

## Terrorism and Regional Security: The Challenges of Insurgency in the Sahel

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines the incidences of terrorism in the Sahel region of Africa and its impact on regional security. The study suggests that terrorism festering in the Sahel is a product of bad governance and the inability of the states within the sphere of influence to exert the needed political will and corresponding action to nip in the bud the slip further down of insecurity. The study also posits that terrorism is a major hindrance to development. Using the Regional Security Complex Theory as a theoretical framework for analysis, the paper tries to explain how despondency results when regional intervention are not implemented. The paper recommends an overhaul of broader regional intervention as a matter of urgency, especially where state cannot tackle the security implications. The data used for this paper were gathered through secondary sources. These sources are textbooks, journal publications, newspapers, magazines and internet sources.

**Keywords:** Terrorism, Regional Security, Insurgency, Sahel

### **Introduction**

We are not deceived by their pretence stopiety. We have seen their kind before. They are the heirs of all the murderous ideologies of the 20th century. By sacrificing human life to serve their radical visions, by abandoning every value except the will to power, they follow in the path of fascism, Nazism, and totalitarianism. And they will follow that path all the way, to where it ends: in history's unmarked grave of discarded lies. (President George W. Bush's Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People, September 2001).

It is a misleading assumption to think that terrorism is alien to the international system. Nothing can be further from such assumption but the most pressing reality about terrorism is that it has assumed a more noticeable presence since 9/11 multiple terror attacks on the United States of America. In quick response, the US assembled a coalition to confront the dreadful attacks leading to the overthrow of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and the routing of Al- Qaeda and the global hunt for terrorists around the world. Why it is well beyond the scope of this paper to agree if the global coalition against terrorists have made the desired result against their attacks, what is not in doubt is that the "advance and spread of modern technologies in the 21st century coupled with the effects of globalization aids and provides terrorist groups with more sophisticated methods in unleashing violent acts of terror, kidnapping,

murdering, hijacking and victimization of their targets most especially innocent civilians and this undermines the collective efforts of the international community in maintaining world peace and security” (Permanent: 2020).

In official US documents, “terrorism is defined as “the calculated use of violence or threat of violence to attain goals that are political, religious or ideological in nature (carried out) through intimidation, coercion or instilling fear” (Muhammed:2004). There are tons of reports about the on-going carnage in the Sahel and its spiraling vulnerabilities on adjoining states with increasing possibilities for insecurities and destabilization. Many of these reports have posted grave concerns for both state and regional stability. Several questions are central to understanding the multiple and complex regional ramifications of insurgent activities in the Sahel. With global and regional initiatives, the threat continues to mount as a consequence of jihadist actions with worsening security situation made more acute by deep poverty, climate change, violence, chronically high food insecurity and malnutrition (International Crisis Group). The rapid expansion of terrorism means the scourge a difficult kernel to crack for states within the international political system, however, “contextually, nations experience terrorism threats from 2 distinctive and inter-related environments. Some threats are from the international environment while others are generated from within the immediate domestic environment of a nation” (Bot, 2020).

The emergence and eventual dominance of terrorism in the international system and its reverberating impact on national security have made state-actors vulnerable and increasingly agitated about non-state actors hitherto subordinate to state-actors’ reckoning. All of this reality has altered-strategic thinking in the aftermath of 9/11 multiple attacks on the United States of America with the clear thinking that if the world’s strongest can be hit then which other country is invincible. Before then though not an entirely alien global reckoning, terrorism was seen as a historical aberrant and distant issue which has long receded to the history back pages. The unpredictability and gaping element of surprise and the attendant vicious impact has made terror prospects an enduring albatross which nations currently grapple with. Perhaps, it is indeed the era of ‘clash of civilization’ and the ‘end of history’, however, believers in multilateralism still maintain a semblance of hope in the ability of the international system to tower above the chaos which terrorism represents. In a nutshell, terrorism should be opposed and not appeased (Sekulow, 2014). For Africa, there has been a plethora of terrorist attacks from within and beyond its frontiers. These threats and attacks are further compounded by the socio-economic realities where hunger, wars, conflicts, tussle for power, political marginalization, corruption and poverty is ever present. All of these and even more of the listed factors make states in Africa vulnerable, weak and captured to destabilization elements such as terrorists and insurgent groups and many of the ungovernable spaces are breeding spots for these groups. All these, have increase prospects for terrorism which have affected the continent’s stability and well-being. All of these fears about possible attacks or when next is the terrorist attack in Africa, it seems, has become a new norm in Africa.

The discontented extremists anywhere and everywhere now have a readily available tool in hand. They simply resort to terror tactics to avenge real or perceived discontentment (Kolawole: 2015). It is against this background that terrorism in the Sahel can be situated with terrorists' networks flourishing and acting as propagator of jihad and Islamic ideals with relative ease and intransigence as arms flow remains unchecked. The menace has continued to grow into a malignant cancer threatening both national and regional security with a deluge of concern into the foreseeable future.

Security is very important in the life of any nation and possibly it is why nations and even their citizens are enjoined to defuse potential security breaches before it undermines national security, cohesion and even regime survivability. In spite of humanity's cravings for peace and security, insecurity exists and continues to grow in escalation as humanity remains in its grip with manifestation of wars, threats of war, hunger, poverty and other vile threats such as insurgencies and terrorism. Some scholars have maintained that terrorism/insurgencies are attenuated by poverty and mismanagement of government resources by a few privileged few. Poverty exacerbate terrorism is a common refrain and in the Sahel; it is not any different. Terrorism and extremism evolve from mismanagement of public funds, bad governance and injustice. It is having negative impact on development (Nwagboghogu and Ojene, 2015).

### **Terrorism and Regional Security: A Discourse**

The spate of terrorism and insecurity in the Sahel continue to animate spirited discourse and elicit mixed reactions from concern persons both within and beyond Africa as humanitarian aid is needed; resultant of years of instability. The magnitude and scale of devastation and spiralling uncertain evidenced in wanton destruction of lives and properties leaves much to be desired and have kept all and sundry on edge for quite some time now. Thus, today, the states within the Sahel are seriously buffeted by element and forces of instability, chaos and destabilization. Furthermore, casual observer of events unfolding in the Sahel readily affirm the imperativeness of stemming the tide after years of violent conflicts and flourishing extremism that has retarded development and stability. Humanity has lived and grappled with one form of terrorism or the other from time immemorial even as it continues to morph into more violent dimensions, it was, however, the multiple terror attacks on the United States of America that shifted the global community into an 'over-drive' in response to what the Americans call a threat to their way of life and the response laid the nursery bed for a global coalition and war on terror (GWOT) as terrorism inherently became a major threat to global peace, security and development. Peace and security are necessary pre-condition for development. Its absence is a corollary for chaos and persistent anarchy.

If there was any doubt that the international system is in the Hobbesian definition as 'nasty, brutish and short', the convulsions by fundamentalism, extremism, insurgencies and terrorism has made valid that assertion where the life of man is threatened with violent death everywhere with numbing unpredictability. The increasing wave of terror attacks and operational responses

by state-actors has not shown any sign of abetting, making some cynics to claim that the 'clash of civilization' is the 3<sup>rd</sup> world war. Indeed, nowhere else is transnational terrorism more visible and threatening to national and regional security than in the Sahel region of Africa.

Brutalities and bestialities in the Sahel are reported with increasingly alarm as jihadists, criminal gangs and armed groups exploiting political and security vacuums across the region have thrust the region on a trajectory of increasing violence and widened instability with attendant security challenge. The rising wave of insecurity has made the Sahel a place of global concern and geo-politics playing out with extra-continental powers with vested interests as partisans. The origin of insecurity and threats in the Sahel has a disconcerting nexus in the socio-economic and political foundation of the region (Otinche and Shimawua: 2017). The Sahel is a region of the African continent, lying in between the Atlantic Ocean and the Red Sea. comprising countries of West, Central and East Africa. It involves a broad geographic net of ten countries spreading from Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Sudan, Algeria, Niger, Nigeria, Chad and Eritrea.

The Sahel is continuously faced with a struggle for dominance between the states and emergent terrorist groups in the region including the Islamic State (IS) with cells in Chad, Burkina Faso, Nigeria and Niger; Ansar Dine, al-Mourabitoun and Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM) which has found sanctuary in Algeria and Northern Mali, Algeria has, particularly, been identified as the hub from where transnational terrorist networks expand into the Sahel region.

In northeast Nigeria, the Boko Haram (BH) with a faction affiliated with ISIS is the dominant terrorist organization. Their activities have brought untold hardship and disruption of socio-economic activities with threats to regional stability as a consequence and states struggling to cope with the security challenges. But the attention of this paper is on the implication of the terror activities and evolving security challenges etc. The paper examines in details the growing spate of terrorism in the Sahel region and the attendant security implication for Africa and the rest of the global system. The prevailing socio-economic, political and security conditions that has defined region have prompted regional and extra-regional interventions in the situation. While regional cooperation has been fostered on acing levels, this reality has also compelled some western states, such as France, the United States of America and other allies, to engage the terrorist's networks in a sustained operation (both by forceful means through the military and peaceful means via social interventions, grants, amongst others) with a view to rid the region of terrorism and the conditions encouraging its festering.

More importantly, however, what has been observed, is that the manifestations and strategies of terrorism in Africa and especially in the Sahel has shown a radical shift in strategy which has labelled terrorism as a new form of warfare (Imogighe, 2007, P. 15). This concern is a rationale for this study therefore, is to examine this phenomenon, with a view to finding a way forward. This paper will therefore, outline the security concern in the Sahel and possible proffer some

solution. The violence emanating from terrorism has already exacerbated the phenomenon of refugees and internally displaced persons in Africa, especially in the Sahel region.

### **Conceptual Analysis**

#### *Terrorism*

No doubt, terrorism has become a global pandemic to contemporary human existence and has continued to feature in the international political system with an alarming rate that leaves in its trail devastation, fear, anxiety and anguish. Its operation is a grave danger to civilization as presently known and an heightened existential threat to humanity. Terrorism is not easily defined and the reason for this is not far-fetched. One fundamental reason for this is, “difficulties arising from the fact that the term is politically and emotionally charged” (Hoffman, 1998:32). Simply put, ‘another person’s terrorist is someone’s freedom fighter. The controversy about a unipolarity of definition notwithstanding, terrorism is regarded as a deliberate employment of violence or use of violence by groups to attain strategic and political objectives through violations of law (Cline and Alexander, 1987:215). Shultz and Sloan (1980:2) defined terrorism as a threat to use or use of extra form of political violence in varying degrees with the objective of achieving certain political goals or objectives. Readings have revealed that terrorism is used to describe a variety of dysfunctional behaviour in the international system but it is necessary to keep in mind as Best and Nocella (2004) warned, “All terrorism involves violence, but not all violence is terrorism”. It is worthy to bear in the mind that the none unanimity or consensus about an agreeable definition on terrorism has spur nothing less than 109 definitions about the concept.

Terrorism is not a new phenomenon in human experience. Violence has been used throughout human history by those who chose to oppose states, tradition, inequality, etc. However, in the word of (Ogaba, 2013), “what differentiates violence used in those circumstances from terrorism is that terrorism is characterized by the use of violence against civilians, with the express desire of causing terror or panic in the population. Terrorism is not unique to the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries nor is it a new phenomenon”. Enders and Sandler (2012) describe terrorism as a premediated threat or actual use of force in which persons or non-state groups that have a socio-political objective express their positions by intimidating or outrightly victimising a large population that are not themselves the target but rather used as a means to an end. The term “terrorism” is derived from the Latin word “terror” which refers to the use of certain means of collective danger deliberately generated by physical violence, fear and acts of violence (Albu, 2016: 2). It was in France from 1793 to 1794 that the term “terror” was widespread applied by the revolutionary government, during the “Fight Against Terror” (Sarwar and Siddiqi, 2014: 1) Richardson, sees the debate on terrorism from the events of September 2001, as the term terrorism was widely used in many contexts and generated numerous debates within the academic arena as to become almost meaningless. It has been employed so widely and carelessly in public and political discourse that there appears

to be a wholesale disregard for any serious endeavour to treat terrorism as an analytical concept (Richardson, 2009). Roberts, 2015, stated his view on the debate as the definition of terrorism could be traced to the 1960s and 1970s.

### ***Security***

The definition of security has no independent meaning in today's world and can be seen to as related to individual or societal value systems. Wolfers (1962) pointed to two sides of the security concept: "Security, in an objective sense, measures the absence of threats to acquired values, in a subjective sense, the absence of fear that such values will be attacked". Thus, in its double meaning security refers to an absence of objective dangers, i.e. of threats, challenges, vulnerabilities and risks, and of subjective fears, and subjectively to the perception thereof. Objective security is achieved if the dangers posed by manifold threats, challenges, vulnerabilities and risks are avoided, prevented, managed, coped with, mitigated and adapted to by individuals, societal groups, the state or regional or global international organizations.

An expanded security concept has been used by governments and in scientific debates that combines four security dimensions: threats, challenges, vulnerabilities and risks. While national security has the state as the major referent, human security has human beings and humankind as the referent (Günter, 2005). Security may also be defined as protection against something that might happen in the future or as the activities involved in protecting a country, a building or persons against threats danger, etc (Wehmeier and Ashby, 2002). What was created in Europe was according to Karl Deutsch "regional security" which he defined as 'the attainment of institutions and practices strong enough and widespread enough to assure, for a long time, dependable expectations of peaceful change among its population' (Deutsch, 1968: 194). In layman term, insecurity possesses the loss of property, no guaranteed safety of lives or businesses. If security is the existence of conditions in which people in a society can go about their normal daily activities without any threats to their lives or properties, then insecurity only portrays the absence of security. The term Insecurity is "the antithesis of security." (Achumba, et al 2013).

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT)**

The end of the cold war perpetrated a door to new security studies, an increasing prevalence of transnational threats and security interdependence, thus, facilitated the rise of regionally coherent subsystems known as regional security complexes (RSCs), within which the pursuit of security cannot be achieved in the absence of cooperation. Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) is a theory of international relations developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver in 1998 and advanced in their 2003 work, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*. In Buzan 1998, the definition of RSCs is 'a set of units whose major processes of securitisation, de- securitisation, or both are so interlinked that their security

problems cannot reasonably be analysed or resolved apart from one another' (Buzan and Wæver 1998: 201). According to Buzan, the Regional Security Complex Theory is constructed around 'security' as it offers the possibility of systematically linking the study of internal conditions, relations among units in the region, relations between regions, and the interplay of regional dynamics with globally acting powers.

Here, the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) holds that all the states in the system are to some extent enmeshed in a global web of security interdependence, it also provides the hypothesis that regional patterns of conflict shape the lines of intervention by global level powers and what links the overarching pattern of distribution of power among the global powers to the regional dynamics of RSCs is the mechanism of penetration. Also, the RSCT stands to combat the tendency to overstress the role of the great powers and to ensure that the local factors are given their proper weight in security analysis. And lastly, the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) made elaborations of the amity–enmity variable.

First, superpowers have such wide-ranging interests, and such massive capabilities, that they can conduct their rivalries. A notable example is the external power of France and the regional power in the Sahel, the state of Nigeria. Thus, giving an unhealthy relationship between Nigeria and France creating rivals for the attainment of power and hegemonic status in the region. There has been a hegemonic struggle for power in the West-African between the great power state of France and a sub-regional hegemon, Nigeria. Nigeria on attainment of independences given its sheer strength in size, population, economic buoyancy and a strong military power assumed the responsibility to lead the Africa state, (Tafawa Balewa: 1960). It included as part of her foreign policy and interest the integration, peace, stability and unity of Africa, Africa was placed at the centre of its foreign policy which of cause the Francophone countries are a part of. France however; has tried to reshape this foreign policy that Nigeria has made for herself.

Second, with penetration as a basic assumption of the regional security complex theory, External intervention in the Sahel is thus characterized by the use of 'penetration' and 'overlay'. The external involvement from states such as France, the United States, Germany, Italy, and so on are analysed as security alignments penetrated the Sahel. France penetration in the region arises from the colonial era having colonies in the Sahel namely; Senegal, Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali, Mauritania and Chad and continues to wield a level of influence in the region from the aftermath of colonialism; neo-colonialism, till the current crises, France continues to exact control over these states. France over its allies in the Sahel tends to exercise full self-legitimacy by deciding the leader suit and promote their interest, control the economic system of the countries, and through contemporary neo-colonialism determine and shapes certain policies of the government to suit and promotion of its interest in the region.

Third, the assumptions of the RSCT is that pattern of Conflict in the region shapes the kind of intervention. In understanding the broad picture, it then becomes a necessity to look at first, the pattern of the conflict. The conflict in the Sahel notably terrorism is known to be transnational

in nature, has established a broad network with a hotspot in Algeria and fostering through foreign assistance from other terrorist groups around the world. Arising from small groups of insurgencies and graduating to terrorism in national countries such as Boko Haram in Nigeria, Al-Qaeda in Algeria has now spread to affect almost every country in the region. All in effort to curtail the spread of terrorism outside sub-region and the regional continent of Africa called for regional and extra-regional intervention ranging from state actors (France, United States, Germany), sub-regional organizations (Economic Community of West African States) regional organizations (African Union, European Union), global organizations (United Nations) amongst others.

### **Geographical Overview and Festering of Terrorism in the Sahel Region**

The Sahel region is described as by experts as a long stretch of land area comprising many countries in the continent of Africa from the Red Sea in the east to the Atlantic Ocean in the west. It is a bio-geographic and eco-climatic zone of transition between the Sahara Desert eco-region to the north and the Sundanian Savana to the south. The area is located in the northern part of Africa which distance covers 3,360 miles with an area of 1,178,850 square miles (World Atlas).

The major factor that characterises the Sahel region is its climate. The region has a semi-arid climatic condition. It has both hot and dry conditions throughout the year with low amounts of rainfall with windy harmattan conditions. The geography of the region features flat terrain with some isolated plateaus, mountain ranges, steppes, thorny shrub lands, grassland, and the Savanah (World Atlas 2018). With multiple challenges, the region is a major migration route between Sub-Saharan Africa to the Middle East, Mediterranean and Continental Europe (Cline, 2007). The wave of migration from Sub-Saharan Africa enroute Europe has made the Sahel a frontline security threat for Africa, the Middle East and Europe by extension (Kalifa, 1998). In determining the nature, and level of insecurities in the Region, one needs to look at the geographical description to aid understanding. This section covers the geographical area of the Sahel, a detailed explanation of the security challenges in the Sahel. Going further, it gives a background, Historical Perspective, types, causes, effects, the strategy to be in place, action against, combating terrorism measures and solution of Terrorism to the Sahel region of Africa.

The “Sahel” is an Arabic language word that means “shore” (Maslouh 2014: 7- 12). The Sahel region, which has undefined geographical borders with the Maghreb, cut across ten countries in sub-Saharan Africa. These countries cover the expanse stretching from the Red Sea to the Atlantic Ocean, comprising of countries such as Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Senegal, Algeria, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Eritrea, Sudan and Chad (Tandođan and Bouacha, 2017).

Sahel region stretches about 4,800 miles from the Horn of Africa to Senegal, at its broadest, it is about 400 miles wide, at its narrowest point, it is less than 100 miles deep. The Sahel covers more than one million square miles of barren or semi-barren grasslands. To the south,

it turns slowly into a lush, green savannah, to the north, the Sahara (desert) is an endless sea of sand (Potts et al., 2013). The vast land of the Sahel is an ungoverned desert region with more than 80 per cent of which is comprised of desert lands. Traditionally, most of the people in the Sahel have been semi-nomads, farming and raising livestock in a system of transhumance, which is probably the most sustainable way of utilizing the Sahel. The region has become a haven for transnational criminal activities such as terrorism; drugs, weapons, and human trafficking; border permeability, and insurgencies, which constitute a significant threat to the security of the individual nations and international community in general (Diarra, 2018; Ujunwa et al., 2019).



*Figure1:* Map showing the Sahel Region.

*Source:* The Conservation (2017)

The climatic condition in the Sahel region is very harsh, characterized by severe drought and desertification resulting in starvation and loss of stock and livestock. The Sahel, amid these shifting climatic conditions that drive an unfriendly environment, represents a source of insecurity and instability (Mbasku, 1989; Tandođan and Bouacha, 2017). It is no gainsaying that, for Africa and particularly in the Sahel, terrorists have had negative implications for both the development and security of the region. Besides the killings and destructions, their activities continue to pose serious subversion on defence and security agencies.

Terrorism has also led to breakdown of law and order and discouragement of foreign direct investment which is badly needed, in this way, sapping on national productivity and development thus making the region and the entire African continent struggling to catch up with the rest of the world. This is bad omen already as the continent missed the 20th century and the additional burden of missing on the tangible gains of the 21st century is too risk to grapple with. Given this dire scenario, it is best to tackle some of the problems that led to the surge in terrorist activities.

### Conclusion

The menace of terrorism has waxed overwhelmingly both at the global and African levels and in the Sahel, it is not different with no signs of abetting. The corollary is that this intractable scourge has rendered both national and regional initiatives impotent. In spite of this albatross confronting the region, all hope should not be lost, rather, it is a wake-up call for the states within in the Sahel and Africa generally to go back to the drawing board and come up with new socio-economic and political measures to confront the root cause that provoke the insurgency in the first place.

The greed, politics of marginalization and corruption have continued to fuel the crisis which unfortunately has defied local mechanism and even with the intervention of foreign powers has not been able to adequately contain the raging fire of terrorism. Concerted efforts in the peace-building is also required to address polarization which these terrorists' groups have capitalized upon in further deepening fault lines in Africa.

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