Politicians, diplomats, and military establishments have their own identities and interests that are not always shared by those for whom they supposedly speak.”

Introduction

The relationship between the military, political leadership and society at large has always been one of intense intrigue and is as old as humanity itself, evolving, as would be expected, from the moment society had to depend on part of its population to fight aggression – as was the case with the Ngoni warriors who did not constitute a standing army. Notable about this specific relationship in which the citizen was an ordinary member of society during one period and a warrior at another when the situation demanded, is that it signifies a special relationship between society and its military. In a situation where a standing military exists, the character of the relationship would not be expected to be the same.

Although these civil–military relations have been subjected to some study – especially during the contemporary era in which democratic tenets are demanded by the general body politik – there has been general acknowledgment that the relations require further study. The aim has been to understand and find means of improving the relations in an environment of uncertainty, mistrust and conflict. Efforts to understand civil–military relations in Zambia have made their own mark on security research. Lee Habasonde stipulates that “the role of civil society in contributing to the deepening of civil–military relations remains unclear”, while another academic – in an attempt to explain the nature of military coup attempts in Zambia – has in the process begged other questions. Stating Zambia’s desire for democratic ideals as the explanation for the failure of five military coup attempts and the loyalty of the military to the government at the height of attacks by the apartheid and settler regimes in South Africa and Rhodesia respectively, does not provide all the dimensions.
Studying civil–military relations may suggest that only societies at conflict or near-conflict need have their relationships interrogated. This, in fact, is not the case, as Hans Born argues:

“While transitional, war-torn or crisis-affected societies are at particular risk, stable democracies also have to grapple with civil–military relations, transforming and managing them so as to keep pace with the changing security environment.”

Despite some progress in the transformation and management of democratic civil–military relations, it remains a critical issue in a number of states. The nature of democratic civil–military relations implies an adherence to principles that conform to accountable, legitimate democratic authorities, and the existence of a parliament that exercises oversight over the military and authorises the declaration of war and also makes the executive accountability to it in terms of the character of its defence policy. Democratic civil–military relations is also defined in terms of good governance to the security sector, and accountability by individual members of the security sector to national and international laws, as well as political neutrality.

As a departure from the majority of works which focus on empirical aspects of civil–military relations, this paper focuses on conceptual issues as a way of enhancing general understanding of these relations; particularly for the Southern African Development Community (SADC), which has been found to require “a much more open, inclusive and transparent debate of defence and security needs, at national and regional levels, than [has] hitherto been the case”. The paper endeavours to examine the dimensions of theories of civil–military relations. It is hoped that the conceptual approach to civil–military relations will be highlighted and will contribute to a reduction in the “likelihood of military coups ... forging new roles and missions for the armed forces [and] reducing the military’s isolation from society at large”. The paper discusses some historical relationships between society and the military before dwelling on a number of theories of civil–military relations, commencing with the more general ones of realism, liberalism and the new security paradigms, and later with the more specific approach using organisational and praetorian theories.

Defining civil–military relations

Prior to entering into the conceptual discussion, the paper begins by elaborating on the meaning of some of the definitional issues of civil–military relations. A plain definition of civil–military relations is one that relates to the interaction between the armed forces and the rest of society. Therefore, the interwoven relations between the Ngoni warriors and the rest of society would not have
been expected to be the same as that where there a distinct separation existed between the two; as would be the case where a society has a standing military. Although part of society in the sense that it would have evolved from there, the military’s separate existence results in the development of a unique culture which may not match that of the society from which it originated. On this point the paper differs from General Sir John Hackett who argues that:

“What a society gets in its armed service is exactly what it asks for, no more and no less. What it asks for tends to be a reflection of what it is. When a country looks at its fighting forces, it is looking in a mirror; the mirror is a true one and the face that it sees will be its own.”

Samuel Huntington identifies civil–military relations as military security policy, which together with internal and situational security policies is an aspect of national security policy working at both the operational and institutional levels. Military security policy’s role is in minimising or neutralising “efforts to weaken or destroy the nation by armed forces operating outside its institutional and territorial confines”. Civil–military relations is situated at the operational level, where it is also a dominant component. By definition, the operational level provides the immediate means to meet security threats.

A peep into the history of civil–military relations

The relationship between the military and the rest of society has been one of great intrigue. Following the end of the Battle of Britain when Nazi Germany’s efforts to bomb the country into submission failed, Winston Churchill – Britain’s wartime prime minister – most probably reflected society’s indebtedness to the military when he said: “Never in the history of human conflict have so many owed so much to so few.” Attributed to the bravery shown by the Royal Air Force (RAF) pilots who tirelessly fought the numerically superior and possibly technologically superior aircraft flown by the Luftwaffe compared to the famous British Spitfire, the British military, and more particularly the RAF, was clearly raised to the levels of gods by the British public. This would also be the view of Mozambican society and other societies afflicted with tragedies, which have had to be responded to by members of the uniformed service – as was the case during the Mozambican floods in 2000.

But then there is the case of Chile. Chilean society’s view of the military during the Pinochet period and the view of those women and children in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) who have been raped and terrorised by men (and in some instances boy-soldiers), must surely reflect less than the admiration for the military shown by British society during and after the Second World War. The atrocities committed by men and boys under arms in...
Sierra Leone, during which period civilians were killed and maimed in the most gruesome manner, must have left an equally skewed view of the military, as is surely the case among the Nigerian public and in other states that have been subjected to repeated military interventions by civilian-led governments in West and Central Africa.

There is clearly a love–hate, trust–mistrust relationship between the military and society on the one hand, and between the military and government on the other. What is also clear is that civil–military relations are issues that need to be well understood in order to ensure the sustainability of peace and security for states and its peoples. The conceptual approach to the issue is expected to assist in this regard.

**Issues, concepts and theories**

“Democracy … is not, and can never be, a matter of weakening the state … The state in Africa needs to become both leaner and stronger in order to carry out successfully its development tasks … Much the same can be said of the state’s repressive apparatuses, but with the proviso that the search must continue for ways of bringing them under effective _democratic_ and not merely _civilian_ control.”

A conceptual study of civil–military relations provides methodological challenges arising from whether it should be a state-centric ontology and realist or a liberal epistemology. The general theoretical approach taken by the paper follows the realist, liberal and new security paradigms. The choice of the realist paradigm is premised on its firm state-centric bias, while the liberal paradigm tends to address the ‘thawing’ of this approach in more recent history. The value of the new security approach resides in its problematising the entire security debate by redefining security in a more radical manner than the more traditional approaches of realism and liberalism.

**The realist paradigm**

Analysing civil–military relations in the context of realism is couched within the framework of the paradigm, which sees a distribution of power as defining the make-up of politics and which regards the international environment as generally hostile. The paradigm therefore assumes an environment filled with chaos and states propelled by national interest. Particularly significant is the paradigm’s assertion that conflicts within a community are unavoidable. Stephen Walt rationalises intra-state conflicts by observing that “family quarrels are often especially bitter and difficult to resolve”.

Analysing civil–military relations within this framework entails the inherent
existence of distrust within the state and therefore the likelihood of poor civil–military relations. This would seem to confirm the view that “(d)istrust between soldiers and civilians remains a preoccupying concern for many African countries”. This reflects a rather plutonic civil–military relationship, which may be explained by the deliberate physical separation between the military and the rest of society, characteristic of the contemporary military. It could consequently be argued that this may in part explain the extension of this separation beyond physical boundaries and manifesting in a variety of dimensions, such as preferences in government’s fiscal budgets. Although such a bias may reflect the military’s needs as determined by security threat projections, an underlining perception will be present that the overall welfare of the military is favoured. The rest of society would therefore view the military as the most important group in society upon which the society as a whole depends.

The military in the realist paradigm is essentially modelled to protect the interests of the state and is not necessarily focused towards national interest, which in effect could mean only regime protection and regime interests; which in turn may be translated to mean favour to the regime’s own ‘loyal’ membership and ‘collaborators’, such as big business – particularly the military industrial complex. Invariably, it has been observed that the military can, and has, been employed under questionable circumstances and for less than national interests. This has not gone unnoticed by society in general and places stress on civil–military relations.

The liberal paradigm
Like the realist paradigm, the state in the liberal paradigm is dominant. Unlike the former, however, the latter does not consider the state as the only critical factor. The paradigm is characterised by a multiplicity of actors with a bias towards non-state actors, such as civil society institutions and the private sector. Although the military in this framework continues to occupy a coveted place as the ultimate protector of the state, liberal democratic principles are well respected and the role of civil society as well as a preference for the subordination of the military to civil authority, are regarded as intricate components of civil–military relations.

Evidently, a more cooperative civil–military relationship appears to characterise this framework; however, competition for limited resources would still be evident this liberal paradigm. For instance, civil society would argue for increased government allocation for some non-military issues and would question the rationale of maintaining a disproportionate percentage of the states’ limited resources to the military in the face of other needy areas. However, if the liberal school appears to be poised towards balanced civil–military relations – that is, one in which “the executive (president or
government) enjoys purely political functions maintaining only a general overview of the military. The new security paradigm provides a more ‘radical’ approach to civil–military relations, and is consequently more robust in its slant for increased expenditure on non-military issues.

The new security paradigm

The new security paradigm problematises the security discourse by moving away from the militaristic focus of the traditional paradigms. It talks of ‘broad security’, ‘caring security’ and even ‘new’ critical security, including ‘human security’. Human security has been defined by the Bonn Declaration of 1991 as “... the absence of threat to human life, lifestyle and culture through the fulfillment of basic needs”, which gives prominence to the security needs of the ‘common’ man and woman. The state in this paradigm is only one of the other actors and not necessarily the most critical.

It may therefore be inferred that civil–military relations in the new security approach does not suggest a problematic relationship but rather one that takes into account a variety of other factors. However, the more direct theoretical interrogation of civil–military relations remains that of administrational and praetorian theories.

Organisational model

The organisational theory of civil–military relations focuses entirely on the military institution as unique from other non-military ones. This exclusive identification of the military organisations invites a perception of a military mystique, which has in part been exacerbated by society’s own intrigue with it, as the earlier part of this paper has shown. This model also views the officer corp as “an exclusive repository of modernising values and devotion to the ideal of the state as opposed to the regime in power.” This understanding of civil–military relations suggests a military that not only is regarded as a special group with exclusive capabilities, but also has an equally comparable view of itself. According to Thomas Cox, this self-acclamation by the officer corp means that they see themselves as a notch above government in the art or science of statecraft; a phenomenon that could explain the motivation by some officers to conduct coups d’etat under the belief that the ruling regime is not sufficiently effective. In this regard, the organisational model exhibits a military with abilities to contribute in a positive manner to the running of the state and, at the same time, to make the government wary of possible military intervention.

Clearly exhibiting a linkage between the military and the political system, the model identifies a close cooperation between the military officers and the ‘new middle class’ or ‘emerging middle sectors’. Such an alliance was regarded in the 1960s by United States (US) policy makers as the means for resolving the
many challenges facing the developing world. This helps explain the apparent acceptance of military regimes by big powers during the early years of Africa’s political development, until more recently when the continental body firmly resolved not to recognise any regime through a coup d’état. Thomas Cox observes that the officer corp endeavours to pursue a modernising path dependent on the middle class. This alliance has been known in some countries to be reflected by the former employing “large numbers of civilian advisers who will in most cases hold middle-sector convictions”. Organisational theory reflects that although the military has certain valuable capacity to contribute towards the development of a state, it is not always successful. Eric Nordlinger observes that the military is not the success organisational theory makes it out to be. Unsuccessful performance in “economic growth or progressive political change” are cases in point.

Yet another notable aspect is that it is not always the military as a corporate entity that engages in a relationship with the ‘civil’. As it turns out, it is not the entire ‘civil’ either but a part of it that enters into the alliance discussed above. This leaves a possibility for a number of permutations in civil–military relations from the perspective of organisational theory. Contrasted with the organisational theorist position is that of the praetorian perspective.

The praetorian model

The praetorian model articulates some important issues of governance that have a number of significant effects in a state. First, the model acknowledges that the military participates in an environment which has a number of other actors, all of which will be competing for the scarce resources available. However, its dominance in this group of actors assures it of all, if not most, of its requirements. South African civil–military relations under the apartheid era provides a suitable example of this on the African continent. The South African example conforms to the praetorian model more particularly because of the apparent ease with which the military was able to get the resources it wanted in order to fulfil its mandate, or indeed the way in which it was seen as the most powerful group amongst the actors in the political system.

Second, the model fosters interaction between the military and society at large, and in this regard acknowledges the role of other actors, albeit in a diminished role relative to its own. While this may signify the potential existence of some tension between the military and the other actors, the nature of the model – in which there is a general expectation by ‘all groups’ that it intervenes in the running of the country – suggests the absence of such tension. Related to this factor is that the model visualises a military that is neither autonomous nor neutral in political issues. This therefore suggests that society would, in the context of the model, expect active military participation in the activities of governance, including outright intervention. The Chilean
and Algerian examples appear to relate to the character of this model very well. The intervention by the military in Chile and the dominance of the military in Algeria are a matter of record.31

Another important dimension which the praetorian model addresses is the matter of intra-military cohesion. In this regard it acknowledges “correlations between the absence of cohesion in the organisation and political fragmentation within the larger system”.32 This entails that the homogeneity characteristic of the military is not a given as such, and consequently points to the existence of rivalry within the rank-and-file of the military.

It follows from the praetorian model that civil–military relations are considered very close, to the point that society ‘pushes’ the military into taking the reins of power, even if it does not consider itself to be particularly effective in this role.33 It therefore seems intervention by the military in government is more out of a deep sense of obligation, however ‘misplaced’, to ensure that the country meets the challenges at hand. Contributing to an enhanced understanding of civil–military relations are other issues that may add to the development of civil–military relations theory.

Issues and concepts

The choice of the issues and concepts to focus on in interrogating the conceptual aspects of civil–military relations is both a function of time and relevance to the application of the nature of relations to a specific geographical space, as well as its critical nature and applicability to other areas. For this reason, examination of the relationship between the military and the constitution, politicisation and professionalism, and the view that the African military is a type distinct from other militaries, are matters that this section seeks to examine.

The military and the constitution

The relation of the military to the constitution is a matter that has had immense interpretation difficulties for both military and security/political analysts. Beginning from the viewpoint that the military is a public institution that is dedicated to the protection of the country (note the avoidance of the term ‘state’), it could therefore be deduced that as with everybody else in the country, the principle guide in all endeavours is the constitution. The constitution is the *grundnorm* – the master law – upon which all other laws are derived. It may therefore be argued that it is this basic norm which is coveted and, indeed, a point of reference for all – including the military.

The Pinochet military regime in Chile took the relation even further by considering the military as the ‘guardians’ of the constitution,34 hitherto regarding it as its duty to remove the civilian-led regime with the support of a
large segment of disaffected civilians. This evidently made the military the ultimate authority and interpreter of the constitution, and by definition allowed it to operate above government and society itself. A bigger problem arises from such a scenario when the military itself is the source of instability, as was the case in Chile: where the military is involved in cases of gross human abuses, there is no recourse other than to use force to return to a better political arrangement. Running the risk of stating the obvious, the democratic system – which provides clear limitations of roles and which makes the courts of law the ultimate arbiter within the confines of separation of powers – becomes the most effective and peaceful manner of ensuring the existence of progressive civil–military relations in a country. Legal reforms to ensure that there are appropriate constitutional amendments to end the military’s official role as the ‘protector of the constitution’ – as was the case in Chile – and placing the military under the executive, but with the legislature exercising oversight and the judiciary ensuring the legality of action(s), is the appropriate direction to take.

Depoliticisation and professionalism

If the issue of the military and the constitution has been problematic, that of politicisation and professionalism has been the hallmark of the challenges facing civil–military relations. The challenges posed by politicisation and professionalism in developing countries have been particularly significant because of the colonial histories and attempts by former colonies to experiment with different forms of government. By definition, depoliticisation refers to “removing and keeping the military from everyday party politics and preventing it from taking public stands in political and policy related public debates”.35 This process has been particularly prevalent in states where the military and the structures of the state were exceptionally close. This situation was especially apparent in regimes that had single-party systems. With the onset of multipartyism – closely associated with a liberal approach to governance – the military has been relatively de-linked from party political activities. However, the extent to which this has affected civil–military relations is to a significant degree speculative and possibly varies from country to country, depending on the closeness of political ties during the era of single-party rule.

Closely related to the issue of depoliticisation is that of professionalism; a phenomenon that, according to Samuel Huntington, refers to “imparting expertise, responsibility and corporateness and contends that professional soldiers should concentrate their efforts on perfecting their fighting skills … render(ing) the military politically sterile, neutral (and) ready to carry out the wishes of any civilian government”.36 It may not be overstating the issue if one was to regard Huntington’s ‘wish list’ as a standard that could never be
attained: it is simply an ideal. What is, however, pertinent to this paper is the extent to which this professionalism affects civil–military relations. It would seem more likely that the strict application of this standard is a certain way of de-linking the military from both society and government. On balance, the jury is still out on the general consequences of the combined effect of depoliticisation and professionalism on civil–military relations.

The myth of the African military

A ‘troubling’ tendency of scholars and researchers, and not least policy makers, is to compact people and institutions into ‘boxes’, believing that they are analysing the issues in an accurate manner because they are confined to ‘own’ environment.

Thomas Cox argues that African officers have not evolved from similar traditions to those in other parts of the world, notably Latin America where the praetorian traditions exist. The growth of the African military from a colonial past which saw it play an apolitical role and yet suppressed indigenous uprisings, and its non-participation in liberation struggles, are given as factors that set the military apart. This is, of course, only partially true. Thomas Cox fails to appreciate the large impact of the contemporary African military under the extensive influence of an officer corp – either trained in the metropol or locally under the same traditions – to the extent that its tradition cannot have been indigenised to a point it can warrant being stereotyped.

It is even more absurd to argue that a praetorian analysis would be inappropriate because “interclass conflict in which the (military) is either a participant or a mediator is generally not found in Black Africa”.37 Instead, it is argued that coups on the continent are a manifestation of disputes within the ruling group as opposed to disputes between classes.38 Thomas Cox has caused himself a disservice in his denial of the existence of classes in Africa. Propertied classes, middle classes and emerging middle classes are a reality, as is the existence of alliances between some of these classes with some members of the officer corp in coups and attempted coups that have taken place in various countries on the African continent. The African military is simply a military like any other in the world; perhaps sometimes a little underfunded, but a military with the same mentality as others and, like any other, influenced by the environment in which it resides.

Conclusion

Civil–military relations are clearly not a mere interrelationship between the military, structures of the state and society, but rather a complex dimension of all these institutions, and between components of the institutions and the military, as well as within the various sections of the military itself. It has also
been shown that findings of an analysis of the nature and character of civil–military relations will largely depend on the paradigm assumed, as well as on a number of other factors that are quasi theory or mere concepts that have a significant explanatory value to the issue of civil–military relations.

It has also been apparent that an eclectic approach in analysing civil–military relations on the African continent is probably the best methodological approach to take in view of the various factors that have influenced the continent over time. Nevertheless, to take the view that a particular model is inapplicable to the continent requires an extensive and intensive examination. What is also evident is that exclusive empirical studies which are not informed by theoretical underpinnings run the risk of being either an inadequate or, in fact, an entirely erroneous analysis. This paper has been designed to rejuvenate the application of theory to the critical issues of civil–military relations as a means of enriching analysis.

Notes
4 B J Phiri, ibid, p 4.
6 Ibid, p 188.
7 Ibid, pp 22-23.
8 Good governance has been defined by the World Bank as characterised by “predictable, open and enlightened policy-making, a bureaucracy imbued with a professional ethos acting in furtherance of the public good, the rule of law, transparent process, and a strong civil society participating in public affairs”. For details see World Bank, Governance: The World Bank's experience, 1994.
9 Ibid.
10 R Williams, Preface, in R Williams, G Cawthra and D Abrahams (eds.), op cit.
13 S P Huntington, The soldier and the state: The theory and politics of civil–military relations,
Civil–Military Relations in Zambia


14 Ibid.
15 <http://www.numbe-10.gov.uk/output/page134.asp>
20 See also H Born, 2003, ibid.
22 See B Tise, *Trading blows: Southern Africa, South Africa and Europe in the post-apartheid era*, Catholic Institute for International Relations, London, 1998. He explains that the ‘critical’ tag refers to the locus of power, the manner in which it is used and who it actually benefits, while the term ‘new’ implies the non-military threats that are put on the agenda. He identifies some of the non-military threats as “poverty, disease, environmental degradation and bad governance”.
28 Ibid.
32 T S Cox, ibid, p 9.
33 Ibid, p 10.
36 Ibid, p 6. See also S P Huntington, op cit.
37 T S Cox, op cit, p 12.
38 Ibid.