

## Counterterrorism and Defense Strategies for Mitigating Threats in Africa

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### Abstract

Today, sub-Saharan Africa increasingly faces threats that jeopardize the region's stability. In the east, Somalia has one of the highest terrorist index levels in the world. From the west, Nigeria has the third highest terrorism index in all of Africa. Due to such staggering terrorism threat levels, existing literature will center on Nigeria as it looks to examine the root causes of terrorism and find strategies that may help to reduce threat levels. In the end, security cooperation programs are recommended as an effective strategy for combating security threats abroad. Future research should continue to examine the value of security cooperation programs as a means of improving stability in the sub-Saharan region of Africa.

**Keywords:** Insurgency; Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF); Security Cooperation Programs; Sub-Saharan Region; Terrorism

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### Introduction

Records from the 2021 Global Terrorism Index [1] show that Somalia has the highest threat of terrorism in all of Africa. In 2021, Somalia "recorded the third largest number of deaths related to terrorism worldwide" (p. 1). In the same year, the Jihadist fundamentalist group Al-Shabaab killed 534 people in Somalia. This accounted for 89% of all terror-related deaths within the country [1]. Additionally, not far behind on the Terrorism Index are Burkina Faso, Nigeria, and Mali. In total the sub-Saharan region of Africa accounts for 10 of the top 12 countries with the highest Terrorism Index. In West Africa, from 2011 to 2022, Boko Haram was been responsible for thousands of deaths in Cameroon, Chad, Nigeria, and Niger. In the same period, they were responsible for over 35 thousand deaths in one state in Nigeria [2] Identifying the root causes of terrorism and communities that are most at risk may help policymakers and defense strategists implement a plan that may help combat terrorism and promote regional stability.

Boukhars (2020) examined the role communities play in an insurgency group's decision to carry out violence. Group leadership and a community's level of hostility factor into a terrorist group's decision on whether to carry out acts of violence against a local population. As mentioned in the study, violence is at its highest levels when there is a lack of leadership to control extremism. Regarding community hostility, the literature shows that terrorist groups with connections to their communities are still violent towards these groups, particularly if they sense

hostility from local militias and rival factions. According to Boukhar (2020), political pressure can be an effective deterrent against terrorism. The research indicates that terrorist groups that face political penalties for carrying out attacks are more likely to refrain from harming civilians, even if it means losing territory. Another strategy for combating terrorism is to better understand its root causes [3].

Since 2009, Boko Haram has been committing acts of terrorism in Northern Nigeria and other countries within the West African region. Despite attempts at government intervention through military response and counterterrorism strategies, none of these tactics have been successful in preventing their continued destruction. A study conducted to examine Public Opinion on the Root Causes of Terrorism and Objectives of Terrorists (Adelaja et al., 2018) focused on what the public viewed as the cause of terrorism. The research indicates that various factors influence a person's choice to join a terrorist organization. Socio-economic, political, and religious motives are all driving factors. The research states that corruption, unstable political institutions, the lack of civil liberties and civil wars are all factors that may lead to an increase in terrorism. Political turmoil can be defined as bad governance, abuse of power, and depriving citizens of basic economic infrastructure [4].

From a socio-economic standpoint, Adelaja et al.'s research (2018) states that although some studies have not found a direct correlation between poverty and terrorism, other working factors affect a person's desire to join a terrorist group. For example,

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individuals who are economically disadvantaged and deprived of basic resources are more likely to resort to committing acts of violence to express their grievances. Based on this research, a terrorism mitigation strategy could focus on improving economic conditions for citizens who are living in poverty. Along with socioeconomic status, religion is another factor that influences the levels of terrorism within the sub-Saharan region of Africa [5].

Because Boko Haram holds radical ideologies which they use to justify their terror, religious and ethnic tensions may be factors that contribute to Boko Haram's terrorist attacks. This idea is further explained in Adelaja et al.'s study (2018). Boko Haram promotes Sharia law and their goal is to create an Islamic state in Nigeria. As a result, they have waged a war against western ideologies which they believe go against Islamic doctrine. As a result, the research states that communities in Nigeria that face religious tensions are more likely to become a hotbed for terrorist groups because of Nigeria's historical ethno religious conflicts.

Socio-economic disparities, political corruption, and religious and ethnic tensions are factors that play a role in the root causes of terrorism. Recruitment of members relies strongly on societal disjunction. When locals feel that they have nowhere else to turn, terrorist groups like Boko Haram provide citizens with structure and a sense of stability. Furthermore, distrust for the government increases due to political corruption and a system where people are denied their basic civil liberties. From a policy and strategic defense perspective, the government must have a vested interest in improving the quality of life of its citizens if there is any chance of working towards lessening Boko Haram's influence in Nigeria [6].

Whereas Adelaja et al. (2018) focused on the socio-economic factors that lead to terrorism, Imhonopi and Urim's research (2016) highlighted the economic disadvantages that were caused by terrorism in Nigeria. Before Boko Haram's terror, Nigeria struggled with industrialization because of the lack of manpower, inadequate capital for investing in programs, inefficient technology, government policies, nepotism, tribalism, and many other factors. Furthermore, many businesses have been unable to function due to constant threats of being attacked. If a business sells goods that are forbidden for Muslims to use, the business becomes a terrorist target and subsequently must relocate. In response to the threats, many business owners have migrated to protect their investments. Additionally, large corporations and local businesses have moved to more commercial areas that operate outside of terror hot spots. Furthermore, goods cannot be shipped through certain regions within Nigeria because territories that are occupied by Boko Haram are targets for attack. The inability of merchandise to be traded then leads to a lack of supplies, inflation, and disruption in commercial activities. Transportation also suffers because Boko Haram is known to stop and execute travellers who are not from northern Nigeria. The fear this causes leads to a reduction in travel, which decreases the number of agricultural supplies coming in and out of the region [7].

Imhonopi and Urim's research (2016) cites security cooperation programs as a terrorist mitigation strategy for terrorism in Nigeria

and the sub-Saharan region. Their research calls for a multinational effort between the United States and the European Union to work cohesively to implement counterterrorism strategies. More specifically, the research calls on the enhancement of security cooperation programs by focusing on improving the region's security forces, promoting a democratic form of governance, and reinforcing military ties with Nigeria and other countries within the region that are affected by terrorism. Additionally, the research calls for the United States and European Union to support efforts to improve education, health, marksmanship training, and border security between partner countries. The research also cites collaborations with civil society groups and religious leaders as another defense strategy. This joint effort would include youth, women's groups, academic researchers, think tanks, and the involvement of grassroots organizations in a joint effort to fight against terrorism. The objective of the civil society group is to focus its efforts on promoting peace and security, rule of law, effective governance, and objectives that promote the economic, social, and political development of Nigeria and the sub-region. For religious leaders, the research (Imhonopi & Urim, 2016) states that those who oversee religious institutions must condemn all forms of hate, bigotry, and extremism. These leaders must also teach their followers to be tolerant of others and follow the true teachings of their faith without infringing on the rights and freedoms of other citizens.

Similarly to Imhonopi and Urim (2016), Ugwuja et al., (2019) explores the specificities of security cooperation programs when examining the effectiveness of the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF). The task force was founded in 1994, but in response to terrorist activities in West Africa, in January 2015, the Peace and Security Council of the African Union approved the mobilization of a Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) to assist in the fight against the Boko Haram insurgency. As Boko Haram's following grew so did the need for a joint task force. Ugwuja et al., (2019) highlighted the role countries within West Africa and abroad played in supporting the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF). Regarding the budgetary allocations each member country contributed towards the war against terrorism, Benin Republic contributed \$1 million dollars, Cameroon contributed \$4 million dollars, Chad contributed \$4 million dollars, Niger sent \$1.5 million dollars, Nigeria gave \$100 million dollars, the European Union contributed \$41 million dollars, France and Switzerland gave \$150 million dollars, the United Kingdom contributed \$6.5 million dollars, and the United States contributed \$5 million dollars. Lastly, \$20 million represented monies given by countries in the 'other' category [7]. The data presented shows the financial benefit that comes when ally countries invest in security cooperation programs. With the support of partner nations, programs such as the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and others may prove to be an effective means of administering security cooperation.

## Conclusion

Although many factors contribute to terrorism and insurgency, the examination of the literature identifies security cooperation programs as a counterterrorism plan of action. According to Biegon and Watts (2021), through security cooperation

programs, the United States can build partner capacities abroad while maintaining low visibility in the parts of Africa that are plagued with terrorism and insurgency. Through these programs, foreign militaries receive training and equipment from the United States and other allies which can be used to improve leadership

capabilities and military functions, enhance border security, and combat security threats. Future research should continue examining the benefits of implementing security cooperation programs as a strategy for mitigating threats of terrorism in the sub-Saharan region of Africa.

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