

Aetiology of the Equilibrium of Civil-Military Relations in Malawi

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Abstract

This paper seeks to address the question how the level of civil-military relations has impacted the extent of democratization in Malawi. In doing so, the discussion has developed a rhombus diamond theory of civil-military relations, which posits that the military is the fulcrum in the relationship that has civilians, elected authorities, civilian authorities and the judiciary on apexes. The theory aims at keeping the relations of civil-military entities in equilibrium to develop the country into a consolidated democracy. The central thesis is that community of practice is the key civil-military relations players that include the local population for the direct political power they portray to the matters of security affecting them. The rhombus diamond theory is developed from the antitheses of classical institutional civil-military relations that focused much on the political-military complexes and consolidated democracies. Rhombus diamond theory has taken into historical accounts of Malawi where the local population and the military contributed directly to civil-military relations and safeguarded democratic values. The theory contributes to the body of knowledge by establishing that development and transformation occur through the interaction of the key civil-military relations players in a specific time and geographical milieu. Qualitative research method was used to develop this theory.

Keywords

Rhombus Diamond Theory, Intelligent Disobedience, Civil-Military Relations, Fulcrum

1. Introduction

Theories of civil-military relations, such as institution, principal-agency, convergence and concordance approaches aim at safeguarding the military, which

poses a threat to the polity. Scholars such as Huntington (1957), Feaver (1999), Janowitz (1960), and Schiff (1995) came up with such theories to safeguard against the threat postured by militaries; however, such approaches have failed to protect some situations owing to cultural, historical and geographical nuances. The end of the bipolar region made security scholars rethink the referent objects of security. The waning space for the political-military complex as a referent object of security and the advent of human security by the Copenhagen school of thought induced a human-centric approach to security matters. A human being became a central organising concept of security and changed the roles of militaries (Buzan et al., 1997). This paper employs the military, the government officials and the citizenry as communities of practice. The discourse presents a civil-military relations rhombus diamond theory (Figure 1) which assumes that the military is a fulcrum that keeps elected authorities, civil authorities, civilians and the judiciary in balance resulting in a path to nation-building and democratic outcomes. The rhombus diamond theory premises that development and transformation occur through the interaction of the key civil-military relations players in time and space.

2. Methodology

This was a qualitative cross-sectional study where secondary data from the literature was analysed using critical content analysis. Primary data was collected from

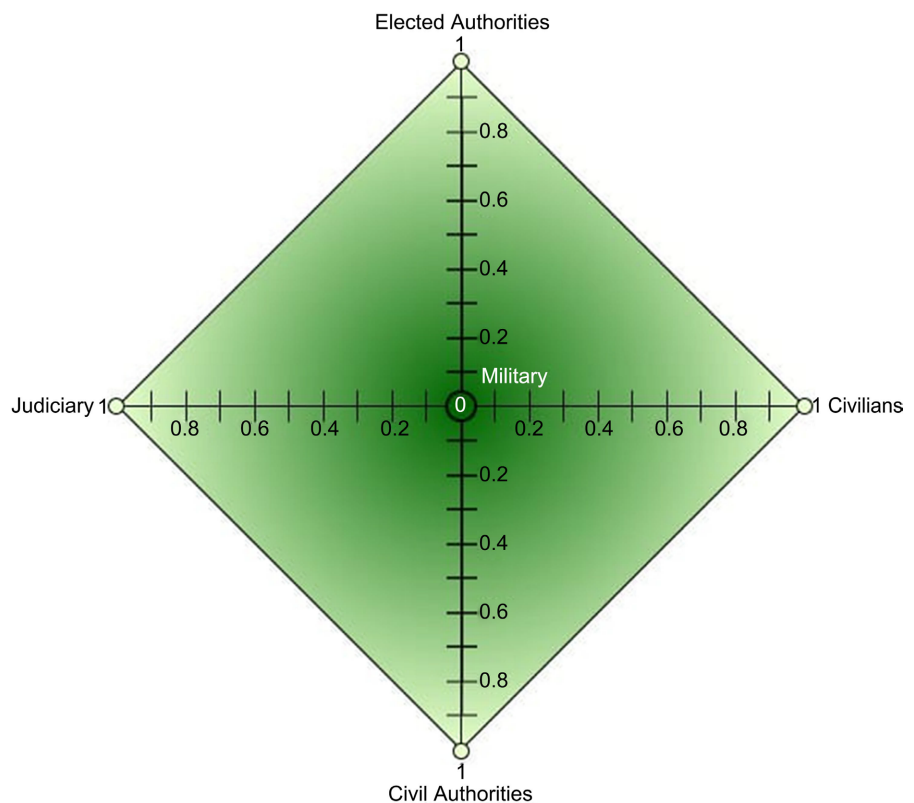


Figure 1. Civil-military relations rhombus diamond model. Source: Created by the author.

in-depth interviews, transcribed, nodes and themes were built and conclusions were drawn to link the study's main objective. Saturation point determined the sample size and data collection cut-off point. This study was also an action research as the authors are stakeholders of the civil-military relations in their own capacity as citizens of Malawi and global scholars.

3. Theoretical Framework

The organising concept of the rhombus diamond theory is civil-military relations. Civil-military relations portray the control of the military and differ according to the type of political systems. In some countries, the political regimes are the military themselves. In a democracy, civil-military relations focus on the civilian control of the military that involves a trinity of democratic civilian control, efficiency and effectiveness of the armed forces (Feaver 1999; Bruneau & Matei, 2013). Democratic civilian control of the military is afforded through oversight bodies such as the parliamentary committee of defence and security, and the appointment of the Defence Force Commander by the President who is also the Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Force. The other oversight body is the Ministry of Defence (MOD), in which the Defence Force Commander is accountable to the Minister of Defence. Efficiency calls for the armed forces to use their resources in an accountable manner and effectiveness requires the military to fulfil their assigned roles efficiently.

The question that arises from this setup is how much control the civilians should exert because much control would weaken the armed forces and fail to fulfil their required roles of defending the territorial integrity of a country. In contrast, less control would pose a threat to civilian control through military involvement in politics. Feaver (1999) coined this situation a *civil-military problematique*. As a solution to the civil-military problematique, Huntington (1996) proposes the subjective and objective civilian control of the armed forces. Subjective control is optimally achieved through the professionalisation of armed forces. Objective control involves placing legal and institutional restrictions on military autonomy.

However, the rhombus diamond theory proposes that the military as a dependent variable is a fulcrum where power concentrates owing to the monopoly of weapons and management of violence. The power is derived from the four stakeholders (independent variables) in the apexes of the diamond namely, civilians, judiciary, elected authorities and civilian authorities (See Figure 1). The legal basis of this proposition is the Constitution of the Republic of Malawi that mandates the Malawi Defence Force to protect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country as well as upholding the constitutional order. Whereas it is recognisable that militaries use orders system to operate, the question comes when the civilian masters issue an illegal order; military commanders will be accountable when they execute such illegal orders. To this extent, the military has continued to develop and evade such situations through the application of *intel-*

*ligent disobedience*¹ in the interest of serving the nation (Sharp, 2021).

The theory has incorporated the local population as having direct powers of influence as opposed to representational powers from the judiciary, elected authorities and civilian authorities. The local population taking to the streets to oppose the regime through continuous demonstrations has shown the weakness of the political elites and reminded formal institutions that power comes from the people. This theory focuses on the local population as a focal point and one of the aetiological forces for attracting the unknown in the academia of civil-military relations. Democratization has been enhanced by the military by not intervening in politics even during the dreaded times of uncertainty when Malawi lost President Bingu Wa Mutharika (Republic of Malawi, 2013). The death that created power vacuum but the military upheld the constitution by supporting President Joyce Banda who was an estranged Vice President.

4. The Central Thesis of the Rhombus Diamond Theory

Civil-military relations rhombus diamond theory aims to keep governance of the security sector in equilibrium. The idea is a nexus and has the elected authorities, civil authorities, civilians and the judiciary interacting with the military and shaping civil-military relations outcomes. The theory posits that any governance tip on the scale towards one element of power brings about a disequilibrium, resulting in security threats in a country. Hence, civil-military relations depend on the relationships between four independent instruments of power and the military in a democracy. It is synthesised that the relationship between the military (dependent variable) and the key civil-military relations players (independent variables) shall shape the outcome of democratic governance. It is theorised that each power has a bearing on the role of the civil-military relations in democratic governance, key civil-military relations players' roles' effectiveness on the path of democratisation, and determinants of civil-military relations equilibrium.

The Rhombus Diamond theory is drawn from the antithesis of the classical theories of civil-military relations. Civil-military relations are traced to the classical military theorists such as Sun Tzu (544 BC-496 BC) and Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831), who claimed that military institutions were predominantly the servants of the state (Sun Tzu, 1971; Clausewitz, 1989; Houngnikpo, 2010). To this end, states controlled the militaries because states and armies were inseparable, and many generals were heads of states. However, as states metamorphosed and delineated between the civilian and military bureaucracies, fault lines emerged over the question of who controls who.

Civil-military relations scholars agree that concerns about a growing militarism in society, mainly coming from the experiences of the first half of the twentieth century, provoked an examination into the impact of militaries. The ramifications of the Cold War, specifically the American decision to maintain a large

¹Intelligent disobedience is the act of doing right when you are told to do is wrong, for example, "shoot the demonstrators down."

standing army for the first time in its history, led to concerns about whether a liberal democracy could effectively maintain such a military structure. Samuel Phillips Huntington and Morris Janowitz published seminal books on the subject, effectively bringing civil-military relations into academia (Huntington, 1957; Janowitz, 1960). Since then, the seminal works of Huntington (1957) and Janowitz (1960) have been replicated in the developed world, albeit with gaps in the developing world.

In *the Man on Horseback*, Samuel Edward Finer (1915-1993) countered some of Huntington's and Janowitz's arguments and assumptions and offered a look into the civil-military relationships in the underdeveloped world. Finer (2002) observed that many governments do not have the administrative skills to govern efficiently, which may open opportunities for military intervention. These options are not as likely in more developed countries. Finer (2002) argued that a stage of political development is a measure of civil-military relations. The stage of political development presents an opportunity for the military to intervene in internal politics. A common issue that ruins civil-military relations is when civil political leaders attempt to resume or gain civilian control after a transition, conflict or dictatorship but do not possess the necessary capacities and commitment to handle defence affairs.

The increased incidence of military coups d'état since World War II, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, brought about a growing interest in the academic domain in studying the nature of such coups. Political upheavals in Africa and Latin America led to military take-overs in Togo, Congo, Uganda, Ghana, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Bolivia (189 military coups in its first 169 years of existence), Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay, was primarily a result of forces attempting to stem the increasing influence of left-wing and communist-led uprisings (Decalo, 1976; Andrain, 1994; Houngnikpo, 2010; Hutchful, 2008; Bruneau & Matei, 2013; Salihu, 2019; Eshiet, 2022; Sany, 2022). During the bipolar region, the military was a closer tool for the state to project power on another state. As such, armies were more concerned with the defence of territorial integrity than internal politics, while political elites were more concerned with the security of the political ideology. However, the winds of change and uncertainty blew when the bipolar region collapsed.

The end of the Cold War led to a new debate about the proper role of the military in society, both in the United States and the former Soviet Union. However, as before, much of the discussion revolved around whether the state's powers were in decline and whether an appropriate level of civilian control was being brought to bear on the military power (Desch, 1998; Buzan et al., 1997; Desch, 2001; Collins, 2013). Security analysts pondered the military's role in human security as a human being became a referent object to security. Huntington (1996) opined that the end of the cold war meant an increase in internal conflicts as people start to align themselves on ethnic lines and predicted that many of the conflicts would be a clash of civilisations. A clash of civilisation is a thesis that

people's cultural and religious identities will be the primary source of conflict in the post-cold war world. Huntington's (1996) thesis on the clash of the civilisations put the military's role in a dilemma.

The basis of civil-military relations is a dilemma. Feaver (1999) has coined this dilemma as the civil-military problematique, which requires a given polity to balance two concerns. On the one hand, it must create a robust military establishment to protect the state. On the other, it must ensure that this same military establishment does not turn on the state that established it. Schiff (1995), Owens (2013) and Williams (2017) argue that the response of a polity to the civil-military problematique in the current world order can be seen as a bargain negotiated among three parties: the citizens, the civilian governmental authorities, and the uniformed military. This bargain aims to allocate prerogatives and responsibilities among the parties to keep civil-military relations in equilibrium and ensure participatory democracy in state affairs. However, the Civil-military relations rhombus diamond theory posits that there should be one strong institution to protect territorial integrity by upholding the constitution. This is the case in Malawi where the MDF is mandated to uphold and protect the constitutional order and assist the civilian authorities in properly managing public affairs.² Conversely, instances of the civilian political elites trying to circumvent the constitution and where the military has protected civilians in maintaining democratic values have not received much scholarly attention, and rhombus diamond theory synthesises this gap.

5. Rhombus Diamond Theory Synthesis

The Rhombus Diamond theory proposes a number of assumptions covering the five-key civil-military relations interactions in democratization (Huntington, 1996; Feaver, 1999; Hounnikpo, 2010; Bruneau & Matei, 2013). The theory proposes that:

- 1) The military is a centrifugal force keeping in check the other four key civil-military relations players as it has a monopoly of coercive power.
- 2) The military is a balancer in civil-military relations and a precondition to democratisation and a function of merit-based promotions, merit-based appointments, joint training and education between the military, citizenry and government officials, representational recruitment, reforms of the military institution, specialisation of the key civil-military relations players on defence matters, professionalization through professional military education and delivery of public goods and services.
- 3) The Judiciary plays a crucial role that involves legal interpretation of the military's role in managing domestic affairs.
- 4) The Judiciary enforces the rule of law, fulfils its role in protecting human rights and curbs abuses of military powers as well as validating military interventions.

²Chapter XVI, Section 160 of Malawi Constitution, 2002.

5) Civil authorities such as the Ministry of Defence, Defence and Security Committee of the National Assembly and District Security Committee present the nation with expertise and represent the interests of elected authorities.

6) Elected authorities such as the executive and the legislature may be a causal factor for unhealthy civil-military relations and present potential security threats.

7) The role of elected authorities is to carry out the civilian democratic control of the military through shaping and formulation of the national security policy.

8) Civilians, thus the local population, Civil Society Organisations and the media monitor activities of other civil-military relations key players. Civilians offer alternative views on national security policy.

6. Rhombus Diamond Theory Justification

This theory is based on the cultural, historical and geographical nuances mainly of Malawi where the country has been saved by other key civil-military relations players than the political elites. Political elites in the past times put the nation on an unhealthy path to nation-building resulting in national security threats. Examples of such an unhealthy path include “Operation Bwezani” in 1993, a political interregnum of 2012 when President Bingu Wa Mutharika passed on, and Vice President Joyce Banda was almost burred from taking over power and the contested tripartite elections of 2019 that culminated in political protests and violent demonstrations (Phiri, 2008; Republic of Malawi, 2013; Charman, 2015).

The rhombus diamond theory focuses on keeping civil-military relations in equilibrium. The equilibrium can be maintained when the military is stable and without internal divisions. The variable for keeping the army neutral is through having a professional military such as Malawi demonstrated. The professional army is the one that propagates merit-based promotions, merit-based appointments, joint training and education between the military, citizenry and government officials, representational recruitment, reforms of the military institution, specialisation of the key civil-military relations players on defence matters, professionalisation through professional military education and delivery of public goods and services.

The Judiciary is justified in nation-building and civil-military relations in enforcing the rule of law and protecting human rights. In this instance, the constitutional judges of Malawi showed courage and independence in defence of democracy, demonstrated in their historic February 2020 ruling to annul the disputed May 2019 presidential elections. The ruling reviewed and suggested that the majority should mean 50+1, not a mere first-past-the-post (FPTP) rule. Fifty plus 1 ensures the President gets a majority and gets accepted country-wide as none of Malawi’s political regions can suffice a 50 + 1 vote hence curbing regionalism and ethnocentrism (Potani et al., 2019).

Civil authorities such as the Ministry of Defence, Defence and Security Committee of the National Committee and District Security Committee present the nation with expertise and represent the interests of elected authorities. If this

category of civil-military relations player is not equipped with the required security knowledge, they can be detrimental to national security. A civil-military relations study in Argentina revealed that expertise in this category was lacking. The study revealed no stability for civilians in positions of authority. Instead, there was a veritable revolving door with all, but very few civilians having any stability, let alone being able to develop their expertise and exercise their authority. The study further argued that the Ministry of Defence, with some 700 employees, is the smallest of the ministries in Argentina, in charge of 75,000 personnel in the armed forces (Bruneau & Matei, 2013). In the case of Malawi Ministry of Defence, 60 employees in charge of some 12,000 employees is a more critical mishap that needs immediate attention for a healthy civil-military relations' path towards democratisation.

Healthy civil-military relations require a balanced contribution of civilians. Civilians, thus the local population, Civil Society Organisations and the media monitor national security activities and policy. They offer alternative views on national security issues directly affecting them. Williams (2017) portends that:

“Although citizens may not be directly involved in creating the civil-military bargains, civil-military relations cannot be sustained without their acquiescence. In order for democracy to continue to thrive, it is pivotal that the public is engaged such that society maintains a healthy balance.”

On the one hand, Williams' (2017) claim is true for consolidated democracies like that of the United States of America. On the other hand, Williams' (2017) assumption is an understatement taking into account political events that have been ensuing in Malawi. An example is where civilians and the military worked together to protect democracy against a political regime after the 2019 contested presidential elections. This assertion cements the assumption that the military is a balancer and that civilians can be directly involved in power balancing as Malawi has shown, vindicating the claims of the Swiss philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (2008) that power is a contractual social obligation given by the people and that if the contractual obligations are not met, power can be withdrawn. Hence power relations must be managed, and the rhombus diamond theory aims to manage power relations of the polity and the military towards nation-building.

7. Rhombus Diamond Theory Applicability

Rhombus diamond theory can be applied in a number of areas of transformative community development mainly in line with Goal 16 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals as well as an enabler to the Malawi Vision 2063, which promotes peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. The theory recognizes that the five civil-military relations players should remain professional in their assigned roles and avoid having multiple interests aimed at self-aggrandizement. Professionalism should be attained

through the specialisation of a particular profession and having a general awareness of the roles of the other civil-military relations players.

The roles of the military should be well known by the polity. The military tend to be rated highly as an effective institution in the country albeit with the civil-military relations key players lacking knowledge of the roles of the military. If the society do not know the roles of the military, how then the same society can rate the military to be highly effective. The knowledge gap of the roles of the military by the society becomes a threat to national security as the military can be wrongly tasked by those who are mandated to control the military; elected civilian authorities. In this case, the military need to continue to receive professional education, its appointments and promotions to be based on seniority and merit and its recruitment to be representational from all the groups of the people for the military to act rationally and where orders from the civilian authorities are deemed illegal, intelligence disobedience can be applied without posing a threat to national security.

The theory aims at keeping the military stable through oversight by the executive, legislature, judiciary and civilians. The theory understands that the military will be stable and professional if there is professional military education, when promotions and appointments are based on merit, when recruitment of soldiers and officers is representational and when resources are available for maintenance and sustainability. Furthermore, joint training among the civil-military relations players to acquaint them with national security issues is also a function towards the transformative development of civil-military relations. The civil-military community need to transformatively develop from an authoritarian era to a democracy. The path to democracy requires realizing the core democratic values of the right to life, liberty, economic freedom and the pursuit of happiness by all the stakeholders in the rhombus diamond. The rhombus diamond theory realises that the vestiges of colonialism and authoritarianism cripple the progression path to democracy and that the civil-military system needs a transformation through the professionalisation of stakeholders.

The rhombus diamond theory buttresses the role theory that concerns one of the essential features of social life and characteristic behaviour patterns of stakeholders. It explains roles by presuming that stakeholders are members of social positions and hold expectations for their behaviours and those of other stakeholders. Role studies have suggested centrifugal, integrative, and competing forces within the role field (Biddle, 1986). The roles of civil-military relations stakeholders influence decision-making. The dynamism of the space of civil-military relations requires the differentiation of roles aimed at curbing competition. Differentiation of roles in civil-military relations is meant to improve the effectiveness of the civil-military relations system. The apparent variation of responsibilities and rights between the centres of political power represents one of the key preconditions for successful democratisation. The constitutional system and judicial definition of the relationship among the various centres of authority have a decisive impact on the character and tempo of democratisation.

8. Conclusion

This paper has elucidated the creation of a rhombus diamond theory of civil-military relations. Rhombus diamond theory assumes that the military is a fulcrum that keeps elected authorities, civil authorities, civilians and the judiciary in equilibrium hence a safer nation. The military itself can only be a balancer if it is professional. A professional military is one where professional military education, representational recruitment, merit-based promotions and appointments are adhered. For the civil-military community to safeguard the nation, they must be professional and work together by fusing, centrifuging, integrating, or complementing each other. The rhombus diamond theory grounds that the development and transformation of civil-military relations occur through the interaction of the key civil-military relations players in a particular time and environment.

The theory focuses on the inclusion of the local population. The local population in emerging democracies have exerted direct political power through informal organizations and must be included in the practice of civil-military relations. The theory does not exclude the roles of other key civil-military relations players; however, emphasis is put on joint training to acquaint with each other's roles and complement each other where possible. The theory portends that Judiciary enforces the rule of law, fulfils its role in protecting human rights and curbs abuses of military powers as well as validating military interventions. Civil authorities present the nation with expertise and represent the interests of elected authorities. Elected authorities carry out the civilian democratic control of the military, national security policy formulation and direction and civilians offer alternative views on matters of national security directly affecting them.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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