Harris Geoff (ed*), Achieving Security in Sub-Saharan Africa: Cost Effective Alternatives to the Military**, Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2004, Pp. 212   ISBN 1-919913-61-0**

Many sub-Saharan Africa countries have been embroiled in armed conflicts over the past 20 years, almost all of which have been internal rather than between states. The traditional way of dealing with such conflicts has been via the military. This book's central premise is that the military is not the most cost effective way of building security in sub-Saharan Africa.

The book is divided into five parts. The first addresses the negative effects of militarisation and outlines the case for demilitarisation. While recognizing that the military does provide some benefits, Harris presents seven arguments for demilitarisation of SSA: the changing nature of war and the meaning of security, the negative effect of military expenditure on economic growth and overall development, the role of the military in human rights abuse, the ineffectiveness of the military in resolving conflicts, the existence of the cost effective alternatives to the military and the moral/spiritual arguments against the use of force. Harris asks one central question at the end of part one which is critical to the next session - "can the military be transformed (or is it, like apartheid, beyond redemption)?"

The second part deals with the possible transformation of the military. Bjorn Moller sets out the argument for a restructuring of the military towards a defence-only capacity. Moller notes that the "fences [between countries] are either low or broken" in Africa, making good neighbourliness an important tool for security. He notes that even though some states appear to be 'nasty', they are often too weak to be able to attack each other. His conclusion raises a pertinent issue for donors, reminding them to "… ensure an evenhandedness in their military assistance and primarily seek to boost the ability of adjacent states to collaborate in managing their shared security problems".

Brian Martin argues for 'defending without the military' through what he terms social defence i.e. training the population to non-violently resist an invader or usurper of power by non-co-operation. The challenge arises from the presence of a ruthless aggressor: an aggressor with a motive for exploitation is likely to use violence irrespective of non-violent resistance.

Part three considers ways of reducing the number of disputes as a way of achieving security. Rebecca Spence highlights the need to befriend the neighbors. Using the Lederach model, she discusses three levels of co-operation. Level one pertains to peacemaking and peacekeeping and involves high-level state and military leaders. Level two deals with national peacekeeping and peace building by ethnic or religious leaders, academics and national NGO leaders, and level three

cooperation revolves around peace building by community level actors. Spence provides examples, which include people exchange, cooperation over the use of natural resources and also economic cooperation.

Lloyd J Dumas highlights the centrality of building democracy and achieving balanced economic relationship to achieve security. For Dumas, real security is achieved through building sustainable democracy, particularly through formal institutions of government and a vibrant civil society sector. Militarisation interferes with building sustainable democracy by strengthening the concentration of economic and political power.

Part four of the book discusses the development of dispute resolution capacities. To Anne-Marie Maxwell, education is central in transforming people's minds. She notes "education needs to take a particular form if it is indeed going to play a role in demilitarising the mind, teaching the management and transformation of conflict, and in peace building". She examines the cost and effectiveness of peace education (not surprisingly, she concludes that it is highly cost effective). Jurgen Brauer's chapter focuses on developing institutions that could help deal with conflicts non-violently.

Part five addresses issues of implementation. Kees Kingma considers aspects in demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants. He provides a detailed explanation of the factors that are central to the success of demobilization – the political and institutional environment, economic opportunities, the availability of weapons, social and cultural norms and the appropriateness of reintegration plans. He reports that demobilization efforts have had differential outcomes.

To implement demilitarization, Keith Suter argues for the development of national Ministries for Peace building, with the following functions: building 'cultures of peace', redefining national security, carrying out and participating in disarmament programmes, negotiation, conversion of military facilities to peaceful purposes, peacekeeping, post conflict peace building, and forming a national peace corps. This, incidentally, is an idea that has gained momentum in recent years and two African countries – Ghana and Uganda – now have at least a fledgling Ministry.

The last part of the book, the epilogue, recommends the adoption of a rational and transparent budget process so as to link planned expenditures and national objectives, and to treat Defence as a normal ministry that does not deserve special treatment. The book concludes with the necessary conditions for demilitarization: a change in the mindset of key actors, designing a demilitarisation plan and establishing organizations to implement demilitarization.

The book presents a rational and convincing argument for demilitarization. It is entirely necessary for such arguments to be presented but the experience of the few countries that have effectively demilitarized (Costa Rica is the often-cited example, and deservedly so) suggests that it often follows a war where the military is discredited. Some African countries – Lesotho and Swaziland spring to mind – have no capacity to repel an invasion and have far greater security issues than territory (poverty and HIV/AIDS). It makes all the sense in the world for them to demilitarize. Donor countries could support them by paying for the demobilization and reintegration of former soldiers. Other African countries might follow their lead to the benefit of the whole continent.

Reviewed by

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