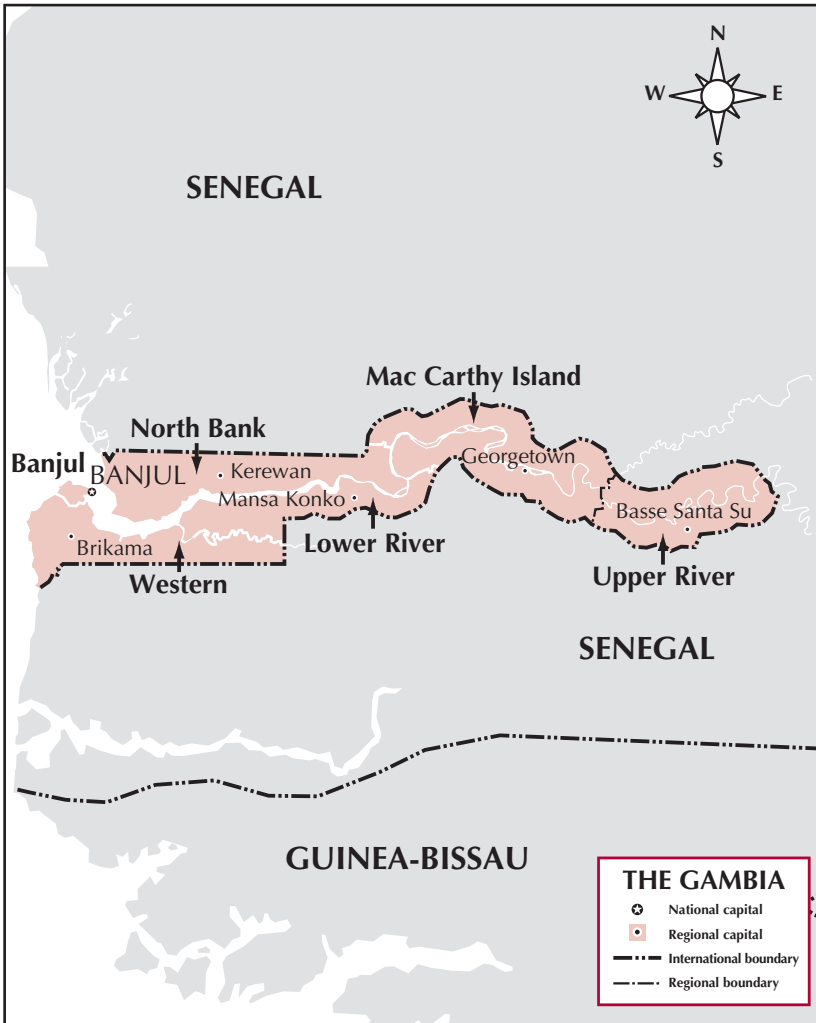


PART II



THE GAMBIA

OVERVIEW

The Gambia attained independence from the United Kingdom in 1965, and for the next 29 years it enjoyed relative political stability. In 1994, Captain Yahya Jammeh staged a coup and won subsequent elections held in 1996 and 2001. In 2001, his ruling party captured all but three seats in the ensuing legislative elections, which the main opposition party boycotted. President Jammeh is currently also defence minister.¹ While President Jammeh launched several anti-corruption initiatives in late 2004, including 'Operation No Compromise',² the government maintains tight control over the country's media.³ Freedom of expression watchdogs have linked several cases of intimidation and harassment of the local press to a group of armed thugs known as the Green Boys and widely reported to be affiliated with the ruling Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction (APRC).⁴

In addition to unrest generated by internal politics, the Gambia's stability is vulnerable to spillover from conflicts waged in neighbouring

countries.⁵ The country's proximity to Guinea-Bissau and the Casamance region of Senegal has made it particularly permeable to small arms traffickers. Although there are no active Gambian armed groups, in the 1990s weapons smuggled through the Gambia from Libya and Iraq reportedly reached Senegal's Movement of the Democratic Forces of Casamance (Mouvement des forces démocratiques de Casamance, MFDC).⁶ In 2004, a number of MFDC fighters were reported to still be in the country,⁷ and an increasing proportion of armed criminal violence is being perpetrated with weapons trafficked in from Casamance.⁸ The export of diamonds, which are not produced in the Gambia and therefore may be linked to the conflicts in Sierra Leone and Liberia, is also engendering concerns over security.⁹

ARMED GROUPS

Green Boys

Origins/composition:

The Green Boys are pro-government activists widely reported to be affiliated with the ruling APRC.¹⁰ The group was originally known as the

PART II

'22 July Movement' after the coup that brought President Jammeh to power on 22 July 1994. Members of the movement reportedly received firearms and religious training in Libya in the mid-1990s. The 22 July Movement was officially disbanded in 1999 but thereafter named Green Boys after the APRC's flagship colour. It has subsequently been involved in several cases of harassment (usually preceded by threats conveyed by letters, faxes, or phone calls) against journalists and press outfits that criticize government policies or members of Jammeh's close political circle.¹¹

Leadership:

Little is known about the Green Boys' hierarchy or size, and the government is extremely cautious about commenting on their existence.¹² At the 23 July National Assembly session, Hamat Bah, leader of the opposition National Reconciliation Party (NRP), claimed that two members of the national guard were among the six gunmen that set fire to the *Independent's* printing press on 12 April 2004. He further stated that one of them sustained burns during the operation and subsequently received medical treatment at the residence of the presidential guard

commander. The Gambian authorities neither investigated nor verified these claims, however.¹³

Areas of control/activity:

Primarily Banjul and its surrounding municipalities.

Sources of financing/support:

The Green Boys are allegedly linked to the ruling APRC.¹⁴

Status:

Active. Freedom of expression organizations have linked the Green Boys to at least four cases of harassment of journalists and press institutions in 2004.¹⁵

OUTLOOK

President Jammeh reiterated his commitment to tackle corruption in early 2005.¹⁶ Freedom of the press, however, has become a particularly sensitive issue. The latest incident to date occurred on 16 December 2004, when Reporters sans frontières (RSF) and Agence France Presse (AFP) correspondent Deyda Hydara was killed in a drive-by shooting two days after the Gambian National Assembly passed two pieces of repressive media legislation, which Hydara along with other local journalists had strongly opposed.¹⁷ As of

12 April 2005, the investigation was foundering amid local journalists' requests that the authorities examine the possible involvement of the Green Boys.¹⁸

Jammeh's grip on the country's internal affairs will likely tighten in the run-up to the next general election, scheduled for 2006,¹⁹ and the opposition remains divided.²⁰ The presence of armed elements and the existence of gun smuggling networks in the country, however, illustrate that the Gambia's political stability should not be taken for granted.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFP	Agence France Presse
APRC	Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction
MFDC	Mouvement des forces démocratiques de Casamance
NRP	National Reconciliation Party
RSF	Reporters sans frontières

ENDNOTES

- 1 CSC (2004).
- 2 IRIN (2004a; 2004b).
- 3 US Department of State (2005).
- 4 CPJ (2005a); RSF (2005b); OPC (2004).
See also Camara (2005).
- 5 In 2003, UNHCR reopened its office in the Gambia in response to an influx of migrants from neighbouring countries. In 2004, the Gambia hosted 7,465 refugees, mostly from (in order of refugee population) Sierra Leone, Senegal, Liberia and various countries of Central Africa. Three thousand one hundred of these benefit from UNHCR assistance (UNHCR, 2003, p. 225; UNOCHA, 2004, p. 9).
- 6 Evans (2004, p. 8); Szajkowski (2004, p. 435); Musah and Thamson (1999, p. 133).
- 7 Evans (2004, p. 8); Szajkowski (2004, p. 435); Musah and Thamson (1999, p. 133).
- 8 Evans (2004, p. 8).
- 9 Several key actors in the illicit Liberian diamond trade have recently moved to the Gambia. Gambian businessmen, however, have been involved in the diamond trade since even before the Sierra Leonean civil war. Written correspondence with Martin Evans, Research Associate, University of Leicester, 21 February 2005. See also CSC (2004) and Ebo (2003, p. 33).
- 10 CPJ (2005a); RSF (2005b); OPC (2004).

PART II

- See also Camara (2005).
- 11 RSF (2005b); CPJ (2005a).
 - 12 One exception, however, is police spokesman Supt Jallow's 27 December 2003 statement that seven members of the Green Boys, whom he said were 'part of those who went for training in Libya', had been arrested in connection with the assassination attempt against Ousman Sillah, a prominent Gambian lawyer working on a corruption scandal involving president Jammeh's former right-hand man, Baba Jobe. Interview with Léonard Vincent, Reporters sans frontières, Paris, 20 April 2005, by telephone.
 - 13 RSF (2005b).
 - 14 RSF (2005b); CPJ (2005a).
 - 15 These include death threat letters addressed to the managing editor of the *Independent* (13 January) and to the president of the Gambia Press Union (7 July), and the burning of the Independent's printing press (12 April) and of the house of the BBC's correspondent in the Gambia (15 August) (CPJ, 2005a; RSF, 2005a, 2005b; OPC, 2004). See also Camara (2005).
 - 16 IRIN (2005).
 - 17 RSF (2005a, 2005b); IRIN (2004c); CPJ (2005a).
 - 18 CPJ (2005a, 2005b); IRIN (2004d).
 - 19 BBC News (2005).
 - 20 US Department of State (2005).
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