

'None But Ourselves'

Democratic Design of Security and Defence Policy in Africa

Laurie Nathan

*Laurie Nathan is a Research Fellow at both the London School of Economics and the University of Cape Town. Between 1992 and 2003 he was Executive Director of the Centre for Conflict Resolution at the University of Cape Town. He currently serves on the Ministerial Review Commission on Intelligence in South Africa. He is the author of *Local Ownership of Security Sector Reform: A Guide for Donors*, University of Birmingham (2007).*

This essay was awarded first prize in the 2007 Nelson Mandela International Essay Competition on African Security and Development

Over the past few years defence analysts and staff officers have explored the emergence of a 'revolution in military affairs', a dramatic change in the nature of operations and warfare occasioned by sophisticated technology and organizational innovation. What are the implications for African armies, which are largely low-tech? More fundamentally, what should African armies in the Twenty-first century be doing? And most important of all, who should decide what African armies and other security services do and look like?

In most countries on the continent, the determination of defence and security policy lies exclusively with senior officers and the cabinet or president. These issues are considered too sensitive and specialized for comment by civil society and parliament. In certain post-war countries, the situation is yet more extreme as foreign governments that pay the bills also call the shots, with even the local government getting scarcely a look in.

By contrast, there are a few states whose formulation of security and defence policy is inclusive and participatory. The benefits are considerable: enhanced democracy; a more people-centred approach to security; and legitimization of the roles and spending of the military and other security services. If there is a need for a revolution in African military affairs, this is it! What African armies do and look like in the Twenty-first century should be

the outcome of democratic consultation and decision-making.

This essay focuses on the process by which security and defence policy is crafted. Drawing on the negative case of Liberia and positive examples from South Africa and Sierra Leone, it is shown that process considerations are not soft and trivial but go to the heart of governance, legitimacy, effectiveness, sustainability and security. It is argued that donor governments should therefore shift their emphasis from punting Western models to supporting local capacity-building in the interests of broad national ownership.

Who should decide what African armies and other security services do and look like?

The South African White Paper on Defence¹

The business of preparing the South African White Paper on Defence of 1996 was initiated by the Deputy Minister of Defence shortly after the country's first democratic election in 1994. The aims were to bring defence policy into line with the new Constitution and post-apartheid security environment; provide a high level policy platform for a Defence Review and new Defence Act; forge a national consensus on defence policy and thereby confer legitimacy on that policy and the armed forces; and serve as a confidence-building measure in Southern Africa.

In the nature of South Africa's negotiated settlement, the drafting committee included former apartheid officials and former members of the



Security Sector Reform is dominated by external actors in Liberia. A young boy at a UN security checkpoint north of the capital Monrovia. *Photo by Greg Mills*

liberation movements. They disagreed strongly on topics such as transparency, regional security, military doctrine, affirmative action and arms exports. They were expected to resolve these disputes in accordance with the Constitution and a set of principles on 'defence in a democracy', drawn up by an anti-militarist research group and approved by the Minister.

The first version of the White Paper went through several iterations before being approved by the Chief of Defence Force, the Secretary for Defence and the Deputy Minister. In June 1995 the Minister tabled the draft White Paper in Parliament and called for public comment. He also published adverts in daily newspapers inviting feedback from interested parties. The consultation was intended to improve the quality of the document and contribute to building a national consensus on defence.

Responses were received from soldiers, veterans, the defence industry, defence analysts, environmentalists,

political parties, religious bodies and human rights groups. Their impact on defence policy was substantial and progressive. Non-governmental organizations were responsible for the White Paper's emphasis on a non-offensive defence doctrine; a collective approach to regional security; respect for international humanitarian law; gender equality; preventing military damage to land and the environment; and respect for human rights in arms trade.

The consultation process culminated in the next draft of the White Paper, which was approved by the principal decision-makers. In late 1995, the Minister presented the revised document to the Parliamentary Defence Committee. Over a period of several weeks, the chief drafter explained the rationale for its provisions, answering questions and recording the amendments proposed by the parliamentarians.

In light of the government's policy of national reconciliation, the chairperson

of the Defence Committee was doggedly non-partisan. Whenever contentious issues arose, he endeavoured to forge a multi-party consensus rather than rely on the ruling party's majority in the committee. There were many angry clashes but in only one instance the committee failed to reach consensus and went to a vote (relating to the official language of the Defence Force).

The ensuing debates between the various stakeholders were not only transparent but also published. The draft White Paper of January 1996 incorporated the views of the Parliamentary Committee. The March version included the response of the Minister and the Department of Defence. The April draft included further comments from the Parliamentary Committee. In May, the penultimate version was presented to Cabinet, which made several amendments.

In the political battles around these various drafts, the ministers sought to maintain a balance between a range of

sometimes conflicting imperatives. They had to ensure that the document was technically sound from a military perspective, conformed to constitutional principles, captured the values and priorities of the new government, honoured the government's commitment to reconciliation and enjoyed the support of senior officers, most of whom were apartheid-era officials.

In May 1996, the Minister tabled the final version of the White Paper in Parliament. As a result of the extensive prior consultation and the non-partisan stance of the chairperson of the Defence Committee, all the political parties in Parliament voted to approve the White Paper without amendment. Every party stated that the Minister had attained a national consensus.

The drafting of the White Paper was time-consuming, complicated and frequently adversarial because of the number of actors involved in the process and because their interests and values were often diametrically opposed. Nevertheless, the effort bore dividends. Against the backdrop of apartheid, it helped to confer legitimacy on defence policy and the military, it provided a consensual platform for transforming the armed forces over the next decade, and it contributed to reconciliation among senior officers and politicians who had previously been enemies.

Outsourcing Security and Defence Reform in Liberia²

In 2003, the civil war in Liberia ended with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). The agreement provides that the United States will 'play a leading role' in reforming the armed forces. In early 2006, the newly elected government of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf upheld this provision and the US Administration outsourced major security sector reform (SSR) functions to American private security contractors. This has generated a great deal of tension and controversy.

Dyncorp International was contracted to restructure and train the military and to vet and recruit its members. Pacific Architects and Engineers is responsible for specialized training, equipment, logistics and base

services, and the US State Department administers a \$95 million training package. In May 2006, the RAND Corporation presented the Liberian government with a commissioned report entitled, 'Making Liberia Safe: Transformation of the National Security Sector'. The RAND team consulted Liberians but did not include any Liberian nationals.

At this early stage of security reform in Liberia, it is evident that outsourcing SSR to foreign companies militates against the acceptability of the outcomes and obstructs the emergence of a national consensus on key functions of the state

Outsourcing SSR to foreigners reflects a failure to grasp the elemental politics of security and local ownership. By way of example, the Liberian Defence Ministry organized a consultative workshop that recommended the formation of a 6,500 strong army but the Pentagon, on the basis of a technical review and assessment of affordability, set a limit of 2,000 soldiers. The Pentagon figure might be financially sustainable but without a Liberian consensus, it is not politically sustainable.

Unsurprisingly, parliamentarians have expressed frustration at their exclusion from military reform and criticized the lack of information, consultation, transparency and accountability in the programmes run by outsiders. They insist that they cannot perform their oversight function properly. Dyncorp has not acceded to Parliament's requests to appear before it, maintaining that the requests should be directed through the US State Department.

Civil society groups have also complained bitterly about their lack of

participation in SSR. According to one of their leaders:

Civil society has not been involved in any meaningful sense in security sector reform in Liberia. In fact, not only is civil society not involved, there is no public debate on these matters. Dyncorp activities are shrouded in secrecy. We have been trying for almost a year to obtain a copy of the Memorandum of Understanding that resulted in Dyncorp's appearance in Monrovia but so far we cannot get that document in spite of the high level access we have in government. We are led to believe that since we are not paying for any of these reform undertakings, we cannot participate in the process and we need only be grateful to those who are paying the cost.³

In 2006, a conference attended by eighty-one non-governmental organizations objected to the over-reliance on RAND and Dyncorp and called for civil society to have an equal voice in security reform. The government has resisted such calls on the grounds that the US has devoted substantial funds to SSR, has already formulated its plans and is unlikely to cancel contracts signed with private companies.

Greater domestic ownership might yet be achieved through the Governance Reform Commission, established by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) to promote good governance and sound public sector management. The government has asked it to review the RAND report and provide advice on the evolution of security policy. The Commission is headed by Amos Sawyer, the widely respected former Interim President of Liberia, who argues that all sectors, including the military, must be brought under a common governance framework as an essential condition for local ownership. In this formulation, local ownership is not simply a means to an end; it is a fundamentally important political goal in its own right.

At this early stage of security reform in Liberia, it is evident that outsourcing SSR to foreign companies militates against the acceptability of the outcomes and obstructs the emergence

of a national consensus on key functions of the state. In his study of security reform in Liberia, Adedeji Ebo draws the following conclusion:

*New security structures are not sustainable without a collective vision of national security and a reform process that accommodates competing demands and interests within society. The vision is best defined locally on the basis of domestic initiatives, albeit with external support. If the process is externally driven, the basis for legitimacy is severely undermined.*⁴

The Security Review in Sierra Leone⁵

In 2004, President Kabbah of Sierra Leone launched a comprehensive Security Review. The aims were to evaluate the main threats to development and stability as the country recovered from a devastating civil war; design appropriate and affordable policies and strategies to address the threats; and identify the institutional arrangements needed to deal with the threats and co-ordinate the strategies.

The Review was motivated by a number of contextual factors. The first was the planned withdrawal of the UN Mission in Sierra Leone, whose 17,000 troops had helped to stabilize the country after hostilities ended in 2001. Second, the existing security reforms lacked coherence and co-ordination; it made no sense to focus on the military, police and intelligence agencies in isolation from each other. Third, the Security Review would feed into the government's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, which had to make hard choices about the allocation of limited funds.

Under the leadership of the Vice-President, the Review was managed by the National Security Co-ordinator. The Office of National Security administered the process and set up a Working Group comprising key actors from government and civil society. The British government provided financial and technical support.

The terms of reference stipulated that the Review had to be conducted in consultation with the widest possible

range of stakeholders. The Working Group consequently held workshops throughout Sierra Leone, drawing people from all the districts. The participants included local administrators, traditional rulers, students, teachers and representatives of various civil society groups. The purpose was to share information, engage in dialogue, generate options, achieve consensus and refine outcomes.

The vision of security emanating from the workshops was summarized as follows: good governance; improved revenue generation and control of resources; improved social services; improved political will; quality education; developed agriculture; and improved infrastructure and communication. The threats to this vision were seen to be a lack of political will; institutionalized corruption; lawlessness and indiscipline; subversion and coups; bad governance; and uncontrolled immigration.

The vision and threats are strikingly different from those that would have emerged from a closed door discussion within the precincts of the state. They are not limited to traditional security issues, they are not intended to justify spending on the security forces and they are not preoccupied with 'enemies out there'. Instead, they reflect popular concerns and aspirations, include problems located within the state and offer a security paradigm that is holistic and people-centred.

Following the formulation of the vision and threats, the Working Group convened workshops to forge a security policy framework. The final output was the Security Sector Reform Programme, which seeks to build and transform the institutional capacity of the security sector. The strategies include policy and legislative reform, training of personnel, provision of adequate logistics and establishment of inter-agency partnerships and effective oversight mechanisms.

The Programme also emphasizes community participation in security matters through provincial and district security committees. This was partly a result of the public consultation; having been included in the Review, communities were keen to stay engaged

and be involved in ensuring their own safety. It had also become evident to senior officers that positive relations with communities would greatly facilitate the work of the security services.

The long-term outcomes of the Programme are expected to include better trained and more professional armed forces, the establishment of a Ministry of Defence under joint civilian and military management, a professional and well-motivated police force, and improved delivery by all the security bodies. Equally important have been the political and security benefits of a process that was participative, inclusive and responsive to the needs of citizens. This served to confer legitimacy on the outputs, avoid militaristic policies and reduce mistrust of the security forces.

Domination and paternalism by external actors induce resentment, resistance and inertia among domestic actors, who have little commitment to externally imposed products

In a context of incomplete and tenuous democratization and security reform, such processes are also vital contributions to consolidating democracy, promoting respect for democracy among the security forces and cementing their accountability to the civil authority. These imperatives will not be achieved solely through participatory endeavours like the Security Review but they will never be achieved if so cardinal an issue as security lies outside the realm of democratic governance.

Implications for Donor Governments

Over the past few years, a growing number of donor governments have shed their reluctance to enter the choppy waters of military and police reform in

post-war societies and developing countries. SSR is becoming a major thematic focus of peacebuilding and reconstruction, requiring a whole-of-government orientation on the part of both the donors and the partner countries. The UN is currently debating its approach to SSR, the European Union has recently formulated its position and the OECD Development Assistance Committee has a long-established perspective.⁶

Although the external actors profess a devotion to the principle of local ownership, they often flout the principle in the field and impose their models and programmes on domestic actors. They have no confidence in these actors and believe in the universality of Western models. Underestimating the difficulty of state building and transformation, frustrated with the slow pace or lack of reform and driven by short-term funding cycles, they rush the reform process at the expense of consultation and inclusivity.

This strategy has proven to be singularly ineffective. Domination and paternalism by external actors induce resentment, resistance and inertia among domestic actors, who have little commitment to externally imposed products.⁷ Reforms that are not shaped and driven locally are unlikely to be implemented properly and sustained. When donor governments regard inclusivity, consultation and ownership concerns as distractions from the core challenge of enhancing security, they fail to grasp an elementary point: process concerns are about politics and are therefore no less important than the hard dimensions of security.

Democratic consultation and decision-making might be fractious, protracted and inefficient but the benefits far outweigh the costs. As occurred in South Africa and Sierra Leone, these processes can contribute to the legitimacy of the security services; improve relations between the services and society; thereby enhance the effectiveness of the services; build a popular constituency for SSR; generate benign policies on security and defence; and strengthen the institutions of democracy.

This is of course a best case scenario. In fragile democracies and weak states, the benefits of participatory policy formulation might be tepid or elusive. Nevertheless, it is only by democratic means that democracy has any chance of being entrenched and it is only by involving civil society that defence and security policies have any chance of being people-centred. Policies crafted by colonels in dark rooms beyond the glare of public scrutiny and debate cannot possibly be good for citizens.

Donor governments should vacate the driving seat, contain their proclivity to promote Western models and concentrate instead on assisting domestic actors engaged in SSR. They can play an invaluable role by supporting local capacity-building in particular. Without the requisite capacity – comprising skills, knowledge, expertise, funds and equipment – there is no prospect of sustainable reform or sustained security.

In the interests of genuine national ownership, as opposed to government ownership, capacity-building is required as much in parliament and civil society as in the state. A Parliamentary Defence Committee, for example, cannot have a fruitful discussion on military doctrine, force design and budgets if its members lack expertise on these topics. Donors should therefore back efforts to enhance the technical proficiency, comparative knowledge and research capacity of defence and security committees. This would equip parliamentarians to engage in informed debate and perform a critical oversight function.

Comparative knowledge can also serve to challenge authoritarian thinking on defence. For example, transparency on defence spending and arms transfers might appear inconceivable in a society whose military activities are cloaked in secrecy. Yet exposure to the UN Arms Register and the published defence budgets of other countries can make the prospect of greater transparency seem less heretical and alarming.

Donors should also support a wide array of non-governmental organizations that want to influence defence and security policy. There is no shortage of such organizations in Africa. Apart from a

handful of elite NGOs, however, most of them lack the funding to play a dynamic role. Donors could address this problem by setting up a small grants scheme for civil society engagement in SSR. The cumulative effect of a multitude of civil society initiatives would be a significant contribution to democracy and SSR. Citizens have a basic right to express their views on security and defence and are most likely to advocate reforms that advance their interests.

What African armies, police and intelligence agencies do and look like in the Twenty-first century should be determined by democratic processes involving government, the security services, parliament, political parties and civil society. Good decisions are not guaranteed but there is no doubt that authoritarian decision-making and donor domination undermine democracy and the legitimacy of security reforms. ■

NOTES

- ¹ This section is based on the author's experience as the chief drafter of the White Paper.
- ² This section is based on Adedeji Ebo, 'Liberia Case Study: Outsourcing SSR to Foreign Companies', in Laurie Nathan, *Local Ownership of Security Sector Reform: A Guide for Donors*, 2007, pp. 84-92, available at <www.crisisstates.com/download/others/SSR%20Reform.%20Nathan.pdf>. See also Louise Andersen, 'Post-Conflict Security Sector Reform and the Challenge of Ownership: The Case of Liberia', *DIIS Brief*, Danish Institute for International Studies, 2006.
- ³ Quoted in Ebo, *op cit.*, pg. 88.
- ⁴ Ebo, *op cit.*, pg. 84.
- ⁵ This section is based on Kellie Conteh, 'Sierra Leone Case Study: Local Ownership of the Security Review and Transformation Processes' in Nathan, *op cit.*, pp. 93-99. See also Jeremy Ginjifer, 'The Challenge of the Security Sector and Security Reform Processes in Democratic Transitions: The Case of Sierra Leone', *Democratization* (Vol. 13, No. 5, 2006), pp. 791-810.
- ⁶ See OECD DAC, *Security System Reform and Governance, DAC Guidelines and Reference Series, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris, 2005.*
- ⁷ See Eric Scheye and Gordon Peake, 'Unknotting Local Ownership', in Anja Ebnöther and Philipp Fluri (eds), *After Intervention: Public Security Management in Post-Conflict Societies. From Intervention to Sustainable Local Ownership*, GKS, Vienna, 2005.