Statement on National Defence Budget

by:

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VOTE 08 BUDGET ESTIMATES

FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2020/2021

10 June 2020
1. It is my honour to present to this August House, Vote 08 for the Financial Year 2020/2021, and to have an opportunity to discuss matters related to national defence and security.

2. I would like to start off by saluting His Excellency Dr. Hage G. Geingob the President of the Republic of Namibia and the Commander in Chief of the Namibian Defence Force for entrusting me to lead the Ministry of Defence and Veterans Affairs.

3. I also wish to thank Hon. Iipumbu Shiimi Minister of Finance and his team, for coming up with a budget that addresses issues of national importance amidst the aftermath of the drought and the challenges of COVID-19. I am also grateful to the Hon. Minister for allocating a reasonable amount to my Ministry, taking into consideration the economic downturn, the drought and COVID-19 among others.

4. Most of us in this house have had first-hand experience of the brutalities that have been perpetrated against our people by the racist, apartheid, colonial regime. Before that our forebears have equally been subjected to the genocidal extermination campaign of
the German colonial army.

5. When we achieved independence through the selfless sacrifices of our heroic sons and daughters, we said to ourselves never again. And today I’m speaking on behalf of the men and women that you have commanded to stand guard day and night to ensure that such atrocities are not repeated.

6. However, if the current public debate is anything to go by, there seems to be a deliberate, ideologically motivated, attempt to use the current economic and health crises to drive a wedge between the nation and its security forces.

7. Currently the nation is being asked to choose between its security and its economic wellbeing; a difficult choice indeed, given that the two are not mutually exclusive.

8. In his book “Soft Power: The means to succeed in World Politics” Joseph S. Nye, former US assistant secretary of defence reveals that:
Markets and economic power rest upon political frameworks: in chaotic conditions of great political uncertainty, markets fail. Political frameworks, in turn, rest upon norms and institution, but also upon the management of coercive power.

A well-ordered modern state is defined by a monopoly on the legitimate use of force, which allows domestic markets to operate.

Metaphorically, military power provides a degree of security that is to political and economic order as oxygen is to breathing: little noticed until it becomes scarce. Once that occurs, its absence dominates everything else.
9. Therefore, a failed state is not only a consequence of economic failure; a state that is unable to protect its citizen and its territory, and enforce its laws becomes a failed state too.

SECURITY CHALLENGES

Honourable Chairperson of the Whole House Committee
Honourable Members

10. The global security environment is significantly influenced by the competition for strategic resources, in particular oil, gas and strategic mineral resources that are essential for high technology industries.

11. Conflict and war has mostly been the result of states pursuing their interest to the detriment and insecurity of others. This is mainly achieved through direct and unilateral acts of armed aggression; sponsorship of armed rebellion or insurrection to weaken or gain control of the state; and the fomenting of violent protests, sporadic communal violence, mass civil disorder, and uncontrolled organized crime.

12. Presently Namibia is engaged in an economic warfare that is characterized by an assault on our fauna and flora and the plunder of our marine resources. There is also an increase in the nature and number of cross border crimes: drug trafficking, trafficking in counterfeit goods, weapons trafficking and human trafficking for migratory purposes and sex trafficking, are some of those that are being reported on.

13. A new threat in the region is the emergence of Islamist Jihadist who wants to establish a caliphate in the Mozambican province of Cabo Delgado. If what is happening in the Middle East, North,
West and East Africa is anything to go by, then this development is a serious cause for concern. Namibia and its people will not be immune from such international security dynamics.

DEFENCE MISSION

Honourable Chairperson of the Whole House Committee
Honourable Members

14. The Defence Force is a contingency organization, and as such lives out its proper mission in times of crises. Being a contingency organization, its effectiveness is measured by its state of readiness and it possessing capabilities necessary to carry out the tasks flowing from each of its strategic objectives.

15. The mission of the Namibian Defence Force defines for it three strategic objectives:

   a. protection of the territorial integrity and national sovereignty;

   b. provision of assistance to civil power and civil authorities; and

   c. contribution to international and regional peace and stability.
16. Sovereignty comes with obligations. Once you are a sovereign state it means that there’s no other political authority higher than yours. There is no big brother. You depend on your own resources to defend your national interest and assert your supreme power and authority. And the Defense Force is the embodiment of that power and authority—the power of the state not of the government.

17. In addition to being an instrument of the state, the Defence Force is also part of government which in turn is an element of the state. In the normal course of government business there will always be some sort of interaction between the Defence Force and other government departments. In as much as it needs to be apolitical the defence force is expected to serve and be loyal to the government of the day.
18. When one intends to destroy a state the first thing that one wants to do is to render the Defence Force as powerless and useless as possible. The quickest way to achieve that is through reduced funding.

19. Hence, wanting to change the government by weakening the defence force has the unintended consequences of destroying the Namibian state. So, we should be careful not to throw out the baby with the bath water by politicizing the military.

20. We should also be wary of some development partners that are constantly urging us to emulate them in keeping our defence budget below a certain percentage of the GDP. What they don’t tell us is that they are only able to achieve that at the benevolence of the American taxpayers.

**AID TO CIVIL AUTHORITIES AND CIVIL POWERS**

Honourable Chairperson of the Whole House Committee
Honourable Members
21. In peace time the defence force may be called upon to assist civil authorities with a range of tasks when their capacity has become strained. Typical tasks may include crime prevention operations, disaster management, the distribution of food or water during drought, the protection of life and property, prevention of the spread of diseases affecting humans and livestock, and fighting major fires.

22. Therefore, in 2019 during the state of emergency on drought 150 troops and 42 trucks were deployed to distribute drought relief food. Since 2016 three hundred troops are permanently deployed in anti-poaching operations in both Etosha and Babwata. The law enforcement operation “Namib Desert” has 500 troops. The State of Emergency due to COVID 19 saw an additional deployment of 2500 troops, 105 trucks, 2 boats and 25 hard skinned vehicles. All these missions require significant financial inputs.

23. However, when parliament resumed last week, I was shocked to hear that the defence budget shouldn’t be a priority during this time of COVID 19.

24. It’s true that the virus cannot be fought with bullets. But it’s also true that there is neither a cure nor a vaccine for it. As such, the overriding strategy was to stop the spread of the virus by restricting the movement of persons. This exercise saw the highest deployment of defense and security forces in an independent Namibia.

25. Despite the risk to themselves and the possibility of bringing the infection into their homes due to the absence of PPEs, they braved it out there in the belief that the wellbeing of the nation was paramount.
CONTRIBUTION TO REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY DEFENCE

Honourable Chairperson of the Whole House Committee
Honourable Members

26. In the era of globalization and interdependence, many threats to peace and stability cannot be addressed effectively unilaterally by individual states. States must collaborate in the pursuit of common security ideals and against threats to security. To this end we have pledged troops to the regional African Standby Force, and we are also signatories to the SADC Mutual Defense Pact.

27. The readiness of these troops is subjected to an annual inspection of teams from the SADC Headquarters. Therefore, the necessary budgetary provisions have to be made to keep them in a state of readiness.

28. It should be borne in mind that although the Caprivi secessionist were dealt a devastating blow by our security forces, the final nail in the coffin was the refusal of our neighbors to grant them operational bases. That’s the dividend of good neighborliness.

29. Hence the false sense of security that we enjoy today is thanks to this common security architecture. We can’t piggyback on other nation’s efforts. We have to carry our fair share of the burden. According to Thomas Reid: “A chain is no stronger than its weakest link.” Namibia cannot afford to be that weak link.” Namibia cannot afford to be that weak link.
CONCLUSION

Honourable Chairperson of the Whole House Committee
Honourable Members

30. In summary those are our defense and security obligations: a. territorial integrity and national sovereignty; b. aid to civil authorities and civil power; and c. contribution to regional and international security.

31. If we do away with any one of these strategic objectives, demobilize the troops and equipment assigned thereto, we would certainly save a billion or a billion and a half. However, we can’t reduce a bit from each without rendering all of them redundant.

32. The biggest challenge in terms of cost for Namibia’s security architecture is the lack of economies of scale. A huge country with a small population, an extensive maritime area, and long and porous land borders are forcing us to disperse our limited capabilities over a wide area. This is actually the main cost driver.

33. As the elected representatives of the people; however, only you know the level of security that the country needs; we can only advise. So, it’s up to the house to direct what to forgo and we shall oblige.

34. Short of that, we need to pledge to the Namibian people that their safety and security is sacrosanct and recommit ourselves to invest in a well-trained and adequately equipped Defence Force with a permanent capacity to carry out its mandate. (See the Votes accountability report as distributed by the minister of finance.)
35. I’m therefore, requesting the honorable members to support and approve the allocation of **Six Billion Two Hundred Twenty-Nine Million One Hundred and Three Thousand Namibian Dollars only (N$6,229,103,000)** to fund the program of the Ministry of Defense during the 2020-2021 Financial Year and continue to render your all round support during this period and beyond.

I THANK YOU!