even though not extensive, reveals the importance of utilizing the resources of the military to help address the challenges now facing the continent. However, given the risks noted above, it is clear that careful planning will be critical if military mobilization is to be done in a way that realizes these benefits, instead of tragically falling victim to the risks.

Creating Safeguards

If militaries are to be mobilized to assist in addressing the challenges now facing much of Africa, then clear expectations need to be established and safeguards need to be put into place. Furthermore, especially in countries where serious violations of human rights have been perpetrated by the military, reconciliation must take place and trust must be built. Trust can only be built if the military communicates effectively and regularly with the population. Even during crisis periods, the military ought to behave in a respectful, responsible, and professional way in order to avoid deliberate violations of human rights. The needs and interests of all relevant stakeholders must be taken into consideration when creating these safeguards, ensuring that the military serves to supplement rather than replace the sectors traditionally charged with responding to these challenges.

In pursuing this mobilization goal, the essential element that can help ensure success is maintaining civilian oversight of the military and its projects. Doing so begins with clearly defining the military's new role as temporary and supplemental to the public and private sectors. Projects should be designed in such a way that it is always clear that the military is not taking over or dominating but rather is assisting the other sectors and alleviating the pressure being placed on them. Having a clearly defined timetable for a military's assistance will help demonstrate the temporary nature of its work, so other sectors do not become overly reliant on it.

Realizing this oversight and creating the environment for these expectations require the development of a legal framework for implementation. The circumstances in which the military can be mobilized to deal with nontraditional security concerns need to be clearly outlined in the states' national security policies and in law. In some cases, it might even make sense to cement these conditions within the

framework of the state constitution in order to broadcast the expectations of both the military and general population.

Creating these safeguards is not entirely a novel concept. Efforts have been made over the past 20 years by those in charge of security sector reform to improve military practices. Thus, even if reforms have been more focused than the proposed initiatives, they have enjoyed varying degrees of success. Lessons can be learned to help shape the necessary framework that ensures the military is mobilized in a manner that is beneficial to the state and its population.

In addition to the lessons learned from security sector reform processes, there are recent examples in Africa that highlight the potential for military mobilization in a supplementary fashion. These examples are of particular importance because they demonstrate that this proposition is not merely a theoretical possibility, but a reality that has already seen some success. In Kenya, for example, the military and civil society have collaborated on environmental issues in a program that produced the concept of the "environmental soldier." This program clearly participated in strengthening the national and international image of Wangari Maathai, an environmental and political activist. Maathai later became the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize for her work. In Guinea, now that the new democratically elected government is in place, the military has been called on to help fix damaged bridges and roads throughout the country. In Burkina Faso, South Africa, and Botswana, the military has worked collaboratively on civic education programs, and in Senegal, there are many examples of how the military has been successfully mobilized in a complementary way.

While it is beyond the scope of this article to examine each of these cases in depth, it is helpful to look at the Senegalese experience to illustrate the possibilities of limited and controlled mobilization of African militaries to deal with nontraditional challenges.

Senegal's Armée-Nation

In Senegal, the military has been successfully mobilized to assist the country in a wide range of activities, paying particular attention to issues directly related to development. The list of areas in which the military has helped is long: health, infrastructure development, agriculture, education, border management, and environmental protection, among others.

The projects the Senegalese military participates in are selected specifically for their ability to help the general population. The military provides immediate and tangible assistance to the people and participates in projects with a longer term focus such as helping in infrastructure

> lessons can be learned to help shape the necessary framework that ensures the military is mobilized in a manner that is beneficial to the state and its population

construction and disease prevention programs. Up to 80 percent of the curative activities undertaken by the military health services are for civilian populations. The Senegalese military, along with the services of the ministry of environment and conservation, is actively participating in the realization of the country's portion of the 7,000-kilometer great green wall that African states are committed to build to stop desert advancement.

In addition to the benefits of these programs for the Senegalese civilian population,

the military itself and the state as a whole receive indirect benefits from these nontraditional activities. In part by participating in such projects, the military enjoys a better reputation within Senegal than most African militaries have in their respective countries. This increased trust helps the military remain connected with the general population and receive support, and thus be better informed of security concerns. The state, for its part, greatly benefits from the work the military does in building cross-sector relationships. For example, with the

the United States and most European countries, as well as emerging powers such as China, Russia, and Brazil, are facing acute difficulties that might prevent them from supporting Africa

border management commission run by the military but composed of members from all sectors of the society, Senegal has been able to promote peaceful relations at certain parts of its borders with neighboring countries and thus needs to deploy fewer security forces to these regions, therefore saving a great deal of resources.

In addition to the above benefits, some scholars consider these nontraditional activities undertaken by the Senegalese military as a key reason for the country's stability. West Africa has been one of the most unstable regions in the world with many coups and human rights abuses. Senegal, however, has been an exception in the region, enjoying stability and peaceful political transitions since independence in 1960. Many argue that the country's first president, Léopold Sédar Senghor, was a major factor for stability. This success is beginning to gain international attention with other countries all

over Africa looking to Senegal for an example of how to improve their militaries.

If the reasons for Senegal's successful experience are many and diverse, the one most invoked is the creation and implementation of the concept Armée-Nation. In fact, the meeting between President Senghor and the country's second chief of defense staff, General Jean Alfred Diallo, determined the Senegalese experience. President Senghor was known as a peaceful leader with a clear vision for the country's future, and General Diallo, a former officer in the French army corps of engineers, was known as a builder. Together, they have helped develop the concept Armée-Nation that has been, since the early years of independence, the backbone of the military's participation in development activities. The Armée-Nation is well known and appreciated by the civilian population and widely studied in the military.

Of course, while this example has been largely successful and offers hope for using the military in nontraditional activities, there is still room for improvement. Most significantly, Senegal could work more closely on the establishment of the formal legal framework suggested earlier and on clearer planning, programming, and coordinating processes. In this regard, the creation in the late 1990s of a civil-military committee was an important initiative that needs to be reconsidered.

To continue to involve the military in development activities while avoiding the militarization of society, leaders of civil society, the military, executive, judiciary, and legislature need to work together on creating the right conditions for the military's projects, notably an efficient communication strategy, a good financing mechanism, and measures that guarantee discretion. That is important not only for Senegal, but also for other countries that seek

to emulate the Senegalese experience and in which the military does not have such a strong history of good practices.

Conclusion

Since the end of the Cold War, the security situation in Africa has evolved, and new nontraditional security challenges have emerged. In reality, the African continent is currently dealing with poverty, health issues, political-based crises, ethnic-based conflicts, food shortages, natural disasters, and radicalization. African states in general, and specifically their public administrations and private sectors, have not been able to cope with these complex security concerns. This situation is not likely to end soon given the fact that the world is facing serious economic crises that are having a negative impact on the continent.

The United States and most European countries, as well as emerging powers such as China, Russia, and Brazil, are facing acute difficulties that might prevent them from supporting Africa. The continent should therefore mobilize all of its available resources to confront these new challenges. The military also needs to be mobilized to deal with these nontraditional security concerns by contributing its resources whenever possible.

Of course, doing so is not without challenges, particularly on a continent that has experienced so many negative events as a result of the military. By carefully planning and putting the necessary safeguards in place, however, military assistance is largely possible and beneficial to society. Furthermore, using the military could help improve the relationship between the military and civilians and ultimately bolster greater cooperation among the various sectors of African society. Several countries have successfully involved their militaries in meeting the new challenges. Among them, the most noticeable are Botswana, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Senegal, and South Africa.

Senegal, though not a perfect example, is often cited as one of the most successful cases in sub-Saharan Africa. The country has been able to keep its military professional and useful to Senegalese society. Many observers of the African security sector consider strong Senegalese civilian and military leadership in the early days of independence as the major factor. To continue its success, Senegal needs to work on a formal legal framework and focus on better planning, programming, and coordination mechanisms.

The Senegalese experience, and its concept Armée-Nation, cannot be exported everywhere in Africa, but it can undoubtedly inspire many African countries that are interested in involving their militaries in development activities. **PRISM**

Notes

[1] United Nations (UN), "West Africa Drug Trade: New Transit Hub for Cocaine Trafficking Fuels Corruption," 2008, available at <www.un.org/en/events/tenstories/08/westafrica.shtml>.

[2] UN, "International Drug Trafficking Poses Biggest Threat to Sierra-Leone, UN Warns," February 3, 2009.

[3] Matt Schroeder and Guy Lamb, "The Illicit Arms Trade in Africa: A Global Enterprise," *African Analyst* 3, no. 1 (2006), 69–78.

[4] Eric G. Berman, "Illicit Trafficking of Small Arms in Africa: Increasingly a Home-Grown Problem," presentation in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, March 14, 2007.

[5] UN Office on Drugs and Crime, "Human Trafficking and Eastern Africa."

[6] Ibid.

[7] Patrick J. McGowan, "African Military coups d'état, 1956–2001: Frequency, Trends and Distribution," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 41, no. 3 (2003), 339–370.

[8] David Zounmenou, "Coups d'état in Africa between 1958 and 2008," adapted from Issaka K. Souaré, *Civil Wars and Coups d'Etat in West Africa: An Attempt to Understand the Roots and Prescribe Possible Solutions* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2006).

[9] "Somalis Displaced by Drought Hit by Mogadishu Rains," BBC News, July 15, 2011, available at <www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14165509>.