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TOPIC

*“What type of leadership is required for the senior
military chain of command to meet the challenges of
the security sector in Africa?”*

SPEAKER:

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Excellency, Ambassador Bellamy, Director of the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS); Members of the ACSS Staff; honored guests; and esteemed officers attending the 2010 session of the Next Generation of African Military Leaders Course:

I should first like to express my deep appreciation to the ACSS Director and to his entire staff for conferring upon me the honor and providing me with the opportunity to address such a distinguished audience this morning. As Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of an African nation, Burkina Faso, and as a former ACSS participant, this is a unique and uplifting opportunity for me, and I can only hope that I will be able to measure up to the confidence that has been placed in me.

Distinguished guests and esteemed officers,

Defense and security forces, acting as a sovereign instrument in the exercise of the authority and power of a State or a Kingdom have often, under varying circumstances and at specific times, played roles that have been as decisive as they have been controversial in the history of nations. Fairly recent examples, occurring in the wake of serious political and institutional crises, whether in the Latin American country of Honduras, Kosovo in Europe, Sri Lanka in Asia, or Guinea in Africa, serve to illustrate this fact and to show that this situation extends to every continent.

After so many African countries gained their independence one after another, beginning in the 1960s and continuing through the 1990s, Africa became a prime example of chronic regional instability. And when grave political crises became coups, armed insurrections, or tragic confrontations, with the massacre of local populations, and even civil wars, and with disastrous consequences, defense and security forces (DSF) were key players and had a decisive role in these events in a number of countries.

This situation, combined with a certain degree of complicity from the outside, explained by the ideological struggle taking place between the Eastern and Western blocs, was long considered a manifestation of national sovereignty over domestic issues, and commonly accepted as an established right that was even recognized as such on the international level.

In the present-day environment, marked by profound changes resulting from significant progress in democracy-building and human rights, an obligation now universally and unanimously proclaimed, this chaotic state of affairs is no longer acceptable. Nonetheless, the path towards democracy, stability, peace, and development still seems long and fraught with obstacles on the African continent, with numerous challenges to overcome, for many different, persistent reasons that take many different forms.

But does this mean that we should despair of ever seeing a new Africa born in either the medium or the long term, as those inveterate Afro-pessimists seem to want to believe? Surely not, since there are already glimmers of hope to be seen on the political horizon. Acting on this conviction, just how should African defense and security forces, as instruments of State authority and legally empowered to use force, conduct themselves and play their assigned role, under the command and leadership of the senior military echelons, in a way that they can nurture such hope and ensure that it comes to fruition?

Distinguished guests, esteemed officers,

The challenges facing the defense and security sector are numerous and originate from both within and outside the sector itself. In both cases, the nature and the quality of the command and leadership exercised by the senior officers constituting the entire chain of command, in their mission to establish a “new military governance,” are what determines the ability to effectively address those challenges. In any given country, however, the expression of a strong political will and respect for the rules of democratic governance by all the socio-political stakeholders of that country are the true catalysts that will make it possible to attain that level of effectiveness. Also important are the degree and the manner in which the defense and security sector is subordinate to political authority, and the level and the quality of the control exercised, with specificity and sensitivity, by such authority and by civil society over the sector.

So that we can more effectively address this issue in terms of the African continent, we must try to determine, as we identify and examine the principal challenges, the directions, and the areas of focus on which the chain of command could base its leadership role and the actions it could take to better meet these challenges, which I have classified under five major headings:

- Establishing national, rationally organized defense and security forces;
- Building professional defense and security forces;
- Implementing a culture of republican values within the defense and security forces;
- Improving civil-military relations; and
- Addressing the complexity of external factors.

Challenge No. 1: Establishing national, rationally organized defense and security forces

Some African defense and security forces, with all their component parts, are characterized by the fact that they were established without any basic constituent document, or text based on such document, that clearly sets forth their missions and defines the rules of deployment for the various entities comprising them. This situation leads to many problems, and causes great confusion in terms of identifying their purpose, defining their configuration, and determining the resources and the tasks assigned to them. In the field, this often results in military and paramilitary forces that are insufficiently organized and poorly equipped, with lopsided troop numbers, either too numerous or too few, and thus difficult to manage and control.

Another problem occurs when defense and security forces are designated by ethnic group, region, or clan, as is the case in a considerable number of African countries. They become an instrument used to arbitrarily put down those on the other side, whether minority or majority groups. Then we face the critical issue of characterizing these forces as a national entity.

Unfortunately, the regional and sub-regional crises occurring in recent years in Africa give every indication that this phenomenon is still a matter of great concern for the continent.

It is important for each State to remedy these structural and organizational deficiencies and weaknesses. The best way to do so is to bring together all the key stakeholders of a country and all its vital forces in an effort to find suitable and pertinent solutions. With this in mind, it is the role and the duty of the senior chain of command in charge of the nation's defense and security forces to serve as a clearinghouse for pertinent and constructive proposals and suggestions for:

- Defining a clear and pertinent national defense policy;
- Establishing suitable concepts and doctrines for the use of force;
- Adopting rational structures for defense and security forces;
- Implementing a transparent recruiting system which, with the needs of the armed forces in mind, covers all the country's regions and ethnic components in a non-discriminatory, fair, and equitable fashion, and addresses the issue of gender without resorting to demagoguery or myth; and
- Establishing appropriate infrastructures and equipment, etc.

In implementing these initiatives, we must not lose sight of the need to rely on defense and security forces that are adapted to the actual capabilities and needs of the country in question.

In this regard, some countries of Africa have made this issue of restructuring their defense and security forces one of their priorities, which is a positive sign that should be encouraged.

Defense and security forces that are truly national develop and strengthen within themselves their common destiny, their sense of fraternity without discrimination, unity, and patriotism, which are all virtues capable of fostering the individual and collective commitment needed to ensure a successful mission based on cohesion, stability, and peace.

Once the structural and organizational framework has been reinforced, the goal will be to strive towards establishing professional defense and security forces.

Challenge No. 2: Building Professional Defense and Security Forces

Order, discipline, know-how, and rigorous standards have always been the mainstays of any effective defense and security force that seeks to set an example for others of its professionalism. The scenes of mutiny, looting, and violence of every sort that troops in ragged fatigues can still be seen committing in Africa in no way reflect the image of a professional DSF.

A professional defense and security force is reflected, on an individual level, by the adoption of the basic ethical and professional values that must guide the thoughts and actions of the troops. Such ethical and professional values generally shared within defense and security forces include, for example:

- Loyalty to the nation and to the armed forces;
- A sense of duty;
- Selfless service; and
- Integrity.

These values must be reinforced by an approach to troop management that is devoid of any arbitrary decision-making and is characterized by a strict adherence to rules and justice, **with merit and performance the only determining factors**. Areas that require special attention on the part of troop leaders in this regard are those relating to promotions, competitive selection and testing, rewards and compensation, punishments, decorations, designation to serve on missions, and appointments to positions of responsibility, among others. To that end, leadership is one of the fundamental qualities needed to maintain a balanced force, through the exercise of authority by example, devoid of all favoritism, weakness, and demagoguery.

Besides an impeccable outward appearance that regular supplies of regulation uniforms will ensure, special attention should also be paid to the social aspect of the military, which is generally left to fend for itself. For example, a social services network is needed to provide support to the military in such varied areas as counseling, retraining to ensure a successful and dignified reentry into society, retirement, and management of family affairs.

The aim is to help keep the concerns and anxieties of the troops to a minimum, and to reduce their vulnerability, thus ensuring their readiness to serve, equilibrium, and well-being on the social level so that they can devote themselves fully and successfully to their service on the professional level.

This psychological support must be buttressed by ongoing high-level training that encompasses all aspects of the profession. The acquisition of professional skills must be the underlying principle governing any organization that seeks to operate effectively and obtain the best results, which is why this must be one of the priorities of the command structure. Professional skills are acquired through objective selection and orientation, meaningful, planned, and appropriate training, and by the proper use of human, material, and financial resources.

To that end, the chain of command must play a major role in drafting appropriate training materials and must be skilled in training and instruction. In this specific area, property targeted and dynamic military cooperation must be developed not only between developed and developing countries, but also between the latter as well to ensure enhanced DSF professionalism. The mastery of information and communication technologies and a willingness to embrace ideas from the outside are also absolute requirements for the chain of command.

Lastly, professionalism requires that senior officers know how to listen, to be there for their troops, and to set an example for them, in addition to strict transparency in the management of financial and material resources. If this is achieved, it will constitute an excellent defense against embezzlement and corruption, which are another example of the gangrene that is eating away at a number of African countries and their defense and security forces.

If such measures are seriously implemented, they should be reflected, on the individual troop level, by a sense of professional duty, responsibility, and competence that every soldier should feel when he assumes a position of responsibility, and by observance of the rules in peacetime and in time of war.

On the collective level, professionalism is characterized by esprit de corps, solidarity, and effective and complementary actions.

Professionalism and professional ethics allow defense and security forces to rise to the challenges of the missions that their country assigns to them. In a democracy, however, these missions can and must only be accomplished in the observance of republican values.

Challenge No. 3: Respect for Republican Values

Endowed with the capacity to employ force under the Constitution, the components of any defense and security forces inspired by republican values must earn the trust and respect of the nation and the citizens they are called upon to protect and defend, and with whom they must be identified. To that end, such forces in their entirety must represent, to the highest degree, the ideals of **national unity, patriotism, readiness to serve, and impartiality**, holding themselves above partisan bickering of a political or religious nature; in short, they must reflect an exemplary republican spirit, especially during the most critical times for a nation and its people. In a democratic form of government, these qualities are most clearly required during periods of elections, labor unrest, and other demonstrations of the exercise of rights and freedoms. Unfortunately, the values most universally shared by security and defense forces in Africa are not inspired by a spirit of republicanism.

To achieve that spirit, the actions of the senior DSF command should focus in particular on four main goals:

First, striving to achieve, on the national level and for each component of the nation's defense and security forces, a legal framework consistent with the demands of the rule of law and reflected in the field and in actual fact by the primacy of the nation's political authority over the armed forces and acceptance of the principle that the armed forces are controlled by the country's political powers. This basic requirement must be reinforced by the non-politicization of the armed forces and by their neutrality as an institution, to ensure its impartiality in the accomplishment of its missions under the law.

Second, ensuring that the nation's defense and security forces are a genuinely national force and a melting pot containing all of the country's ethnic and social components, administered fairly and impartially on a daily basis. Such actions generate a deep-rooted love and commitment, both individually and collectively, which may even inspire a feeling of sacrifice and readiness to defend the interest of the nation and its people.

Third, in terms of training and with respect to military ethics, providing the armed forces with a solid grounding in civics, human rights, and international humanitarian law. This will serve as the foundation for a professional, technically skilled, properly equipped defense and security force that will accomplish its mission in observance of the law.

Fourth, controlling the use of force by ensuring that the conduct of security agents and soldiers is exemplary at all times, in all venues, and under all circumstances. If the local populations being served are to show any consideration and respect and have any positive opinion of the role and the place of the defense and security forces within their country, violence, racketeering, and other types of harassment of the local populace must be eliminated. The chain of command must without question strive to incorporate all aspects of

human security into the sphere of responsibility of the defense and security force in its entirety.

Despite, however, the best efforts expended on one side or the other, relations between the military and civilian populations in Africa are not always conducive to establishing mutual trust. An effort should therefore be made to improve this situation so as to ensure better understanding and to solidify the role, inspired by republican values, of the defense and security forces in a nation governed by the rule of law.

Challenge No. 4: Improving Civil-Military Relations

Whenever African civilians and members of the military have had the opportunity to meet at international events, it is often noted that a huge gulf exists between those possessing the same nationality and living in the same country, in terms of the relations between these two social groups that would normally be thought to complement each other perfectly.

Sadly, however, the reality is that in most African countries, relations between civilians and the military are characterized by deep prejudicial feelings and taboos based primarily on ignorance and mistrust. This state of affairs is quite often explained by a lack of communication stemming from the existence of a state of exception, and by the fact that on the national level, there are few, if any, forums for cooperation and exchange where civilians and the military can freely meet and discuss, with complete trust, national issues of common interest.

Such forums, whether government or non-government in nature, would be just what is needed to gain a better knowledge and understanding of one another and to establish a culture of dialogue between civilians and the military. They would make it possible to exchange views and to gain a deeper insight into issues relating to the organization and use of defense and security forces, and could also serve to debate and discuss multi-sectoral approaches to national strategy.

Lastly, in time of crisis in a particular country, the existence of such forums for civilian and military participants could contribute to finding consensus-based, appropriate solutions for resolving the crisis in a timely manner and for salvaging the situation.

Experiments in bringing senior-level civilians and military officers together that have taken place on university campuses with strategic planning sessions in such countries as Nigeria, South Africa, and Egypt should be extended to include other African countries or groups of countries, to ensure greater effectiveness and impact on the African continent. Seminars and other programs held each year by the ACSS and other, similar organizations should be included as part of these same initiatives. More specifically, the existence of coordinating units or simple exchange programs between the senior officers of the various DSF components in a given country would help to ensure that the actions undertaken on each side are coordinated and complementary.

Establishing a closer relationship between defense and security forces and the nation in general must be an ongoing priority of the military and paramilitary command, whose duty it is to choose an appropriate communication strategy that can open the barracks to the public and the media with a view to strengthening and promoting mutual understanding and trust.

Critically, African defense and security forces must undergo reform if new challenges are to be addressed. Any significant progress in this area, however, in terms of new governance within the DSF, will depend in large measure on whether complex issues involving factors external to these forces can be resolved.

Challenge No. 5: Addressing the Complexity of External Factors

Distinguished guests, esteemed officers,

The tendency to demonize the military and to blame it for the conflicts and violence afflicting the African continent gradually seems to be giving way now to constitutional coups and other popular insurrections. Indeed, as a popular saying puts it so well, “the fish rots from the head down.” If we assume that the armed forces are subsidiary to political authority, then the example must come from above, i.e., from those holding political power. In other words, the level of adherence to republican values within the defense and security forces in a given country depends to a great extent on the quality of the political leadership, all parties and leanings considered. Unfortunately, we can cite many examples in Africa that are hardly encouraging. Sectarianism and individual self-interest often take precedence over the interest of the community or even the nation. In order to hang onto power or to claim victory in elections deemed fraudulent or lost, some are prepared to violate the constitution and to destroy the country, with no thought to the serious danger and harm that could befall the populace and the unity of the nation.

In Africa, attempts to manipulate or take over military and paramilitary units by political entities are common occurrences—moves designed to foment discontent or even uprisings among DSF personnel are often started by spreading serious rumors and other false information cleverly filtered by some of the press media. It even happens that some well-off, power-hungry politicians pay to have their own militia or set up their own self-defense force, tailored to their own needs, to help them realize their dark ambitions.

This is what has happened in most of the recent or current conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Côte d’Ivoire, Liberia, Uganda, Somalia, and other countries, where irregular forces, armed gangs, and other private militias have played the predominant role. Not only are they responsible for the outbreak of the conflicts, they are also their main instigators. These irregular forces, which sometimes manage to put the traditional or loyalist armed forces to rout, are a force to be reckoned with in Africa and the most complex factor in the equation to be solved. Quite often they have received only meager training by trainers lacking in professionalism, making a mockery of the most basic rules of military discipline and international humanitarian law.

Furthermore, the role of mercenaries and the matter of persistent intervention by certain major powers with a view to exacerbating internal conflicts for strategic, economic, or other motives, are often raised as issues in Africa, whether rightly or wrongly so. These issues have become increasingly recurrent and crucial. What the regular local forces cannot or dare not do is entrusted to mercenaries, who are motivated solely by the desire to make money by fulfilling the terms of the contract assigned to them by the sponsor. This is a dangerous alternative because it tends to privatize the defense and security sector and to trivialize the national armed forces.

From the United Nations to the African Union, and including such international and subregional organizations as the European Union (EU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), and others, the primary concern has been to develop legal instruments for strengthening democracy and peace in the African continent, as, for example:

- The African Union: the African Charter of Democracy, Elections, and Governance, adopted by the AU Assembly on January 30, 2007;
- ECOWAS: the Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance Supplementary to the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security, adopted by the Conference of Heads of State and Government on December 21, 2001.

It should be noted, however, that ratification by signatory countries is an extremely slow process that delays and obstructs implementation. Increasingly, though, we can observe the arrival on the international political scene of a new generation of influential national leaders who are not experts in double-talk and come right to the point when they speak. These presidents do not hesitate to denounce certain leaders, African and non-African alike, by name when they drift off the course of democracy and declare themselves immune from justice. As with the Millennium Account, we are gradually witnessing a system of rewards for good governance, a turn of events that offers much hope for the positive development of the political situation in Africa.

Distinguished guests, esteemed officers,

In conclusion, let us recall that the ability of defense and security forces in Africa to meet the numerous challenges they face, both internally and externally, depends to a large extent on the quality of the leadership and the command exerted by the upper echelons of the chain of command.

In addressing internal challenges, which in large part are structural, organizational, and managerial in nature, the senior DSF chain of command must demonstrate strict observance of the ethical values of their profession, must strive to pass those values on to their subordinates, and must become impassioned, serious, and objective defenders of those values. Then it can proceed to develop a clear definition of the necessary configurations, place, and role of the various DSF components within its own country.

We must come to the realization that the inevitable process by which democracy is consolidated on the African continent through the establishment of States in which the rule of law and good governance prevail can only move forward when there is peace, security and stability. This condition to be met provides the senior DSF chain of command of this and the next generation with opportunities and prospects for addressing more effectively the challenges of external origin that they face. When this situation prevails, each country has the opportunity to establish defense and security forces that are professional, based on republican values, subordinate to its political authority, and placed under the effective control thereof.

Whether the challenge is internal or external, the senior command of a defense and security force must be professional, proactive, clear-sighted, and decisive as it builds a force that is responsible and receptive to suggestions and proposals in its dealings with the political authority of the country. Establishing a system of rational, fair, and transparent management of human, material, and financial resources, buoyed by an appropriate and efficient communication strategy, will ensure that a solid force has been put in place.

In terms of the continent itself, the political class and all social and political players must, as must the top military and paramilitary echelons, be aware of this obligation and of the seriousness of their task, and must especially be aware of the need to strive towards reversing the current mindset.

As a result, the international community must incorporate all these elements into a strategy for strengthening the culture of democracy, targeting not only defense and security forces, but the African political class especially. What is needed in particular is to develop and to implement an instrument that both deters and coerces, encouraging good governance and discouraging and prohibiting the interference of defense and security forces in politics, the use of armed militias and mercenaries as an instrument of contestation and conquest, or a means of hanging on to power.

With the momentum now under way throughout the world, there is hope that Africa will see the emergence of countries respectful of democracy and human rights, and of defense and security forces that are professional and inspired by republican values.

Furthermore, the powers that have been assigned to the fearsome yet controversial International Criminal Court (ICC) and the terror that it strikes in the hearts of those alleged to have committed crimes against humanity, make us even more hopeful of being able to see the gradual strengthening of democracy on the African continent.

In closing on this optimistic note, ladies and gentlemen, may I remind you of the heavy responsibility that weighs upon your shoulders if this hope is to be realized. Demonstrating new, proactive, and dynamic leadership, you must be the catalysts for creating defense and security forces that are in perfect harmony with the changes and obligations of democracy and progress so ardently desired for the African continent. I urge you to be active and productive participants in this course, and I hope that you will enjoy it fully.

Thank you.