

Towards a Peaceful Future: A Non-Military Strategy to Ending Conflicts and Violence in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper assesses the feasibility of a non-military approach to rebuilding Nigeria's violent-torn society. It argues that a non-military solution offers a more peaceful and stable future for the country, as it is better equipped to address the root causes of current security challenges and rebuild fragile relations among the interest groups and people. Nigeria's development has been held to ransom by polycrisis since independence, paramount among them is organized violence. The Boko Haram insurgency in the north-east, banditry in the north-west, herders-farmers violence in the north-central, resource control militancy in the south-south and IPOB's secessionist crisis in the south-east, making the country third with highest incidence of violent attacks worldwide. These crises do not exist in silos, they're deeply interconnected and rooted in the country's historical experience. Despite heavy military expenditure and campaigns, five out of six of Nigeria's geo-political regions continue to be locked in furious insurgencies which has consumed thousands of lives with millions displaced, raised food prices and scarcity; and multifaceted humanitarian crisis. The paper also suggests that the use of a non-military approach could circumvent military intervention in the country, create more constructive relationships with the government and relevant groups; and moderate ethnic and religious extremism. This paper use information from primary and secondary sources, and historical and content analysis methods of discussion.

Keywords: Polycrisis, Violence, Non-military, Security and Peacebuilding.

Introduction

Conflict is one of the most sensitive phenomena in human history, due to its double-edge effects on the society. It has been identified to be natural and inevitable, yet with abundance potentials to lead to constructive human relations and orientations; or destructive outcomes depending on the managerial input. Nigeria, while being the most populous country in Africa, have an extensive chronicle of instability and the proliferation of violent conflicts. The amalgamation of different ethnic and religious groups by British in 1914 created a complex web, or what Samuel (2012:1) tagged “appropriate aura” for intra- and inter- religious and ethnic conflicts to thrive. These conflicts have periodically exploded into violences and wars in spite of the various managing attempts. Oyedele (2007:100) affirmed that the eruptions of these conflicts into large-scale violences have impound stark consequences including massive destruction of lives and properties and pervasive feeling of insecurity across the country and impact the economy negatively.

The problem is not a Nigerian problem; it is an African one. From the Congo in 1960, Central African Republic, Mali, Mozambique, Angola, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan, and Liberia, among others, conflicts and violence have been spreading in the continent like a wildfire for the last six decades, compelling Ajayi (2005:143) cited in Aremu (2010:549) to sum that “the regularity of conflicts in Africa has become one of the distinct characteristics of the continent.” The report proffered by the Peace Research Institute, Oslo, in 2022, underscores Africa's designation as the foremost continent afflicted by conflicts of a violent nature on a global scale. While the initial phase of this turbulence was characterized by civil warfare, a discernible shift emerged between late 1980s and late 1990s, marking a transition from civil wars to insurgent manifestations and communal clashes across the continent. Today, Africa accounts for more insurgencies and terrorist groups than any other continent worldwide. This challenge was often been ascribed to the heightened prevalence of political dictatorships and the deficiency of democratic governance across the continent. However, even with the reinstatement of democracy in Nigeria in 1999 for example, the issues of insecurity and violence have endured both within Africa and specifically within Nigeria. In recent years, the country

has witnessed an upsurge in insurgent attacks, banditry, kidnapping-for-ransom, herder-farmer conflicts, communal violence, and riots. The ugly situation has been compounded by corruption, weak public institutions, and a culture of impunity, in which perpetrators of violence often go unpunished.

The Nigerian government has initiated a series of military campaigns targeting various militant factions within the nation, notably including Boko Haram and the Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP), both of which espouse ambitions to establish an Islamic caliphate in Northern Nigeria. Additionally, efforts have been directed towards quelling the activities of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and its paramilitary wing, the Eastern Security Network, alongside other militant entities. In spite of substantial allocations of military resources, extensive mobilization, rigorous public relations campaigns, and heightened expectations, these military actions, geared toward mitigating the operations of these factions and reinstating peace and security across the nation, have exhibited a marked deficiency in terms of tangible progress. Regrettably, Nigeria's military initiatives have yielded constrained achievements, with the unfortunate collateral effect of a substantial loss of civilian lives, the mass displacement of millions, and a disconcerting proliferation of human rights violations.

Amid the ongoing turmoil, it is becoming increasingly apparent that a holistic and novel approach to peacebuilding and conflict resolution is necessary. A strategic framework must be established that accentuates the employment of non-military solutions in order to effectively curb the birth of new and thwart the escalation of old violence. It is crucial to understand that the utilization of military force alone is incapable of resolving the multifaceted insecurity plaguing Nigeria. To that end, a non-military strategy which encompasses a broad range of interventions is required to effectively tackle the underlying causes of violent conflicts. The implementation of this strategy will help foster trust and cohesion among different interest groups and individuals across the nation, whilst simultaneously promoting inclusive governance and permitting sustainable development to take root.

The non-military strategy will however, require a long-term, integrated, and coordinated commitment and efforts that involves multiple stakeholders, including the government,

civil society, and the private sector. This new perspective offers a comprehensive and sustainable alternative that would help rebuild Nigeria's conflict-torn society and create conditions for lasting peace and prosperity for the citizenry. This article argues that rather than a conventional military approach to tackling insecurity and violence in Nigeria, non-military interventions should be employed to address the root causes of the problems and forge a peaceful future for Nigeria, its citizens and generations unborn

Conflicts and Violence in Nigeria: History, Causes and Impacts.

Nigeria is a developing country with an extremely diverse society comprising over 370 ethnic groups, 600 languages, and more than three major religions. Nigeria's diversity has been mismanaged and exploited in such a manner that her National Question has probably become one of the most complicated in the world. This reality has produced severe consequences, including violent conflicts (Ota:2019). One significant issue that has perpetuated instability and conflict in Nigeria is ethnicity. The nation's rich tapestry of diverse ethnicities has, over time, emerged as a prominent source of violence and insecurity. Intense competition among various ethnic groups for access to resources and political power has frequently ignited confrontations and social unrest, creating a recurring cycle of violence that has proven exceedingly challenging to break.

The genesis of this challenge can be traced back to the year 1966 when a faction of military officers orchestrated a coup d'état, commonly known as the "coup of the five majors." This audacious plot, executed by majorly officers of Igbo descent, marked a turning point in Nigerian history. Tragically, the coup resulted in the untimely deaths of several prominent politicians and public figures from the Fulani-Hausa and Yoruba ethnic communities, including the prime minister. Consequently, an Igbo Officer, General Aguyi Ironsi emerged as head of state and government. This event marked the inception of a tumultuous period characterized by ethnic tensions, which has continued to reverberate through Nigeria's contemporary history.

Uwechue (2014:23-27) analyzed that what followed the coup was a cascade of suspicion, intrigue, and paranoia that had come to define the national psyche for years. The Hausa-Fulani ethnic group, in particular, developed and spread a grave conspiracy that the

military coup was a fraction of a master plan by the Igbo ethnic group to establish themselves as the preeminent force in the country's political leadership. This conspiracy theory took root and festered, the consequences was the fueling of ethnic tensions and setting the stage for a turbulent period in Nigerian history

Fueled by the coup, this conspiracy created a deep-seated mistrust between the two major groups and the Igbo, and led to far-reaching consequences, including riots and pogrom in northern Nigeria against the Igbo people. This led to a mass exodus of Igbo people back to their homeland in the southeast. Months later, a counter-coup by northern officers of Hausa-Fulani ethnicity was staged, resulting in the murder of Major General Aguiyi-Ironsi and the enthronement of a northerner, Yakubu Gowon, as Head of State. The pogrom, counter-coup, and subsequent events, forced the Igbo's agitation for greater political autonomy and the later creation of a separate state of Biafra led by General Ojukwu, which pushed the Nigerian Civil War, that lasted from 1967 to 1970.

The war produced millions of casualties, massive humanitarian crisis, with millions of people displaced. These events formed the genesis of organized conflicts and violence in Nigeria. Since the war, Nigeria's post-war reconciliation and nation-building has been quite unfruitful. Akpan accounted that, the civil war engrained tribal loyalties into public policies and governance which promotes sectional interest against the country's nation-building struggles, frustrate attentions and efforts to rebuild trust and confidence among the various ethnic groups in the country, which has force political, economic, and social patronage and development to be concentrated along ethnic and other divisive lines, and ultimately kept the country's developmental aspiration in the woods. Adegbami and Adeoye (2021:12) furthered the argument that

since the end of the Nigerian civil war, violent conflict has remained part of the relationships between and among the diverse ethnic groups...because some of the problems – ethnic eccentricities, ethno-religious identities, ethnic militias, and parochial political sentiments – among other issues that resulted in the civil war, have not been resolved.

In addition to this long history and experience of conflicts and division, today's complex nature of violence that plagues Nigeria is the result of multiple peculiarities: elusive governance, entrenched corruption, unyielding ineffectiveness of basic service delivery, economic exclusion, social deprivation, religious rivalry, and the mounting account of human rights violations. However, in addition to these factors, two other intriguingly noteworthy stimulants that constantly ignite and fuel these crises are the far-reaching reach of terrorism, which has bred an epidemic of armed uprisings, as well as the burgeoning impact of climate change, principally manifesting as withering drought and flood.

The ancient oil town of Warri have witnessed violence between hitherto coexisting communities. This explosion left scars that were visible and invisible. Some of the visible scars were corpses and burnt-out houses that were no more than hollow shells. Hundreds of businesses, big and small, were closed down and people fled the town in panic, while the invisible are years of long hostile relations between these groups, that will surely be transferred down to future generations. This was the outcome of clashes between the three ethnic groups that makeup Warri - the Ijaws and Urhobos on one hand and the Itsekiris on the other. (Samuel 2012:6). The scale and ferocity of the destruction are quite alarming, with hundreds of lives and properties lost. Conflicts in the Niger-Delta oil-rich region are not new phenomena. The Esit-Eket and Uyenghe; Ikot Abasi and Eastern Obolo communities' clash in Akwa Ibom created massive destruction of lives and properties, and similar incidents have occurred in the Bayelsa, Rivers, and Cross River states. While communities-led violence has been on a constant rise in the region, oil militancy is the most eye-catching, disastrous, violent, and blood-spilling exercise in the region. The causes of violence in this region are best established through an understanding of the nexus between natural resources and conflict in Africa. Throughout the continent, it is evident that wherever there are natural resources, conflicts tend to thrive as a result of unjust exploration, exploitation of resources by states, multinationals, and even individuals, and distribution of the end benefits. Issues of natural resources have raised and continue to issue tensions and damages to Nigeria in various ramifications.

Acheme furthered arguments instituted by Umoh, Dickson and Ekpe that, oil companies, as capitalist externalities with profit motives and the Nigerian state, representing a loose federation of ruling class interest in capital accumulation are the dominant factor in this situation. Acting against the background of a neo-colonial dependent capitalist state, these forces employ a continuum of strategies to retain control of the oil resources and people of Niger Delta. These strategies have produced several repercussions, including weak societies with strong degrees of fragmentation and arrow-sharpen tensions which are exacerbating violence in an unmeasurable manner. (2007:259) The Niger Delta situation is best captured by Aghalino and Odeh who averred that “so much wealth is derived from the bowel of the region; however, the scourge of poverty is grim with people lacking basic human needs and environment willfully and constantly degraded by oil companies...this situation has engendered protests, restiveness, communal clash, and in the extreme, and overtime, militancy”. (2018:237-238).

A repetition of the Warri mayhem happened in Ondo State, as the Ijaws and Ilajes went for each other's throat, with the consequent loss of hundreds of lives and property. Even in riverine areas, such as the farming communities of Aguleri and Umuleri in Anambra State, the story is the same. Entire villages were razed. The conflict over land in these areas' dates back to the pre-colonial age, but the recent conflict in 1999 assumed dangerous proportions with thousands of lives and properties destroyed, as more sophisticated weapons were used (Samuel 2012:18). All across Nigeria, there is an ever-lengthening thread of violence; these are not isolated events but strongly interconnected.

In the East, the Indigenous People of Biafra breakaway call is turning the region, which hitherto was the economic hub of the country, into a deserted wilderness. Despite some 52 years since the Nigerian civil war and heavy scientific research into its causes and prevention of reoccurring, civil war-bound events have resurfaced in the eastern part of the country, through the Igbo's renewed agitation for the Biafra Republic. Since the end of the civil war, the Biafra agitation and separatism movement has witnessed a relatively low profile, while Nigeria has witnessed some sense of national cohesion. Three factors have been identified as contributing to the ongoing crisis in Southeastern Nigeria. Firstly, it is noteworthy that Major General Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, the leader of

the Biafra movement, demonstrated a notable absence of provocative actions and instead espoused a message of peace following the cessation of hostilities in the region. Secondly, a significant element in this unfolding crisis is the ascendancy of the Igbo ethnic group and the Eastern region's burgeoning economic influence within the Nigerian landscape. The Igbo, constituting the third-largest ethnic group in Nigeria and having a historical association with secessionist aspirations, now wield substantial economic power and influence. The third factor exacerbating tensions pertains to the perceived dominance of the country's political landscape by Southern Nigeria since the restoration of democratic governance in 1999. A pivotal juncture was reached in 2015, marked by a change in administration with President Buhari and All Progressives Congress (APC) assuming the reins of power in Nigeria. President Buhari's governance model, often characterized as exhibiting tendencies against minority and religious inclusivity, is deemed a primary catalyst for the ongoing crisis in the Southeast.

During his eight-year tenure, both chambers of the Nigerian legislative body were presided over by individuals of the Muslim faith. Moreover, three of the four service chiefs appointed during this period hailed from Northern Nigeria and were adherents of Islam. The Secretary of the Federation and many critical ministerial portfolios were similarly held by individuals of Northern Muslim extraction. Furthermore, the contemporary political reality reveals that President Buhari's party, the APC, under his leadership, has produced a presidential-elect and vice-presidential elect who both adhere to the Muslim faith. This development is historic, marking the first instance of a same-faith presidential ticket in Nigeria's six-decade history. The implications of such a ticket are perceived as potentially detrimental to the cohesion of the nation, given its rich tapestry of diverse interests and religious affiliations.

The division created by the un-inclusive leadership model have provided suitable atmosphere for public dissonance and at extreme, violence to thrive in the southeastern region, whom leaders have openly accused president Buhari's leadership as a deliberate behavior and grand plot towards Islamizing the country. The IPOB group has gone on rampage, using violence to compelled persons to join their agitations against the federal government, kidnapping prominent persons and killing at will. The ongoing agitation in

the region have taken on a hostile tone, leading to the banning of public activities such as National Independence Day celebrations and political events, as well as issuing "sit-at-home orders" on Mondays. This have further weakened the cohesion of the country, and set up a risk of a second civil war and eventual breakup.

In Northern Nigeria, ethnic and religious tensions have contributed to numerous violent conflicts over the past four decades. Groups such as Muslims, Christians, Fulani, Hausa, Kanuri, Tiv, and Nupe have been involved in both minor and major clashes, resulting in significant loss of life and property damage. Notable examples include the Kano revolts of 1980, 2004, and 2023, the Bulunku Bizarre incident of 1982, the Kastina crisis of 1999, the Samfara conflict, the Kaduna revolt, the Bauchi crises, and the Sokoto and Jos conflicts of 1999, 2008, 2010, and 2022 (Canci and Odukoya 2016:5).

The persistence of hostilities between Muslims and Christians in northern Nigeria can be traced, in part, to the manipulative "divide and rule" tactics employed by the region's political leaders. These leaders often stoke religious and ethnic tensions, making baseless accusations and insinuations to incite the masses against themselves. This approach is aimed at consolidating their power and avoiding accountability. Unfortunately, these tactics have had unintended consequences, including the rise of extremist groups like Boko Haram and ISWAP, which have used religion as a pretext to stage insurgencies against the Nigerian state.

The impacts of these violent-conflicts groups and activities run deep, and none have felt its devastating impact more acutely than the vulnerable populations caught in its crosshairs. (Ken 2018:34) cried thus,

The repercussions of such turmoil have forced these vulnerable groups to flee their homes and seek refuge in neighboring villages, towns, and even countries, becoming internally displaced persons (IDPs) in their own nation. The violence perpetrated against these innocent persons is nothing short of catastrophic. Physical and emotional injuries, rape as a traumatic injury, sexually transmitted diseases, maternal mortality, unwanted pregnancy and unsafe abortion; the use of child soldiers is just some of the horrific atrocities that have been visited upon them as a result of conflict and violence.

The ripple effects of such strife have not been limited to these unfortunate souls alone. The very foundations of the government and society at large have been shaken to their core, leading to instability, political unrest and economic distress, a weakening of patriotism, and a breeding of suspicion, distrust, and fractured relationships between different ethnic, religious and interest groups in Nigeria, leaving many to suspect the end of the country as a single sovereign entity is closer than ever.

The United Nations Development Programme report on effects of conflicts in Nigeria, conducted by the Fredrick S. Pardee Center for International Futures in 2021 asserted that

Insecurity has led to decline in agricultural production and trade, reducing access to food and threatening the many households who depend on agriculture for income. Hundreds of thousands of Nigerians have been displaced from their homes, often meaning the loss of livelihoods, assets, and critical support systems. Moreover, displaced populations must often live in overcrowded and degraded living conditions without access to clean water and sanitation. Young children, who are especially vulnerable to malnutrition and disease from a lack of clean water, are hit hardest. We estimate that more than 90 percent of conflict-attributable deaths through 2020, about 324,000, are of children younger than five. With another decade of conflict coming, that could grow to more than 1.1 million.

Conventional Military Approach to End Conflicts and Its Failure in Nigeria.

The Nigerian state's approach towards conflict and violence eradication has been lacklustre at best, as it tends to be reactive rather than proactive. This strategy, which centres on the deployment of the military and other security agencies to occupy regions and communities, and apprehend culprits after the bloods of innocent citizens has been spilled, is both unproductive and counterproductive in its methodology. This reactive policy, which is implemented through conventional military-approach betrays the country's aspirations to effectively address the root causes of violence and conflict.

The Nigerian military, through its various units, has conducted several counter-insurgency operations against Boko Haram. Notably, the Operation Lafiya Dole, which was launched in 2015. The operation has involved several joint operations with neighbouring countries such as Cameroon, Chad and Niger. The operation Zaman Lafiya was launched in in 2016-17, aimed to clear the Boko Haram strongholds in the notorious Sambisa Forest, others include Operation Restore Order 2011-2013, Operation Crackdown 2013-2015 The Nigerian military has also engaged in multifaceted operations to combat various criminal elements and separatist groups, spanning different regions of the country. In the southeast, violent secessionist agitators have been targeted by the aggressive Operation Python Dance and Crocodile Smile launched in 2018 and 2020 respectively, while in the north-west, bandits and kidnappers have been the focus of military operations. In the north-central, the military has been tackling the issue of herdsman and farmers clashes, and in the south-south, resource control agitation militants have been dealt with. The military has employed various strategies and tactics, including intelligence gathering, air raids, and ground operations, to counter these elements at multiple times. Omeni (2017:58) submitted that “counter-insurgency military campaign has moved through different phases, it has also grown in scale, capacity, components and stakeholders, overtime”.

As a result of these efforts, the insurgents have been pushed back, and their ability to carry out attacks has been reduced. The military has been able to restore some level of security and stability in the affected areas by retaking some towns and villages previously held in captivity by the Boko Haram and freeing hundreds of hostages. However, Nigeria’s insurgency and violence experience has refused to cease. The violence groups, have constantly been recruiting, mobilizing resources and supports internally and externally, re-strategizing on their methodologies, while the end of their activities is not in sight. As Omeni has rightly explained, “Boko Haram, ISWAP and others... have developed the capacity to violently engage the Nigerian army using advanced weapons and amor platforms..., consequently, with the acquired capability they could defend and control captured territories for a long period” (2017:79).

There exists a contentious debate among scholars and researchers concerning the most effective approach to quell insurgency and violence in the country. While some hold the belief that increasing military operations holds a panacea to such challenges, many, including myself disagrees with it. Indeed, it is true that the utilization of military force can yield certain immediate gains, such as the disruption of insurgent activities and the apprehension of violent group members. However, it only offers a quick fix and weak to the problems, not a sustainable solution. In fact, the origins of these issues are traced back to socio-economic and political factors, such as marginalization, ethnocentrism, identity problems, poverty, and corruption. Therefore, a more comprehensive and nuanced approach is required to effectively address these complex issues and foster lasting peace and stability.

As we reflect on, it becomes evident that Nigeria's military approach has been tried and tested in several instances, and effected by some reasons, its success rate leaves much to be desired. One major concern is the high level of human rights abuses allegedly committed by the security forces during their operations. In 2020, Amnesty International documented at least 82 cases of torture, extrajudicial execution, and other violations committed by the Nigerian security forces, including the military in Bourn state. These abuses have fuelled resentment and anger among the civilian population, leading to further violence and exacerbation of the conflicts. Despite the deployment of military forces to the northeast region, the Boko Haram insurgency persists and continues to carry out attacks on civilians and security forces. According to the Global Terrorism Index, Nigeria was ranked the third most affected country by terrorism in 2019, with Boko Haram responsible for most of the attacks.

The implementation of a military-centred security strategy for instant in Enugu, Benue, and Nasarawa States has resulted in a proliferation of security checkpoints, roadblocks, and searches in the Enugu-Benue-Lafia highway. While these measures are intended to enhance security, they have had an adverse impact on the movement of goods, services, and people within and across these states. Specifically, the distance between Enugu State and Nasarawa State, which spans 354 kilometres, is punctuated by a total of 72 military checkpoints. Consequently, there is a military checkpoint every 4.92 km. This has led to

an increase in extortion, bribery, and corruption among security personnel, leading to economic disruptions and hardships for civilians who live or travel through these areas. These challenges pose a significant threat to the development of the affected regions. The negative impact of the military checkpoints on the flow of goods and services across state borders cannot be overstated. The checkpoints and roadblocks hinder the free flow of commerce, which inevitably affects economic growth and development. The increase in corruption and extortion at these checkpoints not only stifles economic activity but also creates a hostile business environment that deters investors and undermines the confidence of the public.

The military-approach which has ensured excessive militarization of the conflict-affected regions through deployment of powerful weapons and personnel, have tragically transformed civilian populations into collateral damage, as the indiscriminate use of force rains down deaths and destruction upon innocent lives like a relentless storm. According to the United Nations, more than 36,000 people have been killed and over 2 million displaced by insurgency in Nigeria (UN Report 2022). While a healthy percentage of these deaths are directly attributed to the militants, others have been caused by military operations and the use of excessive force by security forces. On November 20th 1999, 47% of the indigenes of Odi village in Bayelsa state, southern Nigeria were disastrously massacred by the Nigerian Army while carrying out military operations on the orders of the then president Obasanjo to clear-out oil and environmental agitating militants (Wuam, Olali and Obilikwu 2011:49). Similar occurrence has been witnessed in Benue state in when seven towns of Gbeji, Vaase, Kyado, Anyin, Zaki-Biam, Tes-Adoor and Sankera were invaded by thousands of soldiers and more 200 civilians were killed. This has happened in Jos, Southern Kaduna and even Bourn states recently. (Human Rights Watch 2021:3)

The deployment of military forces to conflict-affected areas has also been criticized for undermining democracy in Nigeria. Historically, the insidious proliferation of military presence in violence and conflict-ridden regions have always proved a grave threat to the integrity of democratic institutions, as militarization engenders a culture of coercion and intimidations that undermines the free and fair conducts of elections,

thereby eroding the very essence of democratic ideals. The military's stationed at states of Bayelsa and Rivers in July 2002, and Bourn, Kebbi, Adamawa and Benue in 2015 for military operations against violence groups was mischievously ordered by powers, into involving in 2003, 2015 and 2019 elections, which produced controversial outcomes. This has forced the Transition Monitoring Group to name these states as “states that fell short of minimum acceptable standard for any credible elections” cited in (Nwajiaku 2020:458).

The heavy-handed approach of the military has led to the displacement of people from their homes, and the destruction of property and livelihoods. This has created resentment and mistrust among the civilian population towards the security forces, making it difficult for them to cooperate and work together in addressing the security challenges according to Abubakar (2022). This military-focused approach reinforces militarism as a way of addressing conflicts and violence in Nigeria. This sends a message that violence is an acceptable way of resolving disputes, and it perpetuates a culture of conflicts, making peacebuilding and conflict transformation a difficult initiative as the country drive towards an uncertain future. (Otabasi Akpan 2023).

The deployment of military forces to conflict-affected areas is expensive, and it diverts resources away from other important areas of development, such as education, health, and infrastructure. In the last seven years, Nigeria's military spending has risen drastically. In 2015, when the national budget was N4.405 trillion, the total budget for the security sector was N988,892,506,442. Subsequently, in 2016, when the national budget increased to N6.06 trillion, the security sector received a budgetary allocation of N1.07 trillion. Similarly, in 2017, when the national budget rose to N7.44 trillion, the security sector received a total allocation of N1.15 trillion. In 2018, the national budget was N9.12 trillion, and the security sector was allocated a total budget of N1.35 trillion. In 2019 and 2020, the national budget was N8.92 trillion and N10.59 trillion, respectively, and the security sector received budgetary allocations of N1.4 trillion and N1.8 trillion, respectively. In the 2021 budget, with a total value of N13.59 trillion, the defense and security sectors received a combined budget of N1.96 trillion. Furthermore, the government added another N722.53 billion to the security budget through a supplementary budget. It is noteworthy that Nigeria's military budget is higher than the

combined defense spending of other West African countries. Similar increase has been experienced in the 2022 and 2023 security budgets (The Guardian 2022:14). These increases are despite a fall in gross domestic output due to the post-COVID19 pandemic economic woes and the country's heavy debt profile. This constant military spending has limited the government's ability to address the underlying causes of conflicts and violence. Not to forget that this military-focused approach has not addressed the root causes of the conflicts, such as poverty, ethnic-religious tension, inequality and exclusion; and marginalization. These factors have been identified as key drivers of conflicts and violence in Nigeria. The continued neglect of these issues is likely to lead to the sustenance and possibly, the spread of conflicts and violence in the future. While military intervention may seem like a viable solution to the Nigerian state in resolving conflicts and violence, it's have contributed significantly in escalating the situation by expanding the core of extremism and high violence retaliation, due to the fact it prioritizes force and aggression over diplomacy and peacebuilding.

While it is true that heightened military operations can yield short-term benefits such as the disruption of insurgent activities and the apprehension of some violent group members, it is unlikely to address the remote causes of these conflicts. Therefore, the Nigerian state must appreciate that a piecemeal and knee-jerk militarization strategy to conflict and violence only serves to fuel and exacerbate existing tensions. A lack of comprehensive intervention and prevention measures does not bode well for the country's ambitions to foster a peaceful and harmonious society. A more holistic approach that addresses the underlying causes of conflicts and involves communities in finding solutions will be more effective in achieving lasting peace and stability in Nigeria, which I term non-military approach.

Non-Military Strategies Towards Ending Conflicts in Nigeria.

Population Control: Nigeria's population is growing in a catastrophic mode. Uncontrolled population growth in Nigeria has potentially led to an upsurge in violence, as resources and opportunities are limited, and people are becoming more competitive and aggressive in their pursuit of survival. With about 70% of the country's uncontrollably growing population within the 18-40 age bracket, this demographic poses

a significant challenge to the country's already overstretched resources and limited opportunities. Consequently, sentiments and discriminations based on religious, ethnic, gender, and various other grounds have crept into the process of granting people these opportunities, resulting in increased tensions and conflict between individuals and groups within the Nigerian society. Furthermore, high population density and overcrowding in Nigeria have contributed to increased stress and frustration, leading to a higher likelihood of violent behaviour. Currently, more than 65% of Nigerians live in cramped conditions with limited access to basic necessities such as food, water, and shelter (NBS statistics: 2023). This deplorable condition has made people, especially in northern Nigeria, more prone to engaging in violent acts to secure these resources or stage fights against the government.

To address this critical issue of uncontrolled population growth and the attendant rise in violence, several effective policies and methods of population control should be implemented. Firstly, the government should institute programs and policies aimed at improving access to education, especially for women and girls, as this has been identified as a potent tool for population control. Education empowers women to make informed choices about their reproductive health, leading to reduced fertility rates. Secondly, there should be a widespread campaign by the National Orientation Agency, NGOs and relevant stakeholders to promote the use of modern contraceptives and family planning methods. This can be achieved through the establishment of family planning clinics in underserved areas, providing information and education to individuals, and making contraceptives more accessible and affordable (Assi:2023). Controlling the population growth will assist government's focus on improving the quality of life and standard of living for Nigerians, which will reduce stress and frustration and mitigate the likelihood of violence.

Quality Investment in Education: The pivotal role of education in promoting peacebuilding and stability cannot be overstated. Alas, in Nigeria, just like in several other developing countries, inadequate investment in the educational sector has had far-reaching implications for the country's stability, including proliferation of violence and conflict.

In the region of northern and south-eastern Nigeria, where the level of illiteracy is exceptionally high, the lack of investment in quality education for citizens have created an environment that enables easy conscription of young persons into jihadist and secessionist agitating groups. Lack of quality education limits critical thinking skills, exposing individuals to extremist ideologies and propaganda. Since education is the process of preparing people to fit into complex social structure, and play cohabiting role as members of more than one institutional group (Akpan 2019:1), quality investment in it will, moreover, provide critical thinking skills, making people more resilient and knowledgeable in the face of misinformation, propaganda, and extremist ideologies. This will prevent polarization, sectarianism, and violence, as people will become more enlightened in their beliefs and tolerant of those who hold different views. In a highly literate society, there are resistance to significant societal pressure to conform to certain norms and beliefs.

Quality investment in education will pave the way for standard and modern educational facilities, competent and skilled teachers, and expanded access to quality education. It will create a population with a sense of humour, hope, and patriotism, empowering the people to steer clear of crime or violence at the earliest available opportunity. Furthermore, investment in education will also lead to high levels of employment, especially among young people, who will acquire the requisite skills and training to compete in the job market globally and locally. In Nigeria, the simplest to be manipulated and conscripted into violent movements and armed groups is the uneducated youths between the ages of 22 and 38. 80-90 percentage of Boko Haran, ISWAP, IPOB-ESAN, Herdsmen violent fighters neither complete secondary education or never had access to it. This clearly illustrates how fundamental access to and investment in quality education will prevent conscription into armed groups across the country. Finally, quality investment in education will bolster adequate, peaceful, and forward-thinking responses to social and political challenges, such as corruption, inequality, marginalization and ethno-religious sentiments. It will limit the possibility of fuelling resentment, frustration, and anger among the population, which could ultimately lead to protests, civil unrest, and conflict.

Control of Proliferation of Smalls Arms and Ammunition: The rampant proliferation of arms has unfortunately emerged as perhaps, a major enabler of escalation of conflicts and violence in Nigeria, particularly in the volatile regions of north-east, north-central and south-south. This reality has become a primary catalyst for the exacerbation of hostilities in these regions. The issue of controlling arms proliferation is an endemic problem faced by many developing countries. However, Nigeria's predicament is further aggravated by a dearth of effective policies to regulate and eliminate this scourge, which is further compounded by the lack of political will to make these policies (Otoabasi Akpan 2023). The unfortunate reality is that several public officials and elected government representatives have been implicated in the utilization of criminal elements who possess these weapons for nefarious activities such as election thuggery and other anti-social behaviours, thereby undermining efforts to curb this menace.

It is imperative that the Nigerian government undertakes a comprehensive review and update of existing laws regulating the possession, use, and sale of firearms to make them more effective in controlling this menace. In addition, there is a pressing need for the enactment of new legislation to address gaps in the existing framework. The unchecked influx of vast quantities of weapons through the Sahara, particularly those used in previous wars of independence, civil wars, and insurgencies in neighbouring countries like Libya and Sudan, continues to pose a significant threat to the stability and security of Nigeria. Therefore, it is crucial that the government invests in cutting-edge technology, infrastructure, and skilled manpower to improve border control measures and prevent the influx of illegal weapons. Moreover, the government must implement disarmament programs aimed at retrieving illegal weapons from criminals and other unauthorized individuals. Such programs should involve the use of incentives to encourage individuals to voluntarily surrender their weapons, coupled with public awareness campaigns to educate citizens on the dangers of arms proliferation and the importance of reporting suspicious activities related to the circulation of illegal weapons. Furthermore, collaborative efforts with regional and international partners to implement joint arms control programs are essential. This will involve the allotment of information, harmonizing of arms control measures, and preventing the cross-border movement of

weapons. This robust arms proliferation control strategy will promote community safety by removing illegal weapons from circulation, hence reducing the incidence of interpersonal violence, and fostering a sense of security among citizens, the government towards a peaceful future.

Poverty Alleviation: The reduction of the country's poverty burden will undoubtedly be a major watershed towards ending conflicts and violence in Nigeria. This reality has been substantiated by various studies and data that reflect the complex interplay between poverty and insecurity in the country. According to the BBC, the states with the highest poverty rates are Kano, Kaduna, Kastina, Sokoto, Jigawa, Bauchi, Zamfara, Benue and Kebbi, coincidentally, these states are the most hit by conflicts and violence. Hence, there is an existing relationship between poverty and conflicts. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, seven out of every ten persons living in rural areas are multidimensionally poor, compared to the 5 out of every ten persons in the urban areas. Interestingly, 70% of Nigeria's population live in rural areas, and this reality is connected to the fact that outright majority of conflicts and violence activities in the country happens in the rural areas, and most times spread thereof to the urban centres. (NBS statistics: 2023).

To further solidify this argument, Lagos, with an economy greater than 50 of Africa's 54 countries, is the most prosperous state in Nigeria and has rarely experienced any sort of organized conflict and violence in the last 30 years, exception of the EndSar movement which was a nationwide agitation for the banning of a section of Nigerian police over their unprofessional conducts. Indeed, poverty has been identified as a major driver of violent extremism and conflict in Nigeria, particularly in the northern parts of the country. Poverty's contribution to the proliferation of conflict is multifaceted, as it creates a breeding ground for a range of criminal activities, including armed robbery, kidnapping, riot and insurgency. These activities often serve as a means of survival for many of the country's poor and vulnerable citizens. Furthermore, poverty creates a sense of exclusion and marginalization, leading to social and economic injustices, and exacerbating existing tensions between different communities. This situation is compounded by the fact that Nigeria is a multi-ethnic society with a history of inter-

ethnic tensions, which are often exacerbated by poverty and the competition for scarce resources. Therefore, it is imperative that Nigeria takes proactive steps towards poverty alleviation as a means of addressing the security situation in the country. The provision of economic opportunities and resources will go a long way in reducing the number of unemployed youths, preventing them from joining criminal gangs, and engaging in other forms of illegal activities. The creation of wealth will also foster inclusivity and equality within communities, eliminate social and economic injustices, and reduce wealth disparities, leading to a further reduction in conflict and inter-ethnic tensions. Poverty alleviation will be achieved through strengthening social safety nets, inclusive governance, addressing corruption, investing in strategic economic infrastructures like the proposed Ibom Deep Seaport, Ajaokuta Steel Company, Port Harcourt and Kaduna refineries etc., supporting small and medium-scale enterprises, and total support for private sector. Poverty alleviation will also increase access to basic services such as healthcare and education, which are essential for long-term stability. This will create an environment of peace, security, and stability in the country.

Good Governance, Inclusivity and Gender Equality: Strengthening Nigeria's governance and leadership capacity to reflect good and inclusive practices; and responsive administrative system is a paradigm that will cure the country's multiple conflict experience and breed lasting peace. The country's leadership at various tiers must be reformed to perform in line with the aspirations and needs of the common people. The country should hunt for ideal democratic public servants with sound attitudes, motivation and inclusive policy disposition to bend the country's development direction towards achieving social justice, economic equality and inclusivity. Insecurity and violence in Nigeria, according to (Mukhtar and Ishaq 2017:351) are attributed to corruption, injustice, selfish governance and creation of two unequal classes of citizens, the extreme rich and extreme poor.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics, 69% of riots, crimes and conflicts in the country are perpetrated in areas with high grid of government absence, poor delivery system and exclusion, with the Islam and sharia dominated northern states leading in the maths, while the western part of the country experiences the least. Therefore, the pursuit

of good governance and social equality has become increasingly crucial for the attainment of peace, stability, and sustainable development. Gender equality and inclusion are critical components for enhancing good governance and preventing conflicts in Nigeria. When women are also included in the governance and leadership cycle, it promotes diverse perspectives, increased participation, and decision-making processes that reflect the needs and aspirations of all citizens. This leads to better policies and outcomes that benefit society as a whole. Despite accounting for 49.47 percent of Nigerian population, women have continued to be underrepresented in governance and leadership cycle in Nigeria and their representation remains below 7% in governance at all levels.

To achieve these objectives, governments at all levels need to undertake corrosive measures, including strengthening institutional capacity, promoting transparency and accountability, ensuring citizens and women participation, addressing inequality, tackling discrimination, and ensuring fairness and justice. Various administrations must build strong and effective institutions that shall deliver public goods and services to citizens which are essential for good governance and fostering peaceful co-existence, this requires reforming the civil service, improving the judiciary, and ensuring the independence of regulatory bodies. By acting according to these instructions, the government will promote transparency and accountability, enhance service delivery, and earn the trust and loyalty of the citizenry, which will promote long-term peace and stability. Moreover, citizen participation is vital for ensuring that policies and decisions are reflective of their needs and interests. Therefore, governments need to create avenues for active citizen engagement, such as community-based organizations, public opinion, freedom of expression, and civil societies. By doing so, citizens can contribute their ideas, participate in decision-making, and hold leaders accountable.

Moreover, corruption is a significant obstacle to good governance and social justice in Nigeria. Therefore, the government needs to implement anti-corruption measures, such as enforcing laws, and the promotion of transparency and accountability in public procurement. Lastly, addressing inequality and exclusion is vital for promoting social justice in Nigeria. This requires implementing policies that promote inclusive

growth, such as job creation, poverty reduction programs, and social protection schemes. These shall address the root causes of conflict and reduce social and economic inequality, leading to a more stable, prosperous and peaceful society.

Protection of Human Rights and Justice: Human rights and justice are two concepts that are intricately interconnected, as protection and promotion of human rights are indispensable ingredients to achieving justice in every society. Human beings are born with natural rights which dignify their existence, violation of these rights and the absence of an articulate criminal justice system to address these violations often lead to social unrest, conflicts and instability as individuals and groups tend to seek redress through violent means. Nigeria, having travelled through years of some of the most extreme military totalitarianism, has a dark history of human rights violation and injustice discourse. Few of the most severe violent and conflicts facing the Nigerian state is as the result of the inability of the governments, past and present to protect rights of persons and provide effective justice system for redress them when violated. In 1998, the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other environmental activists and human rights advocates by the Nigerian dictator Sani Abacha, as well as the extrajudicial killing of Mohammed Yusuf by Nigerian soldiers in 2002, were two significant events that sparked the emergence of several acclaimed oil resource and environmental militant groups in the Niger-Delta region, as well as Boko Haram in northern Nigeria. Unfortunately, these cases have not been properly probed (Kukah 2011:71). More recently, the EndSars protests erupted due to the countless violations of rights of young Nigerians by a section of the Nigerian police force. It eventually turned violent, resulting in the loss of lives and property. It's worth noting that if these human rights violations had not occurred, or perhaps the country's judicial system was working appropriately, the consequences that followed would not have transpired.

The human rights situation in Nigeria has been a subject of great concern over the years, with widespread violations of the rights of women and children. These violations are often aided by religious and cultural prejudices, resulting in underage and forced marriages, domestic violence, and religious conscriptions. These marriages have become a breeding ground for the birth of several offspring who due to lack of proper

upbringing and parental guidance, have grown to become extremists and violent instigators who pose a threat to the stability and peace of the Nigerian society. In addition, the Sharia legal system has been a major contributor to the arbitrary arrest, detention, and trials of individuals who openly speak against these practices in Northern Nigeria. A case in point is the recent death sentence handed down to Musician Aminu Yahaya Sharif for blasphemy in 2020.

There must be, a comprehensive reformation of the Nigerian justice system, and the creation of new human rights legislations that offers solutions to the current human rights challenges in the country, culprits of violence and extremism should be adequately punished, and justice served for the victims as this will serve as deterrence to prospective extremists and violent perpetrators. Nigeria should establish a framework for development that focuses on ensuring that human rights are protected and promoted in all aspects of development, and expressively implement and uphold the importance of participation, empowerment, and accountability in ensuring the protection of human rights. More so, adequate training for security agencies and personnel should be implemented, thus, this shall ensure that they understand and respect human rights in their work, and are held accountable for any violations.

The principle of "Rule of Law", which emphasizes that all individuals and institutions are subject to and accountable to the law must be strictly adhere to. Citizens' participation in the protection of human rights is also essential. This should be done through the creation of mechanisms for citizens to report abuses, providing legal aid to victims of human rights violations, and creating spaces for dialogue and consultation with civil society organizations locally and globally. Nigeria must show commitment at protecting rights of its citizens and provide a transparency and integrity judicial system to redress issues of violations, by promoting the independent of the judiciary. The promotion of the independence of the judiciary is equally important to ensure a transparent and integrity judicial system that redresses issues of violations, while ensuring freedom from political, religious, and economic influence in handling matters concerning human rights. This assertion is premised on the fact that these measures engender accountability, promote trust in institutions, and cultivate respect for diversity. Such attributes are fundamental

components for sustainable peacebuilding in any society. Therefore, it is imperative for Nigeria to prioritize the implementation of these human rights and justice-centred policies to ensure a harmonious, peaceful and secure environment for its citizens.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated that a solely military approach to ending violent-conflicts in Nigeria is inadequate, and offers results below expectations. Instead, an across-the-board non-military strategy that addresses the deep-seated root causes of violent-conflicts is not just necessary, but absolutely critical at this stage of the country's history. This strategy requires a multi-faceted approach that prioritizes quality investment in education, population control, poverty alleviation, small and light arms control, good governance and; protection of human rights and enforcement of justice. By pursuing this non-military strategy, Nigeria has the potential to move towards a future characterized by sustainable peace, stability and focused development. The success of this strategy, however, relies on the collective effort of various factors and actors, including the government, civil society, and individuals. It requires a fundamental shift in thinking, and a willingness beyond every sentiment, to address long-standing grievances and inequalities. It is crucial that government and stakeholders recognize the urgent need to adopt this non-military strategy and take the necessary steps to implement it. Failure to do so risks perpetuating the cycle of violence and instability that has hindered Nigeria's progress for too long. The benefits of achieving sustainable peace in Nigeria are clear, not only for Nigerians but also for the wider African region and the international community.

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S/N	Name	Sex	Age	Occupation	Date and Place of Interview

1.	Mr. Idris Abubakar	M	50+	Trader	11 of March, at his business premises, Nasarawa State.
2.	Otoabasi Akpan	M	50+	Professor	12 of January. At his residence, Shelter Afrique Estate, Uyo.
3	Assi Ekpenyong	M	28	Medical Doctor	21 of March, at his office, Ring Road, Uyo.
4	Eno James	F	37	Police Officer	21 of March, at her residence, Udo Umana, Uyo
5	Monday Dickson	M	50+	Lecturer	1 st of February, at his office, Akwa Ibom University, Obio Akpa.
6.	Philp Afaha	M	50+	Professor	2 of December 2022, at his office, University of Abuja.
7	Magdalene Isong	F	50+	Civil Servant	12 of March, at her office, Ministry of Information, Port Harcourt.
8.	Fatima Fintiri	F	40+	Civil Servant	6 of December 2022, at her residence, Makurdi, Benue State.

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