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SMALL WARS (/)
J O U R N A L

TOWARDS THE ABOLITION OF AFRICAN OFFICIAL ARMIES

Articles

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Abstract: *The article argues that maintaining official armies in Africa makes little security, political or economic sense and that the continent will do better without them altogether. Taking the case of Sudan, the author states that Sudan's Armed Forces (SAF) has squarely failed in the undertaking of its mission to secure the country's borders and has instead channelled its energy into killing citizens, thwarting democracy and propping up dictators. While border disputes can be better handled through other channels, internal security issues can be entrusted to civilian police in addition to the adoption of equitable democratic and transparent governance that makes popular uprisings unnecessary. The article concludes by calling for the disbandment of all government armies on the continent of Africa.*

Introduction

In this article, taking the case of Sudan as an example, I argue that African governments should simply disband their armies. The reasons are plain and simple. These official armies are founded on erroneous politico-cultural convictions - namely that without them, the country would be gobbled up by hostile neighbours. However, Africa's post-colonial history has shown the inability of official armies to protect political borders.

Having failed to carry out their mandate of protecting political borders, these armies have become a real menace to democratic evolution on the continent. Almost every single African country has horrific stories to tell about official armies sidestepping their mandate to become involved in toppling elected governments, meddling in politics, committing massacres, rape and harassing the very citizens they are meant to protect.

The article argues that Africa is better off without its official armies. While border conflicts can be addressed through different channels, politics, maintaining law and order and protecting constitutions all lie outside the mandates of official armies. Africa has nothing to lose and a lot to gain by getting rid of its official armies. Meagre resources that are now spent on weapons, most of which become obsolete before they are even used, should be rechaneled for better use in education, housing, food and medicine.

Why Armies?

It is a commonly held view in many parts of the world that war is part and parcel of humanity, that a modern nation-state must have an army to protect it against hostile outsiders. Almost every country on earth now possesses an army, with the exception of less than 20 nation-states, many of which are too small to warrant the term "country/state". These views are misconceived and are part of our unfortunate modern cultural heritage. As a matter of fact, war, as distinct from homicide and feud, is an oddity throughout perhaps 99% of human existence (Fry 2007:70).

Institutions of war, including professional armies, have also been absent throughout most of human history. Scanning through 50,000 years of the history of modern humans, the first professional armies appeared along with clear evidence of war only 12,000 to 9,000 years B.C. in River Nile Sudan and some parts of the Near East (Ibid: 53, 56). There can be no doubt that conflicts exist in all societies, past and present. Nonetheless, it is a fact that humankind is not innately violent as the erroneous term "warrior man" presupposes. Far from it, history shows that mankind gravitates towards peaceful co-existence and has, over the centuries, evolved imaginative non-lethal ways for settling their differences. The image of "man, the warrior" is a product of unfortunate modern western cultural discourse, itself responsible for generating a portrait that glorifies war and celebrates violence.

Let us leap-frog through history and come to modern times in which it is assumed within an almost global wisdom that a nation-state must have an official professional army whose prime function is to protect borders from external threats and a police force to maintain law and order within the country. I have no problem with the need for a police force but I prefer to limit my focus here on the army as such.

The British recolonized Sudan in 1898. The colonisation of Sudan itself was an embarrassing part of the history of the country, necessitating in the collaboration of many Sudanese, some of who later masqueraded as protectors of Sudan's nationhood. Throughout the last colonial period of 1898-1956, a national army was formed for the purpose of protecting British colonial rule over Sudan and certainly not for serving the interests of the Sudanese people as such. I must concede here that Sudan was no exception to other European African colonies whose armies excelled and sacrificed their lives to subjugate their own people; not a glorious history for any institution. In 1958, the Sudan Military Academy was established, mainly to train senior national army officers to replace the then over-stretched and departing British personnel (El-Tom 2012). Following independence in 1956, graduating officers filled out the vacuum left by British officers while maintaining the same distance from the average Sudanese citizen. Their new jobs reflected only a little shift, from supporting colonial rule to propping up the power of a narrow-based elite, the new rulers of Independent Sudan.

Sudan now has one of the biggest armies in Africa, trailing only behind Algeria, Angola, Morocco, Nigeria and South Africa (SIPRI 2010). The Sudan Armed Force (SAF) is 110,000 strong, and as if that is not enough, it is backed up by perhaps 40-50,000 personnel of the National Security Agency (NSA) and the Popular Defence Force (PDF). The recent ethnicisation of Sudan's politics has done away with the national composition of the country's regular forces. Much more so than the SAF, the NSA is now strongly controlled by a handful of ethnic groups from River Nile Sudan. This aspect of the NSA came to the forefront during the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) invasion of Omdurman in 2008, when the NSA successfully defended the capital to the total exclusion of the SAF.

Since its independence, Sudan has been acquiring every conceivable military arsenal and from every corner of the globe: the USA, Russia, Germany, UK, Iran, South Africa and now China. Recently, Sudan has gone on to develop its own Military Industry Corporation (MIC) at a huge cost to its impoverished population, an establishment that has risen to become a jewel of pride for Al-Bashir, the current President of Sudan. In a recent visit to the MIC HQ, instead of detailing his achievements in providing benefits to his own people, Al-Bashir lauded the MIC and its success in achieving military self-sufficiency in conventional weapons such as ammunition, machine guns, mortars, artillery, armoured vehicles and tanks. The President of the country that subsists on foreign aid told his people with pride on October 17th, 2009 that their nation was already manufacturing (assembling) un-manned military airplanes.

Given the poverty of Sudan, the cost of keeping an official army is colossal to say the least. Just prior to the disruption of its oil flow, Sudan had been spending 60% of its oil revenue on security. In 2011, Sudan spent a whopping $2.8 billon on defence, amounting to 3% GDP, while its allocations for health and water did not exceed 1.6% and 0.3% GDP respectively (El-Tom 2008; Seisi 2007). With all of this colossal expenditure in armament, Sudan's name remains synonymous with famine, poverty, starvation and food aid.

As we mentioned earlier, the prime job of the army is to safeguard political borders against foreign intruders. Measured in terms of delivery on this mandate, the SAF have so far demonstrated their astounding failure to retrieve even an inch of territories "illegally" occupied by Sudan's neighbours. As matter of fact, the clumsy decolonisation of Africa left the continent with so many zones whose status are yet to be established. It is therefore necessary to refer to these zones as "disputed" rather than "occupied" territories". However, following Sudan's official logic, the country has several territories allegedly occupied by its neighbours and have remained so despite the periodic threat of Khartoum to resort to war. Sudan's disputed lands are numerous but the most publicised of them are, Red Sea Halaib and Wadi Halfa Salient under Egyptian control; North-West Desert Triangle under Libyan rule; Al-Fashaqa under Ethiopian Occupation and the Ilemi Triangle under Kenyan-Ethiopian hands (Mburu 2003). Needless to say, the SAF has stood idle and has not been able to honour its duty to keep the sovereign borders intact. Negotiations with Ethiopia delivered some success in agreeing to hand over some of Al-Fashqa back to Sudan, a promise yet to be honoured but that is all (Addis Tribune 2012).

The separation of South Sudan in July 2011 has added a new strain to Sudan's border problems. According to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) which paved the way for the independence of the now Republic of South Sudan (RSS), a new country is to reign over its borders as defined on the day of Independence, January 1st 1956 (UNAMIS 2004). Other areas of contention outside this zone are to be handled through different processes. However, as it turned out, January 1956 borders are much clearer on paper than on the ground. The original delineation of boundaries was based on unreliable maps and poor understanding of traditional land ownership. Lack of clarity of the 1956 borders, stretching over 1,950 kilometres and involving tens of nomadic groups has produced at least six disputed territories. In April 2012, conflicts over the disputed town of Heglig brought the CPA to a near collapse, and the problem was only contained following a swift Resolution from the UN Security Council. The situation still remains volatile with both countries claiming ownership of the following territories: Safaha, Kafan Bibi; Samaha, Al –Amud Al-Akhdar; Hufrat Al-Nahas; Kafia Kingi; Heglig, Abyei, Kaka Tiariya, Magenes Jida, Wheatly Monroe (Al Tawil 2011; Douglas 2010, Sudan Tribune 2012).

In discharging its duty of border protection against the encroachment of greedy neighbours, Sudan's army performance can justifiably be rated as a grand ZERO. But what has the army been doing with its time since independence? The answer is perplexing but equally embarrassing. Throughout its post-independence history, the SAF has excelled in killing its own people under the guise of the suppression of uprisings, thwarting democracy, manufacturing and propping up dictators and wasting meagre resources and borrowed funds that could otherwise be used for the development of the country and its people.

Rather than fighting foreigners, the SAF claim with extreme pride to have lost thousands and thousands of martyrs in their efforts to suppress uprisings in the country. But how successful have the SAF been in accomplishing this important job? Not very, I would say! Like many African countries, Sudan inherited a deformed structure in which a tiny regional minority controlled the state to the detriment of its majority population. The legacy of colonialism does not simply lie in the partition of the continent into 50 plus countries. As Kapuscinski states, its legacy is that it lumped several thousand nations into the current 50 plus African countries (Kapuscinski 2001). Unfortunately, many African leaders replaced colonialism with its national counterpart: internal colonialism replete with injustice, inequality, corruption and utter neglect of their own people and hence the uprisings.

Sudan's army has indeed spearheaded the fending off of civilian and armed uprisings, first in the south, then in Darfur and later in the east of the country. In all of these, the army has failed miserably, not to mention the human cost that accompanied that failure. So spectacular has the failure of the army been that it has had to commission so many other proxy armies ranging from the Popular Defence Force, to local militias and now the thuggish cavalry, known in Darfur as Janjaweed; all to no avail. Sudan's war against the Sudanese People's Liberation Army/ Movement of the predominantly Christian south (SPLM/A) ended in a near total defeat of the government army, forcing it into signing the so-called Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). So much for the army preserving the unity of Sudan and suppressing armed uprisings - rather the CPA led to the secession of the south and the birth of the Republic of Southern Sudan.

Other attempts of the SAF and their allied militia to end rebellions in other regions in Sudan have also been a failure. The armed insurrection in Darfur which started in 2003 is still going on at the time of compiling this work. More importantly, the rebels of Darfur have now allied themselves with others in the Blue Nile Province of south-east Sudan and the Nuba Mountains, and the circle is growing. In effect, the current armed uprisings mirror the problems of southern Sudan where simple legitimate developmental demands escalated into an armed uprising, a call for self-determination and later secession.

The horrendous cost of the military approach to uprisings has been apocalyptic. It is estimated that 2 million lives were lost in the war against the south. A further 300,000 to 500,000 people perished in Darfur. To this one may add 4 million IDPs in Darfur and 150,000 in the Nuba Mountain and Blue Nile provinces and the number is growing by the day. Thus, the very involvement of the army in dealing with popular uprisings has demonstrated its failure.

A bizarre myth that has evolved in Sudan's political culture is that the army can protect the national constitution. In tandem with that, military officers graduating at the National Military Academy swear an oath to protect the constitution of the country. It goes without saying, our current President Al-Bashir, together with his preceding military dictators Aboud and Nimeiri, had all sworn the same Koran oath and still proceeded to topple legitimately and constitutionally elected governments. Since its independence, Sudan had only three democratically elected governments, 1956-1968, 1965-1969 and 1986-1989; all of whom were aborted by the very army that had vowed to protect them. These military dictators ruled Sudan for 45 of its 56 post-independence years and the clock is still ticking. Their actions show beyond a doubt that armies in Africa are a threat to the constitution and cannot be entrusted with its protection. The very presence of the army headquarters in Khartoum, rather than at the border of the country, encourages them to meddle in politics and become a real obstacle against the arduous process of democratization.

It is both easy and legitimate to argue that all dictators in Sudan, as indeed in the rest of Africa, have been kept in power for so long by conniving armies. Members of the SAF have always been all too happy to play this role in return for lucrative pay. However, armies do not only keep dictators in power, they manufacture them afresh. In the absence of war, idleness spreads through the army and corrupts its spirit as an institution. No wonder then that soldiers can easily be lured by the glamour of involvement in politics and its lucrative rewards. Idi Amin, Gadhafi Husni Mubarak, Samuel Do, Al-Bashir and many others are a product of this defective institution; a quintessential hatching machine for African dictators and this is more evident in countries with weaker political structures and undeveloped civic societies. Had it not been for the existence of official armies, there would certainly be far fewer dictators around in the continent.

Rebel armies too, pose a similar danger if transformed into official forces. Africa's history of decolonisation has left us with numerous unsavoury examples such as Kenyatta, Mugabe, Jawara, Mobutu, Mangisto and Mubarak. Hence, these rebel forces should equally disband as soon as their legitimate job is accomplished. While the causes of armed insurrections are understandable and often legitimate, their transformation into official armies is a dangerous affair that must be addressed. More often than not, rebel armies are skewed in favour of ethnic, regional or religious interests and as such, may not always be readily accommodative for all in the nation-state.

Finally in this section, I would like to draw attention to a disturbing element in military culture which is pushed to its limit in countries controlled by military dictatorships. Namely, those military personnel are considered superior to their civilian counterparts in everything including the rule of law. It is possible to argue that this is almost international whereby excesses of combatants including extra-judicial killings are often not punished in the same way as those committed by civilian personnel. This is possible to verify in the recent history of European and American military operations in Afghanistan, Somalia and Central America. However, due to the focus of this article, I will remain focused on Sudan.

In the case of Sudan, military as well as para-military personnel are somewhat above constitutional law. Current laws in Sudan make it impossible for law enforcers to arrest army personnel and this is extended to para-military including the notorious Janjaweed of Darfur. Their crimes can only be investigated by their commanders and/or with their explicit approval. Military culture maintains a dubious rationale behind this phenomenon centred around an alleged superiority of the soldier over the civilian citizen. During his reign in the 1970s, Dictator Nimeiri mesmerised his nation with his usual humorous and often illogical sensibilities when breaking free of his written script. When an Arab journalist asked him about his inability to rein in the excesses of his military personnel and apply the law to them, the president protested:

"*A military personnel is incomparable to a civilian citizen. You cannot equate a piastre coin (girish) with a two-piastre coin (Abu girshain). They are different. A civil person is just a citizen while a soldier is a citizen but on top of that he is military personnel. They are not the same and cannot be in front of the law.*"

The president has spoken. Members of the SAF remain to this day above the law. They can kill, maim, loot and flaunt the law of the land, all in the line of duty without fear of the very constitution they vow to uphold.

What is to be Done?

In the above paragraphs, we identified three main spheres of action that supposedly justify maintaining an official army in Sudan. The first pertains to the protection of political borders against external intrusion. As the reader might have realised, the SAF and its allied armies have not lived up to their expectations and have not succeeded in retrieving even an iota of the so-called occupied territories. Fortunately, with the current globalised world, there are better and non-violent ways of resolving political border disputes. There are many structures that support negotiated settlement of disputed lands either on bilateral or multilateral bases. A formidable organisation working in this field is the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Hague (PCA), formed as far back as 1898 but which has gained much more clout in recent years. The PCA has 115 listed members including Sudan and most of its neighbours. Moreover, the PCA conducts its mediation with little or no financial cost to the conflicting parties. Given the nature of disputed lands, often with fluid populations spread over political borders, a peaceful resolution of the conflict creates a better environment for trade, nomadism and peaceful co-existence in the area; a win-win for the conflicting countries and their people. Thus, removal of this function from the list of mandates given to official armies makes perfect sense but there is no such thing as a free lunch. Conflicting parties must be willing to abide by the decision of the mediators. The childish response to the Hague Ruling on Abyei between RSS and Khartoum must not be repeated, a situation in which both parties were not happy with the resolution (PCA 2008). Africans must grow up and to do that, they need go no further than learning from their heritage. A prime African example here is the *Judia*, a traditional council of mediators called by conflicting parties to mediate between them. According to the *Judia*, an opponent is allowed to dismiss a member of the jury on the account of bias before the onset of deliberations. But once the process has started, a conflicting party loses the right to doubt the integrity of a councillor or dismiss him or her and must abide by the final ruling of the council. Let the Africans, Sudanese or otherwise apply this principle to whatever global arbitrators are involved in their border conflicts, no more, no less (for *Judia* see El-Tom 2012b).

The second sphere in which the official army has traditionally been involved is the suppression of uprisings. Uprisings normally start with peaceful demonstrations of ordinary and law-abiding citizens. With eugenic army responses and delays on addressing simple but legitimate demands, the protest escalates into an armed struggle. During my student days, the army occupied the University of Khartoum, where I was

enrolled as a student, several times. Sudan's army boasted some success in quashing some demonstrations, more often than not with fatalities among the demonstrators. However, the army failed to prevent the success of the popular and peaceful uprisings that brought down the governments of Dictator Aboud in 1964 and Nimeiri in 1985. It equally had to back off from many other demonstrations that proceeded to realise their objectives through other means.

The success of Sudan's army has however, been catastrophic when it comes to armed insurrections. With the SPLA of south Sudan, the SAF lost the war and had to give way to a negotiated settlement, the CPA. It is not a secret that many of Sudan's top commanders find the CPA humiliating to say the least, leading to the breakup of Sudan, a reality they worked hard to prevent. Much more recently, after ten years of fighting the Darfur rebellion, the war is still going on and some movements are getting stronger by the day. To this, one may add the insurrections of the Nuba Mountains and later the Blue Nile Province which restricted the presence of Sudan's official army to just a few major military garrisons. These examples suffice to conclude that uprisings are political in nature and do not respond well to military solutions. All uprisings in Sudan, armed or otherwise, have been purely developmental in their demands and primarily due to grievances against political, economic and cultural marginalization. This is a job for politicians and the armies should have nothing to do with it (see Hasan and Ray, 2009; El-Tom 2009).

The third sphere which has been appropriated by the army is the protection of Sudan's constitution. While it is important for any country to preserve and honour its constitution, it is preposterous to entrust that to its army. In the case of developing countries, that duty falls on people led by their civic and political organisations. As the recent history of Sudan shows, leaving the preservation of the constitution to the army is akin to putting a wolf in charge of a flock of sheep. Since independence, hardly a decade has passed without a move by the army to topple the government. The only three democratic and genuinely elected governments in Sudan were destroyed by military interventions.

For all of the above points, I think Sudan has no compelling reason to keep an official army. We must resist the idea that we have to have an army to qualify as a country. There is no reason to suppose that in the absence of an official army, the country will be gobbled up by its neighbours or that there will be popular and perhaps armed uprisings in every town and that the constitution of the country will never be upheld. These are all fictitious ideas that do not stand serious scrutiny.

Practical Steps Towards the Abolition of the Army

It is important to note that the abolition of a country's official army is not an easy job that can be accomplished with the stroke of a pen. Rather, it is a long process that requires bringing the people on board, securing the cooperation of the army itself and taking the necessary steps for the country to live in peace with itself and with its neighbours. Moreover, we should caution against expecting economic dividends from day one.

There is at least one stunningly good model for Sudan to emulate in dismantling its official army, or rather armies. That model does not come from the west with its different settings. Instead, it is a product of an environment Sudan is familiar with. Half a century ago (1948), President Figueres of Costa Rica did the "unthinkable". He courageously and perceptively announced the abolition of Costa Rica's State Army. Of course the decision was controversial but sense prevailed and the neighbours did not devour Costa Rica's territory, as some had feared. The abolition of the army in Costa Rica released needed funds for meeting genuine developmental needs. Surrounded by poverty-stricken countries, Costa Rica is now the envy of other Latin American countries. It is stable, prosperous and 3 to 5 times wealthier than its neighbours. Furthermore, Costa Rica now enjoys a 93% literacy rate, 80% homeownership and a life expectancy of 76 years. With a US literacy rate of 77%, the mighty super power is certainly shamed by -Third World - Costa Rica (El-Tom 2008). There can be no doubt that the very survival of Costa Rican democracy in a region characterised by a political culture of dictatorship can be referred to its absence of an official army (Fry 2007:20).

Costa Rica is not the only county that has made the bold move to subsist without an official army. There are around 20 countries which opted not to waste their meagre resources in armament, although one has to concede that half of these countries are dependencies, reliant on other powers for their protection. Despite this, these unarmed states managed to preserve their territories without being molested by their neighbours which is commonly anticipated.

My option for a Central American state instead of an African one as a model for Sudan to follow must be bewildering for some readers. Why not take Mauritius, the only African country that has no army? The reason is plain and simple: Mauritius is an isolated island far away and relatively sheltered against the usual demands of proximate neighbours. With its small size of 2,040 square kilometres and a tiny population of 1.3 million, Mauritius hardly compares well with Sudan. However, Mauritius is a shining star in Africa and the only nation-state classified as running a "real" democracy. All others within the continent, including South Africa, fall under categories such as "flawed", "hybrid" or "authoritarian" democracies (AFDB 2012; Mo Ibrahim Foundation 2012; Wikipedia 2012b).

In recent years, peacekeeping has risen to become a prime issue in keeping armies busy across the world. Thus, it is not war itself but peace in distant countries that lies behind keeping an army. We must remember Switzerland has not been at war for over 200 years. Yet, it boasts a world-class trained army consuming 1.0% of its GDP, translating into $3.1 billion. Sweden has escaped war for over 170 years but despite this it spends 1.5GDP on its army costing its taxpayers $5b a year (Fry 2007:18; Global Security 2012). Switzerland and Sweden maintain official armies even though the possibility of deploying them in war situations is very remote. Indeed with a decreased listing of European soldiers who witnessed WWII, there is now a whole generation of army generals who have risen to the top of military ranks without the experience of even a single combat. Ireland provides a different example of an army that is not quite kept for combat purposes. Ireland spends €1.5 billion, an equivalent of 0.9 GDP on an army that has little to do in justification of its combat existence. Since the Independence of the country in the 1920s, it has not been tested in the protection of its borders with UK and Spain and it's unlikely that it will be of any use if these mighty neighbours ever decide to invade. It is hard to think of a better employer than the Irish army where its recruits spend their entire career without discharging a single lethal bullet or finding themselves at the receiving end of one. To keep them busy, the army is contracted by big banks to move money from one location to another, a task that involves low to non-existent risks. In addition, the Irish army partakes in lucrative peacekeeping missions. These too, involve exceptionally low risks for most peacekeeping mandates restrict the use of arms only for defensive purposes and discourage lethal means of civilian protection. For example, personnel of the United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), established by UNSC Resolution No. 1769 of July 31st 2007, are armed but have no mandate to shoot except in self defence. Over the years, UNAMID not only failed to protect civilians, it equally failed to protect its own members as evident in the loss of nearly 40 of its soldiers.

At the other extreme, we have the UN Supervision Mission in Syria (UNAMIS), Resolution 2043 of April 2012. Its mission consists of unarmed military personnel whose mandate is restricted to the monitoring of compliance with cessation of violence and supporting the implementation of the Resolution. It is possible to attach some value to such missions and even claim they help in reducing fatalities. However, it is difficult to argue that these missions succeed because its members are drawn from professional armies, trained in handling lethal weapons, let alone use that as a justification for keeping professional armies.

It is possible to contemplate a symbolic value for having an official army, independent of involvement in war including self-defensive combat in peacekeeping. After all, armies are often paraded to epitomize nationhood, its unity, strength, pride, self-sacrifice, struggle for certain ideals and so forth. In the context of new nation-states, the army can be projected as a national institution that defies ethnic, regional, linguistic and religious divides. Having said that, this is an idealized proposition as the army often mirrors divisions in societies like class, ethnicity, regionalism, colour and religion. While I concede the army has the potential to generate national symbolic values, the gains are hardly worth the cost. These symbolic values can equally be entertained in other institutions like the civil service, the legal system, civic organisations, the educational system or even national soccer teams, etc. Those who are interested in seeing personnel wearing uniforms to salute the flag, parade to patriotic songs and sing the national anthem can turn to the police force, youth scouts and school children for these functions. The symbolic dividends of an army simply cannot justify its upkeep.

Practical Steps

In an African nation-state like Sudan, the army is a powerful institution capable of guarding its interests, a matter that is poorly served by its abolition. Periodic toppling of governments, elected or otherwise, stands testimony to the might of official armies in Africa. Thus, the armies themselves must be approached as major stakeholders in the process. The starting point here must be the entrenchment of a new culture that glamourizes peace and demonizes collective violence as a means to resolve conflicts within the country and with its neighbours. Such a move will do away with most of the clout given to the army and demote the status that goes with it, thus making the army less desirable as a career.

The army is not only a career of bravado and heroism. Like other professions, it is a place of income where people earn their living and feed their families. This is where the attraction of the army lies, much more so than in the glory of fighting wars. The evidence is very clear in the deployment of harsh penal rules against soldiers who fail to respond when they are ordered into the battlefield. It is a common rule across the world that soldiers who disobey orders to go to war are court marshalled and often executed. While not all, the absolute majority of solders do want to be in the army but still hope they are never called to the battlefield. Hence, it is the need for making a decent and dignified living and of course self-actualisation that attracts young people to join the army. And mind you, the majority of soldiers are low ranking, with little pay and with little opportunity for job-satisfaction.

It follows from the above that in order to cajole the soldiers to support the abolition of the army, we must first find decent and rewarding alternatives, a substitute that enables them to feed their families and live with dignity and respect. Fortunately, many divisions in the army are already trained for civilian work. For example, with little or no retraining at all, most members of military logistical support, medical, engineering and musical corps and air force can immediately be transferred to civilian institutions. Officers possess valuable skills in engineering, medicine, survey and mapping, logistics, aviation, construction of roads and bridges, security, etc. With little effort, these skills can be upgraded and tuned for civilian duties. Top commanders who belong to older cohorts can be offered lucrative early retirement, retrained to join the police force or simply redeployed to help in the process of demilitarization and landmine clearance - this last one may take a decade or two to accomplish.

In Africa, the army offers great attraction for the young and poor and those who have missed out in schooling. Well, it is easy to spot the dream in this class of youth. Their lack of education destines them to a life of unemployment, poverty and destitution. This cohort can be sent back to school while retaining their pay until they are able to stand on their own. Needless to say, not every poorly educated soldier would want to go back to school, particularly for academic studies. This category may prefer learning a craft such as building, car mechanics, carpentry, metal work, music, trade and agriculture, prior to their transfer to a relevant public department. While the cost of all this might look prohibitively high, it pales into insignificance when compared to retaining an army and providing them with guns, tanks, fighting jets and land mines. Moreover, the rechanneling of warfare energy and resources into safe civilian work is a clear win for the entire society and people involved in the work.

Conclusion

In this article, I have mustered my courage and taken a huge risk. I have opted to look forward. The world has changed and there is little wisdom in looking backwards to the past. Africa is unlikely to see another Gadhafi, Amin, Bokassa or Nimeiri but only if we make our rightful contribution. Yes, there are still far too many dictators in Africa, all of whom are struggling to stay in power and are unlikely to succeed in remaining for long, let alone cloning their successors. In proposing a new future for Sudan and Africa without official armies, many fellow Africans will undoubtedly spring out to accuse me of being naïve, idealistic and perhaps cocooned in an academic cage devoid of practical sensibilities. There is nothing I can say in response except to remind them to design their way forward based on future prospects, not on the vilest memories in our history. Whatever their choice, I appeal to them to be open for debate, no more no less.

Others may see the matter from a different angle. I am a senior member of an armed rebel group, a connection that makes the gist of this article sound somewhat hypocritical. Well, rebel movements too have to disband and there is nothing wrong in an army general calling for the dismantling of armies and to call for alternative ways of resolving conflicts. In fact many of them do and that is why most wars end peacefully instead of being concluded by clean defeats. History affirms the impossibility of reasoning with dictators like Amin, Bokassa, Gadhafi, Al-Bashir, Mugabe and many others and hence, removing them from power and, yes by force, could pave the way for new structures that render armies unnecessary institutions (for an extended list of early African dictators see Ayittey 1991).

Admittedly, my call for the abolition of official armies does not constitute an original vision. As far back as 1795, the German Philosopher Immanuel Kant called for a similar arrangement in his influential article "Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch" (Kant 1795). The world has since moved on but some of the points raised by Kant in his essay are still pertinent and relevant to our current debate. Kant maintains that to employ a person to kill or get killed is to use him/her as a tool or a machine and that is incompatible with his/her autonomous right as a human being. He further states that it is flawed for conflicting parties to enter into a peace accord while still retaining their armies. Such a situation

amounts to no more than a temporal peace that allows a reprieve for rebuilding the army and preparing for future violence. Kant, however, sees war as legitimate when ordinary civilians rise up and engage in war against an invader. With that, Kant's call for the abolition of official armies does not extend to the mobilisation of citizens to defend themselves within what we now call civil defence (Ibid).

Since Kant's time, the philosophy of peace and non-violence has progressed and inspired the concept of non-violent movements, popularized at a global level by Mahatma Ghandi and Martin Luther king. This school is currently represented by Gene Sharp of the Albert Einstein Institute, USA (Sharp 1974; 2010). Sharp is not interested in the role of the army as such, nor is he in the question of its abolition. However, he is adamantly opposed to the use of violence such as armed rebellion against dictators. In his seminal book "From dictatorship to democracy", he criticises the use of a military struggle against dictatorship as an attack on the strongest front of the unjust system, meaning the army. Instead, Sharp outlines about 100 forms of actions aimed at toppling dictatorship. These actions are based on a fundamental principle, passionately argued by Sharp. Generally speaking, dictators stay in power because of the cooperation of the populace. His suggestions of civil disobedience manifested in forms of actions like strikes, not showing up for work, graffiti, demonstrations, etc. will eventually paralyse and destroy the dictatorship. Irrespective of whether one takes Sharp's recipe as capable of toppling mature dictatorships, his views lend credibility to Fry's proposition regarding infinite human ingenuity for finding peaceful alternatives for resolving our conflicts (Fry 2007).

It goes without saying that the abolition of official armies that I am proposing is contingent to the presence of genuine or to use a more established term "full" democracy. I hasten to add here the term "democracy" is a much-abused word. I am yet to come across a dictator who shouts: "hey look, I am a dictator". Instead, dictators claim be democratic and so do all totalitarian leaders. For this reason, it is important to define what we mean by democracy or full democracy. Here we need to go no further than Mo Ibrahim's foundation to define "full democracy". Mo Ibrahim himself is a philanthropist from Sudan and thus his choice complements the search for an African solution to our problems. To assess the democratic performance of a country, the Mo Ibrahim Foundation has developed a set of measurable indices for the purpose. The test rests on rating four broad categories, each divided into several sub-categories. As the information is readily and freely available in the internet, it suffices to list the four categories which have to be satisfied:

1. Safety and rule of law

2. Human development

3. Participation and human rights

4. Sustainable economic opportunity (Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2012).

The 2011 evaluation of African democratic performance gives food for thought to all Africans. The Mo Ibrahim Foundation and another reputable and stringent organisation, the Economic Intelligence Unit put the African continent to shame. The entire continent boasted only one country which scored the category "full democracy" and that is Mauritius. The rest, including Africa's flagship South Africa, with its quackery about leadership of democracy in the continent fell under "flawed democracy", "hybrid democracy", "authoritarian regimes", and below (Ibid; The Economist 2012;AFDB 2012).

It is fortuitous to debate the abolition of official armies at an era endowed with tremendous development in social media. Africa boasts 400 million mobile phones and almost every African activist has access to potential supporters both at home and abroad via Twitter, Facebook, emails, etc. (Barboza 2012). These channels have already demonstrated their power during the uprisings of Tunisia, Libya and Egypt. Social media can be used to spread the culture that upholds the abolition of official armies but much more for the prevention of military takeovers as well as the emergence of new dictators.

The same forces that have ushered in the evolution of social media, called globalisation by some, have also turned the world again in our favour. The world now is better united against oppressive and authoritarian regimes than ever before. Dictators are now besieged by numerous global organisations like the ICC, the UNSC, Amnesty International and human rights institutions. Citizens in African countries can draw on the experience and might of these organisations and can equally use the social media to forge direct connections with like-minded citizens abroad.

The euphoria about new social media should not lure us into forgetting the role of conventional media like newspapers, radio and TV debates and pubic rallies in this debate. Journalism, in particular, has been a powerful force for democracy, rule of law, and the prevention of emerging dictators in prolonging their stay in power beyond constitutional limits of terms of service. The heroic struggle of African journalists is highlighted by the killing of 102 of them in 2010 alone (Ijioma 2011). Journalism in Africa is a major stakeholder and a powerful force in the campaign to rid Africa of its official armies.

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