

# A SURVEY OF CIVIL–MILITARY RELATIONS IN THE SADC SUB-REGION

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## Introduction

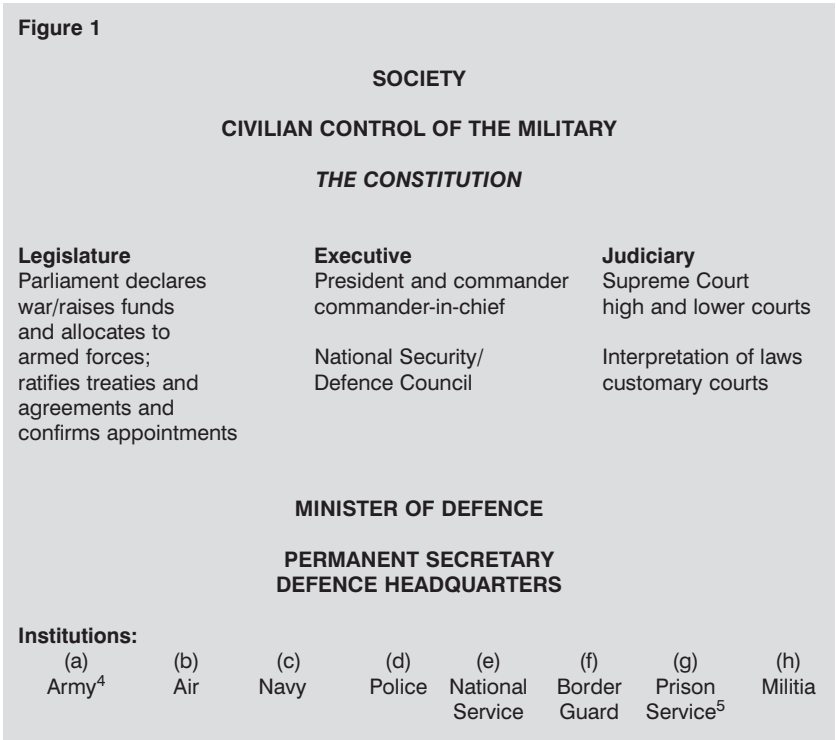
The last word on civil–military relations as they exist on the African continent has not been written. The continent provides an interesting laboratory for civil–military relations innovations informed by its colonial inheritance, which significantly includes the fact that the characteristic role of the armed forces was to repress the majority peoples while supporting the status quo, the continent’s generally dire economic underpinnings<sup>1</sup> and the still undefined and complex role of the armed forces emerging from a post-colonial as well as a Cold War nexus. Civil–military relations sometimes also manifested in the pervasive role of political leadership during the one-party state era of the late 1960s to late 1980s, in which the party became synonymous with the state, and the institution of the executive presidency became enmeshed and closely entwined with notions of national security.<sup>2</sup> Also, of course, there are versions of constitutional democracies exhibiting practices that reflect the liberal democratic norms of separation of powers, a robust and central role of parliament carrying out still shaky oversight functions and clearly circumscribed roles of the executive and institutional commanders that, however, still exhibit strong links to party political connections.<sup>3</sup>

## Ideal liberal democracy: Distribution of power relations

The much hoped for ideal of civil–military relations in a democracy is one in which power is distributed among different sectors to ensure adequate checks and balances (*see Figure 1, over page*).

In practice, there are some generic areas that have been identified as possible areas of misunderstanding, and therefore constitute sources of conflict in the conduct of civil–military relations. These include:

- a lack of understanding of the tasks and responsibilities of key actors;
- the deliberate overstepping of designated bounds by either parties;



- developments in the political, economic, military and social spheres – as is sometimes the case in most countries before crucial elections or appointments in government where there are deep ethnic socio-economic cleavages;
- professionalism – the exertion of or lack of it;
- a skewed budget allocation or the impact of security-related expenditure;
- ineffective policy options – resources, aspects of disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration and resettlement (DDRR) that remain to be adequately addressed. Examples of this have been seen in Mozambique, Angola, Namibia, Lesotho, Zimbabwe and South Africa;
- the hostile impact of globalisation; and
- defeat in war – or violation of sovereignty such as territorial occupation. The recent ‘fall’ of Bukavu in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is illustrative.

After the 1990s, developments in the international community have created inexorable pressure for political systems that impact directly on civil–military relations. The common objective appears to be that these systems, previously left out of the liberal democracy umbrella during the Cold War, now conform to

the ideals of this ideology while functioning in a market economy. The new political dispensation on the African continent has not found a ready and receptive environment, but instead has had to contend with an African architecture that is characterised by its own cultures, the role of elder statesmen, ethnicity and regionalism, culminating in the development of civil–military relations that are unique and fairly specific to each country or sometimes to a group of countries in a particular region.

Furthermore, differences have been magnified as result of historical circumstances that differ, again from country to country as well as from region to region. One example of such factors influencing these differences was the nature of colonisation that emerged from varied motives in different countries in Europe. Second, there was a marked preference for white imperial settlement for different parts of Africa with only the north and south hosting thousands of settlers.

In the Northern Mediterranean and wheat producing regions of Algeria, thousands of white settlers arrived because of the temperate zones and easy access to Europe, and this was also true of the equally temperate climate in the Southern African region. No serious settlement occurred in west, central and large parts of east Africa. Hence, when it came to decolonisation during the 1960s, struggles in Algeria, Angola, Namibia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and South Africa assumed a different scale given the presence of propertied settlers. Many of the settler communities meanwhile had also established defence and security structures whose primary role was to maintain the status quo. Certain ‘martial oriented’ tribes or ethnic groups were selected, generally those in the minority, to control the majority peoples. Many of them only served middle-ranking functions while the command and officer element comprised white settlers themselves. Many of these examples were inherited at independence, and countries followed different routes in either absorbing these or disbanding them in order to introduce yet another civil–military structure in the new state.

It is against this conviction and background that this research argues for a more specific investigation of the nature of civil–military relations in Southern Africa. The expectation is to bring lessons learnt to the table, providing for new contributions that have so far not been widely acknowledged.

This paper therefore seeks to provide a brief survey of the significant trends that inform civil–military relations in Southern Africa, with a view to distilling some of the principles present that appear to have been ignored in the existing civil–military relations typologies. The overall intention is, of course, to enhance our understanding of the broader regime of civil–military relations.<sup>6</sup>

Civil–military relations have been defined as representing a complex set of interrelationships, established norms and practices between the triad – the state, society and the armed forces.<sup>7</sup> Stated differently, this paper argues that there are at least three versions of civil–military relations that inform practice in Southern Africa.

### **Traditional military structures absorbed into modernity**

The first and most enduring has been the conduct of civil–military relations in the monarchies of Botswana,<sup>8</sup> Lesotho<sup>9</sup> and Swaziland. In all three states, existing traditional military structure falling under the king came under the protectorate mandate of Britain during the colonial era. Many of these elements have survived into contemporary times, with only subtle changes but with a distinct traditional ethos and influence.<sup>10</sup> In practice, matters affecting the armed forces fall under the ‘king’ or ‘presidential office’, in a reflection of the evolution of the traditional martial elements as part of the modern institutions of the bureaucracy. Aspects such as the recruiting of personnel, allocation of resources, appointment to command and the relationship between the armed forces and the monarchy, demonstrate the central influence of the latter. As a result, the triad relationship between the state, the armed forces and the people reflects the phenomenon of a conflated relationship between the armed forces and the monarchy, seemingly set for or against the people in a top-down fashion with a deliberately weakened state/bureaucracy. With a growing educated and working class in the former ‘kingdoms’ experiencing the pressures of globalisation and capitalist economies, elements have emerged challenging the ‘rights to rule bestowed by birthright’ and not through democratic processes.

Clashes between the traditionalists and modernists have resulted in a political impasse. While this is true in Swaziland, a careful balance of modernity in Botswana has postponed the day of reckoning, but crisis erupted in Lesotho in 1998 ending with intervention from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. This intervention has allowed a constitutional experiment to be put in place in Lesotho, designed to strengthen the popularly elected central government. If this process is allowed to run its course, then Lesotho may show us the route other monarchies must follow in the future. For many of these states, the struggle continues to focus on how they can transform themselves into fully-fledged constitutional democracies that are able to function side-by-side with a thriving traditional monarchy. Until this balance is achieved, however, civil–military practice in these countries will still be confronted with the challenge of the ‘continuing influence of tradition and custom’ as part of their political life.

The second version is that posed by the post-colonial, one-party state version as seen in the former President Julius Nyerere era in Tanzania; former President Kenneth Kaunda’s reign in Zambia until 1990; the late President Kamuzu Banda’s nearly three-decade reign of Malawi, which was also characterised by the same one-party state features; the practice and ideology in Zimbabwe until the formal abandonment of attempts to institute the one-party system in 1990; the conduct by former President Augustino Neto and current President Dos Santos in Angola; and by the late President Samora Machel of Mozambique<sup>11</sup>

until 1991/2. Important characteristics of civil–military relations during the one-party state era included the following:

- The party was supreme and required the authentication of loyalty and trust in the recruitment of cadres and commissars within the institutions and political allegiance as a precondition for appointment to senior ranks or command positions. Inevitably, there was therefore a close relationship between the state and the armed forces.
- The presidency wielded almost absolute powers, in which parliament was not expected to and did not play a major oversight role.
- The struggle between partisanship and professionalism by the armed forces was overshadowed by tense geostrategic concerns characterising the region during the decolonisation and anti-apartheid period before 1991.
- During this period, units of the presidential guards and other militia groups, such as the Young Pioneers of Malawi, provided evidence of forces that required some sort of reform if they were to take on a national character.

These dimensions, which appeared almost normal, now confronted the states cited as they attempt to restructure their civil–military relations in accordance with multiparty dynamics.

In a number of instances, political conduct – even as the one-party state era is being laid to rest – has attempted to ‘manage’ the political transitions, with candidates vetted by the ruling parties. This quasi one-party state practice demonstrates the difficulty of imbibing a new political ethos of multipartyism.

The challenge for the second category, in civil–military terms, is to restructure in such a way that conforms to a multiparty liberal democratic framework. Given the initial dominant ruling party era – that also ‘created armed forces according to their own images’ – there is now a need to surgically remove these manifestations of the ruling party in military matters. This phenomenon is most prevalent among those countries with the unique experience of having fought a liberation struggle in which the parties established factional ‘nationalist’ forces during the protracted period of the struggle, only to transform these structures into the new national institutions at independence. Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa, to a lesser extent, are countries that have had this practical experience so far. The next challenge for these states is how to create conditions for the new generation of cadres who did not participate in the armed struggle to become part of the national institutions, and this without losing the core objectives of the nationalist era.

The final template emerged after the 1990s in the form of the multiparty democracies of Namibia and South Africa. In both, guidelines in the liberal democratic and market-related framework provided the underpinnings to civil–military relations, although even here the dominance of the nationalist

parties and the military factions established during the struggle for independence has more than influenced the structure of the new security and defence institutions.<sup>12</sup>

It is our belief that given the complexity of the civil–military regimes in the region, a clear understanding of the significance of problems and the way forward appears to be even beyond some of the actors.

In SADC, significant similarities exist in countries that championed the total liberation of the region while adopting the one-party state model for internal political cohesion. This is true of Tanzania and Zambia; countries which during the early 1970s constituted the backbone of the Front Line States (FLS). Although Botswana was also one of the pioneers in the establishment of the FLS, the country has been fortunate in that it has a strong single party whose manifesto not only resonates with local dynamics but also with global liberal democracy characterised by multipartyism.<sup>13</sup>

After the collapse of the Cold War and apartheid, both Tanzania and Zambia have had to restructure their internal civil–military relations in line with multiparty democratic requirements. However, given the settled positions of certain elements such as parliament, the institutions themselves and the surviving political parties, each country continues to experience unique problems, which we shall try to define in the discussion. The second category of civil–military relations in SADC is represented by the group of countries whose independence was given birth to by the efforts of liberation movements enjoying the assistance of the FLS. Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa are countries that fall into this genre, but with slight differences based on the period in which they secured their political independence. For instance, the early candidates such as Angola and Mozambique, whose ruling parties almost marched into the capitals of Luanda and Maputo respectively, tended to adopt the model as existed in Tanzania and Zambia; essentially that of the one-party state syndrome. However, subsequent wars in both countries eventually led to Mozambique first, in 1991 under the Rome Treaty, agreeing to entertain a multiparty political model. This was to be followed by Angola through the Lusaka accords of 1992 and November 1994. Zimbabwe followed this trend in 1980, only to abandon the same after 1991, and Namibia, coming on to the scene through a negotiated settlement and extensive assistance from the United Nations (UN), has adhered to a multiparty constitution from independence in March 1990.

It can also be said that South Africa, when it attained a democratic dispensation in 1994, also followed the example of Namibia, in which the global influence played a prominent role in shaping local institutional structures as well as civil–military relations. Finally, the region has also witnessed a special case of civil–military relations in the form of monarchies co-existing and attempting to survive in parliamentary democracies, as seen in Lesotho and Swaziland. The experience in both has been illustrative.

A number of questions, however, need to be addressed: Why have SADC's different civil–military relations developed the way they have, and what are the implications for refashioning these in order that they fit into a liberal democratic context?

While suggesting that the SADC region may provide some significant lessons and principles to inform the African civil–military relations regime, we need to acknowledge that there are a number of fundamental areas that should be consistent with practices in a liberal democracy.

### **Areas of common principles**

While SADC civil–military relations reflect different versions, as we have tried to elaborate, the political objective in all the countries is the same. Each and every one of them seeks to bring about the practice of civil–military relations as obtains in a liberal democracy operating under a market economy. This is the yardstick to which all the versions identified must try to conform. Below, we make suggestions as to what the ideal civil–military relations should be, hopefully providing a guide to what needs to be achieved. Aspects of military expenditure, recruiting, managing defence forces, relations with legislators and ordinary peoples, conduct of internal military discipline, training and equipment, all constitute the complete raft of a country's civil–military relations. However, whereas in the past at least three groups of countries in SADC each followed a different course, the current post-Cold War era and globalisation demand that these be standardised. In each example, international interest and scrutiny is now focused on how emerging democracies conduct their civil–military relations as one of the important planks and measures to determine a country's level of political maturity and coherence within the international system.

### **Suggested areas for consolidation**

A number of areas present themselves as critical for the infusion of a liberal democratic ethos in the different versions of civil–military relations as they exist in Southern Africa, as countries move towards consolidating democracy and fostering stable civil–military relations.

- The first challenge must be to create processes that professionally inform the national security agenda. Put differently, defining and prioritising national interests – that is, generating the strategic motivation for sovereignty and security policy through the National Council of Defence. This body must be able to draw upon all resources, including professional think-tanks and civil society, in its formulation of a balanced and well-informed national security strategy.

- In the management of civil–military relations, a clear division must exist between the legislature, the executive, the judiciary and civil society input. Further, a clear demarcation of responsibility must be made between the institutional commanders of the army, police, air force, border control, national service and prison service. For instance, the legislature should issue the various acts authorising the establishment of the institutions, allocate resources and play an oversight role over the same.
- DDRR initiatives undertaken in the various states must be revisited with a view to addressing inadequacies normally present in this complex issue. This stage must also include the establishment of ‘nationally’ drawn and recruited forces, including the bureaucracy, in a process that deliberately attempts to address the dominance of the earlier ruling parties in these matters. The process here must lead to the establishment of politically conscious – not apolitical in our view – professional defence and security structures that operate within acceptable civil–military regime(s) in both peace and war.
- Democratic practices in civil–military relations must be entrenched through engaging in conflict prevention, crisis management and political tolerance practices.
- The operational and technological employment of forces – sometimes referred to as the grand strategy and tactics level – must be in the sole hands of the armed forces commanders; of course, operating within the parameters laid out by the political leadership. However, the division of labour and responsibilities must be clear to both sides in order that lines of communication are not confused.

## Conclusion

In the continuing debate related to African civil–military relations, the challenge that has emerged is how each country or group of countries will conduct themselves towards absorbing the liberal democratic and market economy informed regime. In Southern Africa, the practices of monarchical states, former one-party state countries and, finally, the new democracies of Namibia and South Africa all have traces of ‘traditional’ or politically conscientised ‘nationalistic forces’ that are part of the security and defence institutions. Africa’s, particularly Southern Africa’s, fears of introducing new concepts that have an impact on the social formation and political context of each country have to be addressed, together with the demands of the liberal democratic norms. The next step should be to establish a mechanism to draw in the next generation of youths, but to still have the confidence that hard-won

sovereignty and liberation is safeguarded in a context of healthy and mature civil–military relations.

## Notes

- 1 Twenty-eight of Africa's 53 nations fall under the Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) category, where expenditure has to be strictly negotiated with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.
- 2 See P Wallensteen & M Sollenberg, Armed conflicts and regional conflict complexes, 1989-97, *Journal of Peace Research* 35(5), September 1998, pp 621-34 for a global treatment of this phenomenon.
- 3 This is true of the Namibian and South African experience, where the dominant ruling parties are the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) and the African National Congress (ANC) respectively.
- 4 As in the case with the police, this includes the intelligence service and other public safety elements that have been legally legislated. All these elements, including all sectors on the diagram, constitute what is referred to as the security family.
- 5 Adapted from D F Trask, *Democracy and defence – civilian control of the military in the United States*, US Information Agency, 1993, p 2.
- 6 See S P Huntington, *The soldier and the State*, Harvard Univ. Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1959; A J Goodpaster & S P Huntington, *Civil–military relations*, American Enterprise Institute, Washington, 1977; M Rupiya, Civil–military relations in Zimbabwe: Is there a threat?, in R Williams, G Cawthra & D Abrahams (eds) *Ourselves to know: Civil–military relations and defence transformation in Southern Africa*, Institute for Security Studies, Pretoria, 2003, pp 252-253, offers the universal guidelines underlying the objective and subjective typologies of civil–military relations.
- 7 M Rupiya, *ibid*, p 252.
- 8 Since independence in the 1960s and before, the traditional political system around Chief Seretse Khama has dominated the political landscape in that country, even after the introduction of 'modern' political parties. This martial formation process facilitated by the chief is adequately dealt with by N Parsons, The economic history of Khama's country in Botswana, 1844-1930, in R Palmer & N Parsons (eds) *The roots of rural poverty in Central and Southern Africa*, pp 113-143.
- 9 In Lesotho, the problematic of the political role of Chief Letsie Moshoeshoe in the modern political system has resulted in crisis, the resolution of which partly included the intervention of the SADC region.
- 10 Discussions with former Swazi Army Chief, Brigadier Dube with the author, Mbabane, 1995; personal visit to and observations of King Letsie's palace outside Maseru.
- 11 The structure of civil–military relations in Mozambique continued even after the death of Samora Machel in 1986 when he was succeeded by Joachim Chissano, and only changed following the Rome Treaty of 1991 between the ruling Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (Frelimo) and the National Resistance Movement of Mozambique (Renamo).

- 12 Appointments of *Mkonto We Sizwe* cadres for the ANC and People’s Liberation Army Namibia (PLAN) cadres for SWAPO in command positions testify to this development in practice.
- 13 The late President Kamuzu Banda of Malawi also preferred the one-party state model, although he was to spurn becoming a member of the FLS.