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## Sandhurst-trained officer 'led Gambian coup'

### Mastermind of attempt to unseat strongman Yahya Jammeh spent time at Royal Military Academy



Tough guy - President Yahya Jammeh gives many Gambians cause to flee Photo: AFP/Getty



By **Colin Freeman**, chief foreign correspondent

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A Sandhurst-trained military officer has emerged as the mastermind of the attempted coup against Yahya Jammeh, the strongman president of Gambia.

Lieutenant Colonel Lamin Sanneh, 36, a former commander of the country's elite presidential guard, was named as one of a number of men who tried to seize control of the tiny west African state while its leader was abroad in Dubai.

On Friday it emerged that Mr Sanneh, who was killed during the coup attempt, was a career soldier who had received extensive training abroad. His military tuition included spells at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst and at America's National Defence University. He was appointed as commander of the presidential guard in 2012, but is believed to have then left to go the US where he claimed asylum.

Reports in the Gambian media claim that he then teamed up with other Gambian opposition figures in the US and Europe to carry out the bid to

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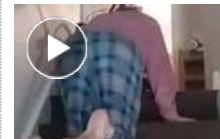
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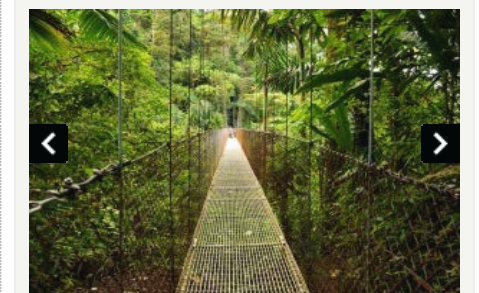


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end Mr Jammeh's 20-year rule.

Gambia's national intelligence agency is now understood to be interrogating "dozens" of people believed to have been involved in the coup, which was foiled by regime loyalists after a brief gunfight.

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Mr Jammeh, **whose time in office has mixed witchcraft with human rights abuses**, returned home earlier this week to accuse foreign "terrorists" of planning the attack. He has pointed the finger at dissidents based in America, Germany, and Britain, the country's former colonial ruler.

"No force can take this place and nobody can destabilise this country," he said. "Anybody who plans to attack this country, be ready, because you are going to die."

Investigators have allegedly seized the plan laying out the attack, in which the three suspects, including the alleged ringleader, were killed, according to a military officer.

One alleged conspirator also led authorities to "a large quantity of very sophisticated automatic weapons and explosives" in a shipping container disguised as second-hand clothing at Banjul's port, Gambian intelligence officials said.

Four other officers suspected of participating in the attempt had taken refuge in neighbouring Guinea-Bissau, a military source told AFP.

Mr Jammeh, 49, who seized power in a 1994 coup that ousted Gambia's founding leader, Dawda Jawara, has come under fire for serious human rights abuses, including repression of the media and the jailing of rivals.

He claims to have foiled a succession of coup plots in the country and military sources have said there are fears he may now launch a vicious purge.

While Gambia is a popular winter sun destination for European holidaymakers, especially from Britain, human rights groups say its people live in fear of its ruler, who has a reputation for practising sorcery.

In 2009, more than 1,000 "sorcerers" were rounded up at gunpoint by the president's "Green Beret" special guards and forced to drink hallucinogenic potions to "exorcise" them. Mr Jammeh has also executed large numbers of prisoners on death row, reportedly in the belief that it would fend off evil spirits who had attacked relatives. In 2013 he also took Gambia out of the Commonwealth, describing it as an outdated colonial institution.



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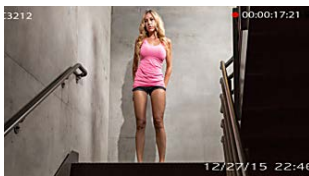
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