

Regular Research Paper

Evaluating the effectiveness of military intervention strategies in urban crime prevention in Namibia: The case of informal settlements in Windhoek

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Urban expansion in Sub-Saharan Africa has outpaced state capacity, fuelling a sharp rise in crime, especially in informal settlements where governance remains weak. Namibia stands as a case in point. High youth unemployment, deep poverty, and limited police presence have pushed the Namibian Defence Force (NDF) into civilian policing roles, as seen in operations like *Hornkranz* and *Kalahari Desert*. This military involvement has sparked ongoing legal and human rights debates, mainly due to minimal civilian oversight. This study assesses the effectiveness and sustainability of military-led public safety efforts in Windhoek's Havana informal settlement. The research pursues four objectives: (1) analyse crime rate trends before, during, and after military deployments; (2) investigate public perceptions and lived experiences of military presence; (3) evaluate the legal, ethical, and institutional frameworks guiding military involvement; and (4) identify key challenges and offer policy recommendations for urban security. Using a mixed-methods design, the study combines quantitative data from 356 resident surveys and official crime records with qualitative insights from 41 key informant interviews, focus groups, and household discussions. Civil-Military Relations Theory and Routine Activity Theory inform the analysis. Findings show short-term drops in reported crime and increased feelings of safety, but these gains vanish once the military withdraws. Lasting security improvement demands stronger legal frameworks, clear institutional roles, effective oversight, and real community participation.

Key words: Military Intervention, Urban Crime Prevention, Civil-Military Relations, Public Safety, Namibia, Informal settlements.

INTRODUCTION

Urban crime remains a significant issue across developing regions, with sub-Saharan Africa facing acute challenges as cities grow faster than local authorities can manage. This mismatch between urban growth and institutional capacity undermines efforts to ensure public safety and order, leading to elevated crime rates and heightened insecurity (UN-Habitat, 2020). Mawby (2002)

describes public safety as a society's shared ability to protect people from crime and disorder, while Tyler (2006) stresses the importance of making people feel secure, not just safe. For Fukuyama (2013), effective governance means state institutions deliver public goods efficiently and transparently. Grindle (2007) adds that good governance actually improves people's lives

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through policies that fit their specific context. Windhoek, Namibia's capital, is a strong example of these pressures. As the city expands, especially on its outskirts, formal institutions cannot keep pace (Mawby, 2002; Tyler, 2006). Windhoek's Havana informal settlement has proliferated, characterized by dense populations, minimal state oversight, and heightened insecurity. UN-Habitat (2003) calls these places "informal settlements" because they lack legal tenure and do not follow city planning rules. Sietchiping (2004) points out that these areas also face poor sanitation, overcrowding, and uncertain land rights. Crime in these localities, robbery, assault, gender-based violence, drug-related offenses, has climbed sharply (Namibian Police Force, 2022). These spikes are tied to deep poverty, joblessness, and weak law enforcement (Muggah and Aguirre, 2018).

In response, many governments in the Global South turn to military forces to address urban crime. Brooks (2008) calls this "military intervention in policing," where soldiers take on police duties, patrols, curfews, and more. Though leaders often describe these deployments as temporary fixes, they tend to stick around and become part of the state's regular security approach. This shift brings tough questions: Do these interventions actually work, and at what cost to democracy, civil rights, and the legitimacy of the police? Military interventions in domestic security often provoke intense debate about legitimacy, especially when compared to police actions. Scholars argue that militaries, as instruments of state power, step in when state authority falters and police capacity falls short (Kraska, 2007). While such interventions can restore order quickly, they often come at a steep price: undermining public trust in the police and blurring the lines between civilian and military authority (Hills, 2009). The legitimacy of military involvement hinges on legal oversight, necessity, and proportionality; absent these, the cost to democracy and the rule of law grows dangerously high. Latin America's recent history shows the dangers of relying on military intervention for public security. Brazil, Mexico, and Venezuela have all deployed armed forces to tackle crime, with some initial declines in violence. Human rights abuses rise, and public trust in government erodes as people witness heavy-handed tactics and impunity (Garmany, 2014; Human Rights Watch, 2016). Soldiers, trained for combat, not community work, often strain relations with marginalized residents. Nigeria's military, through operations like Python Dance and Crocodile Smile, has also faced criticism for using excessive force and causing civilian casualties (Amnesty International, 2020). Krempel (2019) argues this approach ignores principles like necessity, proportionality, and accountability, and Donnelly (2018) shows how it erodes trust in state institutions. Kenya's similar reliance on military and paramilitary forces has led to allegations of extrajudicial killings and abuse (HRW, 2018; Alston, 2006; Sriram, 2003). Namibia's urban development, especially in Havana informal settlement,

reveals how governance, security, and poverty intersect and shape daily realities. Havana now holds around 13,800 shacks, sheltering thousands (Amutenya, 2025). Crime is a persistent concern; Windhoek City Police recorded 2,918 incidents in Havana between January 2017 and December 2018. Residents live with the immediate impact of crime, but they also experience how state interventions, especially through military and police presence, alter local dynamics. The research investigates how these agencies interact in practice, examining their command structures and the effects of joint operations on both accountability and human rights. Legal boundaries, defined by the Defence Act 1 of 2002 and Police Act 19 of 1990, are supposed to clarify roles, yet in reality, overlapping responsibilities create frequent friction and sometimes blur constitutional limits. This work fills a clear gap in African security governance literature. It tests whether military involvement in urban crime prevention is truly effective, legitimate, and sustainable. The goal is to inform national policy, strengthen institutional accountability, and add to broader debates on civil-military relations in democratic societies. As Namibia confronts the overlapping challenges of crime, poverty, and governance, understanding the impact of such interventions is both an academic and policy imperative.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher carried out the study in Havana, an informal settlement in Windhoek, from 04 June 2025 to 04 October 2025. Using a mixed-methods design, the research integrated quantitative and qualitative data to evaluate the effectiveness of military interventions on urban crime prevention within Havana's context. Addressing crime in this context demanded both empirical evidence and an understanding of the socio-political setting (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). The study aimed to assess operational impacts of military interventions on crime rates, analyse public perceptions, examine legal and ethical implications, and identify sustainability challenges for policy development. Quantitative analysis drew on official crime data and intervention records from the Namibian Police Force and Windhoek City Police, examining patterns before, during, and after deployments to trace changes linked to military action (Bachman and Schutt, 2020). The qualitative approach relied on structured interviews, focus groups, and household surveys to gather residents' perspectives on safety, trust, and cooperation with security forces. Legal and ethical dimensions were examined through analysis of the Defence Act, Police Act, and operational protocols, evaluating accountability, proportionality, and human rights protections (Gould and Lazarus, 2010). The study followed a pragmatic approach, allowing flexible integration of methods to address the complexity of security challenges (Creswell, 2014; Morgan, 2007). This combination supported both numerical and narrative evidence for a balanced analysis (Bryman, 2016). Participants included community members, traditional and religious leaders, business owners, and representatives from the Namibia Defence Force, Namibian Police Force, Windhoek City Police, and local government (Schnabel and Krupanski, 2018; Nathan, 2019). For the quantitative survey, sample size was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula, with a population of about 50,000 (City of Windhoek, 2023). Qualitative sampling relied on data saturation (Creswell, 2014). Purposive and stratified purposive sampling

targeted participants with relevant experience and ensured broad representation (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Etikan et al., 2016). In total, 41 participants were interviewed. Systematic random sampling addressed bias in selecting crime data and survey respondents (Neuman, 2014), and snowball sampling helped reach marginalized groups, such as informal leaders and crime victims (Patton, 2015). This blend of sampling methods strengthened validity through triangulation.

Data collection integrated both structured and semi-structured approaches (Creswell, 2014; Kothari, 2004). Quantitative data came directly from official crime records provided by the Namibian Police Force and Windhoek City Police, creating a robust foundation for assessing military intervention strategies and their effect on crime rates in the Havana informal settlement (Namibian Police Force, 2018; Windhoek City Police, 2020). Semi-structured interviews gave voice to a broad spectrum of stakeholders: military personnel with operational experience in urban deployments, members of the Namibian Police Force and City Police, local officials, community leaders, civic activists, legal scholars, and human rights experts. To further ground the study in lived experience, the researcher led focus group discussions with Havana residents, drawing out community perspectives on security and intervention. The analysis also drew on a detailed review of Namibia's legal and policy framework for military involvement in civilian policing. Core documents included the Namibian Constitution, Defence Act (No. 1 of 2002), Police Act (No. 19 of 1990), and related executive directives. This multi-pronged approach ensured a nuanced, context-rich understanding of the research problem. SPSS supported statistical analysis of quantitative data, while qualitative data were analysed thematically with Braun and Clarke (2006)'s approach. Organizing time-series data allowed comparison of crime trends across pre-, during-, and post-intervention periods (Lum et al., 2011). By integrating Creswell's mixed-methods procedures with Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis, the study maintained analytical rigor and provided contextual depth. The combined use of empirical, legal, and stakeholder data offered a nuanced view of Namibia's urban security governance and delivered evidence-based insights for improving the accountability and effectiveness of military intervention in crime prevention.

RESULTS: OBJECTIVE THREE

Analysing legal, ethical, and institutional frameworks governing military intervention in urban crime prevention: A study of Windhoek's Havana informal settlement

Legal, ethical, and institutional frameworks for military deployment

Military deployment in urban crime prevention in Windhoek's Havana informal settlement, sits at the intersection of law, ethics, and institutional design. The Namibian Constitution assigns the Defence Force a clear mandate: defend national sovereignty, but always under the oversight of civilian authority (Republic of Namibia, 1990). This principle, while foundational, becomes messier in practice. The Defence Act grants the military a supporting role during major public security crises, yet it stops short of offering concrete guidance for operations in places like Windhoek's Havana informal settlement

densely packed, economically precarious, and marked by a fragile social fabric (Republic of Namibia, 2002). The legal framework creates room for swift action, as seen in *Operation Hornkranz* and *Operation Kalahari Desert*, but it also hands a troubling amount of discretion to soldiers on the ground (Ndeunyema, 2020). They face split-second decisions about use of force, arrests, and safeguarding civilian rights, all without detailed legal parameters. This ambiguity does not just complicate their job; it breeds tension between achieving operational goals and maintaining the trust of the people they are meant to protect. Institutional challenges in Namibia's security sector stem from fundamental differences between the Defence Force and the Police. The military emphasizes hierarchy, discipline, and rapid decision-making, shaped by training that focuses on national defence rather than community engagement. Police officers, by contrast, receive training that prioritizes negotiation, public interaction, and the maintenance of civic order. When these two entities conduct joint operations, clashes in organizational culture and command structures often disrupt coordination, obscuring lines of authority and undermining operational effectiveness. Civil-Military Theory highlights the dangers of such blurred boundaries, warning that military involvement in policing, absent democratic oversight, threatens civil liberties (Huntington, 1957; Burk, 2002). In Havana, these problems intensify. The city's complex geography and the lack of clear institutional roles exacerbate confusion, making it difficult to distinguish policing functions from military authority. The consequences manifest as excessive force, diminished accountability, and eroded public trust.

Then there is the ethical layer, which cannot be ignored. Sending heavily armed soldiers into marginalized neighbourhoods changes daily life in ways that go far beyond crime statistics. Residents face the constant presence of uniforms and weapons, which can breed fear, resentment, and a sense of occupation rather than protection. Routine Activity Theory frames the military as a "capable guardian," able to disrupt criminal opportunities (Cohen and Felson, 1979). But the theory is clear: the legitimacy of this guardianship depends on how the community perceives the intervention, and whether the military acts with procedural fairness and respect for rights. In Havana, the absence of transparency and meaningful community engagement exposed the limits of military involvement. Without operational protocols sensitive to the neighbourhood's realities, and without genuine ethical safeguards, intervention risks making insecurity worse, not better. All this points to a stark conclusion. Military involvement in urban crime prevention can only succeed when legal rules are clear, institutions are aligned, and ethical standards are upheld. Otherwise, interventions in places like Windhoek's Havana informal settlement risk deepening social wounds, undermining rights, and ultimately failing the

very people they aim to protect.

Legal justifications for military involvement

Crime remains a persistent challenge in Namibia, especially in areas like Havana, where Windhoek City Police documented 2,918 incidents between January 2017 and December 2018 (Windhoek City Police, 2020). This sharp increase in criminal activity led the government to deploy military forces within the Havana informal settlement, signalling a shift in the state's approach to internal security. Namibia's constitutional and statutory framework sets the stage for military involvement in internal security, but it leaves significant room for executive interpretation. The Constitution, through Article 119, appoints the President as Commander-in-Chief, and Article 118 mandates the Defence Force to defend the nation and keep order (Republic of Namibia, 1990). Yet, these articles do not specify exactly when or how the military should step in if the police cannot manage. This vagueness is not unique; many post-colonial states have crafted constitutions that give broad internal security powers to the executive, favouring flexibility over clear constraints (Howe, 2001). The Defence Act No. 1 of 2002 translates these constitutional powers into operational terms, empowering the President to deploy the Defence Force to maintain public safety and support the police when civilian efforts fail (Republic of Namibia, 2002). Section 33(1)(b) specifically authorizes military assistance to civil authorities during times of heightened insecurity. These legal tools underpinned the joint police-military deployment during *Operation Hornkranz*, a direct response to rising violent and property crimes in Windhoek's Havana informal settlement. Further underpinning this framework, the Police Act No. 19 of 1990 allows the Inspector-General to request military support when police resources are stretched thin (Republic of Namibia, 1990). This provision enabled the creation of a joint command structure. Within this arrangement, NAMPOL remained in charge, but the military provided essential support, effectively operationalizing the statutory framework.

Even with these legal and institutional justifications in place, the lived experience in Havana reveals a disconnect. Residents often encountered soldiers on patrol with little warning or explanation. People did not know why the military was present, how long the intervention would last, or what rules governed the operation. This lack of communication aligns with Janowitz (1960)'s argument: legality is not enough for democratic legitimacy, transparency and public buy-in matter. Without open forums, public briefings, or clear messaging, the deployment felt less like a protective measure and more like securitisation, eroding trust and legitimacy in the eyes of the community. The military's

dual constitutional mandate, defending against external threats and upholding internal order, creates inherent structural tensions that complicate civil-military boundaries. This overlap can obscure distinctions between military support for civilian authorities and direct law enforcement intervention, raising the risk of entrenching military practices within routine policing (Feaver, 2003). Namibia's case in the Havana informal settlement demonstrates how existing legal frameworks, when combined with pressing operational demands, can unintentionally erode democratic norms and disrupt established institutional boundaries. These dynamics become particularly pronounced in vulnerable urban contexts, underscoring the necessity for robust oversight to preserve the integrity of civilian governance and prevent the encroachment of military logic into civil affairs.

Institutional interactions and role boundaries

Examining military intervention in urban crime prevention within Windhoek's Havana informal settlement reveals a complex web of institutional relationships and contested boundaries between the Namibian Defence Force, Namibian Police Force, and Windhoek City Police. While Namibia's statutory framework clearly positions NAMPOL as the lead agency, granting them command authority and relegating the NDF to a supporting role in deterrence, real-world operations tell a different story. Fieldwork in Windhoek's Havana informal settlement highlights that these legal arrangements often break down, particularly during high-intensity deployments such as night patrols, rapid responses, and targeted searches. This breakdown is not just a matter of paperwork ignored. It has roots in the day-to-day realities and institutional cultures of these agencies. Key informants in the security sector observe frequent communication breakdowns, often because teams neglect to fully understand or internalize the standard operating procedures meant to coordinate their efforts. This persistent issue undermines operational effectiveness and exposes structural weaknesses within security organizations. Pre-deployment briefings can be brief or inconsistent, leaving personnel uncertain about their roles the moment operations escalate. Additionally, Key informants in the security sector stress that lacking a unified joint-command doctrine forces security personnel to improvise, sometimes pushing NDF units past constitutional boundaries and into policing roles, including apprehending suspects. The consequences are significant. Williams (2016) notes that inter-agency cooperation falters when institutional hierarchies and mandates grow murky. Burk (2002)'s Civil-Military Theory goes further, arguing that effective coordination is only possible when professional domains are respected and operational expertise is acknowledged across agencies.

In Havana informal settlement, these ideals run up against the reality of limited resources, unpredictable criminal dynamics, and the constant pressure to act quickly. Officers on the ground must make snap decisions, often relying on personal judgment rather than clear institutional guidance.

This environment fosters role confusion and mission creep. Military personnel, trained for deterrence and support, can find themselves taking on policing duties, sometimes unintentionally. This is not just a technical breach; it erodes accountability and blurs lines of responsibility. When something goes wrong, it becomes harder to determine who should answer for operational missteps. The Windhoek's Havana informal settlement experience underscores an urgent need for codified, robust inter-agency frameworks. Clear, actionable protocols must define the boundaries of each institution's mandate, streamlining command structures and ensuring legal safeguards are not lost in the heat of the moment. Without such frameworks, military involvement in internal security risks undermining both the rule of law and the legitimacy of urban crime prevention efforts. The lesson from Havana informal settlement is clear: role clarity and institutional respect are not optional, they are foundational to any effective, accountable response to urban crime (Williams, 2016; Burk, 2002).

Accountability, oversight, and ethical concerns

The Namibian Defence Force's deployment in Havana, Windhoek, from December 2018 to May 2019, operated within statutory bounds. Still, the realities on the ground starkly revealed tensions between state security imperatives and the practical exercise of constitutional rights in this contested urban space. Havana's residents consistently described NDF patrols as invasive, night-time operations involved aggressive searches, crowd dispersal tactics that veered into intimidation, and a general sense that military power, rather than civilian policing, set the tone. These patterns cut against constitutional guarantees to dignity, privacy, and protection from arbitrary interference (Republic of Namibia, 1990). The contradiction is stark: the law empowers the military to aid in crime prevention, but in practice, its methods often clash with the rights-focused policing expected in a democracy. Security officials referenced Standard Operating Procedures emphasizing proportionality, minimal force, and human rights. Still, key informants from within the security sector conceded that, in practice, these ideals often fail to match the complex and unpredictable realities encountered during operations. Teams spread across the informal, densely packed settlement struggled to enforce SOPs consistently. As Feaver (2003) argues in his principal-agent theory, civilian authorities face an uphill battle when they try to supervise military actors thrust into

complex, fast-changing urban contexts. Supervisors rarely had a constant presence, and there was no system for real-time oversight. This left a gap, one where military agents operated with considerable autonomy, and where even well-intentioned rules struggled to take hold. Accountability mechanisms in Namibia, at least in this context, seemed distant. The Office of the Ombudsman, parliamentary oversight committees, and internal military inspectors existed on paper, but for Havana informal settlement residents, these institutions felt abstract and unresponsive. People who tried to file complaints encountered long delays, little feedback, and outcomes that seldom matched the seriousness of their claims. This fostered a sense that institutions stood apart from the lived reality of Havana informal settlement's residents, and that violations would go unanswered. Howe (2001) notes that this kind of weak oversight, especially in militarised policing, erodes accountability, undermines democratic values, and chips away at public trust. The evidence from Windhoek's Havana informal settlement in Namibia points to a structural problem. The legal framework for military involvement in urban security is clear enough, but real oversight and enforcement lag far behind. This gap risks turning statutory powers into unchecked authority. To close it, Namibia needs stronger institutional accountability, more robust civilian monitoring, and operational training grounded in human rights. Only then can military intervention play a legitimate role in urban crime prevention, one that supports democratic governance instead of undermining it, and that builds, rather than breaks, the community's trust.

Oversight mechanisms and community perceptions

Oversight mechanisms play a pivotal role when military forces operate in civilian areas, particularly in complex urban environments like Windhoek's Havana informal settlement. In this context, the research underscores deep-seated weaknesses in both institutional and community oversight. These shortcomings have eroded public trust and limited the perceived legitimacy of military involvement in crime prevention. While the Joint Operations Command (JOC) provides a formal channel for inter-agency collaboration, it remains largely a state-driven apparatus. Community representatives and independent civilian observers are notably absent from its proceedings. Residents pick up on this exclusion quickly; it feels less like partnership and more like top-down control. This structure contradicts enduring tenets of democratic civil-military relations, which place transparency, civilian oversight, and proportionality at their core (Huntington, 1957).

People living in Havana informal settlement repeatedly point out that their voices are missing from key decision-making processes. Community leaders, in particular,

describe a sense of alienation. Without organized avenues for dialogue, residents find themselves unsure about where military authority begins and ends, who to approach with grievances, or why specific security measures are deployed in the first place. This uncertainty creates fertile ground for mistrust and fear, widening the divide between the community and those tasked with its protection. When power feels distant and unaccountable, cooperation falters. Joint civilian-security oversight committees play a critical role beyond mere regulatory compliance. These bodies facilitate ongoing communication between security forces and local communities, enhancing transparency and accountability (Williams, 2016). For example, in South Africa, committees regularly convene public forums to address grievances and review security operations, which strengthens trust and reduces conflict (Mistry, 2014). In Ghana, similar mechanisms have improved reporting and resolution of misconduct cases (Aning, 2010). In contrast, Namibia's absence of such oversight structures creates space for unchecked allegations and erodes public confidence. Without these channels, rumours and resentment flourish, undermining both operational legitimacy and the relationship between security personnel and citizens. Strengthening oversight, then, calls for more than just formal rules or procedures. Namibia needs community-rooted systems that place local voices and independent monitors at the heart of security governance. Civil society, trusted local leaders, and outside observers should participate directly in oversight structures. This would not only bring Namibia in line with recognized democratic norms but also lend much-needed credibility to military engagement in crime prevention. Without these reforms, public confidence remains on shaky ground. Perceptions of military overreach linger, and the vital social contract between security forces and the community continues to fray. The conclusion is clear: legitimacy grows when oversight is shared, transparent, and truly inclusive.

Ethical dimensions and community trust

The role of the Namibian Defence Force in Windhoek's Havana informal settlement brings ethical questions that reach far beyond simple legality. Residents noticed a drop in opportunistic crime after the NDF arrived, but that is only part of the story. Many also described a rise in anxiety, daily routines disrupted by patrols, and a growing sense of alienation. These reactions echo what scholars have argued for years: militarised policing does not just fight crime, it often intensifies psychosocial distress in already vulnerable communities (Garland, 2001). In Havana informal settlement, dense social ties and unwritten local norms shape daily survival. Residents navigate scarcity through trusted networks, borrowing food, sharing information, and negotiating disputes face-

to-face. When the military intervened, their rigid protocols and unfamiliar authority shattered these delicate arrangements. For example, soldiers imposed curfews and restricted movement, disrupting neighbours' ability to help one another or resolve conflicts privately. The community's informal leaders lost influence overnight, replaced by external control that ignored local customs. The military's presence did not just alter routines; it fractured the very social fabric that allowed Havana's residents to endure persistent hardship. Ethical tensions appeared elsewhere as well. Participants from Havana informal settlement described a clear communication gap between military personnel and the civilians. Soldiers, lacking awareness of local customs, struggled to interact with residents in ways that honoured their routines and cultural norms, deepening mistrust within the community. In practice, this oversight weakened trust and deepened the sense that the NDF was imposing control rather than offering support. Routine Activity Theory puts this dynamic into focus: the NDF, as 'capable guardians,' made crime less attractive, but their heavy-handed tactics reshaped the rhythms of life in Havana informal settlement, restricting movement and creating an atmosphere of constant oversight (Cohen and Felson, 1979). Some residents said that this everyday surveillance, and the psychological strain it brought, outweighed the comfort of feeling safer from crime.

The research here makes one thing clear: the ethical legitimacy of military involvement in urban crime prevention depends on how the community perceives fairness, transparency, and justice in practice. People called for more robust human rights training for soldiers, regular community meetings, and better ways for civilians to help set security priorities. These are not just abstract legal requirements; they are necessary for building real trust and stopping the slow breakdown of confidence in state institutions. Without these ethical safeguards, interventions risk becoming another source of instability rather than a remedy. Looking ahead, future interventions must weave ethical protections directly into operational plans. Security goals matter, but so does the need to protect human dignity and foster genuine cooperation between state and community. Only by respecting these ethical dimensions can the state hope to secure both immediate safety and lasting legitimacy in places like Havana informal settlement.

Interpretive summary and theoretical integration

Namibia's legal, ethical, and institutional frameworks draw clear lines for military involvement in urban crime prevention, yet, in practice, those lines often blur under pressure. The Constitution places responsibility for law and order squarely on the state, with the Defence Act 1 of 2002 and Police Act 19 of 1990 explicitly allowing Defence Force support to the police when requested by

proper authorities. But this legal scaffolding, as seen in Windhoek's Havana Informal Settlement, does not always translate into smooth or legitimate operations on the ground. Authorization, after all, does not equal acceptance. Weak standard operating procedures, limited civilian oversight, and scarce community consultation complicate the boundaries of military authority. For the few participants living in Havana informal settlement, military presence generates tension, not reassurance, intensifying uncertainties over legitimate exercise of power. Civil-military theory clarifies the persistent friction between military and civilian spheres. Huntington (1957) insists on a clear boundary, arguing that only transparent civilian oversight preserves both democratic integrity and military professionalism. Feaver (2003) builds on this with his agency framework, highlighting how ambiguous authority and lack of coordination directly undermine accountability and discipline. The situation in Windhoek's Havana informal settlement illustrates these problems: unclear command structures and poor cooperation between the Namibian Police and Defence Force created operational gaps, eroding both discipline and public trust. Without visible oversight or unified leadership, communities lose faith in these institutions and scepticism intensifies.

Routine Activity Theory, as articulated by Cohen and Felson (1979), demonstrates that visible security forces can temporarily disrupt criminal activity by altering the relationship between offenders and targets. In the Havana informal settlement, the deployment of armed personnel established short-lived order, functioning primarily as a deterrent. Yet, this effect swiftly disappeared after the military's withdrawal, and disorder resurfaced. Without comprehensive social, economic, and policing interventions, such deterrence remains fleeting. Residents questioned the legitimacy and proportionality of military force, noting that these interventions seldom addressed the underlying causes of disorder and often intensified community anxiety. Bringing these strands together, both theory and evidence point to a simple truth: lasting internal security in informal settlements needs more than sporadic joint operations. It requires clear inter-agency protocols, mechanisms that put community engagement at the centre, and oversight frameworks that genuinely protect constitutional rights. Strengthening these elements makes military-police cooperation not just more effective, but more legitimate in the eyes of those it aims to protect. For Windhoek, and Namibia as a whole, future urban security depends on this kind of grounded, principled reform.

Conclusion

This study set out to untangle how Namibia's legal, ethical, and institutional frameworks influence military

involvement in urban crime prevention, focusing on the NDF's role in Windhoek's Havana informal settlement during *Operation Hornkranz* and *Operation Kalahari Desert*. The findings highlight a fundamental tension: while Namibia's Constitution, Defence Act, and Police Act empower the President and security forces to cooperate during internal crises, the real-world implementation of these laws often blurs the line between military and police functions. Legal authority, on its own, does not guarantee legitimacy. The state's adherence to statutory procedures did not translate into genuine communication or accountability toward Havana's residents. This disconnect fuelled distrust, reinforcing the core insight from civil-military relations theory, legitimacy rests not just on legality, but on transparency, accountability, and authentic public engagement (Huntington, 1957; Feaver, 2003). The deployment of the military in policing roles exposed these tensions in striking ways. Residents voiced their fear, frustration, and the feeling that their rights were precarious. While data indicate a short-lived reduction in crime, consistent with Routine Activity Theory's claim that visible guardians can deter offenders (Cohen & Felson, 1979), the presence of armed forces also brought new anxieties and disrupted the rhythms of daily life. Rather than restoring a sense of order, the intervention shifted the balance of power between citizens and the state, and sometimes deepened social vulnerabilities. Institutional oversight failed to keep pace with operational realities. Mechanisms for civilian monitoring lagged, formal avenues for complaints were lacking, and parliamentary scrutiny barely registered. This pattern matches broader critiques from African security governance literature: without robust oversight, militarized interventions often slip further from public accountability (Howe, 2001; Williams, 2016). Looking across the evidence, a clear message emerges. While military deployment can provide a short-term response to surges in crime, it cannot substitute for strong legal protections, clear institutional boundaries, and thorough human rights safeguards. Lasting legitimacy and effectiveness rely on more than force: they require consistent civil-military coordination, operational guidelines firmly rooted in human rights, and real community participation in oversight. If Namibia wants to build security practices that are both effective and democratic, especially in fragile settings like informal settlements, it must prioritize independent oversight and transparent decision-making. Only then can security interventions truly balance the demands of effectiveness and accountability.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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