

The United Nations Counterterrorism Strategy in West Africa

C. Olawole OLUWASUJI
& Muiwa B. AFOLABI

Abstract

Terrorism has undoubtedly become a potent security issue not just to West African nations but to the entire world. September 11, 2001 experience of the United States has strategically repositioned sub-regional, regional and international organisations to employ diverse counter-terrorism measures to address the menace. This article assesses the counterterrorism strategy of the United Nations (UN) in an attempt to ascertain the relevance, adequacy and challenges of the legal, institutional and policy instruments of the UN in West Africa. It is a truism to state that the African States have been threatened with terrorism incidences. Efforts of individual states and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) are not yielding expected results due to infiltration of terrorist groups; weak government institutions; porosity of international borders, youth unemployment, poverty and a host of other internal factors. The article concludes that the UN counter-terrorism strategy has the potential, together with the existing regional and sub-regional instruments to expeditiously derogate heinous terrorist attacks and related problems in West Africa. It is recommended, therefore that, there is a need for improved collaborative efforts between UN and ECOWAS in order to achieve goals of the UN counterterrorism strategy while good governance is needed to ameliorate government weakness and failures.

Keywords: United Nations, Counter-terrorism, Strategy, West Africa

Introduction

September 11 in the United State opened a new vista in the counter-terrorism effort not only in the US but all over the world. Before the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the United Nations (UN) played

a very small part in counter-terrorism efforts. The General Assembly had failed numerous times to negotiate a convention outlawing terrorism, though its members had successfully negotiated 12 international conventions banning a number of terrorism-related activities. While the Security Council reacted to several terrorist events since its founding, its permanent members did not think of terrorism as a threat to international peace and security. A majority of UN members shared this opinion, emphasising that it was a problem that could be best addressed at the national level. Many states did not ratify the General Assembly's conventions dealing with terrorism. As a result, the UN's role in counterterrorism before 11 September 2001 was very informal, encouraging, rather than requiring members to combat terrorism. However, the attacks of 11 September transformed the UN's role in counter-terrorism. Using its quasi-legislative powers, the Security Council passed Resolution 1368 and 1373, establishing the three pillars of the current global counter-terrorism system (Talmon, 2005). The first pillar is based on Resolution 1368's principle that states have a right to self-defence when attacked or threatened by terrorist groups or state supporters of terrorism (UN Security Council Resolution, 2001). The second pillar is the establishment of a universal counter-terrorism legal framework. According to Resolution 1373, the Security Council obligates all states to criminalise terrorism, to ratify the 12 international conventions mentioned above, and to modify their counter-terrorism laws in accordance with international best practices (UN Security Council Resolution, 2001). In other words, the Security Council required all states to build their capacity to fight terrorism at the domestic level in order to constrain terrorist groups' ability to operate globally. Also, the Security Council has argued that if all states adapt their legal infrastructure in accordance with international law and emerging best practices, it would improve interstate cooperation on counter-terrorism efforts.

The final pillar is the establishment of the Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC) following the Security Council's adoption of Resolution 1373, and the Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (CTED), a specialised staff created in 2004 by the Security Council to assist the CTC's efforts (UN Security Council Resolution, 2004). The CTC and CTED are subsidiary bodies of the Security Council. Thus,

the Security Council is at the system's centre. These bodies' role is to collect and analyse data on states' compliance efforts. The CTC and CTED do not provide technical assistance or set the standards that inform states' counter-terrorism operations. Donor-states and intergovernmental bodies, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, provide financial and technical assistance bilaterally, while international bodies, such as the Financial Action Task Force, the World Customs Organisation, International Maritime Organisation or the International Civil Aviation Organisation, set standards. As such, the Security Council's role is more strategic, than operational. The CTC and CTED work with other intergovernmental bodies to evaluate the international community's global struggle against terrorism and to act as a "switchboard" pairing states that need technical or financial assistance with donor states or intergovernmental organisations. Consequently, the Security Council, by design, established a decentralised, state-centred system, where the UN plays a necessary supportive role and the states are the primary actors in the global struggle against terrorism.

The collapse of the Soviet Union, and subsequently the end of the Cold War, had a major impact on international terrorist activities across the globe because it saw many terrorist organisations lose one of their primary means of support, the Soviet Union. This led to terrorist groups seeking new sources and locations, especially in Africa (Kushner, 1998).

In West Africa, terrorism has had an immense impact on the social, political, economic and security fabrics of the many fragile states. Terrorist acts lead to insecurity and political instability, while also affecting the economic bedrock of West African societies. In the economic context, terrorism has not only discouraged foreign investment and tourism but has led to the use of funds for purposes other than they were meant for (Walker, 2009). Religious and ethnic tensions in countries such as Nigeria have created space for terrorism to prevail. Failed states have fuelled terrorism, specifically as politicians finance and support groups who use terrorist acts to exploit internal conflicts and promote political agendas. The West Africa sub-region is arguably a fertile ground for breeding terrorist networks due to the prevalence of transnational criminal networks, illegal firearms

manufacturing and trafficking, armed robbery, piracy, money laundering, illegal natural resource transfers, human and drug trafficking. The root causes of the precarious security in the sub-region can be linked to governance deficits, poverty, underdevelopment and youth unemployment. These contribute to conflicts and the proliferation of criminal groups that are ready to collaborate with terrorists to undermine security in the region. More worrying is the youth bulge without corresponding economic growth and social safety nets. Most often, frustration and alienation drive many to join ethnic, religious, or political groups, some of which may be hostile to the state. For example, it has been proven concretely that problems of insecurity and Boko Haram insurgency arose from bad governance, injustice, poverty, corruption, unemployment, among other factors (Idowu, 2013).

However, Africa's development agenda is hampered so long as it remains vulnerable to terrorism. For example, the fight against Boko Haram has led to a surge in Nigeria's defence spending to an estimated US\$2.35bn and US\$2.25 in 2013 and 2014 respectively (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2015). This increase in expenditure has come at the detriment of development in the largely impoverished north of Nigeria in particular, and the rest of the country in general. Although it is too early to assess the effectiveness of the strategy, it is not clear whether the declaration and the strategy and implementation plan can adequately combat terrorism in West Africa. While the UN has historically been generally supportive of the security initiatives of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), not much can be identified in the area of counterterrorism. On the part of ECOWAS, its collective security approach has been undoubtedly laudable but has its own problems and does not clearly explain the lack of synergy between the two important organisations. The critical issue for ECOWAS is the preparedness of the organisation and its member states to ensure compliance and effective implementation of the adopted strategy. It has been observed severally that compliance and implementation of ECOWAS normative frameworks are often fraught with challenges such as inadequate financial and technical resources, and lack of political will and coordination among member states. Besides, the dependence on

external funding to implement regionally agreed goals tends to affect the realisation of those goals in cases of non-availability of funds.

Against this background, the study aims to evaluate the counterterrorism strategy of the UN to ascertain the relevance, adequacy and challenges of the legal, institutional, and policy instruments of the UN in West Africa.

United Nations and Global Security

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 a state of terror in the minds of particular persons or a group of persons or the general public” (Duffy, 2006). Terrorism is often employed to achieve political ends, even when it also evinces other motives, such as religious, economic, ethnic or social. But while every 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).

According to Bolaji (2010), 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. Hence, it appears that it is only the great powers that are confronted with the threat of terrorist attacks and have enough resources to fight. However, Africa is not exempted from the spate of attacks in Kenya, Tanzania and Somalia in the early part of the decade. In addition, the activities of pirates in the African high sea illustrates the threat posed by terrorism to African countries. The situation escalated by Africa’s litany of bad governance and economic disarticulation, leading to conflicts, war and the 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. The UN is a primary focal point for conflict resolution and the

establishment of universal legal norms and the setting of human rights standards. In the field of international terrorism, the UN system as a whole has taken a sustained interest in developing an effective multilateral legal response to acts of terrorism, as incidents and diverse forms of terrorism have gained prominence in the last four decades (Norman, 2004). In the aftermath of the attacks on 11 September 2001, both the issues of non-ratification and the lack of an overall convention on terrorism were brought to the fore by the then UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan. He posited that “the fight against terrorism must begin with ensuring that the 12 legal instruments on international terrorism already drafted and adopted under United Nations’ auspices are signed, ratified and implemented without delay by all states. It is also important to obtain agreement on a comprehensive convention on international terrorism” (UN Secretary-General, November 2001).

As of September 11, 2001, only two countries had ratified all twelve of the UN conventions related to terrorism— the UK and Botswana (Ward, 2003). It will be seen below that the lack of widespread ratification and effective implementation of these longstanding legal instruments featured prominently in the unprecedented UN Security Council’s formal response to September 11. The international community’s poor track record in unrealised universal legal norms, poor implementation, and the subsequently patchy picture of international cooperation against international terrorism has become one of the main focal points for remedial action after September 11. Crucially, the most powerful organ of the UN, the Security Council, led this and the apparent results achieved to date raise the prospect of both a globally recognised universal legal framework for countering terrorism and the development of effective proactive and preventive executive responses in all states. Whilst some may regard the response of the UN after 11 September 2001 as a positive indicator of the UN system in action, it is now clear that both financial backing and technical aid have underpinned the realisation of state commitments in the post-9/11 regime. More so, the Group of Eight most industrialised nations of the world have funded much of the UN’s work. Also, the UN Security Council has adopted a strategy to explicitly engage other international, regional and sub-

regional organisations, to cooperate and coordinate bilateral and multilateral technical aid and assistance to states that would not otherwise realise the ambitious counter-terrorism objectives. This engagement raises important issues of ‘tasking’ and the role of regional organisations and the impact of power in formulating counter-terrorism in practice within this new regime of global counter-terrorism. The fall-out of these developments have also been tangible in human rights concerns and the response of certain states to increase action against internal dissent and those seeking to gain self-determination. This has led, somewhat reluctantly at first, to the Security Council explicitly involving wider UN agencies with responsibilities to uphold the universal human rights standards.

United Nations and Counter-Terrorism

Counter-terrorism activities within a nation’s borders operate in the context of each nation’s laws and policies, history, politics, and culture. In democratic societies, “the rule of law is guaranteed by the legitimacy legal norms enjoy from whom such norms apply, on one hand, and by the threat of enforcement from specialised agents of control on the other” (Oche, 2014). But how vigorously can democratic countries fight terrorism and remain a democracy? How can democracies play by their own rules when terrorists obey no rules? Which of our civil liberties should we be willing to give up, and what kind of proof do we need that sacrificing our personal freedom is an effective antidote to terrorism? The counter-terrorism strategies take a critical look from the perspective of the United Nations. The former Secretary-General of the UN, Kofi Annan identified five elements that he termed the five Ds for which is the principle and comprehensive strategy to counter terrorism in Africa in his keynote address at the International Summit on Democracy, Terrorism and Security in 2005. These are:

- i). Dissuade disaffected groups from choosing terrorism as a tactic to achieve their goals;
- ii). Deny terrorists the ability to carry out their attacks;
- iii). Deter them from supporting terrorists;
- iv). Develop capacity to prevent terrorism; and
- v). Defend human rights in the struggle against terrorism.

The United Nations and its agencies have developed a number of international agreements to enable the international community to take actions to counter-terrorism and bring those responsible to justice (Oche, 2014). Treaties, mainly in form of conventions, oblige member states to take stringent steps to root out terrorism out of the globe. The conventions are transformed into actions by specialised agencies of the UN such as the International Maritime Organisation (IMO). These actions include the development of measures to improve the security of air and sea travel. The UN Security Council, the United Nation's principal organ for maintaining peace and security has also been very active in combating terrorism. The Security Council adopted a number of resolutions regarding terrorism and the countering thereof in Africa. The first resolution is 1044 of 1996 which called Sudan to extradite the three suspects wanted in connection with the assassination of the then President of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak, to Ethiopia. The second resolution 1054 called on countries to develop sanctions against the Sudanese government in consequence of their non-compliance with the aforementioned resolution (Oche, 2014). The Security Council's management of the incidence was interrupted by US airstrikes on a pharmaceutical factory in Khartoum, wrongly thought to be producing chemical weapons for terrorist use. The third resolution adopted by the UN Security Council relating to Africa is Resolution 1189 of 1998. This resolution concerned the terrorist bombings of the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998 (Oche, 2014).

Finally, in the case of the UN building bombing in 2011 in Nigeria, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-Moon dispatched security operatives. In January 2012, Ban Ki-Moon reiterated the need for coordinated efforts between member states and international organisations to implement counter-terrorism measures in the country. Likewise, Nigeria's Ambassador Abdulahi Omaki urged the UN to increase security sector assistance and partnerships, citing the "external influence" of international terrorists (Copeland, 2013)

West Africa and Security Challenges

Conflict is part of human society, which exists in various forms, be it religious, political, cultural, social or economic. It is a truism that there is hardly any society without one form of conflict challenging

its corporate existence. However, reliable conflict resolution measures define societies whether developed or developing (Yakubu cited in Owutu, 2014). In other words, African conflicts present some unique security challenges such as small arms proliferation, cross-border banditry, terrorism and public order in post-conflict societies. Notable examples being Liberia and Sierra Leone conflicts of the 1990s and beyond that challenged the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The capacity of regional security apparatus in managing African conflict is very significant despite the political consequences of globalisation in which “the power, authority and influence” of states are in decline as globalisation advances (Olayode, 2006). Economic globalisation leads to development as Ate (2001) asserts that “there has been a new perception that socioeconomic development cannot be assumed to result automatically... without a conducive security environment” (Ate, 2001).

Akinade (2009) submitted that security is defined as “a state of being secured, that is, a state of freedom from apprehension, as well as freedom from danger or risk. It is also a state of psychological confidence in the safety of one’s person, security is taken to mean the freedom of citizens from apprehension and the creation of a psychological environment in which citizen feels safe.” In line with this, Afolabi (2015), described security generally as a feeling of being safe from harm, fear, anxiety, oppression, danger, poverty, defence, protection and preservation of core values and a threat to those values. Abolurin (2003) concluded that security refers to all measures in use to frustrate the activities of a saboteur. The importance attached to security varies from one country to another. The more complex a society is, the more likely the degree of security is, every society requires some good security measures in order to function effectively.

Furthermore, Abolurin (2003) was of the view that internal security is a totality of the nation’s equilibrium state, which needs to be maintained so that the nation can carry out its formal function without unnecessary interruption from anywhere. Internal security involves government coordination of all those actions that would ensure that the equilibrium of the state is constantly maintained by any form of civil disturbances. Internal security could also mean the

citizens' expectation of government to make provision for the protection of life and property and the safety from criminals and armed robbers (Abolurin, 2003 cited in Owutu, 2014). Akinyeye (2001) quoted Arnold Wolfer as seeing security as concerned mainly with such indices as the "military aspect of a nation's goals, competition between satisfied and dissatisfied powers, strategic issues of superpowers alliance-building processes, independence and sovereignty, civil-military relations, the economic basis for strategic forces, conflict spots in international relations and the problem of maintaining systematic balance" (Akinyeye, 2001 cited Owutu, 2014). From all the submissions above, one can easily identify the common demand to all definitions of security as that of protection against threats to interest and values of individual state or nation-state.

The West African region is expected to be the most advanced in designing and nurturing 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 the 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, Tuaregs insurgency in Mali, and violence in the Casamance region of Senegal (Bolaji, 2014). 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 cited in Bolaji, 2014). 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 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. ECOWAS, the sub-regional body in the region is not unaware of this

fact and has put in place some structures for good governance and conflict prevention, to not only prevent conflicts but also safeguard the security of member states from all forms of hostilities, including terrorism. The founding fathers then thought 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 cited in Bolaji, 2014). The ECOWAS structures for mainstreaming good governance and conflict management include the Council of Elders, the ECOWAS Early Warning System, Peace-keeping Missions in collaboration with the United Nations. Peace-building Operations in collaboration with the UN Peace-building 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.

The UN Counter-Terrorism Strategy: An Overview

In 2001, the UN Security Council Resolution 1373 established the Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC) as part of a wider effort to stop terrorism in all of its forms. The Council also passed Resolution 1624 (2005) designed to improve border security and encourage member countries to submit updates to the CTC. At a much broader level, the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy has attempted to consolidate and enhance the various streams of counter-terrorism measures among the Member States through the General Assembly while they are increasingly coordinating their counter-terrorism efforts and continuing their legal norm-setting work. Apart from formal treaties, these countries also discuss ways and means to combat terrorism on a regular basis and pledge their commitment to counter this menace through solemn declarations and resolutions of the General Assembly. The Security Council has also been active in countering terrorism through resolutions and by establishing several subsidiary bodies. At the same time, a number of programmes, offices

and agencies of the United Nations system have been engaged in specific activities against terrorism, further assisting the Member States in their counter-terrorism efforts. The findings agree with Oche (2014) who stressed that the United Nations and its agencies have developed a number of international agreements to enable the international community to take action to counter terrorism and bring those responsible to justice.

Terrorism cannot be addressed through military force alone. It requires a range of policy responses, including capacity building, promotion of human rights, and development assistance, both to strengthen each country's capacity to combat terrorism and address underlying conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism. According to the Permanent Representative of Denmark to the United Nations, "if international cooperation to assist developing countries in building up their resilience against terrorism is to be effective, we need to overcome a recurrent hesitation to combine the development and the security agendas. Including counter-terrorism capacity building as an aspect of development programmes is a delicate but important task" (United Nations, 2008). In support of these views, Norman (2004), stressed that the United Nations is a primary focal point for conflict resolution and the establishment of universal legal norms and the setting of human rights standards. In the field of international terrorism, the UN system as a whole has taken a sustained interest in developing an effective multilateral legal response to acts of terrorism, as incidents and diverse forms of terrorism have gained prominence in the last four decades (Wardlaw 1989 cited in Norman, 2004).

Largely, the UN Counterterrorism Strategy can be taken as a crucial step forward in the institutional approach to confronting the menace of terrorism especially in its ability to encourage a collective approach involving a multiplicity of different actors. For example, the UN counterterrorism programme has been broadened to include the entire UN membership, thus shifting the focus from the Security Council, which had dominated the UN programme since 2001. In addition, for the first time, the United Nations' global membership has agreed that long-term efforts to address conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism are an essential part of an effective and

comprehensive strategy to combat and prevent terrorism, thus moving beyond the Council's emphasis on law enforcement and other security measures. The Strategy is also clear about the imperative for respecting human rights and promoting the rule of law across every element of the document and throughout its implementation.

As noted earlier, it acknowledges the wide range of stakeholders, beyond states, that have a role to play in its implementation and is the first UN document on counterterrorism to include a role for civil society organisations. Part of the Strategy's significance lies in the fact that it is an "instrument of consensus" on an issue where unanimous consent has been difficult to achieve within the United Nations General Assembly. Although, it does not add anything not already contained in pre-existing UN counterterrorism resolutions, norms, and measures, the Strategy pulls them together into a single, coherent, and universally adopted framework. Contributions from a wide range of stakeholders, including not only member states and the relevant parts of the UN system but also civil society, are needed to implement that framework. In particular, the role of CSOs in furthering the objectives of the UN Charter cannot be over-emphasised. As the Chair of the UN Secretary General's Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations–Civil Society Relations noted, Civil Society Organisations are "the prime movers of some of the most innovative initiatives to deal with emerging global threats." The UN Strategy specifically encourages "non-governmental organisations and civil society to engage, as appropriate, on how to enhance efforts to implement the Strategy."

Indeed, the Strategy which emphasises the wide inclusion of stakeholders has been hailed as a "living document" that will evolve. Civil society organisations, with their long-term presence in the field and often deep understanding of the local context in which the Strategy needs to be implemented, can play an important role in ensuring that implementation keeps pace with the changing realities on the ground. For any comprehensive counter-terrorism strategy to be effective, civil society needs to be part of its development and implementation, as broad-based engagement between the state and civil society organisations can help serve as a medium for addressing

concerns between the state and the public in the context of specific counter-terrorism actions.

Also, the Strategy's explicit reference to the role of civil society may lend an added degree of legitimacy to civil society organisations, which have previously been treated by some governments as subversive for working on terrorism and counter-terrorism issues. Further, the Strategy, by enabling Civil society organisations to link their existing work with counter-terrorism and the larger pools of funds often connected with it, may open up new resource flows for Civil society organisations from donors, including governments. Moreover, the adoption of the Strategy may make it easier for civil society organisations to have access to and a dialogue with the "harder edges" of the national security apparatus. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the UN Strategy, with its holistic, human rights-based approach, offers a counter-narrative to less inclusive approaches, such as the U.S.-led "war on terror," which could help bring coherence and balance to national and UN counter-terrorism efforts and create more space for civil society to operate.

Incidences of Terrorism and State of Security in West Africa

The threat of terrorism in West Africa is enormous and poses daunting challenges not only to security management but also to political stability and economic development, in the region. The regularity and enormity of the terror unleashed by insurgents in various parts of West Africa make the need for strategies and solutions to the phenomena unarguably expedient. According to Human Rights Watch, Africa ranks second only to the Middle East in terrorist incidences in 2014. In addition, the West African sub-region also ranks significantly high as one of the hotbeds of increasing violence occasioned by terrorism. The security situation in West Africa has been a major concern for not only the region but also the international community, which considers it a huge symptom of state weakness. These are clear in the porous borders, the infiltration of Al-Qaeda's elements in Africa as a whole, and the growing rate of anti-Western sentiments in the mostly Muslim dominated regions. Many African countries are categorised as weak or failed states where terrorists' operations flourish more. The breakdown of authority, law and order gives them the ability to

conduct their operations without significant interference. Many weak and failed states in West Africa hold a lot of attractions for terrorists. Sometimes, most of these failed states take to smuggling and trafficking to raise funds.

More so, prominent groups such as the Boko haram, which emerged in the predominantly Muslim region of North-eastern Nigeria, is believed to have allegiance to a network of older and perhaps, global terrorist organisations such as Al-Qaeda and Al-Shabaab. The suspicion of probable Al-Qaeda connection in the financing of the Boko Haram was also heightened by the presence of the Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which operates actively in the Sahel-Saharan belt in the West and Central Africa. The activities of the AQIM in this belt are facilitated by the porosity of international borders and the existence of weak government institutions which are unable to ensure effective security within and across the various national and international boundaries. Evidently, the operations of the sect have been transformed from the use of crude implements like knives, bows and arrows to the reliance on various degrees of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs).

Consequently, there will be a need for the continued flow of weapons and tactfulness. This is coupled with the fact that there now exist enormous national and international attention on its operation since they now not only constitute threats to Nigeria's national security but also the regional, Sahel-Saharan belt and the wider global arena. Indicators such as high rate of poverty, corruption, high population density and human rights violation among others are the hallmark of weak or failed states and these are profoundly pronounced regarding the countries in the West African region. Widespread youth unemployment and poverty have been identified as a major challenge to addressing transnational organised crimes and terrorism in West Africa. These twin challenges are believed to have worsened the spate of terrorists' activities in the sub-region as a large number of idle and impoverished youths continue to populate the rank and file of existing armed groups such as the militias, criminal gangs, and vicious terrorist groups. According to Udeh (2010), unemployment and poverty are the greatest threats to peace and security. Yakubu (2005, cited in Owutu 2014) agreed to the above submission by asserting that African

conflicts present some unique security challenges such as small arms proliferation, cross-border banditry, terrorism and public order in post-conflict societies while Olayode (2006), explained that the capacity of regional security apparatus in managing African conflict is very significant despite the political consequences of globalisation in which “the power, authority and influence” of states are in decline as globalisation advances, current realities suggest otherwise. The intensity, networking, growing capacity and capability of terrorists and other armed groups in West Africa lends ample credence to the worrisome fact that widespread acts of terror have become cumbersome, overwhelming and almost intractable despite existing regional conflict resolution instruments.

Assessment of the Counter-Terrorism Strategy in West Africa

The United Nations in fulfilling the international community’s unity of purpose and commitment has continuously offered a comprehensive framework for an effective international response to terrorism in the West African sub-region. It gives priority attention to addressing some underlying conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, such as poverty, prolonged unresolved conflicts, dehumanisation of victims of terrorism, ethnic, national and religious discrimination, political exclusion, socio-economic marginalisation and lack of good governance and emphasises the imperative for respecting human rights and promoting the rule of law that is absolutely essential to the successful combating of terrorism in West Africa. Others feel that UN resolutions/policies to stop terrorism in West Africa have not proven effective.

The efforts at dealing with terrorism and terrorist funding in West Africa can be discussed at three mutually reinforcing levels, global, continental and regional initiatives. First, the international community, according to Ohia, Olugbode, and Oyeyipo (2011), has responded to the increasing spate of money laundering and terrorism financing. One of the measures is the establishment of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) in 1989 by the G-7 countries to respond more effectively to money laundering. The FATF Special Recommendations require countries to criminalise the financing of terrorism, terrorist organisations and terrorist acts. Besides, there is

the UN Convention on Illicit Trafficking in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Vienna Convention), the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (Palermo Convention), the UN Convention against Corruption and the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism (Ohia, Olugbode, & Oyeyipo, 2011). These Conventions and Covenants contain provisions relating to the tracing, freezing, seizing and confiscation of instrumentalities and proceeds of crime. These are laudable but have not achieved much in West Africa in terms of interfering with various activities related to terrorism financing. Hence, Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups appear to be making further inroads into the region, particularly into Nigeria.

The commitment of the international community to protect the integrity of the international financial system and prevent its abuse especially by terrorist organisations and organised crime groups have led to the intensification of measures to combat money laundering and financing of terrorism. This commitment, intensified at national, regional and international levels, stems from an acknowledgement that robust regimes against money laundering and the financing of terrorism constitute vital strands in the implementation of the United Nations Counter-terrorism Strategy and the pursuit of global financial stability.

The three main sources of international obligations on combating the financing of terrorism are derived from the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism of 1999, the United Nations Resolution 1373 of 2001 and the Nine Special Recommendations on Terrorist Financing issued by the Financial Action Task Force. The international response also resulted in the adoption of the United Nations' Convention against Transnational Organised Crimes (also referred to as Palermo Convention) and as well as the United Nations Convention on Illicit Trafficking in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Vienna Convention) in 2000.

Finally, there exists a strong partnership between the UN and ECOWAS in the development and promotion of security mechanisms especially in relation to the growing security threats by non-state armed groups in West Africa. For the sub-regional organisation, the

need to co-opt security initiatives into the broader goal of economic transformation continues to drive ECOWAS' activities. As observed by Adefuye (2008) cited in Bolaji (2014), economic prosperity and regional cooperation can only be fully realised in a peaceful, stable, secure and democratic environment. ECOWAS, therefore, made a shift in emphasis on peace and security in member states as a prerequisite for achieving regional economic development and integration as envisaged by the founders.

Indeed, key programmes and mechanisms under the ECOWAS counter-terrorism strategy are not only greatly patterned after the UN's instruments for combating terror, but are shaped by the fundamental ideals upon which the UN seeks to build a free, peaceful and stable world. Stressing this further, Ndinga-Muvumba and Lamin (2006) opined that the ECOWAS structures for mainstreaming conflict management include the Council of Elders, the ECOWAS Early Warning System, and Peacekeeping Missions in collaboration with the United Nation, Peace-building Operations in collaboration with the UN Peace-building Commission, Democratic Elections and Human Security. These, according to Ndinga-Muvumba *et.al.*, also reinforce the importance of good governance in conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding. Without a doubt, the presence of these structures and existing joint efforts by the UN and ECOWAS is expected to improve the peace and stability of the West African sub-region and stem the tide of terrorism.

Challenges and Prospects of the UN Counter-Terrorism Strategies in West Africa

The UN counter-terrorism strategies in West Africa have encountered various challenges both regionally and locally among countries in the West African sub-region. The ability to prevent terrorists from organising and moving freely across the territories of Member States in the West African sub-region depends not only upon the effectiveness of bilateral and sub-regional cooperation but also on measures taken to put in place international codes and practices related to law enforcement and border control and upon the effective protection and monitoring of borders, coasts and interior regions. All States have cash-based economies except a few that have just started

the cashless policy, and this increases the risk that terrorist financing will occur by means of physical cross-border transportation of currency and bearer negotiable instruments or by means of informal transfers of money and value through alternative remittance systems. Besides, the region continues to face challenges relating to law enforcement, the rule of law and respect for human rights

Also, very few money-laundering cases let alone terrorism-financing cases have been prosecuted and resulted in a conviction in many West African countries, despite an increase in the number of suspicious transaction reports. Judiciaries generally need to be strengthened in terms of capacity and independence. Many countries' financial intelligence units cannot still analyse suspicious transaction reports for the administrative freezing of terrorist assets. These challenges coupled with the fact that there is no sub-regional action plan on counter-terrorism or sub-regional organisation with a dedicated counter-terrorism unit. Even though most West African states have introduced partial measures to detect forged travel documents with some states partially implementing measures to prevent and suppress the movement of terrorists across borders, lengthy and open land borders continue to pose challenges to border control. There are still no properly integrated border management programmes. The majority of police border posts lack the tools and equipment to perform their missions effectively, and national border-control agencies do not sufficiently cooperate among themselves or with their counterparts in neighbouring states due to factors that include corruption.

Bolaji (2010), opined that the West African region ironically 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 the free movement of people in the region and activities of external interests, among other factors. There is an obviously limited law enforcement capacity in many West African countries, which serves as an incentive to transnational organised crimes and terrorist financing in the region. This is a challenge that must be conquered to close all avenues of terrorist financing that comes from various sources including transnational organised crimes.

Aside from the aforementioned, there are problems associated with the UN engagement of certain key actors despite written and verbal commitments to do so. For instance, due to lack of resources, the UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (Task Force) is yet to seek ways to involve civil society organisations in its work or develop an outreach plan, but it needs to do so. Further, the traditional UN counterterrorism actors within the United Nations, for example, the Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC), its Executive Directorate (CTED), and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime's (UNODC) Terrorism Prevention Branch (TPB) have generally not sought to engage with Civil society organisations in their work. This attitude likely reflects the state-centric view of counter-terrorism tends to dominate UN policymaking over the years and is not surprising, given the ambivalence of some member states and parts of the United Nations toward civil society, particularly when dealing with sensitive national security issues.

In addition, targeting civil society is challenging, particularly in a framework as broad as the Strategy, not least because civil society represents a multiplicity of actors with often divergent concerns and interests and includes many elements that will be reluctant to reciprocate. The crucial message that articulates what the Strategy offers civil society organisations in return for their engagement has not been developed or disseminated either by the United Nations or its member states. Although such a message will need to be tailored to take into account the interests and concerns of the particular group of civil society organisations being targeted, some benefits may have broad applicability. For example, the Strategy may offer civil society organisations new networking opportunities with other civil society organisations, intergovernmental bodies, and states on the range of issues that are now linked in the framework of the Strategy. Two prerequisites to increasing the involvement of NGOs and other civil society organisations to promote UN Strategy implementation are raising awareness of it among Civil society organisations and more clearly identifying how the UN Strategy is relevant to their concerns and interests while providing reassurance that supporting implementation will not just further narrow government interests. So far, neither of these has been satisfied. Awareness of the Strategy

among Civil society organisations remains low, with informal surveys by some Civil society organisations indicating that only a small percentage of stakeholders with whom they are interacting report having any previous knowledge of the Strategy.

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation

West Africa has been a major area of interest for terrorism and terrorist activities. Subsequently, the lack of well-coordinated border control systems has been a major cause of the infiltration of terrorists into the region. Coupled with this challenge are prevalent high levels of poverty and unemployment that predispose a large number of youths to join the bandwagon of violent, extremists' groups such as Boko haram. To this end, the United Nations counterterrorism strategy is an important milestone in the global efforts to halt terrorism and its attendant consequences of deaths, rights' violations, human displacement and instability. Despite the initiative, there remain pressing issues relating to poor funding, lack of awareness of the strategy due to the relatively low presence of CSOs and other sundry issues.

Conclusively, terrorist's activities constitute grave threats to the stability of the West African sub-region and the UN Counter-terrorism strategy has the potential, together with existing regional and sub-regional instruments, to effectively address the myriad of terrorist-related problems more than it currently does. Its comprehensive approach which admits the need to revitalise the governance processes in West Africa will no doubt help address the root causes of terrorism but needs to be swiftly undertaken. Also, improved collaborative efforts between the UN and ECOWAS can assist in fast-tracking the achievements of the set goals of the UN Counterterrorism strategy. However, In the light of the above, there is the need for the UN to broadly engage all stakeholders, in particular, civil society organisations. A large presence of CSOs will potentially bring awareness about the strategy itself. Given the resource challenge to developing regions, and their greater exposure as a breeding ground for untoward activities by terrorists' groups, financial, technical as well as training assistance will greatly aid regional organisation's counter-terror operations. A reassessment of the strategy that takes

cognisance of the many peculiarities of Africa and in particular the West African sub-region may also be necessary. Likewise, sharing ideas, intelligence and best practices would go a long way in preventing conflict and restoring peace to troubled regions like West Africa.

Finally, good governance is needed to offset governance failure in West Africa. Therefore, there is a need to ensure that all member states of ECOWAS adhere strictly to the Protocol on Democracy and Good governance. This will minimise corruption, enthrone transparency and accountability. Good governance will also deliver democratic dividends to the people and reduce frustration and aggression that lead to involvement in terrorism and criminality.

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