

MILITARY ALLIANCES AND THE 21ST CENTURY COUNTER TERRORISM CHALLENGES

SUNDAY O. OGON, PhD¹ & BENEDICT NKANU ETAH²

Abstract

Upon the increasing capacity of the military for the protection of the sovereignty of states, terrorist activities appear to have gone on unabated, prompting the interrogation of military alliances as a counter-terrorism approach. Thus, terrorism, whether local or international, is a radical or violent form of political participation by terrorist groups, specifically to let their demands or plights get publicity or attract international attention by causing panic, fear, and death in that particular state or locality. However, the increasing carnage done by terrorist groups had warranted military alliances among countries, as exemplified by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) formed in 1949, the Warsaw Pact formed in 1955, and the International Joint Military Task Force formed in 1994 by the Lake Chad Basin Countries of West Africa in an attempt to curb the menace of terrorism against the states. The Relative deprivation theory was used as a framework for analysis. Thus, the paper interrogated the efficacy of military alliances as a counter-terrorism approach in the fight against terrorism, as observed in Africa and most parts of the world in contemporary times. The paper adopted the qualitative research method that relied on documentary evidence relevant to the study as data. Hence, the paper is divided into four sections. The paper recommended, amongst others, that the government should pay more attention to the provision of human security needs of its citizens.

Keywords: *Military alliances, Terrorism, Counterterrorism, Human Security.*

Introduction

Countries enter into alliances to bolster their areas of need. This could be in the area of politics, economic, or military strategy as the contemporary security environment demands at that moment. Alliances between and among states are increasingly becoming very important as threats in the security environment of nations are now hydra-headed and incrementally making useless national borders, as the interconnectivity among insurgent groups is getting more blurred and spreading at the same velocity with the contagious phenomenon of globalization that has electronically reduced the world to a “global village” (Kegley and Raymond, 2010, p.289).

However, in line with the above scenario, it becomes very imperative and incumbent on states to deepen their alliances militarily as security threats are no longer akin to a particular country, region, or continent. Terrorism is now a global phenomenon that countries must coalesce beyond their military capacities to curtail if not completely obliterate.

¹ Sunday O. OGON, PhD is with the Department of Political Science, Cross River State College of Education, Akamkpa ogon.sunny@crs-coeakamkpa.edu.ng

² Benedict Nkanu ETAH is with the Department of Political Science, Cross River State College of Education, Akamkpa

As Igwe (2007, p.10), put it, “An alliance could be seen as a grouping of states or other bodies intended to bolster their individual and collective potentials to reduce operational costs by joining forces for the solution of shared problems, whether economic, political, military-strategic or whatever”.

Though the concern of this study is on military alliances, Igwe (2007) observed that alliances could crisscross different fields of human endeavor outside the military. What eventually promotes military alliances against insurgent groups is the failure of policy to achieve set objectives, be it economic or political. Hence, military alliances are not just formed or entered by countries but to achieve collective state policy by military means. For instance, as Igwe argued, prominent among military alliances in the 21st century is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), originally formed in 1949 to protect the countries of Western Europe from communist aggression.

Meanwhile, military alliances could be entered by both strong and weak countries depending on the interests of each of the parties. For instance, the United States of America (USA) and Spain, America, with an interest in military bases in Spain and Spain, with the interest of military protection and other sundry handouts from a strong ally like the US. Another example is the US and Saudi Arabia. The US, as a strong ally, is interested in oil, which Saudi Arabia sees as a bargain for the alliance.

Alliances, as advanced by Mogenothau (1967. p.188), are “a necessary function of the balance of power operating within a multiple-state system wherein nations A and B compete with each other to maintain and improve their relative power position.” He went further to state that a nation will shun alliances if it believes that it is strong enough to hold its own unaided or that the burden of the commitments resulting from the alliance will likely outweigh the expected advantages.

Considering the increasing nature of terrorist organizations across the nations of the world today, it is largely believed that the orthodox or traditional means of combating terrorism that have to do with the deployment and the actual use of military power have not yielded the required policy objectives. The traditional means of combating terrorism and other forms of violent extremism are seriously entangled by some legal instruments like international law and other conventions and protocols that restrict countries from the use of maximum force in military campaigns, particularly since the activities of terrorist organizations are hardly predicted or known. For instance, recruitment, population, weapon systems, and a highly unpredictable method of operation, hence careless about the civilian population.

Atelhe (2022), citing Ibeanu *et al.* (2009), noted that the traditionalist looks at security from a pro-defence, military-biased, and state-centric standpoint as against the revisionist perspective that sees security from the prism of human and societal development, which has to do with human security needs like housing, health care, food, clothing etc as the basic needs of life without which, conflict, terrorism, violent extremism, and war are inevitable.

However, the study is aimed at probing into the efficacy of military alliances as a reliable response to insurgency and violent extremism as well as a counter-terrorism measure within the context of Africa's security environment. To achieve this, the study takes a look at some notable global military alliances, after which an in-depth assessment of military alliances, both at the continental and sub-regional levels of the African continent, to ascertain the extent to which these alliances have contributed to the resolution of intrastate conflicts and terrorist

activities across the sub-regions of the continent. Thus, military alliances, in this particular case, are entered for states to combat activities of terrorist groups and other clandestine motives of other anti and non-state actors that are capable of obliterating the state and its institutions. Therefore, the paper is discussed under the following subheads. The first section is the theoretical framework, the second focuses on military alliances, the third section concentrates on insurgency and counter-terrorism, and the fourth section dwells on terrorism and the African Condition.

Theoretical Framework

The Relative Deprivation theory is considered most appropriate in the study due to its explanatory, descriptive, and predictive nature regarding the phenomenon of terrorism and other violent extremisms, as experienced today within the Nigerian security environment. The Relative Deprivation theory is credited to a sociologist, Samuel A. Stouffer (1900-1960), after World War II alongside other social scientists like Rensis Likert and Quin Mcnemner, among others, at the United States Military Research Branch, established in 1941 (Enote, 2016, in Akintola, 2017). The theory was popularized by Ted Robert Gurr as espoused in his book “Why Men Rebel” in 1970. Gurr examines the psychological frustration resulting from a certain deprivation that is responsible for a group's livelihood and sustenance, hence the aggressive behavior.

In the opinion of Gurr, just as frustration produces aggressive behavior on the part of an individual, so does relative deprivation produce collective violence by social groups and terrorist groups like the Boko Haram, Islamic State in Syria (ISIS), Islamic State in West African Province (ISWAP), etc. Deprivation, in this instance, could be political with regard to electoral subversion, economic deprivation, and every other form of human rights deprivation. In view of this theory, it has been argued by most scholars that terrorism, as well as every other form of violent extremism, is not only carried out by anti-state forces because they are deprived of their legitimate entitlements from the government, as a result, expresses their grievances by carrying arms against the state.

Thus, terrorist groups like Al Qaeda Islamic State in Syria (ISIS), Islamic State in West African Province (ISWAP), Al Shabab in Somalia, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Palestine, and the Boko Haram (BH) sect in North East Nigeria are all religious terrorist organizations with the singular ideology of establishing an Islamic State where ever they operate. Hence, they carry arms against the state for the obliteration of the existing government and its institutions and the eventual enthronement of their religious ideology as the state policy, which in this case is Islam.

However, looking at Africa with the spate of military coup de tat as witnessed in Sudan, Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Niger, Gabon, etc., where elected governments with electoral subversion, economic hardship, and other forms of human rights deprivation being the chief reasons for military intervention. Herders-Crop farmers Crisis in North Central Nigeria, Banditry in the North West as well as kidnapping and militancy in the Niger Delta region of South-South Nigeria is all about economic and political deprivation of the citizens of their life-sustaining resources which they believe positive government response to their plights can only be achieved through terrorism and every other form of violent extremisms.

Testimonies abound over the destruction of oil installations and kidnapping of expatriates by the movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) to cause

government attention on the issue of their deprivation from their natural resources like land for farming, water for domestic use, river for fishing as well as air polluted as a result of the activities of the oil drilling companies.

In view of the above, Gurr noted that relative deprivation is the discrepancy between what people think is their legitimate entitlement and what they actually get on the ground. Thus, deprivation the world over is the cause of conflict as most groups clandestinely ask for their entitlement using a violent way to attract global attention.

Military Alliances

As pointed out by Booth (1975, p.173), “Agreements on military cooperation are as old as relations between sovereign political units.” However, military alliances are not just entered or formed by countries to have them in existence. Thus, as Adeniran (1983) observed, alliances are classified into different categories, some for temporary purposes, whereas others for permanent purposes. For instance, military alliances are meant either for offensive or defensive reasons. In this regard, since the end of the Second World War in 1945, the world has experienced two notable military alliances of almost a global equilibrium in terms of military capability and capacity. These military alliances are the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Warsaw Pact Treaty (Warsaw Pact).

Meanwhile, as a military alliance, NATO is membered by Western countries led by the United States of America, while the Warsaw Pact, made up of Eastern European countries, was under the leadership of the Soviet Union before its disintegration. As captured by Adeniran (1983, p.130), apart from offensive and defensive purposes, military alliances still perform the following functions:

1. They help in the members’ acquisition and accretion of power through a combination of resources.
2. They could help stabilize a regime faced with domestic problems.
3. They restrain and control allies through a formal obligation, and they could help establish an international order.

Increasingly, Adeniran sees alliances as a technique of balance of power politics entered by states that have a common interest. In this regard, alliances could be used to prevent hegemonic behavior by a powerful state on weaker states. Therefore, military alliances, both at the continental and sub-regional levels, are to respond to the security threats states suffer and ultimately ensure their peace and stability.

Thus, military alliances at the sub-continental level, like the case of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) military wing code name ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). ECOMOG, in this particular instance, is a military alliance formed by the countries of the West African sub-region to protect member states against any insinuations within member countries that threaten their sovereignty, peace, and stability. For example, it took the intervention of ECOMOG, led by the Nigerian Armed Forces, to establish and restore the hitherto existing democracies in Liberia and Sierra Leone.

In spite of the efforts made by the military to subdue insurgency, terrorism, and every other form of violent extremism in the sub-region, these anti-state forces have continued to execute their agenda of destabilizing the states in Africa under different nomenclature and forms of operation. For instance, the terrorist activities in the Northeast of Nigeria by the Boko Haram (BH) sect, in Mali by the Al Qaeda terrorist group in the Islamic Maghreb, and the Al

Shabaab terrorist group in Somalia. The protracted action of these terrorist groups across the West African sub-region as well as the Islamic Maghreb (Sudan, Mali, Niger, Chad), has further made the convocation of an International Joint Military Task Force by the Lake Chad basin countries to curb the menace spanning over a decade as a wrong policy alternative.

However, an alliance of this magnitude may be temporal but of high significance regarding intelligence gathering and sharing among the countries on how to proffer a lasting solution to terrorist activities affecting the nations outside the use of force that appears to have hitherto failed.

Insurgency and Counter-Terrorism

Insurgency and terrorism, to a very large extent, have become a re-occurring phenomenon in the world today and a huge challenge in the African security environment. According to Igwe (2007, p.205), "Insurgency is a normal opposition to constituted authority by any domestic forces." However, insurgency and terrorism are both actions that are against or not in support of an established authority of a state. Hence, it is incumbent on such a government to introduce revisionist counter-terrorism measures by addressing the fundamentals of human security and survival as the major challenge for the people. Military alliances of whatever sophistication can never address the problem of insurgency and terrorism without addressing the fundamentals as mentioned above.

Characteristically too, the BH, like every other terrorist group, has no operational base; they operate in camps and are trained to die in any operation they carry out (Suicide Bombing); hence, they care less about the civilian population than the military that is meant to protect while in a gun battle. As Simon (2013, p.39) observed, "The only justification, however, that most terrorists have needed throughout history for their violence was a belief that the ends justified the means. Meanwhile, terrorism as a concept cannot be given a straight jacket definition as most scholars have seen it in different dimensions. Williams (2022, p.367), citing Bak et al. (2019), noted that terrorism, radicalization, and violent extremism are concepts that are sometimes used interchangeably, and their definitions, though not often universally accepted, are highly contested. In the opinion of Onuoha (2008), quoting Sample (1987), terrorism is clandestine violence against non-combatants for the specific purpose of bringing about political change. In the same vein, Edeh, and Eze (2009), based on a United Nations (UN) proposed definition, sees terrorism as any act intended to intimidate a population or compel a government or international body to act. An example of a terrorist attack on a global proportion is the September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center (WTC) in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., which affected nationals of several countries across the globe. In the view of Atelhe and Tawo (2022), citing Lodye (1988, p.5), "Terrorism is an illegitimate means of attempting to achieve political change by the indiscriminate use of violence".

Counter-terrorism, also known as anti-terrorism, incorporates the practice of military tactics, techniques, and strategies that government, military, law enforcement, business, and intelligence agencies use to combat or prevent terrorism. Counter-terrorism strategy is also seen as a government plan to adopt the instruments of national power to neutralize terrorists, their organizations, and their networks to render them incapable of using violence to instill fear and to coerce the government or its citizens to react in accordance with the terrorist demands.

Meanwhile, the following measures are mostly deployed by countries as counter-terrorism models.

1. **Pre-emptive neutralization:** this approach is adopted by most developed countries to disable the plans of a terrorist group about to attack a location. This approach is often speculative and not accepted by Western European States as an infringement on human rights, as stated in the European Convention on Human Rights Article 3 (art 3). Pre-emptive neutralization is more in use in the United States, where interrogation is carried out on known or suspected terrorists to obtain information about specific plots, targets, the identity of other terrorists, and whether or not the interrogation subject himself is guilty of terrorist involvement.
2. **Non-military approach:** this does not involve the application of force as a counter-terrorism measure. Hence, it addresses the challenges of human security by formulating and implementing policies that address the issues of inequalities. Inequality in this regard is seen as one of the causative factors of terrorism. Human security looks at equal access to both social security and social amenities for a sustainable livelihood for the people. Human security, therefore, includes providing clean drinking water, education, vaccination programs, food and shelter, protection from violence, military, etc. Thus, reasonable equal access to these resources would eliminate fear and want amongst humans when it comes to the allocation of resources, as a consequence of reducing tension that could have nose-dived or blossomed into terrorism.
3. **Military approach:** though not encouraged as a contemporary counter-terrorism measure in the study. This is introduced as a counter-terrorism measure when every other approach has failed. In fact, it comes as a matter of last resort. It is the application of force in the decimation of terrorists. For instance, the counter-terrorism adopted by the Federal Government of Nigeria is purely a military approach. The constant engagement of the Nigerian military in gun battles with the BH, the bombing of terrorists' alleged location, and the shooting and killing at intervals of the Nigerian soldiers have left no one in doubt that it is high time we changed the military strategy as a counter-terrorism approach. However, no matter how dreaded the military option as a counter-terrorism measure in Nigeria, it appears to have failed as threats from BH are on the increase and changing in forms and tactics. Thus, the military approach could be a temporary solution to terrorist threats but cannot serve as a lasting solution in this era of asymmetric warfare. From the above, Bassey (2019, p.27) observed that "despite the commendable effort of the Nigerian Military, Boko Haram has escalated its murderous campaign with the specific aim of neutralizing Nigerian Military formation in the North-East."
4. **Command and Control Centres:** this focuses on an integrated system of all security departments coordinated to respond to a terrorist attack. Effective communication between the command and control centers gives an exact idea of what is needed to put an incident under control in a given area. The command and control centers working at the same frequency can reduce the extent of destruction during an attack.
5. **Local security:** This involves deploying local security units, such as the police or vigilantes, to put the area under control and prevent people from moving within the vicinity where the incident occurred. After this is done, a specialized unit can now be drafted into a counterterrorism unit.

Terrorism and the African Condition

Terrorism, revolution, and every “uncivilized” way of a group of people expressing their disagreements against an established authority is largely connected with the happening between the super and the sub-structure of the society. Holding that this is true, Igwe (1989, p.97) averred that “at the base of various struggles for survival and hegemony between the newly independent and powerful nations of the world lie the production and distribution of economic and political power.”

Given the above, there is no society where obvious marginalization and intolerable levels of inequality exist in the allocation of goods and services between the led and the leaders, and such a society will know peace. In contemporary African society today, if it is not a military coup d’etat, it is terrorism as a way of expressing their disagreement with the hitherto established order. The military juntas in Sudan 2021, Mali 2021, Republic of Guinea 2021, Burkina Faso 2022, Niger 2023, and Gabon 2023, Central Africa Republic, Chad attempted coups in some countries. This trend is a dangerous signal of the lack of sensitive and responsive leadership among African leaders, causing what Toyo (1983) describes as systems that cannot be systematized.

Like it is in the entire of Africa, so it is with its microcosm (Nigeria) as observed by Achebe (1983) in his book “The Trouble with Nigeria.” He sees the trouble with Nigeria as the leadership style of the Nigerian leaders. According to Achebe (1983, p.13). “A basic element of this misfortune is the seminal absence of intellectual rigor in the political thought of our founding fathers; a tendency to pious materialistic wooliness and self-centered pedestrianism.” In support of this argument, Ake (1987) observed that the premium in political leadership is astronomically high, and political competition has turned into warfare. Consider the impact of political officeholders' lifestyles before and during their tenure. Look for any significant differences between the two.

Terrorist activities in Africa today have taken a different form both in planning and operational procedure, considering the maneuvering and obliteration of the combat movement of conventional armed forces. This level of sophistication of the terrorists leaves much to be desired of the military, considering the number of suicide bombings conducted by the terrorists, which have claimed both the lives of soldiers and civilians alike.

The inter-connectivity that exists among terrorist groups like the Boko-Haram Sect, Islamic State in West Africa Provinces (ISWAP), as well as Islamic State in Syria (ISIS), with regards to operational conduct and recruitment of members, show that there exists some level of internal penetration and collaboration with external anti-government forces within the ranks of the military. Thus, the future of Africa with respect to the activities of terrorism appears to be on the increase as the leaders that are entrusted with the common patrimony (the commonwealth) are increasingly being unrepentantly corrupt with available evidence in the widening of opportunity in existential necessities between the leaders and the followers. What could be the obvious affluence displayed by political office holders a few months after the oath of office? Moving in convoys of exotic cars, living in wonderful apartments, and traveling abroad for medical tourism, this is the character of the Nigerian political leaders that have caused the ordinary citizens to see themselves as being deprived as a result of the hitherto economic hardship in the country.

Conclusion

Military alliances, as discussed in the paper, are a counter-terrorism measure in which a collection of countries unite to respond to terrorism threats through the application of force. This measure is limited by a number of factors, ranging from international protocols to rules of engagement that forbid the maximum use of force by the military.

These alliances, as seen today among the countries of the Lake Chad Basin, have not really served the purpose in the fight against terrorism, insurgency as well as other forms of violent extremism in the zone extending to the Islamic Maghreb region of the Sahel, as much is still left to be desired. The study looked at insurgency and terrorism as crimes against the state largely perpetrated by anti-state forces now operating as a network across countries, hence the need for a counter-terrorism measure that addresses human security challenges as a fundamental reason for the rise of anti-state forces to challenge the status quo.

Several approaches to counter-terrorism were considered, most of them focusing on non-military measures as a panacea to the challenge of all forms of violent extremism in the 21st century.

The study looks at terrorism from the African perspective and summarily sees the failure in political leadership as a causative factor, hence resulting in the frustration of the citizens, which is expressed through violent means. Thus, as espoused by Ted Robert Gurr, the frustration-aggression theory was used as an analytical tool. The inequality in the allocation of resources between the rulers and the ruled brings about wide poverty margins; as a result, therefore, protestations, sometimes violently, become the order of the day to cause the government to acknowledge their grievances. Thus, to address the problems of counter-terrorism challenges in a fast-changing security environment, the following recommendations are reached.

1. The human security needs of citizens should be of topmost priority. When the basic needs of life, such as shelter, food, clothing, health care, good drinking water, education, etc., are made available to citizens, it will go a long way towards reducing the inequality gap that leads to conflict,
2. Counter-terrorism measures should equally take the form of community policing wherein locals must be involved in the security organogram of the state in their respective areas of abode. With the improvement in Information Communication Technology (ICT), reports on security situations from locals like vigilantes to the Central policing authorities of government could be seamlessly effected,
3. Leaders must respect the rule of law regarding the personalization of the common patrimony of the people against the provisions of the country's constitution. Hence, inequality and marginalization manifest in the overt display of such unconstitutional behavior by leaders. Thus, the deprived majority, due to their frustration, now respond to the government through terrorism,
4. Border security should be properly manned through the deployment of ICT facilities to checkmate trans-human migration in addition to the physical patrols by the security operatives. Particularly as societal issues are more of kidnapping and related crimes,
5. In Africa, political leadership must be based on the popularity and the acceptability of such an individual by the people whose mandate he is holding on trust.

REFERENCES

- Achebe, C (1983). *The Trouble with Nigeria*. Fourth dimension press.
- Adeniran, T. (1983). *Introduction to International Relations*. Macmillan press
- Ake, C (1979). *Social Science as Imperialism: The Theory of Political Development*. Ibadan University press.
- Atelhe, G.A (2022). Understanding Security: Some conceptual and Theoretical Notes in Atelhe, G.A and Garba, A.W (eds). *The Nigerian Security Dilemma Since 1999: Challenges, Strategic options and way forward*. Nigerian Defence Academy press
- Atelhe, G.A and Tawo, A.T (2022). Strengthening Policy Framework as State Response to Terrorism in Nigeria interrogating the Terrorism Prevention Act, 2011, in Atelhe, G.A and Garba, A.W (eds). *The Nigerian Security Dilemma since 1999, Challenges, Strategic Options and Way Forward*. Nigerian Defence Academy Press.
- Bassey, C.O. (2019). Security Challenges, Systems Challenges, Systems Failure and Community Policing in Nigeria, Bassey, C.O and Ogbonna, M.O (eds) *Internal Security Crisis and Community Policy in Nigeria. Policy options and Strategies*. Concept Publication Limited.
- Booth, K. (1975). Alliances, in (ed) Baylis, J. Booth, K, Garnett and Williams, P.(ed) *Contemporary strategy: Theories and Policies*.
- Edeh, H.C , & Okpala, A.L. (2009). Myths or realities of global terrorism– 2007), in Okolie. A (ed) *Contemporary Readings on Nigeria's External Relations. Issue, perspective, and challenges*. Willy Rose and Appleseed Press.
- Igwe, O. (2007). *Politics and Globe Dictionary*. Eagle press
- Igwe, O. (1989). *A modern Introduction to Strategic Studies*. National Library of Nigeria Cataloguing in Publication Data.
- Kegley, C.W and Raymond, G.A (2010). *The Global Future: A Brief Introduction to World politics*. Library of Congress terrorism.
- Morgenthau, H. (1967). *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. Harvard University Press.
- Onuoha, J. (2008). *Beyond diplomacy: Contemporary issues in international Relations*. Nigeria: Great AP Express press.
- Simon, J.D (2013). *Lone Wolf Terrorist: understanding the growing threat*. Prometheus Books.
- Toyo, E. (1983). Non-Ethnocentric Flaws in Competing Non-Marxist Paradigms of Development, in Barongo, Y (ed). *Political science in Africa: A Critical Review*. Zed Press Plc.
- Williams, D.U (2022). Terrorism, Radicalization, Violent Extremism and Military Effectiveness in Nigeria, in Atelhe, G.A and Garba, A.W (eds). *The Nigerian Security Dilemma since 1999. Challenges, Strategic Options and Way Forward*, Kaluma: Nigerian Defence Academy Press.