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Legislatures play an integral role in advancing national security by ensuring priorities align with citizen interests, budgets are allocated to meet priorities, and adequate oversight exists for the effective use of these resources.

Legislatures play critical roles in democratic societies to set national priorities and oversee the effective implementation of government policies. This especially pertains to issues of security, which are among the most consequential responsibilities of any government. The Africa Center for Strategic Studies spoke with the Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the Right Honorable Dr. Abbas Tajudeen, to gain his insights on the role of legislatures in advancing security in Africa.

HOW DO LEGISLATIVE BODIES CONTRIBUTE TO SECURITY?

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Legislatures play a critical role in democratic control of the security sector and in sustaining the interface between civilians and security sector experts to deepen mutual understanding and cooperation. The legislature consists of the people's direct representatives and is at the core of democratic governance. Through these representatives, the people become involved in governance and decision-making. Similarly, the legislature allows the people, including the security actors, to hold the government accountable. The essence of democratic governance of the security sector is the involvement of the people, through their elected representatives, in the management and oversight of the actions and activities of the security sector. Civilian, democratic control of the sector means that the ultimate authority on security issues and decisions rests solely with elected civilian representatives who draw their powers from the constitution and related statutes.

Based on the foregoing, the collaboration between the national assembly, security and defense sector officials, and the public is not only desirable but also constitutionally mandated and expected. Such synergy is crucial for several reasons. As legislators representing all 360 federal constituencies of Nigeria, we can offer insights into public expectations of security agencies and specific challenges facing our constituencies. Our knowledge of the grassroots can assist in improving the decision-making in the sector and ensure that the laws we pass and the funding we provide are adequate. Conversely, security officials bring specialized knowledge of strategic threats, operational capabilities, and intelligence assessments, which the legislature needs to make informed decisions.

Institutionally, the legislature is vested with powers to make appropriations for the funding of the security sector and ensure judicious use of appropriated funds. In Nigeria, the legislature equally regulates the deployment of Nigerian troops as well as the appointment of Service Chiefs.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE UNIQUE WAYS THAT CIVILIAN LEADERS CAN STRENGTHEN SECURITY IN AFRICA TODAY?

Many of the drivers of Africa's security challenges are intrasocietal in nature—involving issues like exclusion, insufficient social cohesion, and inconsistent application of the rule of law. Such challenges will not be resolved through security forces. Rather, they require collaborative whole-of-government efforts. Civilian leaders are also uniquely placed to engage communities facing tensions to find acceptable compromises while proactively providing a shared vision that helps unify citizens at the local, state, and national level.

Security challenges have significant implications, not only within our borders but also across West Africa and the broader African continent. The persistence and complexity of these issues underscore the critical need for regional and continental collaboration. Collaborative efforts are essential to address the transnational nature of terrorism, facilitate intelligence sharing, and harmonize economic and social development strategies that can mitigate the root causes of insecurity.

The imperative for effective democratic governance of the security sector is underscored by the integral link between security and sustainable development. The former is a prerequisite for the latter's realization. When the state ensures the physical security of its people, they are better able to strive for and achieve sustainable livelihoods. Consequently, expenditure on security and the efficiency of government agencies in protecting individuals from violence are critical to human development.

The legislature plays a pivotal role in this framework by ensuring that national security laws are current, aligned with best practices, and attuned to the population's needs.

HOW DOES THE ENGAGEMENT OF LEGISLATURES ENHANCE SECURITY SECTOR EFFECTIVENESS?

Partnership between democratic institutions and security sector leaders is essential for upholding the rule of law.

In addition to facilitating collaboration with security leaders, the legislature enhances the effectiveness of security efforts by overseeing and guiding the activities of our security sector, allocating needed resources, and shaping policies that govern national security. A robust partnership between democratic institutions and security sector leaders is essential for upholding the rule of law, protecting human rights, and safeguarding national interests. We must work hand in hand with security sector leaders to ensure that our defense capabilities are robust, effective, and aligned with the needs of our nation. Enhancing collaboration between parliament and security agencies can strengthen accountability, transparency, and effectiveness in our national security efforts.

WHY IS ACCOUNTABILITY OF THE SECURITY SECTOR SO VITAL TO ENSURE THE PUBLIC INTEREST?

The legislature is fundamental to overseeing security and intelligence agencies to ensure they adhere to democratic principles and values and safeguard the public interest. This oversight primarily involves legislative supervision of the policies and programs of these agencies. The legislature not only enacts laws regulating the security sector but also ensures their proper implementation and assesses their effectiveness. Legislative oversight is wide-ranging and encompasses the implementation of legislation, compliance with international standards, and financial control.

In Nigeria, for example, Chapter 1 of the 1999 Constitution emphasizes the legislature's role in civilian oversight of the security sector. Section 214 empowers the national assembly to oversee the organization and administration of the Nigerian police force, while Section 217 allows it to regulate the equipment and maintenance of the armed forces. Additionally, while the president determines the operational use of the armed forces, Sections 218(1) and 218(4) grant the national assembly the authority to legislate on the powers of the commander-in-chief and the appointment, promotion, and discipline of military personnel. Importantly, defense and security are listed under the Constitution's Exclusive Legislative List, solidifying the national assembly's control over these areas.

Toward this end, security sector agencies should commit to open communication, regularly providing accurate and detailed reports to the national assembly. This includes adhering to legal and ethical standards and facilitating external audits and evaluations. This practice has become increasingly institutionalized in Nigeria where the respective service chiefs, the inspector general of police, and the heads of our security agencies are regularly cooperating fully with the House of Representatives. Their dedication to professionalism and responsiveness to our invitations for engagement at various levels, including committee activities, appearances at plenaries, and participation in House activities, such as the National Dialogue on State Policing, are commendable.

Since the return to civilian rule in 1999, legislative control of the security sector in Nigeria has progressively improved. Our standing committees have become more assertive in holding security sector agencies and actors to account. The scope of the activities of these committees has included monitoring the funds the government has budgeted for the sector, ensuring accountability in the use of allocated funds and personnel, and overseeing other issues such as hardware, human rights, etc.

HOW DO OTHER CIVILIAN ACTORS COMPLEMENT AND ADD TO THE LEGISLATURE'S EFFORTS TO ENSURE ACCOUNTABILITY OF THE SECURITY SECTOR?

While the legislature is the principal body for overseeing the democratic control of the security sector, multiple stakeholders also contribute to this oversight. Executive oversight is the initial level of control. This involves developing and implementing security policies and programs. Other important contributors include autonomous bodies such as audit

institutions, ombudspersons, and civil society organizations (CSOs), which often bring specialized knowledge and technical expertise to evaluate and scrutinize sector activities. Over the years, the national assembly has enhanced its oversight capacity by utilizing the expertise, analysis, and recommendations of CSOs, particularly in legislative processes where their inputs have informed amendments and the development of new legislations. Moreover, the media is crucial in raising awareness about security issues and facilitating communication between the government and citizens.

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS THAT LEGISLATURES CAN IMPROVE THEIR SUPPORT TO AND OVERSIGHT OF THE SECURITY SECTOR?

Effective information sharing between security agencies and the national assembly is crucial for enhancing legislative oversight. In fact, the lifeblood of oversight in the security sector is information without which we cannot fulfill our mandate. When security agencies transparently provide relevant, timely information, national assemblies are better equipped to scrutinize policies, evaluate performance, and ensure accountability. This flow of information aids in crafting laws that address current security challenges and in assessing the impact and compliance with existing laws.

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Additionally, this collaboration can assist us in identifying gaps in security infrastructure and in aligning security practices with national and international legal standards. Overall, robust information sharing is key to fostering a more informed, responsive, and accountable legislative process as it concerns security. Emerging good practices include enacting reforms that allow security agencies to regularly report to parliament, establishing independent audit mechanisms for defense expenditures, and ensuring greater transparency in procurement processes within the security sector.

A good case in point relates to the powers of the Nigerian legislature over security sector funding. Legal frameworks empower the legislature to pass money bills, authorize expenditures from the Consolidated Revenue Fund for federal and state levels through appropriation acts, and mandate that no federal spending occurs without its approval. Additionally, the national assembly can amend budgets and withhold funding from non-compliant agencies.

Legislatures can also better support security actors through institutional capacity strengthening. Targeted capacity-building programs for security officials and legislators can help bridge knowledge gaps and equip legislators with the necessary skills to fulfil their oversight responsibilities effectively. While legislators need to develop a better understanding of effective security sector governance, security agencies also require capacity strengthening to understand the importance of democratic control of security agencies and actors.

For their part, CSOs and the public can bolster these efforts by maintaining active engagement with legislative processes, offering independent assessments, and voicing concerns or recommendations. Furthermore, CSOs can help bridge the information gap between the public and parliament, advocating for policy changes and greater public participation in security matters.

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By facilitating inclusive dialogues and public forums, CSOs can ensure that diverse viewpoints and community needs are communicated to lawmakers. We expect CSOs and development partners to provide expert analyses, data-driven insights, empirical evidence, and international best practices to enrich our debates and decision-making. It is also important for the media to amplify such discussions, ensuring widespread public engagement and transparency. This collaborative approach will inform legislators with a broad spectrum of opinions and experiences to help us tailor security policies and laws to reflect the actual needs and aspirations of the citizenry.

Security institutions should prioritize transparency and accountability by systematically preparing and presenting detailed reports and briefings to the national assembly. CSOs and think tanks should support this process by conducting independent research and analysis and sharing findings that could prompt further inquiry or legislative action. Meanwhile, I call on the media to focus on rigorous reporting and coverage of security sector activities, highlighting compliance and discrepancies in officials' engagements with the legislature.

Through this multifaceted approach, we can foster a more transparent environment leading to better governance and enhanced public trust in security institutions.

HOW CAN LEGISLATURES EFFECTIVELY ALLOCATE BUDGETS AND OVERSEE SECURITY AGENCIES WHILE MAINTAINING THE SECRECY NEEDED TO ENSURE THE EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF SOME SECURITY MEASURES?

A major difficulty legislators face in considering and exercising oversight over security budgets is the defense budget's secrecy. To circumvent this problem, I recommend that we draw lessons from South Korea, which has successfully managed the need for both confidentiality and transparency in the defense budget. They achieved this by splitting the security budget into three categories, depending on the degree of secrecy required. Category A budget items are presented to the entire National Assembly in aggregated form. Category B items are disaggregated and revealed without restrictions to the members of the National Assembly's National Defense Committee. Category C items are further disaggregated and revealed to the National Defense Committee with certain restrictions. Such categorization enables the scrutiny of all aspects of the defense budget without compromising national security.

A second challenge the legislature faces in providing oversight of security budgets is the technical and bulky nature of such budgets, which often are too complex and opaque for legislators, given their competing priorities. Access to information is only useful to the extent that we, as legislators or our staff, can analyze the information obtained. To this effect, the legislature and its committees require adequate funding and human resources, particularly when tasked with in-depth oversight of the activities of security agencies. This gap emphasizes the need for a robust secretariat with adequate and competent staff.

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ANY FINAL WORDS?

Let me reiterate Nigeria's steadfast dedication to national security. The House is fully prepared to engage with all relevant stakeholders to bolster our collective security efforts. Our commitment also reaches beyond our national borders as we strive to foster stability and peace throughout the region and across the African continent.