

Civil-Military Relationship During COVID-19

Turning Crisis into
Opportunities

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**FRIEDRICH
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Summary

The book "The soldier and the state: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations" by Samuel Huntington remains one of the classics on the Civil-Military Relations (CMR). The author argues on the need for the military establishment to be subject to civil control through diverse checks and balances on their procedures, regulations and budgeting. Civil-Military Relations(CMR) in Nigeria as a concept and a practice continues to take different trajectories as the relationship between the civil society and the military are affected by developmental issues such as insecurity, conflicts, human security, public safety and democratic control.

As Nigeria's democratic experience continues to grow and mature, the need for legislative and political control of the military, especially after many years of military rule, are not only desirable but is the best practice in most democratic societies in the world. However, CMR in Nigeria is not without some teething problems which have continued to affect the relationship and cooperation between the military and the civil society. With current issues of terrorism, banditry, communal violent conflicts, kidnapping and other forms of insecurity, the military is deployed to either support the Nigeria Police force or other para-military and security agencies. The inadequate number of the police, as well as the inability to deal with some internal security challenges, means that the military is deployed continuously to takeover such assignments.

With the outbreak of COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria just like all around the world, the military was deployed to support in maintaining national lockdown, and like in character it is known for, there were many human rights violations such as assaults and killings of unarmed civilians. Therefore, this policy brief looks at the concepts, ideas, failures and recommendation for a useful CMR especially during complex emergencies like the COVID-19 Lockdown.

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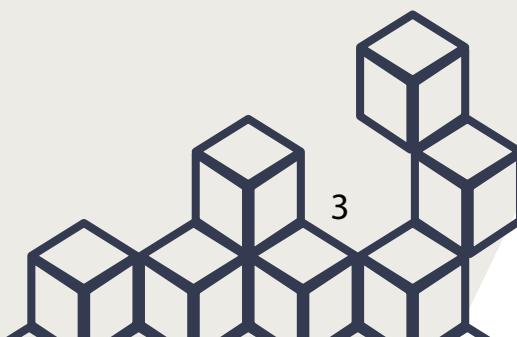
Introduction

Nigeria, as a democratising state, is caught in the web of balancing civil control over its military, which has over the years dominated its political space. With the growing insecurity and conflicts in the country such as insurgency, cultism, kidnapping, vandalism, terrorism and armed banditry, the presence of the military in the civilian spaces and activities continue to grow. While the military is invited to help in providing security and safeguard the public spaces, their relationship with the citizens in many cases have turned sour, as in some cases, the fundamental rights or the constitutional rights of the citizens are either breached or violated.

Civil-Military relations have continued to be debated by researchers, policy experts and Civil Society Organisation as well as military establishments across the world. The various ideas and relationships that exist between civilians and military authorities have made it context-specific, as the relationship between the two is rooted in structures such as democracy, historical, constitutionalism, orientation, obedience to the rule of law, etc. Therefore, civil-military relations afford that approach or method which allows the civil society and the military to relate and co-exist in an atmosphere of mutual respect, trust, understanding and control, especially the civil control over the military.

With the return to democratic rule in 1999, the idea of civil control and the civil-military relationship has continued to grow, especially with more demands for less military encroachment into civil spaces. The ever-presence of the military in security engagements that require less of military presence and involvement has continued to soar the relationship between civil-citizens and military-citizens, as well as the relationship between the military and other paramilitary security actors. In turn, the situation has continued to affect the needed cooperation between the civil society and the military, as well as a reduction in trust amongst them.

The emergence of COVID-19 Pandemic globally was another test of the relationship between civil society and the military. With the deployment of the Nigerian military in many states, they were easily co-opted to work with other security agencies to enforce the lockdown across the country. This situation resulted in a violation of the fundamental human rights of many citizens to the extent of many been killed by security operatives. The implication of this is an apparent failure in strengthening and fostering civil-military relations which are based on dialogue, mutual respect, accountability and rules of engagement.



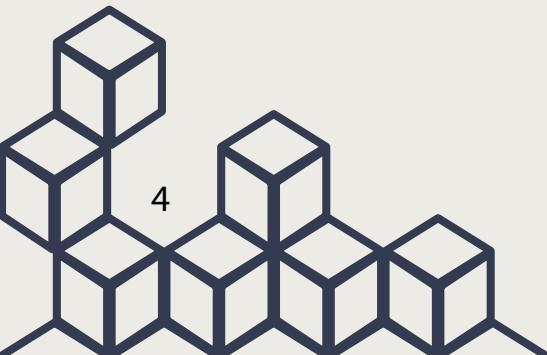
In the light of the above, especially with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and role the military is playing in the civilian space, a virtual meeting of stakeholders consisting of academics, policymakers, civil society and Non-governmental organisation personnel, as well as serving and retired security officers were assembled on August 12, 2020, by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung(EFS) and The Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC), with co-funding from the European Union. Under their discourse programme, Multi-Stakeholder Consultative Forum on Peace and Security, invited experts examined and brainstormed on the issue of "Civil-Military Relations during COVID-19: Turning Crisis into Opportunities".

Two main papers were presented during the discussion; Understanding the relevant CMR Instruments Available for Engagements to Foster New Normal by Non-state Actor by Gen. Ishola Williams(Rtd.) and The Challenges of Civil-Military Relations During and Post-COVID-19 Era by Dr Gbemisola Animasaun. The discourse was moderated by Dr Ndu Nwokolo.

Therefore, this policy brief presents the ideas that came out of the presentations and various debates on the civil-military relations in Nigeria and how to re-set or turn the bad relationship into opportunity especially in this era of COVID-19 which the military are involved in many security activities aimed at slowing down the spread of the Pandemic.

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Conceptualising & Re-Conceptualising

Civil-Military Relations

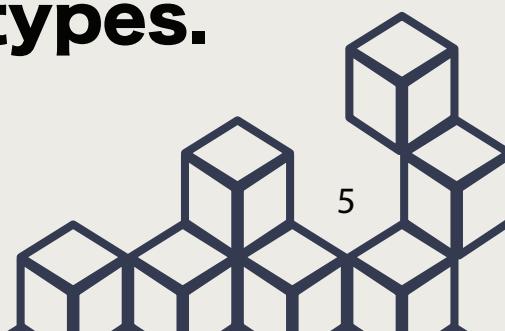
The Civil-Military relations (CMR) concept has many meanings, definitions and explanations. Some apparent similarities among the various reports are that strong democracies have a good relationship between the civil authority and the military. It is based on trust, accountability, parliamentary and civilian oversights. On the other hand, weak democracies like Nigeria have a relationship with trust deficient, lack of accountability and poor civilian and parliamentary directions.

In some of these weak democracies, poor civilian oversights mean that military activities are often shaded away from civilian authorities who should know or control their actions.

In many countries, such as in Nigeria, this emanated from the involvement of the military in politics and control of state power which influenced their perceptions and orientations of thinking and feeling superior over and above all institutions in the state including the civil authority. With many years gone, especially with the return to civil democracy, the emotions and perception have remained the same, and the military overtly has remained visible and feared. According to Oshita(2019), “the contemporary viewpoint of the civil perception of the military supports the deconstruction of the iron-curtain impairing effective civil-military relations due to the residue of the old stereotypes”.

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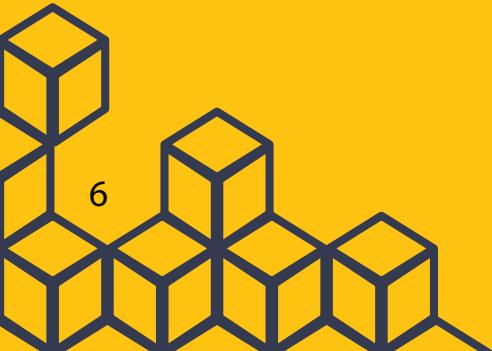


As explained in his presentation, Gen. Williams pointed out that CMR in Nigeria is affected by the politicisation of the military establishment. This politicisation has continued to affect the trust that exists between civil society and the military, thereby leading to a blurred relationship between enforcement and public safety. In countries with recent history of military rule and emerging democracy, there is also this “psychology of superiority or service” by the military over and above others. This situation makes them see their service as more significant than others. Changing this thinking remains one of the solutions to solving the frosty civil-military relations.

Explaining CMR, Dr. Animasawun conceptualised it as the institutionalisation and enforcing of civil control over the military institution. He said that the two agencies important in the control of the military are the legislature and the Ministry of Defence(MoD). The academics further opined that CMR in Nigeria is subjective when political and ruling class crafts the engagement of the military. If there is disregard for the legislature and the MoD by the military, it, in turn, affects the control of the civil society over the military. Furthermore, it is good to know that complex emergencies like pandemics, conflicts and terrorism shapes CMR, and where operational and strategic activities are not well designed, the relationship between the civil society and the military are affected.

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TN Sense & Commons

Turning Crisis to Opportunities

The character and nature of Civil-Military Relation in Nigeria is often said to be anchored on the historical evolution of the military. This is often linked to its emergence as a colonial force or military. Many scholars frequently claim that the relationship should be traced from the pre-colonial relationship between the various ethnic nationalities as they fought against each other, to the colonial relationship that had the British colonial authority use the military for subjugating the people. With independence came the military coups and countercoups, which brought the military into political space and allowing them to rule the country and determine the development of the country. The period the military occupied the political leadership authority in the country, 1966-1979, 1983-1999, actually defined the relationship between the civil society and the military, allowing the military to rise above civil authority and less subordinated to the civil society.

Proactive institutions over the world are readily poised to turning crisis into opportunities. The Pandemic and its containment measures have presented a chance to deepen the estranged civil-military relations in Nigeria. However, it could have also been an opportunity to enhance fruitful collaborations between the two.

Making CMR work during the Pandemic

Undeniably, the socio-economic stress of the Pandemic have been impactful on many Nigerians in terms of jobs losses, salary cuts and stagnated businesses. On the other hand, already stretched thin from the rising insecurity across the country and a backlog of unimplemented reforms, Nigeria's military outfits were expected to perform new roles in enforcing the COVID-19 restrictions. As discussed earlier, civil-military relations have continually waned ; mainly as a result of military high-handedness in dealing with civilians and other reported cases of brutality.

The noticeable leeway the military has in enforcing COVID-19 guidelines have opened up new cases of brutality that further worsen civil-military relations in the country. The National Human Rights Commission said it had received and documented 105 complaints of incidents of human rights violations perpetrated by security forces in 24 of Nigeria's 36 states as of April 2020. About 18 people were killed during that timeline.

The coronavirus lockdown measures was an opportunity for the military to regain public favour through professional conducts and other acts of benevolence that might cushion the effect of the Pandemic and its realities on people. Due to lack of information, the familiarity

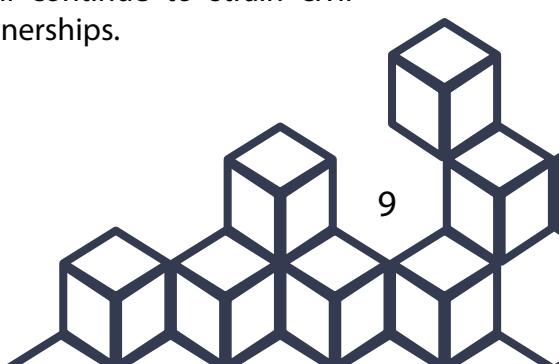


gap exists between the military and society as evidenced in people's questioning of military deployment during the lockdown. The government must invest in public sensitisation on military responsibilities and engagements as it will plug general ignorance and promote mutual help in the course of securitisation.

Generally, the military is expected to protect the sovereignty of the country and defend it against external aggression. However, this function has been more complicated as the Nigerian military are also deployed internally to secure hotspots and maintain law and order. The military's high-handedness in performing these internal roles have created a perception of suppression and brutality amongst the Nigerian public. Information deficits and fake news proliferation is a common feature of how the world is living with the novel coronavirus. Community sensitisation about COVID-19 would have opened an avenue for civil-military engagements that will focus on areas of community needs and collaboration. These conversations will help to close the widening gap between military and society and ultimately improve local partnerships.

For instance, a crime wave was projected to scale up due to loss of income sources, and military deployment would be instrumental in securitising areas, especially as ungoverned rural communities are facing violent attacks. The deployment of military personnel should have aimed at bringing security closer to the people while still ensuring adherence to the coronavirus guidelines.

Again, the military failed to use the deployment at the time of crisis as a learning field for its personnel to practice emotional intelligence and professional conducts. The conduct of the military during the lockdown measures have exposed the challenges in the security sector in terms of collaborating with the public in proper securitisation and maintenance of law and order in the face of crisis. During an emergency, rather than a strictly kinetic approach, military efforts should also target non-combative measures of supporting target populations as it can improve the outcome of military operations. Security is the business of all. Therefore, continued alienation of the public through brutality and coercion will continue to strain civil-military partnerships.



RECOMMENDATIONS



As the military continues to be an integral part of Nigeria's internal security, especially with the growing insecurity in the country and shortage of police officers and other paramilitary officers to match such rise, there should be a deliberate policy at developing well-structured communicative channels and understanding between the civil society and the military. Such structure will help in promoting the relationship between the two, as it will build confidence, trusts, mutual empathy and more importantly helps in promoting civil authority control of the military.



With COVID-19 as a complex emergency, the involvement of the military shapes CMR, and this can go either way depending on the way the military conducts their activities or engagement. Therefore, we need to plan the role the military should play in complex emergencies before they are deployed into public spaces.

There is the need for a continuous training and re-training of military personnel on CMR, especially, when they are to engage in civil-controlled or civilian-dominated engagements such as enforcing the national lockdown on COVID-19. For example, the nationwide lockdown on COVID-19 had its psychological, economic, cultural, social and other implications on ordinary citizens which the military personnel engaged to carry out those functions are supposed to understand and internalised before engaging in them. Such training will help them to implore their best judgement and empathy while handling every situation.





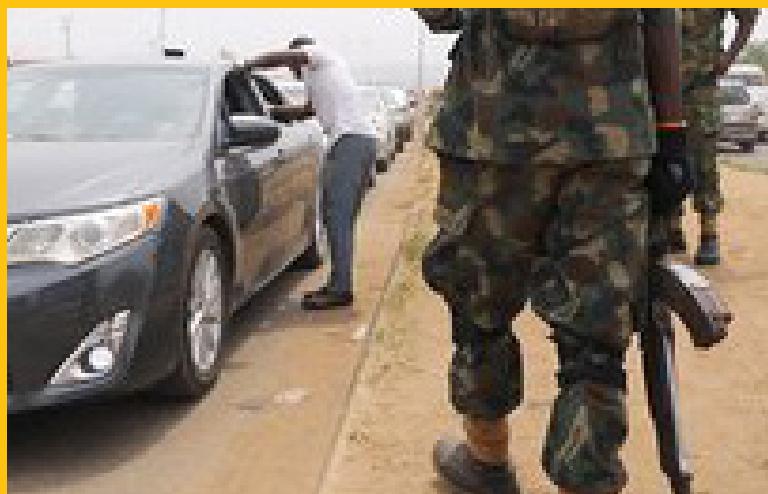
With COVID-19, it is evident that the gulf between civil society and the military have not closed in any form or manner. More importantly, accountability and transparency is a huge issue in CMR, and it needed to be solved. The military feels less accountable to the civil society and this, in many ways, affects how they react to civilian controlled projects. There were cases of order and counter-order on instructions and laid down a rule for executing the lockdown. In future, once military officers are in civilian projects, they should take orders only from the civilian authority in charge of the project or programme.



Security Agencies especially the military are part of governance and must come under political control. With such understanding, it is easier to make security people-centred, sustainable, and accountable. Every public safety engagements or enforcements should be designed to benefit the citizens and to do this, there should be stakeholder analysis and mapping to determine what the citizens want and how best to approach or deliver it.

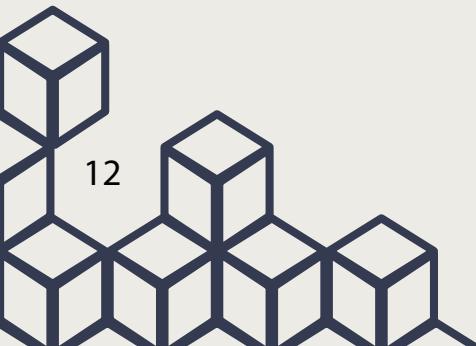


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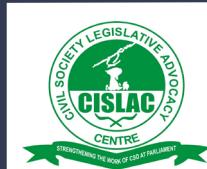
Conclusions

The actions and inactions of the military in enforcing COVID-19 guidelines is a call to action. It is an eye-opener to the character of the army, especially in crisis locations and violent hotspots such as the theatres of war in the northeast and northwest regions. Many policy actors have faced a constant headache of understanding the factors widening the relationship gap between the military and society. Reports from the COVID-19 lockdown have made it more evident that chaotic displays were not mainly due to lax COVID-19 guidelines but more about classical systemic and operational inadequacies in the military. This should prompt comprehensive military reforms focusing on corruption, remunerations, training and operations (mostly the use of deadly force against unarmed civilians). Nigeria's military has not entirely moved away from the military regime characterised by military suppression of civilians. Military reforms must focus on remaking the military into a more people-friendly and oriented outfit rather than employing an us-versus-them approach.



Notes

1. Huntington, S.P(1957). *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and the Politics of Civil-military Relations*, Cambridge Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press
2. CLEEN Foundation (2016), *Fostering Civil-Military Dialogue in Nigeria: Project Profile*, P.1
3. Oshita O.(2019) "Understanding some dynamics of Civil-Military Relations in Nigeria" in Abdullahi and Olofin(ed) *Deepening Civil- Military Relations For Effective Peace-Building and Democratic Governance in Nigeria*. CLEEN Foundation, Abuja.
4. Williams, I.(2020). Paper presented for the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung(FES) and The Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC)- Civil-Military Relations during COVID-19: Turing Crisis into Opportunities, "Understanding the relevant CMR Instruments Available for Engagements to Foster New Normal by Non-state Actor" held in Abuja, 12 August.
5. Animasaun, G(2020). Paper presented for the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung(FES) and The Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC)- Civil-Military Relations during COVID-19: Turing Crisis into Opportunities, "The Challenges of Civil-Military Relations During and Post-COVID-19 Era" held in Abuja, 12 August.



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