



High Level Technical Meeting

Insurgencies and Insecurity in Africa: Counting the Costs, Stemming the Tide

CONCEPT NOTE

Olusegun Obasanjo Presidential Library (OOPL)
Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria

01 and 02 July 2022

The end of the old East-West Cold War was expected to usher in a period of generalised peace and stability around the world as many of the proxy wars fought by the competing global power blocs began to be wound down. Africa, one of the major ideological and military battlegrounds of the old Cold War era, was especially expected to reap a significant peace dividend. However, the lull in conflicts across the continent did not endure for long as African countries were ushered into an era of what Mary Kaldor and others labeled as “new wars” on account of their unique characteristics, including their intra-state nature. These “new wars” were mainly played out in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and The Sudan during the course of the 1990s into the new millennium, to cite the leading examples of the intra-state armed conflicts that came to wrack parts of the continent. Alongside these “new wars”, there were also other sources of severe instability that degenerated, in the worst cases, into episodes of genocide and ethnic cleansing such as was witnessed around the Great Lakes, especially Burundi, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Although the initial rounds of post-Cold War conflicts on the African continent were largely secular in nature, by the dawn of the new millennium, they began to assume a distinctly radical dimension that emerged out of histories and contexts of discontent. They also quickly drew inspiration and resources from global radical extremist franchises such as Al-Qaeda and, later, the Islamic State. Over the 22 years since the new millennium dawned, these radical extremists groups - Al Shabab, Boko Haram, Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb, Ansaru, Seleka, Islamic State West Africa Province, Islamic State and Ansar Al-Sunna in Mozambique, to cite the best known of them - have contested for political and territorial space against the state.

In this regard, they share some core commonalities with the radical extremists in Algeria, organised into the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) and Armed Islamic Group (GIA), whose challenges to the Algerian state after the 1992 military coup led to a prolonged civil war in that country. The radical extremist groups have co-existed with - and, in several instances, shaded into- various organised criminal gangs, ethno-regional militias, and trans-frontier bandits.

Although starting as localised experiences of radical extremism, the activities of the groups have expanded significantly over time to assume cross-boundary dimensions. Despite initiatives, mostly of a military nature, aimed at containing the activities of the radicals and insurgents, they show no signs of decelerating. If anything, beyond the Horn of Africa/East Africa and the Sahel, radical extremist activities and action have been seen in Central Africa and, latterly, Southern Africa. When the activities of the extremist groups in North Africa are added to the picture, where virtually no country is spared the challenge posed by radical insurgents, then we are confronted with an overall situation of a continent exposed across all its component sub-regions to the activities of groups calling the contemporary nation-state project into question and seeking to supplant it with their own versions of a new order founded on their interpretation of Islam. More worryingly, the activities of the radical extremists threaten to continue to spread with potentially unimaginable consequences for stability and progress.

Much has been researched and published about the origins and root causes of violent extremism on the continent. From problems of poverty and inequality that have festered over time to prolonged experiences of exclusion, marginalisation, growing and unsustainable youth unemployment, and state systems with diminished capacity and legitimacy, the various interpretative and analytic frameworks that have been adduced certainly do have some degree of veracity and relevance to them. The unraveling of the Libyan state following the NATO-backed overthrow of the Gaddafi regime and the flow of weapons and fighters from the country to the Sahel also added to the complexity of the security challenges across West and Central Africa. However, beyond the root causes, the challenge of the times is how most effectively to stem the growth and expansion of radical extremism on the continent and, in doing so, re-establish the uncontested authority of the state alongside its legitimacy to govern and its capacity to act on various issues that are at the heart of citizen discontent.

To date, the response to the challenge of the insurgencies which radical extremists are underwriting has been a mixed bag of national security operations supplemented with international support within the overall ambit of the global war on terror. Action at the national level has mostly comprised attempts at prosecuting a military solution aimed at overawing and suppressing the insurgents. Although supported with internationally-sourced weaponry, training, multinational task forces, UN- operations, and, more recently, military contractors and mercenaries, the militarised approach has shown significant limitations manifested in its signal failure on its own to extinguish the insurgencies. As it is, in most countries faced with the problem of extremist insurgents, a situation of stalemate has developed, creating a sense of permanent conflict and insecurity in the populace.

In a bid to contribute to redressing the prevalent situation of stalemate, the African Union has launched a number of initiatives, including the designation of a head of state as the organisation's focal point on terrorism and the establishment of a continental centre on terrorism in Algeria. To support these efforts, as well as initiatives that have been pursued at the country-level by member states of the African Union, the Coalition on Dialogue in Africa (CoDA) is convening a high-level technical meeting. The primary aim of the meeting is to draw on expertise from within and outside the continent to think through additional options for an effective stemming of the spread of extremist violence on the continent. Of particular urgency are options that allow for an expansion of political, economic, and social reforms as part of a broad gamut of measures that will complement a revamped military-security response to insurgency.

The meeting is proposed as a two-day session which will allow the invited experts to undertake an in-depth and grounded review of the promise and limitations of existing approaches to containing and overcoming the activities of the extremists with a view to contributing additional and/or alternative responses that could steer Africa towards lasting solutions to radical insurgency in Africa. Discussions at the meeting will be led by H.E. Olusegun Obasanjo, former President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and frontline pan-African statesman. The perspectives and recommendations emanating from the meeting will be shared with the African Union through the Head of State who serves as the focal point for the fight against terrorism.

The meeting will be organised on the basis of the non-attribution of the contributions made by individual participants. Discussions will be structured around different sub-themes for which invited participants will be designated to offer lead reflections to introduce the issues under consideration. The overarching theme under which the meeting will be held is: Insurgencies and Insecurity in Africa: Counting the Costs, Stemming the Tide. Sub-themes to be covered include the following:

- A recap on the origins and dimensions of extremist insurgency in Africa
- The strategy and record of the military containment of insurgency in Africa
- Beyond militarised solutions to insurgency in Africa: The political options
- Beyond militarised solutions to insurgency in Africa: The socio-economic options
- Beyond militarised solutions to insurgency in Africa: Justice, Reconciliation, and Reintegration
- Recalibrating the role of sub-regional and continental organisations in a more integrated approach to managing and reversing insurgency in Africa

The physically attended meeting will be held on 01 and 02 July at the Olusegun Obasanjo Presidential Library (OOPL), Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria. English and French will be the working languages and simultaneous interpretation services will be provided. Participation is strictly by invitation only.

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