




Chapter 17

Silencing the Guns in Africa from an Algerian Perspective

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Introduction

The report presented at the opening session of the annual African Union (AU) summit held in Addis Ababa in February 2020 under the theme ‘Silencing the Guns: Creating Conducive Conditions for Africa’s Development’ painstakingly admitted “the failure of the engagement taken in 2013 to put an end to all the wars in Africa by 2020” (Algérie-eco 2020). The AU extended this initiative until 2030 during the 14th extraordinary session of its assembly on Silencing the Guns held in December 2020 in Johannesburg, South Africa because of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the failure to consolidate peace, prevent violent extremism, foster democracy, and boost economic progress, has greatly hampered some gains in achieving peace and security in Africa.

Such a bitter observation was not surprising, as Africa’s ambitions seemed overwhelming from the outset. Indeed, the Lusaka Roadmap to End Conflicts, adopted in 2016, pledged not to pass the burden of conflicts to the next generation. According to

a report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the consecration of Silencing the Guns (STG) as the flagship initiative of the AU's Agenda 2063 is emphatically initiated "to end all wars, conflicts, and gender-based violence, and to prevent genocide" (UNDP 2021:5).

Africa has accounted for 47% of the total armed conflicts in the world, with 15 conflicts since the Addis Ababa summit on STG. It accounted also for 42 socio-political crises out of 100 recorded worldwide in 2021 (Relief Web 2022). Africa continues to struggle with non-state armed violence and transnational organised crime, as non-state actors are responsible for more than 75% of these conflicts worldwide. As a result of these conflicts, African civilians and armed groups own over 40 million small arms and light weapons, while state institutions hold fewer than 11 million (Musau 2019). In addition, arms trade and circulation are widespread, due to the looting by militias of the huge arsenal estimated at 23 million arms left after the tragic downfall of the Libyan regime in 2011, the multiplication of terrorist groups, foreign military interventions, and the smuggling of weapons into the African continent.

State conflicts, tribal violence fuelled by 'ethno-religious' cleavages, political and economic tensions, as well as terrorism have not only been widespread, but have left thousands of human casualties in the Sahel-Sahara, Horn of Africa, and Great Lakes regions. As of 31 March 2023, there were approximately 11.71 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the region – mainly in Burundi, Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan. This is despite sustained efforts displayed by African countries, the AU's Peace and Security Council, and foreign military assistance. For instance, the deadliest state-based conflict in Africa in 2021 – between the Ethiopian government and the rebel group Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) – caused more than 8 600 killed in the same year (Statista 2023). Moreover, a report released by the Global Peace Index in 2022 revealed that Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, and Somalia ranked among the top ten countries worldwide most impacted by terrorism (The Armed Conflict Survey 2022).

Definitions of armed conflicts are complex, varied, and somehow contradictory. However, the nature, impact, and logic of conflicts considered here are state-based conflicts. Such conflicts are characterised by contested disputes over government and/or territory, involving the use of armed force and with at least one party being a state, to use the definition proposed by Júlia Palik (2002). This categorisation falls within conflicts that erupted between African countries, usually over border disputes or regional leadership rivalries. Non-state conflicts, not involving the direct implication of states, refer to what we label “aggregate violence” (Iratni 2023). This notion pertains literally to a specific category that was formed by several separate elements. In sociological terms, this notion refers to a group, a class, or a cluster and broadly to socio-occupational aggregated individuals that share similar kinds of occupation. This aggregate category pertains to collective groups using non-peaceful means to attain political objectives, to impose ideological values and behaviours, or to seek economic interests and social advantages. Thus, tribal conflicts and terrorism fall into the category of violent aggregate interests.

Another type of conflict, omitted by Palik’s study and neglected by other researchers and writings engaging global conflicts in Africa, pertains to liberation struggles or the fight against colonialism, as highlighted by the case of Western Sahara. This issue has been the focus of Algeria’s concerns with the persistence of tensions and the potential risks of instability in the Maghreb-Sahel region. Thus, the growing insecurity in Africa that threatens the foundations of the states but also their citizens and undermines the economic and social progress of their peoples has incited AU, and other continental or regional institutions to strive for the eradication of arms from the African continent. From the Lusaka roadmap incepted in 2016 to the AU summit held in Addis Ababa in February 2020, the issue of Silencing the Guns has been imperative, and a source of hope for all African states, peoples, and civil societies to put an end to conflicts, violence, and political instability on the continent.

The objective of the AU’s initiative is ultimately to make Africa a hub for economic development and an active actor in the

world geostrategic configuration that is emerging from the rapid and deep international mutations induced by the destructive COVID-19, and the disastrous war in Ukraine. Africa has certainly the resources to meet these challenges, especially as this continent is witnessing a demographic bulge. In addition, the continent has recorded high rates of economic growth by some African countries in the last few years, and the world major powers may woo the African states in the light of the looming East/West confrontation.

It is noteworthy to recall that Algeria has incepted soft initiatives, through conciliation and reconciliation policies, offering opportunities for social and economic integration to those who took arms against the state. All these policies aimed to silence the guns in its territory for over a decade, following a violent upsurge that occurred in the late 1980s and fought terrorism alone, far from any support and in diplomatic isolation. In addition to operations intended to eradicate terrorist groups militarily, Algeria initiated the policy of National Reconciliation and Civil Concord in 2005 to permit the repentance of terrorist groups under some conditions (Algerian Ministry of Interior 2005). In parallel, it carried out a deradicalisation policy to prevent the brainwashing of youngsters by jihadist groups or their recruitment by terrorist cells based in the Middle East such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or Al-Qaeda.

Externally, Algeria has displayed intensive efforts to ensure peace and stability in the Maghreb region through its role as a decisive and responsible broker. It struck a peaceful settlement of the Malian crisis in 2015, and searched for a political solution to Libya's conflict, based on national reconciliation and inclusive dialogue, away from foreign meddling and military interference. Moreover, it has played a leading role in strengthening the Sahel-Sahara security mechanisms, consolidating the AU's Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), and inducing AU members to endorse its global strategy to fight terrorism, affiliated smuggling networks, and organised crime through military – but also political, economic, and cultural – means. As it appears, Algeria's perspective concerning the implementation of the AU's efforts to end conflicts and all forms of violence from the African continent yields somehow a coherent and persuasive approach, despite

the complexity of the security issues in Africa, their enduring character, and transnational impact.

This chapter encompasses three distinctive but intertwining analytical parts. The first part describes Algeria's conceptions of conflicts and organised transnational crime by focusing on Algerian criticisms against the propagation of radical Islam and its violent practices as well as against the colonial legacy, marked essentially by the long-standing and protracted conflict in Western Sahara. The second part reviews the contents, and the principles of the strategy Algeria has carried out to silence the guns through a combination of military approach and soft and pacific measures conducted through the policies of national reconciliation, youth deradicalisation, public awareness through education, and media dissemination. The third part delves into the appreciation and evaluation of the efforts invested by Algeria to reach a continent free of conflicts by consolidating regional and continental security mechanisms and implementing concrete measures to silence the guns in Africa.

Algeria's Perceptions of Conflicts and Organised Violence

Based on the perspectives of the Algerian leaders, religious extremism and its violent manifestations, and the issue of the decolonisation of Western Sahara, constituted the main sources of instability and tensions in the Maghreb region, as well as the main reason for the proliferation and the use of arms.

Religious Extremism and Jihadist Manifestations: Alien Ideologies

Given its Jacobin tendencies and social character, the Algerian state, ever since its independence in 1962, after a long-standing and bitter war against French colonialism, became omnipresent in the economic and cultural spheres. It retained a strict hold of religious public expressions, controlled the construction of mosques, and collected funds for charity purposes, notably by religious associations. Imams served as civil servants, and the conduct of Friday prayers came under the tight supervision

of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, while the assets (*habous*) of private religious associations were under public ownership and management.

When the violent rise of Islamist radicalism emerged in Algeria during the late 1980s, the authorities were caught off guard by the phenomenon. However, signs of religious extremism had already begun to surface subtly, spreading through proselytising discourse in educational institutions and the visible presence of Algerian youth adopting Afghan-inspired appearances. These public exposures were galvanised and influenced by the Islamist revolution in Iran (1979) and the return to Algeria of young Islamist militants who fought the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan that started in September of the same year. This was after their exposure to jihad precepts and guerrilla training from the Peshawar-based camps run by Taliban fighters. These Afghan-bred Islamists came to constitute the leading nucleus of the Algerian Islamic Groups (GIA), which engaged in violent actions in protest of the cancellation of the second round of the legislative elections in late 1991, according to the leaders of the Islamist movement (Boukraa 2009).

The Algerian rulers justified this cancellation by the declared intention of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) to set up a theocratic state and to ban secular expressions and democracy, which were regarded as 'impious' (*kufir*). The Algerian official perceived terrorism as the most serious threat to national security, a phenomenon alien to the religious and cultural values of Algerian society, without any similarities or links with the religion of the ancestors. From this perspective, the nature of the Algerian regime, illiteracy, youth unemployment, or economic crisis may not explain the causes of breeding terrorism. The ferment of terrorism lies in ideologies imported from the Middle East, whether through the elements who fought in Afghanistan and Iraq or through zealous preaching of Salafi theologians broadcasted by 'channel satellites' based in the Gulf countries. Salafism, deriving from Wahabism, a school of thought initiated by a Saudi Arabian preacher, a relative of the Saudi King, outlines an apparent attachment to the teachings of *salaf* (ancestors), and exalts an ascetic practice of religion. Many theorists of jihad

attributed the resort to violent actions to the precepts of this religious thought.

Algerian official rhetoric regarded Salafism as rigorous beliefs and rigid practices, not compatible with the Maliki rite familiar to the Maghreb people, ever since the arrival of Islam in this region in the late 7th Century. Malikism, a doctrine inspired by the teachings of Malik Ibn Anas (8th Century), sprung from the Muslim law practised in Medina during the era of the prophet Muhammad, which accords great importance to individual opinions. This ritual, which spread in north and sub-Saharan regions, and which expresses tolerance and simple religious practices, was melded with local culture, folklore, and way of thought, and mixed with *maraboutic* ritual teachings of brotherhood cells (Zawaya). Bouabdallah Ghoulamalah, Algerian minister of religious affairs, stated in 2012 that Algerians “are neither Salafi nor Shia” (Liberté 2012).

Moreover, the Algerian rulers accused foreign hands of being responsible for the intrusion of Salafism, and terrorist groups in their country, thereby undermining its stability. They elucidate why foreign powers singled out Algeria, citing its strategic geographical location and abundant oil and gas reserves, as well as its principled stance on global justice, anti-colonialism, and opposition to Western hegemony. Algeria has consistently advocated for just causes worldwide, resisting colonialism and condemning Israel’s aggressive policies against the Palestinian people.

The danger of Salafism does not consist in the radicalisation of the adepts of this ideology as such but in the risk of propagating intolerance, cultural regression, and ignorance that may undermine the foundations of Algerian Islam, which is considered as moderate and more open to other ways of thought. This type of obscurantism spread by Salafism seems worrying, as a survey conducted by the Arab Barometer revealed that 60% of those interviewed in selected Arab countries claimed their respect for sharia (Islamic law), and 55% would not approve the nomination of a woman to the position of president or prime minister (Iratni 2014).

The Western Sahara: A Remnant of Colonialism

During his call for thwarting the manoeuvres that seek to weaken the role of the AU in conflict resolution, Algerian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sabri Boukadoum maintained that “The non-elimination of the remnants of colonialism... still prevent us from achieving our goal, which consists in silencing guns in our continent” (Algerian Embassy 2021). In respect of colonial legacy, he referred to the issue of Western Sahara, the oldest colony in Africa (Ibid). Given its experience as a colony and its commitment to support the struggle of African peoples to recover their sovereignty, Algeria expressed its backing of the right of the Saharawi people for self-determination, following the declaration on decolonisation adopted by the United Nations in 1960 (Iratni 2015). It also strongly supported the resolution taken in December 1967, inviting Spain, as the colonial power, to take immediate measures, which led to the independence of Western Sahara.

After Spain’s refusal and denial to implement the UN mandate related to the referendum for self-determination in the Western Sahara, and Morocco’s takeover of this territory following the Madrid agreements of November 1975, Algeria – according to its principles – expressed its political support for the struggle of the Saharawi liberation movement, Polisario Front (PF). It also tried to help the Saharawi people to alter the *fait accompli* and claim the implementation of a referendum on the right of the Saharawi people for self-determination (Iratni 2014). For the Algerian leadership, the Western Sahara issue is a long-standing conflict between the Polisario Front and Morocco, and Algeria has nothing to do with this Spanish colonial legacy, as the Alawite Kingdom has repeatedly claimed in international forums.

Thus, they consider this conflict as a remnant of colonialism, which is contributing to the risks of destabilising the Maghreb region through armed clashes involving, intermittently, the Moroccan troops and the guerrillas of the Polisario Front, as occurred in 2021–2022. In addition, riots and violent clashes erupted between Saharawi youngsters and Moroccan security forces in the occupied territory of Western Sahara in 2005 and at the Gdeim Izik camp in October 2010. The well-known

American scholar Noam Chomsky considered this Saharawi long-month upsurge as the first manifestation of the “Arab Spring revolutions” (Democracy Now 2011). Algeria’s support for the Saharawi people’s cause increased after the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) officially recognised the self-proclaimed Saharawi Republic (SADR) in 1976.

Western Sahara may become a hot issue if Africa becomes the theatre of the looming East/West Cold War politics, as a possible consequence of the Ukraine–Russia crisis. Some compelling evidence for the renewal of Cold War hostility already exists, such as the renewed and ongoing violent skirmishes between the Polisario Front and the Moroccan forces that started in 2021. Thus, the international community should make more efforts to find a solution to the Western Sahara conflict. The AU, which has formally recognised the Saharawi Republic as a full member in its Constitutive Act, and which supports the role of the UN in achieving the decolonisation of Western Sahara, must urge the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to assume its full responsibility to implement the Saharawi people’s right to self-determination. It should also facilitate the empowerment of the mandate of the United Nations Mission Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), including the respect of human rights in parts of Western Sahara under Moroccan domination. Algerian Prime Minister Abdelaziz Djerad declared at the AU summit held in December 2020, that the objectives of “silencing the guns” cannot be actualised without “the eradication of the residues of colonialism in Africa” and “allowing the Saharawi people to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination through a free and fair referendum in the Sahara” (Hekking 2020).

A Global and Coherent Strategy Against Internal Violence

The strategy developed by Algeria to combat terrorism and its affiliated networks of smuggling arms, drugs, and human beings combines military means that are regarded as necessary, as well as soft measures that focus on eradicating the motivations for

terrorism and organised crime through socio-economic and cultural interventions (Iratni 2017).

An Imperative Military Option

Given the insurrection and violent terrorism that marked nearly the whole 1990s – which resulted in thousands of casualties, economic damages amounting to \$20 billion, and a traumatic experience for a whole generation – the Algerian leadership fought terrorism militarily and ‘with no mercy’ until its eradication, according to official rhetoric. This struggle proved strenuous because of a context marked by a serious and decade-long economic crisis, due to the dwindling of oil revenues, which constituted Algeria’s main source of foreign revenue. Algeria also fought terrorism alone, as its neighbours and foreign powers demonstrated no interest in the phenomenon.

Therefore, the fight against terrorism became continuous, through the mobilisation of Algerian security forces to mainly secure national borders and stop the incursions of terrorist groups from northern neighbouring countries (Libya and Tunisia) and from the Sahara (Niger, Mali, and Mauritania). Algeria confronted an ‘arc of fire’, constituted by the spread of terrorism in the Maghreb and the Sahel-Sahara region. It still faces some incursions from terrorist groups with links to Mali. These groups include the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, and Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimeen, an umbrella group formed after the unification of the Sahara Branch of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Al-Murabitoun, Ansar al-Dine, and the Macina Liberation Movement.

In general, smuggling networks for goods, food items, and even substances like hashish are widespread in cross-border practices. However, the alarming trend indicates that terrorist groups are increasingly involved in the trafficking of arms and humans. The former (smugglers) have the expertise and knowledge of the location and benefit from local complicities, while the latter (terrorists) have gun power and money coming from ransoms obtained in exchange for the release of hostages, who are mainly Europeans. These smuggling networks threaten

the stability of the borders situated in the east of Algeria (Tunisia and Libya), in the western parts (Morocco), and in the Sahara (Mauritania, Mali, and Niger). Armed groups not only use weapons to protect themselves and sustain their illicit activities, but also significantly harm the national economy. Their actions diminish public funds allocated to subsidise essential household items such as milk, semolina, flour, cooking oil, and gasoline, which are critical for many citizens.

Algeria consolidates its military posts along its long and porous borders with troops, mobile patrols, electric surveillance devices, sophisticated cameras, and drones, to efficiently combat terrorist groups, the smuggling of arms and drugs, and human trafficking. Such measures enabled the Algerian security forces to eliminate or arrest jihadists as well as smugglers, and seize large quantities of arms coming from Sub-Saharan African countries. Since the January 2013 attack on the gas plant of Tiguentourine in the Saharan region of Algeria, the military reported the elimination of more than 6 000 terrorists between 2007 and 2021, of which 1 500 had different nationalities and diverse ideologies (Abid 2013).

According to statements issued by the Ministry of National Defence, Algerian security forces have eliminated 43 terrorists and arrested 593 elements involved in all kinds of assistance and support to terrorist groups in 2021-22. They also seized five batteries and a Strella 2M anti-aircraft missile system, 37 Kalashnikov rifles, 507 rifles of different types, 29 automatic guns, and five armatures for 60 mm-calibre mortar shells during the same period (Abi 2013). Arms used in terrorist operations in Algeria, Mali, and Côte d'Ivoire since 2015 were imported from Poland, Lebanon, Bulgaria, and the former Libyan military arsenal. These various and remote sources of supplies highlight the transnational dimension of arms smuggling, which dangerously threatens the security and stability of African countries. Nevertheless, according to the official rhetoric, only a very few remnants of terrorist organisations may still be operating in Algeria, without engaging in military operations. Thus, terrorist threat remains a challenge for the country, especially from the Sahel-Saharan-based AQIM. Indeed, in an interview in March

2023, the emir of AQIM, Mossab Al-Annabi, warned of an attempt to resume attacks in Algeria (Nasr 2023).

The Use of Soft Power

The Algerian authorities resorted to political, social, and cultural measures to efficiently counter terrorism and affiliated smuggling of arms, drugs, and human beings. Algerian media reported the surrender of terrorists after the enactment of the Law of Clemency (*rahma*) in 2005, while the civil concord law, approved by referendum in September 2009, granted amnesty to repentant terrorists who had not been involved in rape, massacres, or bombings in public places (Ikram 2015). The repentant terrorists have benefited from social integration and other financial inducements. In contrast, the victims of the national tragedy (designated as families of killed terrorists and victims of terrorism, as well as the beneficiaries of persons declared missing in that period) have also benefited from the financial compensation. The law on national reconciliation had a resounding international echo, since some countries threatened by terrorism have expressed their interest to learn from the Algerian experience. The former UN Secretary-general Ban Ki-moon declared during a visit to Algiers in March 2016, “What I learned from the policy of *rahma* has impressed me. Rather than remaining divided, Algeria has become united and supportive” (Relief Web 2016).

On the cultural level, the Algerian authorities initiated a deradicalisation programme aimed at propagating the precepts of tolerant Islam through educative, penitentiary institutions and media channels to prevent youngsters from being brainwashed by Salafist propaganda. In this vein, Abdelkader Messahel Minister of Maghreb African Affairs and the Arab League declared in 2016 that the strategy adopted by the Algerian authorities has permitted “to counter efficiently the extremist discourse and its insidious effects, and sensibly reduced its impact on the society, the youth in particular”. He cited this to support the fact that “a heavily reduced number of foreign terrorist combatants were issued from Algeria” (Radio Algerie 2016).

On the socio-economic level, the Algerian authorities initiated some projects, including loans with low interest rates and fiscal incentives for the youth to set up small enterprises and combat unemployment and idleness. These achievements became possible thanks to the increasing foreign revenues due to the spiral of oil prices in the 2000–2014 period. However, it is worth mentioning that the Algerian authorities implemented these soft measures in 2005–2006 as a complement to the imperative use of military instruments against terrorism, well before the AU endorsed them during the 2010 decade.

A 2021–2022 report released by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) indicated that the Human Development Index (HDI) concerning Algeria has improved, as the country ranked 91 out of 191 countries, while the multidimensional poverty rate has decreased from 2.1% in 2013 to 1.4% in 2019 (AfDB 2023). The International Monetary Fund (IMF) expected the unemployment rate to reach 14.9% in 2022, according to the state-owned newspaper *El Moudjahid* (Demmad 2023). The Algerian government initiated a redundancy allocation for youngsters in 2021, which saw a regular increase in 2023. These facts concerned the period when Algeria, like other countries, faced harsh effects of COVID-19, and when the prices of oil (Algeria's main foreign earnings source) were dwindling, until a sudden rise resulting from the Ukraine–Russia war that started in March 2022.

Algeria's Contribution to Make Africa 'Free of Conflicts'

A statement from its foreign ministry confirmed that Algeria “subscribes to the realisation of the flagship project of the agenda 2063 on Silencing the Guns in Africa to achieve a continent free of conflict, and rid of the vestiges of colonialism” (MFA 2022). In this vein, Algeria participated actively in the implementation of this agenda, aiming at making Africa “integrated, peaceful and prosperous”, as well as a dynamic and influential actor in the world scene. Therefore, it contributed restlessly to consolidating regional as well as continental security mechanisms as developed

further below, and searching for specific measures to silence the guns in Africa. It contributed also to setting up and enhancing initiatives to ensure the economic and social development of the African continent.

Algeria did not send its army to intervene abroad or participate with contingents in the peacekeeping missions whether by the UN or the AU. This restriction referred to the Algerian security doctrine of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states. The amendment of the constitution in 2020 provided provisions for sending Algerian forces abroad under certain conditions, and in conformity with international legality (JORA 2020). However, Algerian troops participated in missions abroad, but only for strict humanitarian or logistic purposes.

Regional and Continental Security Arrangements

While regional co-operation in the security sector is imperative, Algeria appears resolute in utilising its capabilities without disregarding the contributions of the Sahel-Saharan countries. It also welcomes the participation of foreign powers as a complement, and not a substitution to the efforts of the Maghreb and Sub-Saharan States in fighting terrorism and transnational organised crime. Thus, Algeria has been the driving engine of co-ordinating the counter-terrorist operations in the Sahel-Sahara region through the Joint Command of the Chief of Staff set up with Mauritania, Niger, and Mali in 2021, and the Unity of Fusion and Liaison (UFL) to exchange information on terrorist groups.

Algeria tried to invigorate these structures to compensate for the weakness of the armies of its Sahel-Saharan partners in fighting terrorism, particularly in the context of the fragmentation of the G5 Sahel, comprising Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, and created under the auspices of France in 2015. In addition, a security vacuum has prevailed in the Sahel region following the progressive withdrawal of French forces, because they failed to eradicate terrorism despite the injection of more than 5 000 French troops, since their intervention in North Mali in 2013.

Algeria committed to the establishment and success of APSA, through its contribution to the North African Regional Capacity (NARC), a component of the African Standby Force.¹ This aimed at the rapid deployment of troops and a prompt response to crises occurring in Africa. Moreover, Algiers hosts the African Centre of Studies and Research on Terrorism (CAERT), which has provided the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) with valuable research on terrorism and religious extremism. Algeria also hosts the headquarters of African Police (AFRIPOL) to co-ordinate the actions of African Police institutions in the field of combating transnational crime. These two African institutions provide valuable information and data that contribute to peace and security on the continent. The country proposed to the AU 2021 summit a new approach to fighting terrorism, based on:

1. the completion of the second programme dedicated to fighting terrorism following the memorandum related to APSA, which Algeria proposed in its status of the AU's co-ordinator on security issues. The AU entrusted Algeria with this mandate because of the country's experience in fighting terrorism and transnational crime;
2. the activation of the African Fund to finance the fight against terrorism, and peacekeeping operations in Africa; and
3. the inducement of African countries to implement the resolutions adopted by the UN and AU through Algerian diplomatic impulse, which aims at criminalising the payment of ransoms to terrorist groups in exchange for the release of hostages, and freeing the sources that provide such financial and logistic facilities.

1 One of the authors of the chapter, Prof Iratni, was a member of a team of experts invited to attend a military parade carried out by NARC forces in Tripoli (Libya) in August 2010 in the framework of fieldwork to prepare a report on the African Union Liaison Officer in the domain of Peace and Security for the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC). The NARC forces 'were believed' to have moved to Egypt after the downfall of President Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, according to unconfirmed sources. In addition, this team of African experts visited, from April to August 2010, the headquarters, the military infrastructures, training centres, and the civilian components that were created.

Media reported that terrorists of the Movement of the Unicity and Jihad (MUJAO) had kidnapped seven Algerian diplomats in Gao, Northern Mali in April 2012 (*Al Jazeera* 2012), and requested Algeria to pay \$15 million and free Islamist militants detained in Algerian prisons in exchange for the release of the diplomats (*George Herald News* 2012). Media also reported that the terrorists killed two of the abducted diplomats and that Algeria refused to yield to blackmail and expressed its commitment to the principle of not paying ransom to terrorists. Algeria was also exasperated by the payment of ransoms to AQMI to liberate the French hostage Pierre Camatte in February 2010, and to Ansar Al Islam wa Al Muslimeen in 2022. Accordingly, Abdelaziz Djerad, the Algerian prime minister at the time, expressed Algeria's worries concerning "the pursuit of transferring huge funds to terrorist groups, based on the payment of ransoms in exchange for the liberation of hostages. This practice undermines our efforts to fight terrorism" (*Ambassade d'Algérie à Bruxelles* 2020).

Boosting Continental Integration

With other AU members, Algeria launched the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), now the African Union Development Agency (AUDA), to free the continent from conflict and poverty through development projects initiated in the framework of the Agenda 2063 horizon, to mark the centennial anniversary of the foundation of AU. It contributed to setting up voluntary self-assessment of governance, as prescribed by the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). It supported other AU members to establish the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), to facilitate the increase of trade exchanges between African countries and the emergence of a common African market. To deliver on continental integration, Algeria initiated projects such as the framework of APSA and assisted through the following interventions:

1. The Trans-Sahara Highway, otherwise called the African Unity Road, links Algiers to Kano in Nigeria.
2. The Trans-Saharan Gas Pipeline links gas fields in Nigeria to European markets through Algerian territory. Such a scheme, with a capacity of 30 billion cm/y of natural gas, proved

particularly vital in light of the European need for energy due to the loss of Russian supplies because of the Ukraine-Russia war.

3. The Trans-Saharan Optical Fiber Backbone network is an underground fibre-optic link connecting Algeria with its Sub-Saharan neighbours, such as Mali, Niger, Nigeria, and Chad (Project Portal (AfDB 2023)).
4. Algeria also financed small projects for unemployed youth in the Sahel region.
5. It also provided debt relief to African countries and pledged 1\$ billion at the AU summit held in February 2023 to finance development projects in Africa.

Peaceful Settlement of Conflicts

During a gathering with lecturers from the Faculty of Political Science at the University of Algiers, Abdelkader Messahel, the Algerian minister of foreign affairs reiterated his popular saying, “We know how conflicts start, but we do not know how they end”. Given the complexity of conflicts, their acuity, unpredictable outcomes, and the multiplicity of belligerent parties, as reflected in Algeria’s security doctrine, the best way to solve them relates to the rejection of foreign meddling and their military interventions.

Tribal tensions, power rivalries, scramble over natural resources, border disputes, and contradictory stakes of foreign powers explained the eruption of conflicts, their violent aspects, and sometimes-perennial character in Africa, including Libya. In the case of the Libyan civil war, Algerian diplomacy displayed intensive mediation efforts, favoured a peaceful settlement, and called for national reconciliation between belligerent parties. Algeria encouraged a regional solution, preferably within the AU’s experts on Libya, which Algeria helped to set up. It also favoured mediation within the framework of the UN to avoid an internal power scramble and foreign interference in Libya (Iratni 2022). It also called for an embargo on arms provided by foreign powers to conflicting parties in the Libyan crisis.

In the quest to facilitate peace in Libya, a conference was held in Berlin in January 2020, “to unequivocally, and fully

respect, and implement the arms embargo established by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1970/2011, including the proliferation of arms from Libya, and call on all international actors to do the same” (The Berlin Conference 2020). While the foreign powers continue to transfer arms to Libyan factions, the UN Secretary-general has accused them of breaching this embargo. In addition, the IRINI operation, launched by the European Union (EU) to enforce the arms embargo on Libya, failed to contribute to finding a peaceful solution to the Libyan crisis.

Algeria continues to plead for a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Western Sahara, according to the provisions of the UN resolutions consecrating the rights of the Saharawi people for self-determination. It also encourages direct negotiations between Morocco and the Polisario Front to implement the UN resolutions. Algeria chaired an international committee charged with following up on the implementation of the Algiers Peace Agreements to maintain the territorial integrity of Mali, satisfy the demands of the populations in the northern parts of the country, and stem the social ferment for the proliferation of terrorist groups and transnational organised crime. The most resounding success achieved by Algerian diplomacy was the effort towards finding a peaceful solution to the Malian crisis, reconciling the belligerent parties, and striking the June 2015 inclusive dialogue in Algiers.

Cultural Initiatives

Algeria launched religious training for students from the Sahel-Saharan region at the University of Adrar, close to the Malian border. It also opened an Islamic Institute in Tamanrasset, close to the frontier with Niger. It helped to create the Sahel League of Ulema (comprising preachers of Muslim law, preachers, and imams) to extirpate religious extremism from African societies by promoting the precepts of tolerant Islam.

Silencing the Guns in Africa: The Need for More Relevance and Interactivity

The dissemination of arms in Africa exacerbates conflicts at the upstream level; however, there are deep-rooted structural factors involved. The Silencing the Guns initiative seems not enough to get rid of conflicts in Africa; there must be a concerted attempt at eradicating smuggling and illicit trade of weapons and imposing an embargo on arms through UN resolutions. The crux of the problem resides in the necessity to extirpate the ferment breeding these violent crises, as well as to initiate public awareness campaigns, media coverage, and educational programmes to reveal the danger arms may pose to the foundations of states, the cohesion of societies, and human security.

The Relevance of Factors Increasing the Proliferation of Arms

To silence the guns, countries with industrial and military establishments have the duty and the obligation to respect arms embargoes. In transferring arms to Africa, these countries only enable the language of guns to prevail for so long, at the expense of peace and stability in the continent. By the same token, the manufacturing of various kinds of small arms and light weapons as well as homemade and artisanal production of weapons by 22 African countries remains a serious obstacle to ending the proliferation of arms in Africa. Put simply, having even a small weapon is always a public danger and a threat to the security of people.

At the downstream level, African regimes should be committed to initiating democratic processes, conducting fair elections, efficiently managing national economies, fighting corruption, settling border disputes, and reducing financial and military dependence on foreign powers. These conditions may seem titanic, but guns are not an option. The Silencing the Guns initiative might make limited headway if African leaders do not consistently fulfil their commitment to initiate these reforms, even if gradually. There is an urgent need to 'silence' the causes that feed conflicts to avoid arms shooting.

African regimes have a great responsibility and duty to respect the AU's engagement and fulfil its resolutions and recommendations. They should be committed to reporting progress on the implementation of the first ten-year plan of Agenda 2063, and assess achievements made in the framework of Africa's Development (NEPAD) towards sustained development for African people. They must stick to voluntary self-assessment of governance as prescribed by the APRM, and respect the principle against unconstitutional changes of government in Africa. Given the sluggish progress made in implementing the AU's recommendations regarding good governance, human rights, and peaceful power transitions, many programmes initiated by the AU, such as the Silencing the Guns initiative, face delays in meeting their deadlines. Since August 2020, power has changed unconstitutionally eight times in seven African countries: Gabon (August 2023), Niger (July 2023), Burkina Faso (January 2022), Sudan (October 2021), Guinea (September 2021), Chad (April 2021), and Mali (August 2020 and May 2021).

Since April 2023, Sudan has been embroiled in conflict as a civil war broke out between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF). The conflict concerns a thirst for power by the leaders of the two factions of the military: General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and Mohamed Hamdan "Hemedti" Dagalo. The case of Sudan is particularly significant and appalling, not only because of the number of victims but also because of power rivalries that occurred at the expense of the political stability and economic development of this already poor country. In addition, competing interests of foreign powers may lead to external military interventions in Sudan, and a possible *de facto* fragmentation of this state, as it happened in Libya.

Not Enough Light on the Silencing the Guns Initiative

Although north African countries, especially Algeria, have been very active in searching for a peaceful solution in Libya, the media in the region has not shed enough light on the STG initiatives, as the people and even some of the warring factions did not get sufficient information about the issue. In the Algerian media, for instance, there are regular reports on the situation in Libya

and security aspects are widely covered, including the massive arms trafficking along the common borders. The media probably underestimated the STG initiative, and even considered it as lacking appropriate details; however, the devil is in the details. After all, the media have a substantial role in raising awareness and sensitising the public on important issues.

The media in North Africa has advocated peaceful solutions through articles and reports. It is important to remember the appalling role of Radio des Mille Collines in the Rwandan genocide in 1994. Although the concepts of peace media and peace journalism are very new in the culture of this region, they are, in practice, gaining ground and understanding. There are now several publications of articles and commentaries, and the broadcast of television and radio programmes, featuring experts and politicians, drawing public attention to the dangerous impact of this conflict on peace and security in the region.

At the continental level, the educational and informative side, through social media tools, media conferences, and press releases, seems narrowly focused and underdeveloped. One proposal involves creating a comprehensive contact list encompassing various forms of African media and subsequently providing it with the required content. Moreover, there is a need to inject regional pools for rapid information flows across the continent. Stories on the media platforms need to be more relevant, and powerful in highlighting the virtues of the state of peace as an opportunity for development, security, and development. Ahead of Agenda 2063, the African continent must indulge in ending images of conflict, deprivation, and violence. A united and strong Africa, utterly engaged in respecting democratic values, social justice, and press freedom, constitutes the best impetus for silencing the guns and launching a new era of Afro-optimism.

Conclusion

The former AU High Representative for Silencing the Guns in Africa, Algerian Ramtane Lamamra, whose unit is now chaired by His Excellency the Ambassador of Ghana Mohamed Ibn Chambers,

points out that “notable progress has been made in conflict prevention, management and resolution in Africa, but several African countries remain caught in the vicious circle of violent conflict and its deadly consequences” (UN 2020). This vicious circle remains fuelled by colonial legacy, the lack of democracy, bad governance, ill management of the national economy, corruption, as well as foreign meddling in African affairs.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have exacerbated famine, which proved the most dangerous threat to the survival of millions of Africans, and perhaps the current catalyst for more violent conflicts, and more use of arms in Africa. Therefore, there is an urgency to tackle food crises and climate disasters. Otherwise, Africa would face a catastrophe and popular upsurges, which even guns would be impotent to calm down. As UN Secretary-general António Guterres, speaking at the Global Food Security Call to Action in May 2022, warned, “If we do not feed people, we feed conflict”. Keeping the guns silenced must not be the concern of the AU and African state actors alone, but it must be the leitmotif of African citizens, as they are the first to suffer from violent conflicts, and the first to make sacrifices – even the most sacred and vital of them, including the loss of human lives. Therefore, civil societies through youth, women, and corporatist organisms should participate in public awareness campaigns, disseminate information, and initiate their proper projects to contribute to consolidating peace and promoting economic development.

The Algerian perspective, as a positive contribution to the Silencing the Guns initiative, delivers instructive lessons which other African states may follow. The Algerian experience stems from a long and bitter fight against terrorism and affiliated networks of smuggling, trafficking, and organised crime. It was not the fruit of a utopian design, but an expression of a generous and voluntary contribution to make the African continent free from violent conflicts and economic backwardness. The nomination of Ahmed Attaf as the new Algerian minister of foreign affairs in March 2023 may be a good indication and an

enhancement of Algeria's engagement in the STG project because he held this post during the so-called 'Black Decade'.²

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