



# **Issues of Peace and Security**

**Essays in Honour of Major-General Charles B. Ndiomu**

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Edited by  
DA Briggs and JG Sanda



**ISSUES OF PEACE AND SECURITY  
IN NIGERIA**

Essays In Honour of  
Major General Charles B Ndiomu

Edited by  
**D.A. Briggs and J.G. Sanda**

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Essays In Honour of  
Major General Charles B Ndiomu

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**Major General Charles Bebeye Ndiomu**



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# PEACE BUILDING FOR CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: INFORMATION TYPOLOGY FOR EARLY WARNING MECHANISMS IN NIGERIA

**Benedict A. Oladele**

## Introduction

A primary responsibility of governance in ancient as in contemporary times has been the provision of security for the citizenry on a sustained basis. This responsibility provides for the foundation of growth and development of the society. But then the existence of a relative level of security in any environment does not in itself suggest the absence of conflict which Imobighe (1993:37) described as “a condition of disharmony” or the “direct result of a clash of interests by the parties involved in an international process.” In essence, individuals, groups and communities are bound to pursue different interests or agenda including divergent means to achieve their interests or goals.

In the light of this scenario, conflict becomes inevitable and it is perhaps apt to say that conflict is an inextricable feature of human existence. As to the desirability or otherwise of conflict to human existence, there are divergent opinions, Fraser et. al. (1984); Christopher (1987); Burton (1987); Imobighe (1993). According to Burton (1987: 137-138), conflict is “an essential creative element in human relations” and one of the driving forces behind societal development. The import of this assertion shows that conflict has an inbuilt dynamism that must never be suppressed or else the society runs the risk of lapsing into stagnation. This is not to say that conflicts are always a driving force behind societal development as they can also impact negatively on the society. Whichever way conflicts are viewed, they need to be managed so as to be able to build bridges of understanding and respect across the society.

In Nigeria, the emergence of violent conflicts has had some grievous implications on the polity. Lives have been lost just as much as public and private properties have been destroyed. The management of such conflicts with specific reference to their resolution has been

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anything but superficial and reactive in nature rather than being proactive. A situation whereby conflicts are allowed to erupt before measures are taken to arrest the situation is an antithesis of good governance. Rather, a more cost-benefit approach to conflict management, and specifically a preventive one, is considered desirable. The objective of this exercise is therefore to discuss the information typology for an early warning mechanism for conflict management in the country.

The paper is divided into five sections commencing with the introduction. This is followed by analysis framework in section two. The third section deals with an exploration of the principle of information management, while section four discusses the role of information in peace-building and more importantly in the context of an early warning arrangement. The last part of the paper contains the conclusion.

### **Concepts and Definition**

Information is one of the most used everyday words yet it is one of the most misunderstood. This is so because conceptually, information is more often than not taken for granted in that it lacks what can be referred to as a consensual or standard definition. This has in turn given the liberty to scholars to bring their individual perceptions of the concept to bear on their writing. Conscious of this lacuna Losee (1997) attempted a generalist description of the concept when he said that information is that which “is produced by all processes and it is the values of characteristics in the processes output that are information.” This description underlines the cognitive attribute of information which is similar to Saracevic and Kantor (1997) who conceived information as a phenomenon “which affects or changes the state of a mind” of an individual or groups. The emphasis here is the important role of information as a facilitator in any decision making process. This has been succinctly put by Aiyepoku (1989), who defined information “as data of value in planning (and) decision-making.” This definition, was further amplified by Oladele (1991) who conceived information as:

*Structured data of value which in themselves are the outcome of conscious observations, thoughts and actions either for immediate or anticipated communication and consumption.*

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An explication of this definition shows that data are mere raw materials that can only become information after careful analysis. Upon internalization information becomes knowledge. In other words, data are of no value if not processed into information, which is meaningful only when it is internalized to become knowledge. Herein lies the Trinitarian concept of information. The three concepts as variants of each other are therefore used interchangeably in this exercise. Closely related to these variants is intelligence report, which is the result of data gathering and analysis on specific subjects or targets for specified objectives.

### **Analysis Framework**

In the context of traditional Africa conflict management system, the popular saying that, “words are used to search for missing links” is indicative of three factors. In the first instance, the saying underscores the importance of dialogue in the African traditional system of conflict adjudication and resolution. Secondly, conflicts are products of their environment and as such mechanism for their resolution must be derived from the same environment. Thirdly the saying, albeit philosophically, underscores the importance of “words” or information as an important element in any peace building arrangement and more importantly in early warning mechanism. A combination of these factors therefore, informs the need to situate this presentation in the context information management as an offshoot of system theory.

The theory states that a system is an aggregation of inter-related elements, which interact with each other and their environment in order to form an entity or synergy, Martin (1992). An explication of the structure of the theory shows that a system has its boundary in much the same way a community has its own boundary. This boundary demarcates the system or community from the outside world. Secondly, a system has its environment just like no community or any arrangement such as an early warning mechanism can exist in isolation of its environment. Moreover, the system interface represents the point at which the system establishes contact with its immediate outside world. Similarly an early warning arrangement must establish contact with its immediate environment if it is to be effective. Above all, a system is effective to the extent it has input and output mechanisms just like an early warning arrangement must have input and output devices. As for the input device, human and material resources, raw data and intelligence reports constitute major entries into the device. These are processed to produce

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information upon which informed prediction as to the likelihood of conflict eruption in a place and executive decisions can be based. With respect to an early warning system for peace building therefore, the system theory offers the ability for greater insight into the dynamics and workings of a conflict-ridden community or environment more importantly in the area of predictive capacity. Characteristically, an early warning system must be elastic as much as it is dynamic to be able to accommodate other intervening occurrences.

Accordingly, for an early warning mechanism for conflict resolution or peace building to be effective, it has to be institutional based and structurally designed in a way it can absorb input from the environment as well as releasing its output to the same environment. As an institutional arrangement, the system relies on budgetary allocation and control for its general sustenance and attainment of the objectives of the system.

As a structural phenomenon, it relies on information management processes of data or intelligence gathering, storage, processing and dissemination, all within a wider context of control and monitoring. These activities become crucial against the background of the objective of the system serving as an arrangement for pre-empting eruption of conflicts within a targeted location or community. Such a system must be robust enough to be able to sound the alarm bell of conflicts eruption in an environment, well ahead of time. The predictive ability of the system must of course be coupled with the ability to indicate measures for managing the conflicts. In other words an early warning mechanism is dynamic and intelligent to the extent it is capable of combining prophylactic and curative measures vis-à-vis conflict resolution or management.

It is emphasized that an early warning mechanism being an information system, while taking into consideration the peculiar nature of its immediate environment, must be a barometer for measuring conflict level in an environment be it local, national or international. In this regard, the interplay of the contents of the system with its predictive and prescriptive elements are no more than an index of the system ability to point at a conflict right from an early stage. Where politics and societal needs are congruent with each other, both the predictive and prescriptive hit rate of the system become high. In a situation such as this, the system can be said to be pointing at an atmosphere of relative peace. Conversely a situation whereby the system's outputs shows the dominance of politics

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or group interests over societal needs for peace, can be said to be a recipe for and/or an index of conflict.

### **Of Information Typology, System and Management for Early Warning**

The efficiency and effectiveness of an alerting mechanism for conflict management or peace building is contingent on the existence of functional information system. Such a system must be intelligent enough to combine capacity for providing answers to queries submitted to it with ability to make some smart predictions as to future upsurge in crises in its targeted area. Some of the examples of the queries should be able to proffer answers to conflict antecedents, who are the actors or parties in a conflict, *their objectives and their modus operandi*. To be able to perform these functions effectively an information typology such as indicated below is illustrative from the system input-output perspectives.

❖ ***Conflict Terrain***

- Geopolitical boundary of the conflict

❖ ***Conflict Nature***

- Socio-economic/Politics/Supremacy/Expansionism/Religion/Inter or intra ethnic conflict

❖ ***Conflict Milieu***

- Historical antecedents/ideology

❖ ***Conflict Actors***

- Identification and characterization of major actors, arrowheads
  - Foot soldiers (population and strength)
  - Interest groups: Internal/External
  - Political groups
- 
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- Religious groups
- ❖ ***Weapons and Logistics***
- Nature/Supplies build up strategies
- ❖ ***Implications***
- National, State, LGA, Security, Economies
- ❖ ***Contingency Measures for Peace Building***
- Reactive
- Proactive

The predictive ability of the system is to a larger extent predicated on the design approach adopted with particular attention to the trade off between recall and precision and the frequency with which the system is being updated. A design approach emphasizing high recall will have less of precision hits and the converse is the truth in the case of emphasis on precision, which can be more beneficial to an information system for peace building. For instance, a situation whereby a system shows increased mobilization of personnel, arms build up coupled with discomfoting utterances by actors in a conflict, are sure indices of heightened level of insecurity. Information management is the pivot around which an early warning mechanism for peace building revolves. This is more so that conflicts cannot occur in a vacuum but against the background of the interplay of factors such as related to politics cum socio-economic conditions and resources and historical antecedents. These factors or elements serve as warning indicators or information around which an information system for decision-making can be based with respect to conflicts management.

As a process, information management is geared towards holistic harnessing of information pertaining to a subject or an issue with focus on the attainment of specific objective namely peace building. Thus information management involves data sourcing, processing and analysis, storage, retrieval and delivery. The totality of these activities

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combines to give value to information as a strategic resource upon which decisions can be predicated. In an effort to build peace in an environment, information management becomes a quintessence activity that can show what had been in the past, what it is now and what is likely to be in future. Information management can be in manual or mechanical form with either of the approaches having its strength and weaknesses.

In contemporary global environment, information management has assumed a new dimension with the ever-converging power of information and communications technologies (ICTs) such as electronics, including computers and telecommunications. As tools, the technologies have not only made it possible for large areas to be monitored remotely but to also gather equally large volume of information or data to be managed irrespective of spatial and time limitations. In much the same way, technologies have also made it possible for two or more people to share information simultaneously with little or no cost. Such is the importance of ICTs that it is absolutely inconceivable in contemporary society to think of an arrangement for early warning for peace building outside the convergence of the technologies. The advantages of these technologies lie in their capacity for high information recall, precision, delivery, Adeyemi and Oladele (1995), all of which are major requirements for decision making in conflict situations.

### **Conclusion**

The underlying assumption of this paper has been that conflicts are human-centred occurrences that follow certain discernable patterns and rhythms that are amenable to prediction ahead of their final eruption. Unfortunately, the preponderance of conflicts in Nigeria cannot be separated from the palpable disregard of early warning signs, which are contained in intelligence reports to those who should act. This in itself in more ways than one confirms the belief that the concept of an early warning mechanism for peace building revolves around information typology and system design all within a framework of information management.

The interplay of the elements of the typology with the activities constituting information management provides the warning indicators. But it takes not only a perceptive to identify and understand these indicators, it also requires a political will-power to utilize the indicators for decision-making with respect to nipping the potential conflicts in the

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bud. A situation whereby a conflict is allowed to fully erupt before measures are taken to control it is as wasteful as much as it is visionless. Rather a preemptive approach relying on a warning mechanism is not only cost effective but more visionary vis-à-vis peace building.

It is important to observe that peace building is a collective responsibility of citizenry of the country and in particular the security agencies. A situation whereby the different security agencies in the country work as archipelagos of their own amounts to duplication of energies and wastage of resources. A linkage or networking arrangement for information sharing among the security outfits is certainly in consonance with an early warning system for conflict prevention and resolution.

An early warning information system for peace building can only be adjudged adequate to the extent it is reliable and intelligent. While reliability is a function of constant updating, a system is intelligent if it is capable of providing the indices of conflicts in the future. It is in this regard that a warning mechanism for peace building can be described as a facility for sounding the alarm bell of a potential conflict well ahead of eruption.

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## ABOUT THE BOOK

This book written by a cream of Nigerian academics and military officers, in honour of their late colleague, Major General Charles B. Ndiomu (1934-2002), contains in-depth analyses of some of the major problems of peace and security in Nigeria. The 17-Chapter book is subdivided into three major sections, each dealing with a vital issue of national security. Section one focuses on Peaceful Co-existence and Civil-Military Relations, while section two is on National Security and Defence. The third section is on the very pressing issue of Ethnic Conflicts and Management. The contributions have handled the various sub-themes incisively, making the book a rich compendium on the subject.

### The Editors

The editors, Deinbo Briggs, and Julie Sanda are currently Research Fellows at NIPSS, Kuru; and CPRCR, National War College, Abuja respectively.



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