The Military in African Conflicts

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Introduction

Race and stability are necessary conditions for development. The absence of these essentials constitutes a major bulwark against the development of Africa. Africa today presents a pitiable profile of conflicts. It has a record of 80 forceful change of government, which claimed the lives of about 24 heads of state, and government which in 1996 alone, 14 African States were simultaneous engulfed in armed conflicts. The 1990s alone witnessed at least nine serious conflicts, many of them transcending national boundaries.

The consequences of these are further complication of Africa's economic crisis. First, African states commit a disproportionate percentage of their national resources to the purchase of arms. Human resources are equally diverted to the battlefield, depriving productive sectors of the economy this necessary ingredient for economic reproduction. The crisis of refugees has also emerged as a major social and economic problem for neighbours of African States in conflict. Finally the necessary environment for development is denied, as local and foreign investors are scared away by the uncertainties of the conflict ridden states.

The military is central to this profile of African States in two major respects. Most African states had at one time or the other come under military rule with its attendant maladministration and consequent legacy of economic underdevelopment. Besides, the military had appropriated disproportional national resources, a phenomenon that Bayo Adekanye aptly calls the Military Extractive Ratio (MER). The military question therefore constitutes a major problematic for Africa's development. This paper addresses this question, with emphasis on two issues, which are here posed as questions: How has the military fared in the sustenance of peace and stability in Africa to guarantee the environment, for development? How has the African military performed as peacekeepers in African conflicts? The paper concludes with suggestions for preparing the African military to effectively discharge these duties to ensure the peaceful environment for development

The Military Imperative for Development

Niccollo Machiavelli aptly captures the role of the military in creating the environment for development when he states that the foundation of all states a*re* good laws and good arms and that good arms are necessary because it is the only guarantee that the citizens would obey the laws. African post-colonial states inherited the military institution as part of the apparati of the state bequeathed by the colonial powers. The management of the military however soon constituted part of the political problems that confronted newly independent African States. It took few years before the military made incursions into the political arena and established itself in government. Both under civilian control and as the new political elite, the military has failed as a guarantor of stability for the states. Whatever the myriad of factors that galvanized African

states to armed conflicts, the fact remains that the inability of the military of these respective states to contain their crises is a factor for the multiplicity of armed conflicts on the continent. A number of factors account for this inability of the African military. One, their ethnic combination in the context of the heterogeneous character of African states affected their perception by the society and their own performance.

The political leadership in many of the African states involved the military as a political instrument in the political chess game thereby compromising their integrity and created them as a possible source of recruiting the political leadership. Many of the military institutions were themselves afflicted by the social malaise of corruption, indiscipline, factionalism, ethnicity, etc. and other vices that comtromised their professionalism. The African military is also lacking in the manpower, training and resources needed for a disciplined and mobile force. Because of these complex factors, the military has repeatedly failed as a safety net for many African states at crisis points.

The African military has equally failed to be efficient peacekeepers when conflicts overwhelm the military of African respective states.

The African military has been involved in peace keeping in African conflicts under three broad arrangements involving the United , Nations, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and sub-regional organizations notably the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Operations involving the United Nations included that in Congo in 1960-1964. The operation involved between 3,500 and 20;000 troops from 39 states including African states like Nigeria, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Morocco, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Egypt. Although the operation, code named ONUC, succeeded in maintaining Congo as one entity, it was at a high cost including the murder of a party to the conflict, Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, and the death of the Secretary General of the United Nations, Daz Hammarskold.The United Nations henceforth receded from direct operations in Africa and only offered support for African initiatives in resolving African conflicts.

The first major effort under this arrangement was in Chad in the 1980s when the Organization of African Unity (OAU) established a 5,000 strong Inter-African Force (IAF) drawn from Nigeria, Senegal, Zaire, Benin, Guinea and Togo in Chad to maintain law and order , assist in elections for a democratically elected government and train and integrate the various factions into one national army. The IAF failed because the force, which never exceeded 3,500 troops, was inadequate to keep the peace; its many participants and the Tchadian government gave different interpretations to its mandate ;was afflicted by the problem of command and acute financial problem. The force was withdrawn in 1981 and Hussein Habre who fought his way to power in Chad was granted OAU recognition.

The Economic Commission of West African States (ECQWAS) established an ECOWAS Monitoring Group to intervene and maintain peace in Liberia in 1990 with the 6,000 pioneer troops drawn from Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, the Gambia, Togo and Guinea. ECOMOG succeeded in assisting to establish an Interim National Government of Unity, the Liberian Transitional Government and finally a democratically elected government in Liberia.

The latest involvement of ECOMOG in this respect was in re-installing the democratically elected government of Tejan Kabbah in 1997 after it was ousted by a military caballed by Major Johnny Paul Koromah.

Four factors are worth highlighting on the peace keeping role of the African military. One, most African states are fractious and fragile and because they are confronted by problems which calls for eternal vigilance, they cannot readily deploy their soldiers as peacekeepers elsewhere without jeopardizing their internal security. Two, most African states have a small military which means they lack surplus troops to commit to peace keeping efforts. Three, most African militaries have problems of facilities like transport aircraft, necessary for rapid deployment to troubled spots. Africa militaries combined have only 300 transport aircraft, with only 40 four-type essential for rapid deployment.

Finally, finance remains a major problem confronting African states and this is necessary for efficient peace keeping efforts. These factors raise a caveat on the potentials of the African military as peacekeepers.

Conclusion

For the military to be peacekeepers in Africa both in their respective states and in troubled spots, they need to be professionalised and well equipped. Constitutional guarantees for civilian control of the military should be enhanced and enforced. Because of the present handicap of their militaries, African States should emphasize Early Warning systems to de- tect and control conflicts before they degenerate to require military peace keeping.

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