

# Contemporary Issues on Governance, Conflict and Security in Africa

Adeoye O. Akinola

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Conflict and Security  
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# PREFACE

## MOTIVATION AND OBJECTIVES

This book offers a holistic understanding of the convergence between governance, conflict and security in Africa. It adopts a political economy approach and qualitative research method, funded on unstructured interview and case studies, to unravel the governance and security questions in Africa. There are exhaustive studies on conventional threats to security in post-colonial Africa; however, there has been a dearth of rigorous research on other emerging threats to human security, which have the potency to aggravate Africa's insecurity and underdevelopment. While cases of armed insurrections and civil wars have reduced on the continent, diverse forms of violent conflicts have endangered the security of lives and property. What explains this trend? As well captured in the volume, the shrinking of many African states and the deepening of structural violence engendered new forms of violent conflict—terrorism, xenophobia, students-led violent protests, gender-based violence, youth-led dissent—and the resurgence of old conflicts, as seen in the new waves of coups in the Sahel and West Africa. Several African states continue to demonstrate their incapacity to ensure peace and security within their territorial delineations.

A resurgence of conflict generated by water and land impedes the quests for social stability, security and socio-economic sustainability in many parts of Africa. In the case of land, it manifests as both structural violence (a precondition for physical violence) and farm attacks as experienced in South Africa, where a high level of land-related inequality and

physical violence persist. Despite the optimism associated with the ‘Africa rising’ conversation, conventional and contemporary threats to peace have stunted its developmental projects. Indeed, there is a strong connection between security and development. While Paul Coulier’s insisted that economic consideration causes and perpetuates conflict, the literature identifies both economic and political variables—particularly the state and the political power system—as the main determinants of conflict.

Africa’s shifting nature of conflict necessitates fresh conversation on exploring effective contextual techniques to ensure Africa’s peace and security. Furthermore, the changing character of the security landscape reveals a rising gap between practice and classical thoughts on conflict, security and governance. Thus, the editor of the book, Oye Akinola, received support from the Institute of Pan-African Thought and Conversation (IPATC) at the University of Johannesburg, to host an author’s workshop and brainstorm new trends on conflict and security and the imperativeness of proffering sustainable recommendations for policy-making. The authors in this volume attended and made paper presentations at the workshop, between 10 and 11 March 2022, at the Sheraton Hotel in Pretoria, South Africa.

As discussed during the workshop, many violent conflicts in Africa are occurring outside the purview of government and without government troops, which becomes alarming due to its volatility and difficulty in mediation and reconciliation. Unlike the past when terrorism was associated with ideological extremisms, contemporary forms of terrorism have been linked to religious fundamentalism. The fall of Libya and the global crusade against westernisation have led to the proliferation of armed conflicts in Africa. From the Sahel to the Horn of Africa, evidence of the state’s failures and the resultant insecurity abound.

Therefore, the edited volume seeks to unpack how the interactions between the modern state, economy and society engender conflict. It is decisive to also focus on the victims of violent conflict and engage on the peculiarity of their vulnerabilities. Thus, it provides a robust engagement on some of the trends of conflict and insecurity that are becoming apparent in contemporary Africa. It also challenges the orthodox peace architecture on the continent and examines the changing demographics, economic and sociological factors that have implications for security. It provides deeper understanding of the nuances and new forms of conversation for addressing threats to African security, such as violent extremism, violent mass movements and underreported gender-based violence. The

book is broad, multi-disciplinary and a knowledge pool for researchers, think-tank community and postgraduate students, and policy practitioners that are engaged in national and regional security and governance.

## REALITY OF CONFLICT AND GOVERNANCE-GAP IN AFRICA

Generally, African states have experienced incessant threats to human security in various forms. In Nigeria, a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report recently revealed that attacks from the dreaded Boko Haram, including its splinter group—Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Fulani herdsmen have resulted in 2.7 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 350,000 deaths. Besides the infiltration of Boko Haram’s terrorism in Chad, the spillover effects of conflicts in its neighbouring countries—Cameroon, Libya, Sudan and Niger—have compounded Nigeria’s quest for stability. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 237,000 refugees and 300,000 IDPs are living in Niger, which includes an additional 4000 refugees and 2000 newly displaced in 2021 due to attacks in the Tillabéri and Tahoua regions.

In June 2021, local armed men unleashed violence on a village—Solhan—in northeast Burkina Faso near the Nigerien border. This attack claimed 138 lives and 40 sustained injuries. By January 2022, the Burkinaabè military struck and toppled the civilian government of President Roch Kaboré. The personalisation of political power has become one of the major reasons for military incursions into politics in West Africa and the Sahel. In Guinea, the military, and the populace, were frustrated by the tenure elongation of two successive post-independence leaders—President Sékou Touré and Lansana Conté—who stayed in power for 26 and 24 years, respectively.

Cameroon, which nearly went to war with Nigeria over border disputes, has become another concern. In 2016, what started as a protest by the two anglophone regions against marginalisation by the majority French-speaking government has turned the country into a war zone. The violent conflict between the central government and minority separatist groups has killed over 4000 people and displaced more than a million, including 66,899 refugees who fled to Nigeria. The spillover of Boko Haram’s terrorism from Nigeria to Cameroon has led to the killing of over 3000 people and displacement of 250,000 in northern Cameroon. The

country has also played host to 441,000 refugees, mostly from Nigeria and the Central African Republic.

On 30 May 2021, about 60 people were killed during an attack—carried out by suspected Allied Democratic Forces (ADF)—in Ituri Province in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The Ethiopian premier, Abiy Ahmed Ali, embarked on a military offensive in November 2020 to ‘restore the rule of law’ in Tigray by confronting the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), who had attacked a federal military base. Ahmed Ali, the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize 2019, continues with a crackdown on Tigray, and African leaders and the African Union (AU), that have initially ‘refused’ to respond effectively have now managed to broker a deal between the two warring sides.

The resource-part of Mozambique, Cabo Delgado Province, is also becoming a harbour for terrorism and lawlessness. This is too grave for regional security and too close for Pretoria’s comfort. The regional body—the Southern African Development Community (SADC)—is currently exploring the best approach to curtail the threat that terrorism poses to regional security. SADC deployed a regional task force, under the SADC Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM), to support the country’s effort at counterterrorism. The hitherto domestic Islamist insurgent group operating in the country’s north-eastern Cabo Delgado Province drew global attention in March 2021, when they attacked Palma in the northern part of the country. According to the BBC, the attack killed many foreigners working on a \$20 billion gas plant—the biggest single foreign investment in Africa.<sup>1</sup> More than 35,000 housing facilities have either been partially or totally destroyed at the start of the conflict,<sup>2</sup> and about 700,000 Mozambicans have now been displaced internally due to the ensuing reign of terror.

<sup>1</sup> See, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-56886085>.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on the conflict in Mozambique, see d’Orsi, Cristiano (2022). Catalogue of failures behind growing humanitarian crisis in northern Mozambique, <https://theconversation.com/catalogue-of-failures-behind-growing-humanitarian-crisis-in-northern-mozambique-149343>.

## THE PROBLEMATIC

Despite slow efforts to silence the guns in Africa, there are cases of blood-letting, and it does not look as if the gun-wielding groups are retreating. What accounts for the expanding proliferation of conflicts? Colonial legacy? While this is close to the heart, the false promise of liberal democracy and capitalism systems have exposed the fragility of the disjointed elitist states that are dependent on global financial oligarchs, many of which are governed by greedy, corrupt and inept leaders. Democratisation in Africa, which is regarded as the antidote to both internal resurrections and external aggressions, has deepened poverty, structural violence, identity assertiveness and the politicisation of ethnic groups, as well as the privatisation of power by the ruling elites.

Indeed, the liberal peace architecture has recorded failures on several fronts in Africa. Proponents of this school of thought have continued to celebrate the democratic peace theory, based on the so-called resilience of political and representative institutions, as well as institutional constraints, within the broad discourse on effective internal mechanisms, which embrace peace, negotiation, accountability and reconciliation. The brand of democracy exported to Africa is lacking in these attributes. Any attempts by the citizens to discuss the nature of relations between themselves and the state, based on shared identity, common values and goals, have been resisted by Africa's ruling class, political entrepreneurs and upper-level bourgeoisie, who have personalised public goods, expanded the inequality gap and manipulated the political spaces. African societies have been militarised to the extent that citizens celebrated the incursions of the military in politics in West Africa and the Sahel. The term, 'military is an aberration', is becoming unpopular in the Sahel.

The AU, including regional organisations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), has its hands full, in attempting to restore order to troubled zones. While the institutional capacity of the AU is becoming worrying and apparent, other foreign powers are seizing the opportunity to consolidate their power and interests in Africa. The new 'scramble' for the soul of the Sahel and West Africa by France, China and Russia, including the existing military visibility of the United States (US), are reminders of imperial wars and colonialism. There have been allegations of mercenaries on African soil, and Russia continues to cut into Mali and Central Africa Republic (CAR). The US military, which is active in about 20 African countries, has continued



to make its military footprint in Africa by investing \$100 million in its armed MQ-9 Reaper drones base in Niger, with an annual maintenance cost of \$30 million.<sup>3</sup> This became the largest ‘airman-built’ project in Air Force history and the largest base-building project ever undertaken by troops in US history. The AU should be worried. African states should be concerned, and Africans should begin to confront the foreign siege on the continent.

Johannesburg, South Africa  
January 2023

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<sup>3</sup> See, Turse, Nick (2018) “The U.S. is building a drone base in Niger that will cost more than \$280 million by 2024”, *The Intercept*, 21 August; <https://theintercept.com/2018/08/21/us-drone-base-niger-africa/>.

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