

Institutional Mediation of United States Grand Strategy in Defence Policy-Making in Botswana

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2026.1306000041>

Received: 16 May 2026; Accepted: 22 May 2026; Published: 20 June 2026

ABSTRACT

This study examines how the United States grand strategy is mediated within defence policy-making in Botswana. It addresses a key debate in International Relations on whether external strategic actors directly shape defence policy outcomes or whether their influence is filtered through domestic institutional structures in small states. The study advances the argument that grand strategic influence is not linear, but institutionally mediated through domestic political and bureaucratic arrangements. A convergent mixed-methods design is employed, combining survey data from 51 respondents with qualitative interviews from defence and policy actors. The analysis focuses on actors, institutions, and norms to assess how external influence is processed within Botswana's defence policy system. Findings show strong executive centralization, with the Presidency as the primary decision-making authority, while the Ministry of Defence and the Botswana Defence Force play advisory and implementation roles. The United States influence is present but indirect, operating through defence diplomacy mechanisms such as training, joint exercises, and doctrinal exposure. These channels shape capacity and professional exposure rather than policy direction. Institutionally, Botswana demonstrates moderate to strong administrative capacity, but limited strategic planning depth and an absence of a consolidated defence policy framework. Normatively, civil–military relations are stable and professional, with external norms selectively absorbed rather than fully transforming domestic practices. The study contributes to theory by demonstrating that grand strategy influence is conditionally mediated rather than directly exercised. It introduces institutional mediation as a mechanism explaining how small states filter external strategic pressures while maintaining policy autonomy.

Keywords :United States grand strategy; institutional mediation; defence policy-making; Botswana; small states; civil–military relations; defence diplomacy; bureaucratic politics; policy autonomy; mixed methods research

INTRODUCTION

The study of grand strategy has increasingly moved beyond traditional state-centric formulations to include the institutional mechanisms through which external strategic influence is mediated within domestic policy systems. Contemporary scholarship in international security emphasizes that external powers rarely shape defence policy directly; instead, influence is filtered through institutional structures, bureaucratic routines, and professional norms that condition how strategic ideas are interpreted and implemented within states (Allison & Zelikow, 1999; Waltz, 1979). Within this broader analytical shift, attention has turned to how medium and small states manage external strategic engagement while maintaining policy autonomy.

United States grand strategy, particularly in the post-Cold War and post-9/11 periods, has been characterized by extensive global military engagement, alliance management, and defence cooperation architectures. Rather than relying solely on coercive instruments, US strategic influence is frequently exercised through defence diplomacy, training programmes, joint exercises, and institutional capacity-building initiatives that embed strategic preferences within partner militaries and defence bureaucracies (Nye, 2004; Williams, 2011). This

form of influence is often indirect, operating through what has been described as “structural diffusion” rather than command authority.

In the African context, the interaction between external military powers and domestic defence institutions is shaped by asymmetries in capability, dependence on training systems, and uneven strategic planning capacity. Scholarly work on civil–military relations in post-colonial states suggests that external engagement often strengthens operational capacity while leaving strategic decision-making largely domestically controlled (Ayoob, 1995; Bratton & van de Walle, 1997). This produces hybrid governance arrangements in which institutional learning coexists with sovereign control over defence policy direction.

Botswana represents a particularly instructive case for examining these dynamics. The country is widely regarded as a stable democratic state with strong civil–military relations and a highly centralized executive decision-making structure. Defence policy formulation is concentrated within the Presidency, while the Ministry of Defence and the Botswana Defence Force primarily perform advisory and implementation functions. This institutional configuration reflects a governance model in which strategic authority is centralized but operational execution is delegated within a disciplined bureaucratic hierarchy.

Within this structure, United States engagement in Botswana’s defence sector is primarily expressed through training cooperation, doctrinal exposure, and joint military exercises. However, such engagement does not typically translate into direct policy control. Instead, it operates through institutional channels that shape professional military norms and enhance technical capacity while preserving domestic decision-making autonomy. This reflects what can be conceptualized as mediated strategic influence, where external inputs are absorbed selectively through domestic institutional filters.

Despite extensive literature on US defence diplomacy and African civil–military relations, limited attention has been given to the institutional mechanisms through which grand strategy is mediated in stable, small-state democracies such as Botswana. Existing studies tend to focus either on external influence or domestic institutional capacity in isolation, rather than examining the interaction between actors, institutions, and norms as an integrated system of mediation. This leaves an analytical gap in understanding how external strategic power is transformed into domestic policy outcomes without direct coercive intervention. Against this background, this study examines the institutional mediation of the United States grand strategy in Botswana’s defence policy-making system. It focuses on how actors, institutional structures, and normative frameworks interact to shape the translation of external strategic influence into domestic defence policy processes, while preserving sovereign decision-making authority.

Problem Statement

Despite the growing literature on small-state security behavior and external strategic influence, the mechanisms through which major-power grand strategies shape defence policy outcomes in stable African states remain insufficiently theorized. Much of the existing scholarship tends to conceptualize influence in either binary terms of dominance or autonomy, or it focuses on formal alliance structures while overlooking subtler forms of institutional mediation. Botswana presents a theoretically important but under-examined case. While the country maintains strong domestic control over defence decision-making, it simultaneously engages in sustained cooperation with the United States through training, doctrine exposure, and defence diplomacy. What remains unclear is how such engagement translates into policy-relevant outcomes without undermining domestic authority. The analytical problem, therefore, is not whether influence exists, but how it is filtered, absorbed, and constrained within domestic institutional arrangements.

Existing studies on US grand strategy largely emphasize global power projection, alliance politics, or coercive diplomacy, with limited attention to how influence operates through capacity-building mechanisms within non-dependent, institutionally stable states. Conversely, African defence governance literature often highlights institutional weakness or external dependence, offering limited explanation for cases where institutions remain stable yet externally engaged in structured ways. This gap leaves unresolved the question of how grand strategy operates in contexts where external influence is neither absent nor directive, but instead institutionally mediated. Understanding this mechanism is critical for refining theories of small-state autonomy, institutional

resilience, and the indirect effects of great-power strategy in contemporary security environments. This study addresses this gap by examining the institutional mediation of the United States grand strategy in Botswana's defence policy-making architecture, focusing on how actors, institutions, and norms shape the translation of external engagement into domestic policy outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a pragmatist epistemological orientation and a convergent mixed-methods case study design to examine how the United States grand strategy is institutionally mediated within Botswana's defence policy-making architecture. Pragmatism is appropriate for this inquiry because it enables integration of observable institutional patterns with interpretive accounts of actor behavior, institutional interaction, and normative adaptation in a policy environment shaped by both domestic authority structures and external strategic engagement.

Botswana is selected as a strategically significant case for analysing indirect forms of great-power influence in a stable, non-allied African state that nonetheless maintains sustained defence cooperation with the United States. The case is analytically useful for shifting attention away from coercive or alliance-based explanations of influence toward mechanisms of institutional mediation, particularly those expressed through training, doctrinal exposure, and defence diplomacy.

Empirical data were generated through elite semi-structured interviews, structured questionnaires, focus group discussions, and documentary analysis. Key informants were drawn purposively from the Ministry of Defence, the Botswana Defence Force, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, parliamentary oversight structures, diplomatic actors, and policy analysts, with supplementary perspectives from academia, media, and civil society included through focus group discussions to enrich interpretive depth and triangulation. Quantitative data captured perceptions of institutional capacity, civil–military coordination, policy coherence, and external influence using structured survey instruments, while qualitative data provided explanatory depth on institutional processes and strategic interaction dynamics.

Quantitative datasets were coded and processed for descriptive statistical analysis, producing frequency distributions and percentage patterns across key institutional variables. Qualitative materials were transcribed, systematically coded, and analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns of institutional mediation, actor influence, and normative alignment. ATLAS.Ti was used to support qualitative coding and organization, while quantitative outputs were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques. The two strands were integrated through a convergent triangulation strategy, enabling cross-validation and synthesis of findings into a unified analytical interpretation.

Methodological validity was strengthened through triangulation across data sources, methods, and respondent categories, while reliability was enhanced through consistent application of data collection instruments and systematic coding procedures. Ethical approval was obtained prior to fieldwork, informed consent was secured from all participants, and confidentiality was strictly maintained through anonymization and secure data handling procedures throughout the research process.

FINDINGS

This section presents the empirical results of the study on institutional mediation of United States grand strategy in Botswana's defence policy-making. The findings are organized around four key analytical dimensions: institutional capacity within the defence sector, the presence and coherence of the national defence policy framework, the nature of civilian–military coordination, and the extent and configuration of United States institutional influence. Together, these dimensions provide an integrated account of how domestic institutional structures shape the reception and filtering of external strategic engagement within Botswana's defence governance system.

Response Rate and Data Profile

A total of 60 questionnaires were distributed to respondents drawn from institutions involved in defence, foreign policy, and security governance in Botswana. Of these, 51 were completed and returned, yielding a response rate of 85%. This response level is considered sufficiently high for institutional and policy-oriented research and provides an adequate empirical basis for analysis. According to Mugenda and Mugenda, response rates above 70% are generally regarded as acceptable for social science research. The relatively low non-response rate also reduces the likelihood of significant response bias and strengthens the reliability of the dataset used in the study.

Table 1: Response Rate and Data Profile

Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Distributed questionnaires	60	100
Returned questionnaires	51	85
Non-response	9	15

Source: Field Data, 2025

Institutions In Defence Policy-Making

This section discusses, presents and analyzes findings related to the institutional aspects of defence policymaking in Botswana. Four key areas addressed in the questionnaire are covered, including: institutional capacity of the Ministry of Defence, a national defence policy framework, effectiveness of civilian military coordination, and level and type of influence of the United States on institutions. The study adopts a convergent mixed methods approach, where quantitative results are supplemented with qualitative data to capture an overall picture of how institutions function in the defence policy context in Botswana.

Demographic Characteristics

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	34	67
	Female	17	33
Age (years)	18–29	6	12
	30–39	14	27
	40–49	16	31
	50–59	10	20
	60+	5	10
Institutional Affiliation	Ministry of Defence & Security	18	35
	Botswana Defence Force	12	24
	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	6	12
	Parliament/Oversight Committees	4	8
	Academia/Research Institutions	5	10
	Civil Society & Media	4	8
Years of Experience	Other Government Ministries	2	3
	0–5 years	7	14
	6–10 years	12	24
	11–15 years	15	29
	16–20 years	9	18
21+ years	8	15	

Source: Field Data, 2025

The demographic profile of respondents indicates a sample drawn from individuals with direct and substantive engagement in defence, security, and foreign policy environments in Botswana. The composition is therefore appropriate for a study examining institutional mediation of grand strategy, as it reflects actors embedded within both decision-making and policy-adjacent structures.

Gender distribution shows a male-dominated sample (67%), with female respondents constituting 33%. This pattern reflects the broader structural reality of defence and security institutions, where historical occupational pathways and institutional recruitment patterns have resulted in persistent gender imbalances. However, the inclusion of female respondents ensures the presence of diverse experiential perspectives within policy-relevant institutions, particularly in advisory and administrative roles.

Age distribution indicates that the majority of respondents fall within the 30–49 age range, representing mid-career professionals who are likely to occupy operational, analytical, and managerial positions. The presence of respondents aged 50 and above further strengthens the dataset by incorporating senior institutional perspectives, while younger respondents (18–29) provide entry-level or emerging institutional viewpoints. Collectively, this spread suggests a balanced mix of experiential depth and generational variation, enhancing interpretive reliability.

Institutional affiliation data shows strong representation from core defence governance structures, particularly the Ministry of Defence and Security (35%) and the Botswana Defence Force (24%). This ensures that the findings are grounded in primary institutional actors directly involved in defence policy processes. The inclusion of respondents from foreign affairs, parliamentary oversight bodies, academia, and civil society introduces complementary perspectives that strengthen triangulation and reduce institutional bias toward a single governance layer. Although smaller in proportion, these groups are analytically significant because they reflect external oversight, interpretive, and policy-review dimensions of defence governance.

Years of experience further reinforce the credibility of the dataset. The largest proportion of respondents have between 6 and 15 years of experience, indicating substantial exposure to institutional processes and policy environments. Respondents with over 16 years of experience contribute institutional memory and historical depth, while those with less than five years provide more recent or emerging perspectives on defence governance dynamics. This distribution suggests a well-balanced sample in terms of professional exposure, enabling both operational and strategic insights into defence policy-making processes.

Overall, the demographic structure of the sample demonstrates strong institutional relevance, adequate experiential depth, and sufficient diversity across governance domains. This enhances the validity of subsequent findings on institutional mediation, civilian–military coordination, and external strategic influence within Botswana’s defence policy system.

Ministry of Defence Institutional Capacity

Institutional capacity in defence is key to the process of policy formulation, coordination and implementation. It assesses the administrative, technical and strategic capabilities of defence institutions to perform complex security tasks.

Table 3: Ministry of Defence Institutional Capacity

Rating	Frequency	Percentage
Very Weak (1)	2	4%
Weak (2)	5	10%
Moderate (3)	18	35%
Strong (4)	20	39%
Very Strong (5)	6	12%
Total	51	100%

Source: Field Data, 2025

The quantitative results show that institutional capacity is mostly perceived in the moderate to strong range. 51% of all respondents rated the Ministry as very strong or strong and 35% rated it as moderate. 14% classified institutional capacity as weak or very weak. The overall attitude towards the Ministry of Defence and Security is that it is basically a fairly stable organization with a moderate to relatively high capacity.

The quantitative distribution indicates an institution that is fully operational and has a well-ordered administration, but that is not equally strong in all aspects of capacity. This needs to be explained in more detail in terms of how the capacity of the institution is set up in various functional areas.

Qualitative evidence adds explanatory depth. Administrative function and strategic analytical skills were always clearly distinguishable in participants. A senior policy respondent commented:

While the Ministry has the structures, in terms of advanced planning, there is still need for external expertise and inter-institutional cooperation” (Senior Policy Official, interview, 2025).

A Defence sector official added:

Capacity is still developing, particularly in the need for high-level strategic analysis. Institutionally, we are stable” (Defence Sector Official, interview, 2025).

From these representations, it is evident that there is an unequal distribution of institutional capacity within the Ministry. The advanced strategic functions such as long-term defence planning and complex policy analysis are comparatively limited, and governance functions such as administrative coordination and routine governance, are considered to be relatively strong. Capacity is therefore being developed at a strategic level and at an operational level is current.

The pattern of the quantitative and qualitative results is converging, with moderate to good institutional capacity seen for the Ministry of Defence with a lack of uniformity in functional domains.

This can be likened to Ayoob (1995) who stated that, "post-colonial security institutions tend to be constrained in their capacity and capability to develop in advanced ways, even if basic security capacities in terms of administration are relatively stable. In this context, the institutions are not failed institutions, they are only institutions that have different levels of capacity maturity in their operational and strategic mastery.

The results of this present study add to this argument because it reveals that the Ministry of Defence (MoD) in Botswana has clear administrative stability and coordination capacity with a reliance on external expertise and inter-institutional collaboration for higher order strategic functions. This means that there is a dual institutional capacity: one that is effective in operation and another that is deepening in strategy.

The findings overall indicate that both the strategic planning and analytical capacity of the Ministry of Defence in Botswana are gradually consolidating, and it is institutionally stable and functionally effective.

Existence of a National Defence Policy Framework

This section provides the results of the question regarding the presence of a clearly defined national defence policy framework, specifically on perceptions of policy consolidation within the defence governance system.

Table 4: Existence of National Defence Policy Framework

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	18	35%
No	12	24%
Not Sure	21	41%
Total	51	100%

Source: Field Data, 2025

The quantitative results show mixed attitudes about the presence of a national defence policy framework. Many respondents (41%) were uncertain, 35% said it does exist and 24% stated that there is no obvious framework. The analysis of the distribution provided little evidence of a shared understanding by stakeholders of the formal level of visibility and integration of Botswana's defence policy architecture.

A significant number are uncertain indicates that the national defence policy framework is not well expressed or evident throughout the institutional actors. This ambiguity is of analytical interest since it is indicative not only of awareness gaps but also of potential ambiguity in the articulation of policy.

Qualitative evidence is used to provide further clarification.

A government respondent said:

There are documents and frameworks to guide, but there is still no defence policy that ties everything together” (Government Respondent, interview, 2025).

A policy analyst observed:

Much of the defence policy is understated and implicit, embedded in practice and legislation rather than in one document” (Policy Analyst, interview, 2025).

The evidence suggests that direction of defence policy does exist in Botswana, but is fragmented into a variety of institutional, legal and administrative instruments and does not appear to be centralized in a single, codified national defence policy document. Policy coherence is thus realized in an embedded way and not in a formal centralized way. If both the quantitative and qualitative results are analyzed together, a convergence becomes apparent that Botswana's defence policy system is formally articulated poorly but it is coherence in action.

This is similar to the perspective of Halperin et al. (2006) that defence policy systems can be coherent even if a single, coherent policy structure is lacking because they are driven by organizational routines and institutional processes. This is not a system completely codified; it is a system that is stable because of institutional interaction, administrative continuity and normal norms in operation.

This study builds on this argument by demonstrating that the governance of the defence sector in Botswana takes place through a multitude of policy instruments that are not coordinated, but institutions manage the coordination process. This is a reason why some respondents have been uncertain on their survey answers, as well as why a large fraction of respondents have recognized the existence of a policy.

The overall picture presented by the evidence indicates that the formal articulation of Botswana's defence policy is structurally decentralized, while its implementation is structurally coherent, in a pragmatic governance model that has been influenced by the continuity of institutions and not by the process of centralization.

Effectiveness of Civilian–Military Coordination

Respondents rated the effectiveness of coordination between civilian authorities and military institutions on a scale from 1 (very ineffective) to 5 (very effective).

Table5: Civilian–Military Coordination

Rating	Frequency	Percentage
Very Ineffective (1)	2	4%
Ineffective (2)	5	10%
Moderate (3)	18	35%
Effective (4)	20	39%
Very Effective (5)	6	12%
Total	51	100%

Source: Field Data, 2025

The quantitative findings indicate that civilian–military coordination in Botswana is generally perceived as effective. A combined 51% of respondents rated coordination as effective or very effective, while 35% indicated a moderate level. 14% said coordination was ineffective or very ineffective. This distribution indicates a rather generalized coordination system, but not necessarily shared by every respondent.

The quantitative pattern indicates the general functionality and stability of the institutional relationship between civil and military. The centralization of the responses in the moderate and the effective categories, however, points to the differences in the way coordination is experienced in different policy contexts and institutional levels.

This variation is explained by the qualitative evidence. The issue of coordination was highlighted by respondents, and it was explained that this is mainly organized in a formal institutional hierarchy and through a defined command chain. A senior government official said:

“Coordination is effective as there is a clear chain of command and respect for institutional roles” (Senior Government Official, interview, 2025).

Similarly, a defence respondent pointed out:

The extent to which there is formalized and efficient civil–military coordination is generally good, particularly in day-to-day policy making (Defence Respondent, interview, 2025).

However, a civil society participant introduced an important nuance:

“Most coordination happens at senior levels, while lower-level institutional interaction is more limited” (Civil Society Participant, interview, 2025).

These accounts indicate that while civilian–military coordination is institutionally formalized and operationally effective, it is also hierarchical in nature. Coordination is strongest at senior decision-making levels, where formal authority and structured interaction are concentrated, but becomes less dense at lower administrative levels where inter-agency engagement is less consistent.

When quantitative and qualitative results are put together, they show that civil-military coordination in Botswana is successful in its structures but has a top-heavy hierarchy. This means there is interconnectedness among formal institutional arrangements, defined lines of authority, and clearly identified roles for civilian and military individuals to come up with coherent policies and predictable operations. However, civil-military coordination is not even across all levels within the institutions because the greatest interaction occurs at the highest levels of decision-making as opposed to at the lower administrative levels.

This aligns with Sebudubudu (2021), who argues that Botswana's governmental structure has many institutions that are very stable and provide solid control of civilian authorities, and the military is loyal and compliant to civilian authorities. A coordination framework exists for this coordination to take place through formalized processes and structures which emphasize hierarchy, order, and a clear definition of authority or the structure of the entities involved.

This work adds to this argument by demonstrating that while coordination serves to maintain system stability at the level of the whole system, the depth of coordination across systems will therefore be very different and this illustrates a governance model built around a centralized governance structure for institutional interaction involving senior managers, civilian–military coordination in Botswana reflects a structured and stable governance arrangement that ensures coherence and control, while also revealing a hierarchical pattern of engagement across institutional levels.

Extent of United States Institutional Influence

Respondents were asked to assess the extent of institutional influence exerted by United States defence and security structures within Botswana’s defence policy environment on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very high).

Table 6: Extent of United States Institutional Influence

Rating	Frequency	Percentage
Not at all (1)	6	12%
Low (2)	10	20%
Moderate (3)	15	29%
High (4)	12	24%
Very High (5)	8	15%
Total	51	100%

Source: Field Data, 2025

The quantitative results show that there is some level of United States influence in Botswana's defence policy setting, but that influence is not seen as being overwhelming. 39% of respondents rated the influence as high or very high and 29% rated it as moderate. Another 32% felt that their influence was low or nonexistent. This distribution indicates that there is a fairly balanced view of the external influence, but no clear majority or minority opinion on the impact of the external influence.

The quantitative pattern indicates that the United States is recognized in Botswana defence policy environment but it is not expressed consistently and moderately. The concentrations at moderate and high levels suggest that influence is primarily in terms of structured engagement rather than through direct policy control. Qualitative evidence is used to illuminate the way this influence is put into practice. The consistent theme of the respondents was that institutional cooperation frameworks are established for US participation, not through authoritative decision-making processes. A senior defence official explained:

“US influence is there but done in a cooperative way, not a decision-maker way

” (Senior Defence Official, interview, 2025).

A policy respondent further noted:

“They can play an important role in capacity building and training, but the final decision is all domestic.

” (Policy Respondent, interview, 2025).

A diplomatic participant added:

“Influences are mediated through institutional engagement processes rather than control

” (Diplomatic Participant, interview, 2025).

Such accounts suggest that US influence within formal cooperation structures is deeply rooted in training programmes, joint exercises, defence dialogue, and advisory support. However, this influence does not extend into direct command over policy decisions, as domestic institutions retain final authority. Moreover, the fact that responses varied indicates that the visibility of US influence varies by institutional actor and policy area based on the level and kind of engagement.

The quantitative and qualitative findings converge with United States institutional influence in Botswana being present but

“mediated

” by institutional structures, and not

“directive.”

This indicates a degree of influence that is delivered via institutionalized defence cooperation mechanisms that facilitate capacity building, professionalization and institutional cooperation and maintain national sovereignty over defence decision-making. US engagement does not influence policy outcomes directly, but rather takes place within the institutional structure that governs the way external inputs are received and utilized.

This is consistent with the findings of Allison and Zelikow (1999) that policy is determined by institutional processes and bureaucratic mediation, not external control. In this context, influence is filtered through Botswana’s domestic governance structures, which determine how external engagement is translated into policy-relevant outcomes, the findings indicate a managed form of external influence in which United States institutional engagement is present, structured, and influential in capacity terms, but ultimately constrained by domestic institutional authority and decision-making autonomy.

Areas of United States Institutional Influence

Respondents identified key areas where United States institutional influence is most evident within Botswana’s defence policy environment.

Table 7: Areas of US Institutional Influence

Area of Influence	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Training and Capacity Building	22	43%
Doctrine Development	15	29%
Strategic Cooperation	9	18%
Procurement	5	10%
Total	51	100%

Source: Field Data, 2025

The quantitative findings indicate that United States institutional influence is most pronounced in training and capacity building (43%), followed by doctrine development (29%) and strategic cooperation (18%). Procurement registers the lowest level of influence at 10%. Overall, the distribution indicates that US influence is focused on capability enhancement areas, and not on core sovereign decision-making areas.

The quantitative pattern implies external influence takes place in a selective and functionally differentiated manner, with United States involvement focused on soft topics (capacity building) but not hard ones (sovereignty/sovereign areas like procurement). This is further supported by qualitative evidence. There was a clear consensus on the respondents that the most visible involvement of the United States in the country is through training and professional development exercises that enhance operational readiness. One of the defenders explained:

The training and professional development engagement is the majority of the engagement and that helps to enhance our capabilities (Defence Official, interview, 2025).

When it comes to doctrine development and strategic cooperation, the respondents said that influence comes from exposure and interaction, not from doctrine formulation. As one policy participant commented:

“Doctrine and strategy are influenced through exposure, but adapted to local needs

” (Policy Participant, interview, 2025).

The least affected area was procurement, where respondents emphasized that the domestic procurement climate is a key issue for the procurement process. A policy analyst observed:

“Procurement is mostly a sovereign process, even if external parties are brought in to give advisories

” (Policy Analyst, interview, 2025).

Qualitative evidence collectively indicated that institutional influence in the United States is channeled via institutionalized cooperation mechanisms, and is subject to institutional filters. Thus, influence is felt as an advising, developmental process, and not as controlling or directive. The results of the integration reveal a differentiated influence structure: the influence of the United States is strongest in the Capacity-building functions, moderate in the doctrinal and strategic functions, and weak in the procurement functions. This is consistent with Williams (2011) who states that in the African context defence diplomacy generally works by training and cooperation, rather than by control over sovereign decisions regarding defence. The findings in this paper also indicate that external influences influence the process of capability formation, but do not take the place of domestic authority over key decision areas.

Theoretically, Defence Diplomacy Theory helps in understanding how Botswana has been influenced, especially through training, while Small States Theory helps in understanding Botswana's selective absorption of external inputs in a sovereignty-preserving environment. The amalgamation of these views indicates that influence is not equal to each other but is strategically mediated in institutional borders. Overall, the evidence suggests that the institutional influence of the United States on Botswana is developmental; that is, it strengthens institutional capabilities, but leaves domestic decision-making on the essential elements of defence policy in place. In Botswana, the institutional framework of defence policy-making is moderately to strongly developed internally, partly formalized, and with an effective, but centralized, coordination system, and a structured external engagement.

The Ministry of Defence is the main coordinating body and the civil-military relations are stable and institutionally disciplined. There is no complete national defence policy framework, indicating that national policy is not consolidated in strategy documents, but rather institutionalized in a dispersed manner. Institutional influence by the United States is realized but largely in the area of defence diplomacy, including training and capacity building. This influence does not supplant the authority of the domestic institutions but rather operates in a complementary and adaptive manner; in this way, institutions emerge as mediating structures that turn the influence of the outside into a controlled policy outcome in Botswana, with which the study's main argument resonates

CONCLUSION

This study examined how United States grand strategy is institutionally mediated within Botswana's defence policy-making system. The central argument advanced is that external strategic influence is not directly exercised, but filtered through domestic institutional structures that determine its form, scope, and policy relevance. The findings demonstrate that Botswana's defence governance is characterized by strong executive centralization, where strategic authority is concentrated at the level of the Presidency, while the Ministry of Defence and the Botswana Defence Force function primarily as advisory and implementation institutions. This configuration produces a stable but hierarchical decision-making architecture in which policy coherence is achieved through centralized authority rather than dispersed institutional bargaining.

Institutionally, Botswana exhibits moderate to strong administrative capacity, but uneven strategic depth. Operational and coordination functions are relatively well developed, while advanced strategic planning and analytical capabilities remain partially dependent on external engagement and inter-institutional support. This

generates a differentiated capacity structure in which institutional stability coexists with constrained strategic autonomy in specific functional domains.

The study further finds that Botswana does not operate on the basis of a fully codified national defence policy framework. Instead, policy coherence is embedded within dispersed institutional practices, legal instruments, and bureaucratic routines. This indicates that defence governance is sustained through institutional continuity rather than formal policy consolidation.

With respect to external influence, the United States grand strategy is present but structurally mediated. Its primary channels of influence are training, doctrinal exposure, and defence diplomacy. These mechanisms shape professional military norms and institutional capacity without translating into direct policy control. Rather than transforming domestic decision-making structures, US engagement is absorbed selectively through institutional filters that preserve sovereign authority. Overall, the evidence supports the proposition that grand strategic influence in Botswana is conditionally mediated rather than directive. Domestic institutions function as effective filters that translate external engagement into capacity development while maintaining policy autonomy. This reinforces the broader theoretical claim that small-state defence policy-making is shaped less by external power projection and more by internal institutional configurations that structure the reception of external inputs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study generates several policy-relevant implications for strengthening defence governance and managing external strategic engagement in Botswana.

- 1. Strengthening Strategic Planning Capacity:** Botswana's defence institutions should prioritize the development of advanced strategic planning and analytical capabilities. While operational effectiveness is relatively strong, long-term policy formulation remains constrained. Targeted investment in defence policy analysis, scenario planning, and strategic foresight would enhance institutional autonomy and reduce reliance on external expertise in high-level planning functions.
- 2. Consolidation of Defence Policy Framework:** The absence of a single, codified national defence policy framework creates interpretive ambiguity across institutions. A consolidated defence policy document would enhance coherence, clarify strategic priorities, and improve coordination across civilian and military actors. Such consolidation would also strengthen policy visibility for both domestic stakeholders and external partners.
- 3. Strengthening Mid-Level Coordination Mechanisms:** Although civil–military coordination is effective at senior levels, it is less consistent at lower administrative tiers. Strengthening mid-level inter-agency coordination structures would improve policy transmission, reduce hierarchical bottlenecks, and enhance operational consistency across defence institutions.
- 4. Institutional Management of External Engagement:** United States defence engagement should remain firmly embedded within formal institutional channels to safeguard policy autonomy. Clear guidelines governing training, doctrinal exchange, and joint exercises would ensure that external inputs remain capacity-enhancing rather than policy-directive. This would reinforce sovereign control while sustaining beneficial cooperation.
- 5. Institutionalizing Knowledge Absorption from Defence Diplomacy:** Botswana should strengthen mechanisms for systematically capturing, evaluating, and integrating knowledge derived from external defence cooperation. This includes formal post-training evaluation systems and structured pathways for translating external exposure into domestic doctrinal and strategic learning.

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