

‘CAGING THE LIONS’

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Introduction

A provocative opening statement in a discussion of the military and security services anywhere in the world would be that it is an absolute necessity to restrain their budgetary habits because these services will always require more and newer equipment to assist them in meeting the defence and security needs of the countries they belong to. I dare to stipulate that this is the norm irrespective of geographical location.

This does not, however, mean that the defence sector¹ is inherently irresponsible but merely that, charged with the enormous undertaking of looking after the defence and security interests of their countries, nothing surely can be too expensive, and no sacrifice too large for the defence and security of the nation.

The defence sector in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) is therefore no exception.

The essence here is to study what the legislature is confronted with as it engages with the military and security services. It focuses on the attitude of the military and security hierarchy of placing its requirements above everything else; believing in the process that it is doing good. The services' success in this endeavour is a matter that will form the critical mass of the paper.

The paper also examines the manner in which the core businesses of the services are adversely affected by the intensity of pursuing the all-important function of defending state sovereignty.

By illuminating the workings and 'exposing' the general mentality of the military, it is expected that a contribution would have been made towards either curtailing the excesses of the military and security services or assisting in their reorientation in an effort to enhance their effectiveness at the lowest opportunity cost.

The paper focuses on the challenges of maintaining the core function of the military and security services, the demands of defence budgets and how best to ensure that the military and security services operate within the overall framework of the national budget.

A case of competing needs

Towards human security

The defence sector in SADC has played significant roles in the attainment of peace and security in the sub-region during both the decolonisation period and apartheid era in Southern Africa. With the attainment of a democratic dispensation in South Africa in 1994 and the relatively peaceful environment that has since followed, a re-examination is required of the prevailing security threat as well as the need to balance the defence and security requirements with the wider needs of the countries encompassed in the fabric of human security.

Important as it would be to maintain acceptable levels of security, so too must other competing needs such as tackling poverty, disease, the environment and unemployment be addressed. It is, of course, not disputed that these seemingly non-traditional security issues can raise the levels of security narrowly defined. With other competing needs, defence and security expenses should no longer be unquestioned, as was the case during the period of intense regional instability. It is the duty of the legislature to exercise this oversight role and to meet the overall needs of the countries.

The current September 11 era has focused attention on security and democratic issues that include adherence to the rule of law and to human rights. Most characteristic of the contemporary era has been a more vigorous debate about the management of the sub-sector, with a particular focus on defence budgets and the procurement of military hardware.² The major constraint has been a defence sector that operates without due regard to the changed circumstances.³

During the period of conflict in Southern Africa – generally from the 1970s to the 1990s – as would be expected, states spent a lot of resources on defence and security budgets. The priority then was meeting the military threat posed by the pre-1994 South African regime, Rhodesia and the settler governments of Angola and Mozambique to the rest of the sub-region. The aggressor regimes in turn felt threatened by the rest of the region and its external supporters (mostly Cuba and Eastern European states). With the sub-region becoming more peaceful, especially after 1994 when South Africa became a democratic state, and with the other states (Zimbabwe, Angola and Mozambique) having earlier changed governments to more democratic ones, it was expected that expenditure on defence and security issues would logically reduce considerably. Although to an extent this was in fact the case, spending on the defence sector has remained fairly high, largely due to conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Angola. Table 1 shows SADC defence expenditure for the period 1985 to 2002.

The significance of the reductions over the period 1985 to 2002 is largely due to the massive reduction in South Africa's defence expenditure by almost half from US\$3,252 million to US\$1,697 million. In fact the aggregate of the rest of

Table 1: SADC defence expenditure (as a % of GDP)

Country	US\$ million			US\$ per capita			% of GDP		
	1985	2001	2002	1985	2001	2002	1985	2001	2002
Angola	1,328.0	1,458.0	946.0	152.0	108.0	68.0	15.0	16.7	9.8
Botswana	32.0	184.0	254.0	30.0	115.0	157.0	2.2	3.8	4.5
DRC	71.0	972.0	946.0	2.0	19.0	18.0	0.9	22.2	21.7
Lesotho	16.0	24.0	21.0	11.0	11.0	9.0	4.8	3.1	2.9
Malawi	32.0	12.0	12.0	5.0	1.0	1.0	2.0	0.7	0.7
Mozambique	330.0	86.0	76.0	24.0	5.0	4.0	9.9	2.4	2
Namibia	n.a.	83.0	79.0	n.a.	46	43.0	n.a.	2.9	2.8
South Africa	3,252.0	1,814.0	1,697.0	97.0	41.0	37.0	3.8	1.6	2
Zambia	34.0	27.0	25.0	5.0	3.0	2.0	0.9	0.8	0.7
Zimbabwe	475.0	287.0	637.0	57.0	25.0	56.0	5.7	3.1	3.4
Tanzania	359.0	139.0	127.0	16.0	4.0	3.0	3.8	1.5	1.5
Mauritius	1.0	9.0	7.0	2.0	8.0	6.0	0.1	0.2	0.1
Total	5,499.0	5,095.0	4,751.0						

Source: *The Military Balance, 2003-2004*, pp 339-340.

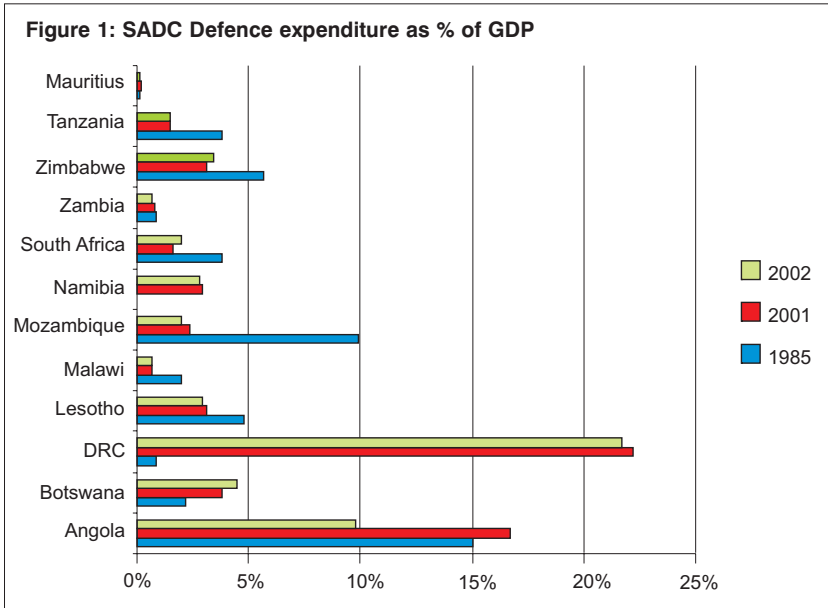
the region showed an increase of 36%. Although much of the generally high defence expenditure is due to Angola and the DRC (the former a country slowly coming out of conflict, and the latter still in the depths of war), the level of defence expenditure remains unacceptable for a region with soaring demands in other areas of human security.⁴ The diagrammatic presentations (*over page*) provide a clearer picture of the SADC defence expenditure, which in the author's view should be much lower for a period without major defence and security concerns.

The role of the legislature is therefore not only in ensuring the appropriate utilisation of the resources that go to the defence sector but also that of balancing the needs of the sector with other sectors, which in times of relative peace are more important. One way of ensuring the optimum utilisation of the meagre resources available to this developing sub-region is to examine critically the role of the military and security services in order to ensure that they remain aligned to their primary roles.

The 'clash' of roles

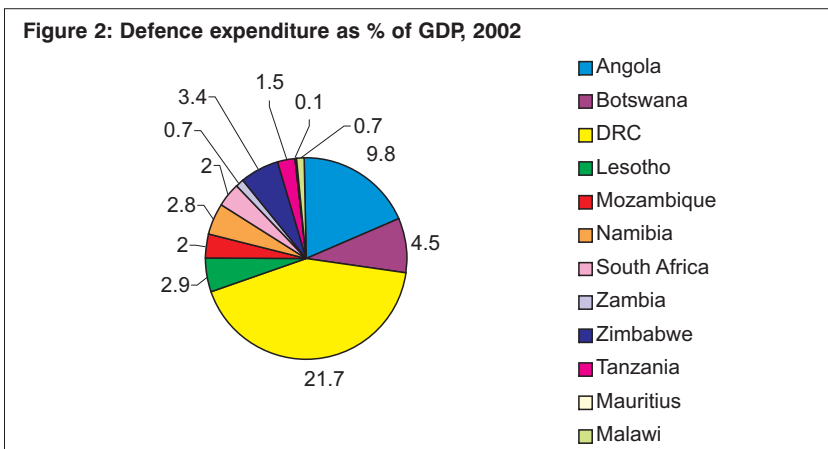
'Widening the mission'

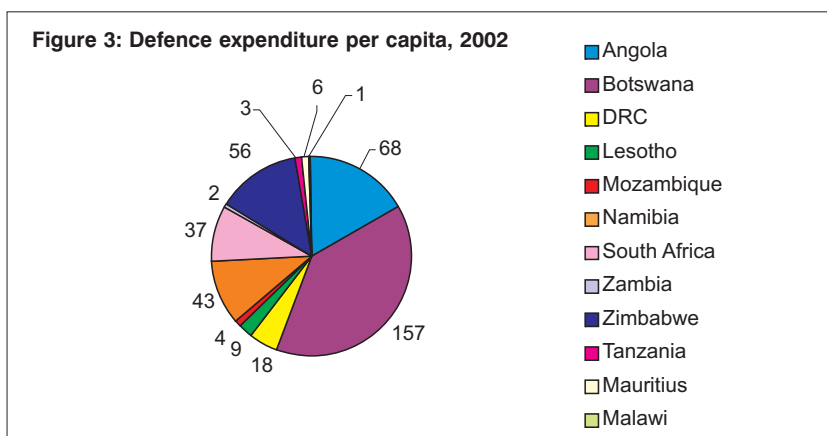
Determining the role of the military and security services is a political function which is nevertheless undertaken in close consultation with the military and security services themselves. The extent to which the role is kept in focus with changes in the national, sub-regional, regional and international environments depends largely on the ability of these services to interpret timeously and accurately what their role actually is and to determine whether they possess the capacity to fulfill that mission. Even more important would be whether the



'expanded' or 'widened' mission compromises their primary role to the extent that it seriously impedes the success critically needed in their traditional function. For instance, the military ought to be able to say that adding to its functions the production of winter maize⁵ is extending its functions somewhat beyond the realm of its traditional role, even if participating in national reconstruction is among its functions.⁶

Providing such services as education, health facilities and improved communication through opening up remote areas which would have been





previously inaccessible, may be considered reasonable because the services could already have the capacity in adequate measure. It may, of course, be argued (not without good reason) that the military as a public institution would be expected to take on roles of an emergency nature. Considering, therefore, that most, if not all, developing countries have by nature of their situation such ongoing emergencies as severe shortages of adequate infrastructure, skills as well as other goods and services, the requirement for the participation in such activities is not unexpected.

What is critical to take into consideration is that the defence sector in undertaking the 'widened' role does not degrade its capacity to carry out the traditional ones of providing defence and security to the state and its people. It is therefore incumbent upon the legislature to evaluate critically the need for the defence sector to undertake additional roles. A long-term perspective is generally found to be the correct one to take. By its very nature, the military tends to be extremely effective at whatever it is ordered to do but may not necessarily be the most efficient agent.⁷

A question of the 'military psyche'

Notwithstanding the challenges posed by an extended role for the defence sector, involvement in the socio-economic function – deserving as it usually would be – is not without unexpected and sometimes negative consequences. For instance, extending the military's activities to commercial businesses would "provide them with an income in addition to the state budget, which is neither overseen nor controlled democratically".⁸

The 'introduction' of the military and security services to such functions would consequently not only create commercial-minded service personnel (which in the bigger scheme of things may be providing a bigger pool of such resources for the state at large), but would also carry with it the baggage of the

'sly' side of business and possibly lead to corruption within the sub-sector.⁹ For instance, the 'disappearance' of US\$20 million intended for the procurement of military equipment in Zambia could be looked at in this context.¹⁰ The fact that the special investigations team on economic offences in Zambia has subpoenaed a number of members of the military to explain aspects of their participation in either some financial or resource transactions that have defrauded the Zambian government, is an indication of plausibility of the military being involved in such issues.

It is, however, important to note that the failure to project accurately the need for an expanded role of the defence and security services is not always due to incorrect appreciation by the services themselves, or for that matter a failure by the government to provide the necessary guidance or indeed that of the legislature to carry out its oversight responsibility *per se*. This may in fact be a function of the traditional military psyche demanding unquestioning obedience to anything projected downward. What inevitably happens is the re-translation of government intentions to the commanders' mission – how so ever it may be 'going against the grain'. More often than not the eagerness to comply with the wishes of the political 'masters' or assisting in the latter's programme is regarded as 'loyalty' to the government; quite often regarded as legitimate. This is, of course, until some political dynamism brings about a regime change that regards the previous one as acting on the fringes of legality, if not altogether illegitimately.

It is important to note that while the defence and security services may appear rather quiescent, at another level (usually privately and most probably in cahoots with some members of the opposition parties) they are projecting their disapproval, and inevitably either supporting the political opposition or indeed redirecting their views through a political process in which they themselves become the ultimate actors. Hence the need to maintain the military and security services as professional bodies with a focused function.¹¹ Harold Lasswell simply coagulates the characteristic function of the military profession by regarding it as the management of violence.¹²

While this rather narrow but accurate description of the defence and security services may be altogether too narrow in a 21st century era in which alternative skills of a body corporate ought to be used in the name of the efficient utilisation of resources, care ought to always be taken that where such roles are given, they are timely executed so that the services return to their primary function. The challenge is therefore in the maintenance of focus.

Making the 'core' function work

Managing the budget

To operationalise the primary function of the military and security services

inevitably demands having the required funding through an adequate budget. Krish Naidoo defines defence expenditure as one “reflect[ing] the extent to which a country will go to protect its sovereignty, territorial integrity and society”.¹³ However, the demands of a budget itself are also the source of challenges to both the services and the legislature. Research reveals that one of the major sources of the fiscal difficulties being experienced by some states on the African continent arises out of their failure to manage their military and security services.¹⁴

Managing the defence budget is the principal form of effecting this control. Stressing this point, Ferdinand Eberstand at a hearing before the US Senate Committee on Armed Services on National Security Act Amendments in 1949, said: “The budget is one of the most effective, if not the strongest, implement of civilian control over the Military Establishment.”¹⁵ This paper holds the view that the legislature has yet to use this tool effectively to enhance its oversight function.

A high-ranking government official once bemoaned that the state’s treasury could not meet the demands of the defence and security services faced with other competing developmental needs. As argued earlier, the SADC defence budgets remain unacceptably high. This is despite the fact that only Botswana has continued to reflect a continuously increasing budget, a noticeable reduction in the South African budget and a seeming ‘levelling out’ of the budgets of the rest of the SADC member states. What seems to be apparent is that the major factors that require to be turned around for a reduction in defence expenditure to become a reality are defence and security personnel – more accurately, the high ranking officials who make and direct decisions in the defence sector.

The generals and their ‘toys’

The defence and security services’ major hold on the defence sector has been their seeming indispensability in the provision of security for the protection of sovereignty, territorial integrity and society. It is argued, therefore, that without providing the financial resources they ask for, security cannot be guaranteed. It is a fact that ‘generals’ (with hardly any exception) will embark on a choice of military hardware without recourse to its actual cost. In the rare instance that this is factored into the equation, its purpose would normally be for selecting the type of hardware.

Foremost in the minds of the services is therefore the effectiveness of the equipment or service *vis-à-vis* that which is held by the ‘enemy’. There is a tendency to ‘overlook’ the ‘less important’ aspects of paying for the equipment in preference for that which meets the demands and activities of the services. It is therefore prudent that a measured balance be attained between the operational and technical demands of the practitioners and that of the

legislative committees that exercise oversight on the defence and security services, whose interest would be on both the efficacy of the services and other competing needs.

Evidently, as much as it is necessary for parliamentarians to acquire the “expertise needed to scrutinise military budgets”,¹⁶ and which expertise is considered lacking in a number of countries, it is also necessary to focus on the service personnel themselves rather than on some technical aspects. A meticulous examination of the defence sector – especially of the military budgets – as well as an intensive interrogation of the service personnel is what is required to understand, and where necessary curb, the desire by generals to have their ‘toys’.

A question of ‘conspiracy’

However, generals, colonels and the like do not always undertake the task of achieving their objectives without some help. This tends to be provided by other branches of the executive – either knowingly or unknowingly. Wuyi Omitoogun writes about “a conspiracy between the legislative and executive branches (in the name of security) to hide defence expenditure either from the public or from donors”,¹⁷ but more often, it is a conspiracy entirely within the executive branch. Some services have been known to reach “gentlemen’s verbal agreements between the Budget office and the departments”,¹⁸ leading to the salaries bill being overstated “to facilitate some unclear allowances like [a] maize meal allowance and other allowances that are outdated”.¹⁹

Further contributing to the difficulties of oversight of the defence and security services has been the limited capacity by auditors to make “on-the-spot assessment[s] of military sites that [is] important in order to verify some of the purchases purportedly made by the military”.²⁰ This has been worsened by the general lack of expertise on defence and security issues among civil society – a situation aggravated by the general veil of secrecy around most aspects of the defence sector. Admittedly, there are issues that governments will want to control access to, but this should not limit the required oversight.

Who guards the guardians?

The new challenge facing SADC, and which confronts the world at large, is seeking a way of establishing the oversight function beyond the legislature; or, put more correctly, what measures to put in place when the parliamentary oversight process is not compromised. How relevant it is to suggest a tier above that of the legislature, is an issue that is an open question. Should it be rather a question of structuring the legislative branch to meet this need? Yet another point to ponder is whether adequate oversight of the military and security sub-sector can ever be achieved in the confines of a state dimension, or whether

such a success is more likely in a collaborative sub-regional and regional framework. The ultimate question is: Who guards the guardian?

Some members of the legislature proudly, though in a somewhat quite manner, admit that oversight committees over the defence sector have been known to collude with the sector, much like that between some civil servants and members of the defence and security discussed earlier. Efforts to try to address the challenge of securing control of the military and security services have not been confined to the generally poor and weak but have even been the subject of intense debate in countries such as the US. The creation of the Defence Management Committee by John Johnson to reduce the defence budget,²¹ notwithstanding existing legislative provisions, begged the question whether that ought to be the way to go in the sub-region. However, that there is an urgent need to tighten control of the military and security services is without any doubt.

Conclusion

We have argued that matters of defence and security require close and concerted attention, not merely because of the important issues of security but also because expenditure on the defence sector means a reduction in expenditure for other sectors. With the reduction in insecurity in the SADC region, there ought to be an increase in resource allocation for other needy areas; human security rather than a concentration on military security is what a more peaceful environment requires.

The defence budget has been recognised as a major component that, if adequately controlled, would assist considerably in achieving both security and development for states in the region. In this regard, the legislature was identified as the critical tool to reign in defence and security, which would normally be more inclined in seeking to meet what it considers to be the requirements for keeping countries safe. There is therefore recognition that unless defence budgets are well controlled, defence and security personnel will seek to maximise their needs – even if this means entering into possibly inappropriate understandings with some members of the executive and legislature. The challenge of a sustained oversight capacity remains an unresolved issue.

Notes

- 1 The defence sector is defined here as one which, *inter alia*, comprises military institutions, government ministries insofar as they provide support to the military, the head of state as commander-in-chief and non-governmental organisations that comment on the activities of the military.

- 2 The debates on the arms procurement programme in South Africa and other related debates in the sub-region are cases in point.
- 3 In a recent interview with an auditor-general of a country in the sub-region, some generals were accused of operating as if they were a law unto themselves.
- 4 General economic growth fell from 3.4% in 2001 to 2.9% in 2002. For details see *The Military Balance, 2003-2004*, p 231.
- 5 Defence forces operating below capacity - Mabenga, *Times of Zambia*, 24 June 2003, pp 1-2.
- 6 Handbook for Parliamentarians, *Parliamentary oversight of the security sector: Principles, mechanisms and practices*, Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, Geneva, 2003, p 53.
- 7 Major General Len Le Roux of the Institute for Security Studies has often made this point based on his experience and observations during his long tour of duty.
- 8 Handbook for Parliamentarians, op cit, p 56.
- 9 For a detailed discussion of the issue of unbudgeted expenditures and their relationship with corruption, see W Omitoogun, The processes of budgeting for the military sector in Africa: Armaments, disarmament and international security, *SIPRI Yearbook 2003*, SIPRI, Oxford, 2003, p 13. See also G Chellah, ACC probing air commander, *The Monitor*, 20 June 2003, <<http://www.monitor.co.zm/media/news/viewnews.cgi?>>. See also, Funnjika charged with receiving £15, 000 bribe, *The Post*, 3 December 2004, <<http://www.zamnet.zm>>.
- 10 Africa: In search of leaders, *Zambia Daily Mail*, 24 June 2003. See also ACC probes Kavindele, three 'New Deal' ministers, ZAMNET, 23 June 2003, <<http://www.zamnet.zm/newsys/news/viewnews.cgi?>>.
- 11 See S Huntington, *The Soldier and the state: The theory and politics of civil-military relations*, Belknap Press and Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 1985, pp 7-18.
- 12 Ibid, p 11.
- 13 K Naidoo, Are we spending too much on defence?, *African Security Review* 4(5), 1995, <www.iss.co.za/Pubs/ASR/4No5/Naidoo.html>.
- 14 Some work has been undertaken on defence expenditure in all the SADC countries, as well as in Uganda and Ghana.
- 15 Huntington, op cit, p 437.
- 16 Omitoogun, op cit, p 13.
- 17 Ibid, p 14.
- 18 Research interviews, 2003.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Omitoogun, op cit, p 15.
- 21 Huntington, op cit, p 443.