Workshop Report
Portsmouth, UK
17th-18th of May 2018

Executive Summary:

The West Africa Peace and Security Network's annual workshop "New Thinking on West African Security Challenges" was held at the University of Portsmouth on the 17th-18th of May 2018. Academics and practitioners from West Africa, the UK, and Europe discussed new approaches to security challenges in West Africa including highly relevant topics such as the role of foreign powers for West African peace and security; the AU and ECOWAS' approaches to address peace and security on the continent; non-state actors, violent extremism, security and knowledge production in West Africa.

Keynotes: Prof Isaac Albert and Dr Linda Darkwa

Prof Isaac Albert's keynotes discussed the importance of "Non-military crisis management in West Africa". To be able to understand the necessity of non-military crisis management one needs to keep in mind the complexity of the crisis in West Africa and the interconnectedness of economic, political and security crises. Previous response mechanism within the region mainly included avoidance, denial, strategic withdrawal, third-party decision making, confrontation and joint problem-solving. Given the side effects of military crisis management such as humanitarian crisis, the increased violence of NSAG's for example, the global community now moves towards of comprehensive security requiring limited use of military force (UN Peace-building Commission 2005). Non-military response option includes addressing causes, national and regional peace architecture, intelligence-driven crisis management, collaborative problem solving, informative warfare and security sector reform. The non-military mechanism should include effective legislative processes, judiciary, policy making, preventing the military from transiting to the police, rebuilding of the police and reducing the conflict-generating capacity of politicians. Non-military crisis management will need to link local, national and global systems such as national peace architecture, ECOWAS normative peace, and security framework, African Union Peace and Security Architecture and the global architecture (UN-Peace-building Commission). A checklist for the future requires issue, structural, legal and actor transformation. Addressing the causes rather than the effects of the peace and security issues in West Africa has been highlighted as the critical issue within non-military crisis management. The collaborative problem solving requires better cooperation between nations as well as regional peace bodies such as ECOWAS and the AU.

Dr Linda Darkwa's keynotes discussed "Tools in a Tool box: The African Union's repertoire of mechanisms for addressing peace and security on the continent. Originally planned to attain Full Operational Capability (FoC) in 2010, the African Standby Force (ASF) did not attain the envisaged status until five years later, in 2015. In the interim, as the continent was confronted with a number of crisis, in the Central African Republic, Mali, the Lake Chad Basin and in the Great Lakes Region among others, two types of response mechanisms emerged. One was the African Capability for Immediate Crisis Response (ACIRC), which was developed as a transitory mechanism, made up of pledged capabilities by volunteering member states, and placed at the disposal of the African Union's Peace and Security Council (AU PSC). Two was the re-emergence of ad hoc security arrangements, mainly by affected member-states who coalesced to address shared threats, outside of existing regional security and/or economic arrangements, but with the authorisation of the African Union.

Although the ASF was originally envisaged as a collective security arrangement, it is fast becoming evident that it is more of a collective defence mechanism. It provides a structured framework for adaptation by the AU, its regions and member states, for addressing the myriad security challenges confronting the continent. However, lessons from the AU's inability to deploy to Burundi and its failure to consider the deployment of either the ASF or the ACIRC as surge capabilities to some of the challenging conflict situations on the continent such as Mali and Libya shows that political considerations play a crucial role in the utilization of the ASF. The ad hoc coalitions, which follow the examples of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s; and countries of the Great Lakes Region (GLR) in addressing in the threat of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in 2008 can be an attractive option to avoid political problems within the AU. Yet, this also risks undermining the ASF.

The AU has not mandated the deployment of either the ASF or ACIRC. Rather, the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) have mandated and deployed their standby forces, with the authorisation of the AU. It appears that the model for deploying the ASF in the foreseeable future would be that the RECs would mandate their standby forces and obtain the authorisation of the AU. The AU can utilise the ASF more effectively if it addresses a number of issues that hamper its deployment. First, it is imperative to provide better clarity through a legal framework, on the modalities for the employment of the ASF. Second, there is the need for closer political coordination especially between the strategic decision making   bodies of the AU and the RECSs/Regional Mechanisms (RMs). Third is the need for predictable, sustainable and adequate financing for African mandated and or authorised Peace Operations. Fourth, there is a critical need for capability enhancement that includes effective training of personnel, adequate airlift capabilities, force enablers, enhancers and multipliers for addressing the contemporary threats confronting the continent.

Foreign powers and West African security

Prof Tony Chafer, Portsmouth University/ Prof Gordon Cumming, Cardiff University / Dr Roel van der Velde, Cardiff University / Dr Richard Alemdjrodo, University of Lome/ Ms Francesca Mercurio, University of São Paulo

The first panel discussed the role of foreign powers for West African peace and security by looking at France's new hybrid forms of coalition-building as a new model of military intervention and the impact of the leadership dispute between AU and ECOWAS on foreign powers such as France. The panel addressed the development from unilateral to multilateral interventions in the 1990s to more recent coalition-building in the 2000s to cope with the challenging and complex nature West African conflicts such as intra- and inner-state, ethnic conflicts, and terrorism. The problems of multilateral missions under EU, AU, and UN such as the lack of purpose, resources, and flexibility led to France's new hybrid forms of coalition-building. The data presented was based on pre-field research findings of a Leverhulme research project including cases such as Mali, CAR, G5-S, and Somalia. The research project explores the processes of coalition building including mobilization, the role of leading nations such as France, UK and Germany and identifies key challenges such as budget constraints, competing norms, and free-riding. The Mali intervention shows the potential of this new hybrid form of coalition-building or 'clustering' for future interventions in West Africa.

Furthermore, the panel discussed whether the problem of non-deployment of troops by the AU is not only caused by its structural weakness but could also be interpreted as an attempt to weaken sub-regional bodies such as ECOWAS. The responsibility of the AU to intervene or to authorize any sub-regional interventions has been increasingly challenged by sub-regional organizations such as ECOWAS who given their experience of military interventions in Liberia and Sierra Leone should be more involved in the resolution of regional conflicts such as Mali. The leadership dispute between the AU and ECOWAS benefits foreign powers such as France, whose omnipresence challenges both the AU and ECOWAS. Finally, the panel looked at new foreign powers in

the region such as Brazil's cooperation with West African countries which is one of Brazil's foreign policy priorities in the 21st century. The South Atlantic has been identified as a place that needs to be secure and controlled from third parties' interests, both states, and non-state actors, because of its marine mineral resources and the growing threats to international security, including piracy, terrorism and organized illegal crime, fostered by regional instability.

The AU and ECOWAS repertoire of mechanisms for addressing peace and security on the continent

Ms Lilian Seffer, Hertie School of Governance / Mr Adiat Abiodun, Obafemi Awolowo University

The second panel discussed the AU and ECOWAS approaches to address peace and security on the continent by looking at ECOWAS' response to Transnational Organized Crime and the challenges of Human Security in West Africa. With regards to the question, whether and how ECOWAS has securitized organized crime in West Africa, two critical issues have been discussed. Firstly, that organized crime has been securitized in the shadow of terrorism and secondly, that it has been securitized through datafication which enhances the technical capabilities of traditional and non-traditional security agencies. Since 9/11, there has been an increased push for a centralized security sector. Even though a security sector reform is crucial for many West-African post-conflict societies, there is currently no comprehensive assessment of the impact of emerging threats on regional security practices in West Africa. Therefore, it has been recommended to acknowledge these patterns but to critical question issues such as the demilitarization of interventions against organized crime in West Africa or the centralization of the security sector.

With regards to ECOWAS' response to the challenges to human security in West Africa, the results of a study including interviews with representatives from ECOWAS Commission, selected Embassies in West Africa and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Nigeria and an analysis of ECOWAS documents have been presented which showed that ECOWAS policies for addressing human security challenges in the sub-region are good. However, they are not very effective due to a lack of political will by member states to implement protocols, weak infrastructure within the member states and inadequate funding. The study shows a strong correlation between human insecurity and state instability and suggests that human security can serve as a conflict prevention mechanism as the drastic reduction in the prevalence of civil wars across the various countries in the sub-region shows. The ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) which is the organization's primary means of promoting human security in the region helps to ensure peace and stability in West Africa.

Non-state actors and violent extremism in West Africa

Mr Akin Oyawale, University of East Anglia / Ms Jessica Moody, Kings College London / Dr Aïcha PEMBOURA, Université de Yaoundé II

The third panel discussed non-state actors and violent extremism in West Africa including an ethnography study exploring public views on security issues such as terrorism and counterterrorism using the example of Boko Haram in Nigeria and two studies exploring the role of ex-combats in Cote d'Ivoire and vigilance committees in Cameroon for peace and security in the region. The first study is based on interviews with Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) at IDP camps and host communities in Northern Nigeria to explore their lived (in) security experiences. It highlights five main images of counterterrorism: views of counterterrorism as Necropolitical; Discriminatory; (state as) limited in security provision; (government as) corrupt; and counterterrorism as (creating a) 'Suspect Community.'

Since the 2002-2011 conflict ended in Cote d'Ivoire, the government and international donors have been seeking to demobilize, disarm and reintegrate (DDR) ex-combatants into Ivoirian society. In contrast to the government and the international community who consider this programme a success, many ex-fighters are dissatisfied with the progress made and increasingly complain of corruption within the programme, lamenting the lack of employment prospects offered and the extreme poverty many of their friends are now living in. The results of this study showed that despite a worsening conflict in Mali and efforts to recruit ex-combat, the number of former fighters seeking to remobilize to join any of these armed groups in Mali is extremely limited. The formative experiences of ex-combatants during the 2002-2011 conflict seems to play an important for their decision not to remobilize. Ex-combatants perceive themselves to be peacemakers, believe they are still closely connected to the current Ivoirian government, are wary of conflict and fearful of trusting new mobilizing agents which acts as a powerful, though not complete, a deterrent to remobilization.

The third study looked at the role of vigilance committees in the fight against Boko Haram in Cameroon. Together with traditional defense forces, these self-defense groups consisting of civilians without special military training have become serious opponents of Boko Haram in Cameroon. They are both respected and feared at the same time as their ability to transform or change according to the security environment poses a risk after the end of the conflict and therefore, the process of disarmament, demobilization, and socio-economic integration need to be planed as soon as possible.

Roundtable discussion - Security and Identity in West Africa

Dr Isaline Bergamaschi, Universite Libre de Bruxelles/ Prof Tony Chafer, Portsmouth University; Prof Isaac Albert, University of Ibadan; Mr Paul Melly, Chatham House; Dr Melita Lazell, University of Portsmouth

Dr Isaline Bergamaschi discussed the ambiguity of the labels and practices of the International Intervention in Mali since 2012. Foreign aid prior to 2012 had a destabilising effect on the country. Despite critical assessment of donors in 2012, the bureaucratic resistance to change led to a lost opportunity for change by 2014. The focus shifted completely to military and security issues. The International Intervention was hold together by ambiguity both in words and action as it served both national and international interests. The de-contextualisation of the conflict allowed a general 'consensus'. However, differences quickly re-emerged and led to further ambiguity. The label 'war on terror' proofed to be useful as it made the intervention possible. However, there seemed to be too much focus on a military solution of the crisis while overlooking political and economic weaknesses of the Mali government.

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