

Ethos of Exploitation

INSECURITY AND PREDATION IN MADAGASCAR

Madagascar's security institutions do not reflect the security needs of its population or the requirements of the state. Instead, they are shaped by the historical contingencies of the island's decolonization process. Weak to begin with and continually undermined by external influence, the security sector has been exploited by successive heads of state and their entourages. Rather than constituting effective units with a clear vocation, the military, gendarmerie, and police are characterized by severely underpaid regular forces and far too many high-ranking officers pursuing their own political and economic agendas.

Fifty years after Madagascar's independence, the armed forces and the police have become part of the island's security liabilities. In March 2009, President Marc Ravalomanana was not overthrown by a violent military coup, nor by a popular movement, as Andry Rajoelina's current transitional government, the HAT, often claims. Ravalomanana had lost control of the state's security apparatus, and it was the mutiny of non-commissioned officers that played a crucial role in the unconstitutional transfer of power to Rajoelina.

Combined with Madagascar's strategic location, the lack of basic infrastructure, difficult terrain, and porous borders which attract predatory actors who plunder the natural resources and engage in illegal trafficking—a dysfunctional security sector has generated the conditions for armed violence of worrisome proportions. The chapter considers three main types of insecurity: armed criminality, large-scale rural banditry, and international trafficking networks on the island. In so doing, it focuses on the role of state security actors in failing to prevent insecurity or in perpetuating it.



It remains unclear exactly how many people died when security forces guarding the presidential offices of Marc Ravalomanana opened fire on protesters, 7 February 2009. © Walter Astrada/AFP Photo



Rebel soldiers loyal to Andry Rajoelina take over one of the presidential offices in downtown Antananarivo, 16 March 2009.
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This chapter's principal conclusions include:

- To a large extent, Madagascar's inability to develop effective state security forces can be attributed to its colonial heritage and strategic location. As a result, the main rationale for a career in the military or gendarmerie is the pursuit of personal gain.
- Since their politicization and instrumentalization in the 1970s, Madagascar's armed forces have constantly been embroiled in struggles over political power and economic access to the country's wealth of resources.
- Today, Madagascar's security sector is characterized by severely underpaid and ill-equipped regular forces, far too many high-ranking officers, and a mushrooming of special intervention units with questionable mandates.
- Collusion between elements of the country's security sector and both foreign and domestic business interests has sharply intensified since the political crisis of early 2009. In the resulting security vacuum, armed criminality is on the rise, rural banditry has expanded, and Madagascar is gaining in importance as an international trafficking hub.
- The state administration has encouraged the organization of neighbourhood watch initiatives and village self-defence groups; it has also turned a blind eye to the operations of highly aggressive indigenous private security companies that hunt down rural bandits.

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Meanwhile, the majority of bilateral and multilateral development programmes remain suspended. Such work, it is said, requires a legitimate national partner. Just as in 2002, when the country was on the brink of civil war, the international community has adopted a wait-and-see strategy, sitting out the crisis and hoping for the return of an elected government so that its development cooperation can recommence.

Every additional day of Madagascar's political impasse plays into the hands of criminal networks that continue to consolidate their position on the island. Until the crisis is resolved and the dysfunctional security sector is tackled head-on, economic predation, ecological degradation, armed violence, and severe poverty will continue to be the key characteristics of the world's fourth-largest island. ❏