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CALL FOR PAPERS

The Changing Character of Africa's Armed Forces

International conference held by IRSEM in Paris (5-6 October 2016)

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Conference objectives:

The armed forces of African countries south of the Sahara were recently the inspiration for research projects in several fields of human and social sciences. Today they are facing new challenges with the development of jihadist terrorism in a context of renewed competition among the international powers and intensifying governance-related issues.

While these studies focus primarily on the (semi)-private and informal actors, little is known about the state security forces and more specifically the armed forces (Debos and Glasman, 2012). The various armed forces of sub-Saharan Africa are currently transitioning from an independence-era model and a model more suited to today's form of conflict. These armed forces embody the sovereignty of their nations, even if they are sometimes neglected by the political power and are occasionally used as tools for development or law enforcement. Since the end of the Cold War they are increasingly called on to improve prevention, contribute to security crisis resolution on the African continent and protect and assist in political progression towards more democratic forms.

The relationship between African armed forces and the political power is a key issue. This has been the topic of previous studies, which remain relevant today (Huntington, 1965). The armed forces, at the request of civilians, can ensure the transition to democracy (Aka, 1999; Bat, 2015) or play a more assertive role in the political manoeuvre (Moshe 1973; McGowan, 2003; Decalo, 1989; Kandeh, 2004). Their training has become the theatre of a new rivalry between the international powers (France, the United Kingdom, the United States, Russia and China). This will certainly affect the economic and political choices of the states that host new bases occupied by foreign forces or take part in defence cooperation initiatives. For the countries with a historical tie to the African continent, this new situation is a source of major challenges, both at the political and strategic levels.

Organised by IRSEM – whose objective is to foster closer cooperation between the academic and military worlds and produce innovative thinking to nourish strategic debate – the aim of this international conference is to examine the transformations of the armed forces in sub-Saharan Africa in the past sixty years, both from a comparative perspective (between countries, chronological periods, etc.) and especially in order to understand the changing

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relationship between the African armed forces and the societies where they originate. Three groups of questions may be identified.

1) The birth and development of African armed forces.

The first group of questions will deal with the birth and development of African armed forces, i.e. how young sovereign states in Africa organised their national military. This means studying the connection between the construction of the military and the creation of the state, their capacity to fulfil their tasks and their contribution to domestic development since the independences. There are several opposing theories on the relationships between the African militaries and the political power: were they passive observers of the independence process and state-building (Martin, 1975) or did they play a leading role in the modernisation of structures inherited from the colonial period (Lefever, 1970)? New national armed forces have often been seen as direct products of the colonial period. Little research has been conducted on the continuity between the pre-colonial military organisations and the military systems produced after the independences. Ogot (1972) showed that it was difficult to grasp the nature and role of service members in post-colonial Africa without studying the nature and role of military power in pre-colonial and colonial Africa, and in particular to understand why even modern civilian regimes in Africa must rely on the military to survive. New monographs on African armed forces – for example, those of Côte d'Ivoire (Banga, 2014) and Mauritania (Evrard, 2015) – provide a new insight into the birth of these militaries. When placed alongside older studies – e.g. Robin Luckham on the Nigerien forces (1970) or Emmanuel Ela Ela on Cameroon (2000) – they form a significant corpus.

Within this first group of questions, draft papers may be proposed on the contribution of the military to the independences, the creation of African armed forces and the role of the military in the new sovereign states. The structuralist study of African armed forces – organisation, equipment, command and funding – are also important aspects of how the security transition took place in sub-Saharan Africa. Particular attention will be given to papers dealing with everyday practices and in particular soldier training – a perspective often left out in the research on African forces (Hutchful and Bathily, 1998) – and projects dealing with the norms that are formed either from colonial or post-colonial practices.

2) African armed forces and external influence.

Furthermore, as these armed forces were mainly formed with assistance from external actors, the conference will also examine issues related to external influence both during their formation and their transformation.

We wish to study the relationship with old colonial powers, and with the new actors from other continents (China, India, Turkey, Japan, the United States, Portugal, the European Union, the United Kingdom, Russia, etc.), as well as the relationships between continental powers (South Africa, Ethiopia, Nigeria, etc.). How do the various multinational and bilateral programmes help reform the African armed forces? What are the standards they produce? The

armed forces were reconstructed as part of the Security Sector Reform (SSR), which requires renewed research (Bryden and Scherrer, 2012; Sedra, 2010; Egnell and Haldén, 2009). How are SSR efforts planned and implemented, and does the "defence institution building" concept (Rand Corporation, 2016) replace it? Has SSR become a new security paradigm, in the same vein as that of financial balances (Chataigner, 2006?)? What are the results of military assistance and support policies? Is it productive to strengthen the civilian institutions, or instead train combatants and command officers, and bring logistics and support structures to a professional level in order to give African forces the same structure as modern armies (Doss, Herbst and Mills, 2013)? The conference will also focus on cooperation between the African armed forces, at various levels (training and operations). The aim is to better understand how the African forces build cooperation networks, which enhance or compete with the classic models of military cooperation in the region. What are the roles played by continental organisations, regional economic communities (REC) and other relevant organisations?

3) Adaptation of African armed forces.

Lastly, the African armed forces also changed to conform to the demands of external and domestic conflicts. They therefore adjusted to the changing nature and shape of African conflict (Straus, 2012; Abrahamsen, 2013). Less than one hundred peacekeeping operations have been deployed on the continent since 1990 and the majority of African states contributed troops to these operations (Williams, 2014). Furthermore, with the emergence of new actors in crisis management and conflict resolution, they formed the following bodies: APSA, CER, and CARIC (Franke, 2006; Warner, 2015). African armed forces are also evolving under the impact of domestic and external political factors (Martin, 1989). The social environment and the evolving role of the military in society and the economic and political system contribute to shaping the new face of African armed forces.

In this last section, we shall focus on the problems caused by the integration of African forces within multinational forces (Fisher, 2012 ; Wilén, Ambrosetti and Birantamije, 2015) and lessons learned from operations that lead to unexpected security challenges for certain states providing peacekeeping contingents (Dwyer, 2015). We would also like to see paper proposals on the role of the armed forces in domestic conflict resolution: through the integration of combatants in a new state military, as part of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes, a topic that is relatively rarely dealt with (Wilén, 2015).

This international conference will focus on the changes in sub-Saharan African armed forces since the independences. The aim is to better understand the military reality, the armed forces and those who are a part of them. The approach taken will be multidisciplinary and diachronic. We welcome proposals from the fields of political science, international relations, history, economy, sociology, anthropology, geography, etc. Particular attention will be given to comparative approaches and papers based on field studies. Conference papers will be published after the event.

Paper proposals:

Paper proposals (maximum 500 words) may be for an individual contribution or for a panel composed of four papers on one of the topics selected for the conference. Each proposal must be accompanied by a biography. Papers are welcomed in French and English. Applicants should specify if they require assistance from IRSEM for their travel and/or stay in Paris. Proposals are to be sent to:

Sonia Le Gouriellec (sonia.le-gouriellec@defense.gouv.fr) and

Jérôme de Lespinois (jerome.de-lespinois@defense.gouv.fr).

Timeline:

10 April 2016: deadline for paper proposals.

1st June 2016: selected authors will be notified.

15 September 2016: deadline for final versions of articles selected by the coordinators and scientific committee.

5-6 October 2016: International conference on "The Changing Character of Africa's Armed Forces" at Ecole Militaire, Paris.

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