Article

West Africa's Terrorist Challenge and the Dynamics of Regional Response

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Abstract

West Africa's trajectory to democratisation and sustained socio-economic development has, since the end of the Cold War, been hamstrung by various forms of violence ranging from bloody civil wars, sectarian conflicts, coup d'états and secessionist insurgency. While some of these conflicts have to an extent been managed through the various interventions of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the region is still stifled by emerging security threats, especially as new waves of terrorism threaten the legitimacy and territorial integrity of some member states, with more obvious and painful evidence in Nigeria and Mali. Against this background, this article will explore the terrorist challenges in Nigeria and Mali in order to establish an identifiable trend and their regional linkages with other Al-Qaeda elements in the Sahel and the Maghreb. The article assesses the capacity of a regional response and argues for more security cooperation among West African governments through the coordination of ECOWAS and the long-term support of the African Union and the international community.

Keywords

ECOWAS, Nigeria, Mali, terrorism, West Africa, regional security

Introduction

Many of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)—a regional body of fifteen West African countries, namely, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, Burkina Faso, Benin, Senegal, Togo, Sierra Leone and Niger—have for many years contended with armed conflicts, violent separatist projects, secessionist insurgency and civil strife (Adedeji, 2004, 43). These conflicts and insurgencies have been a serious

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set back while achieving economic integration as envisaged by ECOWAS in 1975 (Abdullah & Rashid, 2004, 69; Adebajo, 2004, 1; Zouhon-Bi & Nielsen, 2007, 3). While some of these conflicts have to an extent been managed, either by ECOWAS, the African Union (AU), or the United Nations (UN), West Africa is still far from being stable as new pernicious and opportunistic threats emerge throughout the region (Daigne, 2012). The most vicious of these threats is the wave of terrorism pervading some member states, with more obvious and painful traces in Nigeria and Mali.

In Nigeria, the radical Islamist sect in the northeastern region—known by its preferred name as *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad* (Association for Propagating the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad), but popularly dubbed '*Boko Haram*', a name which means Western education/civilisation is sacrilegious—has been responsible for deadly bomb attacks strategically directed at a wide range of public and religious spaces (Uzodike & Maiangwa, 2012). This sect has also conducted targeted assassinations of politicians, ordinary citizens and religious/traditional leaders. *Boko Haram* claims to be on a divine mission to purge corruption and bad governance from the Nigerian society and implement the Sharia Islamic laws across the country. After a harsh crackdown on the sect by the Nigerian police, which led to the death of its leader and founder—Mohammed Yusuf—the rest of the leadership and the remaining sect members reportedly fled Nigeria to neighbouring Niger, Chad and Cameroon, to regroup, recruit more members and prepare for future attacks (*The Economist*, 26 January 2013). When *Boko Haram* eventually returned to Nigeria in 2010, it was a more vicious organisation that employed sophisticated weapons and strategy to conduct attacks that have so far killed more than 3,000 people as well as shattered private and public properties worth millions of dollars. On the whole, the *Boko Haram* crisis is considered as Nigeria's biggest security challenge, which is likely to spill over to countries with contiguous boundaries with Nigeria—especially those with weak government institutions and porous borders.

Similar is the crisis in Mali. About six months after President Amadou Toumani Touré was toppled in an ill-executed coup led by the Malian Army, a triumvirate of radical Islamist sects including the Tuareg separatists of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), the Islamist ighters of Ansar Dine (Defenders of the Faith), and the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) took over the north of the country with the assistance of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) (International Crisis Group, 2012). Akin to *Boko Haram* in Nigeria, the radical Islamists in Mali want a united Mali governed in accordance with the Sharia Islamic law. They had, prior to the joint French and West African troops' intervention in the region, imposed harsh behavioural and dress codes on local residents in the north and have carried out amputations and executions, in accordance with an extremely conservative interpretation of the Sharia Law (Ariel, 2013, 2). Besides the military coup, Lacher and Tull (2013) attribute the increasing terrorist presence in northern Mali and the reason for the escalation of the situation in January 2012 to the absence of regional

security cooperation on the part of the West African governments and they contend that the underlying reasons for this lack of cooperation persist, despite the regional attempts to resolve the crisis (Lacher & Tull, 2013, 1).

A notable consequence of the activities of these radical groups in Nigeria and Mali is that the crises could assume a transnational dimension. While it has not been concretely established that *Boko Haram* is linked to the Malian radical Islamists or AQIM, its demand for the implementation of the Sharia law resonates with the ideology of the groups in Mali and Algeria and could lead to a strong alliance between them to form what may turn out to be an organised terrorist outfit in West Africa. As Tanchum (2012, 75) opines, the outbreak of terrorist activities and rebellion in Mali could carry the 'potential of linking North Africa's AQIM, via Mali and Niger, to Nigeria's *Boko Haram* to form a nexus of transnational Salafi jihadist militancy across West Africa.' In fact, according to Souré (2010), AQIM and Tuareg elements linked to rebels in northern Niger have already engaged in a 'marriage of convenience', by guaranteeing each other the right of passage and aiding each other to escape the law. The collapse of the Gadhafi regime has also led to the proliferation of arms across the Sahel and the return of Tuareg insurgents to their home countries in Mali and Niger where they have been staging attacks against their governments and foreign interests.

Attention so far has focused on a French-backed military intervention to support Malian efforts to retake the north from the radical Islamists and Tuareg rebels and also to forge a more legitimate and effective government in Bamako (Ariel, 2013, 2). On 25 April 2013, the UN authorised a Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). Under the terms of the Security Council Resolution 2100, the Peacekeeping Mission would support the political process in Mali and carry out a number of security-related stabilisation tasks having a focus on major population centres and lines of communication, protecting civilians, human rights monitoring, the creation of conditions for the provision of humanitarian assistance and the return of displaced persons, as well as oversee an inclusive and peaceful election (MINUSMA, 2013). It is the first time that the UN will be initiating a military operation against terrorists and associated elements. Admittedly, the French intervention in Mali has gone a long way in bringing a semblance of peace in the restive northern region. Likewise, the peacekeeping mission of the UN is a welcome development given that Mali would need to return to a democratic government for the proper functioning of the state. But taken the severity of the entire situation across the Sahel and in the West African region, there is a need for a more sustained counterterrorism approach, which according to the submission of this article, lies in the co-ordinating role of ECOWAS with the long-term support of the international community and the AU. To avoid the spiraling of terrorism across West Africa, it is incumbent on the West African Governments to harness their security apparatus and collaborate to stabilise the region, since above and beyond national concerns, only concerted action is capable of averting the terrorist threat and preventing it from taking root and spreading across the subregion (Taje, 2010, 1).

As the main subregional organisation, ECOWAS has made considerable effort in the area of conflict management notwithstanding its many shortcomings. It has adopted and implemented several subregional mechanisms for defense and security collaboration, engaged in peace support operations and conflict mediation in many of its member-states. Nonetheless, as Hutchful (2007, 113) asserts, ECOWAS still lags far behind other African subregions in the area of counterterrorism despite having adopted a counterterrorism framework in February 2013.

Conceived in this way, this article will explore terrorist challenges in Nigeria and Mali in order to establish an identifiable trend and their regional linkages with other Al-Qaeda elements in the Sahel and the Maghreb. In conclusion, the article will canvass for the strengthening of regional security cooperation under the coordinating leadership of ECOWAS, as an effective means of diminishing the operational capacity of terrorists in the West African region. The article is structured in three sections. The first section examines the terrorist activities bedevilling Nigeria and Mali and their transnational ramifications. The second section undertakes a literature review, which will examine some of the recommendations that have been made regarding counterterrorism in West Africa as well as explore the prospects and challenges of a regional response to terrorism in West Africa. Finally, the third section makes recommendations on how ECOWAS can better enhance cooperation and commitment of its member states and other grassroots actors to effectively address terrorism.

West Africa's Terrorist Challenge

Until the dawn of the twenty-first century, the West African region was more or less free of terrorist threats, though bouts of ethno-religious skirmishes occurred, particularly in Nigeria. But following the 9/11 attacks on the United States homeland, West Africa came under the spotlight as a possible hub of terrorism. This unfortunate development has been attributed to various reasons including, the growth of radical Islam in several parts of the region; West Africa's proximity to the Middle East and the Arab world, where many terrorist groups thrive; the general inability of African states to sufficiently police their porous borders; the abject poverty, unemployment and political instability; history of repressive and tyrannical regimes; the mobilisation of religion by sinister actors; the vast ungoverned Sahelian region and other deteriorating socio-economic factors that leave many young people desperate, frustrated and pliable tools for recruitment by terrorist elements (Le Sage, 2007, 48). The combination of these factors has created a 'perfect storm' for radical alternatives, which have manifested themselves variously in the forms of religious radicalism, insurgency, revolutionary gangs and now terrorism. Ultimately, the emerging threat of terrorism in the subregion has been particularly catastrophic, as demonstrated graphically in Nigeria, Mali and other spaces across the Sahel.

Boko Haram Terrorism in Nigeria

The first indication of the possible rise of terrorism in Nigeria came in 2004 which warned that a potent mix of communal clashes, radical Islamism and anti-Americanism would produce a black hole for terrorism with deleterious consequences for the legitimacy and stability of Nigeria (Lyman & Morrison, 2004, 75). It is eight years since this observation was made, and unfolding events in Nigeria seem to corroborate the hypothesis of the authors of an impending terrorist threat in the country. Ever since the return to democratic rule in 1999, Nigeria continues to battle serious socio-economic and political problems, which exposes the country to attacks by radical groups such as *Boko Haram*. Since its violent uprising in 2009, *Boko Haram* has been responsible for a spate of bomb attacks and assassinations that have left more than 3,000 people dead. The sect's attacks have been strategically directed at the Nigerian security forces and prominent northern politicians, innocent civilians, media houses, communication centres, hotels, beer parlours, religious houses and public structures. The avowed mission of the sect is to establish a government in Nigeria functioning under the Islamic Sharia law. The sect reiterated on 24 April 2011:

> We are warriors who are carrying out jihad, that is, religious war in Nigeria, and our struggle is based on the traditions of the Holy Prophet. We would never accept any system of government apart from the one that is stipulated by Islam, because that is the only way that the Muslims could be liberated. (Oshisada, 2012)

In fulfillment of its overarching objective, *Boko Haram* has rejected the amnesty offer made by the Nigerian Government and has become implacable. The sect has heightened its violent campaign of terror on innocent civilians and seem undeterred by the heavy-handedness of Nigeria's security forces who have also intensified their military tactics against the sect since the beginning of 2013. In its beginnings in 2009, the sect mainly attacked security forces, hotels and other government establishments using machetes and small arms. However, by late 2010, after the sect's leader—Mohammed Yusuf—was reportedly killed by the Nigerian Police, *Boko Haram* augmented its modus operandi and embarked on suicide bombing missions by employing highly sophisticated weapons including Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (VBIEDs) to bomb churches, schools, mosques and other public places in northern Nigeria. Given the alarming proportion of attacks, the *Boko Haram* phenomenon remains the most severe terrorist threat that Nigeria has had to confront since its emergence as an independent nation-state in 1960. The snowballing effects have manifested in the killing of humans and the destruction of properties and public infrastructure with the northern region of the country faring the worst (Forest, 2012, 1).

Although *Boko Haram* terrorism is fanned by a complex web of domestic factors within Nigeria, its ideology resonates with those of other terrorist groups in Mali, North Africa and other parts of the world where terrorists are holding sway. Worse still, an environment like northern Nigeria with its chequered history

of religious activism could open up an opportunity for Al-Qaeda elements to easily exploit (Gourley, 2012, 9). Such an ideological affiliation between *Boko Haram* and others of its ilk could provide the sect with the financial support and confidence to further its campaign of terror within Nigeria and beyond. So far, all efforts made by the Nigerian Government to do away with *Boko Haram* have yielded nothing but failure, as the sect's activities still persist with increasing impudence that inflicts pain and instills fear in the minds and hearts of many Nigerians who find themselves embroiled in the midst of the storm.

The Insurgency in Mali

In middle of January 2012, the MNLA along with radical Islamists, notably Ansar Dine and AQIM and disaffected soldiers, embarked on an armed insurrection against government forces in the north of the country. The rebellion was propelled by the availability of sophisticated arms and Tuareg combatants returning from Libya following the collapse of the Gadhafi regime. The take over of the northern region by the Tuareg groups and armed Islamists and a mutiny by junior officers in the Army led to the Military coup d'état of 22 March 2012 that toppled President Amadou Toumani Touré. The coup was led by Captain Amadou Sanogo, who suspended the Constitution immediately after the coup (MINUSMA, 2013). The coup opened a can of worms, which paved the way for further disintegration of the northern region of Mali and the taking over of all major towns in the region by the three loosely connected Islamist extremist groups—including Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the Islamist fighters of the Ansar Dine and the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) (Ariel, 2013, 1). A brief synopsis of the objectives and identity of the armed groups will now be presented.

The Tuareg Separatist Groups

The two known radical Tuareg separatist groups in Mali are the MNLA and the National Liberation Front of Azawad (FLNA). The MNLA was founded on 16 October 2011 by leaders from the National Azawad Movement (MNA) and some Tuareg returnees from Libya (International Crisis Group, 2012, 40). The MNLA comprises the Tuaregs, Songhai, Arabs and the Fulani ethnic groups. The group is headed by Bilal Ag Cherif, an Ifoghas Tuareg, and his second in command is Mahamadou Djeri Maiga, a Songhai. The main objective of the group is to create an independent state in northern Mali called Azawad. The MNLA is said to have instigated the crisis in the north of Mali that eventually led to the destabilisation of the region and the subsequent coup by the young military officers. But it is important to bear in mind that the crisis in the northern region of Mali is deep-rooted and could trace its origins to the first Tuareg rebellion in 1963

(*Aljazeera*, 2013). The FNLA on the other hand, is an Arab group with loose ties to the MNLA which seeks the right of self-determination for the people of northern Mali and wants them to be able to decide their autonomy and independence, possibly through a referendum (*Aljazeera*, 2013).

The Three Armed Islamist Groups

There are three main armed Islamist groups in northern Mali: AQIM, Ansar Dine (defenders of the faith) and the MUJAO. AQIM is originally from Algeria and has been smouldering in Mali since 2003 (Daigne, 2012, 15). It was created when the Salafi Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) pledged allegiance to the Al-Qaeda core in January 2007. AQIM has three strategic objectives: (*a*) to overthrow the Government of Algeria; (*b*) to create a safe base among the Tuareg tribes of Mali, Niger and Mauritania wherein it can obtain refuge and where it can also facilitate Tuareg rebellion against central states; and (*c*) to target France, Britain, Germany, Belgium and Spain through planned bombings and kidnappings (Larémont, 2011, 245).

It is alleged that the AQIM has held more than 50 European and Canadian hostages for ransom in the last ten years, earning what is estimated to be well over $100m. Due to its connivance with local groups like the Ansar Dine, AQIM has become more mainstream and has been openly circulating in the main cities of northern Mali. The group has attracted despondent and unemployed youth and migrants from southern Mali, Senegal, Niger, Mauritania and other neighbouring countries. AQIM's main leader is the Algerian Abdel Malek Droukdel and its Emir for the Sahara is Yahia Abou Hammam (*Aljazeera*, 2013). Although the ethno-racial divide present within AQIM itself has been cited as a possible factor that could work against its influence in Nigeria and other West African countries owing to the level of distrust between black Africans and the group's Arab leaders (Thornberry & Levy, 2011, 7), there are still ominous signs of AQIM linking with local radical groups like *Boko Haram* in Nigeria and other terrorists in the subregion owing to their shared ideology and modus operandi.

Ansar Dine is a group consisting of local Ifoghas, Tuaregs, Berabiche Arabs and other ethnic groups, who like *Boko Haram* in Nigeria, want to institutionalise Sharia law in northern Mali. The founder and head of the Ansar Dine is Iyad Ag Ghali, a former Tuareg leader of the 1990s. The majority of Ansar Dine fighters are Tuaregs from Iyad Ag Ghali's Ifoghas tribe and Berabiche Arabs from the Timbuktu area. Although the group denies any links with AQIM, it nevertheless provides AQIM with the hospitable ground for easy operation and is also known to benefit from close connections with the larger world of radical Islam, including at least a nominal tie to the Al-Qaeda core (Cook, 2013). Ansar Dine appears to be playing host to AQIM in Mali akin to the relationship between the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. The group membership is spread across the three main cities in the north of Mali: Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal (*Aljazeera*, 2013). The third

armed Islamist sect in northern Mali is the MUJAO; it is the most nebulous of the Al-Qaeda-linked groups. It is supposedly a spin-off of AQIM and like Ansar Dine, MUJAO is motivated by an Islamist project to enforce Sharia law not only in northern Mali but across the entire Muslim world. It is alleged that its membership comprises both locals and foreigners from the Sahel region and North Africa (Aljazeera, 2013).

The Transnational Challenge

The terrorist threats that envelop Nigeria, Mali and other places across the Sahel have severe multidimensional implications, with increasing direct negative impact on the peace and stability of the entire West African region. It has been stated by many scholars and observers that *Boko Haram* members are actively involved with other armed Islamist fighters in Mali (Zenn, 2013, 7). After the July 2009 standoff between *Boko Haram* and the Nigerian security forces, sect members were reported to have taken refuge in neighbouring countries like Niger and Mali, where they possibly had more training and acquired new recruits (Uzodike & Maiangwa, 2012). Another scholar has alleged that while in Niger, the sect's operational capability was strengthened by Abdelmalek Droukdel, the leader of AQIM (Tanchum, 2012, 2). The *Boko Haram* leader Abubakar Shekau reportedly pledged his allegiance to the AQIM leader (Larémont, 2011, 245). The links between the two groups were further affirmed in an *Al Jazeera* interview with Droukdel, in which he claimed that his 'group would provide *Boko Haram* with the training and logistics needed to expand its reach and defend Muslims in Nigeria by stopping the advance of a minority of crusaders' (cited in Pham, 2012, 3).

A *Boko Haram* video released on 29 November 2012, further confirms the involvement of Abubakar Shekau with the Islamist armed groups in northern Mali. The video is the first to show Shekau in green military khaki training in a desert surrounded by heavily armed and veiled militants unlike in previous video footages where he had always been in traditional Islamic dress. Also, Shekau was seen in this video speaking pure Arabic praising the brothers and Sheiks in the Maghreb as well as the Islamic fighters in Mali (Zenn, 2013, 8). *Boko Haram* militants could have joined the insurgency in northern Mali in alliance with MUJAO and AQIM and Abubakar Shekau and his commanders may have found refuge in northern Mali or Niger to escape the clampdown of the Nigerian security forces or to assist their Malian counterparts in fighting against what it deemed as 'foreign attacks' against its brethren in Mali (Zenn, 2013, 9).

In another worrying development, *Boko Haram* was reported to have expressed its discontent with the French invasion of Islamist groups in Mali and captured seven French nationals in Cameroon on 19 February 2013, but released them in Nigeria on 18 April 2013 (*This Day Live*, 19 April 2013). The fact that *Boko Haram* could travel to Cameroon to kidnap foreign nationals suggests that the sect

is willing to operate outside of Nigeria's boundaries and to effect attacks in connection with other Islamist groups across the West African region and the Sahel (Cook, 2013). Again, a splinter group of *Boko Haram* known as *Ansaru*, which translates roughly as 'supporters of Black Muslims' in the land of Sudan (Zenn-1, 2012), has claimed responsibility for the killing of two Nigerian army men with an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) on the Ekene-Abuja road on 19 January 2013. The group claimed that the attack on the soldiers was in retaliation against the French-led intervention against its cohorts in northern Mali (*The Guardian*, 19 January 2013). It further claimed responsibility for the kidnapping of seven foreigners from the compound of the Lebanese construction company Setraco in northern Nigeria's Bauchi State. The seven foreigners who hailed from Britain, France, Lebanon and Italy have been reportedly killed by *Ansaru as* revenge for 'atrocities done to the religion of Allah by the European countries in many places such as Afghanistan and Mali' (Cook, 2013).

There are also reports of Nigerians 'traveling north through Niger to northern Mali to join Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb as well as reports of *Boko Haram* members receiving militant training in Niger and setting up bases in southern Niger's largest city, Zinder, which is 150 miles north of Kano' (Zenn-1, 2012, 1). Again, according to the same author, in September 2010 five *Boko Haram* members were arrested by the Nigerian security forces in the Niger town of Zinder. Another similar case in Niger occurred in February 2012 when 15 suspected *Boko Haram* members were arrested in Diffa, Niger's easternmost city (Zenn-2, 2012, 4). The worrying fact about these developments is that both Diva and Zinder border Nigeria's Yobe State, where *Boko Haram* had initially established a mini-state which it named 'Afghanistan' in 2009. Besides, the Niger Republic is one of the world's least developed and most impoverished nation which could provide both a breeding ground and potential recruits for the *Boko Haram* group and other radical elements in Mali and Algeria. Already in northern Niger, terrorists carried out two suicide attacks on 23 May 2013, which targeted a camp of the Niger armed forces in the city of Agadez and a uranium site run by the French nuclear company Areva in the city of Arlit. During the attacks, around 20 people (most of them Niger soldiers) were killed. The MUJAO—one of the three jihadist groups that seized control of northern Mali in March 2012 prior to the French intervention—has claimed responsibility for the attacks (Koepf, 2013, 1). The attacks have raised concerns of the issue of transnational terrorism in West Africa and across the Sahel as well as the beginning of a descent into chaos in Niger. Countries like Benin, Cameroon and Chad are also potential targets for radical elements in West Africa due to their proximity to Nigeria and Mali and their widespread socioeconomic and political issues, which can encourage terrorists in the region to develop recruitment and local support networks for gathering information, supplying arms and ammunition and securing logistical resources and equipment (Security Council Report, 2012).

The foregoing developments serve to corroborate speculation among regional and Western scholars and officials that West African countries have become

incubators where AQIM is training and mobilising Africans for violent jihad (Hinshaw, 2013, 1). Moreover, the influx of refugees and fighters fleeing the French intervention in Mali to neighbouring countries of Niger and Chad is a cause for great concern and portends danger for the peace and stability of the West African region and beyond that reinforces the need for a robust and collective counterterrorism strategy.

Challenges and Prospects for Regional Action

The challenges of terrorism and its escalation in the region of West Africa are indeed tremendous. Given this scenario, several scholars have recently proposed various counterterrorism roadmaps for the subregion. Thus for instance, the International Crisis Group (2012) suggests that a global strategy should be sought to curb the excesses of terrorism in the region. The Group recommends that ECOWAS and the AU should work with the UN to draw up a credible counterterrorism strategy for the subregion, especially in Mali. It also calls for the European Union and the US to help re-establish the Malian defense forces and stabilise the country through the provision of aid. On his part, Rao (2013, 9) proffers that foreign partners should help bolster the region's economy through an accelerated resumption of foreign aid. Lacher (2012) states that external actors should help weaken the criminal networks in Mali's north by developing a coherent international approach that would strengthen regional cooperation. He further suggests a common global approach to limiting ransom payments to radical elements, especially Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. Sidibé (2012), also advises the need for external support for the West African governments, especially Mali, through joint anti-terrorism and development policies that would strengthen the state's operational capacity to deliver security and development in the region. Vines (2013) asserts the need for a full-scale offensive from the French Army and the ECOWAS to adequately prepare for deployment and long-term support peace operations.

While military deployment and long-term peace operations are most needed to eliminate terrorists in West Africa, Blyth (2013) maintains that the disadvantages of responding militarily can often hinder broader counterterrorism initiatives. This is because local populations can feel alienated, invaded and colonised. Besides, civilian casualties which accompany military engagements can have a radicalising effect on populations, causing them to sympathise and collude with terrorist groups. Further, given the military onslaught against the Islamists in Mali, many of them fragmented into smaller groups and moved into neighbouring countries like Niger. Although the armed groups in the north of Mali might not be able to pose a direct military threat to Bamako given the French military intervention, conflict in northern Mali is far from over because the internal crisis in the region is neither due to jihadism nor to 'Tuareg rebellion'. Instead, as contended by Lacher and Tull (2013, 3), the crisis is also hinged on rivalries between the different Tuareg groups, as well as those between the Tuaregs and

other Islamic communities and that resolving this conflict will be a far more difficult and protracted task.

Thus, an exclusively military approach—be it by the UN, AU or ECOWAS—is not adequate for a situation of such social and political magnitude and would only add one more armed group to an already intricate situation (International Crisis Group, 2012, 31). It is also not guaranteed that once foreign aid is provided to stabilise the economy of Mali, terrorism would subside in the country. While the economic impoverishment of many Malians has contributed to their radicalisation it must be noted that most of the radical groups in Mali and elsewhere in West Africa, while being inspired by ideological and political factors have also been susceptible to group rivalries, which cannot be resolved militarily or by mere provision of foreign aid by the international community as some scholars have recommended. Indeed, international assistance is needed to combat terrorist actions in West Africa, but such international assistance would be more beneficial if the existing security mechanisms in the affected region are strenghtened by the respective governments of West Africa. If the West African Governments show the commitment and cohesiveness to tackle their own problems, it would be easier for the international community to assist them. While foreign assistance might be useful in the short run, solidarity and cooperation are imperatives for the West African states if they are to adequately prevent and combat security threats like terrorism. As demonstrated by contemporary experiences in Europe, regional cooperation and integration could offer a veritable and viable means of surmounting West Africa's security challenges (Rashid, 2004, 90).

ECOWAS, the most credible subregional organisation in West Africa, is perceived as the organisation that should take the lead in counterterrorism programming. Besides the various protocols that ECOWAS has already adopted in relation to conflict resolution in the subregion, the organisation has also established a Warning and Response Network known as the ECOWAS Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN). ECOWARN provides the sub-region with the capacity to evaluate, inform and guide responses to potential transnational crime and threats, including terrorism (United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, 2010). In addition, ECOWAS had in 2000 set up the Inter-Governmental Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa (GIABA). The Group represents the single most important response and contribution of ECOWAS to combat money laundering and terrorism financing (United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, 2010). Furthermore, in February 2013, ECOWAS adopted its counterterrorism strategy and implementation plan.

ECOWAS thus, seems to have the requisite institutional framework needed to manage West Africa's security challenges. However, after almost four decades of continued existence, ECOWAS has had its share of misfortunes and challenges. Given the outbreak of the Malian crisis, the West African governments under the auspices of ECOWAS attempted to rein in the situation through diplomatic means and sanctions. ECOWAS and the junta signed a framework of agreement

on 6 April 2012 that led to the resignation of the then President, Amadou Toumani Touré and the appointment of the Speaker of the National Assembly, Dioncounda Traoré, as interim President on 12 April 2012 (MINUSMA, 2013). While this diplomatic tussle was ongoing, the crisis in the region raged on to such an extent that the interim government had to call on their former colonizers—France—to intervene. This suggests that the situation in Mali was overwhelming for ECOWAS to handle alone.

The challenges that ECOWAS faces are enormous. First, the organisation had adopted several protocols and made numerous decisions related to the peace and stability of the subregion. Notwithstanding, a recurrent concern within the subregion and outside is that the observance of these far-reaching decisions and the implementation of these protocols by member states has mostly been in the breach, thus hindering the proper functioning of the security mechanisms of the organisation (Ukeje, 2005, 142). Second, most ECOWAS member states have signed and ratified various counterterrorism conventions of the AU and the UN, but have not taken concrete action to put in place specific national legislation failing to 'close the wide gap between rhetoric and practical implementation at the national level' (Haacke & Williams, 2008, 8). The fact that only 'three out of ECOWAS's fifteen states had ratified its security protocol by August 2002 also suggests a continuing lack of political will in implementing subregional initiatives' (Adebajo, 2004, 312). Third, on their own, some West African countries are unlikely to be able to confront the challenges posed by terrorism, nor will they be able to devote the critical minimum of resources necessary to address the issue of terrorism and strengthen their preventive capabilities.

Another challenge that ECOWAS will have to wrestle with is the internal divisions among member states—anglophone and francophone—which has resulted in the creation of conflicting and often overlapping regional instruments, all geared to achieving the same purpose (Rashid, 2004, 390). Alongside these divisions, ever since the upsurge of the Malian crisis doctrinnaire differences among member states, rivalries and a lack of planning and military capacity have hampered counterterrorism efforts (Ariel, 2013, 7).

Other challenges abound. For instance, member states have been slow in responding to financial requests from the ECOWAS Secretariat (Hutchful, 2007, 117). This is further compounded by several factors such as the immediate concern with preserving the existing patrimonial regime and avoiding social transformation, a distinct lack of trust between political actors, understaffing and the limited influence of regional civil society (Haacke & Williams, 2008, 9). For the most part, many West African states have not yet found sufficient reason to dedicate military, police, or financial resources to solve a problem that they do not believe is urgent or widespread. Only more recently have governments in this region come to appreciate the distressing fact that terrorist insurgency in Nigeria, Mali and Algeria, may eventually pose existential threats to governmental sovereignty in the long term, as it has already done in Niger, Mauritania and Chad (Laremont, 2011, 58).

Although the organisation has made great strides in mapping parameters for politico-security relations within the subregion of West Africa (Ukeje, 2005, 143), it must be stated that the various challenges ECOWAS is facing are complex and enormous which can undermine its efforts to tackle the emerging security challenges in the subregion. In taking stock of its perils and promises then, the following questions posed by Ukeje (2005, 143) eight years ago are still pertinent: What are the substantive factors and forces driving the rethinking and repositioning of ECOWAS to be able to meet serious security challenges such as terrorism? How best can ECOWAS deal with the challenges of cooperation and integration with regard to the issue of counterterrorism? Does ECOWAS have the necessary accoutrements and the political will to meet its security challenges? What other alternative measures can ECOWAS seek as it prepares to meet the new security challenges that confront the twenty-first century and beyond? How ECOWAS addresses these important questions and concerns, will determine whether its counterterrorism initiatives will yield the desired results. The next section examines some factors that will help to strengthen the capacity of ECOWAS to respond to terrorism and other security concerns in West Africa.

Conclusion: How can ECOWAS Respond?

> Considering the transnational nature of the threat of terrorism in the broader western African space, which is exacerbated by the corrosive effect of cross-border criminal activity, purely national approaches to countering the threat are inadequate. National efforts will always be confronted by the same problem: threats can relocate easily, especially in regions with porous borders such as the Sahel, leading to regional tensions and instability on top of national insecurity. (Renard, 2010, 2)

Many actors are involved in preventing and combating transnational crime and terrorism in West Africa and the wider Sahelian region. Some of these actors include the AU, the UN, ECOWAS and other foreign actors like the United States and the European Union. While the support of external actors is indispensable, it will be important to assess the capacity of ECOWAS as the regional body assigned the project to support troubled terrains within its jurisdiction. ECOWAS was formed in 1975 as an economic organisation geared to foster the integration of individual markets of West African countries, which were inadequate to promote the much needed rapid economic growth and political stability envisaged by the nationalists in the run up to independence (Sesey, 2005, 192). Through the sub-regional protocol on the Free Movement of People, ECOWAS member states have been able to record significant achievements in terms of economic development and cooperation and such achievement has also been replicated in the area of peace and security since the early 1990s. Despite the achievements of ECOWAS, many drawbacks such as inadequate financial and human resources, countries' membership of more than one organisation, the duplication of mandates, poor

coordination and harmonisation of policies and inconsistency of member states in the implementation of the many ECOWAS protocols and treaties, have been cited as hampering the capacity of ECOWAS to effectively carry out its security and peacekeeping functions (*African Economic Outlook*, 2012, 63).

Nevertheless, ECOWAS has been resilient and with the exception of Mauritania, member states such as Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso, who experienced devastating economic hardship since the late 1970s, have remained loyal to the agenda of the organisation despite their financial constraints (Bamfo, 2013, 17). Such loyalty and commitment by member states will no doubt determine the overall effectiveness of ECOWAS in the area of peace and stability.

To bolster the capacity of ECOWAS in this regard, this article recommends the following: First, that ECOWAS should fortify its Stand-by Force with more counterterrorism training to be deployed at a given time when the need arises. The main task of the Force involves observation and monitoring, peacekeeping, humanitarian intervention, enforcement of sanctions and embargoes, preventive deployment, peacebuilding operations and policing, including anti-criminal and counterterrorism activities (Adebajo, 2004, 307). If the subregional Force is to collaborate with other foreign troops, then they must be trained to have a complementary and coherent strategy in order to ensure the synergy of doctrine, language and operationality between the foreign troops and the sub-regional Force.

Second, the commitment of West African countries to pool resources, capacity and strategy will be needed to boost the financial wherewithal of ECOWAS. This collectivisation of resources and commitment by member states will help weak states like Mali and Niger, whose national capacity is inadequate to respond to the terrorist threats in their jurisdictions. Additionally, ECOWAS should continue to promote a regional commitment to democracy, reject military incursions and seizures of power and strengthen the capacity of West African citizens to resist repressive regimes and put pressure on their parliaments to pass all the treaties they have signed into law. Particular attention should be paid to Mali's military, which in the medium term should be encouraged to gradually leave the political arena and submit entirely to civilian control (Lacher & Tull, 2013, 6). Democratic governments in the subregion must be demilitarised to avoid the possibility of military coups and armies becoming partisan and repressive instruments of autocratic regimes (Rashid, 2004, 389).

Third, to develop viable counterterrorism strategies, ECOWAS must adopt a comprehensive development programme that will also tackle the effects of climate change. Issues of climate change in Chad and Niger, especially low rainfall and the shrinking of the Lake Chad Basin, have caused untold hardship to the citizens of these impoverished nations, who are constantly on the move in search of greener pastures and are easily recruited to fight wars. As aptly observed by Falola (2002, 300), 'the Sahara Desert keeps expanding, diminishing the areas for farming and grazing in West Africa'. In these regions of ecological and economic distress, AQIM within its southern theater has found a means of survival by linking economically and symbiotically with local Tuareg and Bérabiche tribes

that collaborate with them in the clandestine trafficking of various contraband products such as cocaine, cannabis, resin or hashish and counterfeit tobacco (Larémont, 2011, 249). ECOWAS should strengthen its climate change adaptation strategies in order to enhance the social-ecological and engineering resilience of the inhabitants of these bereft regions. Providing improved methods of irrigation, drought resistant crops, renewable energy sources and replenishing the Lake Chad, might be some of the urgent projects that will need to be undertaken in these regions.

Fourth, is the role of civil societies, youth and religious clerics; they should form a critical part of assisting states in the subregion to combat extremist ideologies and terrorist threats. According to Rashid (2004, 385), civil society groups, especially those spearheaded by women and religious and traditional leaders can re-energize the populace and open up democratic spaces that can contribute to the management of conflicts in West Africa. Through civil society actors, ECOWAS can connect easily with the ordinary people who can help the organisation to implementat its counterterrorism strategy. The key is for ECOWAS to create platforms that will incorporate mainstream religious leaders and other citizens who are at the receiving end of many of the subregion's tragic nightmares.

There is also an absence of the involvement of people in the activities of the organisation. Most West African people do not know much about ECOWAS and only cursorily hear about the organisation when they acquire their national passports or when borders are closed, or ECOWAS Heads of State are holding meetings. There is thus the need for improved public enlightenment and involvement of ordinary people—especially the youth—to be part of the implementation programmes and politics of ECOWAS. Indeed, it is only by allowing the people to take part in the policies and programmes of ECOWAS as well as evaluate them at regular intervals, will successful regionalism and cooperation be achieved in West Africa both on the economic and security fronts (Oruwari, 2005, 172). To this end, ECOWAS should provide internship opportunities for the youth who are interested in peace and security issues to deepen their understanding and work on the ground with ECOWAS trained counterterrorism experts. This will open up the organisation and make it people-friendly both in terms of cultivating the active involvement and participation of ordinary citizens in maintaining security and in making them the ultimate beneficiaries of collective subregional initiatives (Ukeje, 2005, 149).

Finally, West Africa's search for solutions to its problems is important for the entire African continent and the global community. Thus, the collective cooperation of the Sahelian and North African countries, especially Algeria, which has the most effective military force in the region, alongside the African Union and the international community, will be useful in providing logistics, financial resources and personnel to address West Africa's pernicious security threats.

Ultimately, the success of implementing counterterrorism strategy of ECOWAS will depend largely on the unwavering commitment and support of member states. If ECOWAS is to be the main vehicle that addresses the terrorist threat in the

subregion, its members must provide the requisite financial muscle and demonstrate the political will to implement the subregion's counterterrorism strategy in a timely manner. The reality that West Africa is facing a common challenge should propel member states to collectively seek ways under the leadership of ECOWAS to pool economic and human resources to provide the much needed impetus to confront the challenge. In the long run, such kind of subregional integration will afford the West African countries the opportunity to be able to seek assistance among themselves—and in the international arena—in the areas of peace building, economic development, military assistance and humanitarian provisions. This will go a long way to enable ECOWAS achieve its goal of economic integration, sustainable development and peace in West Africa.

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