Feeling Good or Getting Better
Options for Security and Development in Africa

David Chuter

David Chuter has worked for the UK Ministry of Defence for almost thirty years in a variety of functions. He is currently working in Paris as an exchange officer in the French Ministry of Defence. He has had a parallel academic career, and is the author of a number of books and articles on security issues. He has had a special interest in questions of African security for many years. This essay won first prize in the inaugural Nelson Mandela International Essay Competition on African Security and Development, a joint effort by RUSI and The Brenthurst Foundation, generously supported by the Nelson Mandela Foundation.

Today, Africa enjoys no security and no development. This is not a new problem, but one which has existed since the first African states became independent, and which, I argue, is inherent in the very structure of African politics and states. The problem arises from the neglect of the historical experience of state formation elsewhere. Solutions are available. They may seem startling, but they can, in fact, be logically deduced from the situation in Africa today.

The problem is sufficiently well-known and accepted not to require a long description here. Economic growth is anaemic in most parts of Africa, poverty, malnutrition and preventable disease are everywhere, and Africa's situation – similar to most parts of the world half a century ago – now stands out as unique and troubling. Moreover, development, as opposed to mere growth (infrastructure, education, manufacturing industry, even clean drinking water) is still absent in much of the continent; the position may well be getting worse.

In most African states, ordinary people live in conditions of insecurity unmatched elsewhere in the world. Police forces are often unskilled, ineffective and corrupt, and armed conflicts between political-criminal groups have disfigured much of the continent in recent years. Few governments can provide security for their citizens across the whole of the national territory, and many appear to have stopped trying. African armies are small by international standards and, at their best, can often do little more than secure the capital and the surrounding area.

The West has made the situation worse in the various ideologies it has encouraged Africans to adopt since independence. The link between security and development – no matter how obvious it may seem – is one which development ministries refused to accept for decades, and still dislike. Security spending was traditionally regarded as a waste of money, and the military budget, in particular, was frequently reduced, in the hope that resources would thereby be liberated for programmes like health and education. Even today, as the causative link between security and development, in that order, is increasingly acknowledged, there is still a reluctance to draw the obvious conclusion; that the security sectors of African nations have to be strengthened if development is ever to take place. A representative view is that of the OECD's Development Advisory Committee, which was eventually brought to conclude – one imagines through gritted teeth – that

> … *a* single-minded *focus on downsizing the security forces and reducing military and/or security spending, often a component of donor conditionality,* may not *be consistent with the end of enhancing security as a foundation for development. Strengthening state capability to perform* legitimate *duties* may help *restore order and maintain security*.

There are many reasons for this reluctance, including historical ignorance and mistrust of the security services by the development lobby; the remnants of pacifist beliefs that armies somehow cause wars; and the

What chance for his generation *without* security? *Photo by Susan Schulman*

greater political attractiveness of spending money on health or education. But in recent decades, the anti-security posture of the development lobby has been complemented by the demands of International Financial Institutions, dominated by neoclassical economists, for whom all government spending is dubious, and defence spending in particular is 'pure waste.' As a result, African states have been exhorted and even required to reduce expenditure on security, which has promoted conflict and factionalism, and de-legitimized the state in the eyes of a population it can no longer protect.

African states are thus caught in a perfectly circular dilemma, from which there seems to be no logical escape:

● Development requires security.

● Security requires government spending.

● Government spending requires development.

The West has got itself (and of course Africa) into this mess by neglect (or perhaps ignorance) of the mechanisms by which economic development has taken place elsewhere in the world. There are basically three infrastructural requirements. The first is an educated and trained workforce with the organizational and intellectual infrastructure to prepare its replacement. The second is a physical infrastructure of transport and communications, both internally and to promote foreign trade. The third is security against conflict (which of course disrupts trade), as well an infrastructure of physical security for citizens and protection of legitimate

businesses from crime.

States outside Africa approached this state of grace by degrees. In general, a small but wealthy political entity would try to extend its area of control, bringing outlying districts under its sway in return for political loyalty and financial contributions, which enabled it to expand further. When expanding entities collided, the result was sometimes war, sometimes a diplomatic agreement to demarcate spheres of control. Thus, states grew organically, and generally managed to preserve a balance between their security commitments and the financial resources needed to sustain them. In this way also (since even an authoritarian state requires some level of popular acquiescence) outlying areas were offered concrete incentives to stay attached. The situation in Africa, needless to say, has been entirely different.

Colonialism

Pre-colonial Africa did have its own political entities, some of which were quite sophisticated. They were relatively small, because of problems of communication and the lack of horse-drawn transport. Because of the size of territory and the sparseness of population, force-to-space ratios made territorial conquest pointless even if it had been practicable. Military power, such as it was, was used to dominate other groups for tribute purposes, and to steal wealth such as livestock and slaves. The small size of these proto-states made internal security easy, and anyway dissidents could always simply move away.

Colonialism changed both nothing and everything. It changed nothing because, in Africa, the colonial footprint was limited and of short duration. The expected mass immigration from Europe never really took place and the colonies themselves – few of which were ever financially viable – had little money to invest in an infrastructure. As a result, colonial states were often minimalist; their control did not extend much beyond the imperial capitals, usually established by the sea for easy communication with home. The states concentrated on preservation of the power of the colonial elite, and exploitation of the natural resources of the territory for the benefit of that elite and its overseas masters. (In this as in other things, Africans have been apt pupils.) Infrastructure, such as it was, was designed to assist this control and exploitation, and the security forces were focused on regime protection. The colonial state was usually sufficiently weak that it could only really keep order by salutary acts of terror against dissidence. For the vast majority of colonial subjects, therefore, life went on much as it always had.

It changed everything, however, because the entire structure of the post-colonial states – territorial boundaries, political systems, government organization, economic structure, laws, police, military, even the language of the political elite – were all imitated from the colonial state. Contemporary Africa is our creation, after all. Thus, African states were, from the beginning, expected to provide security for a size of territory and population which was beyond their economic means, and without a proper security infrastructure inherited from the colonial powers. This inability to provide security depressed economic growth, and kept economic activity at the level of the market trader, the importer and the small family business. The security funding gap could typically only have been bridged by massive economic growth, which was not forthcoming. As a result, African states progressively withdrew from their security commitments, and so lost both revenue and credibility.

Of course, African states were not the only European colonies, and it is reasonable to ask what lessons might be drawn from those in Asia. In fact, there are very few. Western states were in Asia for much longer, invested far more in the infrastructures, and left behind entities much better able to make their way in the world. Moreover, major Asian economic players such as Japan, Korea and Thailand, as well as Taiwan, and China in many respects, were never Western colonies anyway. With strong and capable governments, a much higher population density and an educated workforce, they were able to grow rapidly behind a wall of tariff barriers, taking only those elements from the West which they thought would be useful. Security, moreover, was the key in each case, and here China is an interesting example. Bedevilled by political disunity, with a weak central state and suffering repeated foreign invasions, China in, say, 1930, was at the level of development of much of Africa, if not below. It was the centralizing and modernizing role of the Communist Party which provided both internal stability and external protection, as well as the massive investment required to begin the process of development itself.

The chances of African states following this model are feeble in the extreme. We would not allow them to, and in any event African states – whatever their aspirations – have never had the human and technical resources to manage their economies in the way that Asian states did. Rather, we have encouraged them to run down their structures for providing security, to abandon even the limited role they were able to play in economic management, and to move from the self-reliance of earlier times to dependence on unpredictable receipts from cash crops for their revenue. It is hard to see what could have been less helpful for development, except perhaps for the appearance of a more virulent strain of AIDS.

A Way Forward

So what is to be done? There are two principal steps which can be taken. The first is to stop our centuries-old preoccupation with trying to make Africa like us, and recognize that, like Asia, it has to be itself if it is to solve its problems. An obvious example is African armies, which are either modelled on colonial forces, or patterned after the organizations of Western or Warsaw Pact donors. As we have seen, interstate warfare for the control of territory is practically unheard of in African history, and shows no sign of becoming more common in the future. No African state has attempted to acquire the territory of another since independence; by contrast, the Ugandan/Rwandan invasions of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in the 1990s, to establish effective control of territory and to loot mineral resources, are entirely in keeping with African traditions of warfare.

For good force-to-space ratio reasons, no African state can actually expect ever to be able to protect its territorial integrity, any more than it can threaten that of another. Yet even today, most African militaries are advertised as being primarily for

defence against external aggression. This makes (or made) sense in the European tradition which African states have imitated, but it now leaves those same states chained to providing forces for a mission which is unlikely ever to be required, and could not be carried out if it were. This can only be resolved by the recognition that African security problems generally do not have a state-to-state dynamic, as European ones historically did, and that military models geared to attack and defence of territory must be jettisoned in favour of models which emphasize control over territory, and management of the kind of ethnic, religious, economic, criminal and resource problems which cross national boundaries.

The second step, which in turn has further consequences, is to recognize that the security gap outlined above must be resolved in some fashion. Logically, there are only two possibilities. Either the demand for security in Africa must be reduced in some fashion, or the supply of security has to be increased.

It is not clear how the first of these could actually be achieved. In theory, it would be possible to return to a pre-colonial situation, with hundreds of little statelets. But unless resources are increased, this is not going to help: either existing funding will have to be spread much more thinly, or some areas will simply have to do without. Likewise, ordinary people will not complacently accept a security vacuum. If the supply of security from the state is reduced, they will try to acquire it from wherever they can, including criminal gangs, ethnic militias and vigilante groups. This has happened often enough before in Africa, and has produced internal fragmentation as well as regional insecurity.

So in practice, we are back to increasing the size and capacity of the security forces of African states to the level at which they can provide the security needed to promote development. Without numbers of police and soldiers (as well as customs and revenue officers), which meet

international norms, there is no chance of that happening. Yet at the same time, numbers alone are not enough, and there are at least three other issues which have to be addressed.

One, very simply, is pay. An army or police force which is paid sporadically, if at all, or whose pay is stolen by senior officers, can scarcely be criticized for being corrupt and inefficient. It would require superhuman dedication (of which few Westerners would be capable) to do one's duty faithfully in such circumstances. Historically it was a proper system of pay and promotion which turned European armies from

HMS *Liverpool* commander Henry Duffy with members of the maritime wing of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces, February 2006. *Photo by Susan Schulman*

ill-trained, semi-privatized, part-time mercenaries into career forces capable of providing genuine stability, and later allowed the development of modern police forces. Consider the British example; until the nineteenth century, the British state was a byword for corruption and inefficiency, yet within a couple of generations, it had become one of the most admired in the world. This was not achieved by any sudden genetic change, still less by advances in transparency and accountability, of which there were few if any. It was

achieved rather by the deliberate creation of a modern state, properly structured and funded. Clear demarcation lines were established between the private and the public, and the two kept at arms length from each other. Opportunities for private gain from public positions were stopped, but replaced by a system of regular pay, and recruitment and promotion according to merit rather than connections. Government procurement – a notorious source of corruption in the past – was taken away from the private sector and put in the hands of permanent officials responsible to Parliament. This was all made possible by the economic

growth resulting from the Industrial Revolution, and of course promoted further development in turn. There is no reason to suppose the same thing could not happen in Africa.

Another is the complex of human factors associated with training, discipline, morale and leadership. Experience suggests that, even in high-technology warfare, these elements are more important than equipment: in the kind of low-intensity conflict common in Africa, they are fundamental. Interventions by European forces in Africa in recent

decades have often achieved startling successes with very small forces for these reasons. And the very limited retraining of Angolan forces by the South African firm Executive Outcomes in the 1990s produced immediate and substantial results in the war with UNITA. It is the same with the police; professional skills in the detection of crime, which can be learnt, can have an enormous effect on the percentage of crimes solved, and on the credibility of the police themselves.

Finally, of course, equipment itself should not be overlooked, but what is required is often very simple. Tactical mobility and communications are the most important needs. This is most obvious for the military, but in fact the police benefit as well: a police station with vehicles is able to address crimes over perhaps ten times the area of one where the police have to walk, and communications to get police assets quickly to where they are needed massively improves the force's efficiency.

Moreover, these three initiatives are additive; they reinforce each other. Security forces which are ill-paid become corrupt to survive, and justify preying on the population by claiming they are neglected. Forces which are well-paid, properly equipped and properly led, develop an *esprit de corps* which makes them more honest as well as more capable. Officers with nothing to do, inadequate wages and no pensions, may become involved in business or politics. Officers with proper salaries, responsible for training and operational deployments or the induction of new equipment, will have other things to worry about.

How is this to be accomplished? African states do not have the resources to do it; that is part of the problem. The only solution is for donors, individually and collectively, to take over the funding of African security forces and their structures of control and policy-making. This would be additional to, and not instead of, local funding, but it would bring this level of funding up to what is required (the actual calculations are relatively straightforward and can be

based on international norms). As economic development picks up, African states will increasingly be able to shoulder the burden themselves, and, in addition, revenues from exploitation of mineral resources can be hypothecated, under donor control, to help with funding. There are objections to this proposal, which will be outlined in a moment, but it has one colossal advantage: it follows the history and the logic of economic development elsewhere in the world, and so stands a high possibility of actually working, if properly implemented.

The first objection will be that we should, as has been the case in the past, rather fund 'feel-good' initiatives like health and education, and that we cannot leave children to starve while the military are given guns. Certainly, the media can be relied upon to look for examples of suitably emaciated children. But intellectually, the case for providing security first is unanswerable, and if we are, in fact, not making policy on intellectual grounds, but on the basis of what makes us feel good, then we had better be honest with ourselves – and Africans – about that. In any event, practical spin-offs in terms of health and education should become noticeable quite rapidly.

A second objection will be that many African security forces are corrupt and brutal. This is true but it is hardly the point. Direct funding enables this issue to be tackled directly. Once security forces are properly paid, trained and employed, there is no longer any excuse for these failings, and the corrupt and the brutal can be dismissed. Equally, the prospect of regular pay and training will of itself be enough to ensure a much higher standard of applicant than in the past.

A third objection will be that the funds – like many others – will simply be stolen by the corrupt. But there are mechanisms which can be used to prevent this. In any case, corruption in Africa is an issue which will take decades to solve through growth and structural change. We can no more cure corruption in Africa today by exhortation and transparency than we could have done in the England of the

eighteenth century.

Finally, it may be argued that we should be acting, once again, in a neo-colonial fashion. Again, this is true but irrelevant, not least because we act in a neo-colonial fashion now. Rather, it is an opportunity to configure African security forces for genuinely African tasks, rather than making them scale models of Western forces, and, if properly managed, is a programme which, history suggests, will lead to tangible improvements in a limited number of years.

Other objections will of course be made by those who stand to lose, professionally and ideologically, from the changes proposed here. More importantly, perhaps, such proposals will also attack the power-bases of local leaders, who often, paradoxically, wish to keep security forces weak and incapable in case their own positions are threatened. This is a much more serious problem, but not an insoluble one, and one where, again, state-formation experience elsewhere in the world will help us.

But ultimately it is doubtful whether there is another solution. The African state is our creation and it is broken. If we are serious about helping Africa, we must fix it. ■

NOTES

1. OECD, DAC Guidelines on Helping Prevent Violent Conflict, Paris, 2001, p.39. Emphasis added.

2. Michael Brozoska, Development Donors and the Concept of Security Sector Reform, Occasional Paper No 4 (Geneva, Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2003), p. 6.

3. I have tried to avoid cluttering up a relatively brief essay with any but the most essential footnotes. On African states yesterday and today see, for example, Basil Davidson, The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State (Oxford, James Currey, 1992); Christopher Clapham, Africa and the International System: The Politics of State Survival (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996); and Jeffrey Herbst, States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000).

4. See for example William Reno, Warlord Politics and African States (Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 1999), and Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument (Oxford, James Curry, 1999).

Spyrobot Sets the Pace

The Spyrobot is ideal for the delivery of sensors into culverts and hides; difficult or impossible for conventional robots on anti IED, and search operations. The Spyrobot can also deliver explosive charges to buildings during urban operations to create entry points.

This innovative, specialist, military engineering company are once again setting the pace, and making the headlines. This time with their advanced robotics products, the new Spyrobot 4WD is an evolution of the Spybot MKII, with higher payload and superior terrain handling capabilities. The unit has a better performance in off- road scenarios and cross-country mobility, making it useable as an recconaiscance vehicle to be deployed from armoured or patrol vehicles, both in urban and rural operations. The Macroswiss Spyrobot 4WD can traverse terrain that other robots would find difficult if not impossible, and deliver a range of sensors to the target area.

Typical of Swiss engineering the shock resistance grants survivability and operational effectiveness, the Spyrobot can be thrown by its operator over obstacles or into windows and through doors, survive and carry out its mission.

At the recent ElRob 2006 European Land Robot Trials held in the German Army Base of Hammelburg in May 2006 (www.elrob2006.org). The unit managed to climb the toughest ramps (over 45° in angle and with slippery surfaces) and crossed soft mud fields, and rivers which were a major obstacle for several other competitors.

Thanks to its fully sealed construction, floatation and the Flapper Wheel design (pat. pending), which resembles the paddles of a river boat but are fully flexible. This design acts as shock absorber, suspension, stabiliser, and it is capable of handling most obstacles.

The Macroswiss Spyrobot weighs under 6 kg, with an operational endurance of over three hours at full speed in rough terrain. The Spyrobot can be operated remotely from an intuitive console.

Macroswiss are represented in the United Kingdom by *www.dosystems.co.uk*
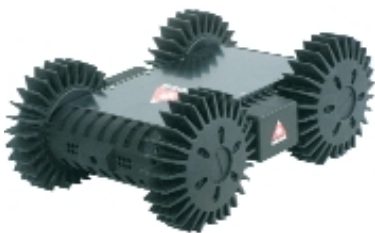
The flapper wheel design acts as a shock absorber and suspension system. Their felxibility can be seen where they meet the ground.