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EVOLUTION OF TERRORISM IN AFRICA

Analysing The Complexity of Long-Term Conflicts and
Foreign Intervention in The Region

Rehet Bains

Edited by: Meenakshi Nair

About the Author

Rehet Bains is a Postgraduate student at Jindal School of International Affairs (JSIA) and is a Research Intern at the Centre for Security Studies, JSIA.

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Introduction

Africa has been one of the oldest and the most prevalent epicenters of terror(ism). While the issue of terrorism is deemed a global threat, the situation seems more critical in the African continent. With numerous groups utilizing violence and intimidation to further their political or ideological objectives, terrorism in Africa has been a persistent issue for decades. The 1960s saw the beginning of the emergence of terrorism in Africa, as nationalist and anti-colonial movements fought for political and territorial independence by resorting to violence and experienced a rise in religiously inspired terrorism in the 1980s and 1990s, with organizations like Boko Haram in Nigeria and Al-Shabaab in Somalia becoming serious security concerns.¹ These organizations, which aimed to build Islamic states in their own nations, were influenced by the worldwide jihadist movement.

Global terror groups like Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the Islamic State (IS/ISIS), as well as Boko Haram (JASDJ), established their roots in various African states. The deep-rooted presence of these groups influenced various other non-state actors to rise up. Fatal attacks by organizations linked to the Islamic State (ISIS) and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) have increased in recent years across West and North Africa and fatal ones are believed to have been carried out in Tunisia, Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso.

A rise in separatist movements, such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) in Nigeria and the Cabinda Liberation Front (FLEC) in Angola, have also been observed

¹ Analytics, HENSOLDT. "The Terrorism Landscape 2022: Jihadist Activity in Sub-Saharan Africa - HENSOLDT Analytics." HENSOLDT Analytics, September 30, 2022. <https://www.hensoldt-analytics.com/2022/09/30/islamic-state-subsaharan-africa/>.

in addition to acts of terrorism inspired by religion. These organizations frequently resort to violence to advance their goals of regional independence or increased autonomy.

Long-lasting conflicts in Africa are frequently distinguished by their complexity. These wars can involve a variety of parties, including governments, rebel organizations, ethnic or religious communities, as well as outside parties, and they are frequently sparked by underlying political, economic, and historical issues. The colonial heritage is one aspect that adds to the complexity of the long-running conflicts in the region. During the colonial era, European powers often divided ethnic and cultural groups, resulting in tensions that still exist today, which led to the formation of many African countries. Most conflicts arise over resources like land, minerals, and oil is another one of the factors for the constant tussle not only between different ethnic groups as well as terror organizations of the continent. When various groups compete for control over these resources, violent conflicts are bound to rise resulting in bloodshed and displacement. In Africa, political unrest and corruption are common causes of protracted conflicts. Conflict-causing situations can be facilitated, and already existing tensions can be heightened by weak or failed nations, political violence, and authoritarian regimes. Finally, outside parties like foreign governments, international organizations, and multinational businesses can have a big impact on how long or how many conflicts there are in Africa. It is possible that these actors' regional, economic, or geopolitical interests clash with those of the local communities, resulting in hostility.

Origin of Terror

There are many different and complicated elements that have contributed to the birth and development of terrorist organizations in Africa. The crucial elements are:

- Political Unrest- Several African nations underwent periods of political unrest, including coups, civil wars, and contentious elections, which the extremist organizations saw as a chance to take advantage of the local complaints and recruit new members.
- Economic factors- Economic possibilities, unemployment, and poverty have all played a role in the emergence of terrorist organizations in Africa. Due to these elements, it is simpler for extremist organizations to enlist new members by promising a better life or financial stability.

- Ethnic and Religious tensions- A number of violent conflicts have been the result of African people being divided on the basis of their diverse ethnic backgrounds, which extremist groups take advantage of. The organizations have sized on these tensions, often by focusing on populations or framing their objectives with regard to “defending” a particular community.
- Foreign Influence- Foreign meddling, whether it be military operations or political meddling, has led to the emergence of some terrorist organizations in Africa. the extremist groups in turn take advantage of the resentment and anger that festered over time to gain more opportunities for acquiring support in their favour.
- Ideology- Some terrorist organizations in Africa are driven by extreme ideologies like Salafism or Wahhabism that call for the establishment of a puritanical Islamic State. These organizations frequently strive to violently overthrow the existing political and social order because they believe it to be corrupt or illegitimate.

The roots of terrorist organizations in Africa are frequently entwined with more general social, economic, and political problems due to the complex interactions between these factors. It is necessary to take a holistic approach that addresses the root causes of terrorism in Africa. This includes addressing economic disparity, supporting political stability and good governance, and encouraging interethnic and interreligious discussion and understanding.

Islamic State (IS)

Apart from the Somalian region, the IS reached other parts of the continent as well, especially in Northern Africa and the Sahel. The organization attracted official media attention due to its brutal and sophisticated approach toward extremist acts.¹ Libya- Following Gaddafi’s overthrow in 2011, the country turned into a refuge for the terror group. In 2014, it created a base in the nation and overran Sirte, where it launched numerous violent assaults. Although the organization is still present in Libya despite having been largely vanquished there in the past.

- Nigeria- An offshoot called the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) is most active there. However, the group has claimed responsibility for a number of assaults in the nation, including a suicide bombing that occurred in Maiduguri in 2019.

- Mali- Since 2015, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) has been carrying out assaults on both civilians and security personnel. Additionally, the group has foreign organizations present in the nation as well as the UN peacekeeping forces.
- Somalia- Although Al-Shabaab continues to be the largest extremist organization, the IS has a presence there thanks to its offshoot, Islamic State in Somalia. The group carried out several attacks on security personnel and civilians.

The presence of IS in Africa is quite complicated and varies from nation to nation. The group has a large presence in some places and poses a serious threat to security, while in other places its influence is less pronounced. The fight against the Islamic State in Africa requires an all-encompassing strategy that targets the underlying causes of its formation and expansion, such as political unrest, economic injustice, and tensions between different ethnic groups and religions.

IS attacks in 2022

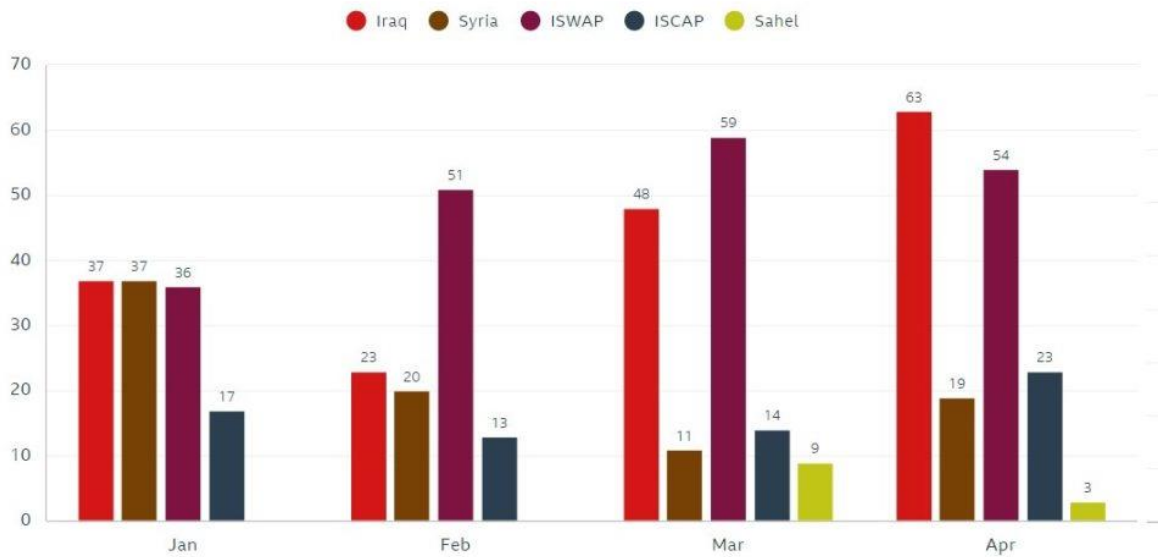


Figure 1. shows the Number of ISIS attacks per region, in 2022 (source: BBC Monitoring)

Al Qaeda (AQ)

Particularly in the Sahel and East Africa, Al Qaeda has a foothold in a number of African nations:

- Mali- The Group for Support of Islam and Muslims (GSIM), an offshoot of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), is one of the primary extremist organizations operating in Mali as of the early 2000s. It claimed a number of attacks on civilians, security personnel as well as international organizations like UN peacekeeping.
- Somalia- AQ has had ties to the Al-Shabaab which has been operating in the region since the early 2000s and has carried out a number of violent acts, including bombings and shootings that targeted both security personnel and civilians.
- Nigeria- Boko Haram has ties to both AQ and the IS in addition to having sworn allegiance to the latter. It executed several bombings and kidnappings in the Nigerian region.
- Kenya- Since the 1990s, Al-Qaeda has operated there and its affiliate, Al-Qaeda in East Africa (AQEA), carried out the bombings of the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998. Al- Shabaab due to its ties with AQ as well as carried out a series of assaults including the 2013 Westgate Mall incident and the 2015 Garissa University College attack had been able to defeat the AQEA.
- Burkina Faso: Since 2015, Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), an affiliate of AQIM, has operated there. Attacks against citizens and security personnel have been conducted by the groups frequently throughout the northern and eastern parts of the nation.²

² Al-Qaeda involvement in Africa - Wikipedia. "Al-Qaeda Involvement in Africa - Wikipedia," September 4, 2008. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Qaeda_involvement_in_Africa.

Al-Qaeda's continued presence in Africa is a serious security risk, and the efforts to combat the organization call for an all-encompassing strategy that takes into account the fundamental causes of its emergence and growth, this includes encouraging interethnic and interreligious communication and understanding.³

Boko Haram

The extremist group was founded in northern Nigeria and has now spread its operations to Cameroon, Niger, and Chad as well as other neighboring nations.

- Nigeria- The group got established in northern Nigeria in the early 2000s and its insurgency has been one of the bloodiest of all in Africa. The group carried out bombings, shootings as well and kidnappings that have targeted killings of civilians and security personnel primarily in the states of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa.
- Cameroon- It started conducting attacks in the nation's northern region in 2013 with kidnappings, bombings, and attacks against security forces seeming as its main objective.
- Niger saw attacks by the terror group in 2015 mainly in the southeast area of the Diffa region on residents, law enforcement officers, and aid workers.
- Chad- In 2015 the region saw attacks primarily in the western Lake Chad region directed towards citizens, security personnel, and public servants.

³ Chivvis, Christopher S., and Andrew Liepman. "North Africa's Menace: AQIM's Evolution and the U.S. Policy Response." North Africa's Menace: AQIM's Evolution and the U.S. Policy Response | RAND, September 9, 2013. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR415.html.

The Lake Chad Basin has suffered greatly as a result of Boko Haram's activity there, with many people being displaced, and killed and the economics negatively impacted in addition to military actions by regional and international forces, ongoing attempts to root causes of the group's emergence and growth such as poverty, unemployment and political marginalization.⁴

Al-Shabaab

Originally from Somalia, the extremist organization Al-Shabaab has subsequently expanded its operations into Kenya and other nearby nations in the Horn of Africa.

- Somalia- the terrorist group launched an uprising against the Somali government and its allies after being created there in 2006. It carried out various bombings, shootings, and kidnappings that have targeted both civilians and security members in addition to imposing strict Sharia law in the regions it controls.
- Uganda- In 2010, it carried out a number of explosions in Kampala, Uganda with the crowd of the FIFA World Cup finals as their objective resulting in the deaths of over 70 civilians.
- Tanzania- It operated primarily along the coast and engaged in smuggling and other illegal operations in the area in addition to carrying out several attacks on civilians.

The actions of the said organization in the Horn of Africa have had a considerable effect on the area, resulting in extensive displacement, fatalities, and economic damage. It has been the target

⁴ MARKOVITZ, IRVING LEONARD. *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 47, no. 2 (2014): 350–52. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24393416>.

of continuing counterterrorism measures, which have included military operations by regional and global forces as well as initiatives to address the root causes of the group's developments and growth, such as poverty, political unrest, and corruption.⁵

The Sub-Saharan region of Africa is the most influenced and the most significant epicenter of terror-induced violence, specifically the Sahel region of the African subcontinent as it accounted for more terror-influenced deaths in 2022 than those combined in South Asia, the Middle East as well as Northern African nations (MENA) with 43% of the global total when compared to the 1% of conflicts in 2007.⁶

⁵ Terrorism in the Horn of Africa | United States Institute of Peace. "Terrorism in the Horn of Africa," n.d. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2004/01/terrorism-horn-africa>.

⁶ Reports – Institute for Economics and Peace. "Reports – Institute for Economics and Peace," n.d. <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/reports/>.

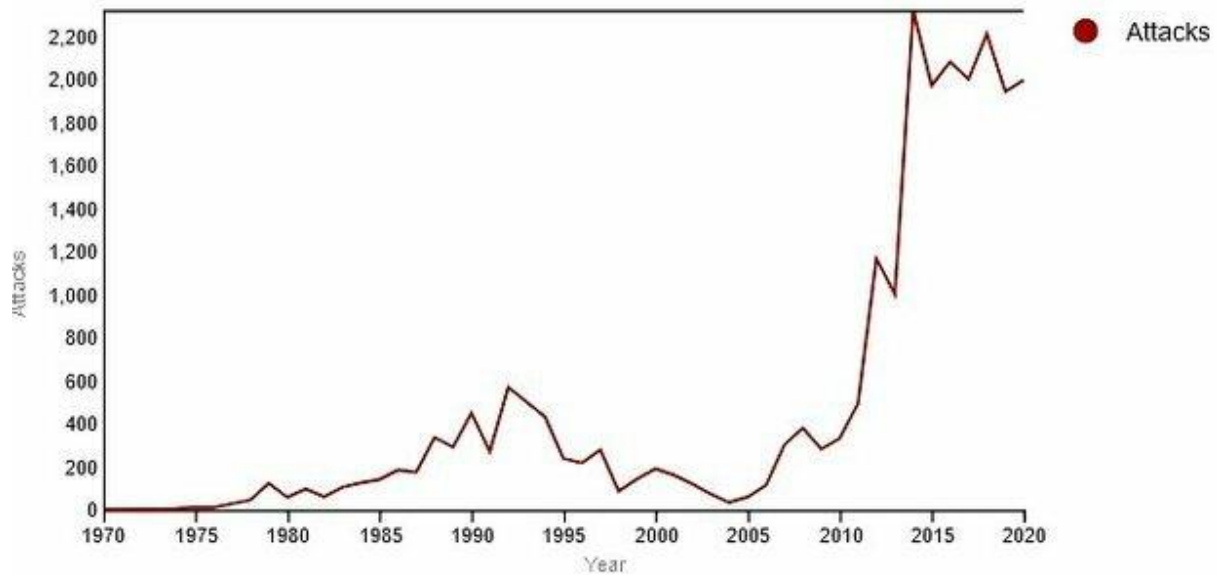


Figure 2 shows the activities of Boko Haram in Nigeria from 2009- 22

Conflict between Actors

These complicated disputes have been stoked by a number of things, including competing over resources, ideological disagreements, and power struggles within the jihadist movement. The consequences of these have terrible effects on the local population, resulting in violence, evictions, and violations of human rights.

The sheer number of state and non-state actors pursuing divergent political goals accounts for a significant portion of the complexity of armed conflicts in Northern and Western Africa. When defending country borders, regular state forces frequently engage in combat alongside various ethnic or pro-government militants, secessionist rebels seeking greater autonomy, jihadist

organizations attempting to impose religious law, militias supported by politicians or businesspeople as well as warlords or criminal entities looking to enrich themselves.⁷

On Dec 21, 2018, Ali Rage, the commander of the biggest Islamist militia in Africa at that time, declared war on the “so-called Islamic State that happened to be in the country”. During their reign for the past years in Africa, he controlled about 4,500 fighters in the Somalian region by 2019. While they were busy opposing the 22,000 troops of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) in the capital of Mogadishu, a mere 150 militants founded the “Islamic State in Somalia” in Puntland based in the northern region of the area.⁸

The IS and the AQ exist close by with each other in the continent of Africa but are also bitter adversaries, which may have an impact on how either side conducts business. Somalia is a good example of how the two groups compete with each other although Al-Shabaab is significantly more powerful and influential than the IS in the area, and it has made it difficult for the latter to operate there.² In 2016, Boko Haram split, and one part aligned itself with the IS becoming the ISWAP. Since then, the two groups have been engaging in aggressive clashes fueled by territorial

⁷ Chapter 2. Violent organisations in conflict in North and West Africa | Conflict Networks in North and West Africa | OECD iLibrary. “Home,” January 1, 1887. <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/efc49eb8-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/efc49eb8-en>.

⁸ The Security Times. “Terror, Old and New: In Africa, Militant Groups Swearing Allegiance to the Islamic State Are Multiplying. - The Security Times,” February 13, 2019. <https://www.the-security-times.com/terror-old-new-africa-militant-groups-swearing-allegiance-islamic-state-multiplying/>.

and resource disputes in the Nigerian region as well as the countries nearby. the AQ and the Islamic State in Libya (ISL) have kept the Libyan state in a constant situation of instability since the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime with numerous jihadist groups profiting from the anarchy. Offshoots of the respective organizations have been in everlasting tussles over land and resources and have engaged in bloody battles for control of the same.

Foreign Intervention

The impact of influence on the terror groups of Africa by both foreign state and non-state actors has been quite significant in the continent's history of terror. The effects of foreign intervention on terrorism in Africa have proved to be quite complex and contradictory. While some interventions have been effective in stopping or curtailing terrorist activity, others might have accidentally fueled those acts in addition to the growth of terrorism. On one hand, international intervention has given African countries much-needed support in their fight against terrorism, for example, the Western countries' donations for the cause of military training, intelligence assistance, and defense equipment have helped African security services become better equipped and more proactive in battling against terrorist threats, in addition to which a reduction in the fascination with extremist beliefs and encouragement of stability and resilience in vulnerable communities by international aid and development programs that try to address the underlying socio-economic conditions that can fuel terrorism.

Although foreign intervention has been able to bring some positive changes, it may not always be beneficial for foreign entities to interfere as it could unknowingly and unintentionally result in violent clashes and bloodshed, for example, some actions have led to criticism for escalating local conflicts and fueling tensions, which has allegedly promoted radicalization and recruitment of extremists by terror groups. Moreover, some foreign interventions have come under fire for their support of oppressive regimes and violations of human rights, which can foster a sense of injustice and encourage the spread of terror-influenced ideologies. The US intervention, during counterterrorism efforts in Somalia, in the early 2000s, was criticized due to the air and drone strikes leaving a vast number of dead civilians in its wake, resulting in a failed objective. Furthermore, the Libyan intervention of 2011 in Mali to overthrow Muammar Gaddafi's government resulted in the AQIM taking advantage of the chaos, after the NATO-led operation,

to deeply root its establishment in the region. These instances show how foreign intervention is a very fragile aspect while dealing with issues of counterterrorism and how meticulous preparation, organization, and execution of those activities is required to avoid unintended consequences and provide long-lasting solutions, not only in the region of Africa but also the countries that have been battling terrorism.

Conclusion

Given the presence of several well-known terrorist organizations on the African continent, it is obvious that terrorism is an obvious and prolonged issue. Various organizations harm civilian communities, leading to eviction, fatalities, and economic damage, although attempts have been made to address the root cause of their development and growth through military operations by domestic as well as international forces. It is quite evident that terrorism in Africa is a very complicated and diverse problem that is affected by a number of elements such as poverty, political unrest, and historical and cultural aspects. The form of terror has changed over time, moving towards more regional and decentralized organizations that are frequently motivated by local conflicts and grievances.

Foreign involvement in the fight against non-state actors in Africa has had both beneficial and detrimental effects, with some operations successfully assisting in counterterrorism initiatives while others promoting the escalation of extremism. External military interventions, which frequently have a significant impact on the patterns of alliances and rivalries between state forces, rebel groups, and violent extremist organizations, further add to the complexity of today's war. Despite recent advancements in the field of conflict studies, formal studies of how foreign interventions affect alliances and rivalries among non-state organizations are still rare. Both the relationships between the belligerents themselves and the relationships between the intervening power and the parties determine how the intervention will turn out.

At last, it seems quite obvious that in order to minimize unexpected repercussions and provide lasting results, foreign operations must be well planned and carried out.

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