



COUNCIL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL  
SCIENCE RESEARCH IN AFRICA

CODESRIA Policy Briefs

No. 3, June 2017

## Security Regimens in Africa

Isaac Olawale Albert\*

### Summary

***Th***is policy brief takes a critical look at security regimens in Africa. Though most African conflicts start at the grassroots level, African governments prefer to manage them centrally using the coercive instruments of states. However, government forces in Africa are easily worsted by 'rag tag armies' in a manner that calls for foreign intervention in African crises. The integrity of some of these foreign interventions is questioned. Though the African Union and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in Africa have their peculiar security regimens these lack requisite capacity. Policy recommendations are made on how to address the contending issues.

---

\* Professor of African History, Peace and Conflict Studies and the pioneer Director of the Institute for Peace and Strategic Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Twice winner of the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) thesis-writing grant. Currently Regional Board Chairman of the West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) in Accra, Ghana, Board Chairman of the Society for Peace Studies and Practice (Nigeria) and an Associate Expert to the Centre for Human Security, Olusegun Obasanjo Presidential Library, Abeokuta (Nigeria).

## Context

Different forms of violent conflicts threaten African development. Two historic factors foregrounded the present day manifestation of the problem: (i) influx of surplus arms and light weapons into the continent from Eastern Europe after the Cold War in the late 1980s and (ii) the unfriendly Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that African states subscribed to during the same period. The two factors combined to weaken the formal and informal social control systems in different parts of Africa. In the late 1990s several African countries transitioned from military to civil rule with the hope that this would calm the continent as people channel their grievances through democratic institutions and procedures. However, the freedoms associated with the expanded democratic space goaded people into questioning their leaders in a manner that led to small-scale insurgencies and wars in some places with the Liberian and Sierra Leonean crises being the most worrisome to the international community until the advent of the ongoing violent religious extremism around the continent.

The North African countries that excluded themselves from the democratic political transition of the 1990s in Africa were plunged into revolutionary violence in 2010 during the so-called 'Arab spring'. This led to leadership change in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. The countries of the region are yet to recover from the devastations associated with this so-called 'North African revolution'. The lesson of the Arab spring is that a peaceful political transition is better than a violent one.

With different extremist movements – al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, al Shabaab, Boko Haram, Anti-balakas – on the prowl around the continent, Africa definitely has its hands full of crises. There is no end in sight for the security threats as their natural and human-made root causes are still evident everywhere. These include youth bulge, electoral malpractices, bad governance and corruption. Troublemakers now have easier access to surplus arms and light weapons, a large pool of unemployed and frustrated youth to recruit as their foot soldiers and a large expanse of 'ungoverned spaces' to be used as safe havens. A lot has been written on these security threats in Africa but more still has to be done before understanding the security regimens in place for contending with them.

## Phases in African Security Regimens

There are two phases in the evolution of the contemporary security regimens in Africa: the Cold War phase from the 1960s to the 1980s and the post-Cold War phase since the late 1980s. The focus of the Cold War phase was on the protection of states and regimes while the post-Cold War dimension places emphasis on the removal of the root causes of insecurity in addition to advancing people-centered solutions in a manner that underscores the linkages and interdependencies of security with development and human rights broadly defined. To this extent, the issues captured by post-Cold War security regimens include ethnic and religious harmony, environmental safety, gender equity and community, political and economic stability.

During the Cold War, the US and Western allies used Africa as a battleground for containing the global influence of the Soviet Union. This manifested in the form of providing support for friendly authoritarian regimes (such as that of Mobutu in Zaire) and resourcing some insurgent movements to fight their leftist governments such as witnessed in Southern Africa and the Horn of Africa.

With the end of the Cold War, the Western world abandoned their protégés in Africa making them vulnerable to rebel attacks. While the regimes were lamenting their abandonment or searching for alternative financing of counter-insurgencies, the rebels demonstrated high resilience capacity through war-related exploitation of natural resources such as charcoal in Somalia, diamonds by the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) in Angola and illegal logging by various armed groups in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). African warlords of the 1990s and beyond also exploited diamonds in Sierra Leone and coffee and cacao in Cote d'Ivoire in a manner that blurred the dividing lines between political and criminal violence. This predatory war strategy continues up to the present.

The crisis in Somalia was one of the earliest of the post-Cold War conflicts in Africa. It attracted the intervention of some Western powers on the side of human rights protection but they retreated with the failure and humiliation suffered by the US-led Unified Task Force (UNITAF) in Somalia (1992-1993) where some American soldiers were brutally killed. Since then, the Western world seemed to have resolved to prevent future spilling of their citizens' blood in Africa. They adopted an ongoing interventionist strategy best described as 'no boots on the ground', which limits their role to equipping and building the capacity of African militaries to fight their own battles. How well has Africa been doing since then?

## CODESRIA's Intervention

The need to answer the above question in a policy-relevant manner compelled CODESRIA, in collaboration with Université des Lettres et Sciences Humaines de Bamako, to organise an international policy dialogue conference on 'Security Regimens in Africa'. The main objective of the conference was to 'generate knowledge on security measures in Africa and promote the influence of such knowledge on practical efforts at grappling with security threats on the continent'. The meeting was held at Azalai Grand Hotel in Bamako, Mali, from 28 to 29 September 2016.

The conference environment helped to bridge the knowledge–practice divide on security regimens in three significant ways. First and foremost, the conference was held in Mali, one of the countries facing the highest security challenges in Africa today. The northern parts of the country are still in the hands of some rebel movements despite the national, regional, continental and global security regimens in place for managing them. Secondly, the conferees stayed in the same hotel as some security formations serving with the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (Mission multidimensionnelle intégrée des Nations unies pour la stabilisation au Mali, MINUSMA). The CODESRIA conferees closely observed these peacekeepers in a manner that led them to the conclusion that indeed Mali was still in a state of war; it had too little peace to keep. The lesson here is that bloody crises are easier to start than terminate. Thirdly, the participants in the CODESRIA conference consisted of not just scholars but also security management practitioners, officials of relevant civil society organisations, state officials, and representatives of the African Union (AU), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), UNWomen, MINUSMA and the Afro-Arab Institute. The dignitaries included former President Pierre Buyoya of Burundi who was appointed in 2013 as the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission as the Head of the African-led International support mission in Mali. This mixed audience forced the discussions at the conference to be policy-relevant.

## Existing Security Regimens

The existing security regimens in Africa can be broken into five interlinked categories: the communal, national, regional, continental and global. The communal ones have to do with traditional social control mechanisms shared by the community members independent of any external interventions. The preventative ones, for example, include belief systems and taboos, which sometimes produce more efficient results in security management at the local levels than any modern law can aspire to achieve. For example local chiefs and priests use different mechanisms for resolving conflicts between disputants and the outcomes are easily acceptable to the people on account of the fact that the principles were transmitted across generations and built into the existing social, economic and political systems of the people. The communal security regimens also include structures of modern local administration built by the modern state for preventing and managing insecurity at the grassroots level. This is often a conflation of the traditional and modern systems. In this case, local chiefs appointed through cultural traditions work with elected local government administrations to manage cases of insecurity in the society. Both aspects of the communal security regimens include what it takes to strengthen the resilience of individuals and groups to all security threats.

National security regimens revolve around the judicial and physical security institutions for defending state authority. Where these institutions lack credibility people manage the security problems around them using self-help strategies. Some of the crises resultant from this attracts the attention of the international community when they start to threaten international peace and security. External responses to such problems could come from neighbouring countries, friendly developed countries whether bilaterally or multilaterally (most especially from the US and the European Union (EU)), regional organisations, the AU and the United Nations (UN). Each of these organisations has its peculiar security regimen with the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), for the entire African continent, being the most strategically important to a policy brief of this nature.

## African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA)

The prevailing situation suggests that Africa lacks what it takes now to secure itself. But a lot can be achieved by African countries pooling their resources around the global mantra of 'African solutions to African problems'. The normative framework for attaining this goal is APSA whose nerve centre is the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC). This entered into force in December 2003. Article 2 of the Protocol considers the PSC to be 'a standing decision-making organ for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts' which operates as 'a collective security and early warning arrangement to facilitate timely and efficient response to conflict and crisis situations in Africa'. According to Article 7 of the Protocol the mandate of the PSC includes to: anticipate and prevent disputes and conflicts, as well as policies that may lead to genocide and crimes against humanity; undertake peace-making and peace-building functions in order to resolve conflicts where they have occurred; authorise the mounting and deployment of peace support missions; recommend to the assembly intervention in a member state in respect of grave circumstances as provided for in Article 4(h) of the Constitutive Act; and support and facilitate humanitarian action in situations of armed conflicts or major natural disasters. The pillars of APSA are the AU Commission, a Panel of the Wise, a Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), an African Standby Force and a Special Fund.

Though APSA is a broad African framework, the AU works with the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and the Regional Mechanisms (RMs) in different parts of Africa for attaining its objectives. The cooperation between the AU and the RECs in this respect is guided by the principles of subsidiarity, of complementarity and of the comparative advantages.

In the spirit of APSA and the peace architecture of the RECs, some African states (most especially South Africa and Ghana) have local and national peace councils for managing conflicts peacefully through the instrumentality of eminent persons. Though not formally inaugurated, Nigeria too has a national peace policy detailing what different stakeholders have to contribute towards building a national culture of peace.

Mali, where the CODESRIA conference was held, provides a good case study of a country where the different security regimens in Africa are networked. The country has been in a deep crisis since mid-January 2012 when a Tuareg movement known as the *Mouvement national pour la libération de l'Azawad*

(MNLA), along with Islamic armed groups including Ansar Dine, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the *Mouvement pour l'unicité et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest* (MUJAO), in addition to deserters from the Malian armed forces started to launch attacks against government forces in the north of the country. The insurgency of the Tuaregs was emboldened by the presence of well-equipped combatants returning from Libya in the wake of the fall of the regime there. ECOWAS brokered the peace agreement that gave the country an interim government; the African Union established the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) that rebuilt the capacity of the Malian army while the UN Security Council established the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) on 25 April 2013 to stabilise the country following the limited outcomes of earlier interventions.

## Critical Issues

### ***Functionality of Communal Regimens***

Violent conflicts are more easily prevented and managed at communal level when the security regimens at the grassroots level are officially allowed to function effectively. Unfortunately, African leaders hardly give sufficient constitutional powers to local chiefs or empower local administrations to effectively manage the problems around them. Issues that could be effectively resolved at the grassroots level, such as competition for land resources, ethnic and religious animosity, are allowed to feed into national election and power allocation realms and then dealt with using national security regimens. This anomaly enables African leaders to easily dominate the country and manipulate the 'opposition' whose support base is usually at the grassroots level. This problem occurs simply because many African leaders still have the mindsets of the Cold War security regimen which emphasised regime protection.

### ***The Futility of Using Force***

African leaders' predilection is often for the use of military force against the 'opposition' and rebel movements that challenge their authority. They fail to see the issues raised by these groups and therefore hardly ever enter into dialogue with them. Unfortunately, African militaries are usually unable to sustain long battles with those initially dismissed as 'rag tag armies'. Shortly after facing African armies, rebel movements in Africa easily overrun them, seizing vast territories difficult to take back. This was the experience in Somalia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Libya, Sudan and Mali. How do we explain this? Is it that

the rebels have better, larger weapons, are better trained or motivated than the African national armies? In both Mali and Nigeria, the army fighting the rebels complained of not being provided with enough arms for the operations. In Libya, Ghaddafi focused more on arming his presidential guard. The Libyan army could not protect him during the crisis in his country.

## ***Encountering the International Criminal Court (ICC)***

Added to the above problem are the regular reports of international human rights organisations accusing African governments and militaries of grossly violating the rights of the civilian population they are expected to protect during counter-insurgency operations. On account of such reports, a number of African leaders have been dragged before the ICC and charged with crimes against humanity. It is unfortunate however that the big global powers dictating to those to be tried by the Court are themselves not signatories to the Rome Treaty under which the court operates. What more? The Court has been criticised heavily for targeting African countries. Only one of the ten cases before the court is not an African politician or warlord. Hence, African leaders consider the ICC as a device for humiliating them. Those that have elected to leave the court so far are Gambia, Burundi and South Africa. More countries could follow.

However, there is a snag in the situation. It is that the ICC is effectively a court of last resort. Its principle of complementarity considers it the primary responsibility of African states to investigate and prosecute atrocity crimes in their jurisdictions. The ICC only wades into the matter when states are unable or unwilling to do the needful. Hence the atrocities that took the likes of Charles Taylor and Laurent Gbagbo to the court might continue to be committed around the continent if African leaders successfully walk out of the ICC as they are doing. Africa's exit from the ICC becomes reasonable only if the AU can build an institution to replace the global body in managing difficult African leaders. Otherwise the ongoing dispute with the ICC would create more wars and armed conflicts in Africa.

## ***The Limitations of APSA***

Though solid on paper, APSA has limited capacity as a pan-African security regimen. That the UN constitutes the dominating force in Mali today is a clear testimony to this conclusion. The AU lacks what it takes to hold the country together independently. Similar failures to those in Mali are noticeable elsewhere across the African continent. Some questions are needed for highlighting the issues. Why is DRC in a state of endless armed conflict today? Why is it difficult to restore normalcy to Somalia? Where was the AU before the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

intervened in Libya ostensibly to implement the UN Resolution 1973 of 2011? Why is the intervention of the AU or ECOWAS not as robust as that of France and the US in managing Nigeria's Boko Haram crisis? Where were the AU's standby army and 'Panel of the Wise' in managing the Boko Haram crisis? Where were the ECOWAS standby army and 'Council of the Wise'? The negotiation leading to the release of twenty-one Nigerian Chibok girls on 13 October 2016 was facilitated by Switzerland and the Red Cross. Why not the AU or the ECOWAS?

The core problem is that the AU lacks the resources for making a perfect job of the implementation of APSA. The transcript of the Executive Council's Twenty-Sixth Ordinary Session held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 23–27 January 2015, shows that APSA is heavily dependent on external funding. It was revealed that 95 per cent of the total AU budget was financed by external partners (EU, EU member states, Japan and China) in 2015. Though the detailed budget plan for the 2016 is yet to be made known, it is estimated that the external financing of the AU for 2016 would amount to 52 per cent of the budget. This is definitely not indicative of a continent that can independently secure itself. Lack of financial resources compromise the competence of the AU to have successful peacekeeping operations or fund mediation missions of the Panel of the Wise. The RECs have a similar problem.

### ***The Lessons of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF)***

Not relying on either the AU or any regional organisation, the countries of the Lake Chad basin – namely Nigeria, Cameroun, Chad and Niger – established a multinational joint task force (MNJTF) to deal with the Boko Haram crisis that negatively affects all of them. The security community challenges the framework of APSA which talks more about which of the RECs and Regional Mechanisms (RMs) could work with the AU. The member states of the MNJTF, however, come from two RECs, namely the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the ECOWAS. This security regimen is not dependent on either of the RECs but is based on the pooling of the military and financial resources of the member states to ensure their collective security, supported by some sympathetic external actors. But the security community faces two major problems. The first is the inability of most of the soldiers to converse smoothly in both English and French. This impacts negatively on coordination of the operations. The leadership of the member states is also suspicious of each other. Nigeria has a frosty relationship with Cameroun over the ownership of the oil rich Bakassi peninsula. There have also been border conflicts between Nigeria and Chad. This problem of trust limits how far the 'peacekeepers' could go. This notwithstanding, there is a lot to learn from this in the drive towards attaining the objectives of the mantra of 'African solutions to African problems'.

## ***Foreign Interventions***

The inability of African states to secure themselves explains the increased intervention of foreign powers in Africa's conflicts. This has positive and negative aspects. On the positive side, the intervention of France in Mali in 2012 is saluted for stopping the rebels from taking over the entire country. The intervention of the US army helped to control the spread of the Ebola disease in Sierra Leone in 2013. On the other hand, the intervention of NATO in Libya led to regime change in the country and made Ghadafi's supposed dictatorial repression, which was terminated in August 2011, to be replaced by internal rivalries and conflicting loyalties amongst the rebels that killed him. This has now turned Libya to a near failed state and enabled the looted arms from the country to fuel the bloody crisis in Mali as well as the Boko Haram crisis in the Lake Chad Basin.

## ***Gender Consideration***

The need to mainstream gender in Africa's security regimens must be strongly emphasised. The global framework for attaining this objective is the UN Resolution 1325 of 2000 which is a landmark international legal framework that addresses not only the inordinate impact of war on women and girls, but also the pivotal role women should and do play in conflict management, conflict resolution and sustainable peace. African states need to domesticate the provisions of the Resolution and set up committees for their actionable implementation. However, the goal of mainstreaming gender in peace and security would be difficult to achieve at the levels of the AU and RECs where African countries are not ready to do the same at national level.

## Recommendations

- African states should strengthen and promote communal security regimens as a strategy for preventing and managing insecurity at the grassroots level.
- Given the fact that no government has all it takes to handle contemporary security threats, it is advisable that African governments pay up their annual dues and levies to the AU and RECs so as to get actionable support from these bodies in times of trouble.
- World powers providing assistance for managing Africa's insecurity must act with more sincerity. The continent needs sympathy and support from the rest of the world and not further exploitation as is sometimes evident in foreign intervention in African problems.
- Security academies in Africa should provide better training in civilian protection and human rights standards in counter-insurgency operations in order to reduce the number of African countries taken to the ICC.
- More institutions should be encouraged to start peace studies programmes as a way of building better capacity for non-coercive crisis management. The African universities teaching peace studies for now include the University of Ibadan (Nigeria), Ilorin (Nigeria), Cape Coast (Ghana), Kwazulu Natal (South Africa), Makerere (Uganda) and Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) just to mention the most popular. There is the need to add to the list as a way of expanding the number of those to manage African security problems.
- There is also the need for the academic institutions in Africa teaching peace studies to work collaboratively with the think tank groups in the field of security regimens. CODESRIA has what it takes to link these two constituencies as part of its larger objective of making a significant contribution to the improvement of the security regimens in contemporary Africa.



## Acknowledgements

CODESRIA would like to express its gratitude to the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY), the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), the Danish Agency for International Development (DANIDA), the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Open Society Foundations (OSFs), TrustAfrica, UNESCO, the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF), Andrew Mellon Foundation, the Government of Ireland through Irish AID (Development Cooperation Division of the Department of Foreign Affairs) and the Government of Senegal for supporting its research, training and publication programmes.

The author would like to personally thank the University of Ibadan (Nigeria) for the leave granted him to work on the various projects from which this Policy Brief emanated.

CODESRIA, Avenue Cheikh Anta Diop X Canal IV, BP : 3304, Dakar, 18524, Senegal  
Tel: +221 33 825 98 22/23 - 33 864 01 36 • Fax: +221 33 824 12 89 • Web: [www.codesria.org](http://www.codesria.org)