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Haiti: Prospects for a Junior Officer Coup [redacted]
A Comparison with Liberia and Ghana

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Summary

A junior officer coup in Haiti does not appear imminent, but various indicators suggest it remains one of the more potent threats to the regime. Haiti is plagued by many of the conditions that confronted regimes in Liberia and Ghana just prior to junior officer coups in those countries: a drifting government, a non-responsive elite, pervasive corruption in the leadership, and a deteriorating economy. In addition, a similar institutional environment exists; all three militaries are small with little opportunity for junior officer advancement and featuring close contact within the lower ranks. [redacted]

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Nevertheless, we doubt these characteristics alone are sufficient to provoke a coup--many countries experience similar problems without suffering military revolts--and several factors diminish the prospect for such an event in Haiti. A successful coup depends highly on access to sufficient materiel and leadership within the lower ranks, which are in short supply in the Haitian military. Furthermore, the strong sense of institutional loyalty in the Haitian military,

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demonstrated most recently by the coup on 19 June and not found in countries beset by tribal rivalries, would tend to impede a coup. Potential changes in these conditions, however, could be key indicators that the prospects for a junior officer coup are increasing.

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The Setting

A small group of junior and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) triggered a series of events in June 1988 that quickly led to the fall of civilian President Leslie Manigat. On 17 June, Manigat ordered the dismissal of Lt. General Henri Namphy, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Haiti (FAd'H), and two other generals. Namphy was charged with insubordination and placed under house arrest. Manigat ordered a second shakeup on 19 June--the day of the coup--transferring several high-level officers, including Presidential Guard leader Colonel Prosper Avril.

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Although they did not plan the coup, the NCOs became its primary implementers. [redacted] the NCOs freed Namphy, delivered him to the National Palace, effected a power blackout of the capital, and intimidated potential opponents with intense weapons firings as the coup progressed. The source reports, however, that the coup would not have succeeded without senior officer direction and access to weapons and armored personnel carriers. Nevertheless, this marked the first time NCOs and junior officers significantly influenced political events in Haiti. Following the coup, about 30 NCOs were promoted to the rank of adjutant, according to the US Defense Attache. [redacted]

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To assess the potential for another such uprising, we examined junior officer coups in Liberia and Ghana to gain insights on how the current situation in Port-au-Prince might play out. Despite clear cultural distinctions between the two regions, we believe that some conditions that provided a hospitable climate for such takeovers in Liberia (1980) and Ghana (1979 and 1981) are present in Haiti. From these earlier cases, we identified eight factors relevant to the Haitian case--five that currently increase the propensity for a junior officer coup

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and three that are working against it, at least for the time being. [redacted]

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Coups in Liberia and Ghana: Lessons Learned

Liberia, the oldest republic in Sub-Saharan Africa (dating to 1847) and Ghana, the first black African colony to gain independence (1957), have experienced coups by junior officers or enlisted men in recent years that have changed internal political dynamics. The coups, largely spontaneous, released pent up frustration with entrenched, unresponsive elites. [redacted]

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[redacted] Both governments had lost legitimacy, however, and only a spark was required to touch off their overthrow. [redacted]

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Liberia. Until the coup in 1980, Liberia was governed by a small group of Americo-Liberians descended from freed American and West Indian slaves, who comprised less than 5 percent of the population. By the 1970s, pressures began to build among Liberians of indigenous origin to have a meaningful share of political and economic power. Under the last Americo-Liberian President--William Tolbert, who constitutionally came to power in 1971--significant numbers of young, educated Liberians of indigenous tribal descent were brought into the lower elite, but real power remained with the ruling oligarchy. [redacted]

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Tolbert was unable to meet rising popular expectations, particularly as the economy deteriorated. Growing numbers of educated Liberians were confronted by high unemployment, escalating inflation, and inadequate housing, as the gap widened between the wealthy, corrupt Americo-Liberian elites and the rest of the population. Unprecedented rioting triggered by increased prices for rice--the staple food for poorer Liberians--erupted in April 1979. The disturbances were put down by the Army, but not before many troops mutinied and joined in the rioting and looting. [redacted]

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Over the following year, the shaken government appeared to drift, making no serious attempt at political or social reform. Tolbert demonstrated little understanding of Liberia's troubles or of how to reinvigorate his faltering regime. His difficulties were compounded by government inefficiency, the elite's protectiveness of its vested interests, and the country's limited economic resources. [redacted]

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Liberia did not have a history of coups and, although the small 5,000-man military was unreliable and ineffective in coping with civil disorder, the regime apparently did not feel threatened. For control, the government relied on Americo-Liberian officers in all senior and mid-grade positions, unconcerned that the lower ranks were almost entirely tribal Liberians. Although Tolbert took some steps to improve morale,

he apparently lacked awareness of the extent of dissatisfaction among the lower ranks. [redacted]

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On 12 April 1980, the anniversary of the rice riots, a small group of soldiers led by Master Sergeant Samuel Doe forced its way into the executive mansion, killed Tolbert, and overthrew the government. They quickly ousted most Americo-Liberians from senior positions and executed a number of them. Although Doe's decision was made on the spur of the moment, the coup was accomplished relatively easily, given the prevailing leadership vacuum. [redacted]

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Ghana. By the 1970s, Ghana, too, suffered from a government adrift amidst increasing economic and political problems. Although the regime in 1979 was a military one led by senior officers, it was widely viewed as part of the same corrupt elite that had brought the country to the brink of bankruptcy. Ghana labored under the heritage of internal antagonisms and economic ruin bequeathed by the late Kwame Nkrumah, its first president and foremost leftist, whose increasingly corrupt rule had left the nation with a burdensome external debt by the time of his death in 1972. Successive regimes failed to stop further economic deterioration, and unpopular reforms contributed to several coups. The poorly disciplined military was split by ideological and tribal rivalries, while the senior and mid-level ranks were corrupt and relatively isolated from the rest of the armed forces. [redacted]

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General Acheampong's government in the 1970s set the stage for the downfall of the Ghanaian elite. He started as an economic reformer, but soon retrenched and maintained power primarily by monitoring and placating the senior officers. The regime reacted to worsening economic conditions with a mix of repression and conciliation that ultimately made the government appear weak and indecisive. Senior officers finally moved to protect their position in July 1978 by quietly replacing Acheampong with General Akuffo, chief of the defense staff. [redacted]

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Akuffo, closely identified with Acheampong's policies, moved quickly to implement unpopular austerity measures. Large budget cuts led to increased consumer prices that sparked popular discontent. Opposition in the urban centers erupted into active protests, including a series of strikes by the civil service. Popular anger over the failure of the traditional ruling class, widespread corruption, and economic mismanagement grew apace. [redacted]

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Finally, junior officers took the initiative to topple the government. Capitalizing on widespread popular discontent, they moved against the regime in May 1979. This initial coup attempt failed and many of its leaders were imprisoned. Junior officers and others from the lower ranks freed one of the most popular leaders of the uprising, Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings, and

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shortly thereafter he abruptly--and without much planning--seized power on 4 June 1979. Rawlings returned the country to civilian rule later that year, but staged another coup in 1981 to end what he considered economic mismanagement and corruption in the new government. [redacted]

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Factors Supporting a Coup

We believe five key conditions that set the stage for junior officer coups in Liberia and Ghana are present in Haiti:

- A Drifting Government.
- A Nonresponsive Elite.
- Rampant Corruption.
- Economic Mismanagement.
- Institutional Vulnerabilities.

Although many countries have long experienced similar problems without military revolts, these factors have provided an environment conducive to junior officer coups in several Third World countries other than Liberia and Ghana.* Furthermore, Haiti's long history of military intervention in politics, combined with a newly-found belief among some junior officers and enlisted men that their actions shaped recent events, make it a country at risk. [redacted]

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Drifting Government. A key determinant impelling action is the perception that the government lacks direction and that reform is necessary to ensure political stability. In Haiti, the new military government shows little political vision beyond trying to maintain power. [redacted]

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reports most Army officers believe that Namphy is not a capable leader, citing his ineffective tenure as President and Army Chief from 1986 to 1988. [redacted] complains that Haiti is virtually leaderless, that many Army officers are not qualified for their ministerial posts, and that the regime has not yet formulated a coherent program to manage the country.

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The problems created by the absence of a firm course for the country are compounded by a lack of cohesion within the senior officer corps. The current regime is less organized and less unified than the former Manigat or military-led provisional governments, [redacted]

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[redacted] the recent coup also has added to the distrust and factionalism within the military because some officers originally

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[redacted] supported Manigat's attempts to reshuffle the military leadership. [redacted] for example, [redacted] three distinct factions exist. The largest supports Namphy; the two others are led respectively by Major General Williams Regala, Minister of Defense and Interior, and Colonel Jean-Claude Paul, Commander of the Dessalines Battalion. [redacted]

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Nonresponsive Elite. Sentiments for direct action against a rudderless government are intensified when junior officers no longer believe political leaders are protecting their interests. [redacted] the recent promotions of numerous senior officers in Haiti has fueled dissension among junior officers overlooked for advancement. In the view of these junior officers, senior leaders are concerned primarily with protecting their individual perquisites. Even the newly-promoted NCOs have complained that the High Command has not sufficiently recognized them for their pivotal role in the coup, [redacted]

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Rampant Corruption. While many Third World leaders use their position for self-enrichment, excessive corruption--at the expense of military preparedness--can provide the impetus for a junior officer coup. Corruption is no stranger to Haiti, but [redacted] the High Command is growing increasingly avaricious. Furthermore, new levels of rake-offs--on top of recent cuts in US and other foreign security assistance--appear to be diminishing military readiness. [redacted] corruption and favoritism have virtually destroyed the effectiveness of many military units. [redacted]

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Economic Mismanagement. Junior officer coups also are more prevalent against a background of severe and worsening economic problems. Haiti's recent coup appears to have accelerated the country's economic deterioration under way since most US and multilateral aid was suspended following the electoral collapse last November. Venezuela, West Germany, and France, which continued to support Haiti after the electoral debacle, have reacted to the coup by reducing economic aid. According to the US Embassy, Port-au-Prince will find it increasingly difficult to raise enough foreign exchange to maintain such critical imports as wheat and petroleum at current levels in the coming months. Growing consumer shortages, in turn, are likely to heighten inflation and to increase junior officer dissatisfaction with the High Command's handling of the economy. [redacted]

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Institutional Vulnerabilities. Institutional factors, particularly the size and capabilities of the military, also can influence the likelihood of a junior officers coup. The relatively unsophisticated and poorly disciplined FAd'H has approximately 8,800 men under arms. In Haiti--as in Liberia and Ghana--a small force, with cleavages between senior and lower ranks, facilitates close contact among junior officers and NCOs without significant interference from above. In addition, the Haitian military offers little opportunity for promotion in the

middle and lower grades, while a disproportionate number of Haiti's 900 commissioned officers hold senior rank. Junior officers, most of whom are relatively better trained and educated, reportedly chafe under this top-heavy leadership, whom they regard as unprofessional. [redacted]

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Factors Working Against a Coup

Although these conditions suggest Haiti would be prone to a military revolt from below, several key factors--present in the cases of Liberia and Ghana--currently are absent in Haiti. Given the elements favoring a coup that already exist, however, changes in these factors would be broad indicators of a serious threat.

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Access to Resources. One of the key elements in the success of any coup is the availability of sufficient resources to undertake an uprising. Lower-level officers in small militaries--as in Liberia and Ghana--often hold positions of greater responsibility and thus command more resources. In Haiti's case, however, all of the military's artillery and armored equipment presently are held by three units located in or near Port-au-Prince, with all armored vehicles assigned to the Presidential Guard. These three primary tactical units are commanded by colonels and have close ties to the current military leadership.

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Respected Leader. Another factor that has facilitated the success of junior officer coups in other Third World nations is the existence of a charismatic leader within the lower ranks who can galvanize discontent and effectively direct a revolt. We have no evidence that such a figure is present in the FAd'H. Nevertheless, we believe that this constraint--like the first--can be overcome if the junior officers approach a sympathetic senior officer for assistance--as they did in June. [redacted]

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Institutional Loyalty. A major factor working against a junior officer coup in Haiti, and a condition absent in many countries that have experienced such uprisings, is the compelling sense of institutional loyalty within the FAd'H. Factionalism caused by ethnic rivalries is a potent motive behind many junior officer coups. In Haiti, however, the military is not beset by ethnic strife and takes pride in its status--aside from the Catholic Church--as the country's only national institution. The junior officers and NCOs involved in Haiti's recent coup were motivated to protect the military as an institution and forwarded their concerns within the chain of command, [redacted]

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[redacted] We have no evidence that these individuals considered seizing power for themselves. [redacted]

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Outlook

We believe a junior officer or NCO coup, while not imminent, remains one of the more potent threats to the Namphy regime. Despite the many conditions favoring a coup, we have no evidence that any officers currently are engaged in such plotting. Furthermore, the High Command apparently recognizes the potential for such an uprising.

[redacted] is concerned that discontent among Presidential Guard NCOs who participated in the last coup is permeating the ranks of other major units in the capital. As a result, the High Command intends to separate the NCOs by sending some to training courses and reassigning others to units outside Port-au-Prince.

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A junior officer coup in Haiti, in our view, would be more likely to occur spontaneously rather than as a calculated plot. Some discrete event--such as failure to meet military pay schedules or a recurrence of violent popular protests--would probably be the spark. Although it would be difficult to predict, several specific indicators could portend an increase in the potential for such an uprising:

- Continued loss of respect for the regime's military leaders, who devise no plan to address the nation's problems.
- Failure of senior officers to placate junior officers perceiving that their careers are stalled and that they are not being amply rewarded.
- Growing complaints that corruption within the High Command is weakening military preparedness and threatening the well-being of the country as a whole.
- The emergence of a popular junior officer or NCO capable of leading the military rank-and-file.
- Steady deterioration of the economy and growing popular unrest.

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APPENDIX

Junior Officer Coups: A Historical Perspective

Successful coups by junior officers or enlisted men in Liberia (1980), Ghana (1979 and 1981), Burkina (1983 and 1987), and Burundi (1987) have raised concern that junior officer coups are a growing phenomenon. Junior officer coups have accounted for more than 40 percent of all military coups over the past five years, compared with only 20 percent in the early 1960s. Almost all have occurred in countries with a small, relatively unsophisticated and poorly disciplined military. [REDACTED]

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The interests of lower ranking officers often differ from those of their military and political superiors. Senior officers' ties to the political elite and junior officers' perceptions that the high-level officers gained their positions through patronage often put the two groups in conflict. In analyzing the more than 30 junior officer coups that have occurred during the past three decades, we have identified three types of coups in which junior officers often have taken the leading role:

- **Revolutionary coups**, which bring profound change to both the political and socioeconomic environment. These coups are usually accompanied by a unifying ideology--such as nationalism or Islamic fundamentalism--which tends to have a greater influence on junior officers who are less entrenched in the existing system and are attracted by radical alternatives. The 1969 coup in Libya that brought Qadhafi to power is an example.
- **Reform coups**, in which participants view themselves as the protectors of the country's values. Corruption, government inefficiency, and economic mismanagement often provide the impetus for action. In El Salvador, for example, the 1979 coup was motivated by a desire for moderate social reform, an improvement in human rights, and an end to corruption.
- **Intraelite coups**, which reflect the desire of one military faction to enhance its status vis-a-vis another group. The issues of pay, perquisites, and supply shortages are major factors prompting these coups--which account for more than half of all junior officer coups--as junior officers usually bear the brunt of such shortages. Supply deficiencies--a scandal involving the purchase of defective weapons--helped motivate a junior officer coup in Egypt in 1952. [REDACTED]

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A key ingredient for success is the extent and strength of the junior officers' organizational network. Ethnic and

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educational linkages appear to be particularly important, largely because young officers have had few opportunities to develop other associations. In El Salvador, [redacted] the "tanda" system--based on military academy graduating classes--provided a association for coup plotters in both 1960 and 1979. [redacted]

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Another determining factor is a lack of cohesion within the senior officer corps. A split in the senior ranks, or their promise not to intervene on behalf of the regime, often clears the way for a successful challenge by junior officers. In some cases, junior officers may act to preempt a coup attempt by senior officers, as was the case in Libya in 1969. In other cases, junior officers have turned to a particular faction or patron in the senior ranks to spearhead their opposition to the regime. A patron who can lend legitimacy to the cause is often in a position to monitor the loyalty of essential units. For example, in Burundi last year, the NCOs who successfully launched the coup turned to Major Pierre Buyoya to help consolidate their action and lead the new government. [redacted]

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The chances for success are significantly improved when the coup plotters are in command of or have connections to specially trained units. For example, Captain Ngouabi in the Congo (1968) and Captain Kong Le in Laos (1960) were commanders of paratrooper units, while Qadhafi was a communications officer. Such contact gives the junior officers access to better disciplined recruits and control over critical logistics. [redacted]

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Finally, research shows the presence of a charismatic leader like Qadhafi or Thomas Sankara in Burkina (1983) can determine the outcome of a coup. The participation of such a leader--especially one who has been imprisoned or otherwise persecuted by the government--is an important factor in rallying the support of junior officers. Leaders who can clearly articulate an alternative to the status quo and unite their peers in pursuit of a common objective have proved hard to stop. [redacted]

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