

Report



Upsurge in Violent Extremism across Africa: Interrogating Capacity Deficits

Introduction

Political violence declined across the world in 2020 except in Africa¹. Terrorism and internal conflicts have been the biggest contributors². Against this background, the Secretariat, African Peace Support Trainers Association (APSTA), pursuant to its workplan 2021, organized a Roundtable on the theme, in consultation with Member Institutions (MIs) and in accordance with Strategic Objective 8.1.1 of the AU ASF Training Directives 2021-2023. It was realized in collaboration with the Dallaire Institute for Children Peace and Security, and made possible via support from the Government of the Republic of Cameroon. The main objective is to underscore, through rigorous research, the impact of emerging dynamics of pandemics, terrorism and violent extremism, on peace and security in Africa and chart way forward.

The virtual Roundtable convoked more than 35 experts from Africa, Europe, North America and Asia. APSTA Chairperson, Col Soulaymane SANGARE, reiterated the imperative for the policy discussion, while the Special Guest of Honour, the Minister Delegate to the Minister of External Relations in charge of Relations with the Commonwealth, His Excellency Felix MBAYU, while underscoring the negative impact of terrorism and violent extremism to peace and security in Africa, reaffirmed the Government of Cameroon's support to the mission of APSTA and urged experts to articulate actionable recommendations.

Presentations

Presentations by subject matter experts (SMEs) covered radicalization/de-radicalization; violent extremism and terrorism; recruitment and use of children in violence; terrorism financing, and the criminal justice system in preventing/countering violent extremism (P/CVE) and countering terrorism (CT). The focus of the Roundtable was on P/CVE and CT as means to neutralize threats to society posed by violent extremist groups through the applications of a combination of direct force, local allies and a focus on winning hearts and minds.³

Findings

Experts underscored, among others, critical gaps in: 1) in-depth understanding of causes and enablers of evolving dynamics of violent extremism and terrorism across Africa; 2) planning/programming corresponding whole-of-Government or Whole-of-Society responses; 3) dedicated juridical framework for prevention and protection of use of children for violence; 4) implementation of measures to thwart terrorism financing (TF) especially through Financial Action Task Forces across the continent; 5) evolution of formidable intra-African legal cooperation and; 6) Human Rights compliant evidence gathering across conflict hotspots. They also noted critical deficits in planning and programming of de-radicalization; review/improvement of respective training course/curricula; training of trainers and professionals for P/CVE & CT across the continent.

¹ Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) 2020: The Year in Review

² Institute for Economics & Peace. Global Peace Index (GPI) 2020: Measuring Peace in a Complex World, Sydney June 2020. Available from:

<http://visionofhumanity.org/reports>. Accessed 30 April 2021.

³ See Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP) Paper, August 2019.

In respect of protection against recruitment and use of children in violence, they affirmed gaps in addressing both root causes and drivers alongside curative action, to facilitate re-integration of children, who had been employed either as combatants or supporters of extremists or terrorist groups. Furthermore, experts noted the need for stakeholders to focus, not only on the flow of TF, but on the overall enabling conditions contributing to the emergence and perpetuation of the phenomenon, to attenuate TF. With respect to strengthening criminal justice system, experts made a strong case for apt application of CT laws, which hold significant advantages for P/CVE and CT in Africa.

Moreover, experts affirmed the lack of rigorous research on the theme and thus emphasized the conduct of research/study on successful P/CVE and CT models as well as associated concepts elsewhere. Most importantly, the forum in consensus, affirmed gross inadequacies regarding concerted commitments on resource mobilization, political will as well as advocacy by respective stakeholders across the continent, in addressing the challenge holistically. Finally, experts lamented the absence of review/evolution of a holistic and robust continental/regional coordination framework; a sort of Grand Strategy for P/CVE and CT in Africa.

Conclusions

In accordance with set objectives, the Roundtable discourse has drawn notable attention to persistent critical capacity deficits in preventing/countering violent extremism and terrorism across Africa. Crucial points in emphasis are as follows: First, the continent must endeavour to get the planning and programming of de-radicalization right. De-radicalization must integrate increased involvement and empowerment of women, - within the dictates of the UN Resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security. Second, the focus should emphasis countering 'extremism/terrorism' in a whole-of-government or whole-of-society approach, in order to

constructively join up efforts, and de-incentivize working in silos, which tend to dissipate energies and debilitate enthusiasm. Three, stakeholders' attention was also drawn to the increasingly important significance of the current dynamics in the geography of extremism/terrorism, which seem to flourish at geographical intersections of sub-regions across the continent, within spaces popularly dubbed 'ungoverned'. Four, the urgent need to de-construct the roles of external actors – bilateral and multilateral, with the objective of improving complementarity with existing efforts on the continent, specifically: MNJTF, G5 Sahel, and AMISOM. Five, conceptualizing an African Grand Strategy for P/CVE and CT. This in particular, holds good prospects for tilting the balance in favour of the continent in terms of cost-benefit analysis with respect to the sustainability of current models of intervention, which appears too exorbitant for the continent, as she continues to rely primarily for necessary resourcing from external actors, at a cost.

Recommendations

In light of the presentations, discussions and findings, the following recommendations were articulated:

- RECs, States, TCEs should integrate de-radicalization planning/programming into related training.
- RECs, States, TCEs should integrate into training, the politico-judicial, socio-economic and strategic communication aspects of the prevention/protection of use of children in violence.
- RECs, States, TCEs should expedite action on creating awareness on nexus between organized crime and terrorism financing.
- RECs, States, TCEs should emphasize training for personnel on human rights compliant criminal investigation.
- The AUC, States and TCEs should incentivize efforts in evolving whole-of-government or Whole-of-Society approach to P/CVE and CT.

