

# Good Governance, Security and Disarmament in Africa

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Laurie Nathan\*

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## Abstract

*Militarisation in Africa is primarily a symptom of intra-state crises. The crises gave rise to a security vacuum which states and groups seek to fill through violence. The ensuing vicious cycle of insecurity will not be broken, and substantial demilitarisation will not be achieved, without addressing the structural causes of the crises. The priority in this regard is the establishment of good governance. While a positive relationship may exist between disarmament, development and security, the more significant relationship is between good governance, security and disarmament.*

## Introduction

I argue in this paper that militarisation in Africa is essentially a product of weak states and intra-state crises. It derives less from efforts to maintain security and pursue national interests against other states, than from the absence of security within states. The conclusion from this argument is that demilitarisation in Africa will not be achieved on a meaningful scale without addressing satisfactorily the structural causes of national crises and insecurity. The first part of the paper presents a critique of the conventional approach to security which relies on military force. The second part traverses the well-known alternative perspective which postulates demilitarisation on the ground that a positive relationship exists between disarmament development and security. The third and final parts suggest that in the context of intra-state crises, the challenge of demilitarisation is better understood in terms of the relationship between good governance, security and disarmament.

## **Rethinking Security<sup>1</sup>**

The extent of militarisation in a given society is a function of historical, geographic, cultural, political and strategic factors. It flows also from philosophical assumptions about state sovereignty, international relations, domestic governance and the use of force. The concept of security is central in this regard: how is security conceived? what constitutes a threat to security? whose security is at issue? and by what means should security be sought? How these questions are answered at a conceptual level will have a major bearing on policy and strategy.

The conventional approach to security was shaped by the political conditions of the Cold War. For close on forty years the international system was characterised by acute tension between rival ideological blocs and the prospect of another world war. In these circumstances, the debate around security focused on states and military stability (Booth, 1994: 3). Security policy was concerned chiefly with defending the sovereignty, territory and political independence of the state. The predominant response to perceived challenges was the threat or use of force. Fuelled by the self-serving interests of military establishments, the perpetual tendency was to build larger armies and arsenals in anticipation of worst-case scenarios.

This approach has a number of major shortcomings: it ignores the root causes of conflict; it fails to take adequate account of the security of people and the many non-military threats to their security; it contributes to a militarist ethos in civil society; and it diverts resources from more constructive employment. This approach may also be counter-productive if the military steps taken by a state to strengthen its security induce insecurity in other states. The likely reaction of those states might be to build their own military capacity, leading inexorably to an arms race. The net result of this scenario, referred to as the "security dilemma", is a reduction in the security of all the states concerned (Buzan, 1991).

Moreover, as in the case of apartheid South Africa, states which lack internal legitimacy typically invoke the notion of "national security" to justify the suppression of their citizens. In such circumstances, "national security" amounts to little more than regime security. The principal source of people's insecurity is their own government rather than potential foreign aggressor (Thomas, 1991). Systematic repression requires considerable sums to be spent on the security forces at the expense of development and the provision of welfare services. The resultant deterioration in standards of living further diminishes the security of citizens and, in some instances, intensifies popular resistance against the state. Olu Ademiji describes this vicious cycle as follows:

Very often, arms acquisitions by Third World countries in the interests of security are made at the apparent cost of primary or basic needs in the area of social and economic well-being. Given the fragile economic base, which

cannot sustain the expenditure on arms, and the equally fragile political base, which requires arms acquisition, self-preservation often dictates a choice of defence over development. The non-military threats to security are thus neglected, creating further cause for instability (quoted in Vale, 1992).

In the light of these problems, United Nations (UN) agencies, independent commissions and peace scholars have long sought to promote alternative security theories and strategies (e.g. Booth, 1991 and 1994; Boulding, 1992; Brandt Commission, 1980; Brundtland Commission, 1987; Life and Peace Institute, 1990; and Palme Commission, 1984 and 1989). In the post Cold War era, many of their ideas have been adopted by the mainstream discipline of strategic studies (e.g. Chipman, 1992), as well as by military leaders (e.g. Worner, 1991) and governments.

Government support is evident, at least at the level of discourse, in the proposal to establish a Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Co-operation in Africa (CSSDCA) (ALF 1991; Nathan, 1992). The proposal, formulated in 1991 by African heads of state and government under the auspices of General Obasanjo's Africa Leadership Forum, is modeled on the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe and draws heavily on the paradigm employed by the Palme Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues (1984 and 1989).

The CSSDCA initiative promotes a set of principles and policies grouped in four baskets or calabashes: security, stability, development and co-operation. The security calabash revolves around the argument that national and regional security should be broadened beyond military matters to include political, social, economic and environmental factors. Abuse of human rights, a lack of self-sufficiency in food and energy, environmental degradation, underdevelopment and a host of other critical problems constitute grave threats to the security of people. These problems also threaten the security of states since they may lead to bloody conflict between governments and citizens.

Security is consequently defined as an all-encompassing concept that enables citizens to live in peace and harmony; have access to resources and the basic necessities of life; participate fully and freely in the processes of governance; and enjoy the protection of fundamental rights. This broad definition marks a radical departure from the state-centric model of security in Africa. Indeed, the CSSDCA proposal makes a point of distinguishing between the security of people and the security of states. The former is fulfilled by satisfying the political, cultural and socio-economic needs of individuals and communities, and the latter is not assured where these needs are not met.

South Africa's democratic government elected in April 1994 has embraced the CSSDCA approach to security (see Republic of South Africa, 1994 and 1996). Some

military officers who served under the previous regime claim that the approach is not new at all since the apartheid security doctrine of Total Strategy similarly emphasised the political and socio-economic dimensions of security (see Swilling and Phillips, 1989). The two models are in fact diametrically opposed: whereas the latter sought to militarise all aspects of national policy, the former seeks to demilitarise the notion of security. This difference is apparent in the following summary features of the new thinking on security:

- Security is conceived as a holistic phenomenon that is not restricted to military matters but broadened to incorporate political, social, economic and environmental issues.
- The objects of security are not confined to states but extend at different levels of society to include people, regions and the global community.
- Threats to security are not limited to military challenges to state sovereignty and territorial integrity; they include poverty, oppression, social injustice and ecological degradation.
- The objectives of security policy therefore go beyond achieving an absence of war to encompass the attainment of democracy, sustainable economic development, social justice and protection of the environment.
- The state's responsibility for ensuring the security of its citizens does not lie exclusively or even predominantly with the police, military and intelligence services. It is shared by many government departments and ultimately resides with Parliament.
- As discussed below, disarmament and other forms of demilitarisation are more likely to enhance than undermine the security of people and states.

Disarmament entails reductions in forces, military spending and weapons holdings. Since World War II the UN has devoted much attention to the necessity for progress in this area in the interests of international peace and security. In 1978 the General Assembly resolved that the ultimate goal of the international community is general and complete disarmament under effective international control; the resolution has served as a guiding principle in subsequent UN deliberations on the subject (Canadian Institute for International Peace and Security, 1989). The Organisation of African Unity has endorsed this position, and African states have repeatedly declared their commitment to conventional and nuclear disarmament (Tokareva, 1989; and United Nations, 1990).

There are two essential motivations for disarmament. First, arms build-ups and the growing sophistication of weaponry in many regions make the world a more dangerous place: they heighten political instability, increase the risk of hostilities and raise the human and economic costs of warfare. Second, armaments divert financial resources and skilled labour from more productive ends. They are a major cause of the net outflow of capital from countries in the South, contributing greatly to underdevelopment. In short, there is a positive relationship between disarma-

ment, development and security. The new South Africa government follows this logic in its White Paper on Defence (Republic of South Africa, 1996: 5). It maintains that the greatest threats to the South African people are criminal violence and socio-economic problems like unemployment, poverty, poor education and inadequate social services. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) is thus "the principal long-term means of promoting the security of citizens and, thereby, the stability of the country". There is consequently "a compelling need to reallocate state resources to the RDP", and to rationalise the armed forces and contain military spending accordingly.

### **Militarisation and Structural Crisis**

Demilitarisation cannot be considered solely in terms of disarmament since it also encompasses a range of qualitative relationships, processes and values in the political, social and economic spheres (Cock, 1989). Andreski identifies the following trends as indicators thereof:

First, ... an aggressive foreign policy, based on a readiness to resort to war; second, the preponderance of the military in the state, the extreme case being that of military rule; third, subservience of the whole society to the needs of the army which may involve a recasting of social life in accordance with the pattern of military organisation; and fourth, an ideology which promotes military ideas (quoted in Cock, 1989: 3).

The most important aspect of militarisation is arguably a tendency by governments or opposition groups to rely on force in the management of international and/or domestic relations and conflict. Such reliance is a critical issue from a normative perspective because it leads directly to destruction of life, property and, in extreme situations, entire communities. From an analytical perspective, it is often the principal source of other forms of militarisation, necessarily requiring the devotion of human and material resources to military means. As argued below, this tendency is so dominant and pervasive in African countries wracked by insecurity that it precludes substantial disarmament.

The problem of militarisation in Africa is largely a consequence of structural conditions which constitute an intra-state crisis. Four structural conditions are central in this regard: authoritarian rule and abuse of human rights and freedoms; acute socio-economic deprivation and inequity; the exclusion of minority or majority groups from governance and economic opportunity because of their race, ethnicity or religion; and weak states in the sense of lacking the institutional capacity to manage normal political and social conflict in a consensual and non-violent way.

These conditions constitute a crisis because they render people and states

profoundly insecure and give rise to a societal propensity towards large-scale violence. The risk of violence increases when the four conditions listed above are present simultaneously, mutually reinforcing and exacerbated by other structural factors. At the national level, these factors may include the lack of coincidence between nations and states as a result of the colonial imposition of borders, and scarcity and degradation of natural resources. At the international level they include the debt crisis; the imbalance in economic power and trade relations between North and South; military support to dictators by foreign states; and the structural adjustment programmes of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Contrary to the analytical premise of much of the academic and policy literature on peace and conflict, intra-state crises are not confined to situations of extreme violence. Crises and violence are better understood as related but distinct phenomena, the latter being typically a manifestation of the former. As illustrated below, violence is either an organised and deliberate response to a crisis or a spontaneous and sporadic outcome thereof.

- If groups are marginalised because of their race, ethnicity or religion, and if more generally citizens are subject to oppression and repression, the potential for armed rebellion will be high; and since authoritarian regimes do not rule with the consent of the governed, they must rely on force to stay in power.
- If people are hungry and have no access to resources and economic opportunities, some of them may turn to banditry as a means of subsistence. They may also initiate riots in protest against corruption and the accumulation of wealth by the ruling elite.
- If the state is too weak to maintain law and order, banditry and other types of criminal activity will flourish. Communities, and in some cases the state itself, will privatise security.
- If the state does not have the legitimacy and institutional capacity to resolve the low-level political and social conflict that characterises all societies, some individuals and groups will attempt to protect their interests and settle their disputes through violence.

These examples demonstrate that violence is not intrinsically the worst-case scenario, nor peace the ideal state of affairs. For the governments and citizens of stable Western democracies, the concept of peace is unproblematic. Defined narrowly as the absence of widespread physical violence, it is held to be an unqualified good in terms of orderly politics and the sanctity of life. In authoritarian states, in contrast, oppressed groups may prize freedom and dignity more than peace and may be prepared to provoke and endure extreme violence to achieve the right of citizenship. Since hostilities threaten relationships of power and privilege, peace serves the interests of the regime and the foreign powers which support it.

The cessation of hostilities is thus not so much a goal in its own right as an outcome of the antagonists' willingness to reach a settlement that addresses the root cause(s) of violence. Both ethically and analytically, the primary objective of efforts to prevent and resolve African crises is best formulated as the establishment of *peace with justice* (see Galtung, 1969). This formulation is not meant in a simplistic and romantic sense. Rather, it helps to explain why the termination of civil wars is so difficult as disputants invariably have conflicting views on the constituent elements of justice in a new dispensation.

In the situations depicted above, the use of force and resultant militarisation compound the crisis. As noted, in the previous section, they promote a culture of violence, perpetuate and deepen insecurity and conflict, divert resources from development, and lay productive capacity to waste. For these reasons, demilitarisation in Africa is regarded as a high priority by certain local and foreign organisations. They focus on, in particular, the demobilisation of former combatants; the proliferation of light weapons; conventional arms transfers; unstable civil-military relations; disproportionate military spending; and the role of mercenary outfits like Executive Outcomes. These efforts will not yield significant results, however, because they focus on the symptoms rather than the causes of intra-state crises. The vicious cycle of insecurity might be mitigated through such efforts but it will not be reversed without overcoming the structural problems that generate and define the crises. Put differently, the crises create a security vacuum which state and non-state actors seek to fill by violent means; demilitarisation is contingent on the filling of that vacuum by legitimate political means.

## **Good Governance**

At the most fundamental level, then, demilitarisation in African countries depends on the resolution of national conflict through inclusive multi-party negotiations and the introduction of democratic and effective governance. Only in these circumstances can development and human security be achieved and sustained. While a positive relationship may exist between disarmament, development and security, the relationship posited here is between good governance, security and disarmament.

It is no coincidence that, for example, the process of light weapons disarmament in Mali followed the ending of military rule and the Taureg rebellion in that country. Similarly, the process of demilitarising the South African state flowed in the first instance from the demise of the Cold War and then escalated with the advent of democracy (see Nathan, 1998). The South African White Paper on Defence motivates demilitarisation in precisely these terms: "While the potential for instability and conflict remains [in the post-apartheid era], the salient fact is that the government is no longer unrepresentative and at war with its own people and neighbouring states in Southern Africa" (Republic of South Africa, 1996: 2).

Conversely, civil society in South Africa remains highly militarised, chiefly in the form of violent crime and private security, because gross poverty and inequity have not yet been ameliorated.

It follows from the above that the potential for demilitarisation in Africa is greater in democratic societies than in authoritarian states. Nevertheless, the realisation of that potential is frequently inhibited by one or more of three factors. First, countries which are democratic and free from large-scale violence will be reluctant to scale down their military capability if they are threatened by instability in neighbouring states. Second, they may be confronted by extremist groups which reject an inclusive political dispensation and resort to terrorism.

Third, good governance is not restricted to free and fair elections, respect for human rights and the other features of democracy. It also entails efficiency and effectiveness in fulfilling the functions of the state. These qualities are missing in most African countries, which lack the skills base, expertise, resources and infrastructure to meet the security and welfare needs of citizens. In the absence of the requisite institutional capacity, the values and principles of democracy cannot be "operationalised", the security vacuum will not be filled, and endeavours to demilitarise the state and civil society will be thwarted. For example, adherence to the rule of law presupposes the existence of a competent and fair judiciary, police service and criminal justice system; the expectation that police would respect human rights is unrealistic if they have not been trained in techniques other than the use of force; democratic civil-military relations rest not only on the organisational culture of the armed forces but also on the proficiency of departments of defence and parliamentary defence committees; and illegal trafficking in small arms will not be stemmed through policy and legislative measures if governments are unable to control their arsenals and borders. The building of capacity in these and other areas is necessarily a long term endeavour.

## **Conclusion**

If security is conceived narrowly in terms of the state and its military strength, then the maintenance of large armed forces and other forms of militarisation will be regarded as an essential and effective basis for stability. This logic has proven to be fallacious in Africa and elsewhere. The security of the state is patently not synonymous with the security of citizens, and the latter derives less from military protection than from meeting basic human rights and needs. Where these rights and needs are neglected, and where the state's capacity to govern is weak, a security vacuum arises and will be filled by violence for defensive and offensive purposes.

Demilitarisation will not in itself resolve the crisis of insecurity because it does not go to the heart of the underlying structural problems. Since the problems are numerous, complex and deep-rooted, they have no single, simple or short-term solution. They can be overcome only by entrenching respect for political pluralism



and human rights; accommodating ethnicity and other forms of diversity; building the capacity of state departments and local authorities; and achieving at least some degree of economic growth and equity. These measures, often referred to as "post conflict peace building", are the cardinal means of preventing crises and are therefore as much pre-crisis as post-crisis imperatives. The term "post conflict peace building" is also inapt since peace building has everything to do with the ongoing management of social and political conflict through good governance.

In this paper I have sought to develop a conceptual and strategic framework for understanding militarisation and the challenge of demilitarisation in Africa. The framework does not provide a sufficient basis for formulating a programme of action, however, since it operates at too high a level of generalisation. Viable programmes have to be grounded in a more detailed analysis of structural problems and militarisation in individual countries and regions, and have to be developed by local actors rather than driven by outsiders. Finally, it should be noted that there are political risks and social and economic costs associated with many aspects of the demilitarisation agenda, such as demobilisation of combatants, a reduction in military spending, downgrading the political status of armed forces and the closure of military bases. These risks and costs militate against any hasty and radical process and reinforce the imperative of involving local actors in shaping and managing the agenda.

## Notes

\* Executive Director, Centre for Conflict Resolution, University of Cape Town, South Africa.

1. This section is drawn from Nathan (1994: Chapter 2).

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