

Contending Issues in Militaristic Approach for Managing Asymmetric Conflicts in Africa: Public Policies Implications for Peace and Security

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Abstract

Since their independences, African countries have been embroiled in incessant armed conflicts, with unbridled threats to peace and security in the continent. Obviously, these raise extensive trepidations both in and out of the continent. So far, opinions differ regarding the character of progress made to instil peace and security in the African continent, especially by wading off the dark history of militarisation in the face of conflicts from the 1960s and 1980s. Apparently, in embracing the democratisation processes from the 1990s, including the UN Sustainable Development Agenda 2030; and AU's Agenda 2063, to 'Silence the Guns'; militarisation appears a favoured approach for many African governments in conflicts situations. Certainly, the rise of asymmetric conflicts between non-state and state actors in the continent is a dire worry. However, most worrisome for this paper is the character of state responses, (mostly military) in trying to nib the objectives of these non-state actors, especially with the syndrome of 'War against Terror.' This paper finds out that extensive deficits exist in the militaristic approach to managing asymmetric conflicts in Africa. Consequently, it argues that the option of countering asymmetric conflicts involving non-state armed groups, through symmetric strategies such as direct military intervention, without recognizing and accepting the fundamental asymmetries of the conflicting parties, simply serves to extend the destructiveness and intractability of the asymmetric armed conflict. Hence, this approach appears inappropriate in addressing the original issues that caused the insurgency. The article concludes that only a much more holistic perspective by African governments, which combines inclusionary governance and socio-economic development, democratic principles, visionary leadership, and genuine dialoguing, could entrench sustainable peace and security, rather than the use of military force.

Key words: Africa, Asymmetric conflict management, militaristic approach, peace, security.

INTRODUCTION

A glance on local and international media on any given day provides a powerful reminder that devastating armed conflicts are destroying lives and whole communities worldwide. Historically, Africa has suffered and continues to suffer from the consequences of violent conflicts. While there has been some progress in the African continent towards shedding the dark history of militarisation in the face of violent conflicts that spanned the 1960s -1980s and embracing the democratisation project in the 1990s, militarisation still appears to remain the favoured approach of many African governments in situations of conflicts. Daily events in many African countries reveal that militaristic approaches to managing societal conflicts appear to be expanding, becoming 'institutionalised' and 'normalised' with far reaching negative implications for peace and security at individual, community, country and continental levels. Moreover, conflict in Africa is becoming more complex as the numbers of

conflict actors have increased. Rebel (and extremist) groups are more numerous and often fracture into additional groupings.

Today, conflicts in Africa generally takes place within states (rather than as a function of war between countries), although a number of armed groups operate regionally, such as Boko Haram and the Lord's Resistance Army. Whereas in 2010 only five countries experienced sustained activity from violent Islamist extremism (Algeria, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Somalia), that number has grown to 12 countries (Algeria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Egypt, Kenya, Libya, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia and Tunisia). Many of these conflicts are asymmetric and protracted in character, involving government security forces countering the war activities of non-state armed groups, rather than purely strategic. These conflicts are not only resulting from internal political disturbances, it is also intermingled with identity, religion, resources, migration, and above all extreme poverty. Non-state armed groups are central figures in many of the world's internal armed conflicts including the African continent. Their objectives and use of violence spark deep controversy about appropriate responses to their actions, particularly in the context of the global 'war on terror.' Recently, some conflict theorists have drawn attention on the approach to manage such complex conflict situations. Current literature related to sustainable conflict management is oriented to the argument that in order to manage and hopefully resolve these kinds of conflicts, a comprehensive approach that sees conflict as having multiple causes in the context of historical, ethnic, religious nationalist, socio-psychological, political, economic factors etc is required. It is certainly for reasons such as these that international development frameworks such as the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and continental frameworks such as the African Union Agenda 2063 include 'silencing the guns' and promoting sustainable peace and security as central and integrated elements for a violent-free world. However, many parts Africa are still inundated with violent conflicts and their resultant human and material negative consequences. Peace and security issues in this complexity of protracted asymmetrical conflicts involving non-state armed groups continue to be essentially pursued from a state-centric perspective, using militaristic strategies to contain the 'opposition', non-state armed and terrorists groups that challenge the state. Governments in Africa fail to see the issues raised by extremist and non-state armed groups and therefore rarely pursue genuine and inclusive dialogue with them. The ultimate result is the prolongation of violence, killings and destructions.

In addition to the human and financial costs, one of the criticisms that has been raised in the literature about the militaristic approach to managing societal conflict is that it does not address the underlying reasons for why people engaged in violent conflicts in the first place (the epicentre of the conflict). Instead, it focuses on the symptoms (the conflict episode) of a much deeper and complex structural factors that is at the root of the 'violent' conflict. It is therefore not surprising that states emerging from war in many parts of Africa (and other fragile states) also frequently relapse into war.

Hence, this paper sets to discern the contending issues in the militaristic approach in managing asymmetric conflicts in Africa and to highlight the ensuing public policies implications for peace and security in the continent. It seeks to answer the following fundamental question: *what are the deficits of the 'militaristic approach' to managing asymmetric conflicts in Africa.* On top of this central question, lies the following secondary questions: (1) how has the militaristic approach contributed to the intensity and violence of asymmetric conflicts in African countries? (2) how does the militaristic approach fits in with and reflects wider politico-economic dynamics of asymmetric conflicts and how can it influence peace and security outcomes in Africa?

Constructed around a critical use of primary and secondary data, particularly, the review of relevant literature and adoption of an essentially multi-disciplinary qualitative approach in a

cross-country case study, on the war activities orchestrated by the Boko Haram terrorist sect in Nigeria and Cameroon, this paper divulges how African governments can provide salient traditional conflict management solutions (symmetric) to non-traditional (asymmetric) conflict situations. It argues that the option of countering asymmetric conflicts involving non-state armed groups, through symmetric strategies such as direct military intervention, without recognizing and accepting the fundamental asymmetries of the conflicting parties, simply serves to extend the destructiveness and intractability of the asymmetric armed conflict. Consequently, this approach appears inappropriate in addressing the original issues that caused the insurgency.

Said differently, this paper divulges that the militaristic approach is not only expensive in terms of human and material damages, including the implantation of future conflicts, it also does not address the deep-rooted issues, structural violence and 'issues of mistrust' as progenitors of conflicts in the continent. As such, the security and peaceful co-existence of people and property in African countries are usually jettisoned by the use of the militaristic approach. Hence, the militaristic approach is fundamentally inappropriate to asymmetric conflict management involving non-state armed groups. The issues raised are critical to our understanding of the deficits of the state-centric and militaristic approach to managing complex asymmetric armed conflicts and prompts the need for a more innovative and holistic approach that puts human security and inclusive governance at the centre of analysis. In fact, this article concludes that only a much more holistic perspective by African governments, which combines inclusive governance, inclusive economic development, periodic regime turnovers, visionary leadership, and genuine dialoguing, could entrench sustainable peace and security, rather than the use of military fiat. The article is organized around six (6) thematic sections, including policy alternatives and a conclusion.

1. Methodology

This research article is theoretically and empirically constructed around a critical review of relevant literature and desk-based inquiry, adopting an essentially qualitative approach and a cross-country case study on Boko Haram orchestrated war activities in Nigeria and Cameroon. Hence, the research design makes use of secondary data from books, articles, online media, national and international research reports.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Orientations.

This section deals with the conceptual clarification of key terms. This is done alongside a careful and selective review of relevant theoretical and empirical arguments for positioning the study within an analytic perspective.

2.1 The Nature of Conflict: Symmetric and Asymmetric conflicts.

There is no standard definition of the term conflict. However, the way people and nations view conflict certainly determines how they respond to it. One prominent definition has been that conflict is an intrinsic and inevitable aspect of social change and part of human co-existence (Mial et al., 1999). It is an expression of the heterogeneity of interests, values and beliefs and arises as new formation generated by social change come up against inherited constraints (ibid). This paper assumes that the dynamics of conflicts should be analyzed along the following components: (1) conflicts unfold over time; (2) conflict is a multidimensional phenomenon (intrapersonal aspects of conflict interact with social or relational ones, and both of them are influenced by higher level, political, economic and social changes); (3) conflicts contain realistic and nonrealistic issues; (4) power distribution among parties plays an important role in conflict development.

As noted earlier, in recent decades, more and more conflicts in Africa have become not only

intra-state, but asymmetrical and protracted in character. Conflicts that occur between relatively similar parties (i.e., those who have equal power) are referred to as *symmetric* conflicts. A good case in point was the Nigeria – Cameroon conflict over the oil rich Bakassi Peninsular. Conflicts that arise between dissimilar parties (e.g., between a majority and a minority, or an established government and a group of rebels or non-state armed groups), are considered *asymmetric* conflicts. Asymmetric guerrilla insurgencies, wars over drug profits, and transnational terrorism, has for decades been the most common kind of asymmetrical warfare in the world.

In asymmetric conflict situations, the root of the conflict lies not in particular issues or interests that may divide the parties, but in the very structure of who they are and the relationship between them. It may be that this structure cannot be changed without conflict. While classical conflict management and resolution, in some views, applies only to symmetric conflict situations, in asymmetric conflicts take place between dissimilar parties and the structure is such that the ‘power party’ such as government always wins and the ‘weaker party’ such as the minority ethnic or non-state armed group always loses. However, in severe asymmetric conflicts, the cost of the relationship often becomes unbearable for both sides. This then opens the possibility for conflict management (and resolution) through a shift from the existing structure of relationships to another—a more balanced and peaceful relationship.

This means transforming violent, unbalanced relationships into peaceful and dynamic ones. There are always alternatives to violence and so these structural changes can be approached without the use of force or violent coercion, including influencing and persuading the power-holders, mobilizing popular movements, increasing solidarity, making demonstrations of resolve, raising awareness of the conflict among those who are external or internal supporters of the ‘powerful party.’ Thus, non-violent approaches use ‘soft power’ to move towards a more balanced relationship. Consequently, most asymmetric conflict situations, when poorly managed, metamorphose into ‘intractable conflict’ or what is generally known as ‘protracted conflict.’ Azar thus used the term protracted social conflict “to suggest the type of ongoing and seemingly irresolvable conflict” (Azar, in Burton and Dukes, 1990) as observed in many parts of Africa such as the ‘war on terror.’ The argument of Azar is that, it is at the juncture of actual physical and psychological deprivation that structural victimization bursts into hostile and violent actions (Azar, in Zinnes, 1983). It thus seems reasonable to assume here that conflicts about real interests take place under certain psychological dispositions and in certain psycho-social contexts which serve to influence substantially the intensity and duration of serious conflicts (as in asymmetric conflicts) and ultimately determine the outcome.

2.2 The Concepts of Peace and Security.

The United Nations declared after the Third World Conference on Women, Nairobi 1985 that “*peace includes not only the absence of war, violence and hostility at the national and international levels but also enjoyment of economic and social justice, equity and the entire range of human rights and fundamental freedoms within the society.*” Consequently, peace, (just like security), is a much broader concept than the absence of war or armed conflict (what is known in peace science as negative peace as oppose to positive peace (to use the terms of the international peace researcher, Johan Galtung). In this case, the removal of armed threats is only a minimalist condition for the attainment of peace and sustainable human security. Thus, the peace question must be seen in two aspects: first, peace should be conceptualised and perceived not only in the negative sense of minimising or resolving conflict but also in the positive sense of working for justice and human security. During the 2000 World’s Children Day, former UN Secretary-general, Kofi Annan, described peace as a

holistic virtue, which accords opportunity to people, including children, a condition under which people lived free of fear and want. In his words, "...There is no duty more important than ensuring that [children's] rights are respected, that their welfare is protected, that their lives are free from fear and want and that they grow up in peace" (Annan 2000:4). In Annan's view, peace is linked to the security of people, summarized as "freedom from fear, freedom from want and freedom to live a life of dignity" which are the core dimensions of human security (UNDP, 1994).

Notwithstanding the visible inadequacy of defining peace as the antithesis of war (negative peace), this article combines the conventional view of peace as representing conditions devoid of war (negative peace), the perspective offered by Kofi Annan and the conditions of human security offered by UNDP's 1994 Human Development Report. ("freedom from fear, freedom from want and freedom to live a life of dignity") . Thus, in this paper, peace is conceived of as not only the absence of war but also the absence and threats to human security. As such, creating socio-economic, political, environmental and cultural conditions, which provide the population a certain minimum condition of human security to be free from want, fear and to live a life of dignity is key to peace. Peace and security are intimately linked not only for the purpose of analysis or as an intellectual exercise but as the only meaningful way to face the peace and development 'problematic.' Moreover, one of the aspirations of the African Union Agenda 2063 is 'a peaceful and secure Africa.' It aims to strengthen mechanisms and promote the inclusive and dialogue-centred prevention and resolution of conflicts to 'silence the guns'. It further identifies good governance, democracy, social inclusion, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law as necessary pre-conditions for a peaceful and conflict-free continent. The Agenda 2063 also regards peace as a prerequisite to sustainable development. This reflects what many leaders have long known: development is impossible without peace and there can be no peace without security, and vice-versa. For example, former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan stated that, "we will not enjoy development without security, we will not enjoy security without development, and we will not enjoy either without respect for human rights." (*Report of the Secretary General Kofi Annan*, UN doc. A/59/2005). More recently, in reaction to the security challenges imposed on Cameroon by the Boko Haram terrorist group, H.E, Paul Biya, President of the Republic of Cameroon, in his 2015 New Year Speech to the nation laid emphasis on the important relationship between peace, security and development. In his words: "il n'y a pas de paix sans sécurité, pas de développement sans paix." This literally means there can be no peace without security and no development is possible without peace.

2.3 The 'Militaristic Approach'

When military institutions and actors are powerful and their power position has a certain degree of legitimacy; when armed actors exert strong influence over various arenas of society (e.g., politics, economy, local governance); and when violence and its wielders occupy a prominent place in symbolic orders and strongly affect modes of social identification, a social order can be called 'militarised' (Verweijen 2015). As stated by Bernazolli and Flint (2009: 379), processes of militarisation are "constituted in large part by the activities of people in everyday settings' which 'work to make militarism a taken-for-granted, or "natural" facet of many societies' thus, powered by a 'culture of war' as oppose to a 'culture of peace.' These processes, so they argue, are place-specific, and depend on the nature of the military presence and the characteristics of the civilian communities and settings involved (ibid). Hence, the militaristic approach as employed in this paper refers to the preference of the use of force through military means as a conflict management strategy to bring about an end to an asymmetric conflict situation involving government security forces and non-state armed groups (fighting for some form of 'self-determination', 'power sharing', resources

distribution etc). With the above, the question that emerges is: What are the challenges to peace and security in Africa and how has the militaristic approach to responding to conflicts situations contributed to this landscape?

3. The Legacy of Militarization and the Challenges to Sustainable Peace and Security in Africa

The African continent pursued political independence more than half a century ago, seeking freedom to overcome colonial legacies of military pacification and iron-fisted colonial governments characterised by administrative tyranny, economic exploitation, socio-cultural repression, and all the dynamics that perpetrated underdevelopment. When victory came, and political transitions to African rule came, the institutions of state bore the marks of a patriarchal and militaristic history.

African armies made a habit of bursting out of the barracks to perpetrate atrocities, and seize control of the state and all its assets (Mama and Okazawa-Rey, 2008). By the mid-1970s more than half of Africa was under military rule, and between 1990 and 2005, no fewer than 23 nations were involved in conflict, with an average cost per year of US \$18 billion to African economies (ibid). The vast majority of these conflicts were carried out within nations, with increasingly devastating impact on civilian populations and rising casualties among women and children. Recent years have seen the heavily militarised US regime declare a new borderless war without end, under the paranoid spectre of the ‘Global War on Terror’. This is having world-wide ramifications and escalating militarization. The effects include the proliferation of weapons and military bases, some direct military action, a number of well-orchestrated proxy-actions in Africa and other parts of the formerly colonized world, and a growing acceptance of violence as the way to resolve conflicts. African countries are spending nearly US \$17 billion a year, of which US \$10 billion are spent in sub-Saharan Africa (SIPRI, 2008). In addition, SIPRI’s 2020 Yearbook, highlights the fact that,

The ongoing deterioration in the conditions for international stability is reflected in the continued rise in military spending and the estimated value of global arms transfers, an unfolding crisis of arms control that has now become chronic, and increasingly toxic global geopolitics and regional rivalries. There also remains a persistently high number of armed conflicts worldwide, with few signs of negotiated settlements on the horizon.

A high percentage of these armed conflicts are located in Africa. Among which include, the worsening crisis in the Sahel and Lake Chad region. The SIPRI 2020 report captures the situation in this way:

The armed conflicts in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Niger and Nigeria all worsened in 2019. The security challenges are linked to the rise of violent extremism and the proliferation of armed non-state groups, such as Boko Haram, which has spread from Nigeria across the Lake Chad region. The violent extremist groups are interwoven with rural insurgent groups, feeding off intercommunal tensions and exploiting grievances of marginalized communities. Armed conflict fatalities increased significantly in Burkina Faso in 2019 due to a broadening of three interconnected layers of conflict: the government’s conflict with heavily armed Islamist groups, clashes between armed ethnic and Islamist groups, and intercommunal violence

According to SIPRI (2020) global military expenditure also rose sharply in 2019 including in Africa. In this regard, the report reads:

World military expenditure is estimated to have been US\$1917 billion in 2019. It accounted for 2.2 per cent of world gross domestic product (GDP) or \$249 per person. Spending in 2019 was 3.6 per cent higher than in 2018 and

7.2 per cent higher than in 2010. The growth in total global military spending in 2019 was the fifth consecutive annual increase and the largest of the decade 2010–19, surpassing the 2.6 per cent rise in 2018. Military expenditure also increased in at least four of the world's five regions: by 5.0 per cent in Europe, 4.8 per cent in Asia and Oceania, 4.7 per cent in the Americas and 1.5 per cent in Africa.

In effect, the internationalisation of what often begins as purely internal conflicts, the nexus of criminal violence and the activities of a multitude of armed groups together with the growing impact of climate change have served to further exacerbate human insecurity in the world in general and Africa in particular. More problematic is the fact that belligerents increasingly target civilians, and global displacement from violent conflicts and terrorism has also sharply increased over the last years (SIPRI Year Book, 2018). In 2017 alone, the 'global population of forcibly displaced people increased to 68.5 million, compared with 65.6 million in 2016' (UNHCR's global trend on forced displacement in 2017) and this figure has been increasing sharply in recent years. This is especially so as a result of violent conflicts and insecurity in countries such as Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Myanmar, Syria, Nigeria and Cameroon (ibid).

In the case of Cameroon, the increasing number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) is exacerbated by the ongoing complex socio-political crisis in the North-West (NW) and South-West (SW) Regions of the country. In fact, the socio-political turmoil and complex security challenges in countries such as Cameroon, Sudan, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Central African Republic, Burundi, Nigeria etc. reveal that despite some peace and democratic advances, Africa as a whole continues to experience serious peace issues rooted in injustice related to the quality of state and human security. Africa's security environment remains fragile with a wide array of ongoing and emerging threats placing great strains on already overburdened governments. Many conflicts in the continent have resulted from post-colonial liberation struggles, others from struggles for effective and inclusionary governance, marginalisation, and resource control. Recently, African countries have been faced with socio-political crises emanating from weak electoral processes and corrupt politico-administrative practices; the politics of belonging; the instrumentalisation of disorder and differences for political ends, the rise in intolerance, social media hate speech and violent extremism.

Moreover, as new forms of conflicts demand innovative responses, experiences on the ground reveal that states emerging from war in many parts of Africa and other fragile states also frequently relapse into war. Peace-making efforts often succeed in the short-term only to fail in securing sustainable peace. Clearly, this increasing incidence of violent conflicts and insecurity in Africa is considered one of the most urgent peace and development problems in the continent today, affecting all levels of governments, persons, social classes and religion affiliation. All this simply point to some of the paradoxes and shortcomings of considering the militaristic approach as the preferred means to respond to complex and asymmetric conflicts in many parts of Africa such as the fight against Boko Haram and Secessionists in Nigeria and Cameroon.

4. The deficits of the Militaristic Approach to Managing Asymmetric Armed Conflicts

The peace and security problems discussed so far raise important questions about the effectiveness of the current state-centric approach to ending asymmetric warfare/violent conflicts and ensuring the peace and human security of individuals and communities. It therefore appears relevant to address the questions: *what are the deficits of the militaristic approach to managing asymmetric conflicts in Africa?* And, *how has the militaristic*

approach contributed to the intensity and violence of asymmetric conflicts in African countries?

As already noted regarding state-centric security responses to the peace and security challenges, many African leaders' preference is the use of a militarised response against the 'opposition' and rebel movements that challenge their authority. Most African governments fail to see the issues raised by these groups and therefore rarely pursue genuine dialogue with them. Unfortunately, because of inherent weaknesses, many African militaries are unable to sustain long battles with those initially dismissed as rebel groups. Shortly after facing African armies, rebel movements in many parts of the continent overrun the countryside seizing vast territories that evade government control. This has been the case in countries such as Somalia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Libya, Sudan, Mali and Democratic Republic of the Congo. What is clear is that most countries battling high levels of crime, violence and insecurity find that the militaristic approach is not enough to have a significant positive impact. As a case in point, it suffices here to demonstrate the extent of the resilience and persistence of violent acts committed by terrorist and non-state armed groups. We shall speak specifically about the case of the Nigerian homegrown terrorist group, Boko Haram that later on infiltrated the territories of Cameroon, Chad and Niger. We focus on the Boko Haram war activities in Nigeria and Cameroon.

4.1 The Case of the War Activities orchestrated by Boko Haram in Nigeria and Cameroon

The Nigerian sect, Boko Haram, founded in 1995 by Mohammed Yusuf, has continued to spread terror in the Lake Chad zone until this day. According to a study carried out by George Berghezan of the Group for Research and Information on Peace and Security (GRIP) based in Brussels, Belgium, entitled: "*Boko Haram: evolution de 2012 a aujourd'hui*" after a brief calm in 2013, Boko Haram attacks become even more violent, perhaps in reaction to the development of village self-defense militias collaborating with the official security forces (Ndutumu, 2020). Boko Haram also multiplied incursions into the Far North region of Cameroon. Between August and November 2014, several Nigerian cities, close to the borders with Niger and Cameroon, had been conquered by the armed group. (ibid, p. 47). This territorial extension goes hand in hand with a real increase in the number of victims: according to the Institute for Economics and Peace, based at Sydney, Boko Haram became the deadliest terrorist organization in the world in 2014, responsible for the death of 6644 people, an increase of 317% compared to the previous year. It also reportedly committed 10 of the 20 most deadly terrorist attacks of the year, including eight in Nigeria and two in Cameroon (Global Terrorism Index, Institute for Economics and Peace, November, 2015 in Ndutumu, 2020). The Nigeria Security Network's estimate goes even further. It states that Boko Haram was responsible for about 9000 death in 2014, the deadliest year since its creation. (ibid, p.48). Moreover, an additional 800, 000 people were displaced by the conflict, (World Bulletin Istanbul, December 22, 2014 in Ndutumu, 2020).

Boko Haram conquests culminated in the beginning of January 2015 with the taking of the city of Baga, on Lake Chad, Headquarters of the Multi National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) system, supposedly responsible for fighting the terrorist group. Notwithstanding, most of the cities conquered the previous year by Boko Haram were then freed by Multi National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) especially forces from Chad, Niger and Nigeria. Interestingly, Boko Haram compensated the loss of territory with the multiplication of attacks on civilians especially through suicide bombings in Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon and even Chad, which had previously been spared of Boko Haram terror. Hence, the speeches made during this period by the Chadian and Nigerian Presidents on its forthcoming eradication seemed, for many observers, to be overly optimistic as the affected countries until today, cannot celebrate the

disappearance of the terrorist sect. The dynamism of the Boko Haram group reveals its great ability to adapt and every announcement of its defeat has been so far contradicted with even more bloody actions. According to the research report, the various reactions of the Nigerian army, such as massive offensive in Maiduguri region in November 2012 or the proclamation of the state of emergency six months later, even if they facilitated the killings of hundreds of insurgents and the recovery of some land, did not have any lasting effects; Boko Haram easily recovered the lost territory as soon as the security mechanisms were weakened. The period between August 2014 and January 2015 was also marked by the capture of several towns in Borno State: Gwoza and Gambaru, near Cameroonian border (August), Malam Fatori and Damasak, on the border with Niger (November), Baga and Monguno, near Lake Chad (January); to the point where, in the beginning of 2015, the Nigerian territory under Jihadist control exceeded the surface area of Belgium (The Telegraph, January 20, 2015 in Ndutumu, 2020). However, Boko Haram has never managed to take control of important localities outside Nigeria.

Furthermore, not relying on either the African Union (AU) or any regional organisation, the countries of the Lake Chad basin – namely Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger – established a multinational joint task force (MNJTF) to address the Boko Haram crisis. Despite progress registered by the joint task force, day-to-day events on the ground indicate it may be premature to declare victory at this time. According to a Friedrich Ebert Stiftung research report titled: *The Boko Haram Conflict in Cameroon: Why is peace so elusive?* by Ntuda Ebode et al., (2017), “the delay in destroying the sect and the sudden increase in terrorist attacks in the past months shows that the conflict is far from over”. The authors further note that “the attacks, incursions and infiltrations by Boko Haram from 2014 caused the Cameroonian government to opt for a mainly military response; but this choice now seems inadequate in the face of the ever-changing strategies of the enemy”. According to BTI 2018 Country Report on Cameroon, Western military assistance, and a more effective posture by Cameroon’s security forces put Boko Haram on the defensive. Yet numerous suicide attacks and the continued displacement of large numbers of Cameroonians indicate that the challenge is far from resolved.

This perhaps prompts us to briefly examine the dynamics of Boko Haram War activities in Cameroon. Between 3500 and 4000 Cameroonians, mostly men, joined Boko Haram for various reasons, including fanaticism, opportunism and vengeance, while others abducted earlier on, were enlisted by force (Heungoup, 2016). Between 2011 and 2014, the group deepened its roots in the Far North region, infiltrating networks of smugglers of contraband fuel, motor bikes, drugs, and stocking arms caches including in Kousseri that served as a logistics base (ibid). A series of abductions of western expatriates and local elite between 2013 and 2014 and attacks on military bases, caused the security situation in Cameroon to deteriorate drastically. In fact, the group subsequently grabbed the national and international media headlines with brutal attacks on the Cameroonian security forces, villages, churches, mosques, markets and schools, as well as the murder of prominent Muslim clerics in the Far North Region of Cameroon. It also became clear that the Boko Haram intrusion posed the fiercest challenge to Cameroon’s national unity.

This deplorable new Cameroon outlook, finally pushed the Cameroon government that had earlier on shoved Boko Haram as a Nigerian problem, to take the threat more seriously. Hence, in May 2014 the President of Republic of Cameroon, H.E. President Paul Biya officially declared war on Boko Haram while in France, just after the regional summit on the insurgency in Paris. In the eyes of Boko Haram, this declaration triggered an escalation of the violence that had already been going on since 2013 (Tull, 2015). There was subsequently a surge in military confrontations in the Far North Region of Cameroon- bordering Nigeria, with many casualties on both sides and the deployment of troops by the government.

Reflecting concern over this state of affairs, Cameroon's Head of State, President Paul Biya also called for collective efforts to fight against this 'malicious terrorist' group. During the Francophonie summit held in Dakar, Senegal, President Biya stated: "The global terror threat requires a global response, especially from the African Union and other regional bodies" On my part, I continue to believe that the threat from Boko Haram, al-Shabab and other groups will be eradicated only through a joint international effort," (BBC World News, 3 October, 2014).

The Boko Haram (BH) group has increasingly targeted northern Cameroon as a source for new recruits, using it as a training ground and for food supply. According to newspaper reports and interviews, the terrorists offer very attractive benefits for their recruits, and in the generalised impoverishment observed in the Far-North in particular and Northern Regions more generally, due to other natural catastrophes such as droughts and floods, the choice becomes easy to make. High underemployment, among all age groups is at least 75 percent (IRIN, 2015). In the Far North Region, many young people, especially recent graduates, say it is impossible to find decent work (ibid). Thus, according to newspaper articles and interviews with a Rabid Intervention Battalion (BIR) on the war front in the Far North Region, members of the BH group started to radicalize new members through preaching in mosques and around villages. They are also increasingly using economic incentives to persuade unemployed youth and former students to join their group.

There was also renewed escalation in the run up to the Nigerian election of March 2015, plus increasingly aggressive action by Nigerian army and neighbouring states like Chad, that forced the group into the defensive. Since then, Boko Haram has shifted strategies from direct confrontation to guerrilla tactics and terrorist attacks, constantly adapting to the response of Cameroonian defence forces (Heungoup, 2016). Statistically, Cameroon is currently the second most targeted country, in terms of Boko Haram attacks (ibid). Between January and November 2019, about 275 people were killed in the FAR North by Boko Haram¹ while new attacks between December and February 2020, displaced an estimated 3000 people along Cameroon's northern borders with Nigeria (VOA, 2020)². Between 2014 and 2016, Boko Haram carried out more than 400 attacks and incursions in Cameroon, about fifty suicide bombings that left 92 members of security forces dead, injured more than 120 others and killed more than 1350 civilians (ibid). Following one of such bloody attacks, President Paul Biya declared in June 21, 2019, a national day of mourning in honour of the death of 17 Cameroonian soldiers killed by Boko Haram in the Far North earlier in June. Another most recent deadly attack by Boko Haram was that carried out overnight between August 1 and 2, 2020 in a displacement camp in the town of Nguetechewe. This suicide attack killed at least 17 civilians, including 5 children and 6 women, and wounded at least 16 (Human Rights Watch, 2020). In the words of Ilaria Allegrozi, senior Africa researcher at Human Rights Watch, "The Boko Haram's nighttime suicide attack in Nguetechewe appears designed to maximize civilian deaths and injuries...Using apparent children as suicide bombers to attack displaced people is a grossly repugnant war crime (ibid)"

The Cameroon government has responded to each stage of escalation by deploying more troops to the Far North. The increasingly frequent attacks has certainly negatively impacted the socioeconomic wellbeing of Cameroonians in the Far North Region in particular and Cameroon at large. Clearly, therefore, the group, instrumentalizes religion and exploits the

¹ See : <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/cameroon-275-killed-by-boko-haram-since-january/1670459>

² For details visit: VOA, 20 February 2020, Boko Haram raids displace thousands more in Cameroon. <https://reliefweb.int/report/cameroon/boko-haram-raids-displace-thousands-more-cameroon>

poor socio-economic condition of the young people in order to radicalise them³. Not only the use of military approach increases the intensity and violence of asymmetric conflicts with its high destructive impact on human life and property, the militaristic approach is also very costly to both African government and their international community development partners.

In many parts of Africa, crises and conflicts are most often generated by governance failure and nourished by socio-economic problems, poverty and unemployment, as well as by the failure of the state to provide basic services and exercise control over the entire national territory. Emphasising the military dimension of security and approaching crises primarily through military means is first and foremost reacting to the manifestations of insecurity. As exemplified by the Boko Haram case in Nigeria and Cameroon, deploying multinational troops in peace operations as a conflict management strategy may certainly be a way of *ad hoc* reaction to tensions and rebellions and temporarily stop violence. It does not, however, also address the deeper causes for destabilisation at the political, social and economic level or provide any long-term solution neither can it prevent any new outbreak of violence. Counter-insurgency research indicate that political frustration, deep-seated grievances and marginalisation are major drivers of people joining radical groups and terrorist movements such as Boko Haram in the Far-North Region of Cameroon. Hence, in this perspective, effective long-term solutions to prevent insurgency from taking root need to go beyond purely military actions and address deep-seated political and socio-economic problems.

It is also possible to argue that, the Military in African context have often been one that upholds first the interest of the government before that of the population it is called to protect. The case of Cameroon whose military has been highly solicited as never before in the Boko Haram Crisis and other socio-political crises in the country is noteworthy. As such, it is critically important to reflect on militarised actions and interventions in the face of complex domestic and international conflict situations in the continent as failure to do so especially in complex conflict situations with non-state armed groups can continually lead to a greatly enhanced willingness to make use of high ‘intensity violence’ with counterproductive and unjust peace and security outcomes for the civil population especially the most vulnerable. The driving question now is, *how does the military approach fits in with and reflects wider politico-economic dynamics of asymmetric conflicts and how can it influence peace and security outcomes in Africa?* In other words, what are the policy implications of the outcome of the militaristic approach to Peace and Security in Africa?.

5. Public Policies Implications for Peace and Security

For sustainable peace and security to become possible in the midst of ‘new’ and complex violent conflict involving non-state actors, particularly armed terrorist groups, more innovative ways are required to limit the dangers of the militaristic approach to addressing conflict situation in Africa. More constructive policy alternatives might focus on the following:

(i) Adopting a holistic approach to peace and security

Durable peace operations demand reflective and multidimensional ‘whole-of-society’ approaches underpinned by a theory of practice that aims at enabling multiplier effects for peacebuilding. It is important to emphasise that violence control and preventive approaches are complementary. For example, an effective criminal justice system with strong policing and prevention approaches are not mutually exclusive but sustain each other. However, the use of force should only be as a last resort. A dialogue between security policymakers,

³ Radicalization in this case refers to a process by which an individual or group adopts extreme political, social, or religious ideals that reject the status quo, undermine contemporary ideas regarding freedom of choice and expression, and condone violence to achieve ideological ends, including undertaking terrorist acts

security forces, and civil society can help identify common ground in state security and human security perspectives and appreciate the areas where their approaches are different.

(ii) Reforming the Security Sector and Empowering the Civilian Population.

To re-emphasise, many security threats, such as government corruption, access to weapons, religiously motivated violence, poverty, and climate change, do not have military solutions. Hence, security of individual and communities depends on political, economic and social factors and not just military solutions – which as pinpointed earlier, are inadequate in many conflict situations. This analysis presents a potential opportunity to identify and meet the needs of vulnerable groups and is a positive development in how the international community, including African governments, should approach peace and security issues. There should be a clear shift in the donor community towards addressing the root causes of violence rather than merely protecting state interests in responding to conflict situations.

Human security requires both *protection* of civilians and *empowerment* of civil society. Neither of these can be dealt with in isolation as they are mutually reinforcing. The concept of ‘protection of civilians’ has tended to emphasise a ‘top-down’ approach, with states having the primary responsibility. The concept of ‘empowerment’ emphasises people as actors and participants in defining and implementing their vital freedoms. It implies a ‘bottom-up’ approach and it enables people to develop their potential and their resilience to difficult conditions. Therefore, the concept of human security as used in this paper, is *inclusive, democratic and people-centred*, requiring national governments (and the international community) to consult with and listen to the security interests of ordinary citizens. Hence, the new security approach should be one that privileges not only state-centric but also human centric approaches. This new security approach should in fact place particular attention on the security of individuals and groups along the human security framework which places MAN at the center of analysis. This is especially because it is insurgent civilians who increasingly decide to take up arms, to challenge the state’s monopolistic use of legitimate physical violence. There is therefore need to ensure the political, socio-economic, cultural and even territorial security of individuals to feel ‘belonging.’ Consequently, African governments in countries affected by violent extremism should ensure effective civilian oversight of their security forces to avoid the negative impact of security force actions as an impetus to violent radicalization.

In addition, African governments need to roll out the basic functions of governing such as effective documentation of populations and cross-border management, improving the state of African police, military and intelligence functions, management of migration, refugees and displaced persons and the transformation of the criminal justice system. Finally, African governments must fight for freedom from want by creating jobs and capacity building for youths. Given the size of Africa’s youth bulge, governments need to prioritise education and training opportunities and create jobs, as high rates of youth unemployment will exacerbate instability.

(iii) Reforming and transforming the Military to adapt to the Dynamics of ‘Asymmetric Armed Conflicts’

Most African armies face structural, political, economic and intelligence challenges that affect their ability to effectively respond to ‘new wars’ orchestrated by non-state armed terrorist groups. Many still believe in bringing about peace through military strength that predominated the cold war period with the adage, “if you want peace prepare for war.” Contemporary African military philosophy is still mostly modelled on the conventional (asymmetric) war model, opposing national army or armies to an organized force. Very few African Armies are yet to deeply understand the paradigm of asymmetric and new war which

are also regarded as wars of societies and within societies. Therefore, policy strategies should also aim at transforming civil-military relations by first, “winning the hearts and minds” of the civilian population that live close to insurgent groups and vulnerable to their violent acts. The asymmetric nature of the Boko Haram crisis for example makes it complicated for the military to identify its enemies amongst the civil population and to draw a fixed war front. The battlefield has often been in the direct vicinity of the civilians who often find it difficult to trust totally the military. In addition, government soldiers are the prime target of armed separatist militia. On the other hand civilians may prefer to find refuge in the hands of non-state armed groups and thereby supporting their actions against government forces. The fact is that by being able to reverse this civil-military relationship of lack of trust and suspicion, the military could benefit from the support and trust of civilians who can assist them with information concerning the hideout of non-state armed actor’s especially terrorist groups. For it is virtually difficult to win these kinds of ‘new wars’ without the help of the local population affected.

(iv) Promote a “Behind the Scenes” Grassroots negotiations with local non-state armed groups.

Governments and the international community tend to label armed groups that attack civilians or state infrastructure as criminal, extremist or terrorist – and correspondingly prefer military and state security options to other types of responses. Where state actors have embarked on political talks with armed groups the criteria for doing so are unclear. While concrete changes in a group’s behaviour may encourage dialogue, more often the strategic interests of the state at a particular time or tactical calculations dictated by the battlefield are paramount. Yet, while states are weighing up whether or how to engage, populations living alongside armed groups may already be in contact. Local populations are not just passive actors in conflict zones, simply coerced by armed actors. Equally, armed groups do not merely exploit or abuse communities in areas in which they operate. Active community engagement with local armed groups through elders for example, church leaders, genuine NGOs, etc can make an important contribution to local human security and peacebuilding. Hence, local Communities’ engagement in possible peace talks with armed groups must be given greater political support by the government.

However one must take note of the ambiguous relations between armed groups and local community peace actors. As they face huge security risks, unprotected by diplomatic immunity or the security of the state. Non-state armed groups often have a blatant disregard for civilian security and local populations face security threats from the state, which often views communities close to armed groups as complicit. Experience has revealed that active contact by a community with an armed group risks exacerbating perceptions of association. During intense fighting, local efforts to reduce violence and promote dialogue may also be seen as contrary to conflict parties’ efforts to gain military advantage. Local actors expend considerable effort to remain both impartial and safe. However, it is hoped that further research can be carried out with the aim of contributing to discussion and inquiry into a broader range of constructive options at the grassroots to reach out to armed groups to promote peace as well as highlight the experiences of people who face the daily challenge and risk of living alongside armed groups and who decide to confront their use of violence.

(v). Promote inclusive peacebuilding and governance.

In the world of today, people are increasingly demanding to live in free, democratic societies with the ability to participate in the events and processes that shape their lives. This quest carries many opportunities as well as potential problems. It can easily transform into anarchy,

violence or social disintegration. If properly nurtured in a responsive national and global framework, it can also become a source of tremendous vitality and innovation for the creation of peaceful and more inclusive societies. The dangers arise as the ‘irresistible urge’ for participation clashes with inflexible systems unable to usher in participatory mechanisms for the active involvement of citizens especially groups that suffer from ‘poverty and marginalisation’ in their socio-economic and political lives such as refugees, IDPs, women, youth and minorities.

Concerning youth involvement in peacebuilding work the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office (UNPBSO) were tasked by then-UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to jointly support the development of an independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security. Published in 2018, this study that included the views of 4,230 young people around the world revealed that in the absence of meaningful opportunities to participate socially, politically and economically, marginalised young people are strikingly creative in forging alternative places of belonging and meaning through which to express themselves. According to the World Bank (2018) report- *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict*, some of the greatest risks of violence today stem from the mobilization of perceptions of exclusion and injustice, rooted in inequalities across groups. The report further argues that exclusion exacerbated by state repressive machinery increases the risk of violent conflicts by reinforcing the perception that there is no viable alternative for expressing grievances and frustration. In the face of endemic poverty, loss of ‘agentic power’ through meaningless participation in political processes, exclusionary governance and development, the only option left for many frustrated and vulnerable youth is recruitment into rebel and terrorist groups as has been the case in the Far North of Cameroon and Northern Nigeria with regards to the Boko Haram war activities. While poor socio-economic conditions and exclusion are not the only facilitator for recruitment to terrorist causes, they constitute an important factor, not least in terms of contributing towards a general sense of hopelessness and the challenge facing many people (especially poor women and youth) in such circumstances of finding some purpose and meaning for their lives.

(vi) The UN and the AU should Prioritize their Preventive Diplomatic Efforts in Peace Processes

International organizations such as the UN and the AU (and its regional economic communities) should prioritize their preventive diplomatic efforts and pay much greater attention to inclusionary democratic governance and inclusive economic development as the most effective (violent) conflict prevention and peacebuilding tool in Africa

6. CONCLUSION

This paper has unfolded how African governments can provide salient traditional conflict management solutions (symmetric) to non-traditional (asymmetric) conflict situations. These human security and non-military drivers of asymmetric conflicts could involve a combination of deep-seated historical and structural factors, which could be political, economic, ethnic, religious, territorial elements etc that caused people to take arms against the state. Causes of asymmetric conflicts can also involve the claim for ‘self-determination.’ In effect, the analysis in this paper has demonstrated that the option of countering asymmetric conflicts involving non-state armed groups, through symmetric strategies such as direct military intervention, without recognizing and accepting the fundamental asymmetries of the conflicting parties, simply serves to extend the destructiveness and intractability of the asymmetric armed conflict. Said differently, this paper has brought to light the fact that the militaristic approach is not only expensive in terms of human and material damages,

including the implantation of future conflicts, but it also does not address the deep-rooted issues, structural violence and ‘issues of mistrust’ as progenitors of conflicts in Africa. As such, the security and peaceful co-existence of people and property in African countries are usually jettisoned by the use of the militaristic approach. Hence, the militaristic approach appears fundamentally inappropriate to asymmetric conflict management involving non-state armed groups as it is unable to address the original issues and contradictions that caused the insurgency. Ultimately, even when the militaristic approach succeeds in mitigating or stopping the violence of conflict temporarily in the short-term, it largely fails to secure sustainable peace and security in the long term. Clearly, the issues raised in this paper are critical to our understanding of the deficits of the state-centric and militaristic approach to managing complex asymmetric armed conflicts and prompts the need for a more innovative and holistic approach that puts human security and inclusive governance at the centre of analysis. Considering the fact that many of the violent asymmetric conflicts and crises are a consequence of historical grievances of minority groups as well as socio-economic, political and even cultural injustices, powered by the ‘crisis of governance’ and ‘leadership failure’, only a much more holistic perspective by African governments can provide a positive way forward. In fact, only a combination of inclusionary governance and socio-economic development, democratic principles, visionary leadership, and genuine dialoguing, could entrench sustainable peace and security, rather than the use of military force.

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