



**Kurzfassung** von Ademola Adediji

## **The Fight Against the Spread of Islamic Terrorism in Africa: Roles of the EU**

In view of the increasing cooperation and networks among various terrorist groups in different parts of Africa and beyond, there is a growing fear that such developments could endanger the peace and security and lead to more loss of lives in Africa, Europe and the entire world. Based on this recent interconnectivity among many terrorist groups, whose commonality can be discerned in the spread of Salafist ideologies, an active and more engaged European Union, in complementing the efforts made by the United States government, is very pertinent in order to stem this new trend.

In view of the afore-mentioned threats to peace and order, this essay will attempt to give a brief highlight on the growing cooperation and expanding terrorist networks among Islamic extremist organisations such as al-Qaeda Core, its affiliate in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), al-Shabaab in Somalia, the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) in Mali, the Islamic State (IS) in Libya and Boko Haram in Nigeria. In addition, attempts will be made to explain how and why these terrorist activities would not only jeopardise fragile democratic structures of many states in Africa, but rather could constitute new threats and, on the long-run, become a dangerous development to the peace and stability of both Africa and Europe. Existing contacts between the above-named terrorist groups and other international terrorist organisations beyond the African continent like al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and

Pakistani Taliban as well as al-Qaeda Core will be made a subject of discussion. Furthermore, the responses of the European Union and the United States government as counter-measures to these perceived threats will be, as much as possible, addressed.

It has been in public discussions lately that there has been an incessant growth in Islamic terror attacks and further spread of Islamic terrorist related activities in many parts of Africa and beyond. The most dangerous aspect of this spread of Islamic extremist propaganda on the African continent is the unprecedented chain of association and widening communication networks among several terrorist groups in different parts of Africa. With the existing loss of sovereignty by many state governments on the continent, countries that could either secure their external territorial borders by preventing unauthorised person(s) from gaining entry or hinder cross-border terrorist activities, the spate of recruitment and transfer of illicit weapons and funds as well as kidnappings by these terrorist groups will continue to pose great danger to the stability of states, an emergency situation which could erode democratic values. A specific consequence of this danger is the current migration crises experienced in many European countries, a situation that could degenerate further and constitute threats to states' capacities.

With the spread of violent activities based on Islamic Salafist ideology and Sunni tenets, many countries on the African continent have witnessed a rapid rise in the advent, radicalisation and cooperation among different terrorist organisations in recent years. Many adherents of Boko Haram, which means *Western education is sin*, fled from Nigeria in 2009 to different African countries such as Mali, Niger Republic, Sudan and Somalia to seek refuge following crackdowns on their hideouts carried out by Nigerian security forces. The flights and sojourn of many of these Boko Haram members, who were subsequently trained by al-Shaabab, AQIM, and MUJAO, are of great importance for understanding the nature of the porous territorial borders existing in all of the above-mentioned countries that made their escape possible.

Without mincing words, from the perspective of this essay, the spread of Boko Haram adherents as from 2009 into other countries and regions in Africa has facilitated an improved cooperation among different terrorist organisations on the African continent. These terrorist related links and networks are enhanced because of a common ideology that many of these violent Islamic organisations share: an anti-Western and anti-Democratic worldview. This implies nothing less than the replacement of democracy and a Republican constitution by the introduction of the Islamic Sharia, in other words, substituting democratisation with Islamisation. Some of the recent developments that depict links and connections among many terrorist organisations will be highlighted henceforth.

As far back as 2003, even before the acquisition of dangerous weapons and sophisticated know-how on how to make and detonate bombs as well as the use of other improvised explosive devices by adherents of Boko Haram, Muhammad Yusuf, the former leader of the Islamic sect until his execution in July 2009, already had strong links to Osama Bin Laden and other leaders of the al-Qaeda group in both Pakistan and Afghanistan. Reports from numerous sources claimed that financial provisions were made available and advice rendered to the leadership of Boko Haram for the building of mosques and madrasa as well as the training of some of its members who were sent to Afghanistan, Sudan, Pakistan and the Sahel region to acquire military training in order to wage a Holy War against perceived unbelievers in Nigeria and the Nigerian state. It could be recollected that Osama Bin Laden delivered a speech in 2003 in which he mentioned Nigeria out of the countries that were "ready for liberation"<sup>1</sup>. This is a clear indication that there exists a link between Boko Haram and the al-Qaeda Core.

In another development, al-Qaeda in the lands of the Islamic Mahgreb, an African affiliate of al-Qaeda international, commonly known as AQIM, has been responsible for the destabilization of the Sahel region of Africa. It is largely responsible for the insecurity experienced few years ago in the West African country of Mali. It is operating widely in the Republic of Niger and Chad and its leader, Abdelmalek Droukel in Algeria, pledged in 2010 to assist his Boko Haram

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<sup>1</sup> Zenn, J. (2014a). Boko Haram and the kidnapping of the Chibok schoolgirls. *CTC Sentinel*, 7(5), 1–8.

brothers with weapons, men and ammunition in order to retaliate against the Christian minority in Nigeria for the loss of his "Salafist brothers"<sup>2</sup>, the former leader of Boko Haram, Muhammad Yusuf, and about 800 Boko Haram militants killed by the Nigerian security forces during a crackdown in July 2009. With this in mind, there is an indication of a strong link between Boko Haram and AQIM extending across many other countries in the Sahel region. That was why the commander of the United States military special operation, Brigadier General Donald C. Bolduc, stationed in the region opined recently that the Lake Chad Basin is ground zero in the fight against radical and militant Islam in Africa.

Having said that, the second in command within the leadership hierarchy of Boko Haram is Mamman Nur, a man believed to be Cameroonian by birth and trained by al-Shaabab in Somalia and AQIM militants in the Mahgreb. One can see the connections between these terrorist groups and how they coordinate in order to carry out their operations with respect to kidnappings and attacks. Al-Shabaab, which means *The Youths or Youngsters*, on the other end, is a Somalian based terrorist organisation that is fighting against the perceived enemies of Islam. They are terrorising the eastern region of Africa, declaring the Federal Government of Somalia, peace-keepers and non-governmental organisations as well as the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) its enemies and carrying out attacks and suicide bombings in Somalia, Uganda and Kenya. Al-Shaabab, being a Salafist extremist group, pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda and it is strongly connected to AQIM, al-Qaeda's African affiliate, and to Boko Haram, the Nigerian terrorist organisation, which was once loyal to al-Qaeda. Within the scope of the existing cooperation among the afore-mentioned terrorist organisations, this could be a very dangerous trend and a major threat to peace and security as well as to the stability of Africa.

Having said that, AQIM in the lands of the Islamic Mahgreb is an African affiliate of al-Qaeda Core, a terrorist organisation formerly led by Osama Bin Laden. The aim of the group, in accordance with the ideology of al-Qaeda, is to attack Westerners as well as western institutions and interests. However, AQIM is no longer intact as two factions have evolved from it. One group is the terrorist

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<sup>2</sup> Zenn, J. (2014b). Leadership analysis of Boko Haram and Ansaru in Nigeria. *CTC Sentinel*, 7(2), 23–29.

organisation known as The Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) and the other faction is called the Veiled Brigades led by a former AQIM commander, Mokhtar Bismokhtar, who separated from AQIM and later formed an alliance with MUJAO in 2013. MUJAO, understandably a dissident group which dissociated itself from AQIM, is, however, referred to by some locals as bands of drug pushers and cocaine smugglers. MUJAO, as some local residents in the Sahel zone believe, is a criminally-oriented organisation which displays itself on the outward as a jihadist organisation, but which, in reality, exploits the ongoing spread of Islamic terrorism in the Sahel region as a cover-up for its criminally-inclined activities. The group has carried out operations in both Timbuktu and Kayes in Mali, Algeria, Niger and Mauritania. In addition, many Boko Haram adherents and jihadists were trained in Mali under the auspices of AQIM. Repeatedly, this analysis shows that the line of difference between jihadism and criminality is eroding, but there is an increase in the spread of Islamic terrorism on the African continent in view of the proliferation of new terrorist groups emerging from the established ones.

A similar situation is experienced in Nigeria. In this case, a group known as Trans-Islamic Ansaru detached itself from Boko Haram in 2012. The reason given by members of Trans-Islamic Ansaru for this separation is the brutality displayed by the Adherents of Boko Haram under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau, its new leader after the death of Muhammad Yusuf. Ideologically, the group also dissociated itself from the style used in the operations of Boko Haram. While Boko Haram eliminates anyone and any group that is against its ideology, Trans-Islamic Ansaru targets mainly Westerners, identifies itself with AQIM and criticises Boko Haram as un-Islamic.

Within the purview of al-Qaeda operations, intra-Islamic violence is rejected as Muslims are not allowed to and should not be targeted, but rather Westerners, western institutions and western interests. Making the situation worse and drawing a line between itself and al-Qaeda and AQIM, Boko Haram under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau pledged and announced its allegiance to the Islamic State (ISIS/ISIL) and recognized its leader, commonly regarded as the caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. By this, the battleground is drawn between al-

Qaeda and ISIS with respect to winning of souls and mobilization of new fighters towards accomplishing their jihadi mission on the African continent. In any case, there is no issue of incompatibility between IS and Boko Haram as both extremist groups are the most brutal and extremist terrorist organisations in the world, both having the ambition of reinstating old caliphates. At the same time, both extremist groups are threats to world peace and security. It should be noted that this alliance will mean new financial resources, arms and foreign fighters from different parts of the world for Boko Haram. For the Islamic State, gaining ground in Africa would provide fresh opportunities towards recruiting new members, opening up a new frontier in its expansive adventure and widening its operations across the African continent.

The same trend of fractionalisation, as a frequent hallmark for many terrorist organisations, is observed in the eastern region of Africa with al-Shaabab, a terrorist organisation in Somalia strongly linked to al-Qaeda Core and identified with the African al-Qaeda affiliate, AQIM. However, in a recent development, a new terrorist group known as Jahba East Africa, which emerged from al-Shabab and whose members consist of some former fighters from the latter, offered *bay'ah*, meaning swearing allegiance and loyalty, to the Islamic State and its caliphate leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The reason for the fractionalisation by this newly splinter group *Jahba East Africa* is confusing. Nonetheless, it could be assumed that the reason is closely related to the existing differences between al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (ISIS): there is, therefore, an ideological difference. While al-Qaeda is interested in disrupting the current world order by targeting only westerners, western interests and institutions without extending such killings or its operations to cover Muslim brethren, the IS operations include not only westerners, but also extended to Muslim dissidents and anyone perceived inimical to its ideology and smooth operations as well as any opposition to its greatest ambition of restoring the old caliphate according to Sunni Muslim's tradition and worldview.

Moreover, that is the reason why members of *Jahba East Africa* implores sponsors of al-Shaabab to halt their support for the organisation, which members of this new fraction regret ever belonging to and which they describe as a

psychological and physical prison. To them, Sunni Islamic tenets are not being followed by al-Shabaab and their allegiance to ISIS under the leadership of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi allows and enables the practice of this Sunni Islamic principles, specifically, the opportunity to wage jihad within the scope of Sunnah traditions against the foes of Allah. In East Africa, this group is urging for support and it is seeking for a more aggressive mobilisation of youths in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Somalia in order to carry out its operations under a new Banner of the Islamic State. With this development, the expansion of IS and the escalation of violence based on religious fanaticism could be witnessed in this part of Africa in the not too distant future.

This current situation calls for more attention and more engagement, especially by the European Union, in order to prevent the total breakdown of law and order, not only in East Africa, but throughout the entire continent. If care is not taken, any further intensification of the crises in the already charged environment and any escalation of this so-called proxy conflicts between al-Qaeda and ISIS in Africa will affect millions of innocent people, including children and women across the continent. Consequently, this will lead to more Africans seeking safety and, thereby, making attempts to flee the continent from terror. The next destination, for many, will be Europe and, eventually, this will lead to an escalating refugee crisis. It should not be forgotten that roughly about one billion people inhabit the continent of Africa.

With the current crisis in Southern Libya, where the Islamic State is steadily gaining foothold and making attempts to establish itself strongly, time is running out if the European Union and the International Community will not join hands with the meager operations that the United States, a country that has foreseen this danger, is carrying out in the region to arrest this current situation. The operations of the United States military command will need to be complemented by the European Union and other stakeholders in order to halt this new trend, a situation whereby ISIS and Boko Haram, the most brutal and deadliest extremist groups, along with Jahba East Africa, MUJAO, and other groups will form an alliance to destroy the ongoing democratisation processes and destabilise the continent. Already, Boko Haram has joined other extremist groups in Egypt,

Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya in pledging allegiance to the IS and proclaiming the recognition of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as their leader.

The current engagement of few countries on the continent is discouraging. While the United States government is spending about 500 Mio. U.S.-\$, while stationing some of its military personnel to prevent the expansion of terrorism in the Lake Chad Basin region, France has about 3000 military men in the Sahel region, from Mali to Niger and Chad, to secure the countries from being overrun or taken over by terrorist groups that are operating in the Sahel zone. In addition, Great Britain made some financial pledges recently to assist some African governments in the fight against the expansion of Islamic terrorism. Nonetheless, these have been individual efforts by each member states of the European Union. This current situation, however, needs more engaged and robust actions of the European Union as a global actor to deal with an emerging threat that is just behind its doors.

It is rather disturbing that the European Union would be willing to prevent and stem migration from Africa to Europe by pledging a whopping amount of 1.8 Bio. € to African countries for more engagement to achieve this aim under the *Emergency Trust Fund for Stability and Addressing Root Causes of Irregular Migration and Displaced Persons in Africa*. However, the same EU is not showing the same commitment to tackle the reasons for migration in the first place in order to prevent the exodus of Africans to Europe. Expending 10 Mio. € for a new threat that could affect the peace and the stability of the EU cannot and should not be taken lightly under its new program: *Countering Radicalization and Foreign Terrorist Fighters*. A lot more needs to be done by the European Union as it is, geopolitically, more threatened than the United States. The United States government is not taking this threat lightly because it is taking more proactive measures and making more commitments. In a nutshell, it is surprising that the US government is devoting more financial and military resources to this new threat than the EU. Some of the measures the EU could introduce, among others, are as follows:



- Provide more financial assistance under the new program *Countering Radicalization and Foreign Terrorist Fighters*. This will go a long way to prevent any unforeseen terrorists attacks
- Engage more personnel and experts to carry out an in-depth research on the risk of *Failure to Act* and the threat of this new development emerging from the African continent to the EU
- Open debates on the level of the European Commission so as to enlighten members of the European Commission on the need to strengthen European Security and Defense Policy
- Develop a sophisticated early warning system in order to detect any imminent terrorist attack on time
- More robust engagement in the form of rendering tangible financial assistance and the willingness to strengthen und consolidate democracy and democratic institutions in African countries
- Outlaw, check and discourage the outflow of monetary assets either by individuals or multinational corporations as well as financial institutions from African Countries as this practice engenders corruption, poverty, unemployment, impunity and erodes the capacity of states, which indirectly contribute immensely to the spread of conflicts, religious extremism and terrorism.

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