

ENCAPSULATING ZAMBIA'S CIVIL–MILITARY RELATIONS IN THE THIRD REPUBLIC

Henry Mtonga

General scope and principles of civil–military relations

Civil–military relations cover the broad concept of 'security', such as the protection of Zambia against external armed threats, which is the responsibility of the military, or protection against public disorder or internal insecurity, for which the police force, the Zambia Security Intelligence Services, Drug Enforcement Commission, customs, prisons, immigration and other ancillary security units, are responsible.

The mission of the military is defined as the defence of the country's sovereignty and the integrity of its territory, and its role in other sectors is often restricted to supportive or cooperative tasks. The military is a permanent institution at the service of the nation. It is an indivisible whole often comprising land, air and naval forces. Its organisation is hierarchical and is based on the principles of discipline and obedience, and will operate within a given doctrine.

A military doctrine should aim at respecting the constitution, human rights, ratified international military instruments, defence of sovereignty and national independence, and the integrity of the country's territory for a firm and lasting peace.

It is also common that the head of state or president of the republic is the defence forces' overall commander-in-chief and will issue instructions through the defence minister, regardless of whether the minister is civilian or military.

Military and democratic society

The military is an important institution in any democratic society and as such plays an equally important role. First, within the role played by democratic institutions, the military's main duty is to defend national sovereignty and the country's territorial integrity. When talking of the military, what comes to mind first is security of the country.

Security is a broad concept and may include protection against external armed threats, which is the responsibility of the military, or protection against

threats to public order and internal security, for which the police is usually responsible.

Citizens' security and state security are inseparable from the full and free exercise by citizens of their political, economic, social and cultural rights and duties. However, beyond this the military is responsible for maintaining and ensuring peace. With the active and permanent participation of citizens through political organisations and civil society organisations, the renewal and capacity building of the institutions should range from local authorities to the working of state organisations, including the military, in order that everyone entrusted with public power fulfill their duty towards social justice, political participation, security and social progress.

It is of utmost importance to reinforce civilian power, which represents the citizens' will with their exercising of political rights, strengthening legislative functions, reforming the administration of justice and guaranteeing citizens' security, which, taken together, are decisive for the enjoyment of liberties and fundamental human rights.

In order to encourage a democratic and participatory process it is necessary to improve and strengthen civilian power by modernising and reinforcing the state and its republican, democratic and representative government system, of which the military is an integral component.

Under exceptional circumstances – and whenever the regular means to preserve public order and internal peace prove insufficient – the president of the republic can use the defence forces for this purpose; however, their participation in this activity must not in any way limit the exercise of the people's constitutional rights. This prerogative must not be abused to oppress citizens and violate human rights.

The military sometimes may provide social services to society, such as humanitarian assistance to cope with natural disasters. Apart from humanitarian assistance, the military has been known to provide other social services such as health and education. Most military hospitals reputedly provide excellent services. The military has also been used in peacekeeping missions in countries ravaged by war and ethnic conflict.

Historical and current perspectives

The First Republic

Prior to October 1964 when Zambia became an independent state, the military was generally perceived to be a supporter of the colonial masters, the British. At independence the president of Zambia, with the Defence Council, decided to 'Zambianise' senior posts in the military, thereby removing this prior perception.

The Lenshina uprising in 1964 (May–June) put to the test the loyalty and the

need for military power, which in the immediate past had served colonial interests. Following the military's successful crushing of the violent uprising, civil society groups began to question whether the new political leaders were justified in using military force in this case. Was the force used excessive? Did the dominant African political parties play a role in igniting the violence, or did white political parties use the Lenshina uprising to abort Zambia's independence? These questions and many others resulted in the appointment of a Commission of Inquiry led by a High Court judge.¹

Birth of the Second Republic

The year 1973 ushered in the one-party regime in Zambia. Popular slogans at the time were 'the party (United National Independence Party – UNIP) is supreme over all state organs' and 'the party commands the gun'.

Civil–military relations often faced a somewhat harsh test, especially when the military was called on to deal with dissidents, public rebuke, food riots and sometime even student protests.

For example, it was clear that constant and prolonged use of the military in dealing with internal security tended to erode the commitment and loyalty of some of its professional elements. The point to note is that the military was dealing with its own unarmed people, some of whom were relatives. This situation resulted in a 'syndrome' of public disorder and riotous behaviour which affected some of the military. An increasing number of them became disaffected.

Moreover, during the one-party era – 1973–1991 – all commanders of the defence and security units became politicians: they automatically became members of UNIP's Central Committee by virtue of their rank and position. It was after the use of the military in the food riots of 1986/87 that the attempted coup of 1988 was planned and plotted.

It was also after the food riots in 1990 that Luchembe and others attempted a coup, taking over the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation. The bottomline is that bad policies and poor or corrupt means of implementing development programmes cannot, and should not, depend on the use of military power to secure the support of citizens.

Birth of the Third Republic

The Third Republic of Zambia was born after much agitation (1988–1991) on the part of civil society. Zambians persistently demanded for a change to multipartyism. Full credit should be given to the First Republican President, Dr Kenneth Kaunda, for reading the political situation in the country correctly and for conceding that early presidential and general elections be held in October 1991, instead of 1993 when they were due.

Ten years in the Third Republic

The transition from one-party politics to multipartyism was characterised by confusion and a general lack of professional effectiveness in the realm of defence and security. It was as if Zambia's newly found freedom resulting out of plural politics had left the new political leadership without any realistic plans or programmes for re-training and re-equipping all defence and security units.

Such re-training and re-equipping was of critical importance to the fledgling democracy, to good governance and to the protection of human rights in plural politics. The military was expected to remain neutral and professional. Moreover, the auditor-general's reports between 1991 and 2001 reflected a serious failure on the part of the new political leadership to be transparent and to account for some of the financial resources allocated to the military. Decisions to retire immediately some senior officers in the defence forces were questioned.

The second phase of the Third Republic – January 2002 to date – has seen a significant improvement in the military submitting to the oversight of civil authority through parliament. Serious parliamentary reforms are being undertaken under the leadership of the speaker of Zambia's National Assembly. Such reforms are largely designed to serve the ordinary citizens of Zambia better through legislative programmes and parliamentary oversight. Elected representatives of the people of Zambia have been systematically exposed, trained and guided in order to maximise accountability and transparency in all public institutions. This definitely constitutes the agenda of both the executive and parliament in the Third Republic.

Conclusion

The demands of most Zambians as far as civil–military relations is concerned centre on the following: that the defence and security units be re-trained and re-equipped so that they become professional, cost effective and 'user friendly'; that the defence and security units should remain non-partisan and should never again be politicised; and that the government should improve salaries and conditions of service as well as support schemes for advanced education for all its officers and soldiers. The National Assembly of Zambia is already opening up and involving the ordinary citizens of Zambia in its programmes.²

Notes

- 1 See, The Commission of Inquiry into the violence of the Lenshina Group.
- 2 See the most recent advertisement in the *Times of Zambia*, 19 May 2004, inviting the general public to participate in the long parliamentary sessional committees such as the National Security and Foreign Affairs Committee, which met from 10–14 May 2004.