

Book Review

*No refuge: The crisis of refugee militarization in Africa* edited by Robert Muggah & Edward Mogire<sup>1</sup>

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In the last two decades, there has been unprecedented proliferation of political turmoil and armed conflicts on the African continent. Conflicts have been both internal and international in character. Invariably, these situations have generated hundreds of thousands of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) with far reaching effects for states and entire regions. For a start, influx of refugees has placed heavy economic burdens on receiving states and destabilized fragile socio-economic arrangements. Additionally, perhaps most importantly, changing dynamics in refugee and IDP camps and in particular movement and use of small arms has had, and continues to have far reaching effects on the security of states and the region at large. Although serious academic interest in refugee and IDP camp militarization is relatively recent, militarization of refugees on the continent has a long history. Militarization of refugees is traceable to the colonial period when refugees were routinely involved in, and often played a crucial role in the liberation wars around the continent. In recent times, this phenomenon is largely associated with those parts of the continent that have witnessed political turmoil and armed conflict. The horn of Africa, the greater Eastern and Central African region and West Africa serve as ample examples.

While there is no agreement on the meaning of refugee militarization, surveys show that refugee militarization may take and has indeed taken various forms: direct participation or support by refugees of insurgencies; refugees as proxies by host states or rebel groups to pursue political or geo-strategic goals against neighbouring states; presence and abuse of firearms and use of camp for firearms trafficking; use of refugee resources to support armed conflict (voluntary and/or coercive); military training of refugees and attacks on refugee camps and settlements. As the cases studies have shown these non-civilian attributes of refugee and IDP camps may be varied in each instance, extending to seemingly non violent activities. The militarization of such camps, whatever form it may take, but more so when refugees engage directly in armed conflict raises serious questions of security for the host state but also on a regional scale. Additionally, such militarization threatens to undermine the existing international regime of refugee and IDP protection implicating not only the specific sector of refugees, but also passive ones and others in various receiving states. Naturally, this phenomenon has posed niggling questions for a range of people notably the UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies.

As noted, although militarization of refugees and IDPs has a long history, recent concern has been heightened by the facility with which small arms can be accessed in various conflict zones and refugee hosting states, which may be equally engulfed, as they often

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have been, in armed conflict of one kind or the other. Aside from the refugee militarization issue, many players concerned or involved in efforts to address small arms proliferation such as the United Nations, various other international organizations including Oxfam International, the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) and Amnesty International as well as domestic groups recognise, as noted by Kofi Annan that small arms proliferation is not only a security issue, but also one that implicates human rights and development. Yet in current discourse, the linkage between refugee militarization and small arms is only beginning to be acknowledged.

In a serious attempt to engage with the issues, *No refuge: The crisis of refugee militarization in Africa*, an impressive book edited by Robert Muggah and Edward Mogire considers the important question of the militarization of refugees and IDPs in camps in select African countries – Guinea, Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda. It is a timely venture indeed. Formulated in consultation with various international relief and humanitarian agencies, diplomats and practitioners, the study is guided by and seeks to answer five core questions: 1) what is, and has been the nature and extent of refugee and IDP camp militarization; 2) what are the pre-conditions for refugee and IDP camp militarization; 3) what are, and have been the scale and distribution of arms availability in refugee camps; 4) what are, and have been the impacts of militarization on refugee and host communities security; and 5) what are the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), host state and regional responses to refugee and IDP militarization issues.

The book is unrolled in six well researched chapters. The first chapter introduces the core issues and concepts and sets out the framework and methodology adopted in the study. Each of the next four chapters discusses the country case studies – Guinea, Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda in that order. The last chapter ties up the study by providing an overview of findings from the preceding chapters thus comparatively reflecting on refugee and IDP militarization in Africa. This exercise is informed largely by the findings of the four case studies and on the burgeoning body of literature on refugee situations and disarmament.

Each case study discusses the array of practical case specific interventions undertaken by the UNHCR to deal with potential or actual militarization of camps, starting with the case of post genocide Rwanda. In breaking with existing studies which do not always sufficiently discuss the linkages between refugee militarization and small arms proliferation as well as the politics associated with it. Muggah recognizes the centrality of small arms politics to a comprehensive view of and measures to be taken in response to militarization of refugee and IDP camps. The book explores, with respect to all the cases under study, reasons why refugees arm themselves and challenges encountered by relevant agencies (in particular the UNHCR) in cooperatively dealing with the problem with host countries. The case studies reveal shared problems such as disruptive regional politics, lack of political will and corruption as well as country specific challenges that require targeted responses, some of which have already been instituted. The case of Guinea is perhaps the best case illustrative of creative targeted responses by the UNHCR.

The strength of this book lies in a number of aspects. First, the book's empirical treatment of the case studies and the comparative approach to the discussion sets it apart from other works on the is perhaps its strongest elements and greatest contribution. Secondly, while the case studies are merely representative - regionally and on other select criteria, they proffer new evidence on existing issues that should enable stakeholders to begin to revisit the issues and pose new questions relating to most, if not all refugee and IDP militarization-related dynamics. Third, if making a case is enough, especially with its well supported analysis, this study should go a long way in raising the profile of small arms control on refugee agenda, being the editors' overall objective. Fourth, the book centrally situates refugee militarization between the realist international relations approach which emphasizes traditional security threats between states and the humanitarian school, which views refugees as harmless victims of conflicts. Lastly, the fact that the editors and authors have appended research protocol setting out methodologies and other relevant particulars is a useful resource for those interested in similar or further research. For its able and excellent treatment of a web of contemporary refugee militarization and security issues in contemporary situations, the book should be a very resourceful read for donors, policy makers, practitioners and academics concerned with strengthening and ameliorating refugee protection.