AFRICA POLICY BRIEF

Tackling terror in Africa: what local roles for insurgency groups?

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This Africa Policy Brief is based on the recently published book *Time for a new approach on terror in Africa?* In line with the conclusions of the book, this policy brief wants to tackle dominant perspectives on insurgency groups in Africa. It argues for a more nuanced understanding of these groups, which also looks into their roles in local societies.

RESEARCH ON TERRORISM IN AFRICA: 'IT'S ALL ABOUT CONTEXT'

One of the current discussions in research on terrorism evolves around the quest for more context-specific research and a more nuanced response to the question to what brings people to commit terrorist violence.[1] While acknowledging the rather limited amount of terrorism research on Africa currently available, Adam Dolnik makes a case for the need for training in high-risk ethnography and for more

systematic academic field research on terrorism.[2] This research should look into the social embeddedness of insurgency groups in order to grasp the contextual complexities of terrorism in Africa.

Such an approach reveals that violence committed by insurgency groups in Africa, in many cases starts out as acts guided by political or social grievances and evolves into more radicalised forms of violence, like terror attacks, due to (inadequate) responses by (local) governments.[3] Detailed contextual knowledge of the political, economic and social intricacies of any country, region or group is thus a prerequisite to a fine-grained understanding of terrorism in Africa. As McGregor argues in his contribution to *Time for a new approach on terror in Africa?*, when we speak about terrorism in an African context, it might even be more suitable

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[1] Smid, A.P. 2014 Comments on Marc Sageman's Polemic "Stagnation in Terrorism Research", Terrorism and Political Violence p. 6

[2] Dolnik, A. 2013 Conducting Terrorism Field Research London, New York: Routledge p1-11 and p 224-250.

[3] Smid uses the Stuart Hamphire definition of political violence and refers to the fact that states have the inclination to label political violence as terrorism. A.P. Smid 2014 Comments on Marc Sageman's Polemic "Stagnation in Terrorism Research", Terrorism and Political Violence p.5

to talk about proxy warfare[4] or insurgencies. Van Merve illustrated how criminal networks copy terrorist tactics and vice versa to enlarge their action radius and mutually reinforce each other's activities.[5] In addition to being careful about labeling political violence as terrorism, we should also look at how governments in their discourse reduce political violence to terrorism in order to delegitimise or criminalise it.[6] Again, more systematic academic research based on field research is needed to paint a more nuanced picture of how insurgency groups function internally as well as in their respective communities on any continent.

Of course, acts of terror should be obstructed and in the long term prevented but the question is: how? Military interventions and counter-terrorism measures have shown that they do not necessarily improve the situation on the ground. This is where more systematic research comes in. A more nuanced perspective on terrorism in Africa should lead to a more diversified approach. Such approach should take into account the roles these groups play in their local societies: why do insurgency groups receive local support; what does that say about the larger political context in which these groups operate?

The following paragraphs illustrate how such approach could look like. Two groups (Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram) being labelled as terrorist organisations will be discussed. A focus on the larger context in which they operate reveal that these groups have specific roles in local society, which provide them with local

support because they reflect responsibilities that the local state no longer guarantees. .

HARAKAT AL-SHABAAB: GROWN OUT OF THE NEED FOR SECURITY?

Roland Marchal illustrates in his historical background on Al-Shabaab that the most prominent enemies of Al-Shabaab, Ethiopia and the US, were instrumental in the promotion of its growth. The US supported warlords that destabilised Somali politics from 2001 to 2006, while Ethiopia's armed intervention of late 2006 to January 2009 was key to the later support for Al-Shabaab. These two developments allowed the movement to take root in Somali society, despite it initial rejection[7].

The first Islamic courts were installed due to a local need for the restoration of a sense of law and order. They were also meant as a countermove to the warlords that had left the clan rules behind. These courts were clan based and were not controlled by a specific Islamic ideology The youth movement Harakat Al-Shabaab was created to make sure that the Islamic courts were not incorporated into the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) at the 2002 Somali Reconciliation Conference in Kenya, as had happened after the Somalia National Peace Conference held in Djibouti in 2000[8].

Al-Shabaab was founded around 2005 and used religion as a political tool to respond to the need for security, justice and order of the Somalis. Public goods, as they argued, that were not provided by the clan-based warlords, the Sharia Courts or the TFG. Al-Shabaab started reorganising Somali society in the cities under their control and filled the security and justice void left by the government and the

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[4] A war instigated by a major power which does not itself become involved

[5] Van Merwe 2014 The Crime-Terror continuum: the case of Africa in JC Hoste & J. Godin 2014 Time for a new approach on terror in Africa? p. 37-50.

[6] Dolnik, A. 2013 Conducting Terrorism Field Research London, New York: Routledge p1-11

[7] Marchal, R. 2011 The rise of a Jihadi Movement in a country at war

[8] Somali peace process http://amisom-au.org/about-somalia/somali-peace-process/

international community. Hansen (2013)[9] described that in 2009-2010, Al-Shabaab developed governance structures and centralised institutions besides the executive and the larger shura, much resembling a political regime. The most important institution that was established was the Ministry of Intelligence and Internal Security, which had to create unity within the organisation. This Maktabatu Amniyat is still an important tool for centralisation directly controlled by Amir Godane[10] and is in charge of internal justice. It is feared within Al-Shabaab because it functions as an intelligence agency. A second institution is the Maktabatu Da'wa or the Ministry that is responsible for the diffusion of Al-Shabaab's interpretation of Islam and Sharia. This organisation is important for the attempts of the Al-Shabaab leadership to standardise religious interpretation down to the local level; as part of this, attempts were even made to standardise the curriculum of schools in Southern Somalia. This department was also very important for the formulation of fatwas regulating local justice, one of the pillars of Al-Shabaab's influence. The third institution was the justice system that could be divided into three levels of which the first one was the militia command, which could hand out punishments for minor offences like Western hairstyles, lack of beards, offensive clothing, playing music etcetera. The second and third level, were

regional and district courts. The district courts in Mogadishu and Baidoa effectively functioned and passed sentences daily. The lower courts handled marriage ceremonies. Although sentences were not standardised, there was cooperation between the courts.

Al-Shabaab as an organisation has had to reinvent itself over time as a response to the challenges it was facing. The governance structures described above, have been at the core of what gave it support in the local community: it provided them a mechanism to provide protection and justice and gave them a base for recruitment. This is where the two faces of Al-Shabaab meet: besides creating a sense of unity within the organisation, these structures create a sense of security for the population it controls and provide an ideal recruitment platform. For these recruitment purposes, Al-Shabaab continuously plays on continuums of tension in Somalia and the Horn: nationalism versus international jihadism or clanism versus wider tribal affiliations. One of the local recruitment strategies feeds on the anti-Ethiopian sentiments dating back to the Ethiopian invasion/intervention in Somalia between 2006 and 2009, which greatly reinforced Al-Shabaab's position.

This short description of the internal organisation of Al-Shabaab illustrates the fact that they do have a local role and are more locally embedded than often assumed. They provide a structure and rules for people to live by and offer services the state no longer provides: security, justice and jobs. Although these structures are fluid and tend to change over time, they remained operational. It is thus important that further research documents these dynamics and shifts. Furthermore, it illustrates the need for a context driven nuanced approach to these insurgency groups if any policy initiative wants to gain traction.

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[9] Hansen, S.J. 2013 Al-Shabaab in Somalia. The history and ideology of a militant Islamist group 2005-2012. Hurst & Compagnie London.

[10] Ahmed Aw Abdi Mahmoud Godane was a product of the Al-Ittihad al-Islamiya (AIAI) patronage network. Godane from the Isaq Arab clan, had been one of the best students of the Omar Bin Khadaab Islamic school in Hargeisa, the second largest city in Somalia after Mogadishu. He studied in Sudan and Pakistan and travelled to Afghanistan. He returned to Somaliland in 2001 and became involved in the Islamic Courts in Mogadishu in 2002. His influence grew as the Al-Shabaab's influence in the Islamic Courts became paramount.

JAMA'ATU AHLIS SUNNA LIDDA'AWATI OR BOKO HARAM: A RESPONSE TO DRIVERS OF CONFLICT?

The following paragraphs illustrate how Boko Haram evolved from an organisation in Northern Nigeria that wanted to work with the Nigerian government to organise Islamic states in Northern Nigeria, to an organisation that currently fights that same state because their grievances were never taken serious. The initial attraction of Boko Haram for the local population in Northern Nigeria was that they provided services including jobs for its members, something that the state could not provide.

The principal goal of the Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati or Boko Haram is to create a strict Islamic state in the north of Nigeria that would address the conflict drivers of society, including corruption and bad governance but not by violent means. Boko Haram clearly exploits the political, socio-economic and ethno-religious fault lines of society, as does the (military) response of the Nigerian government. It has not only relocated the guerrilla attacks of Boko Haram, it also used Boko Haram as a tag to rid themselves of opponents of the regime.[11] Nigerians are as afraid of the Joint Military Task Force as they are of Boko Haram, whose abusive tactics at times strengthen the Islamist group's narrative.[12] The Boko Haram attacks in the wake of the January 20th statement of newly appointed chief of defence staff Air Marshal Alex Badeh, who said that the security situation in the northeast had to be brought to a complete stop before April 2014, are a case in point.[13]

The recent international attention for the abduction of the Chibok girls has reinforced President Jonathan position to ask for an extension of the state of emergency in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states.[14] If this is the result of the implementation of the "soft approach" announced by National Security Adviser Mohammed Sambo Dasuki, on the 18th of March 2014, a lot leaves to be desired.[15] The state of emergency which as been upheld for a year now in the three states mentioned afore has yielded very little results, the attacks of Boko Haram have even become more violent than ever before. President Jonathan also refused negotiations with Boko Haram on an exchange of imprisoned members for the schoolgirls due to the international attention, because he does not want to be perceived as a weak leader[16].

The current strategy of the Nigerian Government does not even begin to take into account that at the basis of the support for Boko Haram, and other similar groups, lay structural drivers of conflict that are not sufficiently addressed by the government. These factors include corruption, high tolerance and impunity for violence, tribalism and inter-communal violence, economic deprivation of youth and instrumentalisation of religion for political purposes. Religion seems to be the language of politics in Nigeria exploited by state and non-state actors alike to demonise

[11] Interview of the author with a respondent on the situation in Nigeria 17/01/14
[12] Spiraling Violence. Boko Haram Attacks and Security Forces Abuses in Nigeria Human Rights Watch October 2012. p 10.
[13] Boko Haram 'deadline' not literal: Nigerian military AFP 05/02/14 http://www.aafonline.co.za/news/boko-haram-deadline-not-literal-nigerian-military?goback=%2Egde_2325252_member_5836850337104818180
[14] Jonathan seeks extension of state of emergency Daly Trust 13 May 2014 http://www.dailytrust.info/top-stories/23953-jonathan-seeks-extension-of-state-of-emergency
[15] Briefing by Dasuki on Nigeria's soft approach in counter terrorism 18 March 2014 http://ireports-ng.com/2014/03/18/nigerias-soft-approach-to-countering-terrorism-by-mohammed-sambo-dasuki/
[16] http://www.rfi.fr/emission/20140513-gilles-yabi-consultant-independant-afrique-ouest/

opponents.[17] Once framed in religious discourse, the potential for violence is easily torched. The repeated inter-communal violence between Muslims and Christians in North and South Jos, Plateau State and Kaduna State are cases in point and each time the interventions of the Federal Government of Nigeria were late or partial. Boko Haram has even made reference to the violence in Jos as a reason for their acts.[18] As long as these drivers of conflict are not addressed, the breading ground for extremism will not cease to exist.

Before 2009, Boko Haram had support from the political elite in Borno State because they relied on the popular support for their leader Muhammed Yusuf,[19] who had a clear goal to establish an Islamic government yet not through a violent strategy.[20] In the early 2000s, he was involved in official efforts to introduce and implement Sharia in several northern states. The failure to achieve this helps to explain Muslim youths' anger with their government. They accused the government of "deception" and "insincerity" subsequently called for an authentic Islamist revolution.[21] But being a member of Boko Haram under Muhammed Yusuf's leadership at that time also meant that the organisation would provide social and other services that the state did or could not deliver. This membership provided new social statuses for young people through arranging marriages and setting up households, jobs or traineeships through the network of the group.

After 2009, when Abubakar Shekau took over, the organisation went underground and further radicalised. One of the reasons they put forward for their change in approach is the killing of Muhammed Yusuf by Nigerian security forces. Under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau, however, the claims and demands of the organisation become less clear even if Boko Haram still asks for the application of Sharia law. More importantly even is their shift in strategy, which links their political claims to criminal acts such as hostage taking and attacks on banks.

According to Pérouse de Montclos, there is another phenomenon that can be added to this mix and which will be probably played out during the next general and Presidential elections foreseen in February 2015: the mobilisation of segments of Boko Haram by local politicians. Traditionally, local election candidates hire youth gangs to physically eliminate their opponents. During the 2003 elections, Boko Haram entered into this business. Ali Modi Sheriff, candidate for the post of governor of Borno State, made a deal with Mohammed Yusuf to support his candidacy through mosques. This deal also included mobilising Boko Haram militants to put pressure on the electorate. Pérouse de Montclos has indications that this same system is being put in place for the elections of 2015[22].

Also the Nigerian government has already used Boko Haram as a political tool to get rid of

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[17] International Crisis Group "Northern Nigeria: Background to Conflict", International Crisis Group Africa Report no. 168. p. 21

[18] Leave Everything to God. Accountability for Inter- Communal Violence in Plateau and Kaduna States, Nigeria Human Rights Watch December 2013. p 72.

[19] Olojo, A. 2013 Nigeria's troubled North: Interrogating the Drivers of Public Support for Boko Haram. ICCT Research Paper p. 5.

[20] International Crisis Group Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II): The Boko Haram Insurgency Africa Report N°216 p. 10

[21] Idem p. 7

[22] Au Nigeria, « Boko Haram élimine des villages entiers suspectés d'avoir collaboré avec le pouvoir » Le Monde March 18 2014 http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2014/0 3/18/au-nigeria-boko-haram-elimine-des-villages-entiers-suspectes-d-avoir-collabore-avec-le-pouvoir_4385171_3212.html

political opponents in preparation of the 2015 elections. A striking example of this practice is the suspension of the Central Bank governor Lamido Sanusi. Sanusi alleged that corruption within Nigeria's petroleum industry meant that the oil production did not match its revenue and so billions of dollars had gone missing. The President reacted by suspending Sanusi and accused him of financing Boko Haram in March 2014. In June 2014, Sanusi has been appointed as new emir of Kano, yet it remains to be seen how his relations with the President will be in his new function.[23]

CONCLUSION

This brief description of Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram shows the need for a more nuanced perspective on terrorist groups. Both groups have at least two faces: one with which they commit acts that terrorise people and another with which they provide services to their local community that are no longer provided by the state: security, justice and even social services which they use to gain local support and recruit people .

Reports This description also illustrates that a security approach alone will not solve the threat of insurgency groups. It seems crucial from the examples that states like Somalia, Nigeria etc. should take up their responsibilities. The international community should not allow governments to hide behind the threat of terrorism to escape their responsibilities as protectors of their people. The demand to tackle corruption, high tolerance and impunity for violence, tribalism, inter-communal violence and economic deprivation of youth are legitimate

and those grievances should be addressed by national and local policy not by military intervention.

Any effective policy will have to take into account that these organisations have multiple functions and faces that each require specific and adapted responses. A long-term inclusive political dialogue with all parties involved: states, political parties, civil society, academia and representatives of these insurgent groups and/or terrorist organisations and the international community should be initiated to curb the increasing violence on all sides.

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[23] Lamido Sanusi named as new emir of Kano in Nigeria
http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-27756492
Sadatchy, P. 2014 Boko Haram: un an sous état d'urgence GRIP Brussels p. 14.