

The Army and Institutional Crises in the Comoros

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Abstract

By its initial conception, the armed forces are supposed to defend the state and the nation, but in some post-colonial African states marked by multiple socio-political upheavals, such as the Comoros, the armed forces are diverted from their main mission. To this end, they remain the only organized institution capable of making or breaking a regime in place, since they embody force without regard to the law. It is in this spirit that we will allow ourselves to make a diagnosis of the institutional crises in the Comoros.

Keywords: Institutional crisis; coup d'état; state; army

INTRODUCTION

In the course of the investigations that we have previously carried out, it is still difficult to have exact figures. Nevertheless, the social facts are numerous due to our observations and reality. Indeed, the Comorian army is still criticized by the population following the numerous coups d'état and political crises that it has not been able to prevent. Several factors prevent it from accomplishing its missions. This gives it a bad image towards the population. Thus, the army is called "mayaboré", an insult that qualifies it as "a thoughtless object at the mercy of power".

Establishment of an authoritarian political regime

We know that the function of political power in any society is to protect the population and ensure its development. The existence of a national feeling, of a will to live together, allows the appearance of a legitimate and accepted political power.

In spite of this, the power of the Comoros Islands remains marked by authoritarian regimes that succeed one another throughout its political history, which has caused the population to lose confidence. This explains the

despair of the people towards regimes that often seek to remain in power at all costs.

Lack and partiality of state services

All Comorian political crises have been provoked by the feeling of belonging to an island. This has been the case since the Mohelian separatist movement in 1992 under the reign of SAID MOHAMED DJOHAR. The smallest island of the archipelago is the least remote in all respects. The lack of infrastructure and the poverty of its population illustrate the marginalization of its inhabitants. Until 1998, to pass a science baccalaureate, you had to go to Moroni high school. Moreover, until today, the small island does not have a seaport.

Moreover, the regimes always seek to control all State services, despite the federalism which is essential in the institutions, given the subdivision of the territory. This concentration of power, coupled with the negligence of the authorities, has led to the abandonment of certain localities, often linked to insularity. But the abandoned inhabitants see in it a discrimination of the large Comorians against the other islands. Thus, the state is often absent and unpopular in the other islands. This led the Anjouanese in 1997 to follow the separatist movement initiated by the Mohélians the same year.

So far, there is no seaport on the island of Moheli. The inhabitants of this island use kwassa to get around. The existing small port does not have the capacity to dock ships, only ocean liners and is very dangerous.

Photo n° 1. Kwassa kwassa transportant des passagers de Mohéli à Anjouan



Source : <http://www.comores-infos.net/un-kwassa-kwassa-a-disparu-avec-5-personnes-a-bord/>

Mohelians who have no way to take the plane are forced to take the kwassa kwas, because for lack of port, the fast boats do not come to Moheli

Social tensions

In 1975, President Ahmed Abdallah Abderrahmane was overthrown by Ali Soilihi, supported by mercenaries. The dictatorship supported by the mercenaries was very strong in this regime, so there was no protest. But just after the fall of the regime, President Djohar, declaring himself the father of

democracy in Comoros, let the people express themselves. Thus, the claims began on the small island that claimed its independence. This allowed him to hold a mandate before the king DE NAR came to overthrow him in 1996. The various social pressures in the archipelago, namely salary arrears, unemployment, school protesters and others, which he left to his successor Mohamed TAKI, brought the country back to the cession of Anjouan. Indeed, President Taki, after his death, was replaced for three months, by Ben Said Massoundi, an Anjouanese, leader of the opposition during the reign of former President Abdallah. Massoundi's appointment of Abbas Djoussouf, the opposition leader among the ministers, was deemed illegal. The two breakaway islands refused to participate in the presidential election and demanded a federal structure with island-by-island voting. Bloody clashes occurred between secessionists in Anjouan. In April 1999, the main leaders of the three islands, joined by observers, met in Antananarivo to find a solution to the crisis.

In fact, they called for the extension of autonomy to each island, but Anjouan's refusal to sign this agreement immediately, as well as discussions on the appointment of the future prime minister, totally destabilized the Comorian government. As we know, this appointment provoked a putsch in Moroni, by the Chief of Staff, Colonel Azali Assoumani who declared:

"Wanting to prevent the country from sinking into chaos and anarchy, I am obliged to take the lead. Upon coming to power, Azali Assoumani dissolved the republican institutions and announced an executive led by himself and constituted by a civilian majority.

Gendarme state

The world has long been dominated by all forms of power. But this domination has become like a virus on all continents. Such is the case of Comoros where it all started with the establishment of socialism by President ALI SOILIH after his coup d'état which overthrew President Ahmed ABDALLAH (the father of independence). Then his overthrow of socialism in 1977 by President Ahmed ABDALLAH ruled for 9 years of dictatorial power with the help of BOB Denard. These regimes of social repression have traumatized the Comorian civil society which does not cease to demonstrate until today for the establishment of a truly democratic and honest state. But the corruption of some government authorities does not allow this. They use the army to create a climate of fear towards the population. The laws are not respected, it is the will of the leaders that becomes the law. Once in power, they try to change the laws and make them fit. But once the wheel turns and they are removed from power, they complain.

Photo n° 2. The NDA at a checkpoint in the town of Mutsamudu



Source:

<https://www.google.fr/search?q=crise+comore+photos&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=4qvh2Y4mHnaSIM%253A%252Cy>

Involvement of the military in constitutional crises

One of the army's senior officers keeps mentioning in his speeches that:

"The army is not there to frighten the population nor to mow it down, but the army is there to secure it, to support it, to supervise it...".

Here the Colonel wants to remind the citizen of the regalian role of the army. This honest and upright image of the profession of arms is often sullied by the public authorities.

a) Passage of mercenaries to the Comoros

The name of Bob Denard will remain indissolubly linked of President Ahmed Abdallah. Tried for this crime with two of his men, including Jean-Paul Guerrier, Bob Denard was acquitted with the benefit of the doubt in Paris in 1999. Retired to France, Bob Denard made a surprise return to the Comoros with his men on September 28, 1995, during which he deposed President Mohamed Djohar and placed power in the hands of opponents Mohamed Taki and Saïd-Ali Kemal. On October 4, the French army intervened and captured the mercenaries, but kept the opponents in power, a scenario that lends credence to the idea that Bob Denard was acting, as he claims, with the tacit agreement of Paris. In his autobiography, entitled "The Corsair of the Republic", he assures us that he operated most of the time in collusion, more or less closely, with the French secret services." On several occasions, I didn't really have a green light from the French authorities, but I would go orange," he will plead to the Comoros archipelago, a French colony that became independent in 1975. Bob Denard, placed at the head of the "presidential guard", had become a sort of viceroy there thanks to a first coup d'état, in 1975, when his group had overthrown Ahmed Abdallah from the presidency to install his opponent Ali Soilih in his place. In 1978, the mercenary carried out the opposite operation, killing Ali Soilih and reinstalling his predecessor. Bob Denard then developed links between the Comoros and the apartheid regime in South Africa. In March 1988, Dulcie, a close friend of Nelson Mandela,

representative of the ANC in Paris, was assassinated in Paris. After the fall of apartheid, representatives of the former regime accused Jean-Paul Guerrier, Bob Denard's right-hand man, of having committed this assassination for Pretoria. No follow-up will be given in France. Bob Denard's first visit to the Comoros ended in 1989 with the assassination.

Photo n° 3. Bob Denard in the Comoros



Source : <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/141171/culture/bob-denard-le-mercenaire-des-comores/>

Bob DENARD controls the army, but also the economy of the archipelago.

The drifts of the army

The weaknesses of the Comorian army are not limited to its power struggles against social tensions. Its involvement and inaction in coups d'état and in the mismanagement of institutional crises have repeatedly upset this young state.

Indeed, all the three coups d'état orchestrated by Bob Denard to finish off President ALI SOILIH and President AHAMED ABDALLAH do not allow us to question the Comorian army which had just been born. But the creation of GP during the 9 years of Denard's reign in the Comoros has left a lasting mark on the history of this young nation. The merger of the FAC (Comorian Armed Forces) and the GP (Presidential Guard) did not prevent Denard's coups. The elements of the GP have always been loyal to their master. During the 1995 coup that overthrew President DJOHAR, there was no resistance in the military camp.

Moreover, the inefficiency and division during the management of the separatist crisis in Anjouan in 1997 showed the flaws of this young army. Some soldiers joined the island cause and joined the separatist movement by turning against the national army. This led to its failure in this intervention.

Involvement of the army in political affairs

As Machiavelli quoted in his book "The Prince": "It is therefore on force alone that the prince must rely in order to try to accredit the conceptions that are politically useful to him. The Comorian regimes, like most African powers, are losing their credibility with their peoples for various reasons. They always try

to stay in power for a long time despite the unpopularity that the political authorities create themselves in their countries. Thus, the use of force remains the only way to stabilize the regime with the social tensions generated by socio-economic difficulties.

Moreover, the military can have political ambitions given the status of the army:

"The military enjoy all the rights and freedoms compatible with their status as military personnel. Philosophical or political opinions or beliefs are free. However, they can only be expressed outside of the service and with the reservations directed by the military state.

But it is clear that politicians use the military for their own political purposes. To repress the people or to overthrow regimes through coups d'état. The politicization of the army has created a climate of mistrust within this institution. Several army officers have died, others have been imprisoned and some have been disbarred for having participated in attempts to destabilize the various regimes.

This politicization of the army began at independence, but this phenomenon has become more pronounced since the military coup of 1999. During the period of the junta, the military held important civilian positions. And they could see the facilities obtained by the politicians by working in this sector.

Relative stability

Political stability is a country's only hope. All plans to revive a state depend on its political stability. Social tensions lead to political divisions that often foster instability. The Comoros is not only divided geographically, but also socially. In addition, poor governance in this young state has led to chronic political instability, which is hampering its development. In the search for a way out of the crisis, President Azali had declared "I believe that the new Constitution can be the solution".

Divided nationalism

Independence, which in principle should have led to the political unification of the territory, has instead led to the political division of the archipelago. First, the feudal socio-political model of the sultanic type had a limited hold on mahorean society and to a lesser extent on Moheli. This can be explained by the strong predominance of the Malagasy ethnic group in Maori society. Indeed, the strong Malagasy influence has strongly altered the cultural influence of the socio-political organization of the sultans. Even more so, Sultan Andriansouli of Malagasy origin, who converted to Islam, remains in the collective memory of the Mahorais, the reference of the founding myth. Over the centuries, political figures of Malagasy origin have always dominated the political life of Mayotte. Zena Mderé, a politician of Malagasy origin, was the leader of the Mouvement populaire mahorais. Mahoran

political activism has been and remains embodied by Mahorans of Malagasy origin. Does the secession of Mahorais find its seeds in part through this ethnic particularism? Located further west, closer to Madagascar, Mayotte served as an airlock for the rest of the Comoros during the systematic intrusions of Malagasy pirates. The Malagasy socio-political heritage in pre-colonial times may have created a conscious or unconscious political break with the other islands. All the more so as in the Comoros as a whole, political divisions have prevailed over unity. Nevertheless, Malagasy influence is limited in scope. For if it has a hold on the political organization, it is diluted in the Arab-Muslim civilization. In terms of identity, Mayotte does not stand out, if at all, from the other islands. Indeed, the particularism of Mayotte is not anchored in a cultural root, but rather in an ethnic root. The pre-eminence of the Malagasy ethnic group in the society of Mayotte has not led to any major identity crisis. However, we must emphasize that the settlement of the Malagasy in Mayotte in particular and in the Comoros in general was from the island of Nosy-Be, in the northwest of Madagascar, an already Islamized region. Our analysis is not intended to justify political positions throughout history, but rather to show that in an island group, differences can serve as motives in a movement of secession. Fontaine G. in his article entitled :

« Mayotte, the island of multiple challenges" emphasizes the particularity of islands as a whole "If it is unavoidable that, in the contemporary world, islands constitute a geopolitical phenomenon of primary importance, it is also unavoidable that the situation is very different from one island to another»¹

If some geopolitical motives seem unconscious, others are instrumentalized as a form of historical legitimization.

Unevenly distributed island federalism

National reconciliation led to the 2001 constitution following the 1997 separatist crisis, which was based on a rotating presidency and island autonomy. "It was based on the rotating presidency and autonomy of the islands."The equality of the islands in rights and duties. Thus, conflicts of competence between the executive of the union and those of the islands continue until today. Indeed, President Azali, the father of national reconciliation, lived this situation with the presidents of the islands until the end of his mandate in 2006. The island presidents all united to fight against the central power. When President Ahmed A. SAMBI came to power, the same crises continued and the president of the island of Anjouan rebelled. This rebellion required the intervention of the African Union to restore order on the island. However, the president decided to revise the constitution to ease autonomy by reducing the terms of office of the island presidents and

¹ Fontaine, 1997, p. 69

changing their names from presidents to governors. This revision was contested by the governors, but the president was able to impose it.

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