Strategic Positioning of Na Veterans in Tackling Conflict for Enhanced Peace and Stability in Nigeria

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Abstract

The post-Cold War era has underscored the necessity of reconfiguring the role of military actors in civilian domains, particularly within fragile states such as Nigeria. Against the backdrop of persistent political instability, protracted conflicts, and rising societal tensions following the return to civilian governance in 1999, the strategic repositioning of Nigerian Army (NA) Veterans emerges as an imperative for sustainable peace and stability. This paper argues that NA Veterans possess invaluable skills and experience that can be repurposed for conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and societal healing. Drawing upon theoretical insights, especially Najam's 'FourCs' framework, and lessons from case studies in Zimbabwe and Mozambique, the paper advocates for the systematic engagement of Veterans through targeted reintegration initiatives, trust-building measures, and the promotion of upstream conflict prevention strategies. It also emphasises how important it is to have strong government support, inclusive community participation, and efficient Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) procedures to turn Veterans into peacemakers. To position NA Veterans as key players in the country's pursuit of lasting peace and development, the paper concludes by

suggesting a hybrid model of veteran engagement that is suited to the Nigerian context.

Key Words: Nigerian Army Veterans, Peacebuilding, Strategic Positioning, Conflict Prevention, Civil-Military Relations

Introduction

The post-Cold War period certainly signals the entry point for Military involvement in civilian affairs across many states. This period witnessed the outbreak of protracted conflicts, insurrections and wars in several places as well as the phenomenal increase in natural disasters, human misery and attendant challenges of conflict management and humanitarian interventions. The Military as defenders of national interest and managers of war and peace had to rise to these new challenges by being proactive and responsive to these non-military stimuli and developments, requiring the (re)formulation of Civil-Military relations (Dike, 2010: iii).

With the return of the country to civilian rule in 1999, contestations over political power became more intense. Since political power is arguably the major source of wealth in Nigeria, the contest for political office is always a 'do or die' affair (Ake, 1981 & Tenuche, 2011 in Alfa & Otaida, 2012), breeding series of conflicts and tensions within the polity. Although, conflict is normal in human relationships, and conflict is a motor of change (Lederach, 2003), the Military by its professionalism has the challenge to change mindsets and perceptions in order to gain civilian confidence. Further, in the years following the return to democratic rule, the military is expected to be pro-people, citizen friendly, and to further common good. This responsibility would not come easy due to their training.

It is against this backdrop that this paper emphasizes the need for a strong Army Veterans coalition, act as a link and as agents of peace as they are able to approach both victims and perpetrators of violence without reproach using the strategic skills acquired over their years. More so that Nigerian Army (NA) Veterans cannot be placed outside the mainstream of Nigerian Life, because;

- The character of warfare has changed, and the need to adapt to its changing character with innovative approaches.

- Military forces, particularly NA veterans, have vital roles to play in post-conflict peacebuilding.
- Contemporary operations are dynamic, and they operate in politically complex environments, and often cover enormous areas; thus, a need to draw on veterans' expertise.
- Veterans can be strategically positioned to play a proactive role in 'upstream' prevention.

Strategies for Re-Engaging Na Vetrans

To successfully re-integrate NA Veterans into Nigerian life, Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) must seek to provide veterans with equitable, sustainable assistance and opportunities to acquire social skills needed to survive life after combat, as part of their reintegration into society. The process is supposed to address attentively their welfare as a way of wooing disaffected Veterans and to develop their 'human dimension of war and strategy, which has a way of triumphing over technology and combat' (Gray, 1999). The DDR process has not been well implemented, considering the hardships faced by retirees of which NA Veterans are a vital part of (Except for Politicians in Uniforms). Veterans are sometimes used to pursue the agenda of the ruling party through violence, while those who refused to do so were dumped by their own government. As a result of this, a huge faction of scholars, independent researchers and analysts have risen with criticism against the government.

The failure of the government to initiate and implement social welfare for Veterans, attracts sympathy from the public and animosity for government, placing them in a more precarious position. Because of their precarity in the society, Army Veterans are exposed to the danger of wanting to engage in conflict. The position presented here is that Veterans as ex-combatants possess the capacity and potential to resolve conflicts and build peace despite their precarity. That veterans are an asset in our communities and a source of innovation and social mediation.

Furthermore, Knight (2008, in Mafu, 2016:22) 'emphasis on how effective the DDR process can play a part in broadening countrywide recovery efforts and support the sustenance of peace and development.' He argues that a 'well-controlled and

administered security sector is essential in ensuring the successful post-war peace building and in avoiding any possible relapses of violent conflicts again. Meaning a fair DDR process is advantageous to national recovery, security, peace and development. Thus, engaging Veterans as peace agents to affected communities is important for development. Nilsson (2005, in Mafu, 2016:23) reaffirms the position by showing how DDR programs can enable Army Veterans to be facilitators of peace-building process thereby providing them with a chance to become agents of peace. Engaging Veterans as agents of change solves the dilemma of figuring out what they would do post-service.

Theoretical Framework

The paper adopts the 'four Cs' framework propounded by Najam (2000 in Mafu, 2016: 31) - Co-operation, Confrontation, Complementarity and Cooptation. These four Cs centers on; a) 'Seeking similar ends with similar means which results in co-operation; b) Seeking dissimilar ends with dissimilar means culminating into confrontation; c) Seeking similar ends but preferring dissimilar means best described as complementarity; d) Preferring similar means but for dissimilar ends resulting into co-option. In this case, co-operation implies a situation whereby government agencies and NGOs do not only share similar policy goals but also favors similar strategies for achieving them. Thus, such a scenario is likely to occur in areas of delivering human services and relief, thereby producing an active NGO-government co-operation. Confrontation, however, according to the model, presents a situation whereby there is total divergence of goals or preferred ends and means between the government and the NGOs, most of these cases involve interrogation of government's mal-administration and policy defiance by the NGOs. Complementarity on the other hand, occurs when the goals of government and those of NGOs are the same or parallel, which gives both parties no choice but to complement each other in achieving similar ends even through different ways. Lastly, co-optation takes place in a situation where government and NGO seem to have similar preferences regarding means but dissimilar ends, however, the model highlights that, under such circumstances, one or both parties will attempt to change the goals of the other leading into manipulation and outright confrontation or one party giving in into the needs of the other.

The four Cs strategic frameworks can be adopted especially in situations where Veterans pursue the objective of engagement with government to bring about sustainable peace and stability. This paper therefore adopts the co-operative approach in situations where both the government and Veterans may be having similar ends that is to ensure national healing, reconciliation and integration, therefore they ought to join hands and use similar means for greater results.

Some Case Studies We Can Learn From

Case Study One: Zimbabwe Liberators Platform

Zimbabwe Liberators Platform (ZLP) part of the Zimbabweans People's Revolutionary Army (ZPRA-Veterans Trust). ZLP was founded by war veterans working to promote political tolerance among Zimbabweans. It was formed in the year 2000 after observing that the government of Zimbabwe under ZANU-PF (Zimbabwean African National Union-People's Front) (brought to power after winning the war) had abandoned the liberation ideals of the struggle, such as serving the people and providing them with opportunities for freedom, jobs, human rights and peace.

The organization also felt that the government was abusing ex-fighters by mobilizing them to engage in unconstitutional and illegal activities such as seizing commercial farms and harassing and abusing citizens, especially at election times, to help them stay in power.

Some of their objectives are: To rehabilitate war veterans and war collaborators so that they cease to be a burden on society, which makes them vulnerable to manipulation by unscrupulous politicians; To promote democratic values and respect of the rule of law; To collaborate and engage in dialogue with civic organizations, trade associations, the business community and other interest groups in order to promote harmony, stability and development; To fight bad governance and corruption, and correct the uneven political landscape in the country by promoting political tolerance among Zimbabweans.

Their values are centered on the ideals of the liberation struggle: Democratic rights of people, both as individuals and collectively; Abhorrence of any form of

discrimination based on color, sex, ethnic origin, religion or belief; Equality before the law; Fair, equitable and transparent land re-distribution.

Case Study Two: Crime Investigation and Social Reinsertion

Mozambican Force for Crime Investigation and Social Reinsertion (FOMICRES): Was founded in 1995 by a group of former combatants. FOMICRES build secure and engaged communities through activities that prevent crime and violence, and promote community economic and social development.

Following the end of the 1977-92 civil war (in which an estimated one million people died and millions more were internally displaced or fled the country) an expensive UN-led programme of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration collected about 155,000 of the more than six million weapons in circulation in the country, but ended in 1994.

In early 1995, fourteen young people (some of whom had been child soldiers or regulars in the army), decided to tackle this threat to public security and the fragile peace. Using an innovative bartering system — exchanging weapons not for money but for the goods needed to start small businesses — the organization they founded (Community Intelligence Force — FIC) had managed to collect or destroy more than 800,000 pieces of ordnance by 2005. Some of the weapons were transformed into pieces of art, which are now world-famous. Good for exchange ranged from sewing machines to tin roofs. The organization also worked closely with Operation Rachel- a collaborative disarmament operation that the South African Government initiated in partnership with the government of Mozambique to stop the illegal flow of arms in Southeast Africa.

FOMICRES continues to expand its activities. It has carried out crime-prevention training for Local Governments, the Judiciary and communities to break down militarized mentalities. It has continued to be involved in arms collections. In May 2005, FIC transformed into FOMICRES, a Portuguese acronym for 'Mozambican Force for Crime Investigation and Social Reintegration.' This reflects the organization's expanded vision to address the wider human security needs of the people of Mozambique and the fact that, as in many post-conflict countries, the

deep social disruption of the war has left a legacy of increased (and often violent) crime.

Strategies Used By FOMICRES and ZLP to Achieve Success:
Both FOMICRES and ZLP are were largely formed by Ex-combatants and Veterans. They both have similar ends that is to ensure national healing, reconciliation and integration.

A: The operational strategies of ZLP Veterans includes Trust building. This was employed a number of different strategies to approach the communities and to implement its peace-building initiatives. First of all, ZLP conducted trainings and peace-building teachings within its personnel before going to the field. This was to make sure that; all the program facilitators understand the meaning of peace and the importance for peace-building in Zimbabwe. This understanding of peace and the need for peace-building in Zimbabwe, helped them to become facilitators of the programs; they were recognized by their traditional leaders (Chiefs) by making them first pot of call into the community was another strategy used by ZLP to easily get permission. When permission granted the Trust would then set up structures for commencement of the program. In this process, inclusion of some of the villagers into the team by making them coordinators of the program was also a strategy employed by the Trust, so as to inject a sense of program ownership among community members.

Furthermore, distribution of peace-building literature, peace-teachings, holding of workshops, seminars, outreaches and memorization were parts of healing activities. These activities involved truth telling as it was believed that, saying out their grievances and what is in their hearts to each other will create connection between people and they get to be relieved from wounds and quarries they would have been carrying with them for a very long time. Also, there was engagement of games during healing process which were meant to spice the program so that people would not get bored. Lastly, as a way of ensuring sustainability of the program, the Trust established Community Conflict Resolution Committees (CCRC) that will handle any conflicts arising within their villages. All these strategies therefore appeared to be very effective.

B: The operational strategy of FOMICRES, include to develop its own capacities in certain areas and acquire the necessary political buy-in and understanding from actors at different levels. Peacebuilding occurred through both the deliberate and the indirect interlinking of several frameworks that aimed to address different challenges.

Prioritization became a critical element in their peacebuilding process by focusing on disarmament and economic prosperity. The economic prosperity was an innovation brought into the disarmament project by focus on creating the conditions that drive and sustain peace- peace entrepreneurship, by subsidizing tools.

The creation of the Community Intelligence Force — FIC) in collaboration with the various groups the mobilization of weapons to demilitarize the system drove success. FOMICRES was very innovative by transforming the recovered tools into pieces of art, which became worlds' famous. The ability of FOMICRES to identify and collaborate with organizations with similar goals was remarkable. FOMICRES provided capacity building to other sister organizations- Local Governments and the Judiciary, to promote a culture of tolerance. They also merged parallel development strategies to increase local ownership and inclusive participation.

How Do We Position Our Veterans As Agents Of Peace?

NA Veterans can be strategically positioned to play a proactive role in creating a less violent and peaceful country. A number of ad hoc arrangements such as neighborhood security committees and elder fora have become particularly visible at times of tension. Since membership of these groups often comprised of highly influential neighborhood residents and Army Veterans who were connected to or were themselves top officials with direct links to the government, their connections could be used to campaign for the deployment of peace agents to secure the neighborhood.

As presented from the cases above, Army Veterans can form a formidable team of Community Intelligence Team to deliver urgent updates based on intelligence gathered and on political aspects of a conflict and keep residents informed on new developments and government plans. They can identify and partner with many

local groups in the communities. They can also create ad hoc committees to help in information dissemination and reorientation on how the neighborhood sees and responds to conflict. Since they have direct links to, or are themselves part of, decision making institutions, their opinions will generally be respected.

Generally, Army Veterans can play a strategic and valuable expanded role in 'upstream' prevention. This will entail re-learning human engagement skills- the 'glues' that hold human networks together is trust. This is clear where cooperation can be given or withheld more or less voluntarily, but even networks sustained by fear and coercion rely on trust to some degree. Veterans must intentionally gain the trust of their community. Trust is key to the success of upstream engagement in any conflict. If trust is not secured, or is broken for any reason, progress towards resolving or transforming the conflict will be slowed, halted or even reversed.

Army veterans should learn the five principles of upstream prevention- Understand; Engage early; Act; Endure and Assess.

1. Understand: Create understanding of the conflict and its dynamics; Adopt a "do no harm" approach; Build relationships — build networks, adapt; Be aware of opportunities for conflict transformation; Engage in a substantial and iterative evaluation of the situation; Develop a narrative that describes what is going on. Also, embrace inclusivity and an interrelated emphasis on 'local first' actions. 'Local first' means that the conflict situation needs, ideally, to be led by local actors, with external actors providing different kinds and levels of support. Where this is not possible, 'local first' means to understand the conflict from the local perspective by truly listening to, and hearing, local actors

2. Engage early: Get key individuals involved through a respectful, humancentric approach; Seek comprehensive inclusivity (local first/tactical, mid-level actors/operational, whole-of- government/strategic); Build credibility and trustworthiness by acting impartially; Respect needs, but tap beliefs, emotions and motivation in order to influence behavior. Engagement is also about generating a human-centric approach that includes respect, impartiality and attention to people's needs. It openly and honestly acknowledges the emotions at work in the situation, along with the motivations of individuals and groups, in order to influence behavior away from violence. It strives to enhance the credibility of all

parties involved, so they can achieve a positive effect together. Creating small successes early is critical to building the partners' credibility and belief in the entire peacebuilding endeavor.

3. Act: Address causes of direct, structural and cultural violence. It is only through a deep and inclusive understanding of the conflict that a 'do no harm' strategy can be brought to bear in an effective plan of action. The actions of all engagement partners and the conflict population must be focused on addressing the root causes of direct and indirect violence. The effort spent on better understanding leads to a learning culture among the actors that, in turn, facilitates adaptation to the evolving situation. This adaptation does not generally come easily to many of the actors involved in violent (or potentially violent) conflicts. However, it is only through a deep understanding of the situation — coupled with a willingness among all partners to commit to transforming the conflict through exploiting new approaches and attitudes — that the direct, structural and cultural violence will be addressed effectively. The prevention narrative aims to engender holistic change, operational change and individual change in support of prevention activities and conflict transformation.

4. Endure: See through the transformation of violent conflict to peace with real, lasting commitment. It is important not to squander hard-won trust and credibility as an (external) actor by losing focus and not following through on the implicit promise of assistance. Shaping a society's values, towards nonviolence and transformation of violent conflict through to a stable and lasting peace, demands a high level of commitment from all involved, something that must be understood from the outset. There will be an ongoing (though presumably reduced) level of help required for some time in most situations, once they are transformed to a manageable level. The aim, however, is to help build enduring local capacity for nonviolent conflict management.

5. Assess: Continuous assessment of community security situation — positive and negative feedback to adapt. At all stages of the engagement, assessment of progress is required. This applies at the interpersonal level, all the way up to the strategic. Various methodologies are available but they should be linked to the same indicators used in the early warning process to ensure coherence. The

requirement for continuous assessment and a continuing effort to gain more understanding never ends. Through a long-term (albeit reduced) engagement, this understanding can be maintained and any weak signals that might suggest renewed violence can help in future decisions about larger scale re-engagement, if necessary.

Conclusion:

The perspectives presented here is far from conclusive, instead, it aims to whet the appetite for more research, addressing the issues NA Veteran's strategic role in peacebuilding- to better understand conflict from a human-centered insights to refocus both military and veterans thinking on upstream engagement.

Conflicts are likely to continue arising in fragile and failing states like Nigeria, and the continuous shifting of the theatres of war. Thus, the need for continuous capacity building for NA veterans to move to upstream conflict prevention in an attempt to avoid hard-end intervention.

As armed conflicts continue to drive millions from their homes every year in Nigeria, finding a way to reduce these conflicts is essential to reduce forced migration and poverty. Further, the growing mistrust between the ordinary citizens and government, continues to affect has therefore, negatively affect peace-building and reconciliation efforts. To solve the problem, I suggest the strategic positioning of NA Veterans as agents of peace. Judging from the two case studies presented above, NA Veterans can play a significant role in dealing with peace-building and community healing. The strategies used by both FOMICRES and ZLP can be re-evaluated to establish a hybrid model for Nigeria.

I conclude that indeed NA veterans have a significant role in restoring peace and rebuilding the Nigeria's troubled economy. In fact, the only obstacle towards achieving that is the approach to their welfare as part of the country's challenge in understanding the need to safeguard the social security of its retirees.

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