

# Counterterrorism in Africa - New Approaches to Old Problems

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**Book review:** J. Besenyő, M. B. Khanyile, D. Vogel (eds.) 2024. *Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism in Modern Sub-Saharan Africa*. Palgrave Macmillan. 300 p.

The editors of the book set out to tackle an actual, relevant, and multi-faceted topic in all its complexity. The volume also pledges to cover a vast geographical area—Sub-Saharan Africa. With thirteen chapters, including an introduction and a strategic outlook at the end, this is an ambitious task to achieve. A look at the chapter titles reveals a slight focus on West Africa, with four chapters devoted to the region. This is balanced by four chapters with a continental approach and one chapter each on East and Southern Africa. The geographical division, however,

is not the only organizing principle of the book. While the first part of the volume introduces the root causes of terrorism—a traditional topic viewed from less traditional angles—the second part focuses on technology and its connection to terrorism.

The introductory chapter acknowledges that the objective suggested in the title cannot be fully achieved within the length limitations of the volume. To balance out these technical constraints, the chapter directs the readers' attention to the new approaches offered by the twelve subsequent parts.

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The second chapter sets out to tackle general questions of terrorism, including the ever-recurring debate on the unsettled nature of its definition. The author states that, despite a degree of consensus on the definition within Africa, controversies have not been eliminated along the concepts of: terrorist organizations and insurgent movements. The chapter also sheds light on the diversity of terrorist organizations operating on the continent; stating that while most organizations operate within a single country and do not necessarily swear allegiance to ISIS or al-Qaeda, they often share similar modi operandi. The chapter also explores the connection between terrorism and development, stating that terrorist activities and government responses to them create a vicious circle of underdevelopment and unrest. The chapter provides a sound theoretical framework for the volume through its clear, accessible language and its ability to highlight matters of importance.

The third chapter provides the case study of Ambazonian struggle for independence, which resonates well with the introduced dilemma on the definition of terrorism, and the difference from insurgency. This section introduces a topic, largely absent from academic literature, which is both one of its greatest strengths and weaknesses. The lack of academic sources in the references is evident in its policy-paper writing style, and the chapter occasionally disregards elements of academic writing. But even together with this

minor shortfall, the chapter provides to the body of academic literature on Ambazonia.

The fourth chapter offers a deeper understanding and comparative analysis on how Ghana and Nigeria address terrorism. While Nigeria tends to over-militarize the issue, Ghana relies more on civil society vigilance and on legislation that provides concrete counterterrorism (CT) tools (e.g., search and preventive-detention powers). The chapter certainly adds an important element to the academic thinking on terrorism in West Africa, particularly through its focus on Ghana, and the country's way of preventing and tackling terrorism.

The fifth chapter turns to Mozambique's Cabo Delgado, analysing the conflict through a deprivation lens. The authors introduce the current situation as the result of decades of neglect, and draw disturbing parallels between colonial era corporate colonizers and modern day company activities in the region. Again, despite the country's visibility through the operating EU mission on the ground, Mozambique is still neglected in the academic literature. The chapter draws attention to the unique case of colonization practices in Mozambique and its consequences in a reader friendly manner.

The following sixth chapter ventures back to the territory of terminological disputes, employing terms like terrorism and insurgency to depict the situation in Mali. It also reveals the differences with which the two

phenomena are treated; pointing out that CT tends to privilege military solutions, which are cheaper and politically more appealing than whole-of-government counterinsurgency. The chapter is very informative and makes effective use of its case-study format to demonstrate differences in CT and counterinsurgency operations.

After exploring CT on land, the volume turns to the maritime domain. In the seventh chapter, the author explores the treaty framework of maritime CT, and again as the recurrent topic of the whole volume, the definition of terrorism vis-à-vis piracy, which is a prevalent security challenge at the shores of Africa, especially in the Gulf of Guinea and at the Horn of Africa. While the chapter provides a well-constructed overview on maritime CT activities, it fails to include European Union efforts to safeguard maritime security at the shores of Africa, which includes both Coordinated Maritime Presences and Common Security and Defence Policy operations (Hornyák & Vecsey, M. (2023). The author of the chapter not only identifies the sectors most affected by maritime terrorism, but also makes recommendations for each of them in order to respond more effectively to the threat.

The following chapter explores terrorist attacks on critical infrastructure, introducing the topic through the case of al-Shabaab activities in Kenya. The authors identified three sectors in which the attacks had been conducted; communications, transportation

and energy. They call for changes to be implemented in all three sectors to respond to the growing number of attacks, considering the vulnerability of the energy sector to be the greatest. The chapter offers a fresh approach on how terrorist groups might exploit their notoriousness, porous borders and corporate greed in their favor to maximize the impact of their attacks on critical infrastructure. The topic is so under-studied, that a Web of Science search did not provide any research articles in similar subjects, but its interdisciplinary nature ensures that despite this, the chapter can have sound theoretical foundation.

Chapter nine explores intelligence collection considering information operations and cyber security from a military and national security approach. The author introduces the principles of (military style) intelligence analysis to the reader, and seeks to promote its use in academic research too. The subchapters on information operations and cyber security are not met with the readers' expectations, as they are (very exhaustive) lists on the characteristics of the two challenges. While this chapter is one of the rare examples to theorize and introduce military intelligence, a rather understudied area (Scheffler & Dietrich, 2023), the author did not provide a literature review to the chapter to support their statement. Research in this area is very important, but the claims made in the chapter that military intelligence and academic research are mutually exclusive practices

are debatable; even so because the aims of the two are fundamentally different. Notwithstanding these issues, the chapter certainly achieves its aim to introduce and theorize military intelligence.

The following chapter delves deeper into technology, introducing the Internet of Things (IoT) in an African context. The chapter claims that the health sector would be the main beneficiary of technology in the continent. The authors also mentioned the security challenges of such systems, and offered recommendations how to address them. Chapter ten also offers a unique approach to the utilization of IoT. Even though it draws attention to challenges related to the employment of smart things in Africa, the authors seem to downplay the scale of IoT vulnerability. While they might have African terrorist organizations and their capabilities in mind when assessing vulnerabilities, IoT is globally reachable, and according to Hypponen's Law, vulnerable (Hypponen & Nyman, 2017). A clearer connection to the overall theme of the volume, terrorism and CT, is also missing from the chapter. The relevance and actuality of the chapter's subject is unquestionable, and further investigation would be really beneficial.

Chapter eleven guides the reader through a case study, which proposes the use of Geospatial Intelligence (GEOINT) to counter terrorism in Nigeria. It takes into consideration previous and current approaches to fight terrorism, and finds that Nigeria could

successfully utilize this method to address the challenge. The chapter offers a logical, well written explanation why GEOINT could be utilized successfully in CT. The true uniqueness of the chapter lies exactly in this topic. While GEOINT is a widely researched area, its utilization in CT operations is under-studied in such a scale that a Web of Science search only provides one article altogether in the subject.

Chapter twelve analyses the question of immunization in conflict areas, stating that different insurgent and terrorist groups cooperate or resist in different levels. The authors conclude that no matter what the attitude of the armed group, immunization always falls behind during an armed conflict even when the warring parties support vaccination campaigns. The chapter thus explores a relevant interdisciplinary topic. The title of the chapter reads rather self-explanatory at first, indicating that vaccination is indeed more difficult in zones of armed conflict, the authors built up a logical argument about a contradictory practice too. They argue that some terrorist or insurgent groups welcome vaccination campaigns to make themselves more acceptable on the international stage. Besides this, the different practices of terrorist groups with various religious backgrounds are also researched. The result shows that Islamist groups are more likely to reject vaccination campaigns. The chapter thus offers a unique knowledge in a niche topic,

which is however very important from the human security point of view.

The thirteenth and last chapter provides an overview and strategic outlook on terrorism and CT in Africa. The future trajectories look grim according to the author, since growing young populations paired with weak economies are a fertile ground for frustration and radicalization. This outlook is juxtaposed with the slow reaction times and structural limitations of peacekeeping, which results in a very slowly changing security landscape according to the author. The chapter provides the reader with a realistic outlook based on demographic, economic and radicalization data, describing the connection between these variables clearly, in a reader friendly style.

The volume is a well-written and complex work that lives up to expectations, successfully tackling multiple topics and case studies to introduce the diverse and challenging realities of terrorism and CT in Sub-Saharan Africa. It offers a multifaceted view of regional security issues, local insurgencies, and the political and technological dynamics that shape responses to violent extremism. However, the diverse subjects covered could have been organized more cohesively; for instance, chapters focusing on Nigeria would flow more naturally if positioned consecutively, allowing readers to build a more comprehensive understanding of the country's CT landscape. Given the wide range of themes and regions addressed, achieving a clear and

consistent structure must have posed a significant editorial challenge. Nonetheless, the inclusion of several innovative and underexplored topics—such as the utilization of GEOINT in CT, assessing IoT vulnerabilities, and terrorist attacks against critical infrastructures among others—adds great value and opens promising avenues for further academic inquiry in CT studies.

This volume is recommended for readers who already possess foundational knowledge of terrorism and CT from traditional perspectives and wish to broaden their understanding through new and emerging approaches.

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