

EDITORIAL

Challenges for defence planners in Africa: Ensuring appropriate, adequate, accountable and affordable armed forces

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The defence debate in Africa has been characterised by two main tendencies. The first is the dominance of the military in many African states preventing effective debate on defence owing to arguments of ‘the need to know’, ‘confidentiality’ and ‘national or state security’. It has kept the defence and security debate outside the domain of civil society and led to the ‘mystification’ of defence and security issues. It has effectively prevented transparency and accountability in defence management in many countries of the continent. The second tendency is the donor-driven debate on cutting defence expenditure and downsizing African armed forces. It takes the rationale that spending on defence is counter-productive to the needs for development and that defence spending must be cut to the ‘thumb-suck’ figure of less than 2 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) before donor funds for development will be made available. This donor

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conditionality has led to inappropriate cuts in defence spending and also caused poor budgeting and expenditure control practices such as off-budget revenue and spending. Both these lines of argument are clearly simplistic, baseless and not supportable. We do not want defence forces that are shrouded in secrecy, a power unto themselves and non-accountable, and defence forces that are designed purely from a cost perspective and reduced to ineffectiveness we do not need.

Yet, there is much more to the defence debate than these two approaches. Africa and African states need defence forces. This assertion is amply supported by developments around the Common African Defence and Security Policy (CADSP), the African Standby Force (ASF) – consisting of the five sub-regional Standby Brigades, the SADC Protocol on Politics, Defence and Security and the SADC Mutual Defence Pact (MDP) – as well as by the lack of ability to respond to the many crises on the continent. As we write, a tragic human disaster is taking place in Sudan and Africa is incapable of interceding. Even when African military forces are deployed in peace operations such as in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Burundi and Sierra Leone, such deployments are dependent on the Western powers for funding, strategic transport, and logistic sustainment and support.

So, if we need defence forces in Africa, what type of defence force do we need? It is postulated here that Africa and African states (and nations) need defence forces that are appropriate, adequate, accountable and affordable.

Africa needs defence forces that are *appropriate* to the realities, needs and challenges of our continent. These include fast reaction to humanitarian disasters, forceful responses to despotic regimes and warlords, effective support to civil authorities, and the ability to act in concert with one another. The hype of defence against external military aggression and major conventional battles that is so often used as the sole driver for the design of African armed forces should be left to those who see Africa as an arms market only.

Africa needs defence forces that are *adequate* to her demands. When we deploy our defence capabilities – as we shall – for peace enforcement, peacekeeping, peace-building, disaster relief, the maintenance of essential services and other operations in support of civil authority, we need to ensure that we have equipped them adequately for their task. As civil society, and as we demand a say in defence matters, we should take responsibility for our soldiers. We should never expect our soldiers to ‘take the punch on our behalf’ if we are not committed to the cause for which we have recruited and deployed them.

Yet, Africa needs defence forces that are *accountable* and *affordable*. Accountability is ensured through democratic civil–military relations and includes the issues of transparency, civil control of defence management and parliamentary oversight. This enhances the ability of governments to prioritise national and regional developmental and security needs

and also serves as a regional confidence-building measure. Yes, we need appropriate and adequate defence forces, but the question is who decides what is appropriate and adequate. The answer to this question is, simply put, the elected representatives of the people.

And ultimately we need armed forces that are affordable and therefore sustainable. Far too many of Africa's defence forces are ineffective and not operationally ready because of unserviceable equipment and untrained personnel as a result of poor acquisition processes and financial mismanagement. Affordability will be ensured through correct design and efficiency in defence management. African states must ensure that defence expenditure is maintained at the absolutely essential level and in so doing release scarce resources that are so desperately needed for developmental and social requirements. African states must also ensure that funds allocated to defence are used as efficiently as possible. This will be achieved by good practice in management, ensuring proper tooth to tail ratios (the ratio between operational forces and administrative and support staff) and proper provision for and use of reserve forces – amongst others.

This issue of the *African Security Review* looks at many of these issues. It addresses the issues of the development of an African Standby Force to serve the continent's needs for conflict prevention and intervention, defence economics and the effect of defence spending, public expenditure management as related to the defence sector and civil-military relations in general. It is the hope of the editor that it will contribute to the achievement of appropriate, adequate, accountable and affordable defence forces on the African continent.

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