

The British Experience in Africa and Oman

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This chapter explores the British experience in defense institution building (DIB) through the examination of four case studies: Oman, Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Sierra Leone. They are all set in the 60-year period between 1955 and 2015, the first 25 years of which was dominated by the British withdrawal from Empire. Throughout, there were severe budgetary pressures on defense expenditure as a result of periodic recessions, demands of the Cold War, operations in Northern Ireland, and more recently those in the Gulf, Balkans, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Thus, the overall approach taken to DIB was one of small-scale assistance to develop self-sustaining local capacity.

With the benefit of hindsight, the speed of British withdrawal from Empire looks hasty. In most of the newly independent countries, there was only a short period of preparation and the military, therefore, in many cases, left behind small training teams and commanders to ease the transition. It would be hard to classify such support as genuine attempts to build sustainable defense institutions. But the four examples chosen are different: Oman because it highlights what can be achieved with sustained commitment and adequate resources; Zimbabwe and South Africa because these countries initially chose different paths upon leaving the Empire, ones which resulted in protracted conflicts, at the conclusion of which they both requested British assistance to rebuild their armed forces from elements of the conflicting forces; and Sierra Leone because, following a long period of conflict, it represents a relatively recent attempt to rebuild all the defense institutions in a country.

These examples highlight the time, commitment, and resources needed to deliver lasting, meaningful results, and the criticality of generating trained, educated, and experienced leaders. They also highlight that, while much attention is typically given by outsiders to the “means to fight,” comparatively little attention is given to the “will to fight.” Yet history is full of examples where the will to fight has been the dominant factor in performance in combat.

Having briefly outlined the historical background and details of British military assistance in these four particular engagements, the chapter concludes with a section that highlights a number of observations of use to future DIB efforts.

A Brief History: British Military Assistance

The British relationship with Oman stretches back to the 17th century and the British East India Company's attempt to trade in the Gulf, with the first defense treaty being signed in 1798. Robert Landen identified five phases in British engagement in Oman: the first until the late 18th century was commercial; the second until the mid-19th century was political; and the third in the second half of the 19th century led to indirect rule (this was linked to the strategic importance of the Gulf to British engagement in India). The last two stages, dominance and accommodation, occurred in the first half of the 20th century, and were linked to the height and the end of the British Empire in India.¹ Oman continued as a partner of strategic importance for Britain throughout the second half of the 20th century, particularly during the period up until the early 1970s, when East of Suez withdrawal was complete. The relationship remains to this day, albeit for slightly different strategic reasons. Thus when the discovery of oil in Oman led to unrest in the 1950s, quickly followed by an insurgency in Dhofar, it was to be expected that the United Kingdom (UK) would come to the Sultan's aid.

Meanwhile, Britain, aware of its declining status as a world power and keen to respond to growing anti-colonial sentiment, granted independence to Ghana in 1957, and thus set in motion an African decolonization process that was to last more than two decades. Initially, Africa was a foreign policy priority, as the UK government sought to protect investments, trade links, and citizens with the right to return to the UK. Yet, by the time of Britain's entry into the Common Market in 1973, Africa was being eclipsed by relations with America and Europe. By 1987, Africa was receiving only \$325 million in aid from the UK, only 16 percent of the over \$2 billion supplied by France. The continent was, moreover, receiving no more than 3.2 percent of the UK's exports and providing only 1.9 percent of the UK's imports.² Throughout this period, the UK sought to avoid becoming militarily committed on the ground, withdrawing forces East of Suez by 1971 and vacating the last operational military base in Africa, in Simon's Town (South Africa), in 1975. The British Army, however, continued to train in sub-Saharan Africa through the development of permanent training facilities in Kenya and through a varied exercise program across the continent.

After the withdrawal from sub-Saharan Africa, the British Army retained links with the newly established African armies and provided a range of training and assistance. This support lessened over time, as UK defense spending was reduced in successive budgetary rounds. Furthermore, as conflicts in former colonies in sub-Saharan Africa ended, surge assistance was offered in the form of British Military Advisory and Training Teams to help establish the new post-conflict armies as stabilizing forces for good.

The end of the Cold War in 1991 and the resultant calls for a peace dividend, combined with the early 1990s recession, put considerable strain on the UK defense budget. The mid-1990s saw many military savings measures imposed on a wide range of areas, with overall

defense spending dropping from £26.33 billion in 1993 to £24.38 billion in 1998.³

The 1997 election of a Labour Government and the creation of the Department for International Development (DfID), which focused on the global alleviation of poverty, marked a renewed focus on sub-Saharan Africa by the UK government. This was further reinforced by the UK's commitment at the Gleneagles Summit in 2005 to double bilateral spending in Africa—a target which has been achieved, resulting in a bilateral aid budget in Africa of over £2.5 billion in 2013/2014, 54 percent of the bilateral program.⁴ In parallel with this change, the focus of military training and assistance shifted to one of supporting African armies taking part in peacekeeping operations. Since 1997, the two largest training teams have changed their titles to “British Peace Support Teams” and adopted a more regional approach, both in terms of their areas of operations, but also in their support to regional security organizations.

The events of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent growth of Islamic extremist groups on the continent has resulted in support to counterterrorist training and assistance first in East and now in West Africa. Combined with fiscal constraints, this new emphasis has resulted in a reduction of support to peacekeeping training, as the UK withdrawal from the Nigerian Army Peacekeeping Centre and the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre highlight.

Oman

Historical Background

Modern-day Oman has a long history of tension between the eastern coastal region that contains the capital Muscat, and the interior, which is separated from the capital region by the Hajar Mountains. Under the Treaty of Seeb (1920), it was agreed that the Sultan of Muscat would rule the coastal region and be responsible for the external affairs of Oman, while the autonomy of the interior of the country would be recognized and ruled by Imams.

The discovery of oil in the 1950s put pressure on this finely balanced arrangement. Sultan Said bin Taimur claimed the right to all dealings with external companies, while the Imam ruling the interior claimed that, as the oil was in his territory, it was an internal matter. In December 1955, the Sultan sent a small force, supported by British advisors, to occupy the main centers in the interior of Oman. Imam Ghalib bin Ali al Hinai, the ruling Imam, led a rebellion against the Sultan that was quickly suppressed. The Imam's brother fled to Saudi Arabia and returned in 1957 with a group of several hundred well-armed fighters. After some initial skirmishes, one of the major interior tribes joined forces with the Imam's fighters; together, they inflicted considerable losses on the Sultan's forces. The rebellion was suppressed with British help, including the deployment of two companies from the Cameronians (a Scottish infantry regiment), and the rebels fled to the mountains of the Jebel Akhdar, where they held out until their defeat by a British Special Air Service (SAS)-led assault in 1959. Imam Ghalib al Hinai escaped to Saudi Arabia, remaining in exile until he died in November 2009.

Peace was not to last for long. In 1962, Mussalin bin Nafi formed the Dhofar Liberation Front (DLF), which aimed to establish a separate state in Dhofar. This started a conflict that would be fueled by the Cold War, result in the overthrow of the Sultan by his son, and last until 1976. To prevail, the state of Oman and its armed forces had to be rapidly modernized, and the benefits of the new-found oil wealth (exports began in 1967) had to be felt by all. To bridge the gap while the transformation took place, both Iran (whose forces suffered the highest casualties) and Britain provided extensive support, with Jordan also providing an engineer squadron.

The Province of Dhofar is in the far west of Oman. It consists of a thin coastal strip containing the regional capital, Salalah, and gives way inland to the Jebel Dhofar hills. Further north, the hills run into the deserts of the Empty Quarter. Initially, the conflict was low-intensity, with the DLF conducting hit-and-run attacks and the Sultan using a locally recruited irregular force—the “Dhofar Force”—to contain the problem. In 1966, this irregular unit attempted to assassinate the Sultan; the Sultan’s response was heavy handed, and the conflict grew in intensity.

In 1967, the British withdrew from Aden and the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen was established, providing a route through which both the Chinese and the Russians could provide support to the rebels.⁵ In 1968, the DLF renamed itself the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf, adopted a communist ideology, and began to receive external support from Yemen in the form of both weapons and training. By the 1970s, the rebels were making considerable progress, controlling the entire Jebel, and their increasingly forceful attacks convinced many, including the British, that a new approach and leadership was needed.

The Sultan’s heir, Qaboos bin Said, was educated in Salalah and India, and was sent to secondary school in England at age 16. Following school, he attended the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, and then served in the British Army with the Cameronians. He then took a course in local government and completed his education with a world tour chaperoned by Leslie Chauncey, who had been the British Consul General in Oman from 1949-1958 and personal advisor to the Sultan from 1961-1970.⁶ On July 23, 1970, Qaboos initiated a bloodless coup at the Sultan’s Palace in Salalah, with the help of his uncle, and exiled his father to Britain, where he was to die two years later.

British Security Assistance in Oman

Back in 1932, Sultan Said bin Taimur inherited a country that was indebted to both the UK and India. Through very tight management of the budget he broke this hold, but the result was a very poor and underdeveloped country, the state of which shocked external observers.⁷ Thus, Sultan Qaboos inherited a country that had seen little benefit from the oil boom and suffered from an insurgency that was now a real threat to the state. James Worrall summed up the situation:

The Sultan had a great deal of internal legitimacy, partly because of his extensive tours, made since his assumption of power and the contact with his people this

*engendered and most importantly because of the hope for future development and prosperity he had promised. The difficulty that faced both the Sultan and the British was the need for the new regime to be seen to be run by Omanis for Omanis when so few Omanis had the educations and skills to create an effective indigenous administration which could provide the development craved by the people... The new regime needed to reduce British influence to appear legitimate but also needed British expertise to be able to create an effective and developing state. . . . It was this dilemma that underpinned the British approach to the development of the Armed Services. In 1971 the five key British interests in Oman were summarized as: "a) to prevent the Sultanate from disintegrating or falling to a regime hostile to the stability of the Gulf and Britain's oil interests during withdrawal from the Gulf, b) in the long term to ensure the Sultanate was a stable, internationally recognized and pro-British State, c) to maintain the flow of high quality oil, d) to maintain the RAF facilities and BBC relay station on Masirah at least for as long as commitments to Malaysia and Singapore continued, and e) to keep to the minimum, British military activities in the Sultanate without damaging the other objectives."*⁸

By the early 1950s, the British knew Oman and its Baluchi and ad hoc forces well.⁹ After the reverses of 1957, the Sultan's Army was reorganized by a British Officer, Colonel David Smiley, who had considerable experience in the Middle East and working with irregular forces.¹⁰ Within each unit and sub-unit, the British provided a number of officers, and the Baluchi and Arab soldiers were mixed in order to reduce their opportunities for sympathizing with the rebels (though this led to language problems and other tensions). By 1964, the Sultan's forces were still in a weak state: undermanned, undertrained, and poorly equipped. Although some reorganization took place with the creation of the all-Baluchi Southern Regiment, it was slow and not enough to deal with the growing insurgency in the West.

When Sultan Qaboos took charge, he initiated rapid reform of the Armed Services. His vision was for a modern force that could not only defeat the insurgency, but would act as a deterrent to future aggression. The existing forces suffered from critical weaknesses, lacking equipment and Omani human capital.

Initially, many more Omanis were recruited into the Armed Forces and the Baluchis were concentrated in separate units, setting up a gradual shift from the use of irregular forces to the creation of a modern professional force. To bridge the gap, a number of local irregular units known as *firqats* were established, each with about 100 men under command of a British officer. During this process, large numbers of British officers and non-commissioned officer (NCO) instructors were attached to Omani units and to the Ministry of Defense (MOD); this was not without its difficulties, as operations in Northern Ireland were putting the British Army under considerable strain in the early 1970s. Over time, the number of British officers and NCOs seconded to the Sultan's Armed Forces was

gradually reduced, but importantly, the senior advisors were among the last to be released.

In parallel, a concerted attempt was made to develop indigenous Omani capability through both internal and external training and education. Considerable funds were applied to the creation of training establishments, such as the Sultan Qaboos Military College, initially established in 1971, and the Command and Staff College, established in 1987. These and other training organizations have been continuously developed, and are regarded by some as among the best in the region.

Initially, the British even provided an officer—Major General John Graham (1970-1972), followed by Major General (later General) Timothy Creasey—to act as the Commander of the Sultan's Armed Forces (1972-1975).¹¹ These experienced commanders drove the rapid modernization that the Sultan desired. When Major General Graham took command, the Sultan's forces numbered 4,000; when he left, they stood at 11,000, with 49 aircraft and a growing navy. In 1977, the Sultan's Armed Forces were reorganized into land, air, and naval forces, with the office of Chief of Staff of Defense being established in 1981. British leadership of all three services by officers on loan continued until the late 1980s, but by the early 1990s, all senior positions were held by Omanis, with the British providing a two-star general as the Sultan's military advisor (a post that remains to this day).

Alongside a real and sustained effort to develop people, the Sultan's Armed Forces received considerable funds to modernize and expand their equipment fleets, and to sustain the progress that it had made in building its defense institutions. In 1970, the defense budget stood at \$123 million (15.2 percent of GNP). It rose quickly: by 1973, it stood at \$366 million (37.5 percent of GNP).¹² Income from oil allowed this growth to be sustained such that by 1988 spending on defense had reached \$1.5 billion, peaked in 2012 at \$12.3 billion, and stood at \$9.8 billion by 2015.¹³

Today, Oman possesses some of the most modern and capable forces in the region, has steadily decreased its dependence on foreign assistance, and has increased its use of modern technology. It is, in many ways, an excellent example of what can be achieved given a clear vision, a long-term approach, and adequate funding.

Zimbabwe

Historical Context

Prime Minister Ian Smith's declaration of independence for Rhodesia (present-day Zimbabwe) from the UK on November 11, 1965, preempted the intended decolonization of the country and set the stage for a bitter internal war that lasted for 14 years, ending with a ceasefire on December 28, 1979.¹⁴

The ceasefire was overseen by a Commonwealth Monitoring Force (CMF), which facilitated the movement of Patriotic Front guerrillas to 16 assembly areas across the country.¹⁵ The leaders of the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) and the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) had some difficulty making contact with their guerrillas, yet by the end of February 1980, some 18,000 ZANLA and

6,000 ZIPRA fighters were in the assembly areas, with an additional 6,000 arriving after the March elections.¹⁶ At the time of the ceasefire, the Rhodesian Security Forces (RSF) numbered 15,000 regulars, 20,000 territorials, and 25,000 auxiliaries, with another 6,000 special troops; all were withdrawn to their barracks.

In February 1980, two months before he was elected prime minister of the newly independent Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe met with the British Governor of Rhodesia, Lord Soames, and the Commander of the CMF, Major General Acland. Mugabe agreed that the CMF would depart on schedule in April, but that a 50-strong British Military Assistance and Training Team (BMATT), under Major General Palmer, would be deployed to Zimbabwe to help integrate the new National Army. The BMATT's deployment was complete by May 8, 1980. The challenge facing the team was huge, as there had been three distinct fighting forces, none of whom thought that they had lost the war, and all of whom had fought each other at various points during the war. With the disparity in living conditions between the RSF in their barracks and the ZANLA and ZIPRA in the assembly areas, there was a real and growing pressure to get on with both demobilization and integration.

British Security Assistance in Zimbabwe

The BMATT plan was to select potential leaders from ZANLA and ZIPRA fighters in the assembly areas, and for BMATT, assisted by former Rhodesian Army instructors, to train them in leadership, administration, and basic skills. The training was also to act as an assessment of leadership ability, on completion of which they were appointed to positions in a battalion. Then, 450 ZANLA and ZIPRA fighters were chosen as the battalion's soldiers and put through a month of basic training. Once the individual training was complete, each new battalion was joined by a BMATT major and warrant officer for six months to help get the organization working effectively. Specialist elements of the battalion were trained separately, and it was in these areas that the former RSF members were concentrated. By July 1980, the first infantry battalion was trained, with new battalions finishing training at the rate of two per month. A Joint High Command (JHC) was established to oversee the process of integration and demobilization. It required much support from senior elements of the BMATT, particularly when the commander of the Zimbabwe Armed Forces (and former Head of the Armed Forces of Rhodesia) Lieutenant General Peter Walls resigned in July 1980 after having given a controversial interview to the British Broadcasting Corporation. The new minister of defense then stepped in and assumed the position of chairman of the JHC. In August 1981, the JHC handed over to a new Defense Headquarters, which was co-located with the MOD.

In December 1980, it was finally agreed that a demobilization scheme was needed, although it took until October 1981 to agree to the details and then it was slow to deliver; the disarmament process was much quicker. The issue of creating a chain of command was particularly problematic while substantial numbers of each faction remained outside the National Army. In February 1981, a Senior Officer's Selection Board selected 27 brigadiers

and colonels from 50 ZIPRA and ZANLA potentials. Those selected then attended staff college training enabled by the BMATT. The whole process was not without controversy; some new appointees managed to bypass the process completely, and there were allegations of bias and political selection.

Throughout this early period in the formation of the new Zimbabwe Defense Force (ZDF), there was considerable friction between former ZANLA and ZIPRA fighters. The height of this friction came during the mutiny and mini-civil war in early February 1981 near Bulawayo, the final death toll of which was some 300 former guerrillas and 200 members of the police, national army, and civil society. However, the JHC and the government held together and were united in ending the crisis. In the summer of 1981, the Government of Zimbabwe decided to accept an offer from North Korea to train a special brigade. The 5th Brigade was composed almost exclusively of former ZANLA fighters. Former ZIPRA fighters viewed it with suspicion, as a potential instrument of coercion, and as the leading edge of the politicization of the Armed Forces.

The last amalgamated battalion, the 42nd, finished training in October 1981, by which point the Armed Forces were approximately 65,000-strong. The BMATT then began to concentrate on improving individual training and helping to start the full suite of professional courses needed to sustain and develop defense institutions. In his final report, Major General Palmer observed that the BMATT had created a large, relatively stable force that would need a lot more work to turn it into a modern professional fighting force. He felt that considerable internal and regional challenges remained and that the eventual outcome was still uncertain. Yet, by 1985, the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) was undergoing formation training, and by 1987, the Zimbabwe Staff College was offering some of the most advanced command and staff training in Africa.

Over time, the BMATT was gradually reduced in size to a point where, in 1995, plans were made to disengage from bilateral support except for a three-man team at the Zimbabwe Staff College. However, after a review, it was decided to keep the team in Zimbabwe, but for it to be given a regional role. It became BMATT (Southern Africa), providing training to the armed forces in Mozambique, Mauritius, Malawi, Botswana, Swaziland, and Zambia, as well as Zimbabwe. The team was mandated to focus on regional peacekeeping training.

In 2001, as a result of the deteriorating relationship between the governments of the UK and Zimbabwe, it was decided to close the BMATT and relocate the regional element of its training to the newly established team in South Africa. The withdrawal of the team was announced by the Foreign Secretary on March 1, 2001, and the withdrawal was complete by March 31, 2001.

Of note is the fact that at some point a civilian advisor was added to the team to help with MOD reform. His work in helping with the development of a Zimbabwean MOD program's branch and defense management plan received much positive comment. He was aided by the ability to send officers to the UK for management planning courses, and by a UK MOD Defense Management Training Team, which deployed to the region and ran a series of in-country courses.

South Africa

Historical Context

Of the 11 statues in London's Parliament Square, seven are of British leaders and two are South African—Jan Smuts and Nelson Mandela— demonstrating the long and deep links between the two countries. Between May 31, 1910 (with the formation of the Union of South Africa) and May 31, 1961 (when South Africa declared itself a republic and left the Commonwealth), South Africa was an independent dominion of the British Empire, fighting as such in both world wars. In the period 1960-61 relations between the two countries deteriorated. On February 3, 1960, British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan gave his “winds of change” speech to the South African Parliament, in which he signaled his country's intention to grant independence to its colonies, including South Africa. This was an unexpectedly sudden change in the British Government's attitude toward African self-government.

On October 5, 1960, the ruling National Party (which had been in power since 1948, was predominantly comprised of white Afrikaners, and was staunchly anti-British, a sentiment stemming from the Anglo-Boer Wars) held a referendum on changing the South African Union to a sovereign republic. Despite significant opposition, voting was restricted to whites, and the referendum was passed with a majority of 52.2 percent.

Then followed a long period of difficult relations. The UK, which opposed the National Party's apartheid regime, attempted to pursue a policy of engagement. This policy led to the isolation of the UK within various international fora that were calling for stronger action, particularly the Commonwealth, and difficult relations with the African National Congress (ANC), which only started to improve in the late 1980s. At its core, the British policy appeared to be based on a belief that it was the Government of South Africa that would deliver the required changes and, therefore, not only pressure but also engagement was needed; critics argued for more pressure, and the UK reluctantly imposed sanctions in 1985. In 1990, the National Party finally lifted the ban on the ANC and other political parties, and released Nelson Mandela from prison. A negotiation process followed, culminating in a multi-party election on April 27, 1994. The ANC gained 62 percent of the vote, winning 252 seats in the National Assembly. The Assembly's first act was to elect Nelson Mandela President.

British Security Assistance in the Republic of South Africa

On April 8, 1994, the South African Transitional Executive Council issued a formal invitation to the UK government to assist in the process of the formation of the new South African National Defense Force (SANDF). The 1993 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa stated that “The National Defense Force shall be established in such a manner that it will provide a balanced, modern and technologically advanced military force, capable of executing its functions in terms of this Constitution” and that “All members of the National Defense Force shall be properly trained in order to comply with international standards of

competency.”¹⁷ The overall challenge was considerable, as it involved the integration of seven separate forces into one body, and a large downsizing operation.

The British Military Advisory and Training Team (South Africa) was quickly established and deployed in June 1994. The first team was 33-strong, of which nine personnel were on two-year-long tours, and the remainder held short-term posts of up to six months in duration. The BMATT was given three principal tasks: validating entrance criteria and standards for the SANDF; monitoring assessment, selection, and training across all four arms of the SANDF to ensure compliance with an even-handed application of the agreed standards; and adjudicating disputes arising between the parties involved in the integration process. It was also asked to assist with training and instruction, but only if such activity did not conflict with its three principal tasks.

The BMATT (South Africa) mission was extended in 1999 and again in 2001. In recognition of the success of the integration program, its work shifted toward the rationalization and development of the SANDF and it was given the additional task of assisting the SANDF in developing its Peace Support Operations capability. In 2002, its name was changed to British Peace Support Team (South Africa) (BPST [SA]). The SANDF integration training was concluded by the end of 2003 and, thus, the original BMATT mission was complete.

However, in anticipation of the end of the original mission, BPST (SA) was reconfigured in March 2003 to focus on peacekeeping training in support of the SANDF as it became more engaged in such operations across Africa. With the change of mission, combined with the closure of BMATT (Harare), it also began to adopt a regional role.

By 2015, the BPST (SA) had been reduced to nine military personnel and three locally employed staff, was based in Pretoria, and was jointly funded by the UK and South Africa under a memorandum of understanding lasting until 2018. It is engaged in supporting both national and multinational peacekeeping training.

Alongside the BMATT, a British Defense Advisory Team (BDAT)—consisting of a civil and military official, each of at least one-star rank—was created to help with the establishment of a Department of Defense. Prior to the 1993 constitution, defense forces were managed and controlled by the military—there was no civilian management structure in place. The BDAT’s mandate was to develop processes related to governance, risk, and control over defense resources, including the framework against which policies, strategies, and plans were to be developed. Initially headed by Dr. Ian Hamill, it provided advice directly to the Secretary of Defense (initially Lieutenant General [retired] Pierre D. Steyn) and the Chief of the National Defense Force. The team was supported by visiting advisors from the UK Ministry of Defense.

Following a lengthy dialogue on training needs in 1998, the UK Government agreed to fund up to eight members of the South African Department of Defense to attend a Higher Management Training Program at Ashridge Business School in the UK. This was considered such a success that Ashridge was invited to deliver an eight-day program,

known as Project Clipper, to Department of Defense civil servants in South Africa. From 1998-2006, some 230 staff took part in the program.¹⁸ Initially, the program was used to train managers of color in order to redress the effects of the apartheid regime; later on it was used to improve gender balance. Such was the profile of the course that individual attendance was countersigned by the Secretary of State for Defense.

Following a 1994 Defense White Paper that set out the primary role of the SANDF as one of territorial integrity, the Defense Review four years later provided the justification for a significant rearmament order from British, German, Italian, and Swedish suppliers. However, new equipment was not enough. What was needed was fresh blood, downsizing of personnel numbers, and a greater slice of operational spending. These were factors recognized in the 2014 South African Defense Review, which described the SANDF as being in:

*a critical state of decline characterized by: force imbalance between capabilities; block obsolescence and unaffordability of many of its main operating systems; a disproportionate tooth-to-tail ratio; the inability to meet current standing defence commitments; and the lack of critical mobility. The current balance of expenditure between personnel, operating and capital is both severely disjointed and institutionally crippling.*¹⁹

It was a force that, despite the international care and advice lavished, had moved from a “warfare” to a “welfare” institution, as a source, primarily, of employment in a job-scarce environment.²⁰

In some respects, the honesty of the report is the mark of a strong institution, but in others, its harsh criticism points to a Department of Defense that has been unable to marshal the arguments for adequate resources and has not managed its business effectively. What is clear is that from a reasonably well-founded starting point (in terms of available equipment and human capability), a new defense force under effective civilian control was established in short order, and a process of rebalancing was initiated to make it more representative of the nation. Twenty years later, in the absence of a direct threat to South Africa, and subject to severe resource constraints, it has fallen on hard times. The acid test for the Department is: can it reform once again to deliver the strategic approach outlined in the 2014 Defense Review? Thus the jury must still be regarded as “out” on the effectiveness, over the long term, of the assistance delivered by the British.

Sierra Leone

The UK-led International Military Advisory and Training Team (Sierra Leone) (IMATT [SL]) was established in 2002, after a peace process that ended years of conflict.²¹ The team’s mission was to “support the Government of Sierra Leone in the development of effective, democratically accountable and affordable Armed Forces.”²² At its high point, the IMATT

(SL) was over one hundred strong, with contributions from Canada, the United States, Nigeria, Jamaica, France, Senegal, Bermuda, and Ghana. It was funded entirely by the UK Africa Conflict Prevention Pool.

The IMATT (SL) was focused on Pillar One of the Government of Sierra Leone's poverty reduction strategy, that, "good governance, consolidated peace and security and a strengthened security sector are key elements of the enabling environment for the delivery of services, for attainment of food security, creation of employment opportunities, human development and economic growth."²³

While in the post-colonial period, prior to the outbreak of war in 1991, the army, police, and intelligence services had become politicized and lost considerable capability, the war broke the institutions completely. The task of the IMATT (SL) was to build the new Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) following a military reintegration program that brought together fighters from all factions, reducing numbers in the process through early retirement. The approach chosen was a bottom-up transformation through the provision of individual and "train-the-trainer" instruction. This allowed the RSLAF to quickly take the training lead, freeing up IMATT (SL) resources to assist the MOD and RSLAF leadership plan for the future, thus producing top-down direction and long-term momentum. The emphasis in the training was on the moral and conceptual components: "thinking, not things."

The Commander of the IMATT (a brigadier general) was appointed as advisor to the Government of Sierra Leone on security issues and given right of direct access to the President. IMATT civilian staff and military officers were embedded in the Ministry of Defense, in both executive and advisory roles, to help establish momentum for change and to ensure that the principle of civilian control was properly understood and accepted. Importantly, from the outset, the British considered the mission a joint endeavor between the British Ministry of Defense, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and the Department for International Development, with funding provided jointly through the Conflict Prevention Pool, thus enhancing civilian engagement in security sector reform and reinforcing the notion of civilian control.

A British Stability Unit Report on Security Sector Reform in West Africa noted, "It is important, however, to recognize that IMATT (SL) represented a significant long-term investment by the UK over its lifespan and that it is seen as a success, not just by the UK but by the Government of Sierra Leone, the RSLAF, and the international community, and it has paved the way for the International Security Assistance Team." Brigadier General Barry Le Grys, a former team commander, writing in 2007, drew three deductions from the IMATT (SL) experience. First, that security sector reform was broader than just the Armed Forces, for unless the rest of government improves, it is hard to ensure effective civilian oversight. Second, that security sector reform takes time, is expensive, and will often require donor support until the economy picks up. Third, that local ownership is critical, both in design and implementation.²⁴

The IMATT (SL) was replaced by an International Security Assistance Team (ISAT) in April 2013. While IMATT (SL)'s focus was on the development of the RSLAF and the MOD, the ISAT's remit is much broader, as it aims to look more strategically across the security sector. This is a huge area, and the final Commander IMATT (SL)'s report highlights the challenge:

There is huge appetite for ISAT support amongst the civilian security sector agencies and ISAT will need to prioritize very carefully where and how it uses its limited resources whilst at the same time being seen to deliver substantive effect early . . . Its main effort must be directed at the Sierra Leone Police.²⁵

The performance of the RSLAF during the Ebola crisis of 2014 and 2015 highlights the progress made. During the crisis, the RSLAF deployed (unarmed) in support of the police across the country, and were widely praised for both their actions and their discipline. The RSLAF engineers worked with British Military Engineers to build treatment centers and the RSLAF played a key role in the management of dead bodies.²⁶ But the scale and length of the international military assistance offered to the RSLAF has been relatively modest, and it will not be until at least the late 2020s that an officer who joined the new RSLAF at the start of their career will emerge with the capability and experience to lead it effectively.

Observations: Tension, Relationships, and Fighting Power

Tensions

In this cursory examination of British attempts at defense institution building, a number of critical tensions are apparent that strike at the very core of such endeavors.

The military in politics: The accepted Western starting point for defense institution building is civilian control of the military—that the military's role is to ensure the security of the nation and that in doing so it should not be a political player. The reality in many countries where assistance is offered is somewhat different. If the military is seen as part of the power structure of a country then, it will inevitably be supplied or denied resources accordingly. External military assistance given without a full understanding of the context can fall foul of this tension. Yet despite this issue, comparatively little effort is put into developing effective civilian control of the military. The case study of Zimbabwe demonstrates this clearly. From very early on, the BMATT was concerned about the politicization of the military and the creation of the North Korean trained 5th Brigade; its subsequent actions confirmed their unease. Indeed, as the leader of both ZANU and ZANLA during the war, Mugabe may never have seen such a separation. The team continued to operate in Zimbabwe until 2001 in the belief that continued engagement over the long term would help position the military as a stabilizing force in society. However, in 2001 after just over 20 years of engagement the political differences between the governments of the UK and

Zimbabwe became too great for such support to continue. Despite recognition of this issue, it appears there was only one civilian post dedicated to assisting the Zimbabwean MOD establish and consolidate its position over the course of the partnership.

Time and timing: While military capability is highly perishable (given the generally young age of soldiers, sailors, and airmen, and the relatively short duration of their service), the development of experienced leaders and commanders takes a considerable amount of time (20-30 years). Yet assisting forces are too often under significant pressure to get up and running fast, to produce early effect, and to move on after a period of a few years. Thus there is often a concentration on developing highly perishable skills, to the detriment of those needed for the operation and leadership of the institutions that make such forces self-sustaining. The approach taken in Oman and resultant success is very thought-provoking in this respect.

Sultan Qaboos had a clear vision, has remained as the Supreme Commander-in-Chief throughout, providing long-term continuity, and was prepared to wait until the early 1990s (20 years) before he appointed trained and experienced Omani Service Chiefs. In the light of the approach taken in Oman, the deployment of a two-man BDAT for three years and the provision of eight days of intensive courses to the South African MOD civil servants in the late 1990s looks thin given the scale of the task. Clearly, following the end of the apartheid regime the challenge faced by South Africa was different. The newly created MOD had a number of highly experienced senior officers and civil servants, but it also had an urgent need to rebalance the leadership structure so that it was more reflective of the nation. The problem is that such experienced leaders, military or civilian, cannot be created quickly. Therefore, logically, to help fill the gap the BDAT should have been larger, stayed for much longer, and offered more access to longer-term education and training.

Resources: The history of British military support to African forces since the early 1960s has been dominated by the reduction of resources allocated to the task. This has manifested in reductions in both the numbers and ranks of the personnel deployed and in the premature curtailment of long-term activities. While this has been the consequence of understandable budgetary pressures and changing priorities, its effect on already small teams has been considerable. For effective senior-level engagement and influence, rank matters, and in this respect is not linked to the size of the team deployed. The approach taken in Oman again offers a sharp contrast, for at the height of the crisis and British engagement, the senior British officer was a Major General; some 40 years later, albeit with a different role, it is still a Major General. This difference is probably underpinned by the fact that Oman has the ability to pay for the support it needs, whereas others do not. At the core of this tension has been a UK defense planning cycle of 5 years, linked to the tenure of governments, and an institution developmental timeframe that is better thought of as generational. Given this resource challenge is shared by many of the nations involved in external defense institution building, there is considerable scope for international cooperation in this area. This is

recognized by many of the key contributors, but actual cooperation on the ground remains relatively limited.

Nature of engagement (internal or external): Throughout Britain's long colonial past there was a practice of embedding officers and NCOs as part of a local force, providing a core human capability from which a unit or institution could be developed. The roles of Colonel David Smiley and Major General John Graham in Oman illustrate this perfectly, and the effects they achieved point to the critical importance of quality, trained, and experienced people. The UK has now moved away from providing embedded personnel to an approach that supplies teams that offer advice from a more external position. There are sound historical and legal reasons for such a change, but it does appear to be less effective. Interestingly, the French have retained an embedded system, and in Afghanistan, under the pressure of combat, the UK returned as close to the embedded approach as possible. For embedding to work, as highlighted by the experience in Oman, there must be local ownership of both the need and the solution, which must include a long-term plan to replace "loaned people capability" with properly trained and experienced locals.

Relationships

Defense engagement and by extension DIB is, at its core, a relational activity. For success in this area, militaries need to build strong, lasting relationships with both institutions and people.

For the UK, there appear to be two issues that militate against the development of such relationships with the senior officers of supported countries. First, British defense forces and institutions operate on an appointment- and time-based personnel management system; once an individual moves on from a post, relationships are only maintained on a personal friendship basis, and much is lost as a result. The vast majority of interviewees in a recent study conducted by the author highlighted the need for continuity through longer and repeated tours, thus allowing the build-up of both understanding and relationships.²⁷

Second, as UK Defense Attaché posts have been "de-enriched," they have dropped to a rank level where it is hard for the incumbents to develop personal relationships with senior officers of the supported nation. Because their visits are too infrequent and brief, visiting senior officers from the UK have not filled the resulting gap. Again, Oman is different in this respect from the other three case studies, given its retention of a two star military advisor. This officer has played a key part in the UK-Oman defense relationship, despite considerable shrinkage in the physical support delivered.

Fighting Power

Ultimately, the aim of defense institution building is to create effective, civilian-controlled, self-sustaining armed forces that operate in accordance with international law. Thus, it is instructive to examine what has been provided through the lens of the concept of "fighting power" and its three components: physical, conceptual, and moral.²⁸

Physical (manpower, equipment, training, sustainability): The vast majority of support is provided in the area of the physical component: equipment, training, and sustainability. This is something the militaries are generally comfortable providing and receiving. But training for frontline forces, given its highly perishable nature, is a short-term activity, and the ability to sustain equipment supplied is often lacking. In terms of long-term defense institution building, this is arguably the least effective component on which to expend effort.

Conceptual (doctrine, education, context): Through a focus on staff college development and training (in the case of Sierra Leone, students attended programs at the Ghanaian Armed Forces Staff College), a reasonable amount has been delivered by the UK in the development of the conceptual component in each of the four cases examined. Indeed, the approach taken in Sierra Leone of “thinking, not things” is a thought-provoking strap line. However, the choice of which concepts to impart bears some consideration. Each of the four countries examined had a long association with the British military and, therefore, the continued use of British doctrine was logical. But effective doctrine contains a strong national element, one that recognizes national culture and how a society operates; it is an expression of guidelines and principles that underpin how a nation fights. Future attempts at defense institution building need to start by recognizing this issue. During the Zimbabwe War of Liberation, ZANLA received considerable assistance from China. Since the British team was withdrawn from Harare in 2001, it is unsurprising that the ZDF has turned to China for assistance. In terms of arms supplies, between 2000 and 2009, China accounted for 39 percent of Zimbabwean imports of major conventional weapons. China has also assisted in the provision of training for the Zimbabwean military, especially at the Zimbabwe Staff College.²⁹ This change in support has come with a change in doctrine: at best, it will offer a thought provoking contrast; at worst, it will create inconsistency and the potential for confusion.

Moral (ethical foundations, moral cohesion, motivation): Comparatively little assistance has been delivered in support of the development of the moral component, yet as Napoleon highlighted, “moral is to the physical [material] as three is to one.”³⁰ In this respect, the case study of Oman is interesting, because, for example, such considerations were at the forefront when Colonel Smiley chose to mix Omani and Baluchi soldiers as part of his 1957 reorganization. They are also seen in Sultan Qaboos’s decision to increase the number of Omanis in the armed forces and in his long-term plan to grow capable, experienced Omani leaders, thus reducing his reliance on outsiders. These actions were all aimed at bonding the armed forces to the state. As we have observed with the initial collapse of the Iraqi Army in the face of attacks by militants from the Islamic State, lack of strong moral cohesion can undo considerable support offered to enhance the physical and conceptual components. What makes support to this component challenging is that it is potentially the most political of the three components. At the very least, this component needs to be thoroughly assessed before support to any of the components is offered.

Conclusion

This short examination of four examples of British attempts at defense institution building offers five pointers for success:

- For defense institutions to flourish they need to be led by high-quality, well educated, and experienced people. Thus, defense institution building must take account of the means of development of such individuals.
- Generating such leaders takes time; therefore, defense institution building needs to be thought of as a long-term, generational activity and resourced accordingly.
- Defense institution building contains a very strong relational element between both individuals and institutions. In this context, rank gives both access and influence. Thus, the rank structure of the support team supplied is key and, therefore, should not be overly dictated to by budgetary concerns.
- In the context of the concept of fighting power, the national nature of “how to fight” (the conceptual component) needs recognition. An approach that teaches unmodified Western military doctrine to a non-Western country is unlikely to yield the best results.
- The issues of power, politics, and the will of a force to fight cannot be ignored; they need to be considered as a fundamental part of defense institution building from the outset.

It may be fairly argued that the circumstances that have given rise to the transformation of the Omani armed forces are unique, given the long continuity of vision and leadership provided by the Sultan and the relative lack of resource constraints. But the results achieved by the transformation, when compared to other attempts at defense institution building, are certainly thought provoking.

Notes

1 Robert Geran Landen, *Oman since 1856: disruptive modernization in a traditional Arab society* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), 488.

2 Ulf Engel and Gorm Rye Olsen, *Africa and the North: Between Globalization and Marginalization* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 42.

3 “Time Series Chart of Public Spending,” Public Spending Chart for United Kingdom 1990-2020, available at <http://www.ukpublicspending.co.uk/spending_chart_1990_2000UKb_15cli11mcm_30#>.

4 “Statistics on International Development 2014,” Department for International Development, October 30, 2014 (amended February 5, 2015), available at <<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statistics-on-international-development-2014>>.

5 Aden was a British Protectorate until 1963. Between 1963 and 1967 it existed as the State of Aden, before finally becoming the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen on November 30, 1967. It consisted of the Southern and Eastern Provinces of the modern day Republic of Yemen.

6 Calvin H. Allen and W. Lynn Rigsbee II, *Oman under Qaboos: From Coup to Constitution, 1970-1996* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 28.

7 John Townsend, *Oman, the Making of a Modern State* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1977), 66.

8 James J. Worrall, *State Building and Counter Insurgency in Oman: Political, Military and Diplomatic Relations*

at the *End of Empire* (London: I.B Tauris, 2014), 112-113, and 116.

9The Sultan of Oman owned the port of Gwadar, in modern day Pakistan, until 1955 and the palace guard was recruited from Baluchistan. Under the hand-back settlement, Baluchistan remains a recruiting area for the Sultan's Armed Forces.

10“Colonel David Smiley,” *The Telegraph*, January 9, 2009, available at <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/4210129/Colonel-David-Smiley.html>>.

11“Major-General John Graham,” *The Telegraph*, January 9, 2013, available at <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/9791567/Major-General-John-Graham.html>>.

12Allen and Rigsbee, *op. cit.*, 65.

13“SIPRI Military Expenditure Database,” Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, June 18, 2015, available at <http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/milex/milex_database>.

14David C. Bennett, “The Army of Zimbabwe: A Role Model for Namibia,” U.S. Army War College Paper, March 2, 1990; Letter from Maj Gen Palmer to Gen Bramall, BMATT/3004, dated January 23, 1982; S. Baynham and G. Mills, “British Military Training and Assistance in Southern Africa: Lessons for South Africa,” *African Insight* 22, No. 3 (1992), 218–223.

15 The Patriotic Front was a coalition of the Zimbabwe African Peoples Union and the Zimbabwe African National Union.

16 ZANLA was the military wing of the Zimbabwe African National Union, led from 1979 by Robert Mugabe. It drew its recruits mainly from Shona speaking groups and used Chinese Maoist doctrine. Until the early 1970s it operated from Zambia following which it shifted to operating mainly from Mozambique. ZIPRA was the military wing of the Zimbabwe African Peoples Union. It was led by Joshua Nkomo's deputy Jason Moyo. It operated mainly from Zambia and followed Soviet Marxist Leninist doctrine.

17 South Africa, *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, 1993, Section 226(4) and 226(5).

18 Martyn Sloman, *The Changing World of the Trainer* (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2007), 50-52.

19 The Government of South Africa, *South African Defence Review 2014*, 2014, available at <http://www.gov.za/sites/www.gov.za/files/dfencereview_2014.pdf>, ix.

20 Greg Mills and David Williams, “From warfare to welfare and back?,” *The RUSI Journal* 149, No. 2 (2004), 22-29.

21 Barry Le Grys, “Looking to the Long Term – International Military Advisory Team (Sierra Leone),” *British Army Review* 42 (Summer 2007), 57-60.

22 *Ibid.*, 57.

23 *Ibid.*

24 *Ibid.*, 59.

25 Unpublished letter from Comd IMATT (SL) to UK MoD dated May 8, 2013.

26 Cathy Haenlein and Ashlee Godwin, “Containing Ebola: A Test for Post-conflict Security Sector Reform in Sierra Leone,” *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 4, No. 1 (2015), available at <<http://www.stabilityjournal.org/articles/10.5334/sta.gb/>>.

27 Field work conducted by the author in sub-Saharan Africa, January-July 2015.

28 Martin van Creveld, *Fighting Power: German and US Army Performance, 1939-45* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982).

29 Abiodun Alao, “China and Zimbabwe: The Context and Content of a Complex Relationship,” *South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA) Occasional Paper 202* (Johannesburg: SAIIA, October 2014), 13.

30 Napoleon Bonaparte, *Maxims of War*, 5th Edition (Paris, 1874).