



Terrorist attacks in West Africa: common evil or internal frustrations?

Dr. Yawo O. Kondo * International Studies, University of Nebraska* Health Informatics Administration, University of Maryland*Information Technology, Walden University* Contact: Konyaw4310@gmail.com

Abstract

West Africa has in recent years become a volatile region plagued with terrorist attacks from varied internationally-acclaimed groups. These terror activities have caused deaths, insecurity, and lack of peace throughout the region as affected countries struggle to contain the situation and restore law and order. The executive power in the region plays an instrumental role in ensuring that individual countries undertake measures towards solving the volatile conditions. The Presidents in affected countries utilize the legal mandate bestowed in their office to institute laws and formulate government structures to help redress the scenario. This article revisits the West African situation and evaluates the measures and practices undertaken to quell the terrorist acts. The article illustrates the practical situation in individual countries such as Mali, Benin, Nigeria, and Togo, with a view of drawing comparisons and conclusions on the way forward in seeking lasting solutions.

Countries around the world continue to face various types of crises that put pressure on the authorities to seek lasting solutions. Terrorism and economic frustrations are among the challenges that have become commonplace on a global scale and are causing untold unrest for nations (Ngujoi, Gabsa, & Nkougou, 2021). Different countries have put in place various mechanisms to address these issues that afflict them based on their organizational structures and constitutional mandates that confer legal powers on public office holders (Ejime, 2017). The extent to which these different arbitration mechanisms successfully resolve country-related crises varies considerably. This article reflects on the frustration of comparing insecurity in southern Burkina Faso to the northern part of Togo, Ghana, and Benin to Mali. The repeated comments of some analysts, parliamentarians, and even intellectuals who are political is not at all a trivial act. Wouldn't it be obvious to see the governance, the political economic, the political sociology, and the link between security and development in these regions before any jihadist terrorist involvement holistically?

In West Africa, a systematic trend seems familiar to the whole region concerning how the executive, especially the presidents, are involved in crisis management. Most West African Presidents head government structures as the executive, with the powers bestowed upon them including the establishment of governments. Their roles extend to maintaining security, peace, and stability, which are crucial for socio-economic development and effective regional integration (Prah & Chanimbe, 2021).

West African presidents also collaborate with other regional heads of state under the auspices of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to combat terrorism (Maiangwa, 2021). For example, one of the West African countries that suffer the threat of terrorism is Mali, an ECOWAS member state. The executive powers allow the Head of State to coordinate with development partners, including the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU), the World Bank, and other international partners around the world. Despite the multiple military agreements between Mali and international institutions, the country struggles to regain tranquility, strengthen democratic



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institutions, trade, and investment, and participate in the Trans-Saharan Partnership to Combat Terrorism (Wing, 2013).

Burkina Faso is one of the West African countries plagued by numerous crises that threaten its security and cause economic frustrations of untold proportions. Since 2011, the country has seen groups linked to the Islamic State and al-Qaeda infiltrate from neighboring Mali and integrate into the north and east of the country (United Nations, 2020). The then President of Burkina Faso exercised his role as Chief Executive to enforce several binding instruments, including the protocols and conventions on conflict prevention, resolution, and management (United Nations, 2020).

Terrorist cells from the Sahel have been heading to the Gulf of Guinea for years. For some time, the northern province of the countries surrounding southern Burkina Faso, in particular, Togo and Benin, have suffered human losses. These losses illustrate the ability of violent extremist groups to organize attacks even in these countries to exploit the porosity of borders (Mroszczyk & Abrahms, 2021). The turn of events describe how Togo recorded its 3rd terrorist attack in less than a year. Before these three incidents, there was no known terrorist group in the country (D'Amato & Baldaro, 2022). The President of the Republic of Togo has recently become involved in diplomacy to initiate the Malian crisis. Can we defacto make a connection between the two?

The tendency to confuse these different conflicts in the countries is understandable. West African countries share the same common denominator evils in terms of the terrorist attacks witnessed. In some regions where insecurity is rife, the lack of basic infrastructure and the complexity of local dynamics (contempt between the military and the civilian, corruption, nepotism, poor governance) are almost non-existent.

The presidents of most West African countries also play a regular monitoring and surveillance role, gathering up-to-date information on compliance with laws aimed at addressing gaps in their government's security and peace laws (Maiangwa, 2021). For example, Sierra Leone's President ratified the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime in 2014 as part of measures to strengthen gaps in the country's laws (Vorath, 2014). In the same vein, the Accra Initiative came into being, establishing a military alliance of coastal countries. The aim of the Initiative entailed conducting joint operations to prevent terrorism from spreading from the Sahel and Nigeria to the coastal countries of West Africa and fighting organized crime in border areas (Noussi & Tametong, 2022). Overall, the trend in West Africa illustrates a practice where leaders legally enjoy powers to initiate the restriction of their governments and formulate laws to improve the ability to deal with complex and challenging issues such as terrorism. Leaders have the legal authority to integrate with partners and international organizations to increase the government's response to such crisis scenarios.

It is pretty challenging to seek peace without seeking to privilege endogenous harmony. An impressive military apparatus will not do much if the population feels marginalized and the management is in the hands of the Elite and a minority close to the ruling class. The importance and centrality of counter-terrorism efforts must be in harmony



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with efforts to resolve internal conflicts. West Africa countries must succeed in putting the separation of power into practice. The promotion of accountability and good governance must be achieved through a moral and physical audit. It is absurd to have elected representatives who do not recognize themselves as having sufficient provisions for regulating and controlling executive and legislative activities.

Independent civil society organizations should be more active in denouncing unethical behavior by political elites, while the judiciary should be more independent in dispensing justice. Organizing civil society is vital for democratic purposes and consolidating good governance. This purpose is achievable through education and capacity training workshops. In this way, civil society will undoubtedly play a key role in defending the rights of disadvantaged communities in providing public services where governments have shown mistrust.

In terrorist sub-threats, civil societies are either federated to government actions or see their room for maneuver reduced to nothing. This insecurity at our borders emerges as a necessary step to redefine our values to conceive of any hope of peace, good governance, and reconciliation, rather than a perpetual posture of conflicts. It is difficult to compare the terrorist attacks in Mali with those in southern Burkina Faso given the lack of quantitative data. However, the governments of these countries can be proactive in contributing to existing endogenous factors in these regions.



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