

ATLANTIC — CENTRE —

POLICY BRIEFS ISSUE 01, MAY | 2020

The role of a Centre for Peace and Security to combat violent extremism in the countries on the Atlantic coast of Africa¹

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SUMMARY STATEMENT

The establishment of the 'Atlantic Centre' by the Department of Defence of Portugal presents an opportunity to create a balance between military response to violent extremism (including terrorism) in Africa and the developmental approach to what is essentially a socio-economic and political problem. This policy brief recommends the establishment of a Centre with a balanced capacity to address the problem of violent extremism in countries along the Atlantic coast of Africa.

¹ This Policy Brief was prepared for the Ministry of Defence of Portugal as an output of the discussions held in Lisbon, on November 2019, at the first Seminar of the Atlantic Centre.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The establishment of the Atlantic Centre presents an opportunity to create a balance between military response to violent extremism (including terrorism) in Africa and the developmental approach to what is essentially a socio-economic and political problem. This policy brief recommends the establishment of a Centre with a balanced capacity to address the problem of violent extremism in countries along the Atlantic coast of Africa.

The main argument is that the Centre is a vital instrument, not only for the defence of the Atlantic but also for the management of peace and security in Africa. Through a collaborative network of participating partners and an inherent capacity to ensure situational awareness, through ongoing intelligence gathering and research for early warning, teaching and capacity building training as well as engaging with societies in conflict, the Centre can play an important role in the combatting of violent extremism in Africa.

This Policy Brief departs from a brief description of the research; presenting the threat of violent extremism in countries on the Atlantic Coast of Africa; the functioning of the Centre as a 'peace and security centre'; and the formation of collaborative partnerships.

The Policy Brief recommends to the Department of Defence of Portugal the establishment of a Centre that consists of a Research Unit responsible for actionable intelligence, a Diplomatic Engagement Team to facilitate and coordinate multilateral collaboration among international (including African) partners, and the establishment of a Social Development Unit to facilitate and participate in developmental projects (with the emphasis on youth education) in countries/societies in Africa that influence the security of the Atlantic.

INTRODUCTION

According to the Global Peace Index of the Institute for Economics and Peace³, some countries in Africa enjoy a high or medium ‘state of peace’. However, most countries in Africa suffer from a low or very low state of peace. Countries around the Atlantic coast of Africa are considered as ‘high’ or ‘medium’ but Nigeria is considered as ‘very low’, with Cameroon, and the Republic of the Congo as ‘low’. According to the latest Stable Seas Maritime Security Index⁴, the Atlantic coast of Africa is probably the world’s ‘most severe maritime security challenge because of the abundance of natural resources, proximity to violent onshore non-state actors, and limited maritime law enforcement capabilities that leaves countries vulnerable to trans-national violent crimes’.

Violent extremism poses a growing threat to countries bordering the Atlantic coast of Africa, mostly originating in remote parts of Nigeria, Cameroon, and the Republic of the Congo as well as the Sahel countries, contributing to insecurity in the Atlantic coast of Africa. Therefore, the collaboration of early warning institutions is important to exchange knowledge on how to prevent the spread of violent extremism in the region⁵. The envisaged Atlantic Centre⁶ (hereafter called ‘the Centre’ considering the possibility of future name change) can add important value to security on the Atlantic coast of Africa, to create and sustain peaceful societies.

³ Institute for Economics & Peace. Global Peace Index 2019: Measuring Peace in a Complex World, Sydney, June 2019. Available from: <http://visionofhumanity.org/reports> (accessed 30 November 2019).

⁴ One Earth Future. The Stable Seas Maritime Security Index. Available from: <https://oneearthfuture.org/news/oef-presents-stable-seas-maritime-security-index> (accessed 30 November 2019).

⁵ Institute for Security Studies. Violent Extremism in West Africa. Available from: <https://issafrica.org/events/preventing-violent-extremism-in-west-africas-conseil-de-lentente-states> (accessed 1 November 2019).

⁶ National Defence Institute, Lisbon. Preliminary conclusions of 1st Seminar on ‘The Atlantic Centre for Defence Capacity Building (CEDA)’ 21 November 2019.

Against this background, the aim of the policy brief is to recommend on how the Centre can contribute to the security of African countries of the Atlantic coast of Africa with specific reference to early warning and situational awareness related to violent extremism. In achieving this aim the discussion will take place on an organizational level, articulating how the Centre can function in the context of African societies bordering the Atlantic coast of Africa. The emphasis will be on the collaboration with civil societies in these countries that overlay national borders, and not just governments within these borders.

The main argument of this presentation is that the Centre is a vital instrument, not only for the defence of the Atlantic but also for the management of peace and security in Africa. Through a collaborative network of participating partners and an inherent capacity to ensure situational awareness, through ongoing intelligence gathering and research for early warning, teaching and capacity building training as well as engaging with societies in conflict, the Centre can play an important role in the combatting of violent extremism in Africa.

The brief presentation will address the research that underpins this policy brief; the threat of violent extremism in countries of the Atlantic coast of Africa; the functioning of the Centre as a 'peace and security centre' and not only focus on military defence; as well as the formation of collaborative partnerships.

The research and analysis that supports the policy brief

The research that underpins this policy brief is committed to an African epistemology (way of knowing) as part of a global knowledge system that is value-driven, technologically-enabled, preparing the people of Africa to engage with the challenges of the 21st century. Furthermore, from an ontological/philosophical perspective, the research investigated the relationship between the concepts military defence; violent conflict prevention and

extremism within the realities of the global peace and security domain, focussing on the role of the African Peace and Security Architecture.

Following a transdisciplinary and qualitative approach to peace and security studies, the research is grounded not only in theoretical knowledge gathered since 2013 from collaborating communities-of-practice in Africa, Asia, Europe and the USA, but also empirical data collected in engagement with several village communities in Africa. By applying a triangulation of research methods, that includes exploration of relevant literature, direct observation of peace, conflict and security landscapes in Africa, as well as focus group discussions and interviews with selected knowledge holders, a picture emerged that questions the adequacy of peace and security arrangements for Africa. After the focussed conversations during the CEDA seminar in Lisbon, it became evident that a mechanism such as the Centre can play a pivotal role in the revitalization of the peace and security architecture of Africa.

Combatting violent extremism

Uprisings against states by identity-based groups is a current global trend, with the tendency to escalate into civil-wars, violent interracial, inter-ethnic, inter-clan, inter-religious, or inter-occupational conflict. The countries of the Atlantic coast of Africa show no diversion from this trend⁷.

According to the 2015 UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism⁸, we need interventions to address the root causes and drivers of violent extremism, which include reaction to socio-economic deprivation; unfair discrimination and

⁷ Haldun Çanciopeyemi & Adedoyin Odukoya. 2016. Ethnic and Religious Crises in Nigeria. A Specific Analysis upon Identities (1999-2013). <https://www.accord.org.za/ajcr-issues/ethnic-religious-crises-nigeria/> (accessed 1 November 2019).

⁸ United Nations Office of Counterterrorism. 'Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism'. Available from: <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/plan-of-action-to-prevent-violent-extremism> (11m November 2019).

marginalization; poor governance; human rights violations; a culture of violent conflict; collective grievances; and other psychological factors that became an ideology. Violent extremism became an internationalised peace and security challenges because of its interconnectedness across national borders and natural boundaries, affecting all walks of society, governance, cultures, technology, and legal systems.

Expanding the peace and security footprint in Africa

It was found that if a mechanism such as the Centre forms part of a broader peace infrastructure across society, complementary to existing government structures, early warning and situational awareness of such a Centre enables it to face specific security challenges. Security awareness enables security solutions that are intelligence- and knowledge-driven. A coherent body of knowledge about the dynamics of security situations, involving civil society organisations and individuals, can provide important knowledge on violent extremism beyond the knowledge claims of governance structures.

Engagement with civil society in Africa, together with the formal African Peace and Security Architecture (that includes national governments and regional security arrangements such as ECOWAS and the SADC) will require a small but dynamic international relations capacity within the Centre beyond statist government-to-government diplomacy, to for instance share intelligence for early warning to prevent the escalation of violent conflict, to participate in peace negotiations, or to mediate in specific disputes.

The unique body of knowledge that will accumulate within the Centre will be ideal to drive defence capacity-building programs of not only the Atlantic coast of Africa countries but also the defence forces and security services of other participating countries. Furthermore, educational interventions in fragile and

post-conflict states, additional to defence capacity building, may reduce the participation of especially young people in violent extremism.

Forming collaborative partnerships

It is essential for the Centre to maintain national, Africa-continental and global connections, especially collaborating with the African Peace and Security Architecture. Furthermore, to ensure situational awareness, the Centre needs to expand collaboration with relevant think tanks and academic institutions in African countries bordering the Atlantic Ocean, prioritising countries influenced by security in the Atlantic coast of Africa. In this regard, it is important for the Centre to create and manage a collaborative platform (e.g. an Africa Security Forum) where the early warning capacities of regional initiatives can gather from time to time to share knowledge and develop actionable scenarios.

However, it is important to recognise the limitations of regional partners, especially their dependence on external funding; limited capacities to implement decision; the absence of political will of most governance institutions to implement decisions; the challenge of relationships between states as well as some participating governments who perpetuates violent extremism as part of securitized and undemocratic governance.

A further important observation is the escalation of especially Chinese and Russian military involvement in Africa. The Centre will have to build some trust and find sufficient common ground with these powerful strategic stakeholders (viewed by some as rivals) in the interest of security in the region. Many countries in Africa enjoy very close relations with China and Russia, and perceptions from these countries of competition or clash of interests may impede on collaboration between the Centre and these governments.

Policy options

The preliminary conclusions of the CEDA seminar of 21 November 2019⁹ indicates a policy direction for the Centre to be located in the Azores to manage a system that will include surveillance of the Atlantic to collect data; provide early warning; maintain situational awareness; to share/exchange value-added information, and produce formal knowledge products. Furthermore, the seminar concluded that the Centre will apply strategic thinking to build 'long term' strategies for the development and security of Atlantic coastal states. The seminar identified the combatting of transnational criminality, illegal trafficking, terrorism and piracy as specific niche areas. From the preliminary conclusion, it can be derived that a Research Unit will perform these tasks. What is less clear in these conclusions is how 'capacity building' for education and mentoring; as well as engagement with civil society, local and regional organizations will take place.

If the preliminary conclusions are accepted by decision-makers, for the countries on the African coastline it will hold a major advantage, in terms of the Centre contributing to the current peace architecture for Africa to reduce or even end violent conflict. This advantage especially holds true if civil society from the coastal countries collaborates with global knowledge holders who participates in the Centre. A challenge for the Centre will be to establish a special capacity additional to a Research Unit to play a vital role to, together with strategic partners in Africa and the rest of the world, address the root causes of violent extremism through education, training and human development.

CONCLUSIONS

⁹ National Defence Institute, Lisbon. Ibid.

Establishment of the Centre creates an opportunity to create a balance between military response to violent extremism (including terrorism) in Africa and the developmental approach. A balance between intelligence, developmental and diplomatic capacities will facilitate non-military responses to violent extremism, which is essentially a socio-economic and political problem. As a multinational mechanism, the Centre will be able to maintain institutional linkages, reducing counter-productive inter-organizational rivalry, aimed primarily at contributing to resilient societies along the Atlantic coast of Africa, reducing grievances that lead to violent conflict.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following policy guidelines to the Department of Defence of Portugal for the establishment and functioning of the Centre is therefore recommended.

- Establishing a Research Unit responsible for actionable intelligence dealing with specific themes and intelligence problems related to violent extremism and criminality in Africa. The ‘African narrative’ should be visible to ensure credibility and legitimacy from an African perspective and for the Centre to become influential in policy debates on peace and security in Africa. This Unit should focus on lessons learned from lived experiences and, together with professionals in Africa, investigate what hides in the ‘forest’ of the security landscape. Based on the findings of the research, the Centre should develop strategies and doctrine that is appropriate to the situation on the Atlantic Coastline of Africa, collaborating with specialists and academic scholars to strengthen rigorous evidence-based scholarship on how to deal with violent extremism in Africa.
- Establishing a Diplomatic Engagement Team to facilitate and coordinate multilateral collaboration among international (including African) partners and other strategic stakeholders to involve all governments and influential civil society institutions. The Diplomatic Engagement Team should enable the involvement of the peace and security communities-of-practice in Africa in

regular Peace and Security Forum, ensuring a seamless link to other centres, academic institutions and even the court system in different countries. This team can also be made responsible for coordinating dispute mediation and defence capacity building.

- Establishing a Social Development Unit to facilitate and participate in developmental projects (with the emphasis on youth education) in countries/societies in Africa that influence the security of the Atlantic. This should be a long-term commitment to end violence in Africa, not just time-bound projects and programs that are not sustainable.
- The common ownership of the Centre should be formalised by means of a founding document that stipulates the “Three Tears” of the Centre in terms of niche and uniqueness that distinguish itself from other overlapping entities.