

Addressing Terrorism Threats around the Globe

What Africa could Learn from some of the Recent Terrorist Attacks around the World

Dr Nicasius Achu Check*

This policy brief examines the recent terrorist attacks in Africa and what Africa should do to prevent them. It equally examines global counter-terrorism measures and its implications for Africa. However, the post 1990 era has witnessed an unprecedented wave of terrorist attacks that have resulted in heavy loss of lives and destruction of properties. Many of these attacks have been claimed or attributed to Islamic groups. While Islam had been perceived as a religion that preaches peace and peaceful co-existence with other religions, the mere fact that the vast majority of terrorist attacks have been carried out by Islamic groups paints a different picture. The downing of the St Petersburg bow plane, the 13/11/15 Paris attacks and the recent Mali and Burkina Faso hotel attacks suggest a new form of terrorist assault which the world will have to learn to deal with. Of critical importance is, what could Africa learn from these attacks and how could such attacks be prevented on the continent? Though Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab and Al-Qaeda the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) have been a constant menace to the security of several countries on the continent, the scale of the Egypt, Bamako and Ouagadougou attacks was unexpected. The policy brief concludes with some recommendations for African countries and multilateral organisations on strategies through which to address the phenomenon.

Introduction

Global counterterrorism measures have occupied the agendas of multilateral organisations for years. They have in fact shaped the manner in which countries draft counterterrorism legislation, leaving room for a multiplicity of

definitions of what acts should be classified as terrorist acts. According to Grozdanova, the lack of an internationally acceptable definition of terrorism has left a definitional gap which has provided too much space for problematic domestic

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developments around the concept.¹ It has been further argued that the lack of a general consensus on what terrorism is could pose a challenge for states contemplating counterterrorism measures when determining their level of compliance with relevant United Nations (UN) legislation and other multilateral and domestic instruments aimed at addressing the challenges of terrorism. Despite the lack of a formally binding inter-state agreement that determines a comprehensive international definition of terrorism, though, consensus does exist on some of the elements of such a definition.

However, the difficulty with defining terrorism before 2001 stems from the fact that acts of terrorism were generally committed by state actors, and the task of defining terrorism was left primarily in the hands of governmental organisations. It was therefore difficult to arrive at a common definition of terrorism that would implicate states that practised it. Nevertheless, in 1994 the UN General Assembly defined terrorism as criminal acts, intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror among the general public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes, that are in any circumstance unjustifiable, whatever the considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or any other nature that may be invoked to justify them.² The various UN member states have still not all accepted this definition, though, and this has been a major obstacle to the adoption of meaningful international counterterrorism measures to address the phenomenon. The question is, how was the UN General Assembly able to define terrorism without consensus having been reached on it? This exemplifies an alarming creeping in of general misunderstandings and misconceptions within the UN of late.

Consensus on terminology would be necessary to create a single comprehensive convention on terrorism, which some countries favour in place of the more than 12 conventions and protocols which the UN has passed to describe acts of terrorism. In lieu of an internationally accepted definition of terrorism, several countries have enacted local laws in an attempt to address the phenomenon. According to the United States' Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), terrorism can be looked at from two diametric angles: international and domestic. International terrorism refers to violent acts or acts dangerous to human life that violate federal or state law that appear intended (1) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population, (2) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion, or (3) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination or kidnapping.

International terrorism occurs primarily outside the territorial jurisdiction of the United States (US) or transcends national boundaries in terms of the means by which they are accomplished, the persons they appear intended to intimidate or coerce, or the locale in which their perpetrators operate or seek asylum.³ Domestic terrorism involves acts dangerous to human life that violate federal or state law and that appear intended to intimidate or coerce the civilian population in order to influence the policy of the government, occurring primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the US.⁴

Drawing the debate closer to Africa, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and later the African Union (AU) have dabbled in efforts to prevent and combat terrorism. Some of these efforts include the 1992 Dakar Resolution on the strengthening of cooperation and coordination among African states. The resolution pledged to fight the phenomena of extremism and terrorism.⁵ Following on the Dakar resolution, the OAU adopted a declaration on the code of conduct for inter-African relations at its June 1994 summit in Tunisia. The Tunis declaration rejected all forms of extremism and terrorism, whether under the pretext of sectarianism, tribalism, ethnicity or religion. The most significant effort by the OAU to fight terrorism on the continent is contained in the 1999 OAU Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism, adopted at the 35th ordinary session of the OAU summit held in Algiers, Algeria in July 1999. According to the convention, a terrorist act is

'any act which is a violation of the criminal laws of a State Party and which may endanger the life, physical integrity or freedom of or cause serious injury or death to any person, any number or group of persons or causes or may cause damage to public or private property, natural resources, environmental or cultural heritage and is calculated or intended to (i) 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, (ii) disrupt any public service, the delivery of any essential service to the public or to create a public emergency, or (iii) create general insurrection in a State'.⁶

The 1999 convention further states that terrorism refers to any promotion, sponsoring, contribution to, command, aid, incitement, encouragement, attempt, threat, conspiracy, organising, or procurement of any person with the intent to

commit any act referred to above. The convention further requires state parties to criminalise terrorist acts under their national laws. It importantly establishes state jurisdiction over terrorist acts and provides a legal framework for extradition as well as extra-territorial investigation and mutual legal assistance.⁷

Following the adoption of the 1999 convention, the AU engaged in several initiatives aimed at thwarting terrorist attacks on the continent. The AU high-level inter-governmental meeting on the prevention and combating of terrorism in Africa, held in Algiers in September 2002, adopted the AU Plan of Action on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism. As part of the implementation of the 2002 Plan of Action, the African Centre for the Study of and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT) was established in 2004 in Algiers.⁸ The 2002 Action Plan and the ACSRT provide practical measures that substantially address Africa's security challenges, including border control, legislative and judicial measures, the financing of terrorism and the exchange of information to combat terrorism.

Despite these measures that have been put in place to combat terrorism, however, Africa has had its fair share of terrorist acts in the past two decades in the form of the US embassy bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, the el-Shabaab attacks in the Horn of Africa, attacks by Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and, more recently, Boko Haram activity in the north eastern and northern parts of Cameroon. The frequent and persistent occurrence of terrorist acts on the continent has been attributed to several factors. The role of bad governance, rigging of elections, poverty, corruption and environmental degradation cannot be overemphasised. Of particular importance is the US's decision to earmark Libya and subsequently Sudan as state sponsors of international terrorism. This actually caused several African countries with special ties to Sudan and Libya to shun any effort by the international community to fight global terror. This and many other considerations, including the skewed manner in which Africa is accommodated at the global political and economic levels, make the fight against terror in Africa all the more challenging.

The Recent Terrorist Attacks and what could have been done to Prevent them

On the night of 13 November 2015 Paris, the capital of France, experienced one of the deadliest attacks on unarmed civilians since the Second World War.

From the Bataclan theatre to the *Stade de France* in the Paris suburb of Saint Denis, the attackers made sure that they killed as many people as possible. By the time the attackers were silenced, 130 people were dead and 368 wounded. The Bataclan attack was the fiercest, with 89 people left dead and many being critically wounded. Two of the militants blew themselves up with explosive belts as heavily armed police stormed the venue to free about 1 500 people who had converged there to listen to the ironically named American band, Eagles of Death.⁹ At the *Stade de France*, less harm was caused as security was tight during the France and Germany friendly. The tight security could perhaps be attributed to the fact that high-ranking French officials were in attendance, including President Francois Hollande. The attackers were discovered and opted to detonate their suicide belts outside the stadium, injuring a handful of people in the process. Almost at the same time, attackers opened fire on a Cambodian restaurant called the *Petit Cambodge*, and on the Le Carillon bar in the Rue Bichat neighbourhood of Paris. Another attack was witnessed on Rue de la Fontaine au Roi and at the Casa Nostra Pizzeria. At the *La Belle Equipe* bar, attackers opened fire and killed 19 people.

The perpetrators of the attacks were brothers Ibrahim Abdeslam, Salah Abdeslam and Mohamed Abdeslam, and accomplices Bilal Hadfi, Ahmad Al Mohammad, Sami Amimour and Abdelhamid Abaaoud, among others. The latter was killed during a raid carried out in a Paris suburb.¹⁰ An important observation to be made is that all of the perpetrators were of North African descent and had spent at least some time fighting for the IS in Syria. Another observation suggests that the Paris attackers had been radicalised by IS through their various propaganda teachings. But the critical question one should ask in relation to the Paris tragedy is, why France? And why should other western democracies be afraid? Two important considerations underpin this: the integration of people from an Islamic background at the periphery of western society, and the skewed nature of global politics.

One of the critical reasons why French youths from an Islamic background have been radicalised to the point of committing acts of terrorism rests in the manner in which most of them are integrated into French society. Charles de Gaulle, the Free France leader during the Second World War, rallied Africans and mostly French colonies in North Africa to liberate France from the yoke of German occupation. Most of the soldiers that liberated France were urged to take up French

citizenship, and many of them settled in France. The children, generation after generation, of these valiant soldiers who liberated France have always been accommodated at the periphery of French society. The majority of them still live in social housing programmes and are unable to get into the *Grand Ecoles*, which would open the way for them into the public service. As long ago as 2005, throngs of these youths embarked on strike action that paralysed Paris for more than two weeks. Though there was a tacit understanding then that radical reforms needed to be undertaken in order to address the challenges raised by the rioters, 10 years down the line nothing has been done yet to ensure that a French youth of Moroccan or Algerian descent considers France to be his home country.

The second consideration is the manner in which global politics are played. The unipolar world policy on the Israel-Palestine situation is a major challenge. France, as one of the supporters of American policy in the Middle East, is suffering as a consequence. France's support of the Free Syrian rebels, too, is a major challenge to those who support the IS. More than 1 200 French citizens have travelled to Iraq and Syria, most of whom seem to have been radicalised.¹¹ The Charlie Hebdo episode and the increasing secularism of French society have made the country an attractive target to religious fundamentalists. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that the IS is facing a major challenge in the form of Russian involvement, which is making it difficult for them to hold on to territories that they captured in previous offensives against Syria and Iraq.

The 31 October 2015 crash of a Russian plane over the Sinai Peninsula has been identified by both Russian and US officials as a terrorist act carried out by sympathisers with the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq. The crash, which killed 224 people, rattled Russian and Egyptian intelligence services, who are unable to ensure that their planes and airports are adequately secured and protected from terrorist acts. Russian president Vladimir Putin has vowed to find and punish those responsible for the act. He has also ordered his military chiefs to increase airstrikes in Syria, targeting those that were responsible for the crash.¹² According to the head of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB), Alexander Bortnikov, the plane was downed by a homemade explosive device equivalent to 1kg of TNT that went off on board the plane. The explosion caused the plane to break up in mid-air with debris from the plane being strewn over a 10 kilometre radius.¹⁵

The second most significant terrorism event to be fed to their global audience by 24-hour news channels consisted of the 13/11/15 attacks on the French capital by sympathisers of *al-Dawla al-Islamiya al-Iraq al-Sham* (DAESH), better known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The attacks, unprecedented in post-1945 France, have been seen as one of the greatest lapses in French intelligence gathering in recent memory. Though ISIS has claimed responsibility for the attacks, three important lessons can be learnt from their occurrence. The first is that there is a discordant view among the mainly Christian west and the predominantly Islamic Middle East of the direction that the world should take – both ideologically and economically. The differences emanating from this discordant view of the world are far from resolved. Secondly, the attacks teach us that the current international political system is biased towards the west. Finally, they suggest that the wealth of the world is not properly and equitably distributed among the people of the world.

A few days after the Paris attacks, gunmen attacked guests at the popular Radisson Blu Hotel in Mali's capital, Bamako. Twenty people were killed, including six Malians, six Russians, three Chinese, two Belgians, and one each from the US, Israel, Senegal, Lebanon and Burkina Faso. Though the Mali attacks were masterminded by Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb,¹⁴ there is a genuine fear and realisation on the continent that terrorism is fast gaining traction and that no country is immune to these attacks. Following the Malian attack, the first terrorist attack in the Sahel region of Africa took place on 15 January 2016 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. The attack, which claimed 28 lives, was masterminded by Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).¹⁵ Though more than 176 hostages were eventual freed from the clutches of the attackers, it highlights the security challenges which African countries have become accustomed to over the past few decades. On the whole, these recent attacks, coupled with the constant menace of Boko Haram and the Al-Shabaab on the Horn of Africa, which recently attacked an AU base in Somali and killed more than 50 Kenya troops, suggest the complex nature of the security challenges faced by African countries.

Global Counterterrorism Measures: How Effective are they?

The fight against global terrorism has been on the international community's agenda for decades.

Countering terrorism acts, in all their forms and manifestations, is of interest to all nations: terrorism has threatened the foundations and security of many. As a result of the threat that terrorism poses to international peace and security, a UN General Assembly was convened in 2006 where all member states agreed on a global strategy to coordinate counterterrorism efforts. The 2006 strategy notes that terrorism constitutes one of the most serious threats ever to international peace and security.¹⁶ The strategy recommends, among others, four key areas which the global coalition should focus on. These include (1) tackling the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, (2) preventing and combating terrorism, (3) building countries' capacity to prevent and combat terrorism and strengthening the role of the United Nations in that regard, and (4) ensuring respect for human rights for all and the rule of law while countering terrorism.¹⁷ Since the 2006 strategy was adopted, the UN has passed six resolutions either condemning or setting a course of action for member states to address terrorism challenges. Besides these six resolutions, the UN General Assembly has also approved 16 universal legal instruments establishing mandates for UN members related to the prevention and suppression of terrorism.¹⁸ The 2006 strategy was preceded by the 2005 Counterterrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF), a body that works to ensure the overall coordination and coherence of global counterterrorism strategies which fall within the ambit of the UN. The work of the CTITF is also complemented by that of the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), which is a multilateral organisation of some 29 countries that includes the European Union.¹⁹ Formed in September 2011, 10 years after the September 2001 terror attacks in the US, the GCTF assists with the implementation of the UN Global Counterterrorism Strategy and is a leading authority on non-military multilateral action against terrorism.

In Africa, several counterterrorism initiatives have been undertaken at both the continental and sub-regional levels. Of these, the 1999 OAU Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism and the 2002 AU Plan of Action on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism are two important continental initiatives aimed at addressing the challenges posed by global terror. In order to operationalise these initiatives, the AU created the African Centre for the Study of and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT) in 2004. The ACSRT serves as a structure for centralising information, studies and analyses on terrorism and terrorist groups and to develop counterterrorism capacity-building

programmes.²⁰ At the sub-regional level, the Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Initiative, a brain child of the US, is an alliance of some countries in the Maghreb and West African sub-regions that provides preventative training and engagement with governments to help prevent the growth of terrorist organisations there. In 2008, the initiative was transferred from the US Central Command to AFRICOM, which assumed full authority over America's military operations in Africa. A similar initiative sponsored by the US government in the East African sub-region, called the Partnership for Regional East Africa Counterterrorism, was initiated in 2011. The initiative is aimed at building the counterterrorism capacity and capability of member countries to thwart short-term terrorist threats, counter violent extremism and address longer-term vulnerabilities.²¹

Viewed in conjunction with national governments' initiatives, the global and AU terrorism framework is impressive. The AU intervention in Somali, the French involvement in Mali and the recent formation of the Multinational Task Force to combat Boko Haram all attest to this. While many of these interventions have not halted the spread of terrorism, there are indications that extensive measures have been taken to address the challenging task of thwarting the re-occurrence of terrorist acts around the globe. For these initiatives to succeed, measures must also be put in place to ensure that the conditions that give rise to terrorism are addressed. The UN has for several years argued that the conditions for the breeding of terrorists have not been adequately addressed by its member countries. According to the UN Global Counterterrorism Strategy, conditions conducive to the spreading of terrorism include, but are not limited to, prolonged unresolved conflicts; the dehumanisation of victims of terrorism; lack of rule of law; violations of human rights; ethnic, national and religious discrimination; political exclusion; socioeconomic marginalisation; and lack of good governance.²² A global coalition needs to be formed to ensure that these issues are addressed and that appropriate measures are put in place to ensure that an equitable distribution of the resources of the world is achieved.

Conclusion: Policy Implications and Lessons for Africa

Africa has experienced varied episodic attacks by terrorists in the past two decades. The American embassy bombings in Tanzania and Kenya in 2008 signalled to the African authorities that

a new form of conflict was being waged within its midst. The activities of groups such as Al-Shabaab in Somalia and Boko Haram in Nigeria and surrounding countries, the Tuareg rebellion in Mali and the activities of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb have necessitated the formation of a new framework for addressing the question of terrorism on the continent. The challenge is primarily how continental bodies should address terrorism issues in an environment where insecurity often stems from challenges of governance and development.²³ As Africa's security challenges largely relate to deficient levels of good governance and socioeconomic inequality, there needs to be a total shift in how these important issues are handled on the continent. In this regard, programmes to counter the lack of security on the continent must start by addressing the challenges of governance, including effective democratic governance and the active inclusion of minority and marginalised ethnic groups in the business of governance.²⁴

What then can African countries learn from all these security challenges which the global community is facing?

- First, there needs to be a complete shift in the manner in which security and its concomitant challenges are conceptualised on the continent. Fundamentally, national security issues tend to emerge as a result of realistic thinking. In this regard, national interests are far more important than bread-and-butter issues. The challenges posed by environmental degradation, the HIV/Aids scourge, and access to affordable and high-quality health services and education are of critical importance here. Issues relating to the economic and social challenges which the continent is facing also need to be looked into. Of primary concern is the need to address the challenges posed by micro-nationalism, ethnicity and the equitable distribution of the natural resources of the continent's countries. Measures need to be put in place to ensure that all ethnic minorities are included in any government formed on the continent. For example, the Tuaregs in Mali and the ethnic Tutsis in the eastern part of the Congo should have a place at the governing tables in Mali and the DRC respectively. They should be able to own the democratic process in these countries and, equally, they should be able to command some form of respect among the other ethnic groups that make up their respective countries.
- African countries should look at the relationship between the state and religion. The role of religion in determining the outcome of

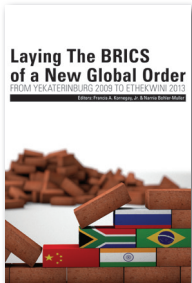
national elections in Africa should be revisited. Religious groups should be encouraged to stay out of politics and focus on moralising society, which has historically been its primary function. Measures should be taken to ensure that the Muslim Brotherhood is properly accommodated within the mainstream Egyptian political space. The *Front Islamique de Salut* should also be given proper recognition in the Algerian political space so that a more harmonious relationship can exist between the party and the state.

- Of critical importance is the bridging of the poverty gap on the continent. Quite a while ago, South Africa overtook Brazil as the most unequal society in the world. It has often been said that the radicalisation of Muslim youths in France happened as a result of the artificial boundary which French society has placed on the children of immigrants, especially those of Muslim background. Policy orientation in France and many African countries should be directed at breaking the artificial ceiling thus created so that these youths are judged on the strength of their character and abilities and not on their ethnic and religious backgrounds.
- Measures need to be taken to ensure that the gap between the upper and lower classes is bridged so as to minimise flare-ups. This will go a long way towards dousing the class fire. The alternative points to uprisings of the lower classes and downtrodden in society, with accompanying shedding of blood and destruction of physical infrastructure.
- The Paris attacks also put the spotlight on the need to better address migration. The push factors that drive people to leave their countries of origin and risk their lives to cross the Mediterranean need to be addressed. And once these migrants have settled in their new homes, appropriate policy directions need to be put in place to ensure²⁵ that they are properly integrated into their host societies. The fact that most of the radicalised youths in France still feel alienated from French society remains a concern.

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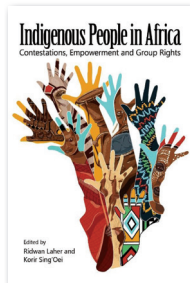
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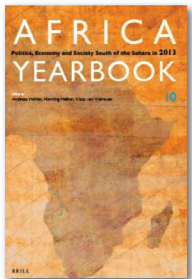
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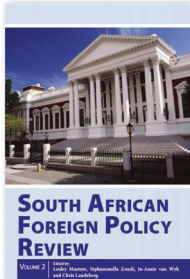
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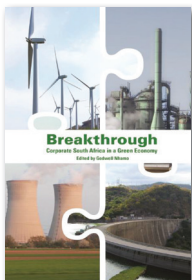
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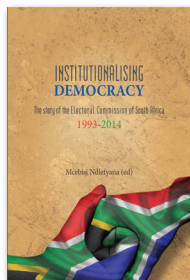
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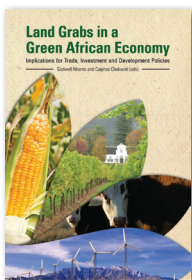
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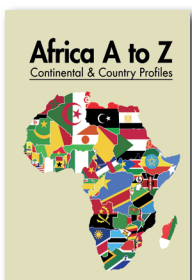
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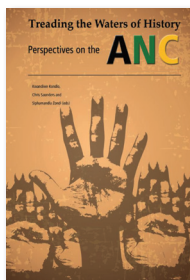
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