

Thank you to the organizers and to the authors for an interesting and very timely report. In my comments, I would like to raise three points, in reflecting on the report, which is meant to stimulate discussion rather than being a thorough review of the report.

I would like to draw my first comment to the current political context, which shapes and will increasingly shape African/European relations, and hence the context in which interventions to prevent violent extremism take place. This I think is perhaps one of the major contributions to the findings of the report as it emphasizes and draws out potential consequences of the risk of securitizing aid.

Policy makers and politicians often talk about the nexus between security and development- as if they go hand in hand - almost necessitates one another. Yet, I think we need to look into and further scrutinize when and how these very different agendas in practice do not go hand in hand. Particular, when there is an immense pressure for militarized solutions to what is in fact socio-economic and political problems. We of course need security measures to tackle some of these challenges. However, military solutions can, if not managed correctly, undermine development efforts.

The push for militarized responses stems from political pressures and priorities in Western countries. To exemplify, in the Sahel, EU countries prioritize efforts to curb migration and counter terrorism. In fact, we are increasingly externalizing our own border control to many of these countries. And, to do this we up-scale the security apparatuses of regimes that so vividly explained in this report neglect and at times abuse their own populations, particular in marginalized borderlands. Because we increasingly come to depend on these regimes to prevent migration and counter terrorism.

Many of these issues of governance raised in the report, such as unaccountable elites that are unable to provide basic public service delivery in terms of protection, access to health and education, are not new to development.

But, the question is to what extent these more long terms development efforts are at risk of being pushed back in the attempt to address what appears to be more urgent security concerns. Terror, migration and organized crime - I think it's safe to say - ranges among top foreign policy and security priorities.

For instance, Niger, the world's poorest country, has quadrupled its military expenditures to the detriment of health and education – social sectors that can build resilience against recruitment to violent jihadist groups.

In the lac Chad region, in order to counter Boko Haram, governments have shut down border trade, which vulnerable communities depend on for survival, banned of motorcycles, which in many remote rural areas is the only means of transportation. And we support the deployment of security forces, without proper training and awareness of how to protect populations - not exploiting them. There are grave examples from Mali in the most recent report from Human Rights watch on human rights violations made in the name of counter terrorism.

So, though we may talk about comprehensive approaches to complex challenges like violent extremism, how do we prioritize de facto efforts and budget allocations?

I think this is the major dilemma, which politicians and policy makers need to think about when prioritizing efforts in their current engagements in Africa.

In other words, how do we ensure the long-term development outcomes, which are so easily trumped by pressures to show the ability to act and respond to terrorism and migration?

I think the report offers a great opportunity to reflect upon how and when security and development does not go hand in hand, and in particular, whose security we claim to address. The world is connected and in the long run, not dealing with the security - and with this I mean, the human security, protection, access to basic services and well-being of some of world most vulnerable populations - will have grave and violent consequences.

That being said, I would like to end on two further issues that we need to look into in dealing with violent extremism

First, we tend to think about the borderlands in which violent extremism flourish as ungoverned territories. But, I think we need to understand that these areas are by no means ungoverned. They are governed through alternative mechanisms to that of the state and competing actors who aims to establish alternative visions of geo-political order and by controlling informal and, at times, illicit trade.

In that perspective, though religion is important and we can come back to that in the discussion – for the moment, I want to emphasize that we need a more nuanced understanding of what these groups do. What do they offer to people, which the state cannot - and are perhaps not willing to.

This include social mobility, self-esteem protection, and sometimes cash as well as a religious ideology, which can help individual regain order in their social lives and escape from social death.

This also directs our attention to the perhaps less acknowledged positive emotions that can emerge in individuals from joining these groups. Pride, attractiveness of violence, possibility to progress.

Here it is important to differentiate between the strategies of the different groups, as Boko Haram is different from Al Qaeda although they sometimes inspire one another. Some jihadists, and perhaps the ones that are most likely to succeed in the end, also provide services to local populations. Thus, as much as they may use religion as a mobilization vehicle, they also compete to build legitimacy.

Local informants I spoke to in Mali, due to banditry and low levels of trust in security forces, the most vulnerable sometimes wished they could return to the time of jihadist occupation, when they were perhaps not free to do a certain number of thing, like playing football and listen to music. At least, they say, there was some kind of order. Now as violence extremism – not just religious motivated violence - have become an everyday practice, everybody is on their own.

Finally, I also wish to draw attention to how jihadist groups recruit, not just by ideological means but the way in which they breed on and exacerbate existing local conflict dynamics. Access and control over natural resources, being one of them. And this leads me to my last point, about what I also believe is missing from the picture, namely, is how we resolve religious motivated conflicts?

We tend to want to exclude jihadist from political processes. Terrorists are considered legitimate political actors. We of course need to distinguish between foot soldiers, the ones being forced and those who join voluntarily, those who joins out of necessity, but we also need to understand those

also have a broader political agenda. We need to acknowledge their quest for an alternative political order to that of the corrupt regimes often supported by the West, in order to understand the motivation and key drivers in preventing violent extremism.

In that regard, we know surprisingly little about the conditions under which conditions jihadist conflicts, partly or completely, may be resolved through peaceful means. In particular, there is a gap in our knowledge about, how, and to what extent, our existing theories on conflict could apply in efforts to solve jihadist conflicts.

Thank you for your attention.