



REPORT

Africa: The Playground of Power Players and Counterterrorism Guises

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Introduction

Since the independence of the last of its colonies, Algeria, in 1962, France has maintained a system of dominance in the continent through 'France Afrique', where bases, troops and influence over political systems have been maintained over its former colonies in the continent.

This control has enabled France to maintain power over security matters in the region and solidified its position as the buffer between the West and the crises in the continent. However, the discovery of oil reserves in the Gulf of Guinea in the 1960s introduced a new player seeking control, contesting France's dominance: the United States.

During the Cold War, Africa became a battleground for both economic and military investments between namely the US and France. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, the US began a series of humanitarian interventions in the Horn of Africa, beginning with the civil war in Somalia in 1992. A few years later, a new threat for Washington emerged in the form of Al-Qaeda (AQ), after the US embassies of Kenya and Tanzania were targeted by the group in 1998.

In response to the 2001 attack on the World Trade Centre, the US launched the War on Terror which would permanently re-configure the region. The US returned to the Horn of Africa to set up its first military base in Djibouti to observe arms exchange and the movement of foreign groups in what they deemed a corridor of terrorism of the Sahel, spanning from Senegal eastward to Sudan. Fleeing militants from fighting in Afghanistan from the 1970s, via recuperation in Sudan, began settling in their native North and West Africa cementing their threat in the continent.

In 2003, the kidnapping of over 30 tourists, headed by an Algerian army veteran, Amari Saifi, provoked the Pan-Sahel Initiative, where the US invested equipment and intelligence in Chad, Mali, Niger

and Mauritania. The initiative was expanded in 2005 into the more robust Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Programme (TSCP) where Sahelian state security apparatuses would be trained by the US in order to do undertake their own counterterrorism exercises and develop intelligence useful to the US fight against terrorism. The perceived success of the organisation gave birth to another American military initiative in 2007, the US Africa Command (AFRICOM), which would allow the US to be better placed to monitor and patrol the continent and consolidate its correlated interests of counterterror initiatives and regional influence. Like France, the US presence in Africa needed a guise by which a desired long-term stay could be justified. Counterterrorism was the perfect guise needed to not only fulfil its security needs but to also maintain access to Africa's riches which France, China and others also sought dominance over. The looming energy crisis stipulated in the Dick Cheney report reiterated the strategic importance of ensuring control over Africa's oil, minerals, land and even water under the desert.

The establishment of a CIA base in Mali and a AFRICOM headquarters in Africa however was a step too far for African leaders and was resisted by none more vigorously than Libya's former pan-Africanist head, Muammar Gaddafi, with his vision of African unity and integration removed from dependence on the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank. The onset of the Arab Spring in 2011 proved timely for the US and French to put an end to Gaddafi's rhetoric. NATO's bombing campaign may have succeeded in eliciting Gaddafi's capture and subsequent death but it failed to stop Gaddafi's large arsenal from falling into the hands of militant groups using the chaos for their own ambitions. Beneficiaries included the Tuareg in Mali who formed the MNLA (The National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad) offensive in Bamako against the government in 2012. Seasoned armed groups in the area, headed by mainly Algerians, took advantage of the lawlessness of northern Mali to begin their own recruitment drives and operations through newly formed alliances.

The common enemy of the Malian state forged an alliance of convenience between the non-state actors and the Tuareg and the impending dominance sent alarm bells in the West. France was the first to act against the rebels in Mali and deployed 4,000 troops to the country to reclaim the North. Though temporarily successful in containing the terrorist threat in Mali, Operation Serval was used by the French to assert power control in the continent once again. French support of some Tuareg autonomy forced the Southern authorities to adhere to French proposals which paved the way for a political intervention which masked control for the country's vital vast uranium sites (Shadow War in the Sahara, 2017).

Seven years later and terrorism in the continent remains ever present with new militant alliances vying for control in areas the US and France were once militarily present in. Africa still remains a profit centre for the military industrial complex with millions of dollars spent on arms manufacturers and private contractors. The War on Terror has become a convenient shadow war for a monopoly over the continents' vast reserves between old and new powers to ensure their future in a world of shrinking resources. However, the pertinent question remains in observing how effective the presence of Western powers in counterterrorism initiatives has been in impeding the terror threat or indeed the measures, or lack of, undertaken by regional states working with or being denied the chance of collaborative assistance by external powers driven by their own interests.



A damaged vehicle is seen as team arrives to clean scene after a terror attack carried out with a bomb-laden vehicle in the Somali capital Mogadishu which killed at least 18 people and wounded 40 others, on March 01, 2019 in Mogadishu, Somalia. Al-Qaeda-affiliated terrorist group al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the suicide car bomb attack on a hotel in Mogadishu. (Sadak Mohamed - AA)



The French peacekeeping troops in Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic, insisted on Tuesday that they are disarming all armed rebels, a contention questioned by many Muslims. (Assed Baig - AA)

The Region's Crises

The simultaneous destabilisation of several Saharan and Sahelian countries has benefited the militant groups present and caused the security situation to deteriorate at an alarming rate, affecting not only the stability of individual states but exacerbating the region's established cross-border terrorism. While the reasons for the emergence and the intensifying trend of terrorism in the region may vary, there are nevertheless some commonalities to observe. The region is characterised by scarce economic opportunities, fierce competition, security services are ineffective or indiscriminate and there is a complex mix of ideologies, ethnicities, and nationalism.

The injustice resulting from the unequal distribution of wealth and the scale of poverty in the region has often justified the fighting in order to alleviate poverty and to target those responsible, which has allowed for the Sahel to become a fertile ground for radicalisation (Porter & Sheehan, 2014). The lack of economic opportunities can

be linked primarily to poor governance either through totalitarianism or absence, creating a suitable environment for exploitation by terrorist groups. This is most evident in the power vacuum in Libya, the weak authority in Somalia, and the quasi-absence of the state in northern Nigeria and Mali.

The Sinai in Egypt, or the Libyan cities of Derna and Sirte, the western stretch of Tunisia's Kasserine Governorate, and parts of Algeria, Morocco, Mali, and Niger have been rife with militancy over the years (Canada Service, 2016). The so-called Arab Spring ended up creating the ripe conditions for militant non-state actors to develop and thrive, evident in Libya, where the power vacuum and split between East and West, following the ousting of Gaddafi, tipped the delicate tribal balance and divergent alliances into violence (Porter & Sheehan, 2014).

Non-state actors' cross-border connections have since amplified: the alliances and breakaways of Boko Haram, Al-

Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Ansar al-Shari'a in Libya and the Uqba ibn Nafi Brigade in Tunisia best exemplifies this but also complicates solutions further to an issue that cannot be isolated into a single entity or place. After 2011, Militant groups in southern Libya revived ties to northern Niger and the insurgency in the region following the Tuareg rebellion over the economic marginalisation in the neglected north was soon underway. The rebellion was opportunisted by AQIM and other extremist groups to perpetuate conditions conducive to radicalisation which has been a strategy also adopted by Daesh in utilising local vulnerabilities to deter national development and stimulate terrorism apparatuses in sectors like arms trade (Canada Service, 2016).

Initially, the appeal of Daesh centred around its self-proclaimed Caliphate and quick territorial expansion. However, with its decline from 2016 onwards, so too did the group's success at attracting foreign fighters and maintaining alliances. The Daesh problem then evolved into the post-Daesh era where North African states had to respond to the presence of returning battle-hardened fighters. The AQ issue, on the other hand, has remained a constant threat namely due to its strategy of survival which relies on popular uprisings, alliances of armed groups and local sensitivity maneuverings driven by a greater sense of affiliation to the local than the transnational ("Terrorism and Counter-terrorism: New Challenges for the European Union", 2017). However the group has also survived on a strong drive to operate transnationally as seen in recent videos of Usama Bin Laden's son or rhetoric driven by Aymen al Zawahiri which suggests that in order to avoid losing territory or expanding their reach of influence, the group has needed to operate outside of the local population it is embedded in to continue operating across borders and creating new alliances.

Daesh's 2014 and 2015 expansion into Libya proved to be consequential for the region. When the 'Battar Battalion' pledged allegiance to Daesh in October of 2014 in the city of Derna, the leaders in the headquarters of Raqqa were quick to send emissaries to provide leadership and organisational skills as well as financial assistance.

As of August 2016, Daesh had orchestrated 298 attacks and was responsible for 1,100 deaths in the region. In contrast, AQIM and affiliate Ansar al-Sharia were responsible for eight attacks and a combined death toll of 62. The majority of Daesh operations were placed in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia between 2015 and 2016 whereas AQIM has mainly operated in Morocco, Algeria and Libya. Following the September 2012 attacks on the US diplomatic facility

in Benghazi, foreign groups took advantage to use the delicate ground in Libya to recruit and conduct their operations. They also took advantage of the groups already present, like Ansar al-Sharia, to build alliances (Canada Service, 2016).

Despite Daesh's dominance in the last five years, and France's intervention in Mali, established groups like AQIM and al-Ansar al-Sharia have managed to maintain their survival and continue to attract a steady stream of following. This has been most evident in Tunisia, following the transition period after the fall of president Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali in 2011 in which unofficial places of congregation were used by extremist preachers to radicalise vulnerable youth. This continued in the years after the Jasmine Revolution where governorates in the east failed to meet the demands of the revolution, thereby exacerbating the frustrations of the local population and leading to continued unrest. Militants have found use for this terrain to recruit and actualise their operations and have used the close proximity of Algeria as a useful getaway from Tunisian forces' crackdown.

The main focus on militant groups in North Africa has been centred on the depth of collaboration between the groups present and how the threat of these units increases the security risk in the region. Fundamental to this discourse is the recognition of how ultimately each respective group poses a threat to the stability of the states in which they are present, in turn leading to greater regional fragmentation (Porter & Sheehan, 2014). Much of the campaigns driven by external powers against militants in the region have focused on winning the population's backing for the operations and avoiding civilian casualties from targeted strikes. However, the civilian killings that often is a result of these operations have often provided the ultimate reason for some to choose to join local armed groups to counter the new external threat. An airstrike conducted in Libya by AFRICOM in November last year for example reportedly killed 11 civilians, the largest civilian death toll from a US strike since 2011 (Airwars, 2019).

The trend of civilians joining local armed groups after losing family or friends to military strikes is commonplace in North West Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia and arguably anywhere they occur and so raises the legitimacy of counterterror operations and their effectiveness. Military action ultimately ends up feeding the cycle of violence and is used by armed groups as ammunition for escalation. The cycle is furthered when the local population, stuck between daily violence from militants and counterterrorism operatives, sees limited progress ("Terrorism and Counter-

Françafrique

The fear of AQIM taking over in Mali and West Africa was used by France to justify the military intervention of Operation Serval. Approximately 4000 troops were dispatched to northern Mali after several towns and cultural centres were desecrated by militants. By January's end, French and Chadian troops controlled Mali's three major cities along the Niger River and the fractured rebel factions and militant groups fled throughout northern Mali. International support via a UN peacekeeping operation was sought by France whilst it continued targeting key militant figures. (Porter and Sheehan, 2014)

The French military expanded its operations across a number of Sahelian states after Operation Serval, including to northern Niger and Chad to provide closer intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance across some of the most remote trafficking routes in the Sahara desert. French Special Forces have also held counterterrorism operations in Libya and related training in Tunisia. Given its tortured history with Algeria, French cooperation with Algeria has been limited (S. Chivvis, 2017).

Operation Serval in Mali was able to contain the militancy insurgency through its coordinated coalition operations. The UN provided peacekeeping efforts removed from any offensive operations with training, equipment, and advisory support proved efficient. However, Operation Serval was a reactive operation and was inherently limited in its ability to remedy the militant threat of extremist groups in the Horn of Africa, the Sahara and sub-Saharan Africa in the long run. Due to these limitations, in 2017 the

G5 Force, made up of the forces of Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad, was authorised by the African Union Peace and Security Council and backed by the adoption of UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2359 in June, 2017 (Kodjo, 2017). The US initially was hesitant to back the G5 (despite this it still pledged \$60 million in bilateral support) and opted to support member states to better articulate their broader strategy (Danish Institute for International Studies, 2018). The G5 pledged to add five thousand of their own troops to aid the fight but the regional members designated in the force, such as Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso, lacked the financial resources to fund a budget estimated at \$500 million in the first year of operation.

President Macron has since used the initiative to maintain French hold in the continent with his foreign policy ambitions and has ensured financial backing from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates amounting to more than 130 million Euros (Campbell, 2017) for the G5 Sahel. Due to the Trump administration's reluctance to channel money through the UN, the G5 Sahel currently receives no UN funding, despite having 12,000 peacekeepers stationed in Mali. France has had a significantly lower budget to the US but has its footing in the region in its operations in the Sahel has proven heavier than that of the US's who have instead chosen to place resources on specific objectives rather than a multitude of projects which fail to yield much success (Audino, 2018).



Iraqi security guards detain 4 ISIS members on October 31, 2013 in Iraq. Twenty-four Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) an al-Qaeda affiliate, members were arrested in an operation on October 31, 2013 in Anbar, Iraq. (Stringer - AA)

The US/NATO Contingency

The US State Department has designated a number of entities operating in North Africa as Foreign Terrorist Organisations, including AQIM, Daesh, Ansar al-Shari'a, and the al-Mulathamun Battalion. In 2002, the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) was established in Djibouti. A year later, a \$100 million counterterrorism initiative for the east and the Horn of Africa was set up. In the same period, the US European Command (EUCOM) led a series of training and military support operations in the Sahel. Later on, the organisation transitioned into the TSCP with more than half a billion dollars spent since 2003 (Rothchild & Harbeson, 2009).

The TSCP was tasked with law enforcement and military training, border security, rule of law, counter-threat financing, and other measures in the region. Funding from the US and Europe supported the counterterrorism-related activities in North Africa, which included providing training and equipment to Tunisia, strikes against terrorist groups in Libya, counterterrorism cooperation with Algeria through Operation Enduring Freedom-Trans Sahara and its successors; and military-to-military engagement aimed at strengthening Egyptian border controls and counterterrorism practices in the Sinai province where Daesh has been active (S. Chivvis, 2017).

The US has also worked via the Counterterrorism Bureau with the Strong Cities Network (SCN), compiled of over 100 global mayors, municipal-level policymakers, and practitioners in order to develop effective community resilience to all forms of extremism. The global Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund (CTPF) inaugurated by President Obama in 2014, offered funding for countering violent extremist messaging, counter-improvised explosive device (IED) training, border security, intelligence support and other efforts to assist partner states in detecting and disrupting violent extremist groups in countries deemed to have a terrorism problem or susceptible to terrorism.

However, due to the US's lack of priority in the region compared with other regions, tangible results as to how effective its counterterrorism strategies have actually been remains to be seen. They also need to be examined from an ethical framework in just how damaging some of the strategies adopted have been in which large swathes of the population end up becoming marginalised through the categorisation of 'good' or 'bad' based off ambiguous definitions.

Counter violent extremism initiatives have also often enticed community members to spy in gatherings at mosques or their social circles to feed intelligence of

potential radicalisation which simply feeds into the extremist rhetoric centred around 'us' vs 'them' notions.

NATO's role in the region has become more pronounced since the collapse of the regimes in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia since 2011 and the resulting political instability and the concomitant proliferation of criminal networks and armed groups. Particularly in Tunisia, where Daesh has been active since 2015 and where a growing insurgency is ensuing, counterterrorism operations for NATO have been prioritised. In the hopes of enhancing its bilateral relationship, based on the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) programme Tunisia entered a NATO Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme (IPCP) to strengthen its capacity to fight terrorism and improve its border security. However, the cooperation between Tunis and NATO has not been particularly smooth. In 2017, Tunisia's Defence Minister Abdulkarim Zbdidi confirmed the country's rejection of a \$3 million grant from NATO for the establishment of a joint command centre. As a result, NATO would limit the scope of its security cooperation with Tunis but it also highlighted the importance of actualising programmes that are more suitable for the selected regional partner (Profazio, 2018).

Despite Algeria's traditional military partnership with Russia and its strong non-interventionist foreign policy, Algeria has maintained a relationship with NATO based on scientific cooperation. In 2017, NATO visited the Krechba natural gas plant with Algerian officials, which was targeted by terrorists in March 2016, as part of a multi-year research project supported by the NATO Science for Peace and Security Programme. The aim of the programme is to develop a new imaging and detection system which secures critical infrastructure from attack (NATO launches first scientific cooperation agreement with Algeria, 2017).

However, the progress made resulting from this cooperation has been threatened by the ongoing security situation in Libya where armed groups have been the most active as well as the threat posed through their infiltration attempts into Libya's neighbours. Since Operation Solid Structure (2016) to oust Daesh from its stronghold of Sirte, AFRICOM has led military operations against terrorist groups in Libya, whereas NATO has taken a more diplomatic role ("Beyond ISIS: Countering Terrorism, Radicalization, and Promoting Stability in North Africa", 2017). The Alliance has also had to take a more active role in monitoring the migrant flow through the Central Mediterranean Route from sub-Saharan Africa in recent years following pressure from states like Italy who have struggled with the influx (L'Italia chiederà una missione NATO ai confini sud della Libia, 2018).



Polish and American troops attend 3rd ABCT Welcome Home Ceremony and Live Fire Demonstration at Karliki Range, Zagan, Poland on January 30, 2017. (Omar Marques-AA)

However, NATO's reach has been limited by a number of factors in the region. The reluctance of regional states to deepen their strategic partnerships with NATO, the presence of international actors and lack of cooperation between member states have all added to the limited manoeuvring of the alliance. Russia's presence in North Africa by way of its military partnership with Algeria and Egypt in particular, and its support for the Khalifa Haftar-led Libyan National Army (LNA) has proven beneficial for Russia's foreign policy ambitions in the region but comes as a direct challenge to NATO. The US's lack of clear priorities in the region has also allowed for greater Russian manoeuvring, which, ironically, has pushed the US to be more vigilant and assertive in preventing Moscow's growing influence ("Beyond ISIS: Countering Terrorism, Radicalization, and Promoting Stability in North Africa", 2017).

As far as resources are concerned, the US has the most to offer but the region has remained a secondary priority in US foreign and security policy and the region's complex set of relationships has posed an organisational challenge for US policymakers. Perhaps one of the US Department's weakest bureaus is charged with policies for the Horn of Africa but the countries linked to the area—Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Egypt—fall under the better funded Middle East Bureau (Rothchild & Harbeson, 2009). Despite this, the US's military operations in the continent have certainly not taken a back seat. 550 airstrikes were conducted in Libya by the US since 2011; more than in Somalia, Yemen and Pakistan (Turse et al., 2019). However, coverage over the civilian costs from the airstrikes is minimal or not duly reported due to the difficulty for example in tracking drone strikes or from the US's careful publication of information.

The central aim of the US in the region is to maintain a strategic presence in Africa whilst at the same shifting the security burden by developing the capacity for states to be able to deal with terrorism in their own backyards, thereby reducing dependence on the US. However, as long as the regional apparatuses in place remain inadequate in dealing with the problem on their own or the threat of foreign entities exacerbating issues, it is unlikely dependence will be relinquished that easily.

The announcement by then Secretary of Defense Mattis in 2018 of three new contingency counterterrorism operations and deployment of a Security Force Assistance Brigade to the continent indicates a longevity to its operations in Africa and contradicts claims of the reported downsizing of its counterterrorism troops in its US Africa Command as an indication of a planned reduced military footing in the continent (AbiNader, 2018).

This year, a new Global Anti-Daesh Coalition meeting took place in Washington DC where 79 foreign ministers held discussions on the next phase of the campaign in Iraq and Syria and how to avoid a resurgence of Daesh through stabilisation and security assistance ("États-Unis: Le Maroc participera à la réunion de la coalition mondiale anti-Daech", 2019). However, the consistent prioritisation of regions outside of North Africa fuels the problem that despite ongoing operations in the continent, little has shifted in the way of gaining a hold on terrorism. In fact insurgencies, for example in Tunisia, the region's highest export of fighters to Daesh, highlight how the millions spent on counterterrorism initiatives are clearly failing to garner significant, long term results.

The EU's Commitment

The EU's focus has traditionally been long-term economic and political development in the region and less about contributing to counterterrorism efforts. However, following Libya's collapse, European decision-makers recognised the challenge to European security and stability that was rooted in the Sahel from armed groups in close proximity and the undocumented migration flow from sub-Saharan Africa (Danish Institute for International Studies, 2018). A number of strategic documents in the last decade have identified how North African engagement in the Sahel is vital in ensuring European security which can only prove successful through the collaboration of key state players (Danish Institute for International Studies, 2018).

EU efforts initially centred around leading efforts on border security in Libya through the European Union Border Assistance and Monitoring Mission (EUBAM), but due to the security situation in Libya, its base was relocated to Tunis where little has progressed since. The EU's naval operation in the Mediterranean, Operation Sophia, intended to stem the flow of migrants leaving from Libya

to Italy but drownings, despite the numbers of migrants making the perilous journey dropping, continue to occur as well as the abuse of migrants in detention centres and at the hands of human traffickers.

In Tunisia, the EU has provided training for the Interior Ministry. It has also strengthened Mali's security sector through the EU Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali) based in Bamako. After the emergence of Daesh in Sirte, the US, UK, and other special forces provided training and support to the Misratan brigades, under the banner of Bunyan Marsus, which drove Daesh from its stronghold. The UK's regional operations have been more limited in recent years with more focus on training. Following the terrorist attack in Sousse, Tunisia, in 2015, which killed mainly British tourists, the UK government provided training to Tunisian security personnel in order to better deal with any potential future repetitions. The UK has also worked with Egypt on developing its tourist infrastructure and counterterrorism training for the Egyptian military.

The Growing Influence of Russia

Moscow has been able to capitalise on developing better relationships through furthering its military cooperation, energy and trade diplomacies particularly with Algeria, Egypt and Libya. Russia is in the midst of diversifying its ties in North Africa with its military cooperation a heavy feature in its influence and relationship with some of the region's leading states. Like the US, the region is not a priority for the Kremlin, however, its desire for a greater role in the region will no doubt be closely observed by the US and EU to see if it develops more significantly.

Russia has proven to be a more affordable option for weapon trade particularly with Egypt and close ally Algeria- indeed Algeria is one of Russia's top five importers for weapons with more than 80 per cent of its equipment supplied by Russia (Ghanem & Kuznetsov 2018). The relationship between Algiers and Moscow has been fruitful since 2006 following the dismissal of the \$4.7 billion debt Algeria owed the former Soviet Union. Following the settlement, the two states expanded their economic and political relationship. Between 2012 and 2016, as a result of a 277 per cent increase in the value of weapons sold, Algeria became the fifth largest arms importer globally (Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2016). The majority of the trade between Algeria and Russia involves military material with \$4 billion spent in 2016 alone (Mehenni, 2017).

After Algeria, Egypt is the most significant partner for Russia in the region. \$3.5 billion worth of Russian military material has been purchased by Egypt since 2014, and in 2017, a preliminary agreement was signed, which allowed for Russian military aircraft to enter Egypt's airspace and use its military bases. This will prove highly significant for Russia's presence in the region if the agreement is concluded and will no doubt raise concerns for the US looking to see its dominance uncontested.

Libya's relationship with Russia was altered following the 2011 uprising after which many of its previous contracts were rendered null. However, in 2017, trade between the two countries increased to \$135 million. In 2016, Moscow recognised the National Transitional Council but at the same time has worked closely with its rival, Marshal Khalifa Haftar, who has himself visited Moscow several times and engaged in talks with foreign minister Sergey Lavrov. Russia's interest in Libya in recent years has been seen within the wider framework of securing its footing in the region and to claim some stake of influence over political proceedings.

The Role of Regional Powers

Violent extremist organisations have existed in North Africa for a quarter of a century with Algeria and Libya being most significant in this regard. The returning 'Mujahidin' fighters from Afghanistan were key in the genesis of the extremist movement in Algeria, first under the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) during the civil war, later the Salafist Group for Preaching and Jihad (GSPC) and then AQIM in 2006. The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) was active from the 1990s until its suppression by Gaddafi, and the Libyan city of Derna, overrun by Daesh affiliates in 2014 until their ousting by military strongman Khalifa Haftar, was known for its export of foreign fighters to AQ during the Iraq insurgency in 2006. Following the uprising and the power vacuum that ensued through the collapse of state institutions after 2011, Libya's extremist groups, particularly the onset of Daesh in the country, thrived and greatly impeded upon the security standing of the region (Canada Service, 2016).

The North African states' important geographical position between the Sahel and Europe makes them necessary partners and their large resources an asset in assisting efforts in the Sahel. This proves even more vital for future strategies given the fact the EU and its member states have made limited tangible progress in convincing North African states to collaborate on issues of security and development (Danish Institute for International Studies, 2018). Paramilitary and security forces in North Africa play an important role in maintaining internal security, safeguarding the power of ruling regimes and consolidating the regional status quo. However many of the systems in the region are increasingly old and efforts to recapitalise have yet to yield many results (H. Cordesman, Nerguizian & A. Burke, 2010).

The region's balance is maintained by the cold peace between Morocco and Algeria where regional competition and disputes over Western Sahara define bilateral relations. Whilst there has not been open war between the Maghreb states, a number of paramilitary and proxy operations have taken place in the context of Morocco and Algeria's struggle over regional hegemony. Aside from its continued power struggle, both Morocco and Algeria have proven to be key regional leaders to further external multilateral counterterrorism initiatives such as those of the African Union, the TSCP and the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) ("Beyond ISIS: Countering Terrorism, Radicalization, and Promoting Stability in North Africa", 2017).

However, Morocco's underlying tensions with Algeria and Mauritania, and its war with the Polisario Front over control of Western Sahara are some of the key factors that

have shaped its efforts. The 1994 bombing in Marrakech by Algerian militants soured relations between the two countries making any collaboration akin to Algeria and Tunisia nigh on impossible currently. Morocco generally underfunds and undertrains its conscripts and enlisted men and lacks modernising efforts for its force. Unlike other Middle East Foreign Military Sales (FMS) recipients like Egypt and Israel, Morocco and Tunisia have not relied solely on US Foreign Military Financing (FMF) assistance to fund national purchases from the US. Both Algeria and Morocco have taken steps to upgrade or replace their combat aircraft and though they have modernised their naval assets, their blue water capabilities and training still remain limited (H. Cordesman, Nerguizian & A. Burke, 2010).

Regional and international conceptions of security in North Africa have been unified by the shared need to contain violent terrorism and regional crises. Regional and international cooperation efforts and shaping security politics in North Africa cannot be successful unless those efforts are headed by leading states in the region. Algeria views its bilateral security partnership with Tunisia as the best way to mitigate the terror threat. A security cooperation agreement was signed in March 2017, following a deal in 2014 to share intelligence and secure their common border. The partnership has proven fruitful in fighting terrorism, targeting senior figures and terrorist cells and networks that operate along their shared border ("Beyond ISIS: Countering Terrorism, Radicalization, and Promoting Stability in North Africa", 2017).

In Algeria, memories of the bloody decade fighting militants is still very present in the nation's conscience and military and counterterrorism arrangements have been in place in order to prevent repeating any repeat of the violence. As a result, Algeria is one of the leaders in counterterrorism operations and has successfully controlled any insurgency along its borders or within the mountains from gaining prominence in the country. As a result of its experience, Algiers has proven a key partner for the US. It has also utilised its experience in training neighbouring Tunisia to deal with its own recent insurgency. Tunisia has struggled with political stabilisation and democratic consolidation since 2011 whilst Daesh has successfully conducted multiple attacks in Tunisia since 2015, causing a strain on the political system and tourist industry (S. Chivvis, 2017). Tunisia's insurgency has also provoked a radicalisation problem that has made it the largest source per capita of foreign terrorist fighters in the world with between 3,000 to 6,000 foreign fighters travelling to Iraq and Syria. In

the wake of the slow downfall of Daesh, many of these fighters have attempted to return home and reintegrate or to remobilise which has proven burdensome for security forces reeling from a bout of attacks since 2015.

In Morocco, the US is training local communities to detect potential radicals and would-be terrorists. This is also done through the training of Imams to teach modernist interpretations of Islam and to ensure their sermon's include messages which do not leave room for radicalisation or non-state aligned rhetoric. This approach is contested by many as flawed and problematic and raises questions of the type of Islam deemed correct and the type of definition applied to those who do not automatically adhere to it and what the consequences are as a result. Morocco has cooperated closely with the US on counterterrorism, holding annual joint exercises with the US known as 'African Lion'. The US has also welcomed Morocco's support and leadership in the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF's) initiative to address homegrown terrorism, however, like Algeria, militants are regularly intercepted in the country which is indicative of the fact that radical ideas still hold a degree of influence.

Algeria has also played an important role in the GCTF through its co-chairing of the West Africa Region Capacity-Building Working Group, which mobilises assistance to help West African countries build upon their counterterrorism apparatuses through financing and enhancing border security. Its own effort, the Joint Military Staff Committee of the Sahel Region (CEMOC), however, failed to enact much through its lack of funding and mutual understanding from its fellow Maghreb members. The opaqueness of the Algerian state also makes it difficult

to determine the stability of the country and with weekly protests still common despite the resignation of ailing president Abdelaziz Bouteflika it is uncertain in what direction Algeria will be developing in or what effects the upheaval in neighbouring Libya by way of Haftar's forces in the capital will have for Algeria and the region as a whole.

The main issue for the region and north of the continent is the consequences of terrorist groups expanding at the rate they have in recent years and the fear of further instability with their presence for countries like Tunisia and Egypt. The ultimate issue is the lack of collaboration efforts with any of these leading states to truly address the terrorism crises. This has enabled France and others to engage directly in the Sahel without proper assistance of North African states particularly Algeria which is Africa's biggest purchaser of arms and whose own counterterrorism experience has been overlooked. Operation Serval avoided collaborative efforts with Algeria who opposed the intervention and subsequently had to reluctantly agree to not obstruct the operation. The G5-Sahel Initiative was another initiative that avoided the inclusion of Algeria but where the expectations of no obstruction were present (Danish Institute for International Studies, 2018).

The reluctance of North African states to assist in every operation and initiative must be addressed so that more inclusive strategies that respect the sovereignties of the region's states, as well as their knowledge, are utilised effectively. If external forces continue their current engagement in the Sahel, they should address the failure to include leading African powers in their solutions in order to further the reach of current measures.



Nigerian soldiers capture a terrorist after an operation against Boko Haram terrorists at a terrorist camp in Borno, Nigeria on March 29, 2016. (Stringer - AA)

Re-Evaluation Of Counterterrorism Strategies

There are a variety of factors that need to be improved upon in order for counterterrorism strategies to reap significant results. Above all, the factors that created spaces for radicalism and extremism to rise need to be addressed. State-building is key in removing the presence of militant groups through the establishment of order and governance wherever they are lacking. States can be strengthened from being administratively or institutionally weak through the assistance of technology and intelligence, combined with skillfully managed political and diplomatic incentives which can have positive impacts on countries suffering from lawlessness where terrorists thrive (Canada Service, 2016).

As has been seen in recent years, controlled military operations like France's Operation Serval can prove useful in quelling the operations of groups like Ansar al-Sharia, Daesh, and AQIM, where under certain conditions, an effective counterforce can aid in the prevention of further dependency of violent extremism. However, there are limitations to their effectiveness and it is problematic to rely on external help which impedes upon the sovereignty of states and is viewed by the larger population with suspicion. Where they may be successful in annihilating the threat of militants in the targeted area in a specific timeframe they often prove consequential when the dust has cleared and the depth of political costs are weighed in their detriment to a country's development. They also do not guarantee that despite the supposed control exerted, civilians will not die. Due to the lack of transparency or oversight of counterterrorism operations, this technique is also not always a successful form of counterterrorism strategy applicable in all cases and when done badly can instead fuel people's motivations to join radical groups that entice people with promises to exact revenge.

Strengthening the reach of states is essential to any lasting counterterrorism strategy through the training of defence and interior ministry forces with the necessary intelligence and ensuring that their joint capacity to work effectively in the context of justice and human rights. This has often lacked in many cases of counterterrorism strategies which often defy international human rights laws and impunity instead allows for states to adopt measures that are not removed from torture, civilian killings and dividing communities for the sake of greater security that instead impeaches upon individual human rights.

Structural-level security sector reform is needed to strengthen tactical capabilities of security forces through small-unit counterterrorism training via Joint Combined Exchange Trainings (JCETs) and other mechanisms. To ensure greater border control, internal security must be improved so that the porous borders needed by cross border militant operations across Egypt, Sudan, Chad, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Niger, and Mali is remedied and the threats remain isolated. Developing technical capabilities in improving border security through funding of watchtowers, patrols and security fences but in order for there to be effective long-term management across the board, policies and coordination practices between relevant agencies, and efficient cross-border communication systems need to be in place as opposed to singular, national-leading measures prioritised over regional development (S. Chivvis, 2017).

The current systems in North Africa are weak and the current lack of coordination between states and joint ventures beyond military exercises is limiting progress. As far as joint ventures are concerned, Tunisia and Algeria seem to be heading in the right direction with their efficient partnership, working closely to strengthen their counterterrorism apparatuses and sharing intelligence in order to track and apprehend militants who have an active network across the two states' borders. An effective regional strategy between states can also address the underlying radicalisation issue in countries like Tunisia where unofficial gatherings are used by individuals to recruit vulnerable people who see no answer but violence to their woes. But understanding the processes of radicalisation and allowing for extremist groups to remain relevant. The case of the 2016 Berlin Christmas Market attacker, Tunisian-born Anis Amri, or the Nice and Strasbourg attacks highlights how deradicalisation programmes are needed on home soil too however care needs to be taken that they do not alienate the ethnic or religious communities the perpetrators are connected to.

There is still a long way to go to achieve regional security objectives which have been largely prevented due to the lack of Maghreb integration and the power politics between states in the region. Algeria and Egypt are reticent about the conditions that come with US and European assistance and are more likely to look elsewhere for the same type of help by cultivating stronger partnerships with allies like Russia. Significant progress is also impeded by a

lack of resources and regional awareness, which would be remedied by allowing for greater regional agency. The long-term presence of external forces is unavoidable and so to ensure progress is made, US and European partners in North and West Africa should help develop stronger local security services embedded in effective domestic and regional institutions, supportive of human rights and most importantly the rule of law.

As it stands, US foreign policy defined by Obama is unlikely to be radically altered under the Trump administration. Regional security will still remain a pertinent issue for Europe and is likely to be a greater threat for the US as Daesh adherents continue to return to their homelands in North Africa from Syria and Iraq. The geographic proximity of the EU makes the region's roles as a base for militant groups and migrant routes a continuous issue and so counterterror and de-radicalisation efforts will remain in place. However, a yearly review of measures adopted that are effective or not and where real progress can be made needs to be in action in order to avoid wasting time and resources centred on short term solutions. These measures need to be strictly collaborative and not imposed in order to remove the suspicion of foreign presences in the continent and the bruising of state sovereignty. Leaders must also operate within the full scope of international law

so as to avoid further grievances and long term continuity of violence where the problem at hand is not dealt with adequately and instead leaves room for marginalisation of local populations with severe consequences ("Terrorism and Counter-terrorism: New Challenges for the European Union", 2017).

There needs to be a wider political strategy in place that accounts for the aftermath of operations against Daesh and AQ-linked groups. One option the EU and US can adopt is to better support UN-led diplomacy that takes into account a more long term solution and one which does not feed into the cycle of violence. As a result, engagement with all conflict parties, either in securing humanitarian corridors for civilians caught up in the violence and in reducing violence for the local populace is vital. This also allows for mediums of reconciliation and reintegration best exemplified by Algeria's 2006 Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation for fatigued fighters following 10 years of civil war. It allows for states to be able to deal with returning fighters in effective ways which either allows for rehabilitation centres, which Morocco has deployed for reintegrating radicalised individuals back into society or to be able to learn from the experiences of repentant fighters in order to avoid others walking the same path.



An inside view of the damaged mosque after a suspected suicide bomber blew himself up inside a mosque in Maiduguri, Nigeria on May 30, 2015. The attack took place only hours after 16 people were killed during raids by the radical Boko Haram movement in the outskirts of the commercial city. (Stringer - AA)

Conclusion

Where focus on preventing a Daesh insurgency seems like the next logical step in the fight against terrorism, the conditions in Iraq and Syria have not been radically altered nor has the fertile conditions where militant groups have thrived been removed. Focus will remain primarily on the Middle East as opposed to Africa when insurgencies in the continent remain rife and old non-state actors continue to develop new alliances, furthering their reach and waiting for an opportunity to operate. The recent uprisings in Sudan and Algeria should be carefully observed so that the same mistakes in Libya are not repeated or indeed to avoid creating conditions to spur terrorism.

The presence of external actors in the continent arguably has more to do with regional dominance and control between the world's power elite over its masses of natural reserves than the active rooting out of terrorism, which in essence has largely failed. The continent has been used as a battleground of interests and power politics with more dominance by the year. Focus is now on the reach of China in the region, which has been successful in appealing to the states with large debt loads, offering to pay them off with no-interest loans. Meanwhile, militant groups continue to bide their time, recuperating, recruiting, forming alliances and targeting police and army targets. The attacks in Europe and beyond have minimised, however, the extremist groups driven by radical rhetoric continue to attract vulnerable, frustrated minds.

The operations in Libya against Daesh have been successful, however, the continued unrest driven by power struggles between rival authorities and groups continues to wreak havoc both in the country and beyond. The precarious situation in neighbouring Sudan is also worrying spectators

that any descent to violence will be embraced by groups in the region as an opportunity to assert influence. In Tunisia, the factors that led the Arab Spring to ignite are still very much present in the western governorates of Kasserine and Kef where groups like AQIM and Jund al-Khilafah are active amidst the disarray of riots over high unemployment and lack of jobs. In Tunisia and Morocco, the ailing health of their leaders is also cause for concern in that their demise could lead to increased instability in the region. On one side you have regimes which lack the willingness to adopt reforms to alleviate social suffering and by extension, the possibility of radicalism but the more pressing predicament of lawlessness and quasi-absent governance in the region remains the most concerning. Neutralising militants is a short-term solution to a long-term problem and remains only useful primarily in reassuring local populations that the tumultuous climate can be remedied quickly. However, a lack of collaborative efforts between states and a desire to aid regional integration leaves room for external forces to occupy spaces of dominance and to lead security measures, deeming regional actors incompetent.

Regional states are also at fault for failing to work towards regional integration whether through the Arab Maghreb Union, the African Union or the Economic Community of West African States, where the region's threats and crises are dealt with as a collective and local problems are remedied by local solutions. Until states learn to deal with the issues in their own borders and develop stronger regional alliances, as militant networks have utilised, it is likely power dominance between the world's power elite will continue to drive control over the continent where its reserves are prioritised over its people.

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