Terrorist Groups in Africa: Quo Vadis?

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Abstract

The frequency of acts of violence in the world has increased in recent years. These acts, perpetuated by different groups under different guises, have one thing in common: the invocation of a sense of terror and horror in people. In Africa, the situation is the same. Events in countries in and around the Horn of Africa, East Africa, Mali, Kenya and Nigeria, to name a few, speak to the rise in events of this nature that leave a trail of loss of life and property and destruction in their wake. At regional and continental levels, different initiatives, both legal and military, have been put in place all over the world to deal with acts of terrorism, and the perpetrators thereof. Despite these, terrorist attacks continue to happen unabated. It is questionable if these initiatives are achieving the desired results, and if these are indeed the correct measures to apply to tackle the malaise. Hence, this paper seeks to examine the nature and peculiarities of the terrorism occurring in Africa, focusing particularly on the groups al-Shabaab in the Horn of Africa, and Boko Haram in West Africa. The effectiveness of current efforts at combatting terrorism is examined with a view to recommending a more nuanced approach to the battle against terrorism in Africa.

Résumé

La fréquence d'actes de violence dans le monde a augmenté ces dernières années. Ces actes, de formes différentes, perpétrés par différents groupes, ont un point commun : l'invocation d'un sentiment de terreur et d'horreur. En Afrique, la situation est la même. Les événements survenus dans des pays de la Corne de l'Afrique, d'Afrique de l'Est, au Mali, au Kenya et au Nigéria, pour ne nommer que ceux-ci, témoignent de la multiplication d'événements de cette nature qui entraînent de nombreuses pertes en vies humaines, ainsi que des dommages matériels. Aux niveaux régional et continental, différentes initiatives juridiques et militaires ont été mises en

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place dans le monde entier pour lutter contre les actes de terrorisme et leurs auteurs. Malgré cela, les attaques terroristes continuent sans relâche. C'est à se demander si ces initiatives donnent les résultats escomptés et si ce sont les bonnes mesures pour lutter contre ce fléau. Dans cette perspective, cet article examine la nature et les particularités du terrorisme qui sévit en Afrique, en se concentrant principalement sur les groupes *Al-Shabaab* dans la Corne de l'Afrique et *Boko Haram* en Afrique de l'Ouest. L'efficacité des efforts actuels de lutte contre le terrorisme est examinée dans le but d'en recommander une approche plus nuancée.

Introduction

Historically, acts of violence that are designed to evoke a sense of shock and horror in people have been used by groups in the battle for recognition and acknowledgement. The post-9/11 world in which we live has seen globalisation of such acts of violence which seemingly can come from anywhere, at any time, and can assume any form in execution. Over the years, there has been a marked increase in the activities of groups engaging in acts that are designed to maim, kill and devastate communities and groups of people, in all parts of the world, particularly in areas of the Middle East, Europe, Asia and Africa. These groups use violence and the invocation of terror as means to achieve their purpose. They breed an atmosphere of fear and insecurity, and sometimes promote the outbreak of conflicts.

In Africa, these groups have left their trail of bombings, kidnappings, assassinations and destruction in the areas in which they have been active. From the activities of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in the countries in and around the Horn of Africa, in northern Mali in early 2012, its involvement in the besiegement of the American consulate in Benghazi, Egypt, the deadly bombings in Somalia, Algeria and Niger, the activities of the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) in Algeria and in the region, the attack by al-Shabaab on the Westgate mall in Nairobi, to the various bombings and kidnappings carried out by Boko Haram in Nigeria, these groups have caused chaos and left a trail of bloodshed in their wake. This status quo has had a negative effect on the continent, and Africa runs the risk of being destabilised by the continuous reign of terror and having the gains and advances of development reversed by the activities of these groups.

These groups invoke terror to cause fear and destabilisation in the countries in which they operate, and on the continent as a whole. And for this purpose, they are loosely grouped as terrorist organisations, or terrorist groups,[1] even though they may differ in their purposes and goals. The aim of this paper is to analyse the rise of terrorism in Africa, using al-Shabaab

and Boko Haram as examples. The conditions that have lent impetus to the increase in terrorist activities in Africa are considered and evaluated, as well as the initiatives by the African Union (AU) and various regional bodies and agencies to deal with this problem on the continent. These initiatives are evaluated to see how effective they have been, and what other steps, if any, should be taken.

Terrorism in Africa

Definition: a moving target

The term 'terrorism' is fraught with definitional problems. There are serious conceptual issues in defining it and in attributing it to certain acts or actions. A general understanding sees 'terrorism' as a human malaise that has plagued socio-political communities for centuries; however, the indices to categorise acts as terrorist acts are unclear and highly disputable. For the most part, the definition of 'terrorism' or 'acts of terror' depends on who is espousing it at a given point in time, and on which divide of the world (socially and politically) they stand. Indeed, '[Y]esterday's terrorist is often today's liberation hero – and possibly tomorrow's autocrat' (*New African Magazine* 2016). To buttress this, the likes of Nelson Mandela, Samora Machel, Jomo Kenyatta and many other freedom fighters and liberation movements were labelled 'terrorists', at some point in time, by Western countries for the part they played in the struggle for freedom and the emancipation of their people (*New African Magazine* 2014, 2016). Obi points out that the concept of 'terrorism', while being highly contested, is now being more and more flexibly construed to 'suit ideological, nationalist, propagandist and political objectives'. The author notes that terrorism is now being associated with an illegal unconventional war against a society or established order, due to the origins of the concept in revolutionary political violence (2010: 59).

The difficulty with pinning down a universal definition for the term or for what constitutes a terrorist act (and by inference who is a terrorist) is further compounded by the many definitions that have been propounded by players in different sectors; at the international, state and individual levels. Hailu identified this well when he noted that 'exact definitions' of terrorism, 'its nature or the legitimacy of its execution have been subjects of controversy' (2010: 43). Competing definitions emphasising different aspects of the act of terrorism have led to controversies around how political groups, states or international bodies could agree on concerted efforts that would bring together the resources, institutions and goodwill of all individuals directly or indirectly affected by its negative impact. Thus, 'in place of the ideal

of building policy models that incorporate absolute consensus, ideas and strategies of addressing terrorism have opted for modalities reflecting general patterns of shared social and political values' (*ibid.*).

The inability to agree on a generally accepted definition of terrorism has led states and other players in international affairs to adopt a sectoral approach in dealing with acts of terrorism.[2] This has however led to a proliferation of definitions. In order to give some context to this discussion, I examine some definitions below. Firstly, at the international level, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1566 in 2004, and condemned terrorist acts as:

> criminal acts, including against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or in a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act, which constitute offences within the scope of and as defined in the international conventions and protocols relating to terrorism, are under no circumstances justifiable by considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or other similar nature.

In the same year, the UN High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change proposed a description of terrorism as follows:

> any action, in addition to actions already specified by the existing conventions on aspects of terrorism, the Geneva Conventions and Security Council Resolution 1566 of 2004, that is intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants, when the purpose of such an act, by its nature or context, is to intimidate a population, or to compel a Government or an international organisation to do or to abstain from doing any act.

At the continental level in Africa, as far back as 1999, the OAU Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism defined a 'terrorist act' as amongst other things, *being calculated or intended to intimidate, put in fear, force, coerce or induce any government, body, institution, the general public or any segment thereof, to do or abstain from doing any act, or to adopt or abandon a particular standpoint, or to act according to certain principles.* This same definition is also adopted by its 2004 Protocol. The 2002 AU Plan of Action for the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism describes terrorism as "a violent form of transnational crime that exploits the limits of the territorial jurisdiction of States, differences in governance systems and judicial procedures, porous borders and the existence of informal and illegal trade and financing networks."[3]

At the individual level, various authors have attempted to give a definition to the term, but these have not been unanimously and universally accepted. Schmid and Jongman in their (1988) *locus classicus* highlighted over a hundred varied definitions for the term and tried to extract the common elements in these definitions. Thus, while there is no universally accepted legal definition of the term, there are basic elements of the crime that have been agreed upon. Some of these elements include the threat and use of violence, intimidation, killing of innocent civilians and non-combatants, destruction of property and the destabilisation of the economic and social order (Moki 2010: 267). These elements are essential in being able to identify and tackle the problem of terrorism. In the next section, I briefly discuss some of the factors that lead to the presence of terrorism within a territorial state.

Factors encouraging terrorism in Africa

Over the past few years, acts of terrorism on the continent have steadily increased as terrorists have multiplied and gained confidence in the lack of repercussions for their actions. Various incidents of high profile bombings in Kenya, abductions in Nigeria, attempted hijackings, and mass killings in villages and settlements in different countries in Africa have gone unpunished to a large extent, and have created the perception, in some, of Africa being 'the soft underbelly for transnational terrorism' (Mentan 2004: 2).[4] This has led others to consider whether Africa is now to be considered the new frontier of global terrorism (Defence Web n.d; Oxford Research Group 2014).

The factors encouraging terrorism in Africa are complex and multidimensional, and as such cannot be limited to particular facts or events. Some scholars have over the years attempted to engage with this reality in Africa, and to posit reasons that cause, attract and fuel terrorist operations in Africa. For his part, Mentan views state failure as being high on the list, due to the lack of responsibility among the governing group to fulfil the state's part of the social contract (Mentan 2004: ix). The proliferation of arms in Africa is identified as another issue, as used and unused arms from world wars have from time been dumped in the continent, with international arms manufacturers finding African countries to be veritable trading partners. The quest for power, by any means, among African leaders, and the ready availability of foreign arms suppliers and trainers, have ended up translating many landscapes of political struggle into military ones (Mentan 2004: ix).

The issue of state failure is supported by Gow, Olonishakin and Dijxhorn (2013), who in their qualitative work titled *Militancy and Violence in West Africa* gave voice to the views of their participants on varying issues leading to and affecting the militancy and violence (both indicators of terrorism)

that is observed in present day Africa. One such participant alluded the gaps between what the government says and what it does: 'when the population reads about the disbursement of millions in the newspaper and yet nothing in their pot of soup, what do you expect?' (*ibid.*).

Linked to this, is the perception of a 'lack of legitimacy' of the African state. This issue has deep historical roots, and is compounded by the overwhelming actions of African states which have mostly negated legitimacy (Solomon 2013: 33–4). In the case of Nigeria, like in many other African states, the legitimacy of the state is in question due to its history, and the role played by different colonial interests that span the continent. Solomon surmises that under colonial rule in Nigeria, ethnic and religious divisions were reinforced and played off against each other. The British in particular imposed differentiation in how they governed the north, west and east of the country (2013: 34). The author here suggests historical disenfranchisement and poverty as serious pull factors into rebellion and acts of terrorism that is seen amongst the Tuaregs of Mali and Boko Haram of Nigeria.

Another reason that has been identified to be aiding terrorism is the proliferation of arms in Africa. As already alluded to, the effect of the world wars left Africa awash with weapons and arms. Mentan indicates that failed or weak states easily become breeding grounds of instability, mass migration and murder as well as witting and unwitting reservoirs and exports of terror (2004: ix).

Porous borders in Africa, nascent judicial institutions, weak and corrupt law enforcement and security services are some of the other factors identified. It has been proposed that the fact that there are portions of the African population who are poor and disillusioned, with religious or ethnic grievances, makes it easier for terrorist organisations to recruit for their jihad from Africa (Seequeh 1996: 9). This assertion has been corroborated to a certain extent by Gow, Olonishakin and Dijxhorn (2013). In their fieldwork sessions with various groups in northern Nigeria, they highlighted the sentiment among participants that socio-economic factors such as poverty, illiteracy and unemployment were key drivers of radicalisation and violence, and that, furthermore, at times it went beyond that to a deep desire on the part of people to defend their religion and beliefs (*ibid.*: 41). Thus, while it was accepted by participants that the complex elements associated with economic deprivation and a lack of education were strongly linked to acts of violence, with an especially strong impact on youth, occasionally, critically reflective counter-views were expressed. Thus, ascriptions of poverty and joblessness to the explosion of terrorism in Africa might actually be too simplistic a view to hold, as there are usually deep seated socio-economic and historical inequalities that lie at the roots of some of the most violent conflicts (Obi 2010: 63).

In the same vein, one must be careful to ascribe the uptake in terrorist attacks in Africa purely to reasons of weak and corrupt governments, stateless stretches of land, and particularly 'impoverished largely Muslim populations' as some have done (Farah and Shultz 2004). This would be simplifying the problem and misleading. It cannot be correct to link only one religion to terrorism; as history has shown us that terrorists can come from any group or religion.[5] It must be acknowledged that the various factors discussed are contributory and do not in any of themselves necessarily lead to the outbreak of terrorism, or the inclination of people to engage in acts of terrorism. So, the fight against terrorism must acknowledge this in its approach.

International organisations and different agencies have also expressed their thoughts on the reasons for the state of terrorist acts on the continent. In 2002, the AU,[6] in its Plan of Action to combat terrorism, linked 'severe conditions of poverty and deprivation experienced by large sections of the African population' to directly providing a fertile breeding ground for terrorist extremism. The document further indicated that few African governments were in a position on their own to marshal the requisite resources to combat the threat of terrorism, and that it was necessary and essential to pool resources together to ensure the effectiveness of counter-terrorism measures.[7]

The UN Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, in a 2010 paper titled 'Africa and international counterterrorism imperatives', discussed the issues to be addressed in the implementation of counter-terrorism measures in Africa (UNOSAA 2010). It lists underdevelopment, poverty, social, economic and political inequities as some of the conditions that make radicalisation and the spread of terrorism in Africa possible.[8] These conditions are exploited by terrorist groups to recruit people and to fund their networks.

It is indeed a fact that the socio-economic state of affairs in Africa leaves much to be desired. Africa currently ranks as one of the poorest continents in the world, with the Sahel and Sudanian Savanna Belt regions of Africa indicated as containing most of the world's poorest sub-regions (MPI 2016).[9] The index assesses the nature and intensity of poverty at the individual level. It uses three dimensions of health, education and living standards in the different countries to reach its results (MPI 2016: 5). This index is indicative of the fact that African governments are failing to put systems in place to ensure the development of their economies, and translating these into making better the lives of their citizens.

The situations of extreme poverty and unemployment, the ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor, rampant corruption and collusion by the police, and the attendant culture of impunity have resulted in certain portions

of the population engaging in unlawful activities, which they perceive to be the only way to make a living. When run by members of terrorist or revolutionary groups, these very same activities generate a flow of income that is then used to further fuel the conflict within the country (University of Macedonia 2014: 13). This, coupled with weak governments, has resulted in an increase in terrorist activities in Africa (as is the case the world over), which is now becoming a viable terrain for terrorist groups. Thus, Terrorist groups have found Africa to be a fertile ground for their nefarious activities. They have been able to recruit, train, group, plan and execute their attacks without much resistance or push back from African states. This conducive environment is what has led to Africa being labelled 'the bedrock of terrorism' (Azumah 2014: 47–8). In order to get a better understanding of these groups and their operations in Africa, the next sections examine Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram, and their operations on the African continent.

Al-Shabaab: origins and philosophy

After its independence from colonial rule in 1960, Somalia was governed by a civilian government which was later ousted by the military in 1969. The military government, led by General Mohamed Siad Barre, collapsed in 1991, and this led to the Somali Civil War, during which time clans, groups and regions organised themselves and began competing for influence in the power vacuum that existed. Efforts to put an end to the civil war led to the creation of the Transitional National Government (TNG) in 2000, which later morphed into the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in 2004. The TFG was greatly assisted by Ethiopian troops, but opposed by the different clan- and religion-based insurgent groups that had emerged in Somalia and coalesced under the banner of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), which, at the time, controlled about half of southern Somalia. The invasion of Somalia by Ethiopia in December 2006 put an end to the expansion of the ICU, and led to its disbandment and the splintering of the organisation (Simpson 2010: 11).

Al-Shabaab, fully known as *Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen* (HSM), was formed in Somalia against the backdrop of a past that has been marked by conflict. It emerged from the vestiges of the ICU, of which it was the youth and military wing, continuing its operations in the southern part of Somalia. The group al-Shabaab was originally a remnant of *Al-Itihaad Al-Islamiya* (AIAI) – a Wahhabi (puritan, ultra-conservative) Islamist terrorist organisation which operated in Somalia in the 1980s with the aim of replacing the regime of Mohammed Said Barre with an Islamic state. When the AIAI was defeated, remnants of the organisation then joined the ICU, from which al-Shabaab emerged (Agbiboa 2014: 27). Al-Shabaab has

been waging a war of resistance against the now departed Ethiopian forces, Kenyan forces, and the AU Mission in Somalia forces (AMISON). It is suspected to have links with al Qaeda, having pledged its allegiance to al-Qaeda in 2012 (Simpson 2010: 11).

Al-Shabaab is run as a decentralised organisation; having often loosely coordinated levels of leadership revolving around local villages and religious leaders, guided by Muslim scholars who interpret the Jihad and Qur'an in specific ways and terms. As mentioned above, the initial purpose of al-Shabaab was the overthrow of the TFG of Somalia, and the removal of foreign troops from the country. This objective was refined by its affiliation to al-Qaeda over the years. The group now wages a global jihad, especially on Christians (Agbiboa 2014: 27). It seeks to create a nucleus Wahhabi sect of the Muslim religion stronghold in Somalia, and ultimately an Islamic state for the entire region. This is its driving force: the need to remove Western and all foreign influence from Somalia, and in Africa as a whole, while spreading its Wahhabi Islamic beliefs (Ali 2008: 3).

In carrying out its goal of fighting a jihad to rid Somalia of foreign forces in the form of the AU, Ethiopia and allies, the group employs different tactics, including random or periodic shootings, kidnappings, bombings and death threats. At the height of its activities, al-Shabaab gained control of considerable territory in Somalia, and even made continuous incursions into Mogadishu, the capital. Its activities in Somalia have further ravaged the country, leaving it void of any real government, harming peacekeeping efforts, impoverishing Somalis all the more, and contributing to an abysmal humanitarian situation.[10] In recent times, al-Shabaab has extended its reach beyond Somalia, and frequently attacks neighbouring countries that have provided troops to AMISON, particularly Kenya.

Uganda and Kenya have borne the brunt of al-Shabaab's activities, with Kenya in particular having seen an upsurge in terror attacks between 2011 and 2015. This is reportedly due to Kenyan military involvement in Somalia (Mann 2013). Al-Shabaab has carried out raids and bomb attacks in Kenya, targeting bus terminals,[11] churches,[12] military convoys, hotels, nightclubs and other places of gathering. In September 2013, it attacked the Westgate mall in Nairobi, Kenya. The attack lasted hours, with hostage takings. It left at least 67 people dead. The most brazen of the attacks so far has been the April 2015 attack on Garissa University College in the north-eastern province of Kenya that left well over a hundred people dead, mainly Christians (Cannon 2016). In claiming responsibility for this attack and others, al-Shabaab directly tied its actions to those of Kenya in Somalia, saying 'Kenyans were relatively safe in their cities before they invaded us and

killed Muslims' (Omar 2013). Al-Shabaab also claimed responsibility for a 2010 bombing in Kampala that killed 70 football fans who had gathered at a venue to watch a World Cup Final match. Indeed, the spate and brutality of the Westgate and Garissa attacks particularly speak to targeted reprisal attacks against Kenya, as confirmed by al-Shabaab itself (Omar 2013).

Quite a number of related factors have been adduced for the upswing of terrorist activities in Kenya, most of them historical. Butime sees some of these factors to include: (1) the way in which the West facilitated the ideological contradictions in the anti-communist Cold War alliance, that saw the West (the US particularly) sponsoring, funding and enabling different politico-religious organisations all over the world, mainly Islamic, in the fight against communism; (2) political instability in and around the Horn of Africa that has led to Kenya becoming an ideal pawn in the game, given its enduring relations with the West and its strategic location as a geographical link between East Africa and the Horn of Africa; and (3) the constant tension between Kenya's central government and the coastal regions which have become a hub for radical Islamic activities in the region (Butime 2015: 53). These points are indicative of the rise in terrorist attacks that Kenya has been subjected to, thus making it the case whereby terrorism in Kenya is a result of 'an inextricable link between internal and external political contradictions' (Butime 2015: 57).

Boko Haram: origins and philosophy

Boko Haram in Nigeria started out as a home-grown jihadist group that carried out acts to destabilise the country in the name of 'true Islam'. In spite of Nigeria having experienced different forms of radicalisation, accompanied by acts of violence over the years,[13] the emergence of Boko Haram in Nigeria, signalled a new phase in Islamic radicalisation in Nigeria (Alao 2013: 74). Boko Haram started in the north-eastern part of Nigeria and its activities expanded to other parts of the country and even to neighbouring states very quickly. Though the exact date of the emergence of Boko Haram is not clear, Nigerian authorities believe that the sect has existed since the mid-1990s,[14] then under the name of *Ahlul sunna wa-al-jama a wa-al-hijra* (People of prophetic practice and withdrawal), and has transformed over time (Onuoha 2010: 55; Azumah 2014: 40). It has taken up different names, having been known as the *Nigerian Taliban*, *Yusufiyyah sect* (after its founder Muhammad Yusuf), and is now currently nicknamed *Boko Haram* (Azumah 2014: 33–40).

There are contradicting views on the origins of Boko Haram. While some believe that the group did not start out as a violent organisation, and was historically formed as a welfare organisation to cater for refugees from

wars around Chad and for jobless Nigerian youths (*New African Magazine* 2014), there are also those who trace the origins of the group historically to the radical reformist fractions who jostled for power and control within Islam in northern Nigeria even prior to independence (Azumah 2014: 39).[15] These different views however agree on the fact that the group has now evolved into a terrorist group, and has quickly developed the capacity to carry out acts of terror in its fight. Boko Haram is reported to have been militarised through the combined clandestine actions of politicians, local and international financiers who wanted to use it for their own benefit; and the actions of sympathisers and supporters who provided the link to the society (*New African Magazine* 2014). The key turning point identified in the evolution of Boko Haram into a terrorist organisation was the arrest and death of its founding leader, Mohammed Yusuf, in police detention in 2009.

Boko Haram came into prominence with its first recognised attack against state security forces in December 2003, when it attacked police stations and public buildings in Yobe State (Onuoha 2010: 57). From this time the activities of the group gained momentum and became more worrisome. The first recognised leader of Boko Haram was the late Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf, whose teachings were said to bear semblance to those of the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan in seeing any form of Western influence on Islamic society as un-Islamic and to be fought against (Alao 2013: 74).[16] As indicated above, Mohammed Yusuf was killed in police custody in 2009.

The official Islamic name for Boko Haram is *Jama'atu ahlis sunna lidda'awati wal jihad* which is the Arabic for 'Group Committed to Propagating the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad'/ 'People of the Tradition of the Prophet (SAW) for Preaching and Striving', though the easier name of Boko Haram is more commonly used in referring to the group (Okpaga, Chijioke and Eme 2012). The name Boko Haram in the Hausa language translates as 'the book is sin', which has been given the connotation that 'Western education is forbidden' (even though the group has purportedly refuted this, saying the name actually means 'Western civilisation is forbidden'. For them, this means that anything that has to do with Western culture and way of life is actually forbidden, and not just education (Onuoha 2010: 57). This is based on the ideology and philosophy of Boko Haram that outwardly opposes any knowledge that contradicts the principles of Islam. It abhors Western liberalism as a whole, maintaining that 'democracy and the current system of education must be changed otherwise this war [that is yet to start] [will] continue for long' (*Daily Trust* 2009). Darwinism, for instance, is seen as an absolute contradiction to the Islamic philosophy of existence; so are issues dealing with the rights and

privileges of women, the idea of homosexuality, multi-party democracy and others, which are all seen as opposed to Islamic civilisation (Onapajo, Uzodike and Whetho 2012: 343).

In the same vein, Boko Haram outwardly disregards the Nigerian state for its secular nature, seeing it as illegitimate, and holding no respect for its constituted laws (*ibid.*: 344), hence its continued direct attacks against the structures and personnel of the state. The anti-Western ideological position of the group also extends to its hatred for southern Nigeria, which it has declared as 'the devil empire'. Southern Nigeria is predominantly Christian, comprising may groups of peoples in Nigeria who happen to have higher levels of Westernisation than northern Nigeria (*ibid.*: 345).

While some experts have traced the root of terrorism in Africa to global developments, and rightly so, the role of local politics manifesting in the politics of segregation and marginalisation that have led to grievances by large communities against the state, the unresponsiveness of the state and the government to the concerns raised by local communities, religious radicalism (in this case Islamic fundamentalism) and other facts must also be acknowledged.

From the initial attacks in and around Maiduguri in Borno State, Nigeria, Boko Haram spread its attacks to several other northern and central Nigerian states.[17] At first, the group carried out minor attacks against Christian targets, police stations and public places in the north, using improvised explosive devices (IEDs) (Stewart 2012). However, by June 2011, its modus operandi changed when it launched its first major attack in the Federal Capital Territory of Abuja, using a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED). This was quickly followed by a deadly attack against the UN compound in Abuja in August of the same year, which left scores dead. Whilst continuing with its targeting of public spaces (Okpaga, Chijioke and Eme 2012: 86–8)[18] the group stepped up its manifestation of terror against the populace by carrying out abductions and attacking predominantly Christian villages in the north (*This Day Live* 2014). In an unprecedented act in April 2014, Boko Haram abducted over 200 girls from a Government Secondary School in Chibok in Borno State of Nigeria, where they had gathered to write a national exam (*ibid.*). Subsequently, the group continued its terrorist acts in northern Nigeria, targeting places of worship, with no discrimination towards religion, and other places where people gather.

Analysis

The two groups discussed are representative of terrorist groups, their philosophy and ideology, and the way they operate in Africa. In analysing these groups, it is important to note their malleable nature. Their ability to change and evolve from one group to another, to operate in different countries, and for the most part, their ability to change and adapt their strategy and tactics as appropriate, have made them very difficult to tackle. These groups have been able to recruit and increase their manpower and attacking capabilities. They have been able to build their extremist militant base by enlisting more and more new recruits to their cause (Stewart 2012).[19] For the African youth rendered jobless and desperate due to growing poverty and unemployment levels, it is easy to become ready subjects and/or victims of these groups.

In the case of Boko Haram, there is evidence that the members of the group retreat across the border to the Republic of Chad after carrying out their acts of terror in north-eastern Nigeria. At some stage after the abductions of the Chibok school girls, the girls were reportedly sighted across the border in Chad (*Vanguard* 2014). The ability of these groups to move freely across borders is indicative of loose borders among neighbouring countries, and this makes law enforcement by individual state agents more difficult. In a newspaper report on 22 May 2014, it was said that the abducted girls had been split into three or four different camps along the western corridors of Lake Chad (*Vanguard* 2014).

In Somalia, the long failure to shore up an effective government that has control over the Somali borders, and the loose ineffective management of the borders, have made it easy for groups like al-Shabaab to infiltrate neighbouring countries, and carry out attacks therein, as in the case of Kenya and Uganda. With the growing trend of terrorism on the continent, and the transnational tilt to the operations of the groups, it is acknowledged that dealing with this scourge cannot be an entirely domestic matter left to the governments of the countries concerned. There is an urgent need for better cooperation at all levels, national, regional and international. Currently, there are concerted national, regional and international counter-terrorism plans and mechanism put in place to address this problem. This was well articulated in the UN High-level Panel report of 2005 which states that:

> in the twenty-first century, more than ever before, no state can stand wholly alone. Collective strategies, collective institutions and a sense of collective responsibility are indispensable … Today's threats recognise no national boundaries, are connected, and must be addressed at the global and regional as well as the national levels.

In Africa, much is being done to implement the different treaties and agreement relating to terrorism, in order to curb the malaise on the continent. The next section specifically looks at the efforts by the AU and its member states to deal with the problem of terrorism, especially as it relates to al-Shabaab and Boko Haram, and seeks to examine if these efforts are effective and sufficient.

Realising peace and security in combating terrorism

Peace and security are prerequisites for growth and development anywhere in the world. In Africa, this is especially the case due to the state of underdevelopment of the continent, largely due to the years of conflict that Africa has been subjected to. Insecurity and unrests are the antithesis to development and growth, and as long as Africa continues to be the 'soft underbelly for transnational terrorism', it will continue to struggle in ensuring growth and development for the vast majority of its peoples. It is thus imperative that African states make concerted efforts to curb the menace of terrorism on the continent.

The transnational and international nature of security problems mandates that the solutions adopted by African states must also be transnational and international. For the continent, this requires a substantial amount of interaction and interdependence among the different security units at sub-regional and regional levels. The Constitutive Act of the AU, in its preamble, speaks of 'the need to promote peace, security and stability as a prerequisite for the implementation of our development and integration agenda'. The Constitutive Act goes further to list the objectives of the AU, one of which is "to accelerate the political and socio-economic integration of the continent (Art 3 c), and again to promote peace, security, and stability on the continent" (Art 3 f). In furtherance of this commitment, article 4 of the Act, in listing the principles on which the AU is formed, dedicates seven principles (as seen in art. 4 d– j), to security and the maintenance of peace amongst its member states. The dedication of these many principles to the issue of peace and security is reflective of a conscious attempt by African leaders to stem the tide of conflicts on the continent.

In actualising these provisions in the fight against continental terrorism, the AU adopted counter-terrorism legal instruments such as the OAU Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism and its 2004 protocol; and the 2002 AU Plan of Action on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism in Africa.[20] These are strategic steps aimed at strengthening the capacity of African states, through a common approach in dealing with the terrorist threat (Davis 2007: 115). The Plan of Action, as Africa's blueprint for the battle against

terrorism, provides for enhanced police and border controls, harmonised legislative and judicial measures, calls on African states to comply with international agreements dealing with terrorism and adopt measures designed to curtail the financing of terrorism, among others (AU Plan of Action, section III). These provisions of the AU Plan of Action can actually be considered a 'regional domestication' of some of the provisions of the UN Resolution 1373 of 2001, which provided for measures to be adopted by member states that would be an effective antidote to terrorism (Okeke 2014: 36–47).

The Plan of Action tasks the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC)[21] with its implementation (art. 16 of the Plan). To its credit, the PSC has been able to function despite facing funding problems. It directs the activities of the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and also maintains a presence in the condemnation of terrorism and in encouraging member states to take the necessary measures to implement all counter-terrorism instruments (Moki 2010: 274). To assist the PSC to fulfil its task, the AU created a terrorism research centre, the African Centre for the Study and Research of Terrorism, to research all aspects of terrorism, patterns of terrorist activities, and carry out sociological and psychological study of individuals or groups engaged in terrorism. The research is aimed at bolstering the capabilities of African countries in dealing with terrorism (Davis 2007: 121).

At the regional level, the different regions, as part of their counter-terrorism measures, have developed various terrorist threat level initiatives aimed at tailoring the subregions' responses to the threats (UNOSAA 2010: 35). Particularly for regions that have part of the Sahel in their territory this is important, as most of the terror attacks that have happened in the continent have been carried out in the Sahel area, which cuts into the territories of West and East Africa. The regional response to terrorism has different levels of counter-terrorism measures that have been developed through the technical assistance and cooperation of the international community (UNOSAA 2010: 35), and these have been effective in both East and West Africa.

In 1999, ECOWAS adopted a protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security. This was said to represent a positive step towards a framework on security at the time. Article 3 of this protocol identifies combatting international terrorism as an objective of the regional body. This has now been followed by various other initiatives, such as the terrorism early warning system, called the ECOWAS Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN), which provides the sub-region with the capacity to gather information about potential threats (including terrorism threats) and to map

out adequate responses to these threats (UNOSAA 2010). From initially focusing on traditional armed conflicts, ECOWARN has now expanded its mandate, and included indicators to monitor extremism and religious fundamentalism in West Africa and the Sahel (Global Centre 2014). In 2014, ECOWAS leaders adopted a Counter terrorism Strategy and Implementation Plan at their 42nd Extraordinary Session of the Authority of the ECOWAS Heads of States and Governments in Accra, Ghana.[22] This features an ECOWAS Counter-Terrorism Coordination Unit; an ECOWAS Arrest Warrant; and an ECOWAS Black List of Terrorist and Criminal Networks (ISS 2013). The strategy rests on three pillars: prevent, pursue and reconstruct (ISS 2013), and when successfully implemented, would be far-reaching in consolidating the fight against terrorism in the region.

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) was conceptualised as a trade bloc covering eight countries from the Horn of Africa, Nile Valley and African Great Lakes region. These include Somalia, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda. In 2006, it developed its IGAD Capacity Building Program against Terrorism (ICPAT) aimed at developing programmes to build the capacity of member states to resist terrorism and promote regional security and cooperation (UNOSAA 2010: 38). By this, member states are to focus on enhancing their judicial capacity, enhancing border control, training and sharing information on best practices, and promoting strategic cooperation. In East Africa, the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) was established post-9/11 as a coalition contingency to detect and disrupt terrorist activities in the region. It is now under the authority of the Africa Command of the AU (AFRICOM) (Davis 2010: 207). Kenya is one of the countries that has benefited immensely from its participation in this task force, having reportedly been able to disrupt several terrorist conspiracies within its region (Davies 2010: 211).

Part of the regional counter-terrorism measures, as stated above, has been the establishment of regional/transnational armed forces to engage in combat against terrorists. The AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) is one such force. It is an active regional multi-dimensional peacekeeping mission created by the AU in 2007, with the approval of the UN and with the purpose, *inter alia*, of reducing the threat posed by al-Shabaab and other armed groups; providing security, stabilisation, reconciliation and peace-building in Somalia; and equipping and training Somali security personnel to prepare them for the taking over of security in their own country.[23] The presence of AMISOM in Somalia is one of the grievances of al-Shabaab, as mentioned above. Countries contributing troops to AMISOM are Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Djibouti and Burundi.[24] Over the years, AMISOM has

been successful to a certain extent. Its presence and activities in Somalia have led to a waning of the activities of al-Shabaab in Mogadishu and recovering of territory from al-Shabaab. Al-Shabaab has been left greatly decimated, even though it still exercises control over large parts of southern Somalia.[25] However the lack of capacity on the part of Somali security forces has meant that such gains have not been consolidated and al-Shabaab has been able to retake some of the areas.[26]

Unfortunately, this is the characteristic of the war against terrorism in Africa. In the case of Somalia, AMISOM succeeds in counter-terrorism attacks and regains lost territory, but is unable to consolidate these victories. This contributes to the resurgence of al-Shabaab's activities as presently being observed in Somalia. More recent attacks for which al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility, are the 25 January 2017 attack on Dayah Hotel in Mogadishu, killing and injuring many, and its ambush of a Kenyan/AMISOM military base in Kulbiyow, Somalia on 27 January 2017. One thing that this scenario tells us is the resilience of al-Shabaab. It continues to be a push-and-pull scenario, and the situation on ground was very tenuous, especially around the time of the Somali elections.

In the case of Boko Haram, the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) against Boko Haram was established as a transnational initiative in the countries around the Lake Chad area affected by the activities of the militant group. Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and to a certain extent Benin, have joined forces with Nigeria to try and combat the activities of Boko Haram.[27] Having been moribund since its inception in 1998, the MNJTF was reactivated in 2012 to deal with the threat posed by Boko Haram. In 2015, the PSC of the AU sanctioned the MNJTF mission to, among other things, achieve coordination of military operations at inter-state level, conduct border patrols, stop the flow of arms and assist in bringing to justice those responsible for crimes. Prior to this, Nigeria, Cameroon and Niger had operated a loose multinational military collaboration that has impacted on the activities of Boko Haram (VOA News 2016).

The 2015 presidential elections in Nigeria brought about a change in governance and a change in the military action against Boko Haram. Thus, the military offensive has been sustained, weakening the group and restricting its activities to mainly rural areas.[28] Since becoming operational in 2015, and despite the operational and financial constraints facing the MNJTF, it has recorded considerable success, leading to the release of hostages (most notably some of the Chibok girls), the destruction of Boko Haram training camps, confiscation and destruction of arms and ammunition belonging to the group, and the liberation of territories, previously occupied by Boko

Haram in Nigeria, Chad and even Cameroon.[29] These successes have led to the restoration of some level of normalcy in certain areas of northern Nigeria, particularly Borno State.[30]

However, these successes have not been sufficient enough to effectively defeat Boko Haram. The group still engages in suicide bombings and attacks in these countries. In June 2016, Boko Haram was reported to have ransacked a town in Niger, killing 26 soldiers and forcing thousands of people to flee. These attacks show the resilience of the group, and its flexibility in changing tactics and now waging asymmetrical warfare against security forces.[31]

Conclusion

The above description speaks to some of the more militarised measures that have been put in place. In general, Africa has adopted a multifaceted response to terrorism, with measures being taken at the continental, regional and transnational levels; and more importantly, with the establishment of softer, non-military measures. Some of these measures by regional bodies are aimed at preventing money laundering, and thus stifling the financial base of terrorist organisations. In West and East Africa, the two bodies of this nature are the Intergovernmental Action Group against Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing in West Africa (GIABA), which was established by ECOWAS in 2000 to strengthen the capacity of its members in combating money laundering, to enhance the capacity of regulatory law enforcement; and the Eastern and Southern Africa Anti-Money Laundering Group (ESAAMLG) (OSAA 2010: 38–29).

In all the steps that have been taken by Africa in the fight against terrorism, the AU has provided leadership in conceptualising and creating the institutional and legal framework to ensure a collective fight against terrorism (Moki 2010: 268). At the regional and transnational levels where the scourge of terrorism is felt the most, the same has been done and this has led to the establishment of armed forces to combat terrorist groups operating at these levels. However, as has been seen in the results by AMISOM and the MNJTF, lasting peace cannot be brought about by military action only, but by concerted efforts to ensure social, economic and political change in a society. It must be noted that the institutional route is not the only way to address the terrorism menace. Tackling socio-economic and governance problems in African states would also go a long way in dealing with the problem from another angle. Thus, a broad multifaceted solution is advocated. African states have shown a high level of commitment to building an institutional counter-terrorism strategy. This needs proper implementation now. There is need also for a concerted effort

to address the socio-economic problems in the continent, as the factors that encourage terrorism are more socio-economic, political and, to some extent, religious. Factors such as youth unemployment, poverty, corruption, lack of development by government and illegitimacy of governments, among others, have been noted to be contributory to radicalisation and terrorism. Reforms must be introduced, and these issues addressed on the continent, if Africa is to be free from terrorism. Reforms are difficult, but not impossible in the face of threats.[32] It is imperative that much energy and commitment needs to be shown in developing the economies of member-states; developing their human capital (hence developing their populations); eradicating poverty, and ensuring that good governance prevails at all levels of the state. This has already begun, and can be further achieved through regional integration and cooperation, especially as the benefits of integration are expected to bring about more prosperity on the continent. When channelled properly, increased wealth will, in turn, reduce unemployment as businesses will flourish and create more employment for the people.

The role of investment in the economy in addressing unemployment and poverty, particularly amongst the youth, is very important. This will enable the creation of more jobs, room for innovation and entrepreneurship, and thus engage the youth in particular, in the building and development of society. Investments must be aimed at exploiting local natural resources to create employment and tax revenue and feeding downstream businesses that thrive on major industrial activities (Africa Conflict Monitor 2015: 1).

This stance has been reiterated by a senior advisor with the International Peace Institute (IPI). He observed that unless the crisis in state–society relations is addressed, violent extremism in the region would continue. According to him, 'social, economic and political inclusion is the prime mechanism in the prevention of violent extremism and in consolidation of long-term peace' (IPI 2016). Mohamed Ibn Chambas, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to the United Nations for West Africa and the Sahel, has also indicated that it is key to take the socio-economic challenges facing the region and its rapid demographic growth into account in the fight against terrorism: 'Proactive and responsible policies, integrating the individual as an actor of development, must be a cornerstone in the economic actions and plans of states in the region, in order to ensure sustainable development and an equitable access to resources', he said (IPI 2016). A key demographic to bring into policy planning will be the continent's young people. This 'youth bulge' will become the African majority by 2025 when 65 per cent of the region's 430 million inhabitants will be under 25 years old.

However, all of these measures are only possible with the right kind of leadership. Africa needs leadership that is selfless and proactively interested in the development of their countries and peoples; without addressing this key point, all other efforts might just be fruitless. Visionary and accountable leadership is needed to drive the process and to set the parameters. It is something that is still very scarce on the continent.

Acknowledgement

Notes

1. With some of them having been designated as such on specific 'terrorist lists' that are kept by certain countries. For example, the US already lists Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab as terrorist organisations.
2. Sectoral approach means that state parties, while acknowledging the difficulties of having a universal definition, and hence one international convention dealing with terrorism, have rather followed the path of dealing with terrorism in different sectors and areas like aviation, on the seas etc. Thus, they have come up with specific conventions dealing with terrorism in specific situations.
3. Preamble 7 of the Plan of Action of the AU High-Level Inter-Governmental Meeting on the Prevention and Combatting of Terrorism in Africa, available at http://bibliotecavirtual.clacso.org.ar/ar/libros/iss/pdfs/oau/PoAfinal.pdf, accessed 28 August 2014.
4. This idea has been corroborated by Mills (2007: 21) when he describes Africa as 'the soft underbelly for global terrorism'.
5. See Gow, Olonishakin and Dijxhorn (2013) where the authors use empirical research gathered from focus group discussions and interviews to investigate historical, religious and socio-economic roots of the militancy that is being witnessed in certain parts of West Africa.
6. African Union High-Level Inter-Governmental Meeting on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism in Africa, Algiers, September 2002.
7. Point 6 of the Preamble to the Plan of Action.
8. Some of the other listed issues are: 'the porous and uncontrolled borders which allow unhindered cross-border movement of terrorists and other criminals'; 'inability by many African states to exercise control over vast areas of territory, thus providing safe haven for terrorist groups to train new recruits'; linkages of terrorism and transnational organised crime – drug trafficking and stability in the West African sub-region – which provides sources of funding for terrorist organisations; and real or perceived lack of political will by some African states to implement counter-terrorism measures.

9. According to the 2016 Multidimensional Poverty Index, 18 out of the top 20 poorest countries indicated in this index were African countries.

10. Organisations such as the UN World Food Program (WFP), the ICRC, Médecins Sans Frontières and CARE have been forced to withdraw at different times due to threats from the militant al-Shabaab.

11. A grenade was thrown into the Machakos bus terminus in 2011, killing five people, and injuring about 69 others. Another attack in March 2012 at a bus station left six people dead.

12. In November 2011, the East African Pentecostal Church was attached, followed by an attack at the God's House of Miracles Church in Nairobi in April 2012.

13. Cases like the Maitatsine riots of the early 1980s. Between 1980 and 2012, it was reported that violence associated with Islamic radicalisation in Nigeria had claimed up to an estimated 50,000 lives.

14. As of June 2009, the then Nigerian Director of Defence Information, Colonel Mohammed Yerima held this view.

15. In this piece, the author traces the history of Nigeria's radical jihadist-reformist from the times of the jihad of Usman dan Fodio in 1804; the fractionalisation of Islam into the Sufi and Shi'a thought groups around about the 1980s, which led to the Maitatsine uprisings around the same time. Boko Haram is one of the many groups that emerged from these different jihadist groups, with its philosophy built principally on the Maitatsine philosophy.

16. Alao (2013) further lists the beliefs of the movement as the conviction that practices like banking, taxation and jurisprudence are completely unacceptable; and they also dispute the principle of Darwinism and oppose the mixing of boys and girls.

17. In 2011, there were several attacks and bomb blasts directed at police stations and the general public, for which Boko Haram claimed responsibility.

18. Okpaga Chijioke and Eme (2012) chronicle about 53 terror attacks in northern Nigeria for which Boko Haram has claimed responsibility. These attacks have led to the deaths of thousands of people.

19. It is reported that many of the attacks in Kenya were actually carried out by Kenyan youths, who were members of al-Shabaab.

20. The Plan of Action links severe conditions of poverty and deprivation experienced by large sections of the African population to directly providing a fertile breeding ground for terrorist extremism. The document further indicates that few African governments were in a position, on their own, to marshall the requisite resources to combat the threat of terrorism, and that it was necessary and essential to pool resources together to ensure the effectiveness of counter-terrorism measures.

21. Created by Article 7 of the Protocol relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council.

22. Adopted at the ECOWAS 42nd ordinary session in Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire.

23. Chergui, S., AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, August 2016.

24. AMISOM website.

25. ISS Analysis, 2016.

26. ISS Analysis, August 2016.
27. ISS Today, February 2015.
28. ISS Today, January 2017.
29. *ibid.*
30. See 'Nigerian army secures major trade route', http://www.voanews.com/a/ nigeria-army-secures-major-trade-route/3410560.html, accessed October 2016.
31. ISS Today, January 2017.
32. *Africa Conflict Monitor*, 2015 March.

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