

# Acts of Terrorism in Africa's Local Conflicts: the Lake Chad Basin Region in Perspective

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**Abstract** – The main argument of the paper is that local conflicts are increasingly taking the dimension of terrorism in Africa. Relying on secondary sources of data, the paper descriptively examined the nature and drivers of local conflicts in the Lake Chad Basin region. It identified the prevalence of ungoverned spaces, easy access to Small Arms and Light Weapons (SAWL) and political exclusion as factors that encouraged terrorism in Africa's local conflicts. Identity theory was used to explain the dimension of terrorism in Africa's local conflicts. The paper emphasized on the need for law enforcement agencies in Africa to arrest and prosecute perpetrators of these local conflicts with terrorism charges which it argued would serve as deterrence. It also suggested for the use of intelligence in order to proactively curbing these conflicts in Africa.

**Keyword** – Lake Chad Basin Commission, Local Conflict, Terrorism.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Local conflicts in this paper refers to all intrastate, ethnic, communal or religious conflicts (Nnoli, 1998; Uwazie et al, 1999; Berman et al, 2004; Alao, 2007). They are considered as local because most times, they are rooted in deep-seated racial, ethnic or religious hatreds. Even most resource conflicts which are caused by issues of poverty, marginalization are often escalated by ethnic and religious sentiments which provides the narrative for mobilization into violence.

Africa's diverse ethnic groups, religious and cultural diversity makes her susceptible to local conflicts (Osaghae, 1991; Suberu, 1996). However, there is an emerging trend in local conflicts where belligerents use terrorist tactics to achieve their respective objectives. This dimension of the conflict need to be further interrogated. The acts of terrorism observed in the protracted ethnic/tribal conflict in South Sudan caused the call to place the country under the rule of a United Nations (UN)/African Union (AU) created regime (Newman, 2017). The armed bandits' robbery, kidnapping and cattle rustling and raids (Moritz, 2010) through the fringe of Maghreb, Sahel and Lake Chad Basin regions, cannot be described to be anything else but terrorism. The indigene/settlers dichotomy that often divides citizens of the same country against each other, causing tension, and sometimes the death tolls in just an attack are comparable with an outright war could also be described as acts of terrorism. Threats from these local conflicts are diverse, complex and deserve further scrutiny. The purpose of this paper is to descriptively establish that some local conflicts are assuming dimension of terrorism in a lot of African societies with focus on the Lake Chad Basin Region.

The data used for this paper were gathered mainly from analysis of secondary materials. The paper is divided into

five segments. After the introductory part of the paper, the second segment is the definition of terms and theoretical framework. This segment adopted an operational definition for the terms, conflict and terrorism, established relationship between them before adoption of a theoretical framework used to underpin the paper. The third segment is a brief historical overview that traced the beginning of acts of terrorism in Africa's local conflicts. The forth segment focused on the dimension of terrorism in the local conflicts in the Lake Chad Basin region. The last segment is the conclusion.

## II. DEFINITION OF TERMS, RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TERMS AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The terms in this paper are local conflict and terrorism. The paper adopts an operational definition of the terms, establishes the relationship between them and adopted a theoretical framework for the paper. The subsequent paragraphs discuss the details.

### A. Local Conflict

The conflicts being discussed in this paper are those either induced by 'identity politics' or escalated by identity which characterises most African conflicts. Galtung (1990) posited that conflict is a dynamic process in which structure, attitudes and behavior are constantly changing and influencing one another. As the dynamic develops, parties then organize around this structure to pursue their interests. They develop hostile attitudes and conflict behavior which makes the conflict complex. And so, the conflict formation starts to grow and intensify, it may widen, drawing in other parties, deepen and spread, generating secondary conflicts within the main parties. It is at this stage that conflict often degenerates in situations that could be described as terrifying making the task of addressing the original, core conflict very complex. From the foregoing, it is observed that identity plays a very important role in local conflicts. It consists of elements that highlights inclusiveness and exclusiveness, and interrelationships between the parts that hold them together, and a boundary, or the limit that defines what is inside or outside the system. This is particularly highlighted by Galtung (Bullen, 2012: 390) because of the description of conflict around the three elements earlier mentioned and its evolving nature that could dislocate from its original form. The definition consists of identity induced conflicts rooted in deep-seated grievances acquired through social political and economic interactions. Galtung's definition is adopted as the operational definition for local conflicts.

### B. *Terrorism*

A study of the term ‘terrorism’ shows that it is defined in various contexts such as crime, politics, warfare, revolution, propaganda and religion (Armstrong, 2003; Gupta, 2005), depending on who is defining it, whether an individual, government actors, the violent terrorists or those who are terrorised and violated. In this paper, the definition offered by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Algiers Convention Article 1(3) is adopted. It defines terrorism as follows:

- a) Any act which is a violation of the criminal laws of a State Party and which may endanger the life, physical integrity or freedom of, or cause serious injury or death to, any person, any number or group of persons or causes or may cause damage to public or private property, natural resources, environmental or cultural heritage and is calculated or intended to:
  - (i) Intimidate, put in fear, force, coerce or induce any government, body, institution, the general public or any segment thereof, to do or abstain from doing any act or to adopt or abandon a particular standpoint or to act according to certain principles; or
  - (ii) Disrupt any public service, the delivery of any essential service to the public or to create a public emergency; or
  - (iii) Create general insurrection in a State;
- b) Any promotion, sponsoring, contribution to, command aid, incitement, encouragement, attempt, threat, conspiracy, organizing, or procurement of any person, with the intent to commit any act referred to in paragraph (a) (i) to (iii) (OAU, 1999).

The OAU definition is an all-encompassing definition as it contains critical elements for an objective definition of a terrorist act. The definition criminalizes an act considered to be a terrorist act. It is this terrorist act as listed in the Article that the researcher have observed in local conflicts in several African communities.

### C. *Nexus between Local Conflict and Terrorism*

Conflict stems from many and sometimes unrelated existential factors. Most times, conflict if not addressed evolves into complex activity of clash of interest. The dynamism of the society enables conflicts to deepen and spread. Gradually, they generate secondary conflicts within the main parties. Under such circumstance, the conflict degenerates into complex situations, making the task of addressing the original, core conflict very difficult. At this point, conflict dynamics begin to change as the parties struggle for survival using every means that could aid their victory including terrorism.

Terrorism in this sense is any act which is a violation of the criminal laws of a State Party and which may endanger the life, cause terror and intimidation. The availability of lethal weapons such as Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) across Africa helps to intensify local conflicts by encouraging the belligerents to adopt terrorism tactics. The easy accessibility of SALW explains the reason why acts of terrorism can be rampant in local conflicts. This is why it is argued that most terrorist acts often starts as local conflicts. Imobighe (2007) argues that terrorism only

occurs in an environment of conflict and discord, and hence it is a product of conflict escalation.

### D. *Identity Theory in Understanding Conflict and T-errorism*

A lot of social science literature on conflicts and terrorism suggests that identity plays a central role in understanding conflicts and terrorism. The works of Tajfel (1981) and Turner (1975) pioneered the study on social identity in 1979. Since then, social identity framework have been used to analysis group behaviors in conflict studies (McLeod, 2008). Huntington also highlighted the prominence of identity in the interpretation of future global conflicts even though there was little explanation the nature of the conflict (1996). This is why it is important to explain the identity dynamics and how it supports terrorism during conflicts.

The identity theoretical framework is wrapped in three levels: (a) cultural identity, (b) social identity, and (c) personal identity (Kupiainen, et al 2004). The cultural identity represents the specific cultural values a person internalizes throughout life which becomes the guiding principles for behavior, such as collectivism, absolutism in belief. These values come from different sources including involvement with national, ethnic, religious, cultural and educational communities, exposure through various media, as well as participation in personal social networks. The social identity represents the image derived from belonging and participating in a social groups. It is this newly acquired image from the social group that gives the individual the propensity to be ready to fight against any opposition to the groups (Schwartz, et al, 2009). The difference between the cultural identity and social identity is that the values attached to cultural identity are usually abstract and somehow vague, whereas, the loyalties to groups associated with one’s social identity are usually intense and specific. Personal identity on the other hand represents the accumulated experiences goals, values, and beliefs, personal orientation that the individual uses to interpret the world and they make sense to the individual.

It is the interaction of these identities that leads mobilizes the individual towards accepting conflicts and even adopting terrorism tactics. For example, the feelings of marginalization or exclusion from mainstream societal politics are not uncommon among young people. However, in real sense, very few cases does this prompt the individual to become violent or a suicide bomber. However, such feelings when embellished with ethnic and religious sentiments, to the extent that a divide is created “us versus them” then violence against those perceived to threaten one’s religious or cultural group becomes justified. No doubt, the interactions among these various identity levels are clearly complex, however, it provides an explanation to the subject matter under discourse and is therefore adopted.

## **III. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF ACT OF TERRORISM IN AFRICAN LOCAL CONFLICTS**

This section of the paper discusses African local conflicts within two historical eras namely the Colonial

and Cold War eras. The details are discussed in subsequent paragraphs.

#### D. Colonial Era

During the 1950s most African states were under colonial regimes of the superpowers such as Great Britain, France, Russia and Netherlands. However, the resentment against colonial rule made a lot of African countries' nationalists to embark on the struggle for independence or self-rule. While some of the struggles were carried out in relatively peaceful atmosphere, this was not the case in a lot of other African countries like South Africa, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Algeria, Mozambique, among others. During this period, the Africans involved in the struggle saw themselves as nationalist and freedom fighters. They justified terrorism on grounds that they were revolutionaries (Banks, Nevers and Wallerstein, 2008) and it was considered a struggle for survival and self-determination. One would have expected that at the attainment of independence, African states would have become a paradise of economic development given her huge natural resources and the nationalism used to dislodge colonialism and imperialism. This is not the case as most of the African states plunged into several civil wars that lasted for decades. The nationalism framework could not be sustained hence it faded away, and an era of ethnic/religious agenda and clannish activism emerged in the African politics.

#### E. Cold War Era

The Cold War era was another turbulent period for the African continent where terrorism featured constantly in several conflicts largely because of foreign intervention from the superpowers. The superpowers brought the wars to African soils which were fought by local proxies agitating for either resources or championing ethnic agenda using terrorist tactics. The upheavals in Congo and Zanzibar, Ethiopian-Somali war, brutal wars in Angola and the Horn of Africa were all inspired by the superpowers and there was no limit to the use of terror in these conflicts. These wars revealed the fragile nature of the newly formed states. As soon as the Cold War came to an end in the 1990s and the superpower rivalries fell away, ethnic rivalry which formed the basis of selecting the identity framework in this paper took the centre stage in African conflicts. Even though some of these local conflicts were triggered by struggles for resources, ethnicity and religion which are framed along social identity became the vessels for prosecution of the conflicts. In Somalia, the state collapsed. Liberia and later Sierra Leone plunged into bloody civil wars. The Rwandan genocide triggered a war in Congo, which dragged in participants from numerous neighboring states. The conflict trend during this era also revealed the strategic use of terrorist tactics in the broader African conflicts.

### IV. THE DIMENSION OF TERRORISM IN AFRICA'S LOCAL CONFLICTS

This section first discusses the factors that encourages the dimension of terrorism in Africa's local conflicts

before it analyzes the local conflicts in the Lake Chad Basin region.

#### F. Drivers of Terrorism in Local Conflicts in Africa

Conflicts between communities is not new in Africa. More so, acts of terrorism in African conflicts are also not entirely new. Review of the local conflict systems reveals a longtime presence of terrorist groups, militias and armed bandits in the region. Many of them are inspired by issues of political exclusion within the different countries. The insistence by most African leaders to cling to political power even after the constitutional expiration of their tenure is a major driver of these local conflicts. Some examples include Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni, Congo Brazzaville's President Denis Sassou Nguesso, DRC's President Joseph Kabila, Burundi's President Pierre Nkurunziza, and Rwanda's President Paul Kagame among others. Their refusal to step down from power or bid to influence the result of the political polls or manipulate the constitution in order to extend tenure often helps to trigger tension in the already aggrieved and deprived societies in Africa.

Political exclusion often escalate existing grievances and encourages ethnic and religious mobilization to justify terrorism as means to self-determination. The feeling of being marginalized or excluded politically creates the requisite attitudes for grievances. As this evolves, it gradually creates structures for conflict. The consequence is the conflict situation that escalates and results in violence. The easy accessibility to SALW is another major driver of the dimension of terrorism in local conflicts Africa. The Oxfam report (Adesoji, 2017) posits that SALW are the world's principal cause of death and conflict. In the report, it states that in the last two decades millions of lives were lost as a direct result of wars in Africa and cited example with the period 1983-2005 in the DRC, Sudan and Rwanda combined, where between 4.3 million and 8.4 million people lost their lives due to armed conflict. The growing violent attacks from bandits, herders/farmers and cattle rustler around the Lake Chad Basin region is enhanced by lack of government presence within the border communities. The frontier areas within this region could be considered as ungoverned spaces where illicit dealing of SALW and smuggling activities thrive. These armed bandits and rebels/militants have killed thousands of people and kidnapped thousands around the frontiers of the countries of the LCBC. The nature of the attacks are usually terroristic hence the need to consider these groups as terrorists and prosecute them as terrorists.

Politicians also play important role in the proliferation of these SALW by arming their vanguards during electoral periods as being witnessed in Nigeria. In fact, it was reported by the Nigerian Customs Service (NCS) in a number of instances in Nigeria of the confiscation of large cache of arms allegedly imported by faceless persons and groups for furthering their political ambition. However, after the elections, these arms and ammunition disappears. Where and how do they disappear to? It is suspected that they find their way into unauthorized handlers who unleashed them in the numerous community and even

family clashes within the Lake Chad Basin region given the level of destruction that comes in the aftermath of these local conflicts.

### G. *The Local Conflicts in Lakes Chad Basin Region*

The Lake Chad Basin region is defined in this paper within the context of the multilateral arrangement among the countries that make up the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC). The LCBC members include Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Nigeria, Algeria, the Central African Republic (CAR), Libya and Sudan. The recession of the Lake Chad has continued to impact negatively on the economic conditions of the millions of young population that depend on the lake for survival. The Lake Chad has decreased by 90 percent since the 1960s, from 23,000 square kilometers to only 1,350 by 2001 (UNEP, Giwa Report, 2004). There is intense competition between the various resource-users; in particular farmers and herders. A lot of the spaces within the frontiers of the countries of the LCBC lack law enforcement agencies' presence. Consequently, it serves as safe haven for terrorist groups like Boko Haram, deadly rebels/militia and armed bandits. Some of these violent non-state actors have been operate as rebels (Janjaweed, the armed Arab militia or armed horsemen) either in support of one government or against another.

The Libya revolution in 2011 led to the collapse of the forty years of regime of Muammar Qaddafi and subsequently collapse of state institutions. The political and economic struggle that ensued triggered fighting among the Arab, Tabu, and Tuareg tribes among others. Tribal groups like Tuaregs and Tabu who were able to access illicit arms (SALW) from Libya found their way into countries like Chad and Niger where they share cultural affinity. The entrance and easy access to SALW further gave impetus to acts of terrorism like raiding and stealing of camels and cattle (Tabib, 2016). Many of the young people who live within the borders of the four countries that directly share the lake (Ngomba-Roth, 2008) have now found banditry, kidnapping, armed robbery and cattle rustling as their new occupation. The brutality and display of terror by these groups who are equally invisible due to their mode of operation makes this a core security concern to the countries of the LCBC (MacEachern, (2018)).

Chad and Niger also suffer local conflicts from the spillover effects of Sudan conflict. While the people of Darfur are black African-Muslims they are recognized as inferior to the Arab-Muslims of the North. The ethnic divisions then have a spillover effect across borders into Chad and Niger with consequences of insecurity (ACCORD, 2013). The herders/farmers conflicts have continued to complicate the conflict situation within the region with gruesome murder of local communities in Cameroon and Nigeria. These groups have uprooted millions of people from their home across the four LCBC countries. They have destroyed vital infrastructure, threaten entire economies and prevent people from earning their livelihoods. Widespread trauma, suffering and displacement of people are counted in millions.

The Cameroonian Government's response to the trend

in 2015 was to mobilize vigilantes within communities. However, this could not be sustained because the vigilantes could not withstand the Kalashnikovs of these local bandits. The uninterrupted attacks on these communities and unleash of brutal terror has been attributed to poor policing and weak intelligence gathering system. Additionally, prosecution of those arrested have not been quite effective and even when it takes place, they are usually charged for crimes like armed robbery instead of terrorism. The governments of LCBC could setup their policing of the area by including local communities in their intelligence gathering apparatus and organizing a coordinated policing system among the connecting countries of the LCBC. If the law enforcement agencies of the LCBC countries were equipped in such a way that their effectiveness is enhanced, they will definitely serve as deterrence to these groups. The need to arm the vigilantes through their ward heads and village heads in order to scale up their ability to protect themselves must be emphasized. Additionally, the governments of the countries of the LCBC must provide means for empowering local communities through provision of infrastructure that could help to curb the incidence of struggles over scarce resources in the region.

## V. CONCLUSION

Act of terrorism has always been part of local conflicts in Africa. In the Colonial era, it was sustained using the power of nationalism while the Cold War era witnessed a significant role by ethnic identity. Contemporary local conflicts in Africa especially the Lake Chad Basin region revealed increased use of terrorist acts in local conflicts. Political exclusion and marginalization creates the requisite attitudes and grievances that leads to local conflicts in most African States. However, identity precepts based on ethnicity and religion creates the mobilization and justification to use terrorism to achieve set objectives. This availability of large ungoverned spaces scattered in the different frontiers of the countries of the LCBC helps to sustain the terrorists' dimension in the local conflicts. The easy access to SALW is also a driver of terrorists' dimension of local conflict in Africa. The lack of presence of law enforcement agencies within the frontiers where these terrorist activities take place encourages acts of terrorism in local conflicts.

In order to curb the terrorist dimension to local conflicts, the governments of the LCBC need to begin to prosecute those arrested committing criminal activities within the region as terrorists. The governments of the countries of the LCBC also need to act proactively by initiating coordinated policing system that will include local communities in the intelligence gathering apparatus. In this regard, the governments need to formally arm the vigilantes through their ward heads and village heads in order to scale up their ability to protect themselves. The governments of the countries of the LCBC also need to provide means for empowering local communities through provision of infrastructure that could help to curb the incidence of struggles over scarce resources in the region.

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