

**TOWARDS A MORE EFFECTIVE REGIONAL COUNTER-TERRORISM
COOPERATION IN AFRICA**

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Introduction

Terrorism does not respect political or geographic borders. A cursory look at the incidence and fatality of terrorist attacks around the world would reveal relatively low numbers for Africa.ⁱ However, in recent years, the number and severity of terror attacks in Africa are on the rise. This trend demands urgent attention and action. This policy brief looks at the nature of terrorism in Africa, highlights some issues and challenges in regional and sub-regional responses and suggests ways to improve regional counter-terrorism cooperation.

The Nature of Terrorism in Africa

Africa is currently home to five major terrorist groups and several splinter groups.ⁱⁱ These groups are generally based on religion. They seek to impose their religious beliefs and principles in their areas of operation. Some target governments due to policies and programs perceived as contradictory with their beliefs and interests.

Generally, terrorist groups in Africa start operating within the borders of one country. However, with time, they spread to neighbouring countries. For these reasons, terrorist activity in Africa cuts across boundaries of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) set up to deal with issues at the sub-regional level. More so, there is evidence of cooperation in funding, technical assistance, radicalization, information and weapon sharing among the groups.ⁱⁱⁱ

Regional Counter-Terrorism Cooperation and Challenges

In Africa, regional cooperation is widely acknowledged as the best approach for countering terrorism. In response to the attacks in Kenya and Tanzania in August of 1998, the African Union (AU) adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism. To facilitate implementation of the Convention, a Plan of Action was also adopted in September 2002.^{iv} However, only 46 out of the 54 Member States have signed and only 32 have ratified.^v

Additionally, a Protocol adopted to the AU Convention and intended to reflect the new forms of terrorism and facilitate implementation names the AU Peace and Security Council, the Commission and Regional Mechanisms (RECs/sub-regional organizations) as the responsible instruments for implementation.^{vi} Although the three are supposed to carry out this responsibility within the framework of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), the latter is yet to be fully functional. This deprives the components from delivering expected outcomes of which counter-terrorism is one.

Apart from the AU, sub-regional organizations in Africa play a major role in peace and security efforts in the continent.^{vii} At a time when the OAU (the predecessor to the AU) was not in good standing to spearhead peace efforts within the region, the ECOWAS, for example, was at the forefront of peace initiatives within West Africa. Typical cases are the massive contributions to bring peace to Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s. Presently, the ECOWAS and some other sub-regional organizations serve as a great source of information for the AU's Continental Early Warning System (CEWS). They have observation and monitoring units for relaying early warning information to the Situation Room of the CEWS.^{viii} Thus sub-regional bodies seem essential partners in the fight against terrorism. Presently, there is a counter-terrorism strategy for four of

the five sub-regions in the continent. Central Africa is in the process of adopting one in collaboration with the UN Counterterrorism Implementation Task Force (UN-CTITF).

Further, the contribution of the sub-regional bodies could be better if they could collaborate among themselves. The cross-border nature of terrorism and the increasing networks among terrorist groups in the continent makes the sub-regional frameworks for countering terrorism inadequate and near obsolescence. The situation calls for inter-sub-regional strategies. Although there are some ad hoc counter-terrorism arrangements among directly affected states which cut across sub-regional boundaries, this is not enough.^{ix} Practical efforts to combat terrorism should not be the preoccupation of only countries in which terrorist groups operate. This is because the porous nature of most African borders and the fact that the conditions which fester terrorism are prevalent in most countries in the continent puts others at risk.^x Moreover, the demands of effectively responding to terrorism in the continent outweigh the capabilities of individual states.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Regional cooperation is a widely-accepted approach for countering terrorism in Africa. However, there are issues and challenges with implementation. There is currently limited inter-sub-regional cooperation. The closest so far have been ad hoc arrangements among directly affected states. Neighbouring countries with similar vulnerabilities to terrorism are excluded from such initiatives. While terrorist groups in the continent are cooperating effectively among themselves, cooperation is not as smooth among states and sub-regional organizations. For these reasons several potential options are worthy of consideration:

- The African states yet to sign, or ratify, the AU Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism could be encouraged to do so.
- The AU could create a permanent African Standby Force (ASF) to replace ad hoc approaches. The capacity of the other components of the APSA could be built to enhance effectiveness.
- The AU could partner the UN-CTITF to encourage the adoption and implementation of comprehensive frameworks for combating terrorism in the sub-regions.
- Inter-REC cooperation could be encouraged as a matching response to the cross-border nature of terrorism in Africa. There could be policy reforms in movement of persons across borders, information and technical assistance sharing.
- In the spirit of the Principle of Responsibility to Protect (RtoP), the UN, AU and sub-regional organizations could adopt measures for intervention in states when terrorism puts human lives at risk..

The bottom line is that regional counter-terrorism cooperation could be more easily achieved by promoting Pan-Africanism as a means to achieve peace, security and sustainable development in Africa..^{xi}

Notes

ⁱ Global Terrorism Database (GTD), <http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/> (09/30/2016); data available at <http://storymaps.esri.com/stories/2016/terrorist-attacks/> (09/30/2016); Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism (CPOST), 2016. Suicide Attack Database (October 12, 2016 Release). [Data File]. Retrieved from <http://cpostdata.uchicago.edu> (10/15/2016), Search Year: 2001-2016 and Location: All African Countries Listed.

ⁱⁱ The Al-Shabaab of Somalia, the Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in Northwest Africa, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) of Uganda, the Ansar Dine of Mali, and the Boko Haram of Nigeria. See Rosenzweig, M., "Kidnapped Nigerian Girls: Key Terrorist Groups in Africa", ABC News, 2016, <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/fullpage/african-terrorist-groups-infographic-23610960> (10/22/2016). On the Ansar Dine, see "Mali Crisis: Key Players", <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-17582909> (10/22/2016).

ⁱⁱⁱ Onuoha, F., "Boko Haram and the Evolving Salafi Jihadist Threat in Nigeria", De Montclos, Marc-Antoine P., (ed.), *Boko Haram: Islamism, Politics, Security and the State in Nigeria*. Leiden: African Studies Centre, 2014, pp. 180-184, <https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/bitstream/handle/1887/23853/ASC-075287668-3441-01.pdf?sequence=2> (09/22/2016).

^{iv} Wani, I.J., "The African Union Role in Global Counterterrorism", Le Sage, A., (ed.), *African Counterterrorism Cooperation: Assessing Regional and Subregional Initiatives*. Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, Potomac Books, Inc., 2007, pp. 46-47.

^v Kanu, Allieu I., "The African Union", Nesi, G., (ed.), *International Cooperation in Counter-terrorism: The United Nations and Regional Organizations in the Fight Against Terrorism*. London and New York: Routledge, Taylor&Francis Group, 2016, p. 171.

^{vi} See Articles 4,5, and 6 of the Protocol to the OAU Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism, Addis Ababa, 8 July 2004, <http://www.peaceau.org/uploads/protocol-oau-convention-on-the-prevention-combating-terrorism-en.pdf> (11/13/2016) are core components of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) which is yet to be fully functional. See Bah, Alhaji S., et al, *The African Peace and Security Architecture: A Handbook*. (Addis Ababa: African Union/Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2014), p. 21, <https://library.fes.de/bueros/aethiopien> (16/5/2016); African Union, "Peace and Security Council", <http://au.int/en> (18/5/2016); and "African Peace and Security Architecture: AU's blueprint for the promotion of peace, security and stability in Africa", www.peaceau.org (17/5/2016).

^{vii} The OAU's inability to handle widespread political instability in the continent moved sub-regional organizations like the ECOWAS into action. See Franke, B., *Security Cooperation in Africa: a Reappraisal*. Boulder and London: First Forum Press, 2009, pp. 64-65.

^{viii} See <http://www.peaceau.org/en/page/28-continental-early-warning> (02/05/2017).

^{ix} An example is the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) made up of Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, and Benin. Benin is the only one which has not as yet been affected by the activities of the Boko Haram.

^x See Denoeux, G., and Carter, L., *Guide to the Drivers of Violent Extremism*. USAID, February 2009, http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pnadt978.pdf (09/15/2016); Dowd, C., Grievances, “Governance and Islamist Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa”, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 53, 4 (2015), pp. 505-531; Le Sage, A., (ed.), “Terrorism Threats and Vulnerabilities in Africa”, Le Sage, A., op. cit., pp. 8-11.

^{xi} Pan-Africanism, the idea that all Africans must unite in pursuing common goals and aspirations, is one of the major ideas inspiring regional cooperation in Africa. See the Charter of the OAU, http://www.au.int/en/sites/default/files/treaties/7759-sl-oau_charter_1963_0.pdf (09/12/2016); and the Constitutive Act of the African Union, http://www.au.int/en/sites/default/files/ConstitutiveAct_EN.pdf (09/12/2016).