



COUNTERTERRORISM IN WEST AFRICA INADEQUACY OF MILITARY TOOLS

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The West Africa countries switched gear to adopt a military confrontation approach given the exacerbation of international cross-border terrorism, drawing on globalization and information technology and communications, which reduced the borders between countries. The said approach failed to repel terrorist attacks and prevent terrorist operations from snowballing into the region that extends over vast swathes of areas. This triggers the dilemmas of military solutions in this region.

DILEMMAS OF MILITARY SOLUTION FAILURE

counterterrorism in West Africa militarily was not a cinch. However, the confrontation has always been hemmed by many challenges that obstructed the path of the military solution, for a set of reasons including but not limited to the following:

1. OVERLAPPING CONFLICTS

Conflicts in the West Africa countries overlap in most cases. We find ongoing conflicts between different ethnic groups and organizations, and between terrorist groups and governments. As such, the defining lines between terrorists have become blurred, which greatly complicates counterterrorism, rendering observers fail to identify a clear map of what is happening based on the reality of geography and local conditions. This caused major problems, especially with the continuous shifts in the security and political situation in the region, and the failure to appoint the large numbers of such rival groups to control the territory. The conflict in the region is often marked by ancient tough rivalries, trafficking, and self-defence activities and violent terrorism. While the confusion between non-state actors - supposedly separate groups - acquires additional importance, especially with the aid that France provided to the MNLA to help fight terrorist groups.

2. TERRORIST COMPLEX MAP

The complex map of terrorism increases the dilemmas across the region. The activity of terrorist organizations is focused in the border areas between Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, or in the middle of the region, which is called the LIPTAKO-GOURMA TRIANGLE, in an area that has become the center of cross-border activity of extremist groups today. In March 2017, the main groups in the region, ANSAR DINE, the MACINA LIBERATION FRONT, the AL-MOURABITOUN, and the SAHARA WING of AL-QAEDA in the Islamic Maghreb announced that they had formed an alliance under the banner of the new entity JAMA'A NUSRAT AL-ISLAM WA AL-MUSLIMIN, which declared itself the official wing of Al-Qaeda in Mali.

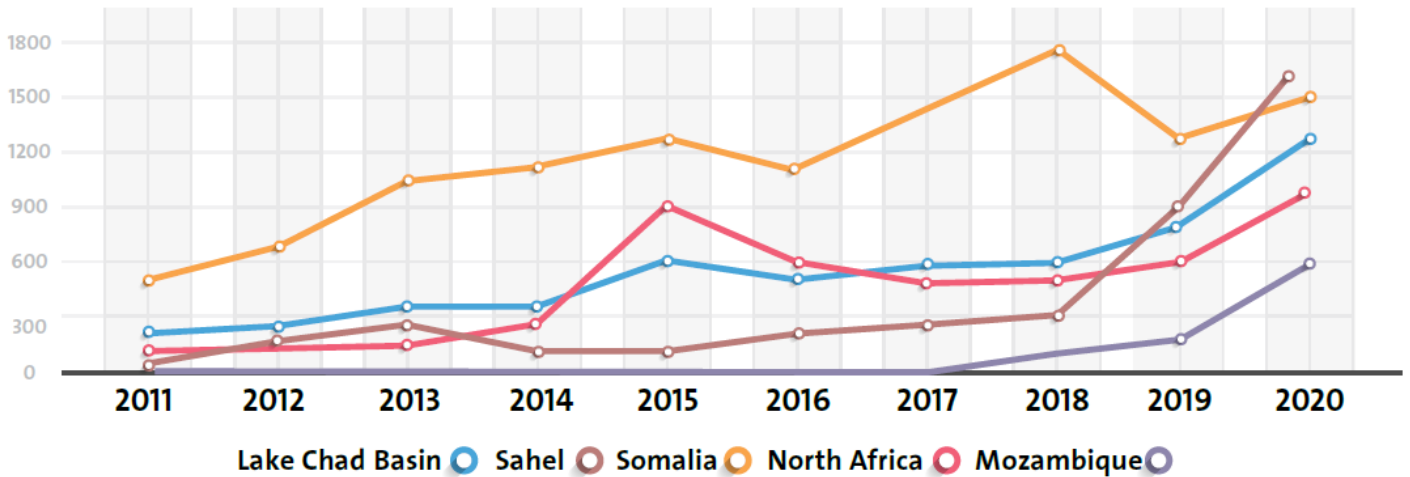
The Boko Haram was established in northern Nigeria in 2002, and ballooned into a violent rebellion in 2009, which led to the death of at least 25,000 people and the displacement of spates of people; it is active in Nigeria, northern Cameroon, Niger, and Chad.

ISIS in the Greater Sahara was established in 2015, and the TAWHEED WA JIHAD in West Africa, which was recognized the following year by an official branch in the region, joined it.

Ansar Al-Islam has emerged in Burkina Faso since December 2016, when it claimed responsibility for an attack on a military base in the north-eastern region of Somme, which killed 12 members of the anti-terrorism unit.

The operations of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb also overlap in this region, and the Macina Liberation Front, which includes the various components of the ethnic Azawad, is active.

As for the ALTAWHEED AND JIHAD in West Africa led by Ahmed Ould Al-Amer, and The Signers of Blood led by Mokhtar Belmokhtar, they merged in August 2013 under the name AL-MOURABITOUN, and after the killing of the group's leader Ahmed Al-Amer, his successor – Abu Al-Walid Al-Sahrawi – pledged allegiance to in May 2015. ISIS. This prompted Mokhtar Belmokhtar to issue a counterstatement denying joining ISIS and renewing the pledge of allegiance to al-Qaeda and its leader Ayman Al-Zawahiri. This fuelled the conflict between the two parties, which overthrew Abu Al-Walid Al-Sahrawi and Belmokhtar assumed the leadership.



Organization	Leader	Region
SUDAN LIBERATION FRONT	MOHAMED KOFA	Mali and Burkina Faso
AL-MOURABITOUN	MOKHTAR BELMOKHTAR	Southern Libya, Northern Mali
EMIRATE OF THE DESERT	YAHYA ABU AL-HAMAM (KILLED)	Southern Algeria, Northern Mali
BOKO HARAM	ABU BAKR SHEKAU	Northern Nigeria
SARMA BRIGADE	ABU JALIL FULANI	Northern Mali
ANSAR AL-ISLAM	IBRAHIM DEKO (KILLED)	Burkina Faso
ISIS IN THE SAHARA	ABU AL-WALID AL-SAHRAWI	Mali, Burkina Faso, and southern Libya
AL-QAEDA IN THE MAGHREB	ALI MICHO	Morocco, Algeria
ANSAR AL-DIN	IYAD AGH GHALI	Northern Mali

KEY TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS IN THE WEST AFRICA COUNTRIES

3. NON-STATE ACTORS

The military solutions are also further complicated by the presence of many non-state actors, as is the case for example the Council for the Coordination of Azawad Movements, a loose alliance of former rebel movements with common interests, and the Coalition of Armed Groups. It includes the Imghad Tuareg Group and their allies, a branch of the Arab Movement of Azawad, the Council for Coordination of Movements, and the National Resistance Front. These entities also include the Avogas Alliance of Tuareg clans, the Conference for Justice in Azawad in the Timbuktu region, the Movement to Save the Azawad in the Menaka region, and the dissident wing of the Coordination Council of Movements and the National Resistance Front.

With the establishment of Vigilante self-protection groups in Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger and Chad, concerns were raised about their impact in complicating the situation,

according to a report by the International Crisis Group issued in February 2017, on this phenomenon in the Lake Chad region.

4. FRAGILITY OF STRUCTURES OF SOCIETIES

The threats of the spread of terrorism in West Africa cause military solutions to fail, and this happens because large areas of those countries are not practically subject to the authority of the state. Especially those areas that are considered one of the poorest in the world, with tribal and religious differences that have affected the extension of state authority over most of its parts.

5. HIGH RATES OF POVERTY

Poverty contributed to a great deal of political and social problems and conflicts in that region; it weakened military solutions and created a breeding ground for the expansion of terrorism in the West Africa countries, while widening the knowledge gap between the outputs of the educational systems and the labour markets, and the deterioration of human rights and the values of justice, as well as dwindling opportunities for political, social and economic participation, the deterioration of the environmental situation, political instability, and the abundance of wars and conflicts, and military coups.

The high rates of poverty considering the population increase in the West Africa countries have led to the spread of terrorism on a large scale, according to United Nations statistics, Niger is the second poorest country in the world at 63%, while the poverty rate in Chad is more than 80%, and in Mali 64%. In Mauritania 40%. This is due to the nature of the region, which is dominated by desertification and drought resulting from spasmodic and poor rain. More than 13 million people in the countries of the region need emergency humanitarian assistance, five million more than the number recorded at the beginning of the year.

6. ETHNIC AND TRIBAL OVERLAP

West Africa is characterized by a multitude of extremist trends among dozens of tribes, and this is what made it an overlap between tribal, ethnic, and ideological aspects, and made the region an active and diverse center for various criminal groups and terrorist organizations that differed in ideologies, visions, goals, and objectives, which contributed to the failure Military confrontations.

For instance, in the past, the Tuareg in Mali were seen as a protective shield against Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and terrorist extremism in the north, but the Ansar Al-

Din group, founded in 2012, initially raised the banner of the Tuareg rebellion, then returned to adopt Extremist ideologies in 2017. The researcher remarks in extremist movements in Africa Julie Coleman many citizens of these countries believe that Al-Qaeda and ISIS are two opposition forces or parties that compensate for the absence of democracy, and that joining either of them may be a message towards suppressing legal opposition in the country.

7. IMPACT OF INCREASING ORGANIZED CRIME

The extended areas outside the state's authority in West Africa enabled criminal activity to mushroom and snowball in the region, especially with the complicity of some officials, and the willingness of Western governments to pay ransoms, which contributed to the expansion of kidnapping and smuggling and trafficking crimes since 2003, including the smuggling of Moroccan hashish gum and cocaine.

Some leaders in Mali took advantage of the turmoil to exercise their influence. When European tourists were kidnapped in 2003, the Malian and European governments relied on two men: Iyad Agh Ghali, the Tuareg leader and former rebel and head of the Al-Qaeda-linked Ansar Dine group, and the mayor of Tarkint Baba Ould Cheikh, to be mediators in negotiations over the ransom payment.

At the beginning of 2008, this trade flourished more when terrorist figures appeared as mediators in the hostage cases, with compelling evidence that these intermediaries seized a large part of the ransom sums and shared it with the politicians who provided them with protection. The overlap between ideological terrorism, organized crime and corrupt politicians increased in search of money and financing, which also contributed to the weakness and failure of military confrontations.

BEYOND MILITARY SOLUTIONS

The counterterrorism solutions in West Africa were based on military efforts, the most important of which was an agreement concluded by the Sahel group in February 2014, in the Mauritanian capital, Nouakchott. The agreement included the formation of a force of 3,000 soldiers to confront terrorist organizations. Then came the creation of the TAKOBA, a new task force created by France and some European and African allies, and the Blue Helmets, the UN peacekeeping force. It becomes clear that West Africa needs solutions that go beyond military efforts to a variety of others, and this will be according to the following steps:

A. Gathering Information

It is necessary to develop an electronic and human information network on extremist groups and individuals, containing accurate information about the weakness and strength of these terrorist organizations and groups, in addition to intercepting, collecting, analyzing and assessing their correspondence to arrive at an accurate prediction about what can be done, especially with regard to recruitment and joining methods, training locations, ideological references, sources of funding, armament and logistical support, and social and tribal references for elements and leaders.

B. Penetration and Siege of Organizations

This step follows the collection of information. It is possible to benefit from the complex map of organizations in the West Africa countries, the most prominent of which are the battles mounted now between ISIS led by Abu Al-Walid Al-Sahrawi and the Al-Qaeda group led by Iyad Agh Ghali, and the recruitment and use of dissident elements for penetration operations, especially those who are now fleeing from Syria and Libya to tribal havens in this area to join the internal networks.

C. Changing Trajectory of Terrorism

After the first and second steps, changing the course of terrorism comes by drying up the funding sources to which the leaders and other elements are linked (smuggling, ransom, kidnapping, hostages), and supporting defection and dissent, by directing intensified propaganda to highlight schisms, and sowing sedition between the tribal base of all organizations, by separating them from the tribal leaders and making the groups hostile and aggressive to each other, or neutralizing each other.

CONCLUSION

To well counter terrorist organizations in the West Africa countries, the problems raised must be solved, including confronting organized crime, resolving tribal turmoil, addressing state fragility, and combating poverty. Dismantling these groups comes into play, according to a set of steps that harmonize simultaneously with the military efforts in the confrontation.