

Security Threats Facing Africa and its Capacity to Respond

BY PAUL COLLIER

Africa is currently facing two entirely distinct security threats, one from the rise of radical Islam, the other from increased natural resource extraction. African security forces are ill-equipped to meet these threats. Much of this is deep-rooted, rather than due to deficiencies that could readily be addressed. I first set out each of the new security threats. I then turn to Africa's military capacity, tracing its limitations to underlying motivations. I suggest that the most straightforward way of changing the belief systems that generate motivation is strengthening national identity, but that this has been made more difficult by the divisive force of electoral competition. I conclude that Africa will need three forms of international support.

Threat 1: Radical Islam

Radical Islam is a global phenomenon, generated by the uncontrolled dissemination of extremist ideology, supported by vast private wealth in the Gulf, the use of which is not subject to scrutiny. It poses a distinctive threat to Africa partly because many African countries have substantial Muslim populations that, in conditions of poverty and poor governance, can easily become disaffected. Additionally, the threat is distinctive because the organizations needed to counter it effectively require a level of sophistication and cost that are beyond the means of most African militaries.

The threat from radical Islam has recently been evident in Mali, the Central African Republic (CAR), Kenya and Nigeria. In Mali and CAR it was existential: without timely French military intervention both states would have been overrun and fallen to radical Islamic forces. In Nigeria and Kenya the threat has taken the form of sensational terrorism that, while not threatening the states themselves, is highly damaging to their international reputations. This difference in consequences is primarily due to the greater military capacity of Nigeria and Kenya: both countries have economies that are sufficiently robust to finance militaries with the capacity to defeat feasible

Paul Collier is Professor of Economics and Public Policy and Director for the Centre for the Study of African Economies at the University of Oxford.

rebel challenges. However, their security forces are not adequate for the more demanding task of preventing the escalation of terrorism.

In all four situations the Islamic terrorism is a spill-over from failing neighbouring countries in which Islamic militants have been able to build their military capacity. The meltdown in Libya, which is ongoing, provided a base from which a rebel force could equip itself sufficiently to defeat the Malian army; the endemic insecurity of vast areas of the Sahel enabled a rebel force to defeat the army of CAR and to infiltrate North-East Nigeria; and Islamists in Somalia were able to mount terrorist attacks in Kenya. Geography, more than policy differences, probably accounts for why it is these countries and not others that are facing the worst threats: these countries border on failing states. But there is clearly potential for terrorism to spread.

Threat 2: Natural Resource Discoveries

Although Africa has long been a natural resource exporter, until recently it was only lightly prospected: resource extraction per square mile was much lower than in other regions. The high commodity prices of the past decade have triggered a wave of investment in prospecting and, because Africa was the least explored region, it became the favored location for exploration. During the past decade many valuable resources have been discovered in previously resource-poor African countries, often in remote areas. During the present decade the mines and transport infrastructure will be developed in order to exploit these discoveries.¹

While natural resources have the potential to finance development, they also have the potential to catalyze violent conflict.² Valuable resources have sometimes been a source of



Rwandan soldier stands guard at Bangui M'Poko international Airport in CAR

finance for rebel groups, as with diamonds in Angola and Sierra Leone. They have also raised the stakes for capturing power, while reducing the need for accountability to citizens by displacing taxes as the primary source of state revenue: the resulting contamination of politics has long been illustrated by Nigeria. Further, since valuable resources are never evenly spread throughout a territory, they give well-endowed regions an incentive to try to secede from the nation, as with the Katanga region of Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and the Biafra region of Nigeria.

The localized nature of resource discoveries interacts with strong sub-national identities to create serious security vulnerabilities. The same national and sub-national identities can be entirely compatible in the context of cooperation, but become oppositional once the ownership of valuable resources becomes salient. This is by no means Africa-specific: Scotland is an example. For three centuries being Scottish was not seen as incompatible with being British: for much of this period the most salient activity was the common task of defence against external threat. However, during the past decade of high oil prices, the oil off the shore of Scotland has replaced external security as the most salient issue, leading to strong pressure for secession. Because African sub-national identities are so strong, this interaction of resources and local identity is likely to be particularly troubling in the region. The recent oil discovery in Kenya is located in a remote area whose people, the Turkana, have never been integrated into Kenyan identity. Oil activities soon had to be suspended due to local violence. Even in Tanzania, the discovery of gas offshore of the region of Mtwara led to riots and four deaths because people in the region claimed that it belonged to them, not

to the nation. Currently, South Sudan has collapsed into civil war because the oil which is the government's sole source of finance is located in the territory of the Nuer tribe, whereas the government is controlled by the Dinka, their ancestral rivals.

African Military Capacity

The limitations of African militaries in response to these threats have been all too evident. Their weakness in Mali and the CAR was probably inevitable in view of their economic and geographic fundamentals: these territories are basically too poor to impose security on their highly dispersed populations. While retrospectively it is always easy to identify political weaknesses, prior to its collapse Mali was not on any of the three independently maintained lists of fragile states (e.g. by the World Bank, OECD, or the EU³). By African standards, it was one of the better-conducted democracies. Hence, any solution to insecurity in these and similar countries will require a degree of external military assistance. In contrast, the limitations of the military in Nigeria and Kenya are not fundamentally economic. In both countries the military tasks required to respond to terrorist attacks were relatively modest. In Nigeria, 200 schoolgirls were abducted by a small rebel group and taken to a forest area, yet they could not be traced by the Nigerian military. In Kenya, a shopping mall in Nairobi was overrun by terrorists and coastal villages were brutally attacked. When soldiers were called in to the Nairobi shopping mall they took the opportunity to loot the shops rather than stop the carnage; on the coast, following the attack, terrorists were able to repeat the slaughter in a neighboring village. These failings are not, fundamentally, due to

an inadequate budget, but to something both deeper and less tractable: motivation.

Conventionally, economics has analyzed motivation in terms of financial incentives linked to monitored performance. However, as argued by Akerlof and Kranton⁴, in many contexts this is not an effective solution. They show that in high-productivity private sector firms the most common solution to the challenge of retaining motivation is that the organization succeeds in getting its workforce to internalize its objectives. Through internalization, scale and specialization are reconciled with motivation. While internalization rather than financial incentives is the preferred solution in many commercial organizations, it is far more important in public organizations. The nature of the work usually limits the scope for using high-powered financial incentives because individual performance is difficult to monitor, while the objectives of the organization lend themselves to internalization more readily than those of most firms. This is true of the military, par excellence. So, to understand military organizations it is essential to understand the psychological mechanics of internalization.

In summary, an “effective organization” is a locally stable constellation of identities, narratives, norms and networks that makes the workforce productive by reconciling scale and specialization with motivation.

Directly, internalization is a change in *identity*: hence the name that Akerlof and Kranton give to their book. The military recruit internalizes the proposition, “I am a good soldier.” This change in identity enhances performance because it implies new *norms*: a good

soldier bravely fights the enemy. What brings about the change in identity is a changed perception of some aspects of how the world works. Psychologists have established that overwhelmingly people acquire their understanding of the world not through analytic expositions but through *narratives*. The soldier changes his perception because he comes to accept a set of narratives, such as “this army is essential for the peace of the country.” Identities, narratives and norms, which I will term collectively *beliefs*, are the psychological processes that determine internalization. In turn, beliefs are generated through participation in social networks within which information circulates. In summary, an “effective organization” is a locally stable constellation of identities, narratives, norms and networks that makes the workforce productive by reconciling scale and specialization with motivation.

Most African countries are chronically short of such public organizations: shirking and corruption are debilitating and endemic. Many armies are no more effective than other parts of the public sector. Nevertheless, an army should be the easiest public organization to make effective. All militaries have at their disposal an identity, a narrative and a norm that are functional and compatible, and a network that can be used to deliver them. Indeed, while Akerlof and Kranton take most of their examples from the private sector, their archetypical example of an effective organization, used as the opening illustration in their book, is the U.S. Army. Around the developed world, armies recruit low-skilled teenage males and are able to motivate many of them to risk their lives, a degree of motivation which even investment banks using high-powered incentives to the limit seldom achieve. Globally, the military has the monopoly on the right to

promote the narrative that its workers are defending the nation. While particular circumstances can undermine this narrative, in most circumstances it is a powerful one. The narrative supports clear norms of personal courage and sacrifice both for the national interest, and that of the team. Between them, the narrative and norm support the internalization of an identity: “I am a member of a team that defends the nation.”

Not only are the beliefs attractive and reinforcing, the hierarchical, team-based, and hermetic nature of military networks gives military leaders a potent vehicle for delivering beliefs to the workforce. In contrast, political leaders might lack networks for building motivation in teachers. Whereas soldiers live together in barracks, teachers live in their local communities. Above the level of headmaster, there is little organizational structure whereby Ministries of Education can deliver functional beliefs to teachers: there is little that is national about a typical teacher’s experience of the job. The military hierarchy leads all the way up to the Head of State. In consequence, it may be easier for the Head of State to inculcate a common norm of public service among soldiers than among teachers. The easy communication afforded to military leaders by means of the networks they control carries a qualification. If the conduct of leaders is visibly incompatible with the beliefs they promote then the process degenerates into theatre: participants merely perform a role and understand that that is what others are doing.

In summary, it is easier to build functional beliefs through a military network than in either a democratic political party or the civilian parts of the public sector. Although other public sector organizations can invoke narratives of the national interest, none is as potent

as that of defending the nation: teenage boys do not dream of being tax inspectors.

Motivation, Nationalism and Democracy: Links and Tensions

Two key building blocks in the belief system that generates and sustains an effective military are nationalism and heroic leadership. The nation is what the military protects, and the nation’s leader is visibly self-sacrificing in the national interest. Directly, nationalism provides a shared identity, but it also involves a supporting narrative, typically of a past struggle that has forged the nation, with heroes of that struggle as role models. From this follows the norm of service to protect the nation. Internalization, and the nationalism that facilitates it, are not the only mechanisms for motivation: men fight for their colleagues. But comradeship alone is not enough: lacking a sense of public duty, Kenyan soldiers chose to loot together rather than to fight together.

Most African militaries are ineffective because most African countries lack a strong sense of national identity and their leaders have ostentatiously eschewed self-sacrifice. The contrast between the founding presidents of Kenya and Tanzania demonstrates the long-term consequences. In Kenya, President Jomo Kenyatta behaved like most other African presidents, using his power to favor his own tribe over its rivals. Exceptionally, and in contrast, the Tanzanian president, Julius Nyerere, prioritized building national identity. He introduced a national language, a common school curriculum, and a neutrally sited new capital city, while requiring civil servants to work in regions other than that of their birth. Also exceptionally, Nyerere lived modestly making his narrative of a common national struggle

credible, whereas Kenyatta amassed one of the largest fortunes in the world. Forty years later Eduard Miguel compared similar multi-ethnic villages on either side of the border to see whether people could cooperate to maintain a well.⁵ On the Kenyan side of the border people had not learned to cooperate across tribal lines whereas on the Tanzanian side they had.

When President Nyerere set about building a sense of common Tanzanian identity, he was concerned that multi-party democracy would make the task more difficult. Inevitably, political parties would be organized on the basis of established sub-national, tribal, identities. The rivalry and competition between parties would likely reinforce these identities, overriding his desired new narrative of shared identity based on shared endeavour. His opposition to multi-party politics was not based on a personal calculation of power retention. Elections were held in which the population was given a yes/no choice of whether to reelect the President, and in 1984, feeling responsible for the failure of his economic policies, he resigned.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union practical international action has promoted, and increasingly insisted, on multi-party electoral competition as the defining feature of the passage to modernity. This policy has not been directed specifically to Africa: its core foci were in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. But aid to Africa gave Western governments the power to insist. An inadvertent consequence is that in most African countries at no stage has there been an environment conducive to building a strong national identity. Politics passed directly from ethnically divisive autocracy to ethnically divisive electoral competition.

The weakness of national identity has made motivation more difficult in all public

service organizations. Teachers do not show up for class; nurses steal drugs; tax officials extort bribes rather than raise revenue for government. But arguably, it is the military that is most reliant upon national identity for the vital psychological process of internalization of organizational objectives. In the absence of a sense of shared national identity, teachers may still be motivated by a desire to pass on learning, and nurses by a desire to heal the sick. But without a sense of shared identity it is difficult to see why soldiers would risk their lives.

The most striking exceptions to African public sector weakness are in Ethiopia and Rwanda. Not only have both got effective militaries, but both have very low levels of corruption and have delivered rapid, broad-based economic growth for their citizens. Neither of these political systems is a conventional democracy: while elections are held, neither government would acquiesce in a loss of political power. In consequence, they have been subject to much international criticism. In place of multi-party electoral competition, they have a mass national party: the public officials who administer government functions are members of the party. In turn, the party has emerged out of a successful rebel movement. The conditions necessary for military success were not only military patterns of command, but a set of beliefs – an ideology – in which the key tenets were personal sacrifice for the goal of national liberation and development. This ideology could only be made credible to ordinary rebel fighters if the leadership itself set an example. In both countries leaders and leadership teams lived frugally. Not only was this imperative for the practical military functioning of the rebel organization, once these beliefs had been internalized across the higher

cadres of party membership they enabled a wider range of functions to be performed to an adequate standard once in government. While both rebel organizations were ethnically based and retain a strong ethnic core, their ideology was national rather than ethnic. Consistent with their ideology, in their evolution to mass national parties they have gradually broadened their membership to include other ethnic groups. For example, upon the death of Meles Zenawi in 2012, his replacement as Head of Government was from southern Ethiopia rather than his native Tigray.

The internalized ideology of party cadres has provided an effective, albeit unconventional, form of checks and balances on the use of power. Elsewhere in Africa, alongside electoral competition there is now a conventional suite of checks and balances such as courts and audits. However, while more readily

recognizable to the Western eye, they have proved to be easy to circumvent.

Implications for International Policy

For the next decade the security threats from radical Islam and natural resource discoveries are likely to be important issues in Africa. African militaries are mostly in no condition to meet these threats. If my diagnosis is correct, that the underlying problem is the weakness of national identity, this is unlikely to be remedied. On the contrary, localized natural resource discoveries, religious polarization, and multi-party winner-take-all politics played for heightened stakes, may all further tend to weaken national identity.

This prospect has three broad security implications for international policy. One is that in the neighborhoods of the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, it might be advisable to



Malian soldier establishes security in a landing site during the multi-national exercise Flintlock

strengthen some states that could become neighborhood anchors. A second is that the confidence placed in electoral competition may need to be questioned: some unconventional forms of governance may nevertheless work reasonably well in African conditions. The third is that for several states external military assistance is likely to be necessary. It is, however, important to recognize that each of these has the potential to go badly wrong.

Using international policy to favor countries that are judged to be strategically important can backfire. The favored governments can exaggerate their fortune and relax the necessary focus on delivering services to citizens. Neighboring governments can become resentful, impeding cooperation. Nevertheless, there are currently some situations in Africa where promoting neighborhood bulwarks would be sensible. In Francophone West Africa two countries have recently emerged from fragility and now have considerable potential. Guinea has its best government since independence and is beginning to exploit its vast natural resource wealth. By harnessing this wealth, the country has the opportunity for economic transformation over the next decade. Similarly, Cote d'Ivoire, having emerged from a decade of civil war, now has the opportunity for rapid resource-financed development. In both countries a legacy of conflict has left them short of management capacity across the public sector. International action to strengthen this capacity has been slow to scale up so as to accelerate recovery.

In the Horn of Africa Ethiopia and Kenya are vital bulwarks. Yet the core economic strategy of the Ethiopian government to industrialize on the back of cheap hydropower has been frustrated by international opposition to dams. This matter should be recognized as a

legitimate choice of a legitimate government. Analogously, the Kenyan government is currently facing international pressure to cooperate in the trial of its President and Vice-President at the International Criminal Court in the Hague. While the international desire to end political impunity is commendable, the Kenyan situation is highly peculiar. While the President and Vice-President are accused of having previously sanctioned organized violence against each others' supporters, they are now manifestly reconciled in a political alliance which has been endorsed by citizens through an election. In consequence, the action of the court appears locally as re-enacting colonialism rather than as breaking the cycle of impunity.

A more eclectic approach to African political development risks giving license for the repeat of past political abuses: autocracy, ethnic dominance, and corruption. However, properly done it would shift emphasis from the forms of power acquisition to the substance of how power is being used. Financial integrity and wider ethnic social inclusion would become more important, with a particular focus on the good management of natural resources. Conversely, in those contexts in which these criteria were being met, the right to challenge power would become less important. Manifestly, the task of building national identity cannot be assisted externally. But the current insistence upon multi-party electoral competition in contexts of weak checks and balances on the use of power once won, has created powerfully divisive forces. Ultimately, the most desirable remedy for this situation is much stronger checks and balances. But checks and balances are processes rather than events, and they have proved to be difficult to build in African conditions. In some countries they

may require a much longer time horizon than the timetables of radical Islam and resource discoveries are likely to permit. In such contexts a more rapidly achievable outcome might be for ruling parties to be encouraged to evolve into mass organizations with an ideology of national development, ethnic inclusion, and leadership self-sacrifice.

External military assistance has had a terrible decade and the potential for mistakes is evident. However, Africa is a far less demanding security challenge than the Middle East in this regard. The immediate priorities arise from radical Islam. There is an urgent need for strengthened security in the Sahel, and enhanced intelligence against terrorism, especially in East Africa. Countering the security risks from the growth of natural resource extraction is less immediate but it is also more difficult to achieve a military solution.

The threat from radical Islam in the Sahel requires security cooperation among African countries. The regional hegemons, South Africa and Nigeria, have both recognized this need but neither is strong enough to be able to satisfy it. For example, South Africa had a force in CAR at the time it was overrun, but the force was too small and was rapidly withdrawn after taking casualties. As in the Europe of seventy years ago, cooperation is impeded by a long history of rivalries: Sahelian countries have periodically been at war with each other; Nigeria and South Africa are bitter rivals for the role of leadership, while both are viewed with suspicion by smaller countries. As in Europe, the solution is to catalyze cooperation externally. Either the African Union, or ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States), could be the African partner organization. The international partner could be the UN, NATO, or an *ad hoc* consortium of

interested parties such as China, the U.S., France, and the UK. The key elements of cooperation would be mutual commitments. The external parties would commit to substantial and sustained financial, logistic, and training support for an African military force, but would eschew troops on the ground. The African parties would commit to contribute sufficient manpower to a standing force, a genuinely unified command structure, an unambiguous mandate for combat operations, clear rules for when such an engagement would be authorized, and a precisely specified and speedy authorizing mechanism. It might be a decade before an effective force was fully in place. But both Islamic radicalism and natural resource extraction are probably still in their early stages: in a decade the need for containing the associated security problems is likely to have increased.

The pervasive corruption of the African public sector therefore precludes substantial sharing.

The need for enhanced counter-terrorism intelligence, especially in East Africa, may be more difficult to meet. Intelligence cannot reasonably be shared with organizations that are too weak to keep it secure. The pervasive corruption of the African public sector therefore precludes substantial sharing. The alternative is to finance and train self-contained intelligence gathering capacity country-by-country.

While the threat from radical Islam is immediate, that from natural resources is likely to build up gradually over the decade. Unfortunately, neither the pan-African force needed for the Sahel, nor enhanced counter-terrorist intelligence would address it. It would

be highly problematic to use a pan-African military force to suppress rebellions in resource-rich regions demanding greater autonomy. The commitments would risk being open-ended, and would encourage government intransigence. Cumulatively, such uses would undermine continued international support. The only feasible military counter to resource-based rebellions is to have a strong and effective national army, but building such nation-by-nation military capacity is beyond the power of international actors. The revealed weakness of the Nigerian military was not due to a lack of budget: the Nigerian military commands a budget far higher than could be attained in any other African country. The revealed weakness of the Kenyan military was that its soldiers were less interested in protecting citizens than in shopping: such a deficiency is not amenable to foreign training. It is worth noting that there is nothing specifically African about these failings: the revealed weaknesses of the Iraqi army, despite external efforts far in excess of anything conceivable for Africa, are informative.

Rather, the most credible solution to the threat posed by the enhanced importance of natural resources is political: better domestic governance of natural resources can reduce the risk of violence. This has several key components: resolving tensions between national and local interests; building trust in the financial integrity of budgets; and managing expectations.

There are two sources of tension between the local and the national: ownership of the revenues and environmental damage. By far the best time to resolve ownership issues is before the resource has been discovered. Sir Seretse Khama, the first president of Botswana, had the foresight to tour the country prior to

prospecting for diamonds with the message, “can we agree that anything we find belongs to all of us?” Prior to discovery, brute self-interest is sufficient to get agreement to such a proposition; after discovery, self-interest drags the fortunate locality into indignant assertions of ownership. Environmental damage is necessarily borne locally not nationally. Building systems that ensure speedy and proportionate compensation in remote and weakly governed areas is difficult but essential. The Delta region of Nigeria illustrates the disastrous consequences of early neglect: local populations resorted to violence to force compensation, and this evolved into an extortion racket. Without trust in the financial integrity of budgets, local populations come to believe that their valuable resources are being stolen by distant elites. Since African governments start from a position of deep suspicion among citizens, building trust requires drastic enhancement of practical budget transparency. In the absence of an active policy to manage expectations, the announcement of a valuable resource discovery is liable to trigger wildly exaggerated hopes. Poor people have no familiarity in digesting news expressed in billions of dollars and millions of barrels. Again, the political leadership of Botswana provides a model. Citizens were educated in the need for patience – “we’re poor and so we must carry a heavy load.” This narrative was operationalized into a policy of using diamond revenues to accumulate assets rather than to finance immediate increases in consumption. Such political wisdom remains rare.

There is a lot that international political action can do to enhance the governance of natural resources. To date, there has been considerable progress in revenue transparency, but there has as yet been little attention to the

transparency of expenditure, which is obviously of more concern to citizens. The onus for building effective systems of compensation for environmental damage is on the international companies that extract resources. The management of expectations through a positive narrative of prudent accumulation is beginning: the Norwegian model of a sovereign wealth fund has become fashionable. However, as yet this probably reflects isomorphic mimicry of institutions, rather than a genuine attempt to harness an economic opportunity: alongside sovereign wealth funds, governments are issuing bonds to finance consumption.

Conclusion

Africa has been through a successful decade of rapid growth. However, it is facing new security threats that are likely to be beyond its current or feasible domestic military capacity. While the threat from the increasing importance of natural resources can best be countered by improved economic governance, that from Islamic extremism probably requires international military assistance, at least to the neighbourhoods of the Sahel and the Horn of Africa. In the longer term, African governments will need to improve domestic military effectiveness. However, I have suggested that the current lack of effectiveness is rooted in a more general lack of worker motivation in the public sector. In this case, rectifying it may depend upon resetting the identities, narratives and norms which underpin motivation. Leaders may be able to achieve such a reset through national parties, embodying an ideology of ethnic inclusivity and personal sacrifice, as appears to be underway in Rwanda and Ethiopia. Such a strategy differs considerably from the preferred Western approach of multi-party electoral competition. But in retrospect,

the emphasis on the process by which power is acquired, as opposed to how it is used, may have been misplaced. **PRISM**

Notes

¹ Collier, Paul. *The Plundered Planet: Why We Must, and How We Can, Manage Nature for Global Prosperity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

² Collier, Paul. *Wars, Guns, and Votes: Democracy in Dangerous Places*. New York: Harper, 2009.

³ Please see the following for more information: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/fragilityconflictviolence> and <http://www.oecd.org/dac/incaf/>

⁴ Akerlof, George A., and Rachel E. Kranton. *Identity Economics: How Our Identities Shape Our Work, Wages, and Well-being*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.

⁵ Miguel, Edward. "Tribe or Nation?: Nation Building and Public Goods in Kenya versus Tanzania." *World Politics* 56, no. 3 (2004): 327-62.