

Out of the Box: Rethinking Africa's Security

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Abstract

Africa's enduring security challenges have for decades been approached through militarized strategies inherited from colonial administration approaches that often suppress conflict momentarily but fail to address the deep structural, socio-economic, and political roots of violence. This article contends that such heavy reliance on force has entrenched what Johan Galtung terms "negative peace": a fragile calm maintained through coercion rather than genuine reconciliation and justice. In contrast, the study advocates for a transformative security paradigm anchored in Galtung's theory of Positive Peace, which highlights the need for social justice, inclusive governance, and equitable development as foundational pillars of sustainable peace. Drawing on recent case studies from Kenya, Nigeria, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the paper demonstrates that militarization not only fails to resolve grievances but often exacerbates them, deepening societal divisions and feeding cycles of retribution. Furthermore, the analysis emphasizes the rising influence of Africa's Generation Z, whose digital activism has proven to be a powerful tool for civic mobilization, nonviolent resistance, and exposing the limitations of outdated security models. From the #EndSARS movement in Nigeria to youth-led protests against unpopular policies in Kenya, young people are demanding new forms of accountability and participatory governance that reject brute force in favour of dialogue and peaceful action. Importantly, it argues that integrating peace education into the school curricula, revitalizing traditional community mediation mechanisms, and empowering local voices are essential steps toward building resilient, people-centered security structures. Moreover, it calls for policymakers, civil society, and international partners to shift resources away from excessive militarization and toward social investments that address inequality and economic disenfranchisement. Ultimately, the study proposes that Africa's security future depends on an out-of-the-box approach that blends theoretical insight with practical community-led solutions, forging a path where peace is not simply the absence of war, but the active presence of justice, opportunity, and hope for all.

Keywords: African Security, Militarization, Peace Education, Nonviolent Conflict Resolution, Digital Activism, Community-Based Peacebuilding, Post-Colonial Legacy, Positive Peace, Youth Movements, Inclusive Governance

Introduction

Africa's security challenges are as diverse as its rich cultural landscape. From the shores of the Atlantic to the vast plains of the Rift Valley, nations across the continent have struggled with conflicts rooted in political, economic, and historical grievances. Traditionally, African states have relied on militaristic strategies inherited from colonial administrations to address internal

insurgencies, electoral violence, ethnic conflicts, and transnational terrorism. However, scholars such as Mazrui (2021), Mamdani (2022) and Williams (2023) have noted that such approaches have repeatedly proven ineffective. Rather than ensuring sustainable peace, militarization deepens societal divisions and perpetuates cycles of violence.

Moreover, at the heart of Africa's persistent insecurity lies the lingering impact of colonial rule. European powers arbitrarily delineated borders without regard for pre-existing ethnic and cultural realities (Mbeki, 2023; Munene, 2023), thereby disrupting indigenous systems of governance and conflict resolution. Consequently, post-colonial state structures were designed to control rather than reconcile, setting the stage for decades of instability (Odhiambo, 2022). As Nwosu (2021) asserts, the imposition of Western-style militarized responses has eroded traditional mechanisms that once enabled communities to resolve disputes peacefully.

In addition, despite various democratization and governance reforms, recent episodes of the 2022 and 2023 electoral violence in Kenya and Nigeria respectively have exposed the fragility of political institutions. In Kenya, political mobilization along ethnic lines fueled by divisive rhetoric from political elites has repeatedly undermined electoral stability (Adebanwi & Obadare, 2023). Similarly, Nigeria's experience with disputed elections has triggered violent protests while also revealing deep-seated economic disenfranchisement and social exclusion (Okafor, 2023). These recurring crises underscore the urgent need for a paradigm shift on how security is conceptualized and managed.

Furthermore, a transformative element in this discourse is the rising influence of Generation Z across Africa. Digital platforms such as 'X' formerly Twitter, Tok-tok, and WhatsApp have become powerful tools for mobilization, enabling youth to spearhead movements like Nigeria's #EndSARS campaign (Nkrumah, 2024). The digital platform has also been used to mobilize youth and at the same time doing the so called sending greetings (sending messages with bad descriptions and condemning evil members of parliament, or prominent government officials) to members of parliament who were promoting the 2024-2025 Finance Bill in Kenya. Young Africans are increasingly critical of state-sponsored militarization and are advocating for dialogue and nonviolent resistance. Yet, despite the promise of digital activism, state repression remains

prevalent, revealing an alarming gap between innovative peacebuilding methods and outdated security paradigms (Heindl, 2024).

Most importantly, the Rethinking African Security Conference held at St. Paul's University on November 15, 2024, provided a critical forum to re-examine these issues. Esteemed speakers, presented a compelling case for abandoning militaristic strategies. They emphasized that violence, whether direct or structural, only begets further violence, and that a shift toward nonviolent approaches that incorporate peace education, community-based mediation, and economic development is essential (Munene, Wamuyu, & Mbila, 2024). In summary, this article analyzes Africa's historical security challenges, critically evaluates the limitations of militarization, and presents alternative strategies that promote a holistic, inclusive, and nonviolent approach to conflict resolution. Drawing on insights from diverse scholars including Collier (2022) on economic drivers of conflict and Boege and Foltz (2021) on post-conflict reconciliation, this study contributes to the growing literature envisioning a future where peace is not merely the absence of war but the presence of justice and opportunity for all.

Historical Context and the Evolution of African Security Challenges

Africa's modern security landscape is inseparable from its colonial past. European colonizers redrew territorial boundaries without regard for indigenous social structures, often favouring strategies of control and repression over negotiation and reconciliation (Mazrui 2021; Mbeki, 2023). As Mamdani (2022) poignantly argues, these legacies have ingrained a reliance on force within the state apparatus, a reliance that persists in contemporary security policies. Traditionally, pre-colonial societies resolved disputes through dialogue, customary law, and community-based reconciliation rituals (Nwosu, 2021). However, the imposition of European legal systems and militarized control mechanisms marginalized these indigenous practices. Munene (2023) contends that this historical dislocation has left a void in conflict resolution, a gap that modern militaristic approaches have failed to fill.

Moreover, historical case studies illustrate these dynamics vividly. For example, the Rwandan genocide revealed how the absence of effective, culturally resonant conflict mediation contributed to catastrophic violence (Boege & Foltz, 2021). Similarly, in Nigeria, colonial divide-and-rule

strategies continue to exacerbate ethnic tensions, fueling recurring episodes of electoral violence (Adebanwi & Obadare, 2023). Odhiambo (2022) provides evidence that African states often revert to military solutions because they lack the institutional frameworks necessary for meaningful dialogue and reconciliation.

Furthermore, the enduring impact of colonial legacies is not solely political but also socio-economic. Scholars like Nkrumah (2024) highlight entrenched disparities in wealth distribution, resource allocation, and regional development as direct outcomes of colonial exploitation. These factors, combined with a militaristic mindset inherited from colonial administrations, create a vicious cycle where violence becomes the default means of addressing grievances (Okafor, 2023).

The Limitations of Militarization

Despite decades of military interventions, Africa remains one of the most conflict-prone regions in the world. As alluded by Wachira (2024), “the old methods in resolving conflicts, which are militaristic in nature, are themselves a form of violence”. In this context, militarization is increasingly recognized as a primitive and counterproductive approach that fails to address the root causes of conflict. In addition, the phenomenon of “negative peace” a temporary cessation of violence without the establishment of lasting, just social order is a common outcome of militaristic strategies. Hubert Heindl, Director of the University of Peace Africa, stresses that excessive military expenditure diverts resources away from crucial investments in education, healthcare, and community development (Heindl, 2024). Consequently, this approach not only fails to prevent conflict recurrence but may also exacerbate conditions such as poverty and inequality (Collier, 2022).

Moreover, the economic implications of militarization are deeply concerning. According to Waal (2024), “ongoing armament and the commercialization of weapons contribute directly to humanitarian crises and can escalate regional conflicts, potentially even triggering a global conflict or nuclear strike.” Previously Waal had argued that the arms trade fuels violence, as conflict entrepreneurs’ profit from the cycle of war and peacekeeping efforts (2023). Furthermore, militarization tends to marginalize vulnerable populations. Women and children bear the brunt of militarized conflicts, suffering from displacement, sexual and gender-based violence, and

economic disenfranchisement (Mombo, 2024). The emphasis on force rather than dialogue not only alienates these groups but also undermines the state's legitimacy, ultimately eroding the social contract (Oduro & Mensah, 2020).

In spite of these challenges, militaristic strategies also inherently fail to foster reconciliation. As Mbila (2024) poignantly stated, "If a tiger enters your compound, even if you speak different languages, the tiger will not understand you; it will kill you. But when we share peace like a flowing river, we can benefit everyone". This metaphor encapsulates the argument that true security must be built on empathy, dialogue, and the willingness to sacrifice for collective well-being.

Contemporary Case Studies and the Human Toll of Militarization

Recent conflicts in Africa provide a stark illustration of the failure of militarized solutions. For instance, in Kenya, the repeated episodes of electoral violence notably during the 2007–2008 post-election crisis and the more recent turmoil in 2022 demonstrate how political manipulation and ethnic divisiveness can lead to catastrophic outcomes (Odhiambo, 2022; Adebani & Obadare, 2023). These events have not only resulted in the loss of countless lives but have also left deep psychological scars on communities, particularly among children and the elderly who witness violence as a routine aspect of life. Similarly, Nigeria's experiences with the Boko Haram insurgency and protests following disputed elections reveal a society in crisis. The heavy-handed military responses have often escalated violence rather than diffusing tensions (Salami & Adeniyi, 2022). Instead of addressing the underlying socio-economic issues, militarization has resulted in cycles of retribution and deep mistrust between citizens and state institutions (Okafor, 2023).

Moreover, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the resurgence of rebel groups such as M23 underscores the limitations of force-based interventions (Odhiambo, 2022). Here, militarization has created an environment where arms proliferation and economic exploitation fuel ongoing conflict. Collier (2022) notes that the diversion of resources toward military expenditure detracts from critical development initiatives, thereby perpetuating poverty, a primary driver of conflict.

Furthermore, the human cost of these conflicts cannot be overstated. Women, children, and the elderly are often the most affected. The impacts of militarization extend far beyond the battlefield, affecting the daily lives of ordinary people. For example, displaced populations in conflict zones frequently face severe hardships, including loss of livelihoods, disrupted education, and heightened vulnerability to exploitation (Mombo, 2024). These challenges underscore the urgent need for alternative strategies that address both immediate and structural causes of violence.

Alternative Approaches: Toward Nonviolent Conflict Resolution

A shift away from militarized responses must be grounded in a clear theoretical framework that redefines what genuine security entails. Johan Galtung's (1969; 1996) influential theory of *Positive Peace* provides this critical foundation. According to Galtung, most traditional security approaches deliver only *negative peace* — a state in which direct violence is absent but structural injustices, social inequalities, and unresolved grievances persist beneath the surface. In contrast, *positive peace* focuses on building just and equitable conditions that prevent violence from erupting in the first place. This study adopts Galtung's framework to argue that Africa's security solutions must move beyond merely suppressing conflict to actively addressing its root causes through inclusive governance, economic fairness, community dialogue, and peace education (Galtung, 1996). Embedding *positive peace* into Africa's security discourse ensures that interventions dismantle the structures of inequality and alienation that often fuel repeated cycles of violence.

Given the compelling evidence against militarization, many scholars and practitioners now advocate for alternative, nonviolent approaches to conflict resolution. At the heart of this vision is the concept of "positive peace," which is characterized not merely by the absence of violence, but by the presence of justice, equitable resource distribution, and robust mechanisms for social reconciliation (Boege & Foltz, 2021). Furthermore, one of the most promising strategies for achieving positive peace is the implementation of comprehensive peace education programs. Educating young people about nonviolence, conflict resolution, and civic responsibility is crucial for long-term stability (Wamuyu, 2024), drawing lessons from Rwanda's post-genocide education reforms where peace studies played a central role in national healing. A similar approach in other African nations can dismantle cycles of violence perpetuated by militarization (Mombo, 2024).

Moreover, peace education challenges the glorification of violence. Mombo (2024) notes that “we must dismantle all systems that glorify violence, bearing in mind that all of us were created by God”. This sentiment resonates with the teachings of both the Bible, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9)—and the Quran, “And if two parties of the believers fight, then make peace between them” (Quran 49:9). By instilling these values in future generations, African societies can gradually shift towards a culture that prizes dialogue over force.

Additionally, community-based peacebuilding offers another critical alternative. Traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, long practiced by African communities, provide valuable insights into sustainable peace. “For peace to prevail, we must pursue it, even if sacrifice is required just as Jesus sacrificed for change” (Mbila, 2024). Religious and cultural leaders have historically played indispensable roles in mediating conflicts. African security must be reimaged through local empowerment and nonviolence (Wachira, 2024). This calls for reconciliation through mediation and dialogue that echoes the traditional practices of community elders, who for centuries have resolved disputes through consensus rather than coercion.

Furthermore, the role of youth and digital activism is increasingly important in reshaping African security. Generation Z, empowered by digital technologies, has emerged as a formidable force for change. Nkrumah (2024) illustrates how social media platforms have given rise to new forms of civic engagement, as seen in the #EndSARS movement in Nigeria and youth-led protests in Kenya. These digital movements not only raise awareness about state violence but also mobilize young people to advocate for nonviolent alternatives. Heindl (2024) pointed out that while digital platforms can amplify marginalized voices, they must be integrated into broader institutional frameworks to translate nonviolent messages into concrete policy reforms.

Moreover, addressing structural drivers of conflict is paramount. Political and economic disenfranchisement are often at the root of violent upheavals. Jerome Van De loo (2024) noted that if resources are exploited to fuel conflict, then harnessing local potential for wealth and stability becomes essential. Munene (2024) warns of “conflict entrepreneurs”, individuals who profit from war and later masquerade as peacemakers, and calls for transparency, accountability, and

community participation in managing national resources. In addition, community policing and local security initiatives have emerged as effective measures for preventing violence. Research by Salami and Adeniyi (2022) supports that community-oriented security frameworks build trust and reduce violence more effectively than traditional militaristic approaches.

Moreover, it is essential to recognize that the foundation for a peaceful society is laid in childhood. Teaching children nonviolent methods of conflict resolution is as crucial as imparting basic academic concepts. For example, when a child learns that $1+1 = 2$ —a simple arithmetic truth—the lesson becomes a fundamental building block of logical reasoning that the child will carry throughout life. In a similar way, when children are taught to live in harmony, to be peaceful, and to love one another, these values become indelibly etched in their hearts and minds. They internalize the idea that unity and cooperation yield far greater outcomes than conflict or division. In addition, religious teachings provide a rich source of guidance for instilling these values. The Bible instructs, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6, New King James Version). This verse underscores the lasting impact of early education in shaping an individual's character and behaviour. Similarly, the Quran emphasizes reconciliation by stating, “And if two parties of the believers fight, then make peace between them” (Quran 49:9), encouraging mediation and harmony. By teaching children these sacred principles from a young age, societies can form the moral backbone necessary for long-term peace and social cohesion. Thus, just as the simple arithmetic fact that $1+1 = 2$ serves as a foundational truth in mathematics, so too does the early instruction in peaceful conflict resolution serve as a cornerstone for a future of positive peace. When children learn to value dialogue, empathy, and nonviolence, they grow into adults who are better equipped to contribute to a harmonious, inclusive, and sustainable society.

The Role of International and Regional Frameworks

While African security is fundamentally a domestic concern, it is deeply interwoven with global political and economic systems. International institutions such as the United Nations and regional bodies like the African Union play critical roles in facilitating peace. UN Peacekeeping (2023) reports emphasize that nonviolent peacebuilding and conflict prevention must be supported by international cooperation. Nevertheless, many scholars argue that external interventions should

empower local actors rather than impose top-down solutions reminiscent of colonial practices (Boege & Foltz, 2021).

In addition, regional organizations such as Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) have initiated reforms aimed at integrating community perspectives into their peacekeeping mandates. Okafor (2023) asserts that these frameworks are better attuned to the socio-political dynamics on the ground and can facilitate dialogue and reconciliation among conflicting parties more effectively. The future of African security lies in a hybrid model that blends local knowledge with international support, rejecting one-size-fits-all militarization in favor of tailored, context-specific solutions.

Bridging the Gap: From Negative to Positive Peace

The ultimate goal of rethinking African security is to transition from negative peace a mere cessation of violence maintained by coercion to positive peace, which is characterized by social justice, economic opportunity, and robust reconciliation mechanisms (Williams, 2023; Mombo, 2024). Negative peace is inherently fragile because it suppresses dissent without addressing underlying grievances. In contrast, positive peace demands the active participation of all segments of society, from children and youth to the elderly, and across all socio-economic and religious lines.

Most importantly, peace education is central to achieving this transformative change. As Wachira (2024) passionately articulates, educating young people on the futility of violence and the value of dialogue is a moral imperative citing the inspiring examples from Kenya's Gen Z demonstrations, where youth-led movements challenged entrenched militaristic ideologies. This form of education not only equips future citizens with the skills to resolve conflicts nonviolently but also fosters a culture of empathy and social responsibility that transcends traditional political divisions.

Additionally, integrating religious principles into peace education can serve as a unifying force. The Bible's call to "bless the peacemakers" (Matthew 5:9) and the Quran's emphasis on mediation (Quran 49:9) provide universal ethical foundations capable of bridging cultural and ideological divides. Mombo (2024) highlights the need to dismantle systems that glorify violence in order to create societies where every individual feels valued and empowered.

Policy Implications and the Roadmap for Action

Given the compelling evidence and diverse perspectives presented, it is clear that a new roadmap for African security is urgently needed. In this light, several key policy recommendations emerge. First, African governments should integrate peace education into their national curricula, teaching nonviolence, conflict resolution, and civic responsibility from an early age. Rwanda's post-genocide initiatives (Boege & Foltz, 2021) have shown that such reforms can transform societies by fostering a culture of reconciliation and proactive engagement.

Moreover, investments in community-based conflict resolution mechanisms must be prioritized. Empowering traditional mediators, religious leaders, and community elders to play central roles in local peacebuilding is essential, as demonstrated by Oduro and Mensah (2020). In addition, promoting inclusive governance and economic development is critical. Collier (2022) argues that sustainable peace depends on reducing socio-economic inequalities and ensuring political inclusion through job creation, transparent resource management, and community empowerment initiatives.

Furthermore, leveraging digital platforms for nonviolent mobilization offers a modern avenue for fostering dialogue and social transformation. With the growing influence of digital activism, establishing online forums for conflict resolution and ensuring free digital communication channels can complement grassroots peace initiatives (Nkrumah, 2024). Also, security sector reforms should be pursued to transition from militaristic orientations to community-oriented policing models that prioritize prevention over repression (Salami & Adeniyi, 2022).

Finally, international, and regional cooperation must be strengthened. External actors, including the United Nations and regional bodies like the African Union, should support locally driven peace initiatives rather than imposing external mandates. Collaborative frameworks that integrate local, national, and international efforts are essential for creating sustainable security (Boege & Foltz, 2021; UN Peacekeeping, 2023). In addition, academic institutions and research organizations should intensify efforts to document and analyze conflict trends in Africa, ensuring that policy is informed by robust empirical evidence.

Emotional and Human Dimensions of Conflict

Violence in Africa is not an abstract policy issue. It is a profound human tragedy affecting every segment of society. Militarization inflicts deep and lasting wounds, particularly on vulnerable populations. As Mombo (2024) poignantly remarks, “the wounds inflicted by militarization run deep, affecting the most vulnerable and perpetuating cycles of trauma that span generations”.

For example, in Kenya, the scars of electoral violence are evident in the shattered lives of families in regions such as Turkana and Samburu Counties where children grow up witnessing conflict and loss (Wachira, 2024). Likewise, in Nigeria, communities ravaged by the Boko Haram insurgency face the dual burdens of displacement and economic deprivation (Okafor, 2023). The emotional toll of such violence is compounded by the erosion of trust in institutions meant to protect citizens. As Heindl (2024) noted, when people lose faith in the state’s ability to ensure their security, they become vulnerable to extremist ideologies that promise change through violence.

Moreover, the role of the youth is particularly critical. Generation Z, armed with digital technologies and a vision for a better future, stands at the forefront of a movement that rejects the status quo. Their protests in Kenya and Nigeria exemplify a growing desire for a security paradigm that values dialogue, empathy, and collective action over brute force. As Nkrumah (2024) observed, digital activism represents not only a tool but a movement embodying the hopes of millions for a peaceful, inclusive future. Furthermore, religious leaders have provided inspirational guidance. Drawing upon the Bible’s call to “bless the peacemakers” (Matthew 5:9) and the Quran’s emphasis on mediation (Quran 49:9), many faith leaders argue that true security is grounded in spiritual renewal. During the conference, speakers from diverse religious traditions decried the commercialization of conflict, with Martin Waal (2023) warning that the arms trade only deepens divisions.

Integrating Scholarly Insights with Practical Initiatives

The diverse ideas presented by scholars and practitioners at the Rethinking African Security Conference underscore the complexity of the challenge. Nonetheless, these insights converge on a clear path forward, one that integrates academic theory with practical, community-based initiatives. For instance, Munene’s (2024) critique of “conflict entrepreneurs” highlights the need

for systemic transparency and accountability, while Jerome Van De loo's (2024) call to "grow locally" underscores the importance of harnessing indigenous resources for economic resilience. Mbila's (2024) poignant metaphor about the tiger and the river further reminds us that while violence spares no one, the spread of peace can heal and unify.

In addition, the integration of these insights with on-the-ground initiatives is not merely theoretical but a practical necessity. As Collier (2022) and Okafor (2023) have argued, sustainable development and inclusive governance are the bedrock of long-term peace. Therefore, policy makers must invest in education, healthcare, and economic opportunities while reforming security institutions to be more responsive to local needs.

The Imperative of Rethinking African Security

Ultimately, the cumulative evidence presented in this article makes it clear that militarization is an outdated and unsustainable approach to addressing Africa's security challenges. The voices at the Rethinking African Security Conference resonated with urgency: Africa must reimagine its security not as a state of perpetual readiness for conflict, but as a dynamic process of building community resilience, fostering economic empowerment, and nurturing a culture of nonviolence. Wachira (2024) emphatically stated, "We must struggle to pursue peace through reconciliation, mediation, and dialogue; for it is in these acts that we find the seeds of a better future". Moreover, Heindl (2024) warned that continued militarization could lead to humanitarian crises, escalating regional conflicts, and even the specter of global warfare. Mombo (2024) and Munene (2024) have both stressed that dismantling systems which glorify violence is imperative if we are to build societies where justice and equity prevail. In the words of Mbila (2024), true peace is not simply the absence of war, but the presence of hope, opportunity, and shared humanity.

Conclusion

In the end, Africa's security challenges will not be solved by polishing old guns or replaying colonial scripts that never worked in the first place. If there is one thing this article makes clear, it is that militarization is like trying to fix a leaky roof with more rain — it only makes the mess bigger. Instead, genuine security demands that we pick up chalk instead of guns, choose dialogue over division, and invest in classrooms, communities, and creativity. Theoretically, this vision aligns with Johan Galtung's influential concept of *Positive Peace*, which goes beyond simply

stopping violence to building the social justice, equity, and reconciliation needed to prevent violence in the first place (Galtung, 1996). Accordingly, true security must grow from the grassroots up; nurtured by education, strengthened by community trust, and sustained by inclusive governance.

Moreover, it's time to retire the lion's roar and learn from the dove's gentle coo — calm, collaborative, and impossible to silence with bullets. And let us not forget our brave hummingbird, flitting tirelessly to drop water on raging fires, reminding us that small, persistent acts of peace can put out the biggest flames. Consequently, here's the final stew recipe: throw out the burnt broth of brute force, stir in heaping ladles of peace education, sprinkle generously with community trust, garnish with youth-led digital activism, and let it simmer slowly over the warm fire of local ownership. Serve it picnic-style, under the shade of a baobab, with laughter instead of loud tugs-of-war because when we choose cooperation over confrontation, we trade bruised egos for stronger bonds.

Ultimately if Africa is to break free from the cycles of conflict, it must dare to think and act out of the box — one lesson, one conversation, one brave hummingbird at a time. After all, as every wise African grandmother would say: *if you want a good stew, stop throwing stones in the pot and maybe invite the neighbours over for a taste of peace while you're at it.*

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