Radicalisation and violent extremism in West Africa: implications for African and international security

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Analysis

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This article interrogates emerging trends and patterns in the process of radicalisation and violent extremism in West Africa and the implications for regional and international security regimes, practices and thinking. It argues that there are real and imagined challenges of radicalisation and violent extremism. The overarching view is that the emergence of intra- and extra-African preoccupation with violent extremism alone, rather than alongside seriously addressing its structural undercurrents related to preventing and interrupting the process of radicalisation, distorts the security realities and further exacerbates the security situation in Africa. Radicalisation and violent extremism further integrates West Africa into global security assemblages, yet the absence or non-incorporation of an indigenous African (civil society) perspective or counter-narrative about radicalisation and violent extremism uncritically fuses and conflates the strategic interests of major powers with the local realities in Africa. Moreover, there is a huge potential that national governments could exploit local, regional and international interests in counteracting terrorism for domestic political advantages, such as mis-characterisation of subsisting conflicts, regular political opposition and other local grievances as cases of terrorism, thereby risking a deterioration in security conditions.

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Introduction

On 16 June 2011, a violent extremist group known as Boko Haram[1] used a suicide bomber to attack the ostensibly heavily guarded headquarters of the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) in Abuja. The Inspector General of the NPF, the main target of the bombing, escaped by a whisker. On 26 August, the group undertook another suicide bombing of the United Nations (UN) country office in Abuja, Nigeria, killing 23 persons, including 18 UN personnel. On 1 October 2011, Nigeria's annual national independence day parade celebration, usually a public event, was abruptly downgraded into a private event, relocated from the Eagle Square to the inner chambers of *Aso Rock* (seat of power). This was a veiled acknowledgement of and capitulation to the threat of another suicide bomb attack. To be clear, bombings and other terror tactics were neither new nor restricted to a particular armed group in Nigeria and West Africa since the 1990s. However, the chain of events, human and material losses, and the atmosphere of fear that pervaded before, during and after these attacks signpost three important transformations. It shattered sociocultural myths about the implausibility and impossibility of suicide bombing in Nigeria; it marked a transition from radicalisation to violent extremism and from local to regional and perhaps international linkages; and it opened a new chapter in the study, analyses and policy interventions in the security calculus of West Africa. All this accelerated the integration of Africa into global security assemblages —'new security structures and practices that are simultaneously public and private, global and local'.[2]

This article interrogates emerging trends and patterns in the process of radicalisation and violent extremism in West Africa and the implications for regional and international security regimes, practices and thinking. It builds on the four country case studies (Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone) included in this collection. It argues that there are real and imagined challenges of radicalisation and violent extremism. This article acknowledges and discusses the potential real challenges, yet it strongly underlines the possibility of imagined challenges that could be or are being exploited by African and international political actors for other purposes.[3] The overarching view is that the emergence of intra- and extra-African preoccupation with violent extremism alone, rather than alongside seriously addressing its structural undercurrents (preventing and interrupting the process of radicalisation), distorts the security realities and further exacerbates the security situation in Africa. The potential negative implications transcend radicalisation and violent extremism as phenomena, relating more to the actions and inactions of national

governments and their international collaborators. On the one hand, the absence or non-incorporation of an indigenous African (civil society) perspective or counter-narrative about radicalisation and violent extremism uncritically fuses and conflates the strategic interests of major powers with the local realities in Africa. And on the other, there is a huge potential that national governments could exploit local, regional and international interests in counteracting terrorism for domestic political advantages such as mis-characterisation of subsisting conflicts, regular political opposition and other local grievances as cases of terrorism, thereby risking a deterioration in security conditions.

More broadly, radicalisation and violent extremism, like previous themes in African security, are likely to spread across communities, countries and regions in Africa and amongst African populations in the diaspora. Another potential implication is the heightened militarisation of security and reversals in efforts to subject African security forces to democratic oversight and increased transparency and accountability. Radicalisation and violent extremism also harbour conceptual and operational challenges (muddle) to orthodox conflict management regimes in Africa and internationally; they could inflame old or generate new inter-state tensions and interventions. Finally, where the integration of Africa into emerging global security assemblages is reduced to increased external military activities, presence and operations in Africa, there are considerable risks of worsening Africa's security dynamic, not least by provoking widespread anger and resistance amongst African Muslims.

The attempt to map out possible pathways in which emerging trends could impact on regional and international security is neither an exercise in academic prediction or hearsay, nor scare mongering. This article is hardly about interrogating the relationship between violence on one hand and, on the other, religion broadly and Islam specifically.[4] Rather, the intention is limited to underlining, in a systematic way, the changing dynamic of radicalisation and violent extremism, and its potential future impacts, based on emerging trends and patterns, on human, national, regional and international security. Although the focus is on radicalisation and violent extremism linked to religion (specifically, Political Islam[5]), it nonetheless acknowledges the plurality of radicalisation and violent extremism in Africa and beyond. In addition, the focus on Islam is not intended to stereotype either the religion and its adherents (Muslims) or the countries and citizens (especially youth) of the countries concerned. This article, alongside others in this volume, is designed to contribute to the burgeoning knowledge on how to prevent radicalisation, disrupt

mobilisation into violent extremist groups, and diminish the motivation to undertake terrorist operations.[6]

Given the conceptual and methodological challenges inherent in research on radicalisation and violent extremism, this article is restricted to the operational meanings given in the introduction to this collection. While the broad focus is on radicalisation and violent extremism, it is not unusual that the analysis concentrates more on the latter, given its overt political character and direct impact on security. As a result, considerable attention is given to the Boko Haram crises in North-East Nigeria. The rest of this paper provides a synoptic overview of emerging trends, possible signifiers and pathways, and responses to radicalisation and violent extremism in West Africa. This is followed by a sequential assessment of the potential implications for African and international security.

Trends and patterns in West Africa

In November 2001, the former American Assistant Secretary of State submitted to a Congress sub-committee hearing on Africa that

> Much of Africa is a veritable incubator for foot soldiers of terrorism. Its poor overwhelmingly young, disaffected and under-educated populations [. . .] violence and crime may be at least as attractive as hardwork. Perhaps that is part of the reason why we have seen an increase in recent years in the number of African nationals engaged in international terrorism.[7]

In 2006, Osama bin Laden identified Africa, especially countries with Muslim populations (Nigeria in particular), as being ripe for radical changes, including attacks against Western interests and pro-West regimes.[8] Against the background of the current security dynamic is it the case that West Africa is now fulfilling recent predictions and expectations as a seabed of radicalisation and violent extremism? Is a wave of radicalisation sweeping through West Africa? How has West Africa evolved in the context of the global counter-terror agenda?

In-depth answers to the above questions are provided by the four case studies included in this collection. Here I provide a broad overview of the content and context of radicalisation and violent extremism with a view to highlighting emergent trends and patterns. In doing so, this paper emphasises that West Africa represents a puzzle—it combines vulnerabilities with resilience, convergence with diffusion and growth with

mutation. Specifically, different patterns and dynamics underlie radicalisation and violent extremism within and across countries. It is not implausible that some countries or areas are already witnessing or have witnessed some levels of radicalisation, while others are in a latent phase along the continuum. The factors that determine a specific location on the radicalisation plane include levels of societal and cultural resilience, recent political-security experiences, degree of centripetal mechanisms, nature and intensity of intra- and inter-religious rivalries, and government policies.

Despite all of this, it is important to restate that the support, popularity and membership of radical groups amongst youth and the total population of West African countries remain marginal, relative to the youth and overall population. This indicates the existence of some form of resilience, built around civil society institutions and practices that act as a bulwark to radicalisation.

Drivers of radicalisation

The potential and actual drivers of radicalisation in West Africa include the following.

Inter-group tensions and struggles over socio-economic privileges

A majority of countries in West Africa are multi-ethnic in their composition and, in a majority of cases, ethnic and religious identities converge. The tendency to use the ethno-political and religious identities in competition to create or defend socio-economic privileges was observed to underlie cases of radicalisation in West Africa. The convergence of ethnicity and religion makes it the most effective tool of mobilisation for collective action. In most cases, the creation and defence of ethno-religious interests tends to involve employment of radical ideas and ideals. In Liberia for example, ethno-religious identities, such as the Mandingo-Muslim identity, were exploited during and after armed conflict. Mandingos were mobilised and formed the core of fighters for the United Liberia Movement (ULIMO) and Liberia United for Reconstruction and Development (LURD) rebel groups between 1990 and 2003. Moreover, tensions and violent clashes over lands and farmlands, constructed around ethno-religious identities (involving Mandingos), have occurred in the post-war era. In Nigeria, perennial violent clashes in Northern cities of Jos, Kano, Kaduna, Zaria and Maiduguri parallel ethno-religious identities in the context of struggles over socio-economic privileges such as trade, collection of taxes (market levies), grazing rights, etc.

Marginalisation (perceived or actual) in politics

Against the backdrop of multi-ethnic composition and its convergence with religious identities, competition for and claims over political rights and privileges like the right to political offices and even citizenship, tend to involve an appeal to religion as a basis for resisting or advancing demands. The need to protest and reverse perceived or actual marginalisation in sociopolitical privileges becomes a contributory driver to radicalisation. In some cases, this parallels colonial history as the establishment of contemporary state structures and practices are perceived to favour Christians. In practice, this involves contestations over the secularity of the state, as indexed by demands for Muslim public holidays alongside Christian holidays of Easter and Christmas in Liberia, or the demand to declare Friday a work-free day for Muslims similar to Sunday for Christians, or state sponsorship of religious pilgrims, etc. In post-war Liberia, Mandingo nationalism involves mobilisation to protect citizenship and political rights, which are perceived to be questioned by other groups.

Doctrinal rivalries

A majority of Muslims in West Africa are adherents of the Sunni branch of Islam, and several centuries of practicising Islam have led to some integration and normalisation of certain elements of indigenous cultural practices as parts of the religion. The infiltration of the region by alternative sects, especially Shia (from Iran) and Ahmadiyah (from Pakistan) over the past 50 years has led to a challenge of the Sunni orthodoxy or aspects of it. The doctrinal rivalries and challenges within and between Sunni and Shia followers are the fiercest and are often at the root of radicalisation. This tends to involve intra-Sunni rivalries related to a rejection of orthodox Islamic practices (local African contents) by Wahabist or Shia groups. At the heart of this is the rejection of *bidia* (innovations after the holy prophet of Islam) and the drive towards puritanical standards. In a majority of cases, the rejection of the orthodoxy, often mainstream Sunni practices, precede the emergence of radical groups and charismatic individuals. In Sierra Leone, the radical Salafist groups and their leaders (Imam Bashar and Sheikh Mujtabah) emerged through their rejection of orthodox Sunni doctrines and their call for puritanical Islam. In Ghana, the Ahlussunna Waljama'a group follows a similar pattern of criticising, condemning and rejecting orthodox Sunni practices and advocating Islamic revival and renewal. In Nigeria,

successive radical groups, such as Izala Brothers (Shia) and Boko Haram, consistently reject orthodox Sunni practices and advocate cultural change.

Inter-religious rivalries

The growth, intensity and spread of Nigerian-led Pentecostal Christian movements in West Africa in the past 30 years is a contributory factor in the radicalisation of Muslim groups. Apart from doctrinal differences, Christianity is often conceived of as a vector of Western culture and practices. Moreover, the proselytisation activities of Pentecostal movements are seen as a challenge to Islam that warrants a response from Muslims. Given that the Pentecostal churches also evolved through a breakaway from orthodox Christian churches, the response among Muslims tends to involve advocacy for a return to puritanical Islam on the one hand, and the development of new dawah (proselytisation) strategies involving religious education; training in martial arts; redefinition of ceremonial practices; open-air preaching; printing and distribution of audio and video clips in compact disks, stickers, tracts and pamphlets; and holiday camps. In Nigeria, rivalries between Muslim and Christian groups, textured by ethnicity, have led to several violent clashes in Kano, Kaduna, Bauchi and Jos.

Provision of social services by radical groups

Given the high levels of poverty, the juridical nature of statehood and the rollback of the state in the provision of social services following the implementation of structural adjustment policies (SAPs) in the 1980s across West Africa, religious groups have stepped in to provide education, health, housing and employment services for a majority of citizens. Although this practice predates contemporary times, it has intensified since the 1980s when the empirical state and its social expenditure shrunk considerably. Islamic groups, similar to Pentecostal Movements, use their provision of social services to proselytise and attract new members. Radical groups attract large youth followership on account of West Africa's youth 'bulge' and their neglect by the state. Radical groups tend to spread in the most deprived areas within a country or a city. Beyond providing social services, the membership of radical groups provides new social statuses, especially for young people, through assumption of positions of authority and responsibility, contracting marriage and setting up households, recognition and respect as a trainee cleric or adherent, and providing a platform to challenge orthodox structures perceived to

be responsible for their prior deprivation and marginalisation. Across the four case studies, evidence suggests that youth constitute the core membership of radical groups.

Alienated youth and their search for alternatives

The growth in the size of radical groups is linked to the increase in youth membership. The desire of a majority of youth to reverse their alienation from mainstream society and formal processes (education, employment, political representation and decision-making) do contribute to their membership of radical groups. The membership of radical groups is often instrumental to the re-empowerment or rehabilitation of marginalised youth. The membership drives of most radical groups are targeted at attracting youth through the offer of housing, marriage, religious education, employment and new social status. In Sierra Leone and Nigeria, a majority of the members of radical groups are youth who had little or no prior education and are homeless, unemployed and unmarried.

Charismatic leaders

The rise in radical tendencies has been accompanied by the emergence of a centripetal individual, in the form of a charismatic leader, who is able to mobilise large followership. A majority of radical groups tend to be embodied or personified by such charismatic leaders. Through claims to superior knowledge and teachings, and open challenges and criticisms of orthodox institutions, such individuals progressively acquire a cult-like hero status amongst their followers and their words tend to be regarded as a religious command (fatwa). A majority of these charismatic leaders tend to emerge from the group's youth cohort, and they were generally of middle age at the time their groups fully crystalised. In the case of Mohammed Yussuf (Boko Haram) and Sheikh Mujtaba (Sierra Leone), their existence was cut short (killed in their 40s) in armed clashes with state security forces following the outbreak of sectarian violence.

Politicisation and manipulation of religion by political elites

Radical groups often emerge in the context of overt or covert support by political elites who tap into their popularity and youth membership for political gains. This often involves both the political elite's sponsorship of programmes and pilgrimage and also insulating radical groups from arrest by the police. In Nigeria, a majority of governors across the Northern region introduced Sharia in 2002 largely for political reasons (to win

re-elections) and thereafter forged working relationships with a number of religious groups, including Boko Haram. Moreover, up until 2010, arrested Boko Haram members were released upon intervention by influential politicians from the North.

External influences

The actions and inactions of external actors, including countries and non-state organisations, constitute important variables in the process of radicalisation in West Africa. This takes different forms, including the provision of scholarships to study in foreign countries, especially Saudi Arabia, Iran and Pakistan; sponsorship of religious groups and programmes; and the provision of religious texts and other learning materials. A majority of radical clerics in West Africa were either trained abroad or influenced by doctrines and teachings outside their countries. Sierra Leone's Sheikh Mujtabah was trained in Pakistan; and the top leadership of the Izala brothers (and other radical groups) in Nigeria had some form of exposure to foreign training or visits. Crucially, states recovering from wars (Liberia and Sierra Leone) are most vulnerable to this. The presence of peacekeepers from Islamic countries, specifically Pakistan, has also been used to proselytise through their distribution of religious materials and the construction and renovation of Mosques in Liberia. It is not impossible that this may also contribute to radicalisation. In Sierra Leone, countries such as Iran, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia have used their cultural activities and provision of development aid as vehicles to import their brands of Islamic doctrines. External influence in the form of the dynamic of global politics, specifically the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and the American-led invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, also contributes to radicalisation. In a majority of cases, radical groups use global political dynamics as examples of Western (often Christian) hatred and injustice towards Islam, and as the basis for jihad. There were street demonstrations in Nigeria and Ghana over the Danish cartoons.

Signposts of radicalisation

Across the four country studies, it is possible to identify potential signposts of ongoing or latent (preparatory) phases of radicalisation. Signposts relate to potential indicators, signals or markers of ongoing or imminent process of radicalisation. Some of these include:

- Rejection of orthodox practices and de-linking from mainstream Muslim (often Sunni) groups or societies;

- Emphasis on puritanical Islam and cultural change, including distinctive cultural changes among members expressed in dressing, daily routines, cycle of friendship, etc;
- Calls and demands for the introduction of Sharia law;
- Large followership and popularity amongst youth;
- Public statements through press releases, recorded audio messages and tracts condemning, rejecting or criticising orthodox institutions, including mainstream Muslim communities, rival religions and national and foreign governments;
- Open-air crusades and preaching;
- Linkages to external actors through funding, training, scholarship, receipt of religious texts and visits of clerics, etc.;
- Presence of charismatic leaders with popular appeal amongst youth;
- Organisation of holiday camps, martial art training, inexpensive marriage ceremonies, etc. for members; and
- Building of safe havens accessible only to members of the sect or permitted visitors.

Signifiers of the pathway from radicalisation to violent extremism

From the cases of violent extremism in Northern Nigeria and in Sierra Leone, it is possible to identify potential signifiers or pathways of the transition from radicalisation to violent extremism. In a descending order, this includes the following:

- The existence or creation of local grievances or conflict situation;
- Escalation of grievances or conflict through government action (mismanagement) or inaction (neglect);
- Linkages to foreign actors and influences;
- Fusion of local grievances and global dynamic to create a 'master narrative' justifying the need for or readiness to use violence in pursuit or defence of group objectives; and
- Manifestations of heightened levels of violence either in pursuit of a group's objectives or to resist government's law enforcement efforts.

Trends in policy responses

Radicalisation and violent extremism interaction with official policies, practices and actions of governmental institutions at the local, national, regional and international levels

must be identified in order to determine the type of impacts and the implications for security. There are four key observations about the responses to radicalisation and violent extremism in West Africa. First is the absence of a counter-narrative, different from those espoused by governments, in defining the meaning, significance and responses to radicalisation and violent extremism. A monolithic definition, profiling and policies dominate the current discourse and responses to radicalisation and violent extremism. This is marked by a strategic fusion of interests, perspectives and policies between African governments and major powers. Yet alternative perspectives and counter-narratives, founded on local realities and subsisting in African civil society, are needed or indeed already exist and are crucial to understanding, to interrupting development and to building sustainable resilience against radicalisation and violent extremism in Africa.

Second is the disproportionate focus on violent extremism, rather than alongside radicalisation. This is congruent with the adoption of a law-enforcement approach in managing radicalisation and violent extremism. This is manifested in the passage of new anti-terror legislation, actions against money laundering and terrorist financing, creation and deployment of specialist anti-terror units, and foreign training and assistance in counter-terrorism. This underlines the convergence of the strategic interests of international actors and African incumbents of powers with the continued militarised definition of security. This does not preclude the existence of provisions, policies and strategies for addressing radicalisation. For instance, the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy as approved by General Assembly Resolution 60/288 of 20 September 2006 declared the first two of its five pillars to be taking measures to address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism and measures to prevent and combat terrorism.[9] This has been reinforced by subsequent resolutions, including UN Security Council Resolution 1963 of 20 December 2010 that recognised 'that terrorism will not be defeated by military force, law enforcement measures and intelligence operations alone' and identified the need to 'offer a viable alternative to those who could be susceptible to terrorist recruitment and to radicalisation leading to violence'.[10]

The third relates to the overarching emphasis on top-down, official and inter-governmental co-operation and activities. There is very little involvement or mobilisation of civil society groups and institutions in current response regimes. This underlines the focus on violent extremism, rather than alongside radicalisation. This is inspite of the UN's acknowledgement of the key role of civil society in addressing radicalisation and violent extremism as highlighted in UN Security Council Resolution 64/297 of 13 October 2010

that 'encourages civil society, including non-governmental organisations, to engage, as appropriate, in efforts to enhance the implementation of the [UN Global] Strategy, including through interaction with Member States and the United Nations system'.[11] This observation does not dismiss the imperative of official and inter-governmental co-operation as mandated under relevant international and regional legal instruments—such as UN Security Council Resolution 1373 (2001) and Article 2 of the African Union (AU) 1999 Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism, along with its 2002 Plan of Action and 2004 Additional Protocol. The point here is that any successful counter-violent extremism strategy must include addressing radicalisation, tap into societal resources and resilience, and involve civil society. For instance, the narratives of wartime destruction and of the imperatives of post-conflict reconciliation and reconstruction amongst civil society groups in Liberia and Sierra Leone are key resources counteracting the pull towards radicalisation and violent extremism thereat.

Fourth is the absence of a regional approach or response thus far. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has been passive. Beyond subscribing to AU conventions and treaties on terrorism, ECOWAS appears to betray its reputation as the frontline regional economic community (REC) in security issues in Africa. Perhaps, in the face of an emerging threat, ECOWAS does not appear to have any institutional structures or resources to address radicalisation and violent extremism.[12] However, of greater concern is ECOWAS's failure either to organise any high level summit or attempt to reinterpret and domesticate UN and AU treaties in the region or to take steps to effectively integrate issues of radicalisation and violent extremism into its security agenda. A noticeable consequence of this is the emerging bilateral and cross-regional arrangements by ECOWAS member states. For instance, Mali and Niger are involved in joint counter-terrorist operations in the Sahel in partnership with Algeria and Mauritania under the Joint Command Centre in Tamanrasset, Algeria.

Implications for African and international security

Following the bombing of the UN building in Nigeria, the UN Secretary-General remarked that 'the attack on our presence in Nigeria, like previous assaults on the United Nations, targets not only our physical premises but our values and global missions of peace'.[13] Similarly, the Peace and Security Council of the African Union at its 303rd meeting in December 2011 strongly condemned Boko Haram terrorist attacks and those by

Al-Shabab, and it expressed 'deep concern over the worsening scourge of terrorism in Africa and the growing linkages between terrorism and transnational organised crime'.[14] The post-2009 increases in the activities of al-Qaeda in the land of Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) across the Sahel,[15] including the kidnapping of foreign nationals (mostly Europeans), involvement in organised crime (narcotics, weapons smuggling and human trafficking) and armed attacks against security forces, and at the same time Al-Shabab's continued control over much of Somalia put Africa in the global policy debate on radicalisation and violent extremism.[16] The emergence of Boko Haram, its bombing of the UN building and several Nigerian government targets, its destabilisation of Nigeria's North-East region and cross-border activities across the Sahel region largely confirmed prior fears and predictions about violent radicalisation taking root and further destabilising West Africa with implications for international security.

The focus here is on the strategic threats and challenges that radicalisation and violent extremism pose to West Africa, Africa and the international community at large. This does not preclude opportunities for enhanced security co-operation within and outside Africa, including improved intelligence-gathering, border security, standardised immigration procedures, improved operational efficiency of security forces, safeguarding of democratic governance, action to reduce transnational crime and cross-border proliferation of small arms and light weapons. Based on the trends discussed above, this paper proceeds to highlight, in a systematic way, seven plausible mutually reinforcing implications for African and international security.

Distortion of security realities

Based on the trends and patterns from West Africa, the spread of radicalisation and violent extremism in Africa is laden with risks of distorting and diluting the undercurrents of insecurity—this creates a situation whereby security issues and threats are viewed strictly through the lens of violent extremism. The strategic interests and counter-terrorism activities of major powers in Africa, especially the US and EU states, create the appropriate political clime for this. It is not impossible that subsisting armed conflicts in areas with substantial Muslim populations and which are underlined by genuine socio-economic and political grievances become labelled as violent extremism. In such cases, the militarised approach to violent extremism precludes addressing either the important sociopolitical undercurrents of armed conflict or the political

opportunism exploited by incumbents of power, and thus it further damages the prospect of sustainable peace.

This is clearly the case with the Tuareg conflict in Northern Mali that is now viewed through the narrow lens of violent extremism and is being misconstrued as part of the AQIM uprising in the Sahel. The Malian government has broken the terms of the 2002 negotiated peace and resorted to a military solution.[17] Similarly the Boko Haram crisis in Northern Nigeria is beginning to be seen from a violent extremism perspective, rather than alongside the perennial problem of youth disempowerment, ethno-political competition for political privileges and the failure of governance in Northern Nigeria and across Nigeria. The fact that armed clashes, deadly riots and violent demonstrations took place in Northern Nigeria prior to 2009 suggests that the Boko Haram crisis can hardly be reduced to violent extremism. There is also the reality of a 'politics' of counter-violent extremism across Africa—where incumbents of power exploit international strategic concerns about violent extremism in order to cement political power through the repression of political opponents.[18] Similarly to the Cold War era, co-operation and participation in counter-violent extremism is bound to be a key variable in the relations between African states and major powers.

Contagion

Contagion in this context is defined as the spread of radical ideas, ideals and movements. Like other old and extant themes in African security (natural resources, military coups, youth, etc.), there is a considerable possibility of contagion of radicalisation and violent extremism across communities, countries and regions in Africa and among African populations in the diaspora. From the four case studies included in this collection, there is emerging evidence that the onset of radicalisation is often linked to the contagion from other locations, especially the return of African Islamic scholars from Gulf States, Pakistan and Afghanistan, and cross-border travels in Africa. The rationale for the possible intensification of this trend are manifold. First is the similarity in subsisting structural conditions, not least poverty, youth bulge and alienation, corruption and bad governance, and the complicity of national and international actors in the mismanagement of natural resources. These structural factors do not in themselves cause radicalisation; however, they fuel the search for radical alternatives amongst the population, and radicalisation tends to emerge in such processes.[19] Already the Boko Haram crisis is spreading into communities

and states outside of the North-East region of Nigeria, and there is growing evidence of operational and ideological linkages among Boko Haram, AQIM and Al-Shabab.[20]

Second is that radicalisation and violent extremism tend to occur alongside subsisting ethno-religious and political tensions and conflicts. Given the spate of ethno-political conflicts in several African countries, especially countries with substantial Muslim populations, the spread of radical ideas and groups seems logical. Already, the flashpoints of radicalisation and violent extremism in Africa (Northern Nigeria, Northern Mali, Northern Ghana, Northern Niger, Northern Kenya, Mauritania and Chad) have subsisting ethno-political tensions and conflicts.

Third is geographical contiguity and the resulting cross-border ethno-religious ties, which harbour important social capital—trusts, alliance, obligations and relationships—that could be exploited to propagate radical ideas and movements. For instance, radicalisation and violent extremism in and around the Sahel is tangentially related to trans-border presence of the Hausa-Fulani and Tuareg ethnic groups. A corollary of this is the potential exploitation of 'alternatively governed' spaces (so called 'ungoverned spaces') by radical groups. Geographically, these spaces are usually in remote locations, often in and around border areas, and with peculiar environmental features (deserts, forests, etc.) that require extra resources for effective state presence and policing. They are however governed by unofficial sociocultural norms and practices and ethno-religious networks. Radical groups tend to operate in border regions for strategic reasons, including to set up training camps and to evade monitoring; engage in cross-border trade in legal and illegal commodities and criminality; conduct undetected movement of personnel, weapons and other operational materials; and exploit both cross-border ethno-religious ties and the genuine lack of capacity by African states to effectively police their often vast national borders.

The Sahel for example, is an eight million square kilometre area on the edge of the Sahara desert shared by several countries. Along the Sahel, Nigeria has a 4,500-kilometre border with Niger and Chad, with an estimated 480 regular crossing points.[21] The Sahel region was used to move small arms and light weapons into West Africa from Libya following the armed uprising against the Gaddafi regime in 2011.[22] In November 2011, Nigeria's security forces, following a search operation, recovered 6,000 assorted arms and over 5,000 rounds of ammunition from the border city of Maiduguri in the North-East region.[23]

Fourth is the advent of new media and its increasing accessibility across Africa and among Africans. Extant patterns already indicate the use of mobile phones though SMS messaging and voice and video recording, and DVD technologies as key means of sharing and spreading religious ideas. For example, the preaching and messages from the Boko Haram sect leaders were widely circulated across North-East Nigeria through these means. As more Africans, especially the youth, access new media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, their contact with and exposure to radical ideas is likely to increase. There is also the potential that radical ideas and materials in the form of recorded sermons and preaching could be shared across borders in Africa and with Africans in the diaspora. Finally, there is the possibility of a domino-effect element whereby publicised activities of one or more radical groups (Boko Haram) provide moral, material and operational inspiration for other radical groups to emerge or to transition to violent extremism. The Ghana case study, for example, contains indications that groups with radical tendencies in Ghana—the Ahlusunna Walijama'a, for example, already see Muslims in Northern Nigeria as more devout due to their demand for Sharia than those in Ghana. It is not implausible that agitation for the introduction of Sharia could increase in other African countries with a substantial Muslim population in the future.

Challenges to orthodox peace-building and conflict management regimes

The overlap of radicalisation and violent extremism with ethno-political conflicts and armed rebellion in Africa posed considerable challenges to extant conflict management systems and peace-building processes. First, it creates a conceptual and practical muddle between peace and counter-terrorism operations, especially where peacekeepers are deployed. As the experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan reveal, there are important posers, including whether faith-based violent extremist groups should be treated as rebel groups; what difference does intervention in conflicts linked to violent extremist groups have for the practice of peacekeeping and peace-building; and will violent extremist groups be allowed to transmute into political parties, contest elections and assume power. This is already the case with the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) where the mission criss-crosses the boundaries between an orthodox peace mission and counter-terrorism operations.

Second is the extent to which existing peace and security mechanisms in Africa are adaptable to the twin challenge of interrupting the process of radicalisation and stemming

the tide of violent extremism. Beyond setting the norms as outlined in the relevant African Union treaties,[24] it is unclear or doubtful how effective the new African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) could be in addressing radicalisation and violent extremism. At best, the APSA, like a majority of extant conflict management regimes, could be useful in counter-terrorism, rather than against radicalisation.

Third is the potential problem of inter-operability of two or more regional security systems in Africa as violent extremism is emerging as a trans-regional phenomenon. For instance, the activities of AQIM and Boko Haram transcend West, Central and North Africa, where the states along the Sahel belong to different regional groupings and are integrated into different regional security arrangements. Moreover, it is unclear what the implications of bilateral engagement across two or more regions, rather than regional arrangements for addressing violent extremism, could have for the emerging regional security complexes in Africa.

Inter-state tensions and interventions

The trans-border nature of radicalisation and violent extremism in Africa harbours significant risks of tensions and even clashes among African states and the possibilities of military intervention by external countries. Considering that radical groups operate in border areas and across two or more countries, acts of violent extremism in one country could generate claims and counter-claims regarding the complicity of neighbouring countries, or lead to cross-border raids degenerating into violations of territorial integrity, or highlight different perspectives and approaches to addressing the threats of violent extremism, or lead to counter-terrorism activities having unintended consequences (refugees and displacement, straining of ethno-religious relations and reprisal attacks against nationals) across borders.

There appears to be some evidence of this already in the context of relations between Mali and its Sahelian neighbours (Algeria and Mauritania) over its February 2010 release of four terrorist suspects owing to French pressures (in exchange for a kidnapped French citizen).[25] Similarly, the upsurge in Boko Haram attacks has prompted the deportation of nationals of neighbouring states (Chad, Niger and Cameroon) across Northern Nigeria. While this has yet to degenerate into official inter-state tensions, there is unstated stereotyping of certain foreign nationals (Chadian and Nigerien) as violent extremists. Also, allegations of Eritrean support for violent extremist groups (Al-Shabab) continue to

dominate or further worsen its already strained relations with countries in the Horn of Africa (Kenya, Uganda, Somalia and Djibouti). Based on an official briefing by the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the UN Security Council in December 2011 renewed and expanded its December 2009 sanctions on Eritrea for its support to violent extremist groups in the Horn of Africa.[26] By extension, suspicions and allegations of exporting or supporting radical ideas and groups in Africa could strain relations between African countries and Gulf and Asian states, including Saudi Arabia, Iran, Kuwait, Bahrain and Pakistan. This is already evidenced by tensions in Nigeria–Iran relations following the discovery of secret arms shipments from Iran into Nigeria at a Lagos seaport in October 2010.[27]

The possibility of direct foreign military intervention to disrupt, defeat and dismantle suspected or real terrorist infrastructures, especially where the security forces of the concerned African country(s) lack the capacity for such operations or there are time pressures, can hardly be precluded. There are burgeoning precedents for this, including the series of US unilateral operations (interventions) in 2011 to kill Osama Bin Laden in Pakistan, its air strike against Anwar Alwaqi in Yemen and drone strikes in Somalia.[28] The US, from its Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti and the Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) sites in Ethiopia, already conducts a series of overt and covert military operations, including reconnaissance missions and air strikes against suspected terrorists in Somalia, and provides logistical support to the African peace mission in Somalia—AMISOM. France has also participated in counter-terrorist military operations in the Sahel, including the ongoing Operation Serval to oust Islamic militants from Nothern Mali.[29]

Heightened militarisation of security and reversals of gains from security sector reform agendas

The emerging pattern of a strongly militarised response to radicalisation and violent extremism and its negative implications for the democratic control of security forces in Africa is likely to spread and intensify. The emerging template for this involves the passing of new anti-terror legislation that gives security forces sweeping powers (including minimal democratic oversight), retraining and reorganisation of security forces (largely the military) to reflect counter-violent extremism priorities, and increases in military expenditure to reflect new weapons acquisitions and other operational needs.[30] Understandably, the strategic threats from radicalisation and violent extremism, including

the negative impacts of ungoverned spaces, destabilisation of political order (democratic governance) and physical insecurity do make law enforcement, not necessarily a militarised one, a requisite component in countering violent extremism. However, other opportunistic considerations amongst government circles, especially in the military, and pressures, encouragement and support by major powers with strategic interests in Africa combine to make a militarised approach popular.

This approach undermines civil liberties, democratisation and the tenuous progress made in transforming the security sector in Africa. Apart from being insufficient and involving risks of worsening the security situation, the militarised approach also rolls back modest gains made in subjecting security forces, especially the military, to democratic oversight and greater transparency and accountability.[31] Also, the strong emphasis on the role of the military and the demand for new security infrastructures, such as surveillance, intelligence gathering and new weapon systems, raises the proportion of national budgets devoted to the military. Algeria and Nigeria, two countries involved in counter-violent extremism activities and using a militarised approach, justify continued increases in military budgets in terms of counter-violent extremism. In real terms, Algeria spent US$ 8.1 billion in 2011, an increase of 170 per cent over its 2002 figures and 44 per cent over the 2010 outlay.[32] Nigeria spent US$ 2.1 billion in 2011, an increase of 33 per cent over 2002 figures, and it is proposing a nominal outlay of US$ 6 billion in total security spending for 2012.[33] Such huge military expenditure increases the scope for corrupt practices and limits the amount of resources available for addressing the more important structural undercurrents of radicalisation and violent extremism.

Internationalisation of African security

The onset of radicalisation and violent extremism in West Africa and its potential contagion in Africa and amongst Africans in the diaspora further intensifies the process of internationalising African security issues. The process of internationalisation was kick-started by the outbreak of what Kaldor described as 'New Wars' in the post-Cold War era, whereby African security issues became interlocked with globalisation through linkages to international criminal networks, refugees, illicit trade in arms and weapons proliferation, and a series of external interventions through peace missions and unilateral military deployments. Where and when the internationalisation process is reduced to increased military visibility and direct intervention by external actors, it harbours a considerable risk

of worsening Africa's security dynamic, not least by provoking widespread anger and resistance amongst African Muslims.

Radicalisation and violent extremism in West Africa and across the Sahel is already on the continental and global security policy agenda, and it is a key issue in the geo-strategic threat assessment of the UN and major powers. In 2007, the US established a separate Unified Combatant Command for Africa (AFRICOM) as a robust mechanism for protecting American national interests, including countering violent extremism in Africa. The EU, through its 2005 Counter-Terrorism Strategy and 2007 Africa–EU Strategic Partnership, expressly made counter-violent extremism in Africa a topmost priority. Another dimension of this impact lies in the prospect of increased external military activities, both the presence of units and possibly intervention in Africa. An added possibility for this lies in the need to protect the extraction and supply of energy resources from Africa.[34]

Major powers, notably the US and France, have initiated specialist capacity-building programmes in counter-violent extremism for African militaries in the form of training and supply of logistics and other operational materials. The US launched the Pan Sahel Initiative (PSI), later turned to the Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP), in 2005 and the Partnership for Regional East African Counter-Terrorism (PREACT) in 2009 to train and equip national armies of the countries along the Sahel and East Africa, respectively.[35] The US and France, for example, have expanded their military presence through operational bases in Djibouti and are involved with other major powers in counter-piracy naval patrols off the Gulf of Aden and Gulf of Guinea. The US has forward operating bases for drones in Ethiopia and conducts air operations in Somalia.

Conclusion

This article argued and highlighted the key implications of emerging patterns in radicalisation and violent extremism in West Africa for African and international security to be the distortion and obscuring of the structural undercurrents of insecurity in Africa. It argued that current responses to radicalisation and violent extremism is patterned to reflect the strategic interests of African incumbents of power and their international collaborators, rather than alongside those of African citizens; it is organised as top-down, official government-to-government co-operation rather than to incorporate civil society perspectives, resources and actors; and, contrary to the evolving security architecture in

Africa, RECs and regional mechanisms have so far failed to respond to the challenges of radicalisation and violent extremism. It is argued that this pattern is insufficient and incapable of addressing the real and imagined challenges posed by radicalisation and violent extremism in a sustainable way.

Other potential implications of radicalisation and violent extremism include contagion across borders and amongst Africans in the diaspora; the continued militarisation of security and rolling back of modest gains made from security sector reform programmes; conceptual, policy and operational dilemmas for orthodox conflict management mechanisms at regional, continental and international levels; potential rise in inter-state tensions and interventions; and the internationalisation of African security, likely to be dominated by increased visibility of external military activities, including presence and intervention in Africa, that could be counter-productive over the long term.

Endnotes

1. The real name of the group is Jama'atul Ahlus Sunna Li Da'awatis Jihad (JASLIDAT), but is generally known as Boko Haram (Western education or culture or civilisation is sin). It was formed in 2002 in the North-East city of Maiduguri and later spread to neighbouring states in the region. Following the killing of its founder (Mohammed Yussuf) in July 2009 in armed clashes with the Nigerian security forces, its members regrouped and launched more sophisticated and deadlier attacks in the North-East and some other major cities in Northern Nigeria. See 'How we Formed Boko Haram, by Spokesman'. *Vanguard*, 27 July 2011.

2. Abrahamsen and Williams, *Security Beyond the State*, 3.

3. Keenan, *The Dark Sahara*.

4. Mainuddin, *Religion and Politics in the Developing World*, 2.

5. 'Political Islam' was coined in the 1970s to describe the belief that Islam provides the most appropriate basis for a community and its political, economic, legal and social organisation. Since the onset of the US-led GWoT, the term has been used to qualify Islamist movements involved in terrorism. See Le Sage, 'Terrorism Threats and Vulnerabilities in Africa', 31.

6. Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, 25.

7. Rice, 'Africa and the War on Global Terrorism', 12.

8. Le Sage, 'Terrorism Threats and Vulnerabilities in Africa', 8.

9. UN General Assembly, 'Resolution 60/288', 4–5.

10. UN Security Council, 'Resolution 1963', para.3.

11. UN General Assembly, 'Resolution 64/297', para. 6.

12. Hutchful, 'ECOWAS Counter-Terrorism Efforts', 114.

13. 'Nigeria's Terror Attack, Threat to Global Peace'. *Nigerian Guardian*, 20 September 2011.

14. AU, 'AU PSC', paras. 3 and 4.

15. The 2007 merger of the Algerian Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) and al-Qaeda led to the formation of AQIM. See Le Sage, 'Terrorism Threats and Vulnerabilities in Africa', 20–21.

16. For instance, between July and August 2011, AQIM was responsible for at least 32 attacks against Algerian security forces. See 'North Africa's Sahel: The Next Terrorism Hot Spot?'. *Time World*, 12 September 2011.

17. BBC News Africa, 'Dozens of Tuareg Rebels Dead in Mali Clash, Says Army', 20 January 2012.

18. International Commission of Jurists, *E-Bulletin on Counter-Terrorism*, 3.

19. Hutchful and Aning, 'Political Economy of Conflict', 207.

20. 'Boko Haram has Links with al-Qaeda Algerian Minister'. *The Nation*, 14 November 2011; and 'Boko Haram Makes World Terrorists List'. *Sun News*, 18 November 2011.

21. 'Arms Inflow From Northern Borders Intensifies'. *Nigerian Tribune*, 3 October 2011.

22. 'ECOWAS Raises Alarm over Illegal Arms Shipments'. *Nigerian Guardian*, 22 June 2011.

23. 'JTF Seizes 5,000 Arms in Maiduguri House-To-House Search'. *Nigerian Punch*, 4 November 2011.

24. These are the 1999 Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism, the September 2002 Algiers Plan of Action of the AU for the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism, and the 2004 Protocol to the Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism.
25. US Department of State, *Country Reports*, 20. See also Renard, 'Terrorism and other Transnational Threats', 3.
26. UN News Centre, 'Security Council Expands Sanctions on Eritrea'.
27. BBC News Africa, 'Nigeria Reports Seized Iranian Arms Shipment to UN', 16 November 2010.
28. 'US Drone Targets Two Leaders of Somali Group Allied with al-Qaeda, Official Says'. *Washington Post*, 29 June 2011.
29. Keenan, 'A New Crisis in the Sahel'.
30. Luckham, 'Military, Militarisation and Democratisation', 24.
31. Olonisakin, 'How 9/11 Derailed African Peace'.
32. Perlo-Freeman et al., 'Military Expenditure'.
33. 'Security: FG to Spend Billions on Weapons'. *Daily Trust*, 19 December 2011.
34. Obi, 'Terrorism in West Africa', 88.
35. US Department of State, *Country Reports*, 12.

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