The Nexus of Politics, Religion, and Violent Extremism: The Impact of Politico-Religious Extremist and Militia Violent Groups on Peace and Development in Africa

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Abstract

This study explores the impact of politico-religious extremist armed militia groups in Africa. Armed groups in Africa have caused destruction of both life and property, resulting in underdevelopment and making it difficult to engage in profitable and meaningful development and peace due to conflict. All regions in Africa have been affected by these armed groups; Al-Shabaab in East Africa, armed conflicts in Sudan, Uganda's Joseph Kony in Central Africa, Boko Haram in West Africa, and ISIS in North Africa, among others, are both religiously and politically connected. These groups, driven by their ideologies of conflict and deep theological conceptions of a hermeneutical nature, claim either to fight for God or against those opposed to their ideologies. They assert that they have been excluded from democratic political processes or religious participation, leading to leadership struggles where a minority, or majority, group seems to be sidelined in political governance or religious recognition. Politico-religious conflicts have left behind destruction, including murder, loss of property, underdevelopment, insecurity, and food scarcity, among others.

Introduction

The central argument of this work is that extreme militia or armed, violent groups use of religious and political ideologies of exclusion to access power and natural resources through force. Stein (1996) defines extremism as a complex phenomenon, though its complexity is often hard to perceive. In its simplest form, extremism can be defined as activities (beliefs, attitudes, feelings, actions, strategies) that are far removed from the ordinary. In conflict settings, it manifests as a severe form of conflict engagement. However, the labelling of activities, people, and groups as 'extremist,' and defining what is 'ordinary' in any setting, are subjective and political matters. Hastings (1988) and Smith (1995) argue that armed groups use arms to achieve political, ideological, religious, and economic objectives. In most cases, they are not part of any government under the control of the state in which they operate. These groups include rebel movements, ethnic militias, and military mercenaries.

In this work, an examination of the causes and reasons for violence reveals manifestations of exclusion and inclusion worldviews by militia groups. According to Nnoli (2018), this ideology is religiously and politically entrenched in people's minds, practices, and belief systems. The situation is exacerbated by discrimination based on ethnicity, political patronage, gender, and egocentric mentalities. Africa has a history of religious and political acrimony embedded in its structures of governance. For example, heredity became the most common way of ascending to leadership, both religiously and politically, in most communities, thus excluding other communities or clans from leadership. Almost nobody questioned it. This group dynamic is common across Africa, although today new trends are aggravated by external military pressures. In East Africa, recent militia conflicts that have threatened to wipe out communities include the Burundi Civil War (1993–2005), the Rwandan Genocide (1994), the Ugandan Civil War (1986–1994), the Darfur conflict beginning in 2003 (UN Report, 2005), and the Kenyan post-election violence of 2007, among other local conflicts. Armed gangs went on a killing spree because they were either excluded from political processes and access to resources or aimed to eliminate another community, as seen in Rwanda between the Hutus and the Tutsis, or with Joseph Kony in Uganda, among others. Histories and traditional ethnic communities are revisited to examine their influence on modern atrocities on the continent today. Case studies of militia groups depict

the casualties and agony inflicted on the continent. In this regard, this work explores some of the dreaded militant groups in Africa among the many that exist.

Africa as a region has seen an insurgency in religious militant ideologies and traditions among Christians and Muslims. Hastings (1988) and Smith (1995) explore religious militant practices and influences in Christian scripture. It is evident that theological justifications for violence can be derived from scripture by different interpreters. However, the point here is that scripture, both in Islam and Christianity, if not properly interpreted and applied, can lead to conflicts and physical warfare. Religion seems to have influenced exclusive and inclusive ideological practices throughout history. Jews, Muslims, and Christians engage in conflict because of their missionary nature and motivations stemming from the common triple heritage they share from their cradle land in Palestine. Some Muslim groups accuse and fight Christians for deviating from the monotheistic faith, while Jews and Muslims fight to reclaim their ancestral land in Canaan. Throughout history these differences have attracted global attention with supporters and opposers on each side. This heritage has been the cause of differences and alignments against one another. Thus, religion has been a powerful force for peace or war in the world, both then and now.

In Protestant Christianity, the theology of election is paramount. Barth (1959), and Hastings (1988) trace some of the ideological sentiments of war in scripture. The Israelites in the Old Testament claimed to be God's chosen people destined to rule the rest of the world, often at the expense of other communities. They saw God as their exclusive deity, while others worshipped idols and were seen as Israel's missionary fields. This missionary view led to violent wars against other groups. This perspective explains the rampant violence in the Old Testament, some of which is depicted as being instructed by God. For example, in Numbers 33:50-56, Deuteronomy 20:13, and Joshua 3:10 (NIV), the Israelites are commanded to drive out the Canaanites and take over their land, as the Canaanites were not in a covenant with God and thus not included among God's favoured people. Similarly, King Saul was instructed to wipe out the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15:2-3). Paradoxically, God later uses the Assyrians and Babylonians to punish His own chosen people in a series of battles in Israel and Judah.

Passages such as Matthew 5:38-41, Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:19-20, and Deuteronomy 19:21 appear to suggest that violence will be used against aggressors or those not of their kind: "eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth" (KJV). These and many other examples are sometimes followed blindly by Christian nations, communities, and individuals without proper exegesis, especially against non-Christians. The same scripture that discusses war also advocates for peaceful means to settle disputes. Therefore, proper exegesis must be undertaken before scripture is used selectively to support a particular ideology. For instance, violence is forbidden in Leviticus 19:18. At different levels, Christians have engaged in warfare to safeguard their religion or leadership or as aggressors. The Crusades of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries and the Israeli-Palestinian wars in the Gulf are cases in point. Modern militant groups like Al-Shabaab, ISIS, or Boko Haram often have links to Muslim Arabs or Israeli-American alliances in the Middle East.

Some Muslim groups possess a similar ideology of war, often taken to the extreme. It should be noted that the meaning of Islam and the concept of Din exclude all other religions. The theology of exclusion begins with the meanings of the words Islam and Muslim. The term Islam is derived from the Arabic root 'SLM,' which implies peace from the Arabic word aslama, meaning 'he/she submitted.' It also implies purity, submission, and obedience to the will of Allah and Sharia. Etymologically, Islam signifies complete submission to the will of God and total obedience to His law. Al-Islam is presented as the religion that brings peace to humankind when one submits and commits oneself to God's will.

The ideal of Islam as a religion of peace seems to differ in practice among some Muslims, or those who use Islam as a basis for militant ideologies like Wahhabism, which advocate for force or war. Likewise, a Muslim is one who submits to God by professing the faith or religion of Al-Islam. A Muslim thus believes that Islam is the original and universal religion of humankind, revealed through successive prophets. This belief implies that other religions are considered distortions, corruptions, or derivatives of the true original and universal religion. Islam waged various battles to expand its territory and fend off enemies during its formative periods: the Prophetic, Umayyad, and Abbasid eras. In Medina, Prophet Muhammad fought several battles to establish his position both as a religious leader and as a statesman. During these two

dynasties, Islamdom spread across Asia, Africa, and Europe, becoming one of the most flourishing civilizations in the world. This expansionist mentality was influenced by Islamic scripture, the Quran.

According to the Quran (21:76–93), "Islam is the only religion of humankind," a message professed by all prophets from Adam to Muhammad (Quran 2:128–140, 42:13) (see Yusuf. A.A., 2022). The core message of all prophets of God was Islam. Therefore, a Muslim accepts all the prophets of God without discrimination. God's message to humankind ceased with the final revelations received by Prophet Muhammad. This message is the Quran, which is considered the most comprehensive and final guidance for humankind. It is meant to be followed by all creatures created by Allah. It is common to hear Muslim-related militant groups shout "Allahu Akbar," meaning "Allah is great."

The finality of prophethood is a fundamental teaching in Islam, and according to the Quran (33:40), the universality of Muhammad's message is upheld for all humanity. Jihad is an Arabic term derived from jahada, meaning "to exert oneself" or "to strive, make an effort" (Quran 22:78, 22:39–40, 9:13, 49:15). It can mean fighting or physical confrontation against non-Muslims, as found in the Quran (23:39–40, 47:41) (see Yusuf 2022). The use of force makes jihad a tool for extremists in Islam, although it is often taken out of context without proper exegetical considerations. Those to be fought include opponents of Muslim leadership, rebels against iman (faith), and those who begin hostilities or fight Muslims, including fellow Muslims. Islam is composed of different groups; for example, some Sunnis do not recognize Shiites, while groups like Wahhabis and Salafis hold extreme views and may fight fellow Muslims with whom they disagree.

"Fight those who fight you" (Quran 2:190) (see Yusuf 2022) is often used to legitimize the use of weapons against perceived enemies. However, a Muslim should first appeal to non-Muslims to embrace Islam or avoid unwarranted provocation before applying jihad or force. Jihad should never be weaponized against non-Muslims to convert them to Islam, according to Surah (2:257). Therefore, tolerance and restraint should be practiced. There is a need to clarify the meaning and types of *jihad* due to modern misconceptions perpetuated by militant jihadist groups:

1. The meaning most preferred in pluralistic modern communities is jihad against nafs (self). For example, an individual should struggle with themselves to overcome any anti-Islamic moral code (Quran 22:41) (see Yusuf 2022).

2. Jihad against evil deeds in society (Quran 3:104, 16:125) (see Yusuf 2022).

3. Physical jihad: lesser jihad, only used in self-defense (Quran 2:190-191) (see Yusuf 2022), which prohibits wanton killing of women, children, or destruction of property.

Jihad may include preaching and propagation of faith, religious training and spiritual guidance, reformation of society along Islamic lines by ulama (scholars) and academicians, verbal resistance against oppression, and correction of injustice. This religious ideology is present in most world political organizations. Often, those excluded from politics or religion tend to fight back extremely and radically. However, it is against human rights to use war to settle disputes.

From the foregoing, despite ideals of love, peace, and support for nonviolent strategies for the peaceful coexistence of believers in a pluralist society, groups within religions like Islam and Christianity still resort to militarism and violence to seek recognition and participation in politics and the religious sphere. This occurs despite the availability of other peaceful avenues of engagement, such as dialogue or democratic processes, within their respective spheres of influence. Furthermore, the use of religion by politically motivated groups is perplexing in Africa. According to Mbiti (1969), Africans never fought because of religion or used it to dominate others. Hypothetically, scripture seems to send mixed signals of peace and war, necessitating an investigation into how scripture is either used to promote peace or abused to cause violence. Against this backdrop, this study seeks ways to sustain peace for development in Africa through mitigation measures. Let us analyse why these groups resort to violence.

Reasons for Religious and Political Militant Groups in Africa

There might not be a direct correlation or influence between current religio-political ideologies of war and militia thought-forms in pre-independence Africa. This does not mean that there were no such militia groups in Africa before modern times. Seemingly, both Christian and Islamic theologies of exclusion perpetrated by armed groups have similar aspects in Africa. The truth is that contemporary militant groups use religion and political ideologies to authenticate their existence and solicit support and sympathy. According to Glenn (2014), African ideologies of exclusion or the use of war find fertile ground in traditional contexts and worldviews where there was almost no dichotomy between secular and religious spheres. Ethnic leaders often held both religious and political offices. This was common among chiefdoms and kingdoms such as the Sokoto Caliphate, Mutapa Empire, Ashanti Kingdom, and the Bornu Empire in West Africa, and the Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom, Wanga Kingdom, Ankole Kingdom, and Hehe Kingdom in East Africa. These chiefdoms and kingdoms were often in constant conflict with their neighbours, as well as with internal family or clan leadership struggles. Those who felt excluded from ascending to leadership sometimes revolted.

Glenn (2014) and other scholars have extensively written about the military history of Africa, epoch by epoch and region by region: pre-independence, independence, and post-colonial Africa. He has classified several categories of military organizations and systems, what he calls a continuum of African warfare, that have caused ongoing agony and fuelled conflicts in Africa. These categories include:

- Antiquity, before 1800: This includes ancient Egyptian, Nubian, and Aksumite military history.

- Military history of modern Africa (1800-1900): Pre-colonial, independence struggles, and post-colonial periods.

- Military history of Africa by region after 1900: Northern Africa, the Horn of Africa, East Africa, Central Africa, Western Africa, and Southern Africa.

This evidence shows that Africa experienced wars where military combat has destroyed many communities, lives, and property. Militia groups in Africa have a history and foundation that is difficult to break, with ethnicity, religion, politics, and poor governance being key factors (Glenn 2014). Ideologically, there were well-known ethnic groups and clans with leadership that was often hereditary. Any capable individual not from the ruling clan or tribe could not ascend to power. Those with dissenting voices were often fought, silenced, or exiled from the larger community, eventually forming new groups elsewhere. One main feature of these ethnic organizations was their strong military presence, which ensured their survival. For example, the warriors among the Maasai, or trained soldiers and mercenaries, were used to raid other communities, steal cattle, extend their territories, and safeguard their people. Weak communities often disappeared or were annihilated. In Africa, there is a strong clan and ethnic solidarity that influences other life patterns, such as religion and politics. Politicians and religious leaders have always had ethnic backing, regardless of whether their actions are lawful. In Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda, when politicians are accused of corruption and incompetence, they often appeal to their ethnic background for support with slogans like "we are being targeted," when in fact they commit these crimes as individuals, not on behalf of their communities (Glenn 2014).

Ethnic and Political Conflicts

Glenn (2014) contends that, during and after independence, these chiefdoms and kingdoms were consolidated under national political governments using European spheres of influence boundaries. However, the ethnic boundaries remained. Most colonial rulers in East Africa used indirect rule, utilizing local leaders for administrative purposes. This meant that traditional ethnic leaders largely remained relevant and had the authority to define their identity in terms of land and security, as well as to observe some local autonomy. During and after colonialism, traditional structures of leadership remained intact with only minor changes. For example, in Uganda, the Kabaka and Baganda people have always remained a significant force in Ugandan politics, similar to the Kikuyu community in Kenya. Hence, after independence, these ethnic political groups retained their military identities and have resurfaced during times of crisis. Whenever certain communities felt neglected by the national government, denied access to national resources or political patronage, or

forced into opposition by certain ethnic-inclined political parties, they have regrouped to cause mayhem. Al-Shabaab has gained support, sympathy, and solidarity from their Somali brothers in northern Kenya due to claimed historical injustices committed against them by the regimes of former presidents Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel arap Moi.

Many notorious militia groups in Africa now have an international outlook with foreign support. For example, over ten foreign terrorist organizations support certain communities or ethnic groups in Africa with similar religious influences. The M23 rebel group has been active in the Democratic Republic of the Congo since 2012, led by commanders such as Bosco Ntaganda, nicknamed "the terminator," and Sultani Makenga. They rebelled against Joseph Kabila's leadership, causing significant havoc, but were later captured and imprisoned for life by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague.

In Africa, politicians often form political parties based on ethnic affiliation or proximity, and these parties later form coalitions with like-minded individuals and ideologies. This has been the case in Kenya and Uganda, where the opposition leader Dr. Kizza Besigye, supported by fellow Ugandans, has been challenged in political campaigns by the government of President Yoweri Museveni, who is from the Ankole community. In Kenya, the Luo community largely supports parties led by Luo leader Raila Odinga, while Uhuru Kenyatta commands support from his ethnic group in Central Province. Similarly, the Luhyas and Kambas generally support politicians or parties formed by members of their own ethnic groups (Glenn 2014).

Clamour for Equal Resource Distribution

According to Glenn (2014), violence in Kenya, Rwanda (the 1994 genocide), Libya, Somalia, Nigeria, and other countries is economically related to the unequal distribution of resources by political governments. Politicians use ethnic affiliation and manipulate ethnic grievances for political gain, which includes land, employment, access to education, and more. Most religious groups discussed here use politics to appeal to their ethnic masses. For example: The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) under Joseph Kony aims to establish a state that will implement the Ten Commandments. Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab's main agenda is to create an Islamic state under Sharia law.

Most, if not all, militia groups adhere to and observe some religious doctrines. They either use religion for their selfish interests or genuinely follow teachings that encourage the use of military force against perceived or real enemies, as seen in the introduction of this paper regarding Christianity and Islam (Glenn 2014).

Al-Ikhwan or Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, whose ideology is based on Quranic teachings, supports democratic principles and aims to create a state ruled by Islamic law, or Sharia, with the slogan "Islam is the solution" since 1928 to date. Their impact in Egypt has led to civil war between different military groups, resulting in pain, deaths, imprisonments, and the destruction of property. On Al-Shabaab in Somalia, Abdulkadir (2012) argued that the Somalian central government collapsed in 1991, leading to clan conflict that has spread beyond the Horn of Africa. This collapse has also led to anarchy, insecurity, poverty, rampant violence, and numerous deaths (Ibrahim 2010). The Boko Haram group has some of the most noteworthy negative effects on West Africa, according to the United Nations Development Programme (2023). The conflict between Boko Haram and the Nigerian government began around 2009, July, in Maiduguri, capital of Borno state. From 2010 onwards the group reorganised itself as a terrorist military outfit under Abubakar Shekau.

There are different theories that explain the origin of the term *Boko Haram* but in this work I opt for the etymological origins supported by Jegede (2019). The name of Boko Haram was coined from the word *buku* in for 'book', and has connotations of being against Western education and modernism. According to Muhammad Yusuf's unofficial religious edict, he declared attending government schools (*boko*) and working for the Nigeria government forbidden (*haram*) for Muslims. The second idea related to the inception of Boko Haram came from the graduates of Islamic University in Medina devoted to teaching and implementing the *wahhabi daw'ah* (missionary call) against traditional Sufi orders. The use of armed struggles to implement Sharia forcefully against the government negatively affected community growth and development. The Boko Haram impact is enormous and includes but is not limited to abduction of schoolgirls, attacks on Christians and government officials, and destruction of property like schools (Jegede 2019).

Bad Governance and Leadership in Africa

Besides the clamour for natural resources, governance in most African countries is deficient. Coupled with discrimination and marginalization, this has been an accelerator of conflicts in Africa. These ongoing, unaddressed, and underlying drivers of conflict include unemployment, horizontal inequality, and highly centralized ethnopolitics and patronage created by bad governance. This has resulted in the marginalization of certain groups and areas. According to Menkhaus (2006, 2008), Al-Shabaab has found fertile ground to sow their hatred within Kenya's violent Islamist mobilization and militancy, profoundly shaped by local conditions. It has its roots in years of 'alienation, disaffection, and dissent' among Kenya's Muslim community. Due to extrajudicial killings and indiscriminate harassment of suspects in Kenya, Nigeria, and other nations, many Muslims feel that their rights are not recognized by the state. Somalia became a failed state soon after Siad Barre's regime fell in 1991 due to the poor leadership strategy of divide and rule.

Government hostility towards opposition is another significant factor. For instance, when Kenya became a multi-party state in 1992, small vigilante groups arose within some ethnic enclaves ostensibly to counter the aggression of the Kenya African National Union. Boko Haram in Nigeria, the Interahamwe in Rwanda and Congo, ISIS in the Middle East, and the Muslim Brotherhood (al-Ikhwan) in Egypt were exacerbated by government hostility towards opposition rather than engaging in dialogue and negotiations to resolve differences. The same turmoil in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Libya, Nigeria, Uganda, and others can be attributed to bad governance and leadership, which have resulted in many lives lost and communities shattered. While there are other causes, those mentioned herein clearly support this argument. Otherwise, there are some reasons, though weak, why people resort to violence to be heard and make their point.

Reasons for Military and Violence as Solutions

There are arguments for and against the use of armed struggle and violence to create peace. Section Two of this work has shown why violence erupts. Some amicable ways to bring about peace include, but are not limited to, dialogue, diplomacy, and negotiation. However, most conflicts in Africa seem to lead to

armed struggle and violence. Instead, dialogue and negotiation typically occur only after interventions by other parties, such as the African Union or the United Nations. Examples of this can be seen in Somalia, Kenya after the post-election violence in 2007–08, South Sudan, Egypt, Sudan, Congo, Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Libya, and other countries. Why is this often the case? Hoekema (1986) argues that the following reasons have been advanced in some instances:

a) Violence is the "language" that those in power respond to quickly. Those in power may enjoy exerting control over others, but when their followers are affected, killed, and have their property destroyed, they quickly realize the pain because it is the same language of violence they use on others.

b) In many cases, violence is the only option left when dialogue and diplomacy fail to produce any change. Violence becomes a resort when other means such as diplomacy and dialogue have failed. It is seen as a practical way to alleviate suffering caused by violence. In some cases, it is a last desperate measure to be heard, although violence often begets more violence. Hoekema refers to the just war tradition based on the ethical theories of Plato and Cicero, which have also been used within Christian traditions by Augustine, Aquinas, and the Protestant reformers to defend military force as a last resort against grave injustices. In this theory, when the innocent are threatened by an unjust aggressor and all other remedies have failed, Jesus's command for sacrificial love may require the use of lethal force.

c) Violence is an effective form of communication. Violence is sometimes viewed as an effectual way to communicate with an unjust power or government. The message sent through violence is loud and clear enough to force a quick response from the other party. Dialogue can often drag on too long while injustices continue.

Regardless of the above arguments, it should be noted that violence begets violence. For Africa to develop and have stable communities, it must heed the warning once given by Martin Luther King Jr. (1991):

> "Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot

drive out darkness; only light can do that. [...] Hate multiplies hate, violence multiplies violence, and toughness multiplies toughness in a descending spiral of destruction" (Jegede 2019).

King warned that this spiral of destruction is must be broken. This call and warning is more relevant to Africa now than ever before, given the agony, pain, suffering, and loss of lives and property inflicted by militia groups such as Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, and others, as argued by Jegede (2019).

Impact of Politico-Religious Extremist Groups on Peace and Development in Africa

From the foregoing discussion, it is noted that religion has been used to whip up political emotions in order to gain political legitimacy by invoking God's word, as done by the militia groups identified herein. This religio-political perception has helped militia groups fight against sitting governments in the countries where they reside, contends Jegede (2019). The enormous impact on peace and development includes the destruction of life, displacement of communities, destruction of property such as houses and social amenities like hospitals and schools, economic retrogression, environmental degradation, kidnapping, and more (Turse 2015). Menkhaus (2006/07) and the Crisis Group Africa Report (2001) have analysed the impact of Al-Shabaab in the Horn of Africa, detailing property destruction and numerous deaths resulting from physical attacks, bombings, and suicide missions.

Similarly, Boko Haram in Nigeria has wrought destruction upon communities, caused fatal casualties, attacked foreigners, carried out kidnappings and killings, indoctrinated and radicalized captives, and turned captives into soldiers, porters, cooks, or sex slaves. Numerous attempts to reach a peace agreement were made between the LRA and the Ugandan government, but Kony withdrew each time. The Ugandan People's Defence Force (UPDF) continues its pursuit of the rebels beyond borders, into Congo.

This analysis shows that militia groups are motivated by ethnic, religious, and regional assertions, contests for political space, access to natural resources, and power struggles. They also react to bad governance, weak state formation,

challenges of development, exclusionary politics, and corruption. These groups view themselves as civil armed forces, alternative police, anti-crime forces, religious and regional armies, or the armed wings of political parties (Wafula and Ikelegbe 2010). The Crisis Group Africa Report (2001) and the analysis within this study indicate that deaths caused by terrorism have been rising year after year. In 2013, there were 18,000 recorded deaths, a 60% increase from the previous year, with 66% of these deaths attributed to militia groups. Five percent of terrorist casualties occur in Europe and America, while the rest occur in Africa.

Recommendations

Military conflict in African countries is so extensive that it cannot be resolved solely through military means, though some situations may call for armed intervention to control turmoil. Communities have been destroyed and continue to suffer in terms of human and material resources. Resolving a conflict through confrontation also constitutes violent conflict. There are no universal solutions that work in every situation. However, strategies of nonviolence at both local and global levels have been tested and can be deployed to quell turmoil. Dialogue, negotiations, proactive mediation, reconciliation, and conflict transformation through the reconstruction of destroyed communities are some of these strategies. Judicial and punitive measures by international criminal courts such as the ICC and local judicial mechanisms are timely to deter future militarily organized groups.

Dialogue in Africa must include all interested groups, such as religious organizations, civil society, and political parties among others. This approach has worked in South Africa and is currently working in Somalia, Kenya, and South Sudan. Uganda, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Nigeria need to enhance this approach. Dialogue should target the main causes of military conflict, such as resource distribution, ethnicity, religious extremism, and human rights. It should embrace democratic principles as opposed to ethnic-based and despotic rule. Interreligious or interfaith dialogue should also emphasize the use of scripture to create peace and not war. This will help resolve sectarian differences that arise due to biblical misinterpretations and misconceptions, such as jihadist movements in Islam.

Mediation and negotiations have been successfully utilized in Kenya through Kofi Annan after the post-election violence of 2007–08. Sierra Leone, Liberia, Zimbabwe, and South Sudan have benefited from African Union mediation efforts. There is a need for warring parties to strike deals and agree to work together, share resources, and respect ethnic differences and peace accords. Sitting leaders in Africa, such as in Sudan, South Sudan, Zimbabwe, the DRC, Libya, and Egypt, have reneged on accords entered into with opposition parties, leading to the recurrence of war. Mediation and negotiations should be prioritized to settle all forms of dispute in the world because they give reason a chance against militiamen who follow commands.

Politico-religious, ideological deconstruction, and reconstruction: Exclusive theologies, such as concepts like jihad that can be manipulated against others, should be examined and reconstructed through contemporary contextual studies and applications. Sound hermeneutical approaches to the study of theology are now gaining acceptance in religious institutions. This can help tame religious extreme views and ideologies, such as jihadist movements that often resort to military solutions and terrorism. The way forward lies in proper theologizing and the contextual application of scripture.

God in both religions is depicted as a God of peace, regardless of texts that can be manipulated for personal gains. In Christianity, God did not choose individuals solely because of their faith in Him. In Ephesians 1:5-6, 2:1-19, and 1 Timothy 1:9, the Bible recognizes all as God's people. When God chose certain communities for leadership, it was for them to reach out to others. There is no reason why God cannot choose others as well. It is by God's grace. Isaiah 43:10 states, "You did not choose me; I chose you." Therefore, those who believe they are chosen by God to rule others should recognize that the same God can also choose others to rule them. The United Nations Development Programme report (2023) noted that since wars begin in the minds of people, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed. Therefore, conflict transformation, mitigation, and peace restorative initiatives by concerned mediators must target the psychological ideologies of groups like Al-Shabaab and jihadist movements. This can be achieved through education and training. Religions should build cultures that foster peace in mosques and churches as part of socialization.

Reconstruction of displaced communities: Africa has the highest number of refugees in the world. In Kenya alone, the Kakuma and Dadaab camps house about one million refugees from Somalia, South Sudan, Rwanda, Uganda, among others. These figures are decreasing due to some peace gained in Sudan, Congo, and Somalia. If the numbers from West, North, and Central Africa are included, the total exceeds two million refugees. These are potential participants in community development activities who are currently underutilized. These displaced persons and shattered communities often resort to becoming migrants to Europe and America, but this does not solve the problem. Displaced persons whose home countries have gained some peace and stability should return home to help reconstruct their lives and maintain peace. The substantial resources channelled through NGOs and governments to sustain refugees in camps are not sustainable and are insufficient. Handouts, grants, and UN protective strategies do not address all humanitarian rights. This assistance can help displaced persons return home and begin rebuilding their lives.

Africa should embrace and respect democratic principles of governance and accept religious pluralism as a reality. Respecting the 'other' does not mean compromising or showing weakness; it is the strongest weapon for coexistence today. Communities should not continue to glorify past military achievements but should positively accommodate contemporary community dynamism and civilization. Sectarian and egocentric religious and political ideologies will tear society apart, leaving no room for any of us to live. To deter terrorism and war, human development in affected communities should take center stage by combining development with security agendas. This means integrating development as a key strategy to tackle war, pain, and terror. This approach helps to implement humanitarian projects that create long-term resilience.

Above all, conflict prevention and preventive diplomacy measures are the most effective ways to address African situations. These measures can be described as actions, policies, procedures, frameworks, systems, and institutions undertaken to avoid the threat or use of physical force to resolve or settle disputes, challenges, or concerns. Preventive diplomacy aims to prevent disputes from escalating into violence, insurrection, or restiveness. This is an area that should be further investigated.

Conclusion

As seen in the foregoing discussion, Africa has been hard hit by extremist military groups caused by various factors: ideological, religious, and political needs, among others. Armed struggle occurs when people are pushed to conflict by opposing forces—typically when certain groups exclude others from politics for their own survival, prompting the excluded to fight back vehemently. However, there is no justification for military campaigns or war in modern Africa. There is no just war or holy war purported to be fought in the name of any deity or God. No one should kill, rape, hurt, or destroy property created by God.

Although Africa has a history of violence, the current conflicts are internally connected. Religion was not typically the cause of war, but now it is being used to settle and create disputes at the expense of development. If not for the rampant wars caused by various factors, Africa could be ranked among developed nations due to its massive natural resources that can trigger rapid community development. For Africa to develop, there must be peace. Violence destroys communities, scares away potential investors, and kills energetic and prominent individuals in communities, among other human rights atrocities like educational setbacks and political regression.

Finally, the solution to extremist and militia conflict does not lie in military action or the use of brute force by police or armies, but in building the capacity of states and communities to govern well and to share and utilize God-given resources equitably. Equal distribution of resources can mitigate 'negative ethnicity'. Democratic processes of electing leaders transparently can help avert political conflicts. No political party or ideology related to religion should be allowed to thrive unchecked. No violence is equal to peace and development.

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