

**PREVENTING TERRORISM IN WEST AFRICA: GOOD GOVERNANCE OR  
COLLECTIVE SECURITY?**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper argues that terrorism poses enormous threats to the security, political stability, economic development and human security of the West African governments and people. It submits that the region is not presently a hub of terrorism but is a fertile ground for breeding terrorist networks through trans-national criminal networks, small arms proliferation, illegal natural resource transfer, human and drugs trafficking. It traces the root of precarious security in the region to poverty, underdevelopment, youth unemployment, bad governance and categorises the types of terrorist groups in Africa, all of which are presently operating in the region. The paper examines the theoretical and practical justification and also the limit of good governance and collective security in the fight against terrorism. It posits that West Africa has robust governance mechanism for preventing security threat but a relatively underdeveloped security architecture for effectively tackling the menace. It submits that neither of these two approaches can work alone, in isolation of the other and articulates a framework for integrating good governance and collective security strategies in the region's effort to prevent terrorism.

Keywords: Governance, terrorism, security

## INTRODUCTION

The attack on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001 by a terrorist group known as Al-Qaeda re-awakened the world to the threat posed by the phenomenon to international peace and security. It also renewed the interests of stakeholders in fighting terrorism anywhere it could be found in the world. However, fighting terrorism is no tea party because it entails a lot of financial commitments. Though it appears that it is only the great powers that are confronted with the threat of terrorist attacks and have sufficient resources to fight it, the spate of attacks in Kenya, Tanzania and Somalia in the early part of the decade; coupled with growing activities of pirates in the African high sea illustrates the threat posed by terrorism to African countries. This situation has been compounded by Africa's litany of bad governance and economic disarticulation, leading to conflicts, war and proliferation of criminal groups in several parts of the continent. Unfortunately, most African countries do not possess the resources and required technology to individually fight terrorism. Terrorism is a term that has defied a generally accepted definition. The 1937 Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of Terrorism defines terrorism as "all criminal acts directed against a state and intended or calculated to create state of terror in the minds of particular persons or a group of persons or the general public" (Duffy, 2006: 17). Terrorism is often employed to achieve political ends, even when it also evinces other motives, such as religious, economic, ethnic or social. But while all terrorism has a political purpose, there are technical and moral dissimilarities, civil dissidence, and other forms of civil violence, or revolution, which are also political phenomena in themselves (Harmon, 2000:1).

Africa's exposure to the menace of terrorism is perhaps best illustrated by the recorded incidents of terrorism on the continent. In 1993, 18 American soldiers were killed in Mogadishu, Somalia, during an attack carried out on the US Peacekeeping team in the country and which some analysts attributed to Islamic terrorists. In 1998, terrorists bombed the American embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and killing over 200 people while injuring more than 4,000. In October 2000, the U.S.S. *Cole* ship was struck by terrorists in Yemen, just off the east coast of Africa in an attack that

claimed the lives of 17 American sailors. Furthermore, in November 2002, al Qaeda-backed terrorists bombed a hotel and attempted to force down an Israeli airliner with a shoulder-held surface-to-air missile near Mombasa, Kenya (United States Institute of Peace, 2004:1-2). Between 1999 and 2006 alone, 6,177 casualties were recorded from 296 acts of terrorism in Africa (Goredema and Botha, 2005: 51). In addition to these, pirates in the Gulf of Aden, off the Coast of Somalia carried out 73 attacks on ship, and were still holding on to 11 people as at October 2008 (*The Guardian*, 2008:11). War and weak governance in several parts of Africa provided the fertile land for criminal networks to germinate and these networks have proved themselves ready to collaborate with terrorists in order to undermine security in Africa. Terrorism has the brightest chances of blossoming in Africa in the next decades due to its multifarious “ungoverned spaces”, unresolved “national questions” and bad governance which are at the root of political instability, the question of over non-transparent resource management, political selection rather than election which results from failure to deepen democratic governance.

The West African region is the most advanced in designing and nurturing of structures and institutions to fight insecurity in Africa. Ironically, it is the most vulnerable to terrorist attacks because of the availability of small arms and light weapons, bad governance, management problem in the extractive industries, trans-border criminal networks capitalising on free movement of people in the region and activities of external interests, among other factors. Simmering indicators of possible terrorist presence in the region included Islamic fundamentalists’ activities in Northern Nigeria and militancy in the Niger Delta region, Touareg insurgency in Mali, and violence in the Cassamance region of Senegal. Pirates have already hijacked 8 Nigerian Vessels off the Niger Delta coast while 64 attacks have been carried out against Nigerian Merchant Ships in 2008 alone (Osagie and Nzeshi, 2008: 1, 7). The crisis in the Mano River region in the 90s has demonstrated that they may, if not checked, have contagious effects and spread to other countries in the region. ECOWAS, the sub-regional body in the region is not unaware of this fact and has put in place some structures for the good governance and conflict prevention, so as to not only prevent conflicts but also safeguard the security of member state from all forms of hostilities, including terrorism. ECOWAS was founded in 1975 as

a sub-regional organisation aimed at regional integration and economic development of its member states. Unfortunately, over the years, the sub-region was beset with a number of violent conflicts which force the member states to divert the scarce resources available for regional economic development and integration to military purposes and peacekeeping. The founding fathers then found it necessary to revise the ECOWAS Treaty of 1975 in July 1993 and among the innovation was their acknowledgement of the fact that economic prosperity and regional cooperation can only be fully realised in a peaceful, stable, secure and democratic environment. It, therefore, made a shift in emphasis to peace and security in member states as a pre-requisite for achieving regional economic development and integration as envisaged by the founders (Adefuye, 2008: 8). The ECOWAS structures for mainstreaming good governance and conflict management include the Council of Elders, the ECOWAS Early Warning System, Peacekeeping Missions in collaboration with the UN, Peacebuilding Operations in collaboration with the UN Peacebuilding Commission, Elections and Democratic Elections and Human Security (Ndinga-Muvumba and Lamin, 2006). However, these initiatives have proved insufficient in putting an end to security threats, especially terrorism in West Africa.

This paper will, therefore, ask the question: Is it good governance or collective security that represents the best strategy to combat terrorism in West Africa? The paper shall analyse the terrorists' typology in the Africa (because there is no difference between the West African scenario and the entire continent), examine the principles of collective security, enumerate the principles of good governance, and suggest ways through which the region can prevent terrorism through the combination good governance and collective security, and then conclude.

## **TYPES OF TERRORIST GROUPS IN AFRICA**

Africa's colonial and post-colonial history is synonymous with the emergence and development of several violent groups which were label as "terrorist" groups. "Terrorism" in Africa has however, undergone some changes, defined by the dynamics inherent in global political, social and economic milieu. The types of terrorist groups that

emerged from the continent over time differs in orientation and mission, but can be captured under four major headings, namely revolutionary, economic, religious and transnational criminals. This list overlaps and it is neither comprehensive nor exhaustive but helps as analytical tool in knowing the underlying causes of terrorism on the continent.

**Revolutionary:** According to Paul Wilkinson, revolutionary terrorism is aimed at revolution or to the achievement tactical revolutionary objectives. Its characteristics are: (a) always a group phenomenon, however, tiny the group, with a leadership and an ideology or programme, however crude; (b) develops alternative institutional structures; (c) the organisation of violence and terrorism is typically undertaken by specialist conspiratorial and Para-military organs within the revolutionary movement (Wilkinson, 1977:56). Revolutionary terrorists always have their ultimate goal, the capture of political power and seek to restructure both the sub-structure and super-structure of the society. The African revolutionary groups included the African National Congress of South Africa, the Mau Mau Movement in Kenya, revolutionary groups that fought for the independence of Zimbabwe, Guinea Bissau, Angola, Algeria and Mozambique. These groups, whose leading lights included Franz Fanon, Amilcar Cabral, Oliver Thambo and Joshua Nkomo, engaged violent means in either forcefully capturing power from the colonialists or compelling them to the negotiation table.

**Religious Groups:** Many of the Islamic movements in Africa are not terrorists, but some groups are hiding under the umbrella of Islam to perpetrate terrorist activities. They have agents in Northern, Eastern and Central Africa and they have claimed responsibility for past attacks on Kenya, Tanzania and Algeria. The continent has also become exposed to terrorists' threat due to the increasing difficulty being experienced by Al-Qaeda in launching attacks directly on the US, hence their several attempts to attack their allies in Africa like Nigeria, Egypt, Kenya, and Ethiopia.

**Economic/Transnational Criminals:** The activities of this group gained prominence as a result of poverty and neglect of the people in the developing world. The underlying reason for their activities is profit-making. Groups in this category lack a clearly defined

political goal, though some are adopted merely for the purpose of “legitimising” their activities. Their scope of activities ranges from robbery, internet scam, drug and human trafficking to small arms proliferation, illegal oil bunkering and diamond transfer, money laundering and so on. This menace, partly caused by high level of youth unemployment, poorly regulated immigration, ill-prepared economic liberalisation, has different levels of development in most parts of West Africa. A report on the problem by the UN explained that the impact of crime in West Africa is profound as it undercuts state institutions, threatens human security, and increases the challenges for honest travellers and business operators (UNODC, 2005:4). The account of US Bureau of investigation attributed the emergence of trans-national criminal gangs in Africa to Nigeria. According to the report, they are:

Predominantly originate from Nigeria, but also with some criminal groups originating from other African countries, such as Ghana and Liberia...Nigerian criminal enterprises are the most significant of the African criminal enterprises...operating in more than 80 countries of the world. They are a significant emerging criminal threat confronting law enforcement agencies worldwide. Nigeria criminal enterprises are some of the most aggressive and expansionist international criminal group and are primarily involved in drug trafficking and financial frauds (Peters, 2003: 321)

To Peters (Ibid: 323-324) five factors that are responsible for the upsurge in trans-national crime include: the end of the cold war, economic and trade liberalisation, technological advancement globalisation of businesses and explosion in international travels.

## **PRINCIPLES OF COLLECTIVE SECURITY**

Collective security is an indispensable tool used by nation-states in ensuring stability, peace and development of the international system. It stems from the realization that the security threats confronting nations in contemporary times are such that may not be

solved by states acting alone, hence the need for synergy of capacity and strategy. Collective security also assures of the protection of economic, cultural, political, and other ties which states involved treasures and wants to continue preserving. The United Nations, African Union, and ECOWAS have collective security framework for ensuring sustainable peace and security. Their agenda covers a wide spectrum of issues and security considerations are usually defined within the framework of actions geared towards long-term sustainable development. However, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) made up of the United States and its allies represents a quintessential collective security organisation defined in purely military term.

Globalization is a major factor which makes collective security indispensable for states in recent times. Growing inter-relatedness and liberalization of movement and economic affairs have increased the risk of attack and made easier planning and execution of violence, criminality and terrorism. The increasing 'privatization' of terrorism, perpetrated with a high level of sophistication and precision, is one of the manifestations and side effects of globalization (Adejumobi, 2004).

However, collective security is solution to insecurity, including terrorism that has a lot of problems which makes it insufficient to tackle the challenges posed by terrorism. According to Chalk, the problem with this solution, as far as the fight against terrorism is concerned includes:

- The inherent tension between state sovereignty and the common will upon which regional cooperation is founded – namely that effective collaborative action necessarily requires individual member countries to cede some of their national independence to the wider group collective.
- The highly personalized nature of governance and politics in Africa, which has not only hindered the development of institutionalized forms of cooperation but also made these efforts contingent on the nature of the individual relationships that exist between what are often overly powerful presidents.

- The proliferation of regional groupings with overlapping memberships and/or mandates, which has resulted in duplication of effort, wastage of resources and conflicting spheres of jurisdiction. Moreover, in several instances it has led to highly problematic institutional confusion, much of which has arisen from the pursuit of contradictory policies that have been instituted by countries belonging to more than one organization.
- A general lack of stakeholder involvement – particularly in relation to those constituencies most affected by regional security cooperation and related decision-making processes.
- Differing perceptions of the terrorist phenomena and the specific threat that it is seen to pose.
- A general absence of integrated national counter-terrorist structures through which to channel and direct wider regional responses.
- Insufficient national resources – both technical and human – to invest in counter-terrorism strategies commensurate with the rhetorical missions and designs adopted at the international level.
- The frequent use of proxy sub-state actors to undermine and destabilize bordering states (Chalk, 2005 16).

These challenges are present in West Africa. As the ECOWAS is rivalled by UEMOA and the Mano River Union, the region is bedevilled by an implicit power-play between the Presidents, while many of the nations in the region still consider regime security as national security.

## **PRINCIPLES OF GOOD GOVERNANCE**

It is often said that there cannot be development without good governance, a point which underscores the importance of governance to human well-being. Unlike terrorism and collective security, good governance is not a highly contested term as it has fairly-



generally acceptable principles by which it can be identified. It consists of guidelines for decision-makers in order to enable them competently manage the human, material and economic resources in an open, accountable, transparent, equitable and lawful manner in order to bring about social and economic development.

#### BOX 1: PRINCIPLES OF GOOD GOVERNANCE

##### POLITICAL PRINCIPLES

- Good governance is based on the establishment of a representative and accountable form of government.
- Good governance requires a strong and pluralistic civil society, where there is freedom of expression and association.
- Good governance requires good institutions – sets of rules governing the actions of individuals and organizations and the negotiation of differences between them.
- Good governance requires the primacy of the rule of law, maintained through an impartial and effective legal system.
- Good governance requires a high degree of transparency and accountability in public and corporate processes. A participatory approach to service delivery is important for public services to be effective.

##### ECONOMIC PRINCIPLES

- Good governance requires policies to promote broad-based economic growth, a dynamic private sector and social policies that will lead to poverty reduction. Economic growth is best achieved in an efficient, open, marketbased economy.
- Investment in people is a high priority, through policies and institutions that improve access to quality education, health and other services that underpin a country's human resource base.
- Effective institutions and good corporate governance are needed to support the development of a competitive private sector. In particular, for markets to function, social norms are needed that respect contract and property rights.
- Careful management of the national economy is vital in order to maximize economic and social advancement.

Source: The Australian Government Overseas Aids Program (2008). Good Governance: Guiding Principles for Implementation, Canberra: AUSaid.

As illustrated by Box 1 (above), good governance contains economic and political principles like representative governance, plurality of opinion, observance of the rule of law, good institutions and participatory decision-making. It also features pro-poor market based economic process, investment in human capital and primacy of social consideration in the economic process. Good governance ensure the achievement of stability in states, and if replicated across a regional bloc could discourage political instability, criminality, dissension, corruption and other forms of factors that can lead to regional security threats.

However, is good governance sufficient to prevent threats to regional security, especially by terrorists? Proponents of the good governance school will point to the influence on accountable and democratic governance in parts of South East Asia, North America and Europe as a catalyst of enduring security, growth and development. Because of the influence of these open societies, inter-state wars has been eliminated, internal dissensions are being taken care of by strong institutions and equitable governance which prevents their degeneration into conflict, while consensus towards the promotion of human rights, fight against corruption, extractive industries transparency initiatives and other trans-border consensus building on values, have enabled them make their countries inhabitable for terrorist groups. Proponents of this approach argues that there would neither be need for peacekeeping and conflict prevention by international organisations if good governance principles are adhered to by states and that African countries will not be conducive to terrorist groups. Nevertheless, replicating this in Africa, albeit West Africa, seems problematic as far as the opponents of this school of thought are concerned. These realists argue that many African countries are far from establishing the structures and institutions to entrench good governance and the only realistic measure is the military-centric approach. Radical elements from the Marxian school of thoughts even believe that there is inextricable linkage between the wealth of the developed world and the poverty of the developing world and that the international capitalist division of labour, rather than governance, determines wealth, stability and capacity of states. However, for African countries, it will take time before most of them domesticate and internalise good governance principles in such a way that conflict, trans-national crimes and terrorism can be substantially prevented solely through governance strategies. Institutions have to be

re-built, distribution process of public resources has to be re-ordered, and electoral institutions have to be reformed while economic liberalisation structures have to be entrenched. These in themselves could become catalyst for breeding of more terrorists if not well handled. How do we then tackle terrorism?

## **PREVENTING TERRORISM IN WEST AFRICA: SOME OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

The idea underlying the promotion of good governance in West Africa is to prevent all forms of threats to security and provide avenue for contradictions and conflicts to be amicably resolved within the domestic/national framework. To this end ECOWAS has enacted some principles in its Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Peacekeeping and Security, and the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance to which member-states must subscribe to, in order to be seen to be practising good and accountable governance. They include provisions on the conduct of elections, constitutional convergence principles, provisions on human rights and others which many African countries have signed on to. Proponents of the good governance perspective are persuaded that the domestication and institutionalisation of these regional mechanisms would assure the region of enhanced security. They would quickly point to the impact of ECOWAS Election Observation Missions have ensured better elections in member countries like Benin 2008, Ghana 2008, Mali and Nigeria 2007, Guinea 2007, The Gambia 2006 and Guinea Bissau 2007 and 2009. They will also point to the stabilisation of the situation in Guinea Bissau and the restoration of democracy in Togo after the death of Gnassingbe Eyadema. To them, these states might have become failed states, but for the governance initiatives of ECOWAS. Another avenue through which ECOWAS fight terrorists' networks is through the Dakar-based Inter-Governmental Action Group Against Money Laundering (GIABA), an agency of the ECOWAS Commission. GIABA undertake actions to stop the financing of terrorism in West Africa by helping the build the capacity of states and networking with other international organisations. In addition, the ECOWAS Council of the Wise have also mediated in

conflicts in the region to prevent them from degenerating to full-fledged war. Since many African countries do not possess the financial clout to fight terrorism, the best form of defence they could put in place, according to them, is to prevent situations that will make them flourish through good political governance.

The essence of collective security is to combat present threats to peace and stability in the West African sub-region. This strategy's usage became imperative following growing insecurity in the Mano River Basin starting from the late 80s, with spill-over effects on other West African countries. It started with the deployment of the West African Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) and the eventual development of a framework for sustainable peace and security in West Africa, following the UN model. However, the region lacks a specific framework on the fight against terrorism, from a collective security standpoint. The provisions in its revised treaty of 1993 as contained in Chapter X, Articles 56-59, (ECOWAS, 1993: 34-36) to fight criminal networks that may collaborate with terrorists and which are yet to become fully operational include the ones that makes provision for judicial/legal matters, regional security, and immigration (ECOWAS, *Ibid*).

Against this backdrop, ECOWAS encourages and supports periodic meetings between Defence Chiefs of member-states and has also been coordinating its peace support operation activities with the United Nations and the Africa Union. This led to the creation of the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF). It also instituted the Moratorium against Importation and Exportation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in 1998 and this was renewed in 2001, while its code of conduct came into force in 2002. It was later upgraded to a Convention (Yoroms, 2007:100). Most of the countries in the ECOWAS region have not put in place legislations to combat terrorism; save for Nigeria, Ghana and Senegal. The non-existence of a properly-functioning collective structure to fight terrorism in the sub-region is a source of concern to stakeholders, especially given the unwillingness of some member-states to conform to the Convention and also the non-implementation of the relevant protocol.

The solution to the terrorist threats facing the region however lays in the fusion of both governance and collective security strategies. The relative underdevelopment of military strategy to combat terrorism in West Africa would appear to be a blessing in disguise because of its tendency to ignore the material and sociological root of terrorism and throw up more vicious, violent and radical elements. Adopting this would have been counter-productive for the region. It also has the tendency to raise anti-west sentiments because of the keenness of the Western countries to sponsor this aspect (and given the poverty of many West African countries). More so, terrorism is not only concerned with military affairs as it involves financial transactions, biological warfare, and website hacking and a host of other activities. However, the military component should be developed only as a complement to the already existing robust governance strategy which is being operationalized in the region. This more sober and human-security biased view, appears to be the direction of the ECOWAS Commission and other stakeholders in the region in the fight against terrorism, and should be encouraged. This should be done in a number of ways.

Efforts to prevent terrorism should be more holistic, systematic and address the human security dimension. It should involve inter-governmental and inter-departmental activities involving as a single whole working together, the following organisations and interests: ECOWAS (its different agencies and units), UEMOA, Mano River Union, civil society networks like WACSOF, WANSSED, WANSAA and so on, other inter-governmental organisations and governments of member states. A strategy should be evolved to situate counter-terrorism measures within a broad development agenda for the pauperised people of the region. First, continued pressure has to be mounted by stakeholders for the enforcement of convention on small arms by member states in order for the region to witness reduction in small arms and light weapons proliferation in the region. This is important because criminal networks have turned the region into major transit point for these arms and they have been used to undermine the security of the people. Secondly, anti-corruption institutions should be strengthened so that illicit transactions will be drastically reduced. Internal political and financial reforms should be encouraged in the member-states because many incidents of arms proliferation and money laundering are

carried out by people in politically powerful positions. Thirdly, collaboration and consultations between security chiefs across military, intelligence, immigration, police, gendarmeries, and civilian practitioners' lines should be geared towards the realisation of clearly defined goals within workable time-frames, while the ESF should include counter-terrorism as part of its core areas of operational capabilities. In addition to these, sections of ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance that addresses principles supportive of deepening democracy such as the ones on conduct of credible elections and the enactment of truly democratic constitutions should be followed up at state level by ECOWAS to ensure that they are not only reflected but also ensure their implementation. The ECOWAS Commission is gradually evolving a follow-up mechanism to commit member-states to the implementation of the report of ECOWAS Election Observation Missions. This should be supported by member states as it promises to strengthen democracy and reduce political conflicts. These institutions should be encouraged to work with local institutions, civil society groups and women groups to realise the goal of sustainable security in the region.

## **CONCLUSION**

The governance framework on the prevention of terrorism needs to be reinforced as complement to the security architecture in the region. More important is the reform of the governance of the security sector and the reinforcement of security of the governance architecture at the member-states level. This entails making sure that security organs should function with the ultimate goal of assisting the political leadership realise human security for the people. Secondly, it connotes that democracy has to be secured with good governance, rule of law, organisation of credible elections, fight against corruption, decentralised, open and equitable governance and accountable governance. Focusing on the human security perspective would assure the ECOWAS countries of a total and enduring victory in the war against corruption.

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