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Towards the Creation of an African Civil-Military Relations Tradition

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Abstract

This paper seeks first to underscore the limitations of Western models of civil control which African countries employ to create stable civil-military relations. Second, it uses the recent experience of Southern African civil-military relations to illustrate the extent to which effective civil control over the military has been secured through a combination of objective and subjective mechanisms. And finally, it suggests some revisions in the conceptual architecture of late modern civil-military relations theory so as to ensure that discipline is more consistent with the exigencies of the African political landscape.

Introduction

The influence of Western intellectual and political traditions over both the political and intellectual traditions of the developing countries of the periphery has been well chronicled by a range of scholars and political analysts alike. The economic dependence of African countries on their former colonial masters was replicated in the introduction of various political, educational and intellectual systems that were markedly similar in both form and content to those of the departing Western colonisers. Both the armed forces of African countries and the patterns of civil-military relations which began to emerge during the post-colonial period mirrored this close ascriptive relationship between coloniser and colonised. Although the ethnic and racial composition of the armed forces of the newly independent countries changed significantly in the first decade following independence, their culture, traditions and corporate identity remained strongly influenced by the discourses and ideological themes of the Western armed forces.

The emerging patterns of post-independence civil-military relations were also marked, at the level of institutions and mechanisms, by a strong similarity between

the formal mechanisms and institutions of civil control found in the metropole and those introduced in the newly independent countries. Virtually all African countries possess, on paper at least, the battery of formal mechanisms via which, it is claimed, civil control over the armed forces is ensured – although the form of these mechanisms may vary depending on the country concerned and the politico-juridical system which they have inherited and subsequently adapted. Countries possessing a stronger legislative tradition tend to emphasise the role of the legislative mechanisms entrusted with the task of civil oversight – parliamentary committees, ombudsman systems and approval of the budget for example. Other countries with a stronger executive culture may rely more extensively on the regulatory role of civil servants, finance ministries and presidential control to ensure the subordination of the armed forces to civil control.

An analysis of the political institutions of most African countries therefore reveals a range of formal mechanisms designed to ensure the maintenance of stable civil-military relations. Typically these include constitutional provisions regulating the functions of the armed forces, parliamentary defence committees, public accounts committees, audit and exchequer acts, internal audits and service regulations. In some countries, fully-fledged Ministries of Defence and Military Ombudsman systems exist, whilst in others creative and varied forms of civilian oversight over the armed forces have been instituted.

Notwithstanding this range of formal mechanisms, the reality underpinning African civil-military relations (and indeed the civil-military relations of most developing countries) is the fact that in most countries the subordination of the armed forces to civil control, when this has occurred, has been achieved by a complex system of processes and interfaces of a non-institutional nature. In virtually all these countries where the armed forces remain subordinate to the civil authorities (regardless of whether the latter are democratically elected or not), real control over the armed forces is wielded via a range of subjective interfaces and partnerships of which the formal mechanisms are either a component or are, alternatively, merely the formal expression of these power relations.

The aim of this article in relation to the above is threefold. Firstly, it seeks to outline the limitations of the Western intellectual traditions in providing models of civil control which African countries can utilise in creating stable civil-military relations. The importance of reconstructing the central concepts of modern civil-military relations theory and the manner in which they are applied to developing countries has already been referred to in recent literature. A number of analysts have succinctly outlined the weaknesses of current modern civil-military relations theory particularly its historically and culturally-bound nature (Schiff 1996 and 1995: 17). Secondly, to concretise the theoretical observations proffered above, this article examines the recent tradition of Southern African civil-military relations and illustrates the extent to which effective civil control over the activities

of the armed forces has been secured by a robust combination of both objective and subjective forms of control. It highlights the centrality of subjective processes and partnerships in ensuring stable African civil-military relations regardless of the political culture of the country concerned. Finally, it suggests some revisions to the conceptual architecture and scaffolding of late modern civil-military relations theory so as to ensure that this discipline is more consistent with the exigencies of African political processes. The creation of such a theoretical architecture is, of course, an ambitious project and will require time and ongoing research to develop but it does have very practical consequences. Any limitations or inconsistencies within our civil-military relations theory can result in the introduction of models of civil-military relations entirely inappropriate to and ineffective within African countries. It is for this reason that a rigorous and radical critique of many of the key assumptions of modern civil-military relations theory is required.

The Limitations of Formal Mechanisms of Civil Control:

Key Features of the Western Civil-Military Relations Tradition

In a number of recent critiques, some civil-military relations theorists have referred to the pervasive influence of the USA experience of civil-military relations over Western military sociology and have illustrated how this tradition has become universalised and absolutised within both the theory of civil-military relations and in its practice. Much of this tradition can be traced back to the earlier writings of Samuel Huntington who emphasised the subordination of the armed forces to a diversity of more “traditional” western-styled checks and balances emanating from regulations, military procedures, military command and control patterns, and legislative oversight for instance (Huntington 1957). However, recent critics, among the most eloquent being Rebecca Schiff, have challenged this tradition:

A major conclusion of current civil-military relations theory is that militaries should remain physically and ideologically separated from the political institutions. By contrast, the alternative theory argues that three partners – the military, the political elites and the citizenry – should aim for a co-operative relationship that may or may not involve separation but does not require it (Schiff 1996: 278).

Schiff’s Theory of Concordance possesses direct relevance for both the study of civil-military relations and its practical application in the developing world. In her own words:

Concordance theory considers the importance of context in studying the military and society. Some of the indicators, such as military style and the

inclusion of the citizenry as a partner, deal with the norms, customs, and values of particular nations. Concordance theory explains which major aspects of a nation should be in agreement in order to prevent domestic military intervention. How a particular society achieves such an agreement is largely dependent upon the nature of that society, its institutions, and its culture. That is what makes concordance theory unique: it causally predicts conditions for domestic military intervention without superimposing a particular historical or cultural context upon a nation (*Ibid.*: 278).

She has argued, quite cogently and rightly so that the effective subordination of the armed forces to civil control is not a necessary outcome of the institutional separation of the armed forces from the civil authorities. Effective civil-military relations are achieved, in her opinion, via the extent to which political, military and civil actors find agreement, and accommodate one another, in the definition of the values and objectives of the armed forces. Within this equation disruptions of stable civil-military relations are, more often than not, caused not by the failure of formal institutional mechanisms but by a breakdown in trust and its attendant consequences: According to (Metz and Johnson 1995: 5),

Civil-military relations tend to be placid when both sides understand and accept the distribution of responsibility for specific issues and functions. Three things can upset this: *a perception by one side that the other is unable or unwilling to fulfill its responsibilities; deliberate encroachment by one party on an issue or function considered the prerogative of the other; or, the emergence of new issues or functions not yet allocated to one party or the other* (italics mine).

The key areas of agreement that need to be secured between the armed forces and the political elite in order to ensure stable civil-military relations include agreement as to the involvement of the armed forces in the political decision-making process regardless of the political culture within which this political decision-making process occurs; agreement as to the composition of the officer corps in terms of its social and national representiveness and its functional capabilities; agreement as to the method of recruitment into the armed forces (conscript or voluntary systems), agreement as to the military style and corporate ethos of the armed forces “what it looks like, what ethos drives it, and what people think about it” (Schiff 1995: 23).

In the light of Schiff’s critique, and from an appraisal of the current Western literature on civil-military relations, three key characteristics of the institutional separation model can be discerned:

a. The key feature of this tradition is its emphasis on the institutional dimension

of civil-military relations – the assertion that militaries should remain physically and ideologically separated from political institutions. This approach is referred to as the institutional-separation model in this article.

- b. This approach emphasises, in accordance with the institutional-separation model referred to above, the importance of formal institutional mechanisms in ensuring the subordination of the armed forces to civil control. This approach downplays the role which non-institutional forms of civil control and the role which civil society and culture can play in determining the parameters of a country's civil-military relations (what is referred to in this article as the collaborative-partnership model of civil-military relations).
- c. The corporate identity of the armed forces in this tradition is defined as being that of the professional, apolitical soldier, loyal to the government of the day and possessing its own value framework. The armed forces eschew politics and concentrate their energies on developing and applying their functional military expertise.

Not all writings on civil-military relations by Western scholars have corroborated the current dominant institutional-separation paradigm. A number of influential Western civil-military relations scholars such as *Finer* and *Janowitz* have written extensively on the role which societal factors and non-institutional factors play in ensuring the armed forces' adherence to the principle of civil supremacy. Notwithstanding these arguments, however, Western civil-military relations theory has been dominated in the second half of the 20th century by a focus on the institutional (and hence formal, legal and constitutional) dimension underpinning civil-military relations and the importance of securing the ideological and political separation of the armed forces from the body-politic.

Whilst it is important not to dismiss elements of the Western tradition, it is equally important to avoid reifying this tradition to the detriment of other traditions, and to reclaim as well as reintroduce into the contemporary African debate on civil-military relations those elements of the collaborative-partnership approach that argues for the introduction of a creative range of additional measures whereby the subordination of the military to civil control can be ensured. For this reason it is important to differentiate between objective and subjective forms of control over the armed forces.

The Distinction Between Objective and Subjective Forms of Civil Control

For the purposes of clarity it is also necessary to explain the distinction made between the terms "objective" and "subjective" as used throughout this article. Typically, civil-military relations, and the stresses and contradictions contained therein, can be classified and ultimately explained according to a range of "objective" and "subjective" conditions.

Objective forms of control include those mechanisms of a formal, constitutional

and legalistic nature operating externally to the military establishment and embodying the political and constitutional pact entered into between the state and the armed forces in most liberal democracies. It is significant to note that the efficacy of these formal mechanisms is neither inherent in their structure nor pre-given in their logic but depends, critically, on the balance of power within and between different social classes, state actors, and individuals within a given social formation, and the extent to which this power relationship articulates itself within the political culture and traditions of the country in question.

Objective factors refer to the level and legitimacy of political culture within the country concerned, the level of formal political and civil organisation within society, the role of parliament and its various committees and mechanisms in ensuring civil oversight over both the state in general and the armed forces in particular, the existence of formal control mechanisms within government designed to ensure the acquiescence of the armed forces (the role of the judiciary, ombudsman systems, financial mechanisms, etc.), the role of legislation in determining the roles and responsibilities of the armed forces, and the existence of other control mechanisms (be they of a civil or administrative nature) whereby the activities of the armed forces are monitored.

In order to bolster robust civil-military relations, a range of additional subjective measures is often required via which both the political and civil authorities can ensure the ongoing obedience and compliance of the armed forces. These subjective mechanisms are neither formal nor constitutional-legalistic in nature and most often translate themselves into a series of relationships and partnerships entered into between the leadership of the armed forces and the leadership of the political and civil elite. These subjective mechanisms may not necessarily be premised on democratic civil-military relations and can include such arrangements as party penetration of the leadership echelons of the armed forces; ethnic manipulation of the composition of the officer corps to ensure loyalty; manipulation of the military mission to prevent its intrusion onto the party-political terrain; monitoring the activities of the armed forces via other non-military intelligence agencies; and the establishment of security "counter balances" to the influence of the armed forces in the form of police, intelligence or para-military agencies. However, they can also include progressive mechanisms entirely consistent with and supportive of democratic civil-military relations such as joint political-military management of defence policy and planning processes and the regular involvement of civilian society in the defence policy formulation process (Baynham 1992).

Additional subjective factors within the military that affect their predisposition to intervene include their organisational features, the social and class composition of their personnel, the distribution of authority within the military hierarchy, their corporate identity (and the extent to which this is prepared to entertain and obstruct intervention), their skills patterns and operational experiences, the relationships

between the different arms of the service, and the fissures and contradictions within the officer corps. The significance of these factors will vary according to the particular military formation or mode of civil-military relations under scrutiny, and the inter-relationships between these various instances will change according to the developments within both the body politic and social fabric of the society concerned.

Civil-Military Relations and The Limitations of Institutional Forms of Control

Current civil-military relations theory places great store on the importance of external guarantees – a range of institutional checks and balances — to ensure healthy civil-military relations. It maintains that it is via formal mechanisms of control (parliamentary oversight, civilian control over the defence budgeting process, etc.) that military activities can be constrained and their involvement in the political process pre-empted.

This system works to great effect in the industrialised democracies of Western Europe and is a model that is “exported” from Western countries to African countries via the military academies and defence colleges of the West as well as via the various mobile training teams on civil-military relations that work regularly throughout Africa (the International Military Education and Training Programme of the USA and the British Military Assistance Training Teams of the UK, for instance). Yet the arguments in defence of formal institutional mechanisms of control are problematic for a variety of inter-related reasons.

- The first is the limited utility that this concept possesses in explaining the diverse forms of civil control that can be instituted over the armed forces which are not formal-legalistic in nature and which involve other social actors, processes and interfaces beyond those located in both the legislature and the executive.
- The second is the inherent limitations of formal mechanisms of control “in-themselves”. The institutional-separation model presumes the efficacy of formal mechanisms standing separate from and “above” the armed forces they seek to control. Yet the efficacy of the mechanisms depends on three critical variables (variables that are often absent in specific situations). These are:
 - i. Formal-legalistic measures tend to operate retroactively and only address a small area of organisational behaviour. They are designed more to prevent the abuse of power than contain the security forces within a legitimate and mutually agreed sphere of activity.
 - ii. Formal-legalistic measures are largely externally focused and do not address the behavioural patterns of military officers themselves, the way they view their mission and responsibilities, and the way their

seniors view their role-orientation towards the political leaders of the day.

- iii. To be effective, political control mechanisms require the political will to make them work. Given the lack of familiarity displayed by many political leaders with the world of the military, and the fact that political leaders often depend on the support of sectors of the armed forces for their political ambitions (particularly with regard to their organisational and intelligence capabilities) there is often a reluctance to fully utilise these formal mechanisms of control. This also explains the ability of the armed forces to intervene in African countries where such mechanisms have already existed – Zambia (1997), Nigeria (throughout the 1970s and 1980s) and Lesotho (1985).

It is also instructive that the patterns of civil-military relations evident in the self-same European countries operated in a fundamentally different manner in the early 20th century and the centuries prior to it. Control over the armed forces of Western Europe during the Feudal, Absolutist and Early Industrial periods were maintained by a complex web of patronage, venality (purchasing of commissions by the landed classes), and reciprocal material benefits. Effective control over the British armed forces, for instance, was maintained well into the 20th century via the strong ascriptive ties (ancestral, social and educational) that existed between the dominant classes and the command echelons of the Navy, Army and Air Force. Control over the armed forces in Germany, Italy and Spain during the pre-Second World War period was maintained through the inter-penetration of the ruling party and the command echelons of the security forces and the establishment of security agencies to counter-balance the influence of a sometimes uncooperative military (the role of the SS and the SA in Germany for example).

Equally problematic is the assertion prevalent in the institutional-separation model that the armed forces should not be involved in “politics” and should remain “apolitical”. The corporate responsibility of the armed forces is, in this equation, to uphold the Constitution, remain loyal to the government of the day and to concentrate their energies on developing their functional military expertise. In reality, of course, the notion of the “apolitical” soldier is redolent with contradictions even within those Western countries where this model is applied. Both the institutional conservatism of the armed forces and the historical links that have bound them to the dominant classes have resulted in their command echelons both involving themselves in the political process and making pronouncements on matters of a political nature. Indeed, the decision-making processes of most modern democracies is such that the involvement of the armed forces in the political process (the Congressional Committee system in the USA for example) is a necessity rather than an option.

A survey of Southern African civil-military relations illustrates the limited

utility of the institutional-separation model in providing an all-embracing model upon which an effective African civil-military relations tradition can be established. This is analysed in more detail below.

Objective and Subjective Control of the Armed Forces: The Southern African Experience

The points made above and those elaborated in further detail below stress the need for a more integrated and flexible definition of those mechanisms which can be used to underpin healthy civil-military relations. The central tenets of this theory would envisage a range of objective and subjective mechanisms, processes and partnerships as constituting the heart of civil-military relations. The efficacy of these mechanisms, processes and partnerships would not be pre-given and neither would they be applicable to all contexts but would depend, critically, on the balance of power within society, and among the political elite, the military elite and civil society itself. Given the fact that such relationships are continually changing, any shifts within this balance of power would obviously entail different formal and informal configurations upon which civil-military relations would be established.

Early South African Civil-Military Relations: Ethnic Partnerships and Shared Visions

South Africa possesses a rich and diverse military history and it is these traditions that underpin much of the nature of its present patterns of civil-military relations and much of the country's present military culture. The emergence of the modern South African state and its tradition of institutionalised armed forces is a relatively recent phenomenon. Prior to the formation of the Union Defence Force in 1912, South Africa possessed a variety of military structures and traditions including the Boer Commandos; the Zulu age regiments; the Colonial Volunteer regiments, and the Pandour tradition in the Cape Colony (Tylden 1982).

Civil-military relations within these different scenarios were unproblematic. Civil-military relations within the Zulu Kingdoms during the 19th century were stable – notwithstanding the ongoing palace intrigues which characterised Zulu politics. Military service assumed the form of conscription, and political and economic privileges were dependent on all able-bodied Zulu males providing military service. The co-location of political office, royal standing and military seniority ensured the complete subordination of military capabilities to political dictates.

A similar civic tradition prevailed in the Boer Republics. Very few regular units were maintained (the exception being certain standing infantry regiments in the Cape Colony, and the Staats Artillerie in the Transvaal), and the tradition of the "citizen-soldier" remained pronounced through the extensive reliance of all forces on reserves (the best examples being the "nation-in-arms" concept as reflected in

both the Boer Commandos and the Zulu Regiments). As with the Zulu tradition, the unity of values, ideological beliefs and broad political systems between the Boers, their political representatives in the Volksraad (parliament) and their military commanders pre-empted the emergence of a praetorian military disposition akin to Argentina in the pre-1930 period.¹

The smashing of the Bambata Rebellion in 1906 was a turning point for organised African resistance to colonialism. It also marked the emergence of a specific form of civil-military relations within South Africa. Prior to the Bambata Rebellion, African resistance to colonialism had been mounted by the different kingdoms in existence within South Africa at the time. Much of it was highly organized and came from kingdoms and states that boasted an impressive military culture and capability – the Zulu, Basotho and Bapedi resistance for instance. The superior firepower of the colonisers and the fact that African resistance was fragmented along ethnic lines saw its ultimate dissipation in the wake of both Boer and British conquest (Roux 1978).

The victory of the British during the Anglo-Boer war had seen the entrenchment of British capital (and particularly the hegemonic class fraction of mining capital) as the dominant economic player within South Africa. The Bambata Rebellion, a defeated and disaffected Boer population, and limited military resources compelled the British Government to seek a pact with the Boers to jointly establish political and administrative control over South Africa with the purpose of ensuring the subjugation of the African population to their respective industrial and agricultural needs.

Early patterns of formal civil-military relations were thus characterised by both their racially exclusive nature and by the fact that it must in the mutual interest of both the Boer and British to ensure that the armed forces remain subordinate to the new Union Government established in 1910. The Act of Union in 1910 saw the establishment of forms of institutional control over the armed forces almost entirely modeled upon the Westminster system. Legislative control over the armed forces was vested in the parliament (which approved the budget), executive control resided in the Prime Minister and his Cabinet, and civil control was further enhanced by a civilian Ministry of Defence and a civilian Secretary for Defence.

The existence of these mechanisms, however, proved incapable of preventing large sectors of the recently formed Union Defence Force (formed in 1912 as a result of the integration of former British and Boer military personnel into a unified national defence force) from going into open rebellion against the decision by the government to enter the First World War on the side of the British government. The 1915 Rebellion and the subsequent mass mutinies of the armed forces during the 1922 white mineworkers strike underscored the importance of developing robust partnerships with the command echelons of the armed forces. During this period it was only due to the Union Government's ability to establish partnerships with

the more influential sectors of the armed forces (particularly with Generals Smuts, Botha and Lukin) that the prospects of secession and insurrection were avoided.

Whilst the formal structures governing civil-military relations remained intact in the post-1948 period, the National Party proceeded to reshuffle the executive reaches of the armed forces on the basis of a largely ethnic agenda. To ensure that the armed forces remained loyal to the political project of the Afrikaner Nationalist Party, the new ruling party proceeded to purge elements within the senior command levels who were deemed to be either Smuts supporters or of a liberal political orientation. This *de facto* palace coup was determined largely, although not exclusively, along ethnic and linguistic lines and also involved an attempted “indigenisation” of the traditions of the armed forces themselves. An outcry from officers, ex-servicemen and white opposition parties, however, curtailed the National Party’s proposed restructuring programme – but not before the political orientation of the senior officer corps had been substantially altered.

The effect of this restructuring on South African civil-military relations was not insignificant. Although the Air Force and the Navy were left largely unscathed by this purge – a product, partially, of their smallness and, at that stage, relatively unimportant institutional profiles – the Army was drastically overhauled within the period of a decade. Henceforth its senior officer corps became more homogeneous in both its political and social orientation (white, male Afrikaans-speakers). The strong ascriptive ties that developed between the SA Army and the National Party, was to create the basis for an alliance that was, later, to substantially empower the SADF and gradually erode political control over its actions (Williams 1994).

Civil-Military relations within the South African state were to remain largely unproblematic from 1948 onwards until De Klerk’s initiation of the negotiations process in 1990. This is significant given the fact that during this period the formal mechanisms of control were either abolished (as with the miniaturisation of the Ministry of Defence in 1968) or rendered inoperative via a battery of legal constraints (particularly in as much as it related to public access to information and the role of parliament in ensuring oversight and scrutiny over the activities of the armed forces). Yet notwithstanding the high levels of SADF influence over the political process during the 1980s, it was both the shared values and common vision shared between itself and the political and civil elite, and the strong ascriptive ties that existed between its command cadre and the leadership of the then ruling National Party that prevented its intrusion onto the extra-parliamentary terrain (ascriptive ties that were largely a product of the racial, ethnic, religious, political and linguistic commonalities between political and military elites). “Total Strategy”, as the joint political-military management of South African political life was to become known in the 1980s, was the product of:

... reforming the elite coalition, both internally and through power reallo-

cations working in favour of a tri-partite alliance between government, business and the military, and, externally, through extension of its boundaries to bring the Coloureds and Indians into the minority political camp (Frankel 1980: 277).

This partnership proved critical during a period in which the role of the white parliament had been substantially reduced via the shift to executive decision-making in the post-1978 period: considerable power had been consolidated in the hands of P.W. Botha via the institution of the Executive Presidency in 1983, and the influence of the ruling party over policy matters had been substantially reduced (from 1982 onwards the National Party and its provincial congresses could only deliberate on matters of principle and not policy).

A similar, although substantially less autocratic process, was evident in the civil-military relations of South Africa's "other army" – the army of the African National Congress (ANC), Umkhonto We Sizwe (MK). The ANC's ability to control MK was, as is the case with most revolutionary organisations, the product of a continuous inter-penetration by the MK leadership and the ANC political hierarchy. The integration of MK into the political structures, culture and hierarchy of the ANC prevented it pursuing its own corporate agenda (a phenomenon that was noticeably absent in the relationship between the Azanian People's Liberation Army and the Pan Africanist Congress for instance).

The experience of MK was markedly different from that of the SADF. Unlike the National Party/SADF with its tradition of ethnic and racial exclusivity, isolation and authoritarianism, the MK was a partnership premised on a strong non-racial tradition and an enduring commitment to democracy. The comparison between both partnerships highlights a point that is central to any appreciation of why there is need for broadening the scope of current civil-military relations theory. It is true that partnerships may constitute highly effective forms of civil control; but not all partnerships provide the basis upon which one would endeavour to establish healthy civil-military relations. Partnerships, when established, must include a mutual respect for the primacy of civil supremacy by the armed forces, must be conducted in a transparent manner, and must be accountable to the democratic processes of the country concerned (and this article presupposes that democratic civil-military relations are desirable in themselves).

From Authoritarianism to Democracy: Consolidating Democratic Civil-Military Relations

Within a comparatively short period of time the new South African Government has managed to institute a range of mechanisms, legislation and processes to ensure appropriate civil oversight over the activities of the newly integrated South African National Defence Force. The Interim Constitution outlines in considerable detail

the roles, functions, posture, composition and responsibilities of the new South African National Defence Force (the latter having been created in the post-April 1994 period as a result of the integration of the seven hitherto warring armies within the country). In a marked break from the past, the Constitution called for the posture of the new Defence Force to be "primarily defensive", for its structures to be representative of the country's population, and for its activities to be sufficiently transparent to enable effective civil control and oversight.

The visible shift of power from the executive to the legislature during the post-April 1994 period has possibly been most manifest in the activities of the Joint Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence. A robust insistence by the Committee on its involvement in all major aspects of defence policy and planning, and its refusal to "rubber-stamp" key policy documents emerging from the Department of Defence has characterised this tendency. The transfer of the departmental accounting function and the defence policy function from the Defence Force to the recently established Ministry of Defence has deprived the armed forces of much of their institutional influence possessed during the pre-April 1994 period. The appointment of civilians to senior positions within the Department of Defence, most notably the Secretary of Defence, the Chief of the Policy Division, and the Directors of all the key Policy positions, has strengthened the role of civilian bureaucrats in the administration of defence matters.²

These mechanisms were further buttressed by a range of key legal amendments and policy processes which began to substantially reconfigure the strategic direction of defence. The White Paper on Defence approved by parliament in 1996 sought to redefine the responsibilities of the armed forces in the new democracy whilst the Defence Review sought to secure a national consensus on the defence requirements appropriate to a fledgling democracy. By 1997, South African civil-military relations, despite the dire predictions of many pundits, were on a substantially better footing than even optimists had predicted during the tense years of the pre-1994 period.

The ability of these mechanisms to contribute to the stabilisation and democratic control of South Africa's civil-military relations was not inherent in their structure and/or functioning. The resilience of the emerging democratic political culture and its high legitimacy within the broad population, have ensured that these formal mechanisms of control enjoy a *de facto* power that often far exceeds their constitutionally and legally mandated authority. The undisputed majority enjoyed by the new ruling party in parliament and its extensive support within the trade unions, the churches, and civil society, renders the likelihood of military intervention in the political process improbable, and the chances of its success, should it occur, remote.

Yet, in retrospect the relative success (for indeed some tensions do inevitably persist) of this transition in the defence sector was not simply, or even largely,

attributable to the institution of new constitutional and legal systems or defence policy pronouncements. Many of the key interfaces whereby the acquiescence of the former SADF under the new ANC government was accomplished were created at the level of subjective partnerships. A number of examples illustrate this observation.

Firstly, in accordance with the policy of "sunset clauses" no former SADF members were removed from their positions, neither were their privileges undermined (salaries, pensions, gratuities and medical benefits). Secondly, whilst a number of key positions were occupied by new incumbents drawn from the former guerrilla forces, the key command positions and staff positions continued to be occupied by former regular officers. Notwithstanding the transfer of both the policy and financial functions from the SADF to the Secretary of Defence within the newly created Ministry of Defence, the Chief of the National Defence Force continued to remain the Head of the Department of Defence. Thirdly, President Mandela, took pains to praise and respect the professionalism of the armed forces and to enhance their image in the public eye.

Fourthly, and perhaps the most important, it was via such processes as the Defence Review that the basis was laid for an ongoing partnership with parliament, the political elite and a wide range of civil society actors. The comprehensive Defence Review process initiated in 1996 and completed in 1997 (arguably the most consultative review process conducted by any democracy in the post-Second World War period), saw the Joint Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence playing an oversight role in the policy and plans emerging from the Review (a role entirely consistent with their constitutional mandate) as well as entering into a more robust and collegial joint management of this process with the Department of Defence (particularly in the arena of defining posture, functions and tasks of the armed forces, determining the design of the future Defence Force, and approving the equipment requirements of the armed forces). Whilst it was their formal authority that enabled the Committee to ensure that all policy processes operating within the Department of Defence were subject to their scrutiny, it was the partnerships established between military personnel and the members of the Committee that facilitated joint ownership of the process and contributed to the high levels of transparency and accountability which characterised the process.

Furthermore, it was via processes such as the Defence Review that civil society was able to enter into the defence debate and influence its results. This was effected at two levels – at a series of provincial workshops through which both civil society and the general public made a wide range of proposals on the direction, shape and content of future defence policy, and through their extensive involvement in the specialist working groups established to formulate this particular policy in conjunction with defence and parliamentary actors. The significance of the involvement of civil society in the Defence Review was both the precedent it established

and the culture of consultation that it instituted – an interactive process that is increasingly becoming institutionalised within South African defence management and significantly contributes to the enhancement of civil society's direct and indirect control over the armed forces.

All these interfaces were the result of a continuous interaction and negotiation between the political elite and the command cadre of the armed forces – a dialogue that was, at times, tense but which developed, in a relatively short period of time, into a collegial and largely mutually supportive relationship. What has made this relationship work within the civil-military orbit, has been the development of sufficient trust between the political and military leaderships to enable the joint management and discussion of all key policy and strategic issues – a process that was initiated and is maintained voluntarily between both players.

Civil-Military Relations in Southern Africa: The Power of Partnerships

The experience of other Southern African countries tends in a similar vein to South Africa's. Virtually, all countries possess the battery of formal mechanisms via which, it is claimed, civil control over the armed forces is ensured and which are largely derived from the institutional and judicial traditions of the former colonisers. Typically these include constitutional provisions regulating the functions of the armed forces, parliamentary defence committees, public accounts committees, audit and exchequer acts, internal audits and service regulations. In some countries, fully-fledged Ministries of Defence and Military Ombudsman systems exist, whilst in others creative and varied forms of both civil and civilian oversight over the armed forces have been instituted. Yet, in virtually all these countries, real control over the armed forces is wielded via a range of subjective interfaces and partnerships of which the formal mechanisms are either a component thereof or are, alternatively, the formal expression of these power relations. A brief overview of prevailing Southern African civil-military relations confirms this observation.

For those countries that emerged victorious from their respective liberation struggles, a strong symbiotic relationship exists between the new government and the military elite in the armed forces. This has ensured that the activities of the armed forces have been conducted within the context of a shared value framework – itself a product of an enduring political-military partnership that had its roots in the fusion of political and military leaderships which occurred during the liberation wars. This partnership has resulted in the maintenance and development of well-established transmission belts between the new political and military elites that is reinforced by the role which the ruling party performs in these different countries.

Former Frelimo commanders in Mozambique constitute a sizeable percentage of the present government's Ministers and senior civil servants. The former head of the Zimbabwean National Army is now the chair of the Parliamentary Defence Committee for instance, and many former senior Tanzania officers are now

prominent politicians constituting prime examples in this regard. Furthermore in Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia, Angola, Zimbabwe and Tanzania, members of the military elite are either card-carrying members of the ruling party or, more significantly, they are represented on the central committees of the ruling parties themselves.

Tanzania, for instance, devised a system of civil and civilian control over its armed forces which exceeded many of the control mechanisms introduced by other post-colonial Southern African states. Strongly influenced by the attempt by the Tanzanian armed forces to seize power in the early 1960s, Nyerere introduced a series of additional measures to ensure the obedience of the armed forces. These ranged from the introduction of a National Service Scheme and militia on the one hand, to the creation of a range of national, regional and district committees of the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi party whereby the activities of the armed forces could be monitored. The net effect of this system was to ensure the establishment of a variety of non-government, civilian oversight mechanisms whereby the activities of the armed forces could be continually monitored, as well as ensuring that the skills monopoly enjoyed by the military was now broken and dispersed within civilian society itself (Rupiyah 1996; Baynham 1992).

This close relationship has been loosened in some ways with the introduction of multi-party rule in both Tanzania and Zambia, for example. Interestingly neither experience has resulted in the development of a praetorian mentality amongst their officer cadre. This is attributable to a number of different factors. The first is undoubtedly the fact that political conditions within Southern Africa have generally (with the exception of Lesotho) not lent themselves to the development of an interventionist ethos within the armed forces. Mass based parties emerging from a long struggle for democracy, the close relationships forged between the political and military elites during the guerrilla struggles, the strong civic ethos instilled within the corporate identities of the armed forces (all guerrilla armies did, after all, was literally to fight for the institution of democracy with its various "checks and balances"!), and the strong sense of regional co-operation and destiny (the latter being the product of the anti-apartheid struggle) have been major factors in this regard.³

Political control over the armed forces has also been maintained in the negative sense in some Southern African countries. The former President of Malawi, Hastings Banda, attempted to monitor and control the activities of the armed forces via the creation of the Young Pioneers – a paramilitary structure designed to support the programme of the ruling party. The eventual disbanding of the Young Pioneers by the military was a product, interestingly, of the armed forces resistance to the intrusion into their constitutionally demarcated territory and their concern that the Young Pioneers constituted an obstacle to the democratisation of the country. In Zaire, similarly, the late Mobutu encouraged rivalries amongst his

different military units in order to ensure that their attentions were not turned towards him. His Civil Guard was Egyptian-trained, his former 31st Brigade was French trained, and the elite Special Presidential Division was Israeli-trained (the latter being composed mainly of Ngwandi – Mobutu’s own ethnic group and power base) (Luckham 1995, 1997; Baynham 1992).

Purges of the officer cadre of the armed forces have also been conducted in order to ensure the subordination of the armed forces to political authority. This was done somewhat brutally as was the case with the Matabeleland uprising in Zimbabwe in 1982 and the subsequent purging of elements of the ZIPRA command echelon from the Zimbabwean armed forces; or subtly as was the case with the removal of many English-speaking officers and liberal Afrikaner officers from the South African armed forces after the Afrikaner Nationalist victory at the polls in 1948. One of the reasons cited for the abortive coup in Zambia in November 1997 was the belief that President Chiluba was meddling with the promotions of Zambian Army officers.

In a nutshell, objective mechanisms do exist and work with varying degrees of efficacy in Southern Africa; but both South African and the other Southern African examples reinforce the centrality of subjective mechanisms in contributing to the maintenance of stable civil-military relations. They also highlight the importance of exploring such partnerships in the future and establishing areas within which further theoretical research can be conducted. In this connection, some tentative suggestions are made below.

Theoretical Possibilities and Revisions: African Civil-Military Relations into the 21st Century

It was stated in the introduction that developing countries in general and African countries in particular have often tended to mediate their experiences of civil-military relations via the traditions of either their former colonisers, or, with the impact of globalisation, via their major trading partners. The resulting intellectual, ideological and doctrinal dependence produces a situation aptly described (in this case, the Latin America context) as follows:

As long as imported theories and cultural movements remain divorced from the opposition of forces which are the only means of lending specific importance and historical density to the signs produced in Latin American cultures, *they act as little more than orthopedic aides within the contexts of those cultures. Characteristically, this kind of production exhausts itself in mere formal repetitions or ‘doctrinal mannerism’* (italics mine) (Richard 1993: 465).

If African countries are to avoid this “doctrinal mannerism” referred to here,

then it is imperative that some of the key assumptions underpinning current Western civil-military relations theory be revisited. A conceptual geography of civil-military relations needs to be developed that is more consistent with the realities of civil-military relations in general. The reification of one tradition and theoretical system to the detriment of other discourses can stifle and impede constructive intellectual debate as well as produce unintended political consequences if literally applied. A number of suggestions can be made regarding the proposed re-examination of the theoretical assumptions underpinning the study of civil-military relations in African countries.

Firstly, the adoption of a more flexible and less absolute approach to the current Western civil-military relations tradition should not be construed as constituting a negative attack on the positive principles of traditional civil-military theory. The limited utility or inapplicability of certain formal mechanisms to developing countries does not detract from the principles upon which these mechanisms are predicated (the principle of civil supremacy and the importance of precisely defining the roles and tasks of the armed forces for instance). The limitation of current civil-military relations discourse lies with its ontological pretensions and not the formal, epistemological status of its central concepts. The latter can be redeemed and key categories of civil-military relations can be reconstructed via a critique of their ontological status — the manner in which they are constructed in relation to a plurality of contexts and realities. A key area of research in the future will be investigating how these mechanisms can be made more effective and, significantly, how objective mechanisms can interface with subjective mechanisms to improve the overall levels of oversight over the armed forces.

Secondly, the exploration of the hitherto neglected realm of partnerships (the subjective component) in civil-military relations does not imply an abrogation of the utility of objective mechanisms in “traditional” civil-military relations theory. The primacy of the political and the importance of ensuring the subordination of the armed forces to elected civilian government continues within this expanded scope of civil-military relations. It is only through a combination of both objective and subjective mechanisms, each developed in relation to the political and cultural peculiarities of the country concerned that effective and context-specific civil-military relations can be developed.

At a practical level, a range of measures can be instituted to build capacity and mutual trust between the political and civilian elites and the command echelons of the armed forces. Active involvement of the parliamentary representatives and non-military civilian experts in the defence policy process can contribute immensely to their understanding of both the nuances of the defence decision-making process and the peculiarities of military culture. Similarly, the exposure of the senior officer corps to the parliamentary process, the party-political process and the civilian budgeting process will sensitise them to the exigencies of political and

civilian rule. Joint seminars, team-building exercises, active involvement by political and civilian representatives in the reserve formations of the armed forces, and joint visits to military installations are among some of the mechanisms that can be instituted in this regard. It is important to stress that such partnerships are not equal partnerships, however, and operate within the hierarchy of authority provided for by either a democratic dispensation or, where a "traditional" liberal democratic system does not prevail, a situation in which the inviolable authority of the elected civilian authority is respected (as in Uganda for instance).

Thirdly, the scope of civil military relations needs to be expanded to incorporate non-institutional actors and mechanisms into its orbit as well as a consideration of the role which both police agencies, intelligence services and, in some cases, private security companies may play in either ensuring or undermining civil-military relations. In the case of the former, the transformation of the South African Defence Forces illustrates the critical role which can be played by organs of civil society in contributing to the shaping of the mission of the armed forces and ensuring their subordination to civil control. In the case of the latter it is instructive to note that the downsizing of the armed forces in many developing countries (a product of both budgetary constraints and inter-lined donor agency/IMF injunctions) has led to a corresponding increase in the size and power of the police force and the civilian intelligence agencies. Notwithstanding the emphasis on their civilianisation, and although not equipped with the organisational and logistical ability to influence civil-military relations at a national level, they do possess the capacity to influence civil-military relations at a regional and, more particularly, a local level.

Equally perturbing has been the transfer of state functions, intentionally and unintentionally, from state agencies to private security companies – a phenomenon most vividly exemplified by the influence of the private South African security company Executive Outcomes in diverse African conflicts, and the expansion of private security companies throughout Southern Africa generally (the latter increasingly consisting of former police and military personnel drawn from both the former guerrilla armies of the liberation movements and soldiers from the old regular forces). Ultimately, it may be more appropriate in many developing countries to speak either of *civilian-military relations* or even *civilian-security relations* rather than simply focusing on civil-military relations in the narrower institutional sense of the word.

Fourthly, whilst it may not be possible to erect an integrated and overarching theoretical system or an axiomatic foundational basis which proves capable of explaining all civil-military relations scenarios, it will be possible to elucidate the central values of such a project. The normative dimension of civil-military relations theory needs to be stressed and bolstered and this should provide a lodestar for all interventions in the civil-military debate in developing countries.

The basis of this normative framework emphasises the importance of democratic civil-military relations and stresses those universal moral values of transparency, accountability and the primacy of elected government within this equation.

Fifthly, a new methodology is required that will prove capable of providing a radical critique of the assumptions of much of contemporary civil-military relations theory, as well as constituting the basis for an ongoing and active intervention in the civil-military relations debate within the developing world. It is proposed here that any theoretical revision can only be effected on the basis of an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates into its orbit both African and Western intellectual traditions as evident in such disciplines as sociology, political science, international relations, state theory, and the critical-reflective traditions developed in such schools of thought as the Frankfurt School, Post-Modernism and elsewhere.

Finally, the concept of the “apolitical” soldier (popular, if somewhat misapplied, in the discourses of many Third World armed forces) needs to be re-examined. Even in democracies and countries with little experience of the intrusion of the armed forces into the political realm, the armed forces are invariably involved in politics in varying degrees. This involvement (be it of a benign or more assertive nature) inevitably results in the penetration of political themes and concepts into the discourse and, ultimately, the construction of the corporate identity of the armed forces (identities as diverse as those of the revolutionary soldier; the Western professional soldier of the USA and the UK, or the “Citizen-in-uniform” of the Bundeswehr). The influence of the “political” may be manifest in an asymmetrical and differentiated manner within the practices of different armed forces depending on the peculiarities of the country concerned, but is always present at the heart of their activities. This may be reflected in the constitutional imperatives to which the armed forces are expected to adhere, the involvement of the armed forces in the parliamentary, policy and state budgeting process, the access to the president as Commander-in-Chief which the armed forces enjoy or, simply, the different political persuasions of the different members of the armed forces.

It is not only inevitable that the armed forces should be “political”; but it is also *perhaps desirable that they are so inclined*. It is imperative that the armed forces of developing countries, and particularly those that are involved in the delicate task of consolidating democracy, are fully conversant with the democratic features of the system which they serve (hence the need for a robust civic education programme amongst its members), understand and are integrated into the government’s key policy initiatives (especially when these relate to the encouragement of domestic development and stability) and are able, on a discursive and interactive basis, to interact with the elected civil authorities around a range of issues critical to their national mandate. What is critical about this “political” role, however, is the fact

that it does not include the terrain of the party-political (and the armed forces as such must always be non-partisan in orientation), that their partnership with the civil authorities is not an equal partnership, and that their involvement in the terrain of national policy (politics with a small "p" as opposed to politics with a big "P") is clearly circumscribed and mutually acknowledged. It will be on this basis that a more fruitful debate on civil-military relations in developing countries, a debate less ascriptive than many of the present theoretical assumptions, will be generated.

Conclusion

It is important, therefore, to strike a balance between the strengths of traditional civil-military relations (and there are many) and the possible insights which could flow from the type of analysis suggested in the preceding pages. This article argues for the adoption of a critique that utilises the new insights proposed above to redeem those elements of value within traditional civil-military relations and thereby render them more applicable in an African environment. This is essential if the ongoing process of democratisation and demilitarisation in Africa is to be supported.

In essence, the answers to these intellectual challenges lies not in a reformulation of answers, but in a reconstruction of the questions that underpin much of the logic and methodology of defence thinking. Many of the key concepts which have been used to justify the existence of armed forces in the past are inadequate in their ability to explain the complexities of the present. Consequently, new interventions are required to create the space within which the boundaries of the civil-military relations debate can be expanded.

Notes

- * A former commander in Umkhonto We Sizwe (the guerrilla army of the African National Congress). He is currently the Director of Operations Policy at the South African Ministry of Defence.
- 1. See "Uit Die Voorgeskiedenis van die S.A.W.: 1902-1910" (The History of the South African Defence Force : 1902- 1910) published in the first edition of *Militaria*, 1969, South Africa and "History of the S.A.D.F." in the *South African Defence Force Review*, 1989, S.A.D.F. Directorate of Public Relations, Pretoria, p. 25.
- 2. The move towards civilianisation has been most manifest in the Policy, Finance, Logistics, and Personnel Divisions. This process has not been without its problems and was initially characterised by a certain degree of mistrust and suspicion between the uniformed component and the new civilian incumbents. The civilian Secretariat still relies heavily on both serving and former military members for the execution of its function and the process of capacity-building

amongst its new members will clearly take some years before it reaches fruition. This has obviously limited the extent to which effective civil oversight can be instituted over all aspects of the defence function, as well as reducing the receptivity of the armed forces to the requirements of the new government.

3. The information on the variety of formal and informal mechanisms on civil-military control was gathered from extensive interviews and discussions with senior officers and civilian defence officials from Zimbabwe, Namibia, Mozambique, Swaziland, Lesotho, Zambia, Tanzania, Botswana and Angola. A similar pattern to that described here also persists in such countries as Uganda and Kenya.

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