Civilians' Supportive Roles in the Efforts of the State Security Agencies in Combating Violent Conflicts in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper was an analysis of roles expected of the civilian population in supporting state security agencies' fight against violent conflict in Nigeria. The onus for the restoration of law and order is statutorily vested on the state security agencies, however, this does not relegate the efficacies of civilians' support, as some civilians' attitudes suggest. This study employed qualitative analysis of both primary and secondary data, that span a period of ten years—2011 to 2021. The paper relied on the theory of civil-military relations, which demonstrate symbiotic relationship between the public and security agencies. The paper summarized the civilian's supportive role into three major conjunctive orders, described as the "EEE gauge"—that is, education, engagement and entrenchment. From the paper's standpoint, through peace education, individuals' would development non-destructive approach to conflict resolution. Engagement implies the provision of relevant physical, moral and intelligence support to security agencies during operations. By entrenchment, it is the responsibility of public office holders to create atmosphere of peace, through developmental thrives. It was therefore recommended that necessary basic social and economic support should be made available to the public, which will largely reduce the likelihood of conflictual factors in the society.

Keywords: supportive role; state security agencies, violent conflict, the public

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Introduction

In recent time, violent conflicts have been recorded in different parts of Nigeria. Although conflict is one of the variances of every human society, which by its nature underlines those dialectical confrontations as well as the vectors of disequilibrium of power, as well as defining the various diversities and stratum of the society, but not necessarily destructive (Attah, 2021). Misdirection of conflictual issues by individuals, or institutions of the state over time prove to be the leading triggers of uprisings, insurgencies, wars, and other forms of violent conflicts recorded in history (Hoeffler, 2012). It is not debatable the different magnitudes of violent conflicts are currently making waves in different parts of Nigeria. Constitutionally, the onus for the restoration of law and order in all the troubled zones of Nigeria, is rested on the state security agencies. But however, does not downgrade the roles of the public in supporting the state security agencies, as it is often erroneously perceived in different quarters in Nigeria. Instructively, the security agencies make up an insignificant number of the general population of Nigeria, which naturally makes it difficult, if not impossible for them to successfully combat the current violent conflicts, without reasonable support from the public. Hence, considering the exigency of the roles the public play in the efforts of state security agencies in combating violent conflicts in Nigeria, it is essential to examine the extent and diverse ways this cooperation has been achieved, as well as to identify some of the hitches frustrating such collaboration, for possible enhancement.

To this end, the objectives of this paper is to;

   i.   Examine forms of violent conflicts in different parts of Nigeria;
   ii. Identify the roles of state security agencies in combating violent conflict in Nigeria;
   iii. Examine the roles of the public in the efforts of state security agencies in combating violent conflict in Nigeria.

This paper focuses on the period between June 2011 and June 2021. This

is the period that saw heightened violent conflict in Nigeria, significantly portrayed by the insurgency in northeast, banditry in northwest, herders–farmers clashes in north-central, violent agitations, cultism, piracy, and organized crimes in parts of southeast, south-south and southwest Nigeria.

Methodology

This study employed qualitative analysis of both primary and secondary data. The primary data consisted of special reports from government and non-profit agencies. Observations and informal personal communication with different class of civilians on their perception of support to security agencies, also formed part of the primary data source. The secondary sources included texts and other published materials that supported the views expressed in the paper.

Conceptual Clarification

The following terms were conceptualized in this section, they include;

 i. Violent conflict

 ii. State security agencies

Literally violent conflict is the centre of the premise for this paper. In other words, if we remove violent conflict from this discussion there is nothing more to talk about. This is because it is the raging nature of violent conflict in different parts of Nigeria that has re-echoed the place of the public in cooperating with the state security agencies in tackling insecurity. Now the fundamental question is, what is violent conflict? For us to have a better grasp of what violent conflict is, we need to first and foremost understand the concept of conflict.

Conflict is one of the inevitable characteristics of the human society (even animals). In other words, every society has component of factors that trigger conflict. Therefore, the only differences is that in some societies those factors are actively triggered, due to some unaddressed issues, negligence, ignorance, and poor promotion of peacefulness attitude; while in some societies with vast experiences in conflicts, institutional,

collective, and individual efforts are channelled towards prevention of unhealthy conflict in all its ramifications (Attah, 2021).

The term 'conflict' has a range of meanings and interpretations among different individuals and groups. To some, conflict is bad, destructive, and anti-development, while to others, conflict is natural, inevitable, necessary, and normal. To the later proponents the problem is not the existence of conflict, but how we handle it. According to Attah (2021), the challenges of achieving peaceful coexistence in conflict-ridden areas are largely attributed to a poor understanding of the nature of conflict. Conflict has two major stances according to him, which include:

    i.   dialectical confrontation, and;

    ii.   vector of disequilibrium of power.

This is therefore such that conflict is a natural phenomenon among humans. The expression of this desire for change is what materialized to conflict (Attah, 2021). On the other hand, following an offshoot of dialectic-ism, conflict naturally portrays the imbalanced sphere of human affairs. This could be expressed based on want, desire, needs, values, beliefs, expectations, and so on. The incompatibility of these dialectics produces assumed "advantaged" and "disadvantaged" leading to perceived disequilibrium that seeks a balance (Attah, 2021). Direct force can be applied in the pursuit of balance, but this can often lead to violence due to the 'violence begets violence' phenomenon". This explains why Meyer (2000.p.5) defined conflict as a "dispute in a situation defined by the parties' underlying goals and beliefs, mutual perception and communication, and the facts involved". Conceptually, conflict may be viewed as occurring along cognitive (perception), emotional (feeling), and behavioural (action) dimensions. This three-dimensional perspective can help us understand the complexities of conflict and why a conflict sometimes seems to proceed in contradictory directions including violence. Hence, major sources of conflict include;

    i.   the ways people communicate,

    ii.   emotions,

iii.   values,

iv.   the structures within which interactions take place, and;
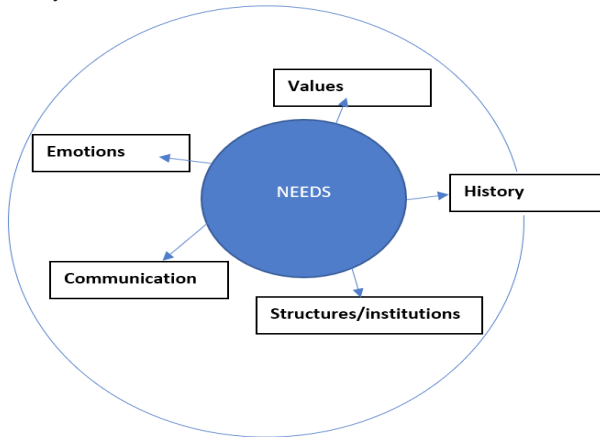
v.   history

Fig. 1:   Conflict forces. (Source: Attah, 2021)

Kindly note that human needs are always at the centre of every conflict, largely driven by the above listed sources, which determine the dimension a conflict will take. Unfortunately, such outcomes are basically engineered by elements of history.

On this note, we can define violent conflict for the purpose of this paper as the employment of physical force in expressing dialectical issues of perceived disequilibrium of power, without recourse for constituted authorities. It is therefore noteworthy, that violent conflict is basically orchestrated by the public in segments or collectively. Such irate actions inevitably pinch the erring individuals or groups in direct confrontation with the state. And the state often reacts through her security agencies. On the other hand, the inherent nature of crime, violent conflict and war necessitated state institutionalization of violent organs. Every state

maintains sizeable security agencies ranging from the police, intelligent circles, paramilitaries, and the armed forces, for the purpose of internal and external security as well as defence. The police is traditionally responsible for handling internal security alongside other interior agencies in many countries. However, in Nigeria increasing cases of violent conflict has really changed the statutory line.

Towards the middle of this current democratic experience (that started in 1999), conflictual turmoil has characterized vast of the Nigerian states. Hence, military styled joint security task force is operational in almost all the 36 states of Nigeria, under different operational code names, according to the context and non-state actors in rampage (Idowu, 2016). State security agencies for the purpose of this paper could be defined as all the military, paramilitary and all the intelligent agencies statutorily recognized in Nigeria. This includes the Nigerian Armed Forces, Nigerian Police Force, Department of State Security, National Intelligence Agency, Defence Intelligence Agency and components of the Ministry of Interior-Nigerian Correctional Service, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, Nigeria Immigration Service, and Nigeria Customs Service.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of civil-military relations is the most suitable standpoint for this paper. Civil–military relations involve issues of the attitude of the military (the state security agencies) towards the civilian society, vis a vis the civilian society's perception of, and attitudes towards the state security agencies, as well as the role of the state security agencies in relation to the state. Samuel Huntington one of the leading scholars in the field of military history conceived the root problem of civil-military relations as the interaction between the twin imperatives of security and accountability. As such, in his views, the state security agencies of any society are shaped by forces due to a functional imperative that stems from the threats to the society's security and a societal imperative arising from social forces, ideologies and institution dominant within the society (Huntington, 1957). In submissions, the theory of civil-military relations

advocates a "holy romance" between the security and agencies and the public. Besides the operational benefits of civil-military relations to the state security agencies, it also fosters synergy in finding better solutions to peace and promotes long lasting peace in the society.

Forms of Violent Conflict in Nigeria

It is no longer a debate that different parts of Nigeria are engulfed by different forms of violent conflicts. Violent conflict in Nigeria today historically could be traced back to most unsolved political, religious and primordial national issues that were largely suppressed during the long period of military rule. The emergence of freedom of expression and other democratic rights triggered most of the repressed divides which has resulted into different forms of violent conflicts (personal communication, 2021). Besides this, other environmental factors, poor human security, institutional flaws, and institutionalized corruption have facilitated violent conflicts in different rights. On this note, all the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria are currently characterized by various forms of violent conflict, ranging from insurgency, banditry, farmer–herder clashes, secessionist agitations, communal clashes, gang/cult clashes, kidnapping, armed clashes and so on (Idowu, 2016).

According to Economic Intelligence Report (2021), a total of 77,850 people were reportedly killed as a result violent conflicts between June 2011 and June 2021. The table below shows the number of fatalities from violent conflict by geopolitical zones;
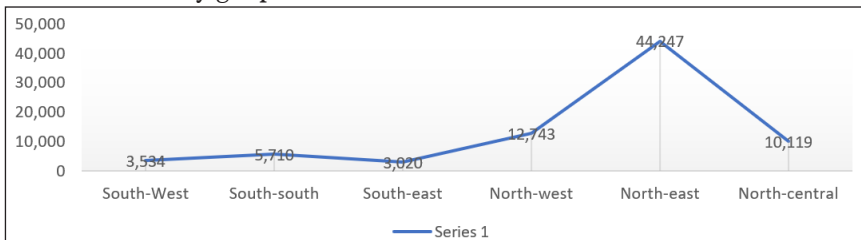

Fig. 2: *Statistics of deaths via conflicts by geopolitical zones—June 2011-June 2021. (Source: Econ intelligence July 2021*

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According to National Bureau of Statistics of Nigeria (2018) report, in northeast Nigeria, more than two-thirds of conflict events between 2010 and 2016 were caused by insurgents (72%). A smaller minority of conflict was due to crime or cultism (15%), disputes over land or resources (7%), and ethnicity, politics, or religion (2%). The report further indicated that in the north central zone, disputes over access to land or resources was the cause of more than half of the most recent events (55%). Land or resource access refers to the responses "livestock grazing on farm," "land disputes," and "access to natural resources." Another fifth of the reported most recent events were caused by terrorism (21%). Similarly, pastorals were reportedly the perpetrators of 45% of the most recent conflict event experienced by the household, and insurgents were named as the perpetrator of 21% of these acts.

Meanwhile, some of Nigeria's conflict-affected regions have a predominant, identifiable cause and related perpetrator of violence, while in some places there are interlopes in terms of the perpetrators and conflict situations. For instance, according to the National Bureau of Statistics Report (2018) in the South-south region, both the cause and the perpetrator of events is less consistent. Based on this report, approximately one-third of the conflict events reported by households (36%) are said to be caused by cultism or criminality. Another cause of violent in that region is by personal disputes (32%). Access to land or resources is said to be the cause of 19% of conflict events in the region. Those named as the perpetrator of conflict events are most often bandits, criminals, or cultists – 45% of conflict events in communities are attributed to these actors. Another 42% of events are attributed to individuals.

In data collected via open sources as reported by the Risk and Strategic Management Corps it shows that between December 2020 and June 2021 various armed attacks and violent civil disorders were recorded in different parts of Nigeria. Below is a graphical representation of the incidents that took place in the northwest, southeast and southwest regions.
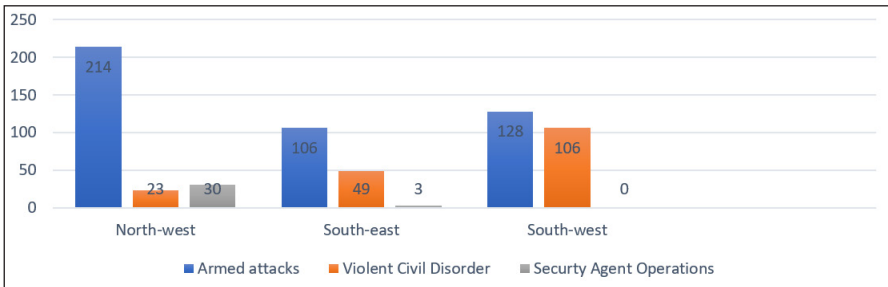
Fig. 3:   Violent conflict: Northwest, Southeast and Southwest Nigeria (Source: Risk and Strategic Management Corps, July 2021)

Based on the report findings, banditry characterized by violent attacks, forceful abduction/kidnaps and communal violent clashes as well as traces of insurgent attacks, defined most of the violent conflicts recorded in the Northwest within this period. In addition, the activities of the suspected members of Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) following the operations of nonstate "eastern security network (ESN)" heightened armed attacks in the South-east of Nigeria, with some level of spill-over effects. Furthermore, the Risk and Strategic Corps (2021) report attributed good number of the violent conflict in the southwest Nigeria to gang clashes, violent protests, violent communal cum ethnical clashes, pastoral and farmers clashes and violent secession agitations.

A data credence appeared to have been buttressed by a *Daily Trust* infographic, published in July 22, 2021. With a headline titled "Insecurity: Zamfara, Kebbi, Niger lead as gunmen kill 1, 031 Nigerians in 1 month", the paper highlighted the North-west and North-central as the regions with the highest fatality rate, with 416 and 218 causalities respectively. The Northeast had 188, Southeast 117, southwest 74 while south-south had the lowest of 18. Amassing of dangerous weapons is increasingly making these conflicts bloodier in unprecedented magnitude. Regrettably, members of the state security agencies are always drafted to these troubled zones,

most times with little or no remedy to the causes of the conflict, except for the initial use of force.

Roles of State Security Agencies in Combating Violent Conflict in Nigeria

Various state security agencies are constitutionally recognized in Nigeria. Professionally, these security agencies could be strictly classified into two—paramilitary and military forces. The statutory role of combating internal insurrections rest on the Nigerian Police Force (NPF). The NPF was created under Section 194 of the 1979 constitution with exclusive jurisdiction throughout the country (Ikuteyipo & Rotimi, 2014). Due to emerging threats from various sources, constitutional provisions were made for the establishment of separate branches of the force. Part of the clause that supported the emergence of special units of the NPF reads "forming part of the armed forces of the Federation or for the protection of harbours, waterways, railways, and airfields." The Nigeria Police Mobile Force (MOPOL) was the basic unit that was created in this regard, through which other specialized combatant units have been dratted for the NPF (Ikuteyipo & Rotimi, 2014).

Against this backdrop, in Section 23 of the Police Act, the role of the NPF was clearly stated, this includes among others, prevention and detection of crime, preservation of law and order, protection of life and property, performance of such military duties (cited in Ikuteyipo & Rotimi, 2014). By this specification of roles, the NPF is the first responder to any violent conflict in Nigeria, as it is the statutory civil authority saddled with such responsibilities. Meanwhile, with the dynamics of the state security, the Department of State Security was equally established in 1986 to complement the efforts of the NPF by a way of intelligence and subtle operations for internal security (Ugochukwu, 1997). Similarly, the institutionalization of the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) was also geared towards a more robust state security system, by providing the agency with the task of ensuring protection of public infrastructure and maintenance of law and order in aid of the conventional

police, when and where necessary. This provision has seen the NSCDC actively participating in quelling violent conflicts in Nigeria (Observation, December 2021).

Nevertheless, with the overwhelming nature of violent conflicts in Nigeria, other paramilitary agencies have formed part of the integral state security agencies, to combat violent conflicts in different parts of Nigeria. It is also important to note that besides the need for operational synergy, these paramilitary agencies are themselves circumstantially "dragged" into the violent conflict, as their personnel are often target of attacks by most of the assailants. Thus, joint security operations have involved agencies whose constitutional task or mandate does not necessarily involve combating violent conflicts. For instance, it is a common practice to see agencies such as the Nigerian Correctional Service, Nigerian Immigration Service, Nigeria Custom Service, National Drug Law Enforcement Agency and even the Federal Road Safety Commission, forming part of a combatant security task force (Observation, December 2021).

On the other hand, the Nigerian Armed Forces formed the military sector in the state security agencies combat of violent conflict. The Nigeria Army (NA) is the leading force in this direction. Such leadership role could be attributed to numerous factors such as the numeracy, training and other operational expertise required for internal security operations (Idowu, 2016). This however, does not mean that other arms of the Armed Forces, have not provided significant support for internal security operations. The efforts of the Nigeria Air-force (NAF) in the fight against banditry and Boko Haram insurgencies are quite remarkable. The Nigeria Navy (NN) has equally supported in the same light, including combat against sea pirates and other violent conflict from the coastal lines of Nigeria. The three arms of the Nigerian military have complemented each other in different operational terrains in the fight against violent conflicts (Idowu, 2016).

Meanwhile, the role of the Nigerian Armed Forces in combating violent conflicts in the past have raised some concerns among commentators (Schnabel & Krupanski, 2012; Stephen, 2010; and Momodu, 2019). Despite

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this, it is imperative to note that the involvement of the Nigerian Armed Forces in internal security operations is captured in Section 217 of the 1999 Constitution, which stated among other fundamental roles of the military, to "Suppress insurrection and act in aid of civil authorities to restore order when called upon to do so by the President, but subject to such conditions as maybe prescribed by an Act of the National Assembly" (cited in Attah, 2013.p. 82). It is therefore needful to note that the current massive involvement of the military in combating violent conflict is constitutionally recognized, which also signified the present downtrodden dilemma of the designated state security agencies in tackling the boiling conflicts across Nigeria.

Supportively, a combination of both the military and paramilitary components of the state security agencies have strived so hard to confront violent conflicts in Nigeria. But not without hurdles that often make their efforts look intangible in the eyes of uninformed onlookers (Idowu, 2016). Besides the problem of training, equipment, welfare and poor operational synergy, the numerical size of the state security agencies has further shown the impossibility of the security agencies to combat violent conflict without any meaningful support from the public (Sahara Reporters, 2018, May 29).
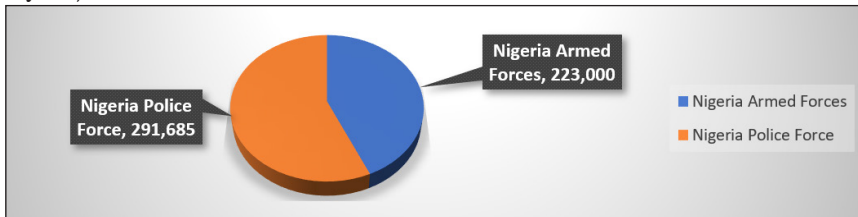
Fig. 4:   Numerical strength of Nigeria's military and police force-2018 Source: Data from World Bank obtained via https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/NGA/nigeria/ military-army-size and Sahara Reporters May 29, 2018. https://saharareporters. com/2018/05/29/124000-active-military-personnel-291685

By the ratio of this number to the total Nigeria population, the significant role of the public in combating violent conflict is non-debatable. This

is coupled to the fact that significant number of the violent conflicts emanate from the general population, not just as active actors but also as the framers of the narratives that brew violent.

Supportive Roles of the Public in Combating Violent Conflicts in Nigeriaoo

"Security is everybody business," this is one of the common dictum in the security parley. Although security is literally expressed here, but in a broader sense, it includes violent conflict as an aspect of security concerns. By this dictum, irrespective of the position of every individual in the society, the scorch of insecurity will directly or indirectly impact on his or her well-being. In a survey conducted by Afrobarometer (2016), across 36 countries, about one in five citizens (19%) cited security-related issues (crime and security, political violence, political instability, ethnic tensions, interstate war, civil war, and terrorism) as one of the three most important problems facing their country. This places security in the seventh position, following unemployment, health, education, infrastructure/transport, water supply, and poverty. Taking a closer look at some of the identified factors of public concern, it is quite obvious that the roles of the public in the efforts of state security agencies in combating violent conflicts are intertwined.

The role of the public in this regard is cyclic, at the same time consequential. The inability of the public to provide such cooperation to the security agencies could worsen other socioeconomic challenges; just like those unpleasant socio-economic situations could also lead to violent conflicts (personal communication, December 2021). Regrettably, the public is at the centre of this vicious circle. Since this fact has been well established, the cooperation of the public in complementing the efforts of the state security agencies could be conceived in three manifolds of interwoven edges—education, engagement and entrenchment. This is what could be described here as the EEE gauges against violent conflict.
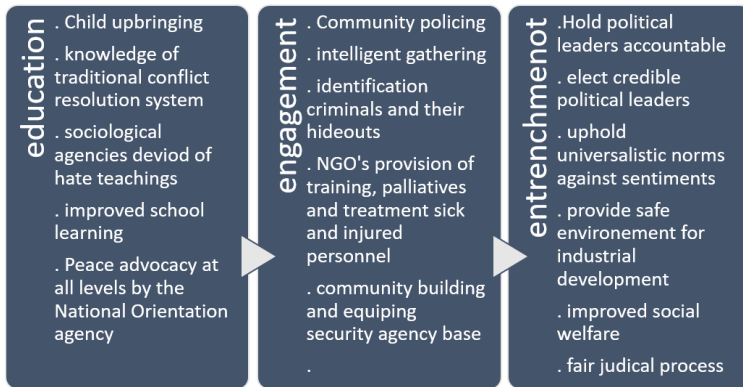
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education
. Child upbringing
. knowledge of traditional conflict resolution system
. sociological agencies deviod of hate teachings
. improved school learning
. Peace advocacy at all levels by the National Orientation agency

engagement
. Community policing
. intelligent gathering
. identification criminals and their hideouts
. NGO's provision of training, palliatives and treatment sick and injured personnel
. community building and equiping security agency base
.

entrenchmenot
. Hold political leaders accountable
. elect credible political leaders
. uphold universalistic norms against sentiments
. provide safe environement for industrial development
. improved social welfare
. fair judical process

Fig. 5:   EEE gauges for civil support of security agencies. (Source: the authors)

The role of the public in supporting the efforts of the state security agency is aptly summarized in the above EEE gauges. Education is the major key to tackle violent conflict in Nigeria. This is a long-term approach that involves both formal and informal educational processes. Most violent acts are learnt from different sociological process, beginning from the family, down to places of worship to the community at large. The child is either taught to hate or love through these sociological agencies, and such learning-experience will speak volume of the young adults in the future. As it is commonly said, 'man is a creation of society' and education, (whether it is formal, semi-formal, or informal), is the gateway to moulding man in either a positive or negative light.

To this end, no matter how long the public listens to the government media jingle that says "if you see something, say something", without peace education, many people would still be part of violence instigators in their action or inactions. If there are no intentional peace education process from the cradle, many children of today who will become adults of tomorrow, will likely undermine communal peace (personal communication, December 2021).

Besides the peaceful educational enrichment, the role of the public

in the efforts of state security agencies also requires some engagement. Crime as maybe manifested in violent conflict, at some point is inherent in human nature. This means that it is likely to happen, irrespective of the level of peace education genuinely professed at all sociological levels. In this light, public engagement will come in handy in support of the state security agencies, through vibrant community policing, intelligent gathering, identifying criminal elements and their safe havens, as well as providing welfare and medical support to sick and injured security operatives through philanthropist, NGOs, or other hospitable gestures. Community policing is one of the major means of public support to state security agencies to combat violent conflict in Nigeria today. The efficiency of this role was revamped by the formation of the Civilian JTF in parts of northeast Nigeria at the height of the Boko Haram insurgency in the urban cities of Maiduguri and Damaturu (Attah, 2019). Subsequently, this public security vanguard has provided reasonable offensive, defensive and intelligent supports to state security agencies fighting the insurgents (Garba, 2017). In the same vein, in some other parts of Nigeria, community policing is replicated in form of vigilantes or youth security watch. Irrespective of the context or formation type, community policing implies the general commitment of the public towards the security of their immediate environment, through security consciousness, arrest of hoodlums and reporting of suspicious movements to the state security agencies (Observation, December 2021).

Meanwhile, as pointed at the beginning of this paper, violent conflict is often the by-product of unmet human needs. As such, for a comprehensive role of the public in support of state security agencies fight against violent conflicts, entrenchment of conducive socio-economic and political order is essential. Based on various UN studies (United Nations Secretary General's high-level task force on the Global Food Crisis, 2008), there is a paradigm shift on the approach to fight against insecurity and violent conflict. Poor human security is conceived as the major drive to such hostilities, irrespective of the camouflaging factors. Good infrastructural development, functional institutions, employment, job security, social

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security and so on, are veritable roles of the political leaders which ensure equity, stability, fairness, justice, and other social welfare in the society (Attah, Bashir, & Aliyu, 2015). The indifferent posture of the public towards political leadership at all levels, pose a great threat to election of the right persons into political office. And the aftermath is mediocrity, partiality, corrupt leadership and unaccountable political leaders, which in return breeds all forms of violent conflict (Attah, Bashir, & Aliyu, 2015). As such, the enhancement of good socio-economic via a social-contracted political order by the public, will enhance peace and drastically reduce human needs that engineer violent conflicts.

From the foregoing, the usefulness of the EEE gauges for public support of the state security agencies in combating violent conflicts is quite stunning. But a miniature of this gesture has been received by the state security agencies from the Nigerian public, in most of the conflict affected localities. This therefore begs the question, what could be responsible for public cold feet in support of state security agencies efforts to combat violent conflicts in Nigeria?

Conclusion

Conflict is not completely an anathema in the society, as it is part of what defines the direction a society goes. However, most conflicts turn violent, when individuals or state institutions who are supposed to handle them are not attuned to what is breeding the conflict and how best to mitigate them. In the case of Nigeria, over the years the guns continue to be the major means of resolving conflict, even when it should serve as the last resort. Such approach in the long run dissipates civility and causes chaotic polity. This could be attributed to increasing violent conflicts that have been highlighted here through various data and studies. Unfortunately, the security agencies most times are looked up to, to quell this violent conflict, with the public mostly standing in akimbo. The fact remains that the security agencies cannot successfully resolve this conflict or restore law and order without the help of the public; just as the public cannot enjoy peace and development in the atmosphere of uncertainty

and destruction. Thus, both the public and security agencies are bound by necessity to complement each other in providing a peaceful and conducive environment for peace to thrive, with attendance benefits of social welfare and development.

Sequel to the issues raised at the body of this paper, the following are recommended;

i. Massive peace education should be entrenched in school curriculum;

ii. Ethnicity, tribalism and nepotism should be avoided in the affairs of the state, most especially in the state security agencies, this will give a lead-way to admirable public perception of such sentiments;

iii. The public should be enlightened on the dangers of violent conflict;

iv. State security agencies should maintain a sound and vibrant peace advocate unit, to engage communities in conflict resolution whenever early warning signals are received through intelligence;

v. Use of violence should be the last resort to conflict, as other means could be explored to de-escalate by both the public and the state security agencies;

vi. Political office holders should see their positions as a call to service and not to be serviced, in order to provide the public with necessary basic social and economic support that will reduce conflictual factors in the society;

vii. State security agencies should train and retrain their personnel on the principles of rules of engagement and professionalism;

viii. Issues of unprofessional conduct by the state security agencies should be handled transparently with the outcome made public;

ix. Based on the principles of civil-military relations, state

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security agencies should be made to be accountable to the public and not to bully them in the course of quelling violent conflicts. On the hand, the public should be reminded that "security is everybody's business."

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