

Demilitarizing a small African country: Rationale, necessary conditions, and financing

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Abstract

Most efforts directed at security sector reform (SSR) in African countries have had very little impact. This includes efforts aimed at a more rational allocation of tasks and resources in the sector. This article is concerned with the strongest form of SSR, the total disbanding of military forces. The best example of effective demilitarization is Costa Rica, which has flourished since it disbanded its military some 70 years ago. The strategic situation, the negative behavior of its defense force since its formation, and the opportunity costs of military expenditure provide a strong case for the demilitarization of Lesotho, a small country in southern Africa. Five necessary conditions for a successful demilitarization can be identified, namely its acceptance by a country's citizens, a willing government, a detailed demilitarization plan, an implementing agency, and adequate finances. While these are interrelated, the article focuses on financial aspects, including the need for foreign assistance to finance the initial investment required. The peace dividend resulting from demilitarization could be used to provide a basic income grant to all adult citizens. We estimate that this would raise average incomes of the poorest 95 percent of households by around 20 percent per annum.

The concept of security sector reform (SSR) was introduced some 20 years ago by Clare Short, then U.K. Secretary of State for International Development. A decade later, a review of the experience of security sector reform efforts in Africa concluded that little reform had in fact taken place.¹ Another decade on, there still is little evidence of resource reallocations within the security sector in response to a more rational allocation of functions among the various components of the sector. The military has generally proven adept at maintaining, and often increasing, their share of national budgets and the question whether a country needs a military of a particular size, let alone whether it needs one at all, is almost never asked.

As shown in Table 1 there are, however, some 21 sovereign states without armed forces—15 with no official military forces and six without standing army but some form of limited military forces. Some of these states have never had military forces while others made a decision to demilitarize. Most are small island states with populations of less than 200,000 people although some are much larger. It has been argued that most small countries have virtually no capacity to maintain armed forces of any military usefulness and should therefore make alternative arrangements to meet their national security needs.²

In consequence, the argument presented in this article has most relevance to small countries.

Demilitarization may be total or partial and will very likely have two aspects. At the least, it will involve a significant and sustained reduction in the power and influence of the military indicated by reductions in military expenditure, military personnel, and the effectiveness or capacity of a military; the last is often termed force projection. Demilitarization may well go together with efforts to move toward a “culture of peace,” whereby a society emphasizes the nonviolent resolution of conflict and of personal and social justice. An alternative way of expressing this is via the concept of positive peace, which

Table 1: Countries without armed forces

No official military forces

Andorra, Dominica, Grenada, Kiribati, Liechtenstein, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Vatican State

No standing army but limited military capacity

Costa Rica, Iceland, Mauritius, Monaco, Panama, Vanuatu

Source: Wikipedia (2018).

can result from conscious and sustained efforts to address the underlying causes of conflict, be they interpersonal, intergroup, or international. Countries on such a path have the motive and opportunity to divert government expenditures from the military to expenditure categories such as health, education, and welfare, which further reinforces positive peace. A critical component of a commitment to a culture of peace and/or positive peace, as discussed later, is a constitutional change which bans the existence of a standing army.

Costa Rica's demilitarization

Following civil war, Costa Rica's decision to disband its military was formalized in Article 12 of its 1949 Constitution:

The Army as a permanent institution is abolished. There shall be the necessary police forces for surveillance and the preservation of the public order. Military forces may only be organized under a continental agreement or for the national defense; in either case, they shall always be subordinate to the civil power: they may not deliberate or make statements or representations individually or collectively.³

Internal security in Costa Rica is maintained by a range of uniformed forces, including the Public Forces, Judicial Police (investigative), Transit Police (transport), Municipal Police, DIS (intelligence), and the Coast Guard. For the purpose of national security, Costa Rica has opted for collective security under the Organization of the American States (OAS) and it is a signatory to the Inter-American Reciprocal Defence Treaty (TIAR). Costa Rica has invoked TIAR against invasion threats from neighboring states, particularly Nicaragua, in 1948, 1955, and 1978. In each instance, OAS intervention facilitated the signing of peace pacts between Costa Rica and Nicaragua which have proven reasonably durable. In 2018, the United Nations Court of Justice granted Costa Rica sovereignty over a coastal border area claimed by both countries. In recent years, the country has allowed U.S. military forces into its waters and ports to assist in the fight against drug trafficking, but this does not in any formal sense mean that the United States is a guarantor of Costa Rica's security.

For decades, the country has been known as a haven of peace, democracy, and prosperity in a region bedeviled by violence and insecurity. It operates a strictly neutral foreign

Table 2: Costa Rica and its neighbors

	Ranking			Share in GDP (%)		
	HDI	GPI	WHI	Health	Education	Military
Costa Rica	65	40	13	6.8	7	0
El Salvador	117	116	40	4.5	3.4	0.9
Guatemala	125	111	41	2.3	2.8	0.4
Honduras	130	118	30	2.5	5.9	1.6
Nicaragua	124	68	72	5.1	4.5	0.6
Panama	60	50	27	5.9	3.3	0

Sources: HDI (United Nations Development Program, 2018); GPI (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2017); WHI (Helliwell, Layard, and Sachs, 2017); Health and Education (United Nations Development Program, 2018); Military (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2018).

policy. From time to time, it has acted as a mediator in the conflicts of its neighbors and has helped to build democracy in the region and in the wider world. It hosts the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the United Nations University for Peace. Table 2 summarizes the country's ranking on some well-known indicators and expenditures on public health, public education, and the military, each as a proportion of its GDP, as compared to its neighbors. The only one of its neighbors which comes close to Costa Rica in terms of its ranking in the Human Development Index (HDI), the Global Peace Index (GPI), and the World Happiness Index (WHI) is Panama, which itself demilitarized in 1990, and Costa Rica's public expenditure on health and education as proportions of GDP is far higher.

Acknowledging the positives of his country's demilitarization, former president Oscar Sanchez noted that

[i]nternational development agencies recognize that Costa Rica today has a standard of living comparable to that of industrialised countries. It is universally accepted that the extraordinary advances of my country in the fields of education, health, housing and social welfare are basically due to the fact that we do not dedicate our resources to the purchase of arms. The absence of the army has strengthened the Costa Rica democracy system, making it one of the most consolidated democracies of Latin America. To us, these are the dividends that would be within the grasp of all third world countries if they did not dedicate a very important part of their resources to the purchasing of arms.⁴

To understand Costa Rica's socioeconomic success only in terms of tradeoffs between military and other expenditures may

be too simple. Costa Rica has had a long commitment to human rights and social democracy (for example, it abolished the death penalty as early as 1877 and banned the corporal punishment of children in 2008) which suggests that a combination of a mindset inclined to demilitarization along with expenditure (re)allocations is essential for a successful demilitarization. We will return to the importance of such a mindset later on.⁵

Thus far, we have shown that countries can survive—and some can thrive—without the presence of a military force. We now turn to considering whether demilitarization is appropriate and feasible for Lesotho.

The case for demilitarizing Lesotho

Lesotho is a small, landlocked country in southern Africa with a population of some 2.2 million people. Ranking 159th of the 189 countries reported on in the UNDP's Human Development Index, it has per capita gross national income, in 2018, of PPP\$3,255 (i.e., in purchasing power parity or international dollars). The most recent poverty data indicates that 59.6 percent of its population earns less than the international poverty line minimum of PPP1.90/day. Life expectancy is a scant 54.6 years and mean years of schooling are but 6.3.⁶

Three main reasons for the demilitarization of Lesotho can be identified, namely the lack of any significant need in terms of national security, a continual history of military interference with democratic processes, and—given the high levels of poverty—the high opportunity cost of the resources allocated to the military.⁷ First, the country is completely surrounded by South Africa, one of Africa's military superpowers. Assuming that it had reason to invade, with military expenditure in 2017 almost 70 times that of Lesotho, South Africa would easily overwhelm the Lesotho Defence Force (LDF) of some 3,000 soldiers. Lesotho's army must not be viewed as an end in itself. If it serves no significant security function, then its very existence needs to be reconsidered.⁸

Second, from its inception, the LDF has interfered with the democratic process and engaged in human rights abuse. Having survived without a military for 13 years following independence, the Lesotho Para-Military Force was forged out of the Police Mobile Unit (the riot squad) in 1979 and was used by the ruling party to thwart political opposition and strengthen its hold on power. In 1986, the military took over political power via a coup. Even after the return of the country to civilian rule in 1993, it continued to interfere in political processes, prompting the then-Prime Minister to include the military among “the five enemies of democracy” in the country. In April 1994, a group of soldiers took four government ministers hostage, resulting in the death of the

Not quite two dozens countries in the world are demilitarized. This article examines the case for demilitarization for Lesotho, a small country in southern Africa. Five necessary conditions for demilitarization are identified. The discussion suggests the implementation of a basic income grant to all adult citizens of Lesotho to best recycle the resources from demilitarization and advance the country's economic development prospects.

deputy prime minister. The prime minister called for assistance from the Commonwealth and South Africa to disarm the LDF but this only occurred (and even then, only partially) following military intervention by South Africa and Botswana under the auspices of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in 1998.⁹

In August 2014, members of the LDF stormed then-Prime Minister Thabane's official residence in what local and international commentators labeled an attempted coup. Thabane fled to South Africa but returned some days later under the guard of South African security personnel, against his own armed forces, until he vacated office following the 2015 elections. The LDF has also been racked by internal divisions and intrigues. In addition to many incidences of mutiny, two of its commanders were murdered by subordinates, in June 2015 and September 2017.

In response to the events of late 2014, SADC intervened to help build political and security sector stability in Lesotho. A standby force of 269 personnel was sent to the country in December 2017 to facilitate an environment conducive for the implementation of SADC decisions, including security sector reform. Most recently, SADC established the Lesotho National Dialogue and Stabilization Project to help develop a “roadmap” for constitutional and security sector reforms, scheduled for completion by May 2019.

Third, given the extent of poverty in the country, military expenditure comes with high opportunity costs. In 2017, Lesotho's military expenditure was USD52.6 million (in local currency, 698 million maloti), 70 percent of which consisted of personnel costs. In constant prices and exchange rates (2016 USD), the country's military expenditure has doubled in the 10 years from 2008 to 2017 and now represents 2.2 percent of GDP and 5.1 percent of government expenditure.¹⁰

Requirements for effective demilitarization

Demilitarization can occur in several ways. It might be forcefully imposed on a country in the hope that in due course its net benefits will become apparent to its citizens; or it might come about more gradually as a logical consequence of movement toward a culture of peace over time. In either case, the actual and perceived security needs of the country will need

to be taken into account. Five requirements, often interrelated, seem necessary for a successful demilitarization, namely widespread acceptance by the citizenry, a government which is willing to make the decision (preferably with the support of other political parties), a detailed plan for implementation, an implementing agency, and adequate finance. We briefly discuss each of these.¹¹

Widespread acceptance by citizens

A well-known UNESCO statement asserts that “[s]ince war begins in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.” Fundamentally, demilitarization needs a strong and widespread aspiration for a culture of peace as opposed to a culture of violence. Such a change may occur relatively quickly as the result of a crisis, as with Panama (which demilitarized in 1990 following the U.S. invasion) and Haiti (which disbanded its military in 1994 when a civilian government replaced the military government), or it may be more gradual and be built on careful planning. It may begin as a groundswell among the masses and/or it may be inspired by political leadership. It may be entirely indigenous or it may be supported by international agencies, NGOs, or governments.¹²

This change in mindset will involve a population feeling more secure. It is possible that this may occur simply by disbanding the military, as may have been the case in Haiti, but they may need to be convinced that other arrangements are being made. Of course, security has a much wider meaning than protection against the threat of invasion and the UNDP’s concept of human security includes economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security. If the narrow aspect of security is regarded as relatively unimportant by society—by comparison, say, with economic security—it may be possible to use resources released by demilitarization to build economic security. More generally, as alternative ways of achieving security are developed, feelings of security, widely defined, likely will increase. Neighbors can support a country’s decision to demilitarize, and help nurture the new mindset, by appropriate confidence-building measures, e.g., assurances of peaceful intent and perhaps statements about their own plans to demilitarize.

A willing government

The government of the day needs to be willing and able to make the decision to demilitarize. It might come to the decision largely on its own and then encourage its acceptance by citizens or it might act in response to pressure from below. It is highly desirable that the decision not be seen as belonging to

one particular political party but is promoted by most if not all parties. The importance of a constitutional change which does away with a standing army needs to be emphasized. In its absence, there is every possibility that a military will reappear in the future.

After decades of military interference in politics and many military coups, Haiti’s military was disbanded in 1995, following a referendum in which 62 percent of the population voted in favor of demilitarization. However, no change was made to the country’s constitution and, in 2017, remilitarization began with the recruitment of armed forces to assist with development projects, disaster relief, and border security.¹³

A detailed plan

Whether demilitarization is rapid or more gradual, it needs to be based on a detailed plan which meets the needs of society and uses appropriate means. That is, the process of demilitarization itself must reflect the new mindset, and specifically the need to manage or resolve conflict nonviolently and democratically. The benefit of a gradual approach is that a careful plan can be worked out; the danger is that countervailing forces may gain strength and the opportunity to demilitarize may be lost. In any case, the aforementioned constitutional change must form part of the plan.

An implementing agency

A plan will achieve nothing if it is not effectively implemented. The range of the tasks involved in demilitarization, and their complexity, means that they cannot be left to various government departments, each influenced by their own ethos and agendas. An organizational structure needs to be established, perhaps a National Ministry of Peacebuilding, to plan and implement the tasks of demilitarization. Six countries have such a ministry—Costa Rica, the Solomon Islands, Nepal, Timor Leste, South Sudan and, since late 2018, Ethiopia—each set up under different circumstances and performing different functions. Of necessity, this would need to be a senior ministry, staffed by personnel committed to a demilitarized society.¹⁴

Financing demilitarization

It is tempting to think that demilitarization will result in an immediate “peace dividend” which is available for other government purposes. However, the experience of reduced military expenditure during the 1990s, when much of the saved expenditures went to reduce government budget deficits, shows that this is by no means certain. In addition, disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) efforts that accompany demilitarization are complex and expensive

processes and need to be well planned and funded in order to avoid the real possibility that ex-combatants will recommence fighting or turn to crime and banditry. Where demobilization follows the end of a war, some sources of wartime finance, including war taxes and the cavalier exploitation of natural resources, may no longer be available. Almost certainly, foreign financial aid will need to be tapped. Cost categories include DDR, compensation of former soldiers (e.g., financial payouts, reintegration training), providing for alternative ways to achieve national security, and meeting secondary tasks previously performed by the military. These apply whether demilitarization follows the end of a war or during a time of peace. The main potential sources of finance include, on the domestic front, saved expenditures (the peace dividend), taxation, selling government bonds (borrowing from the public), and the sale of military assets, and, for the foreign side, development assistance (NGOs and bi- and multilateral aid) and as well borrowing from commercial banks (with private and/or public guarantees).

The first two cost categories can be considered as necessary investments in successful demilitarization. Disarming and demobilizing need to be well-organized (there are numerous examples of failures around the world) but are the lesser of the two in terms of cost and time. We focus here on the costs of compensating former soldiers for their loss of employment, which would have to at least meet the requirements of Lesotho's Labour Code Order, 1992. The Code allows for dismissals, among other reasons, "... based on the operational requirements of the undertaking, establishment or service" and stipulates a severance payment equivalent to two week's wages for each completed year of continuous service with the employer (see Table 3). A more generous approach would be to pay each of the LDF personnel the equivalent of, say, two years of their present gross income. The approximate total costs of these two approaches are M152 million (USD12.1 million) and M789 million (USD59.3 million), respectively. A combination of the two, to meet the Labour Code Order requirements, and pay one year of present gross income, would cost M546.2 million (USD41.1 million). Such amounts would probably need to come from foreign assistance.¹⁵

Linking demilitarization to poverty reduction

One of the arguments for demilitarizing Lesotho concerns the opportunity cost of military expenditure. It is a very poor country; almost 60 percent of its population live below the international poverty line of PPP\$1.90/day. What follows is a proposal for a basic income grant (BIG) payable to all adult citizens and financed by the savings from demilitarization. The detail involved in applying a BIG to Lesotho is the subject of

Table 3: Payouts to LDF personnel following disbandment

Scenario 1 (following Lesotho's Labour Code Order, 1992)
Assuming wages makes up 56.5 percent of annual military expenditure and that LDF personnel have an average length of service of 10 years, the total cost of a one-off payout would be M151.8 million (USD11.4 million).

Scenario 2 (paying two years' of present gross income to each LDF member)
Assuming wages makes up 56.5 percent of annual military expenditure, the total cost of a one-off payout would be M789 million (USD59.3 million).

Scenario 3 (following the Labour Code Order plus one year present gross income for each LDF member)
M151.8 million plus M394.4 million or M546.2 million total (USD41.1 million).

another article in preparation. Here we sketch out the broad picture.¹⁶

A BIG is "a modest amount of money paid unconditionally to individuals on a regular basis (for example, monthly). It is often called a universal basic income (UBI) because it is intended to be paid to all." Not fundamentally aimed at poverty reduction *per se*, but providing psychological security in a way that a means-tested, behavior-tested, or non-universal system of benefits cannot, BIG is about economic security for a population at large. It also promotes worthy objectives like social justice, freedom, and equality. Other potential benefits include its emancipatory value and the development of agency.¹⁷

Opponents of BIGs have four main concerns—that they are unaffordable, reduce incentives to work, result in wasteful expenditures, and reduce social cohesion and reciprocity—but recent reviews of the experience of BIG-type programs worldwide report very positive outcomes. In the words of one review, "[c]ash transfers have arguably the strongest existing evidence base among anti-poverty tools, with dozens of high-quality evaluations of cash transfer programs spanning Africa, Asia and Latin America." Its summary of this evidence is that cash transfers result in improved health and education, lead to higher incomes in the long term, and are not used on wasteful "temptation" expenditures.¹⁸

Two significant African BIG experiments (one completed, one ongoing) are worth noting. The first basic income pilot in a developing country was in a Namibian village of around 1,000 people in 2008–9. All village members, including children but not those over 60 already receiving a pension, received a monthly payment of some USD12, around a third of the poverty line. Before versus after comparisons indicated better nutrition and health, especially among children, higher

school attendance, a substantial decrease in petty economic crime (e.g., food theft), increased economic activity, lower expenditure on alcohol, and an enhanced status for women. Village members, on their own initiative, set up a committee to advise people on spending and saving matters.¹⁹

In November 2017, a long-term randomized control experiment began in Kenya. Villages were randomly assigned to a control group (whose residents received no cash transfers) or to one of three treatment groups. The first treatment group villages are receiving an amount equivalent to half the average income in rural Kenya each month for 12 years; the second are receiving the same amount for two years; and the third have received a single lump-sum payment equal to the two year basic income.²⁰

An estimate of a possible BIG for all adults in Lesotho—using the expenditure currently allocated to the LDF—is summarized in Table 4. This is based on data from the 2010/11 Household Budget Survey, the most recent available, which estimated average household income for the poorest 94.3 percent of the population at M4,853 (USD346) per year. If the M698 million (USD53 million) currently spent on the military were allocated instead to all adults, assuming two adults per household, then the average household income of the poorest households would increase by M954 (USD68) per year, i.e., a gain of almost 20 percent.²¹

A considerable proportion of payouts to the LDF and to the BIG would flow back to government in the form of income- and value-added taxes. A rough estimate of the former, assuming a Scenario 3 payout (Table 3), is M137 million (USD10.3 million) from income taxes, plus M43 million (USD3.2 million) from VAT as one-off recoupments. Those individuals who pay income tax will also pay tax on their BIG receipts (M17.5 million; USD1.3 million), and all recipients will pay VAT to the extent that they spend their BIG payments (M71.4 million; USD5.4 million); both BIG-related taxes will be recouped each year.

Conclusion

Two of the major challenges facing Lesotho are high levels of poverty and the negative involvement of the LDF in political matters. This article has argued the case for both, demilitarization and a basic income grant for all adult citizens and has shown how the latter can be financed from the savings made by demilitarizing. Both suggestions are subject to critiques, addressed earlier in the article.

Some important questions remain, particularly with respect to timing. Should demilitarization be imposed with the hope that its net benefits would become apparent to the population in the future or should a long-term process of building a culture

Table 4: Financing a basic income grant for Lesotho

Military expenditure, 2017	M698 mn (USD53 mn)
Population, 2018	2.2 mn (1.46mn adults)
Households, 2010/11	426,000 (typically 2 adults, 3 children)
Household income, 2010/11	Overall average household income was M12,827/year (USD964), with 94.3% earning less than M36,000 (USD2,707)/year. For these households, average income was M4,853/year (USD365).
Basic income grant	M477/adult; M954/household (USD36/72), a 19.7% increase in average household income per year for 94.3% of households.

of peace be undertaken in the hope that it would result in a future consensus to demilitarize? More specifically, would a 20 percent increase in average household income for 94 percent of households be enough to persuade them to support demilitarization? Would LDF personnel be happy with one or the other of the payout scenarios outlined in Table 3? And is government willing to make the decision to disband the LDF? However these questions are answered, the case for the demilitarization of Lesotho is clear to us.

Notes

1. Bendix and Stanley (2008).
2. Hill (2000); Harris (2004a, pp. 193–196).
3. Quoted in Peters (2013, p. 185).
4. Quoted in Harris (2008, pp.82–83).
5. On Costa Rica's story, see Harris (2004a).
6. UNDP (2018).
7. Letsie (2018).
8. Easily overwhelm: SIPRI (2018). LDF: The LDF does perform some functions unrelated to national security, e.g., disaster relief, assisting with medical emergencies, rural engineering works, and some policing functions. However, these occur to a very limited extent and almost certainly could be performed more cost effectively by more specialized government entities.
9. Quote from: Mothibe (1999, p. 48).
10. SIPRI (2018).
11. Taken into account: Harris (2004b).

12. UNESCO quote: Opening statement of the UNESCO Constitution. http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=15244%26URL_DO=DO_TOPIC%26URL_SECTION=201.html [accessed 7 March 2019].
13. Haiti-FLASH (2017a; 2017b).
14. Ministry of Peacebuilding: See Harris (2019).
15. Labor code: See <http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/WEBTEXT/31536/64865/E92LSO01.htm> [accessed 7 March 2019].
16. International poverty line: UNDP (2016, p. 218).
17. See Standing (2017, pp. 65, 314; the quote is from p. 3).
18. Positive outcomes: McFarland (2017); Standing (2017). Quote: GiveDirectly (2018).
19. Haarmann, *et al.* (2009).
20. GiveDirectly (2018).
21. Budget survey: Lesotho Bureau of Statistics and United Nations Development Program (2014).

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