Committee: African Union
Topic: Strengthening Regional Cooperation to Combat Terrorism and Extremist Groups.
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Overview of the Problem

Increasing levels of extremist violence have turned into a crisis that threatens the stability of sovereign African nations. The Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin, and the Horn of Africa now act as primary regions of extremist activity, responsible for more than half of global deaths caused by terrorist groups. Traditional regional partnerships like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the regional G5 Sahel alliance, and localized military efforts like the Multinational Task Force (MNJTF), have been undermined by severe socio-economic issues. This political division, along with the withdrawal of key international security forces, such as the French Operation Barkhane and the United Nations, has resulted in former state controlled areas being taken over by extremist groups. These overlapping gaps in the security forces have resulted in over 4 million civilians being displaced from their homes and continue to threaten the lands of the states surrounding them (UNHCR, 2025).

Introduction

The African Union defines terrorist acts as any act that violates the laws of a state and that may endanger the life, integrity or freedom of beings causing injury or death, as well as causing damage to private or state property, environment or natural resources. Today this definition reflects a reality in the African continent: The extremist violence is now not only a local and isolated problem, but a collective crisis that threatens regional stability. Across regions like The Sahel, Lake Chad Basin, the Horn of Africa and Burkina Faso, terrorist groups like Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab and others, have terrorized and killed hundreds of families, torn apart entire villages and displaced millions of innocents. According to the Institute for Economics & Peace (2026), between 51% and 59% of all global fatalities resulting from terrorism occur in Africa; analysts have recorded more than 6,000 annual fatalities in this region alone. Terrorism in Africa has a direct impact on the global population through an increase in security risk, irregular migration and disruption to global economies. Due to large areas of ungoverned territories being controlled by terrorist groups, including Al-Qaeda and ISIS, they can train operatives, store weapons and work alongside global organized crime networks to move illicit goods and drugs to Europe and beyond.
The African Union Peace and Security Council provides a critical platform for member states to coordinate regional defense strategies. This background paper examines how extremist networks abuse the governance gaps to establish illegal administrations. This paper will also examine the objectives of existing regional institutions.
The purpose of this committee is to close the gap between regions and form a cohesive strategy which addresses the underlying economic causes of violent terrorist groups in Africa.

Historical Background

The recent 2026 Global Terrorism Index of the Institute for Economics & Peace confirmed that Africa is indeed the center of global terrorism. In 2025, 2,944 terrorist attacks and 5,882 fatalities were recorded. The Sahel accounted for more than half of deaths caused by terrorism globally.
But it was not always like that, it goes all the way back to colonial times. After decolonization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Western powers drew territorial limits without taking into consideration the ethnic, tribal or cultural separation. Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, and Mauritania share similarities in their historical, and political past. These countries share the history of a colonization process, mainly French, that is considered responsible for creating a deep instability inside their institutions and economies. This created ongoing conflicts between communities that still persist today.

Boko Haram which literally translates as “the Western education is a sin” was created in 2002 in Maiduguri, Nigeria by Mohammed Yusuf an Islamic preacher. It started as a movement of religious preaching and salafist charity. It attracted young, unemployed, poor and unsatisfied students. The group collided with the authorities in July 2009, which caused a violent repression and led to the execution of Yusuf. After this, the organization transformed into a radical and brutal armed group under the command of Abubakar Shekau, deploying violent tactics, including kidnappings and suicide bombings.
Jihadist groups, which are armed organizations that follow an extremist interpretation of Islam, sometimes may appear to be an alternative, and the only way to obtain certain services and address needs that are not provided by the government. Under such harsh conditions, joining a terrorist group is often viewed, by some young people, as their only chance to survive, and in most cases, their only viable choice.
In areas such as the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, where youth unemployment is widespread, extremist networks present themselves from violent groups to feasible job opportunities. They provide regular monthly payment and initial bonus and economic security for families. This means that jihadist networks can take advantage of the lack of economic security caused by failed movement. (Eizenga & Williams, 2020)
This is further strengthened by the feeling of being saved. For these youths who feel excluded from society, joining extremist groups gives them an instant status, a weapon, a salary and a sense of belonging in a community.

This phenomenon of state replacement can be seen across the region as many different armed groups have taken control. There are many groups across the region including the Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM). This is an official alliance of Al-Qaeda jihadists in West Africa (Eizenga & Williams, 2020). It was formed in the Sahel region in 2017 and has quickly spread from Mali to Burkina Faso and Niger by exploiting the lack of effective government and existing ethnic conflicts within these countries. They have used groups such as the Fulani people to increase their numbers. The group now acts as an alternative government within the areas they control. They have their own judicial system and tax system. There are also factions of Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS). There is also the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), a powerful branch of Boko Haram. This has resulted in a two front war with the Islamic State groups fighting both the local military regimes and the Al-Qaeda affiliates. This is so they can gain control of the illegal gold mining and smuggling routes. These groups have exploited poverty and division within the region making the Sahel the center of modern warfare.
Actions to eradicate terrorism in Africa have mainly focused on the reconfiguration of institutions with the creation of the African Union (AU) in 2002 as a supranational body that coordinates security, the design of regional defense institutions and the search of international accompaniment to provide technical, legal and military tools and the weakened states. However, this has led to some issues, the AU has faced

significant operational constraints, leaving regional frameworks vulnerable to rapid escalation by militant factions. This has caused the elites to question strategies due to the poverty and inequality of Member States, which has caused a power imbalance where consolidated groups such as Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab surpass state forces, this has caused the conflict to spread to bordering countries. The phenomenon that was wrongly labeled as endemic conflict for decades is still growing in Africa.

The efforts to combat terrorism in Africa, specifically in regions of the Sahel (like Mali, Somalia, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, etc) have failed due to an excessive military approach that ignored the socioeconomic problems and the institutional instability of regional governments.
International interventions, historically led by Europe and the United States, prioritized the eradication of terrorist leaders and elite forces. However, they did not solve the crisis like lack of basic services in rural areas, such as education, health and criminal justice.

Situation Today

The escalation of regional conflict has displaced millions of civilians and caused an urgent humanitarian crisis all over the African continent. The increase of violent acts in 2026 has reached unprecedented levels in the capitals themselves. According to the most recent reports of the Global Terrorist index and the Soufan Center, the crisis has aggravated due to a lack of security caused by a withdrawal of Western forces and the consolidation of the confederation of Sahel States. Terrorism is expanding from the land of Sahel. Groups are pushing to the south, launching an attack into northern regions of west Africa, such as Benin, Ghana and Togo. It has caused the separation of local organizations like ECOWAS (Regional bloc of economic, political, and security integration in West Africa) given that the junta-led states broke away from their own.
The Al-Qaeda cell JNIM launched a massive coordinated attack on Mali and laid an assault on its capital city of Bamako. The terrorist displayed sophisticated warfare skills by attacking secured areas, killing the defense minister in a suicide bombing attack and surrounding the capital, with armed forces causing a blockade around the city that paralyzed the transportation routes internationally.
The data indicates that the Sahel has become the epicenter of global terrorism. This has been greatly aggravated by the formation of the new Confederation of Sahel States (Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger). The governments of these nations, which are headed by military authorities, have opted to contract Russians for their defense operations and security. However, there has been increased political instability following military defeats, ambushes and coordinated terrorist attacks by Al-Qaeda jihadist alliances and separatist in northern Mali.

Key Stakeholders and Their Positions

Armed conflicts and the expansion of terrorism to other territories outside the Sahel resulted in a humanitarian crisis which directly affects the interest to understand what those different sides want and why they pursue particular goals in order to analyze the current situation with this problem.
The confederation of the Sahel States (Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger) aims to achieve a greater national sovereignty and military autonomy and therefore externalizing the protection of its territories to Russian representatives. Coastal West African states, including Benin, Ghana, and Togo, established the Accra Initiative to coordinate intelligence. In contrast, Western partners such as the United States and the European Union focus primarily on fighting terrorist activities and restrict Russian influence on the

continent, are extremely concerned about their inability to operate their tactical military bases in this region due to lack of intelligence (Webber, 2025)

International groups such as ECOWAS are seeking to restore regional integration and collective security integration in West Africa. But they are deeply frustrated by the separation of junta-led states. UN agencies such as UNHCR and UNOWAS, are calling for unrestricted humanitarian access and an end to human rights violations. They are motivated by the dire need to respond to the displacement of more than 4 million people across the region.

Non-profit organizations and humanitarian groups on the ground, trying to get food, medical supplies and emergency aid to overwhelmed rural areas. They also do a lot in the way of documenting war crimes by both militant groups and military forces. They are driven by a strong humanitarian imperative to relieve human suffering, humanitarian organizations are facing operational danger and bureaucratic obstruction from local military juntas.

Economically, affected businesses desire stable logistics lines and heavy physical security for their infrastructure.
Supply routes are regularly attacked by military groups or artisanal mining fields are hijacked to stop their operations, leaving them vulnerable. This forces legitimate businesses to spend millions on private security to protect their means.

Most importantly, civilians such as those from the rural areas and displaced families would bear the hardest burden of violence. They desire basic security, working infrastructure and government run services. However they suffer the most targeted killings, extortions and lack of communication. They feel neglected due to their lack of priority within the central government as they do not place big emphasis on ensuring that the major cities are protected, but leave those from remote border villages extremely exposed to extremist attacks.

Past Attempts and Existing Frameworks

The UN and the AU have developed strategies and policies to counter the problem of terrorism in Africa over time. These policies have focused on intergovernmental cooperation, intelligence sharing, security, and prevention of recruitment of new members by such groups. However, despite all this effort, terrorism remains a major threat to the continent. In 1999, regional states deployed the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) to secure the Lake Chad Basin (Kodjo, 2025). In 2002, the African Union launched a Plan of Action that would deal with border security, intelligence sharing, and combating financial terrorism. ACSRT was founded in Algeria in 2004 to research terrorist groups in Africa and assist countries in boosting their security capabilities. AU further developed a Model law on Counter-terrorism in 2011 to guide countries in improving their national laws.
While these initiatives have made significant progress in the field of International cooperation and lawmaking against terrorism, they have not succeeded in eradicating terrorism. Limited resources, political tension, and lack of compliance with agreements are some of the main problems. This effort has been limited by ineffective institutions and inability to maintain collaboration over the long-term, resulting in terrorist groups continuing operating in several regions.

Challenges and Complications

However, there are some challenges that could affect the process of terrorism prevention in Africa. For instance, political differences could stand in the way of information exchange and the coordination of security operations. Inadequate financing, limited technology and shortages of personnel hinder border security and investigative efforts.
In addition, corruption and weak government institutions can obstruct the effort of law enforcement agencies to protect the vulnerable populations. Several members lack communication systems, advanced satellite navigation, and biometric tools, which limits their capacity to react quickly to any security threat. Moreover, coordination of military actions can be difficult due to differences between the community and its government. Poverty, unemployment, and poor education can make some part of the population more vulnerable to recruitment by extremists. Moreover, terrorists can take advantage of zones in which government control is weak and this makes it difficult for the authorities to secure the zones. Social media and digital platforms can also be used by extremists in spreading their propaganda messages and recruiting members. Lastly, lack of cooperation between communities and security forces, because of the mistrust that exists between them poses another problem in the fight against terrorism in Africa.

The Committee's Role and Powers

The African Union (AU) assists with the member states in preventing terrorism through cooperation, intelligence, and implementation of security policy. While the AU Peace and Security Council can mandate Peace Support Operations, it depends on UN Security Council authorization and external partner funding for major deployments.
The delegates will draft resolutions proposing measures such as improving border security and strengthening intelligence sharing. The committee can work together with UN agencies like the UN security council, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The action of regional organizations should be approved by the Security Council.

Delegates must follow the rules of procedures in the committee, respect views of different states, and use diplomatic language. Furthermore, delegates should consider national sovereignty alongside the Union's right to intervene under Article 4(h) of the Constitutive Act during grave circumstances.
The PSC recommends actions that can coordinate the cooperation of the member states and can authorize peace support operations. It cannot in any way compel the member states to act or control them in any way. Its effectiveness is entirely dependent on the co-operation of member states, on the availability of funding and in some cases on the authorization of the UN Security Council.

Guiding Questions for Debate

1- How can African countries improve intelligence sharing among themselves while protecting national security?
2- In what ways can members strengthen the border surveillance despite severe resource and personnel constraints?
3- In what ways could the AU foster cooperation between states with different political objectives?
4- In what ways could governments combat terrorism while ensuring human rights protection?
5- What should be the role of the UN in backing counterterrorism efforts by Africa?
6- How should matters concerning poverty, unemployment, and education be addressed to stop extremists from recruiting people?
7- In what ways can nations enhance the coordination of their army during joint operations?
8- How can the AU ensure that its member states comply with treaty obligations in counterterrorism
9- What types of international funding should be distributed among countries having various levels of terrorist threats?
10- How can governments restore public trust in those communities suffering from terrorism?
11- What could be done in order to stop terrorism from obtaining money and arms in other countries?
12- In what ways can the AU evaluate the success of its counterterrorism tactics in the long term?

Conclusion and Call to Action

In conclusion, terrorism is seen as one of the most serious threats facing many African nations because it brings harm to the people, undermines the effective operations of governments, brings disruption to the economic development of countries, and brings instability to the societies of countries that are affected by terrorism. The African Union and the UN have attempted to provide solutions to combat terrorism but their achievements have been limited due to a number of problems such as the lack of funding, disagreements between countries, poor intelligence sharing, and logistics barriers associated with regional military coordination.

There is an urgent need to take action to strengthen the cooperation between African countries, improve border controls and use intelligence sharing methods for preventing terrorist recruitment. Governments must deal with the issues causing terrorism like poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to education as well as ensure respect for human rights and state sovereignty.

Despite differences in political views and national priorities, member states must work toward common goals. Open dialogue, mutual understanding, and regional cooperation are essential to developing realistic and effective counterterrorism strategies. Ultimately, the success of these efforts will depend on the willingness of African countries to work together toward a safer, more united, and more stable continent.

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