

Upholding Constitutionalism in Precarious Times: Case study of Malawi Defence Force

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Abstract: This paper seeks to understand the role of the military in a democratic state. It focuses on how the military performs under the civilian leadership put in place through a duly elected process in Malawi. Evidence has shown that some civilian leadership have gone overboard to influence the military to act contrary to the constitutional mandate. This paper examines the role played by the Malawi Defense Force in upholding the constitution. Data was collected using an interview guide with key informants and archival research. Data was analysed using content analysis. The results suggest that on a number of occasions between 1994 and 2019 there have been occasions also referred to as 'critical junctures' where the civilian leadership attempted to influence the military to go outside its constitutional mandate and act in the interest of civilians in power. Key notable events include the death of the Head of State in 2014 and during the 2014 elections where the incumbent president ordered the closure of the Tally Centre arguing 'immense irregularity'. The paper concluded that for the continued professional work of the MDF operated within the dictates of the law that guides their operations.

Keywords: Civilian Control, Constitutionalism, Power Transition, Critical Junctures, Military Professionalism, Power Vacuum, Governance.

1. INTRODUCTION

This study is about understanding the role of the military in a democratic environment. It focuses on how the military operates in defence of the constitution and how consolidated democracies cannot exist without the support of the military (Barrany, 2012).

Globally, the military has three massive political advantages over civilian organizations and these include a marked superiority in the organization, a highly emotionalized symbolic status and a monopoly of arms (Finer, 2017). In addition, the military forms a prestigious corporation or order while enjoying overwhelming superiority in the means of applying force. With this in mind, one may wonder why the military does not rebel against its civilian masters (Finer, 2017).

However, consolidated democracies cannot exist without the military being committed to democratic governance and that its support is a necessary condition for upholding democratic values (Barrany, 2012). Where there is no military support to uphold democracy, the institution becomes a threat to democracy as evidenced in some parts of Africa, Southeast Asia, South Western Europe, and Latin America (Feaver, 2003). In such environments, if officers in the military believe that state policies jeopardize their corporate, material, strategic, or other interests, they may well decide to mount an armed challenge to civilian rule. The year 2021 has experienced a number of coups in West Africa generally emanating from bad governance by the elected civil authorities (Sueilaman & Onapajo, 2022)

For decades, governments and academics have been in search of the most appropriate means by which to manage civil-military relations. Leading works within this field include (Huntington, 1985), Finer (2017) and Schiff (2009). These authors centered their arguments on either the professionalism or separation of the military from political institutions or the theory that argues for partnership –the military, the political elites, and the citizenry, with the aim of establishing cooperative relationships.

While certain elements of their theories remain relevant for the civil-military relations in the twenty-first century, there is a growing body of literature which calls for a more holistic approach to the issues of defence, governance, and management (Barrany, 2012), hence the focus of the study.

This study should be viewed as an attempt to respond to the obtaining situation in Malawi. Within this study, concepts such as democratic control of the military should be understood to mean the subordination of the military to democratically elected political authorities, who are responsible for taking all decisions concerning the defence of the country (McConville, 2006). Civil control sometimes referred to as civil supremacy, is defined as the obedience which the military owes to the civilians and the state (Finer, 1976). This concept implies an allegiance to a group larger than government of the day; it is an allegiance to the citizen body in its entirety. Further, while it is important that the military should adhere to such a principle, it is equally important that the politicians and civil servants believe in this same principle. An understanding of shared values and allegiance is one element of concordance theory. According to Schiff (2009), military involvement in politics is less likely to occur when the military, the political leadership, and the citizenry view each other as partners in the delivery of security.

Since Malawi gained independence in 1964, the Malawi Defense Force (MDF) has been one of the instruments of national power that has been at the forefront to see that politicians govern the country by upholding the Constitution (Malawi Government, 1994). Section 159 of the Constitution establishes the MDF as the one and only military constituted in Malawi. The constitution also spells out that the MDF shall operate at all times under the direction of appropriate civil authorities entrusted with such power by the constitution (Malawi Government, 1994). According to Section 160 of the Constitution, the MDF is mandated to perform the following functions:

- To uphold the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic and guard against threats to the safety of its citizens by force of arms.
- To uphold and protect the constitutional order in the Republic and assist the civil authorities in the proper exercise of their functions under this Constitution;
- To provide technical expertise and resources to assist the civilian authorities in the maintenance of essential services in times of emergency; and
- To perform such other duties outside the territory of Malawi as may be required of them by any treaty entered into by Malawi in accordance with the prescriptions of international law.

To ensure that the MDF performs these roles, the Constitution prohibits anyone or authority from ordering or deploying the MDF to act in contravention of its constitutional mandate and other provisions of the Constitution in general.

Malawi as a new democracy, is going through various challenges to graduate towards democratic consolidation, especially the four political vacuums that occurred between 1993 and 2020. Since 1994 militaries and civilians interact in areas of elections management; power transition; subordination; security management; command; power vacuum; civil unrest; power offer; and budgets. These interactions trigger chains of reactions and outcomes to secure constitutionalism. Hence, this paper examines the role played by the Malawi Defence Force in upholding the constitution. Specifically, we assessed the response of the military to the injects, chains of reactions, and outcomes to uphold constitutionalism in Malawi.

2. THEORIZING CIVIL CONTROL OF MILITARY AND CONSTITUTIONALISM

Current civil – military control theory emphasizes the separation of civil and military institutions and the authority of the civil sphere over the military to prevent domestic military intervention. According to Schiff (2009), by contrast the theory of concordance highlights dialogue, accommodation, and shared values or objectives among the military, the political elites, and society. Concordance theory views the military, the political leadership, and citizenry as partners and predicts that when they agree about the role of the military by achieving a mutual accommodation, domestic

military intervention is less likely to occur in a particular state. However, as conceptualized in Figure 1, there are interactions between civil authorities and militaries at 'critical juncture' when there are injects i.e. inputs that trigger reaction by either parties to agree or disagree. The examples of injects are: elections management; power transition; subordination; security management; command; power vacuum; civil unrests; power offer; and budgets. These injections trigger chains of reactions and outcomes to secure constitutionalism. This paper focused on to assess the injects, chains of reactions, and outcomes in civil military control in Malawi.

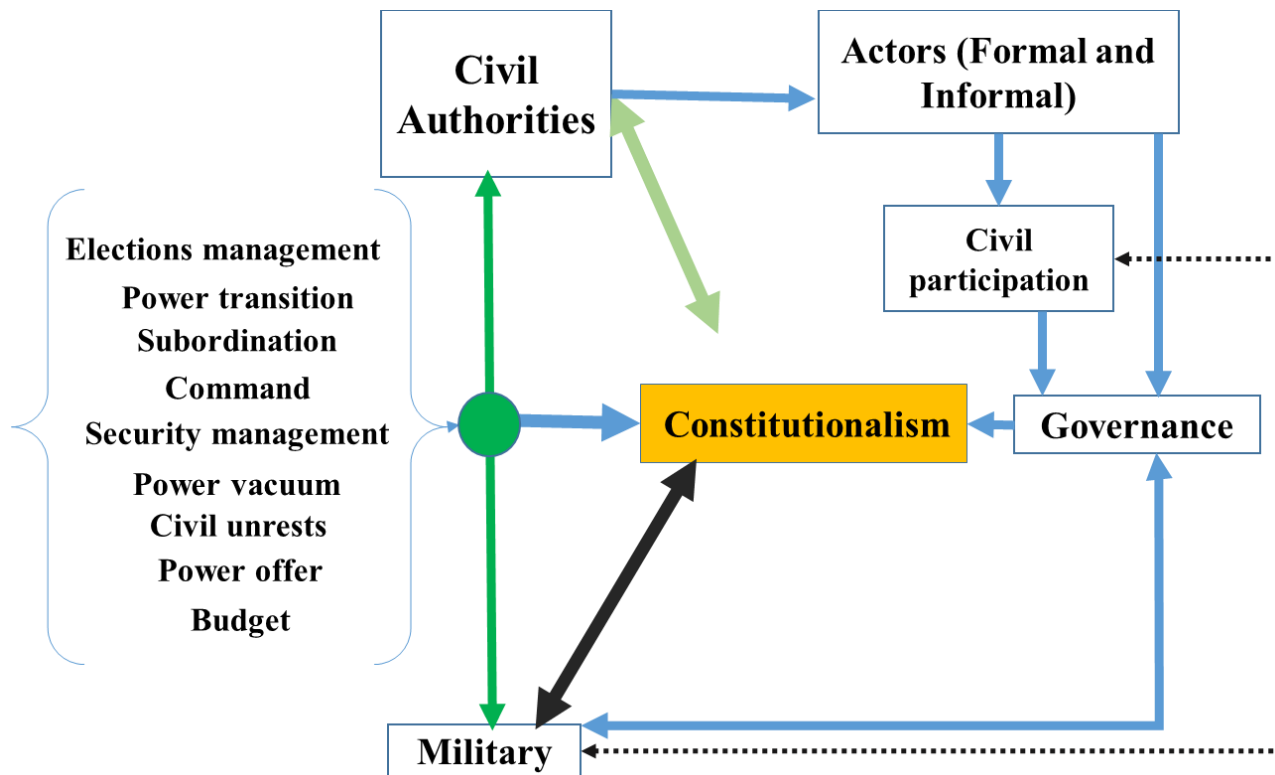


Figure 1: conceptual framework for civil control of military and constitutionalism in Malawi (Source: Own compilation)

The rest of the paper explains the methodology used in data collection and analysis, the results of the study, conclusion and recommendations.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative approach and data was collected through archival research and oral interviews with key informants.

Archival research is premised on the conceptualization that few non/official actions of any sort are conceived, enabled, or enacted without having been written down both in advance, in retrospect, and invariably several more times in between (Ventresca and Mohr, 2017). Hence, archival research methods include a broad range of activities applied to facilitate the investigation of documents and textual materials produced by and about organizations. The data collection involved the study of historical documents that were created at some point in time during critical junctures, providing us access that we might not otherwise have to the organizations, individuals, and events of that earlier time and sensitive in nature (for more details on archival research see Ventresca and Mohr (2017)). Although Subotić (2021) argues that archival research is more widely applied when participants are no longer alive, we included key informant interviews of those alive to triangulate archival data because Corti and Thompson (2004) said archival research works with key informant, surveys and focus group discussion.

Key informant interviews were used to reflections on the actions of people at particular time (e.g., Wong, 2008). The key informants were the serving MDF Generals, past presidents and vice presidents, past ministers of and civil society organization leaders.

Data collection and analysis

Once the data was collected, it was transcribed, coded and categorized to reduce the volume of raw information. This was done in order to identify significant patterns and draw meaning from it and subsequently built a logical chain of evidence. The process of data analysis in qualitative research was informed by Wong (2008) content analysis steps as follows: a) Transcription was done in four steps, i) Identify themes related to original research questions, ii) Develop categories, iii) Reducing selected data at category created, and iv) Relate, create association between categories; b) Synthesize and make sense of data was done in three steps; i) Exploration of relationships between categories, ii) Seeking patterns on relationships, and iii) Mapping interpretation of findings (Wong, 2008).

The next section presents results using case studies of critical junctures between civil authorities and MDF. The case studies which had put Malawi's Constitution at disequilibrium were, Operation Bwezani, Power Transition of 2012, Tripartite election cancellation 24 May 2014, Tippex election protests by Civil Society Organization May 2019 -2020, and Constabulary roles of MDF.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY

Case study one: Operation Bwezani

Orchadson (2022) states that Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, Malawi's first president, was extremely concerned about the international "youth culture" that threatened to reach Malawi in the post-colonial era. This culture had the type of youth that questioned everything that happened. Dr. Banda was not amused by the questioning culture that was emerging in the youths, hence he declared that Malawi could not afford such type of youth. Determined that the country's youth should not be brought up as "parasites", who "loafed about" once the political war was won, he sought a means of diverting "the energies and enthusiasm of the youth into constructive and useful channels" by establishing the Malawi Young Pioneers (MYP) in 1963. As a movement to mobilize the youth, its ideological goals were initially to tackle "poverty, disease, and ignorance", although these, increasingly, took a back seat to the violent campaign against disunity, disloyalty, ill-discipline, and disobedience. MYP, *the Green Shirts*; was a paramilitary wing of the Malawi Congress Party (MCP), and was set up in 1967 mainly concerned with rural development work and political indoctrination.

Following the cabinet crisis after independence on 6th July 1964, four years later in 1967, some of the ministers launched internal armed insurrections from neighboring countries. In response to this security challenge, Dr. Banda took the decision to strengthen the MYP, making it the para military wing of his party; a decision that removed Malawi Army's central role and function, leading to its stagnation and neglect (Lupia, 2002). To train the movement for this offensive, the MCP government accepted an offer from the Israeli government to provide expert advisors on youth, education and training. The decision in 1963 to embrace Israeli expertise was a clear indicator of the foreign policy orientation that the independent government would adopt. Assisted by these experts, the first MYP youth leadership course was held in 1964 at Nasawa. The establishment of more MYP training bases in 1965 enabled the original leadership training course to be transformed into a more comprehensive education program (Charman, 1997).

MYP became the most dreaded agent of Dr. Banda's brutality exacted overtly and covertly. As national and regional security problems rose, the one party state increasingly engaged the MYP in security related services, enhancing its status and power to become a competing faction among the country's security establishment. The organization bore arms in their bases and the ammunition was labelled Malawi Army, without the knowledge of the Malawi Army authorities though it is claimed that one military officer facilitated the procurement. From the communication that was intercepted by the Malawi Army intelligence, it was also established that MYP conducted espionage and intelligence operations besides being the most trusted body guards around Dr. Banda. According to Orchardson (2022) it was in this work for Dr. Banda that the MYP relations with the Malawi Army and other security agents in the country soured. The Malawi Army became suspicious and resented the MYP for usurping their roles as security agents, which contravened with section 159 of the Malawi Constitution that established the Malawi Army as the only military constituted in Malawi. Since then, there was cold war between Malawi Army and MYP up to 1993 Operation Bwezani. Kasuka (2013) writes this about the Kamuzu Banda, the MYP and Operation Bwezani:

As the tide of democracy swept across Malawi, efforts were made to destroy the institutions Banda had built to keep him power. One of the most feared was the Malawi Young Pioneers (MYP).

An operation was launched to deal with the menace. Known as Operation Bwezani, it was an army operation to disarm the Malawi Young Pioneers at the height of political transition in December 1993.

Bwezani means “give back”, in Chichewa, the main local language although he forgot how to speak it after more than 40 years of absence from his homeland.

The MYP had a strong network of spies and supporters countrywide at all levels in society. They were Kamuzu Banda’s personal security bodyguards and were all trained and indoctrinated in Kamuzuism. They also had military training (Kasuka, 2013: 202).

Operation Bwezani was triggered by the shooting of four soldiers by MYP cadres in Mzuzu on 1st December, 1993 following a bar room brawl. At that historical juncture, the year-old democratization struggle neared a crisis point. Prior to Operation Bwezani, the government had agreed to a national consultative conference to discuss the fate of the estimated 1,500 armed MYPs. The Malawi opposition argued that the MYP presented a formidable obstacle to a democratic multiparty election. Under pressure from the international community, the government agreed, at the above conference, to gradually demobilize and disarm the MYP, incorporating the armed party into the police and the military institutions. However, the military declined to incorporate the MYP into the Malawi Army. In fact, Operation Bwezani was initiated by the Malawi Army junior ranks in response to MYP’s killing of their colleagues in Mzuzu. It was just a spontaneous action by the junior ranks without orders from the high command to disarm the MYP. This occurred due to delays by the Malawi Army high command on making a decision on the way forward after the killing of the four soldiers in Mzuzu by MYP cadres. Effectively there was no order given to the soldiers to disarm the MYP. Instead, the officers had to follow the soldiers to make the disarmament process orderly.

Operation Bwezani was equally significant in reforming the Malawi Army. After the event, once the soldiers had returned to the barracks, President Banda took immediate steps to address some of the grievances within the rank and file that had given rise to the breakdown in order and discipline, allowing junior officers to initiate the mutiny. On 7th December, 1993, President Banda addressed the nation, appealing for calm, and announced the immediate appointment of a Minister of Defence, a portfolio that he himself held since independence. The Malawi Army, after transitioning from the Kings African Rifles on 6th July, 1964 was under the office of the President and Cabinet as there was no Ministry of Defence (Newell, 1995). The Malawi Army was therefore commended for intervening to disarm the MYP that served the interest of Kamuzu Banda and MCP at that time. The Army has been trusted by majority of citizens in Malawi whenever the constitution is threatened in Malawi (for more read Khaila and Chibwana, 2005). The Army until today enjoys public trust when the arms of government demonstrate departure from the constitution.

Case study two: Power Transition in 2012

MDF plays an oversight role during power transition and symbolic transfer of power from one presidency to the next presidency. The power transition is constitutional matter. On 12th April, 2012, political tension developed following the death in office of His Excellency President Bingu wa Muntharika on 5th April, 2023.

Despite a clear provision of the law under section 83 (4) which clearly stipulates succession guidelines when such occurrence take place, there was an attempt to block the second in command, Dr Joyce Banda, to take over power and proceed till the next elections succession as per the prescription of the law. It should be noted that by the time the president died the relationship between the two top citizens had gone sour and had formed her own party, People’s Progressive Party.

“Malawi’s transition: the constitution vs the cabinet

President Mutharika suffered a heart attack on the morning of 5 April 2012. He was rushed to the Intensive Care Unit of Kamuzu Central Hospital (KCH), the largest public hospital in Lilongwe. He was dead on arrival and efforts to resuscitate him failed.²¹ The Information Ministry and government-run Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) were silent on Mutharika’s illness or death. However, Malawi’s private, online, and social media began to report that the President was dead. Private media house Zodiak Broadcasting Services (ZBS) aired live commentary of developments at KCH when news broke of Mutharika’s hospitalization. Online publications, a number of bloggers,

and Facebook or Twitter posters offered regular updates, while the Malawi Democrat announced Mutharika's death two days before any public state ment was issued.²² Government officials tried to control reporting on Mutharika's condition and death, but coverage in the private and social media made it increasingly impossible for them to do so. By nightfall on 5 April, State House released a statement through MBC stating only that Mutharika was ill and would be flown to South Africa for treatment. Malawi's constitution has provisions for succession related to both presidential incapacity and death. In the case of incapacity, the constitution states the Vice-President will lead the country until the President is able to resume office.²³ (Yi Dionne and Dulani, 2013: 116)

However, the Constitution is very clear in Section 83(4) clearly stipulates that in the event of the death of a sitting president or when he or she incapacitated, the second in command shall immediately take over reign power to finish the remaining part of the term if upon death he or she has served more than half of the term.

The political standoff created a lot of tension. Six Cabinet ministers met at midnight of 6th April, 2012 and made a declaration that Dr Joyce Banda, was not eligible to take over power as she was no longer a member of Democratic Progressive Party, a party that ushered her into power alongside the departed president (Daily Times 2012). Despite such developments, the leadership of the Malawi Defense Force stood its grounds in defense of the Republican Constitution, guided by Section 160(1)(b) which gives power to the Defense Force to protect the constitutional order and assist civilian authorities in proper exercise of their functions. In line with that the Defense Force Commander, General Odillo, after sensing some tensions culminating into threats, deployed soldiers to guard the house of Dr Joyce Banda (see Nassah, 2020).

What is seen here is that following the death of Bingu wa Mutharika, a power transition struggle was eminent and the MDF stood its grounds in defense of the Republican Constitution. Eventually things normalized and Dr Joyce Banda was sworn in as President of the Republic of Malawi. Her party became the ruling party while DPP became an opposition party. The response by MDF was necessary support required by military leaders to uphold the constitution which was at the verge of violation as argued by Yi Dionne and Dulani (2013).

Case study three: Tripartite election cancellation 24 May 2014

The military can respond to legal or illegal orders given circumstances. The military can execute legal orders or refuse to execute illegal orders in the interest of serving the nation (Patterson, 2022). In 2014, Malawi held general elections which were conducted amid concerns about the credibility of the electoral process (Guardian, 2014). There were serious accusations bordering on irregularities, voter intimidation, and logistical challenges that led to delays in the release of results. These issues raised tensions and uncertainties in the lead-up to the announcement of the final outcomes. Amid these challenges, Dr. Joyce Banda, President of the Republic of Malawi, seeking a fresh mandate, declared that the entire vote for president, members of parliament and local councils be nullified for alleged 'serious irregularities' and fresh elections be held within 90 days (Malawi News, 2014).

Both local and international print and electronic media houses carried the story. On Saturday, May 24, 2014 the Malawi News reported chaotic scenes at the Tally Center in Blantyre when word went around that the poll had been nullified and Dr. Joyce Banda had ordered its shutdown. However, the Malawi Electoral Commission challenged the unconstitutional exercise of power by the President in the High Court. The order was granted by the High Court to announce the results of the election. Almost immediately the MDF stepped in to ensure that the rule of law was adhered to despite efforts by the civil authorities to let MDF close the Tally Centre. Orders were given to the Commander 93 Brigade to enforce the order to shut down the Tally Centre, but the Brigade Commander, recognizing that the orders were illegal stood in support of the Constitutional Order and did not close the tally center.

Case study four: Tippex election protests by Civil Society Organization May 2019 -2020

Every Malawian who participated in the 2019 tripartite election is aware of term 'tippex election' implying rigged elections. Because irregularities, MCP obtained an injunction in Lilongwe High Court to restrain the MEC chair from proceeding with announcing of the results on 25 May 2019. On 27 May 2019, MEC went to High Court in Lilongwe and successfully lifted the injunction and proceeded to announce the results in which incumbent president Prof. Arthur Peter Mutharika of the DPP was declared the winner. All this time the MDF was watching. At the same time Election Case Number 26 was filed by Dr. Lazarus Chakwera of MCP and Election Case 16 was filed by Dr. Saulos Chilima of UTM. The two cases were later consolidated and heard by the Constitutional Court. For details on case details we

refer you to Nkhata, Mwenifumbo and Majamanda (2021). All this time the MDF was watching because the professional military does not intervene in internal politics.

The Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) on the other hand, in the aftermath of the 2019 tripartite election, led by the Human Rights Defenders Coalition (HRDC) organized national wide protests. The protesters demanded the resignation of Dr. Jane Ansah, the then chairperson of the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) and the entire commission. Dr Ansah was alleged, according to them, mismanagement of elections especially at the Tally Center. The Commission declared Prof Arthur Peter Mutharika the winner of the May 2019 elections, a decision that did not go down well with those mostly in the opposition (Malawi News, 2019). The protest degenerated into ugly scenes almost putting the functionalities of the Malawi Government at a near standstill. Clashes between police and government in power on one side and protest leaders with citizens on the other. Property was destroyed, shops were looted, and some roads were blocked in cities and towns in Malawi. Some trading centers outside the capital Lilongwe such as Naere and Nathenje motorists found it difficult to pass. Ruthless young boys demanding money to allow motorists to proceed. The government branded protesters as a group of terrorists, a development that fueled more anger than anticipated (Chiuta, 2019).

The government repeatedly tried to stop the demonstrations through court orders, by denying the protestors "permission" through local government councils mandated to process notification of such assemblies, by demanding huge sums of money for surety, and by prohibiting access to certain areas under the 1960 Protected Places and Areas Act. The government contended that protests should be stopped because they were destructive and threatened public security. The president of the Republic of Malawi with vested powers under section 160 (2) of the Malawi Constitution ordered the Malawi Defence Force to support the Malawi Police Service in dealing with the demonstrations, including shooting at the protestors. However, MDF understanding its constitutional role and the constitutional provision that stipulates that "every person shall have the right to assemble and demonstrate with others peacefully and unarmed", the MDF only deployed soldiers to provide security to ensure law and order during the demonstrations, and not to stop the demonstrations as ordered by the politicians of the then ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). The MDF also advised the civil authorities to find a political solution to the problem and not use the military as it only worsened the situation.

The three events cited above are a demonstration of how the Malawi Defense Force has maintained its professional conduct in discharging its duties (Chiuta, 2019). The MDF has not intervened in politics owing to professionalism and upholding the Constitution. This military culture is passed from generation to generation and postures MDF as a professional army in the international and domestic standing.

Case study five: Constabulary roles of MDF

According to section 160 (1) (b) (c) of the Malawi Constitution (2004), the MDF is mandated to perform certain roles in assisting the civil authorities as follows:

- To uphold and protect the constitutional order in the Republic and assist the civil authorities in the proper exercise of their functions under the constitution
- To provide technical expertise and resources to assist the civilian authorities in the maintenance of essential services in times of emergency

According to Janowitz (1988), with the emerging technologies the distinction between the civilian and military roles that lay at the heart of Huntington's (1985) theory of separation had been blurred by the emergence of nuclear weapons and limited war. For Janowitz, the state of affairs with the manifestation of the way in which emerging technologies and political interaction between civilian and military elites were causing the two spheres to converge. Janowitz contended that in the nuclear age the military need to adopt a new military role and military self-conception, that of a "constabulary force". In this instance, the military establishment becomes a constabulary force when it is continuously prepared to act, committed to the minimum use of force, and seeks viable international relations, rather than victory. Accordingly, the soldier comes to resemble a police officer instead of a warrior, as the soldier is tasked to undertake internal security roles, such as internal conflicts, transnational crime, terrorism, disaster relief and other related tasks.

In the aftermath of the 2019 general elections, Malawi was engulfed in a series of protest marches led by Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) like the Human Rights Defenders Coalition (HRDC). The protesters demanded the resignation of Dr. Jane Ansah, the then Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) Chairperson and all its members on charges that they mismanaged the election (Chauluka, 2019). However, some protests degenerated into deadly and destructive clashes with the police and ruling party cadres and in response, government labelled protest organizers “terrorist groups” and accused them of advancing a regime- change agenda orchestrated by opposition parties (Chiuta, 2019). The government repeatedly tried to stop the demonstrations through court orders, by denying protesters “permission” through local government councils mandated to process notification of such assemblies, by demanding huge sums of money for surety, and by prohibiting access to certain areas under the Protected Places and Areas Act 1960. Further due to the police failure to control the demonstrations, the government contended that protests should be stopped because they were destructive and a threat to public security and went ahead to order the MDF to block the protestors and even to harm them in order to deter them from further protest. However, understanding its constitutional role and the constitutional provision that stipulates that “every person shall have the right to assemble and demonstrate with others peacefully and unarmed”, the MDF only deployed soldiers to provide security to ensure law and order during the demonstrations and not to stop the demonstrations as ordered by the politicians. The MDF also gave advice to the civil authorities to find a political solution to the problem and not to use the military.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper sought to understand the role of the military in a democratic state. The paper concludes that the Malawi Defense Force has so far discharged its duties in line with the Constitutional mandate. Using the three case examples cited above, the paper has demonstrated that while the civilian authorities thought they had the power to order even the military to dance to their tune, the results were not what they expected. Fundamental contention of this paper is that consolidated democracies cannot exist without military elites committed to democratic governance and that their support is a necessary condition of democratization (Barany, 2012). As we have seen, when the military does not support democratic rule, they pose a threat, even if it may be a dormant threat, to the survival of the democratizing state. In such environments, if officers believe that state policies jeopardize their corporate, material, strategic, or other interests, they may well decide to mount an armed challenge to civilian rule.

The basic truth is that for the military to be professional it is necessary for the government, to whose authority the security sector actors are subject, to show commitment to democratic norms and checks and balances. The key is to constructing governance ethos that nurture professionalism, efficiency, and effectiveness.

The Malawi Constitution (1994) has laid down an impressive array of principles that seek to ensure that the military is an instrument for protecting the safety and democratic rights of the people. These principles cannot be given full effect unless the MDF are allowed in practice to discharge their constitutional roles in an independent and professional manner.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the many and seemingly insurmountable challenges, the professionalization of the MDF may seem like a pipe dream. However, realizing progress will require advancing reforms in overarching areas, the Malawi government should focus in the following areas to improve civil military control and MDF’s professionalism; repurposing the MDF’s mandate and role in the security sector; depoliticizing the environment in which the military operates; and institutionalizing ethics and accountability into MDF culture.

Declaration of conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest. Co-authors have reviewed and agreed to the manuscript, and there is no financial interest to report. The submission is original and not under review elsewhere.

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