

---

# Terrorism In West Africa: An Introductory Essay

---

Samuel Yaw Appiah-Marfo (PhD)

---

## Abstract:

Etymologically, the term *terrorism* lays the word terror. *Terror* comes from the Latin word “*terrere*”, which means “frighten” or “tremble”. When liaised with the French suffix “*isme*” (referencing “to practice”), it becomes akin to “practicing the trembling” or “causing the frightening.” (Mitusitz, 2015). Trembling and frightening are similar to fear, panic, and anxiety - what we would naturally refer to as “*terror*”. The origin of the word “*terror*” is over 2,100 years old. In ancient Rome, the terror Cimbricus era was a state of panic and emergency in response to the coming of the Cimbri tribe killers in 105 BCE. From this standpoint, the word *terrorism* was coined during the French Revolution’s Reign of Terror in (1793-1794). In this work, four (4) out of eight (8) terrorists organizations operating in West Africa are discussed. This study further examines their origins, development, the extent of their networks and inter-linkages with the global terror networks. Also their methods of operations (modus operandi) and sponsorship have been discussed. All these thematic areas will enable us understand the activities of terrorists and their organizations, as well as consciously prepare us adequately to counteract their actions before they strike. More so, apart from awareness and sensitization of West African States nationals, the study helps international counter-terrorism efforts to deal with the challenge or menace of global terrorism.

## Key Words:

Terrorism; Salafist; Terror, Sharia Laws; Sufism; Terror- cells; Modus Operandi

## Introduction:

Etymologically, the term *terrorism*, lays the word terror. *Terror* comes from the Latin word “*terrere*”, which means “frighten” or “tremble”. When liaised with the French suffix “*isme*” (referencing “to practice”), it becomes akin to “practicing the trembling” or “causing the frightening.” (Mitusitz, 2015). Trembling and frightening are similar to fear, panic, and anxiety – which we would naturally referred to as “*terror*”. The origin of the word “*terror*” is over 2,100 years old. In ancient Rome, the terror cimbricus were simply a state of panic and emergency in response to the coming of the Cimbri tribe killers in 105 BCE.

There are plethora of definitions for the term “*terrorism*”. Academic and legal scholars have defined it variously to suit different contexts in different circumstances and times. Terrorism, therefore is an amorphous term which means it is opened to different interpretations and meanings. Also,

---

---

when people use the term 'terrorism', they characterize their enemies' actions as something evil and lacking human compassion. This again, makes the term pejorative - that is, fraught with negative and derogatory meanings..

However, central to over "212 different definitions" (Simon, 1994) used presently, were violent use of force and fear which causes physical, material, and emotional damage with heavy casualty of innocent non-combatants (Schwartz, 1998, p. 486). Also *terrorism* could be defined as a crime; which consist of both '*mala prohibita*' acts (i.e. crimes that are made illegal by legislations) and '*mala in se*' acts (which are crimes of immoral or wrong in themselves) (Rush, 2002 as cited in Matusitz, 2013, p. 2).

Matusitz (2013) in his work: *Terrorism & Communication: A Critical Introduction*. Thousand Oaks: Sage publication, further argued that, even though, there were no universally agreed-on definition of *terrorism*, at best, there were "most universally accepted" definition of it; which are, the use of violence to create fear (i.e., terror, and/or psychic fear) for political, religious or ideological reasons" (p. 23). Similarly, The Office of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights observed in its general Factsheet N° 32 (2008, p. 6) that, *terrorism* is commonly understood to be acts of violence which target civilians in the pursuit of political or ideological aims. In 1994, the UN General Assembly's Declaration on Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism, sets out in its Resolution 49/60, stated that *terrorism* includes "criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public by group of persons or particular persons for political purposes" and that, such acts "were in any circumstances unjustifiable, whatever the considerations, be it political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or other nature that may be invoked to justify them."

There are several arguments which have been advanced as impediment to non-agreement of universally accepted definition of *terrorism*. Bassiouni (1988) in his work, "A Policy-oriented Inquiry of 'International Terrorism'" in M. Cherif Bassiouni, ed., *Legal Responses to International Terrorism: U.S. Procedural Aspects*. London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, observed that, an all-inclusive and ambiguous definition was impossible. This was because "the fundamental values at stake in the acceptance or rejection of terror-inspiring violence as means of accomplishing a given goal was obvious and well known range of views on these issues were what makes an internationally accepted specific definition of what was loosely called "*terrorism*," a largely impossible undertaking. This was why the search for and internationally agreed upon definition may well be a futile and unnecessary effort."

Another non-agreement could be found by considering the typology of *terrorism*. Laqueur (2000) observed that, defining *terrorism* in specific terms "were bound to fail" in that, there were "not one, but many terrorisms" (p.46) which are recognized by multitude of factors, motivations, and activities considered when describing *terrorism*. The maxim, "one man's terrorist could passed as another man's freedom fighter"; these aptly captures the present-day challenges of groups or individual sympathies typically lies, either with the "terror" perpetrators or the victims. Obviously, these sympathies unavoidably shaped how the term's application would be applied or rejected. More so, labeling actions simultaneously places a value and/or moral judgment on those actions which unavoidably are shaped by the orientation of the definer and the receiver. Therefore,

---

“*terrorism*” was and still is a pejorative label. It could be used to characterize an individual or organization as “terrorist” which indicates a negative connotation or wrongdoing. These have given currency currently to governments, organizations, and individuals to indiscriminately tag to suit their overt or covert political agendas. For example, the list of most wanted terrorists were kept by the United States prior to 9/11, 2001, it featured at one point, Yasser Arafat and Nelson Mandela, both of whom were subsequently awarded the Noble Peace Prize; an evidence that, the definition / tag was highly political and controversial. Besides, Yasser Arafat, before his death was again branded terrorist by US government, yet *terrorism* had continued to evolve over the centuries (Matusitz, 2013, p. 2).

Consequently, the non-universally agreed-on definition does not mean that states can act arbitrary towards terrorists and their organizations. Under the international law and international human rights laws of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights factsheet N° 32, particularly the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and its two optional protocols, the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment of 1984 and its optional protocols and UDHR prohibits all States even if they are not party to any of such treaties. For instance, in event of human rights challenges in countering *terrorism*, all members of the United Nations (UN) are obliged to take joint and separate actions in cooperation with the UN for the achievement of the purposes set out in Article 55 of its Charter.

Also to ensure dignity and security of all human beings everywhere and protect innocent lives, States rights to tailor their legislations on *terrorism* and their arbitrariness must still be checked. For example in U.S., persons suspected of *terrorism* were subjected to indefinite detention. Since January 2002, over 700 persons have been held as terror suspects at the US naval base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, pursuant to a Military Order issued by President George Bush: “Detention Treatment and Trial of Certain Non-Citizens in the war against *Terrorism*”. In earlier cases, these detainees were deemed not to be covered under the US constitution and the Bill of Rights. They did not even have the right to ‘*Habeas Corpus*’. They were considered to be in a “legal black hole”. These US legislations were in congruous to both Article 7 of the Inter-American Convention of Human Rights and Article 118 of the Geneva Convention of 1949 which ensures that prisoners of war must be released “without delay”, and not be held in indefinite detention. Thus on June 28, 2004, three of the six Supreme Court Judges rejected the fiction of the legal-black-hole and apprehended that persons being held in Guantanamo Bay are entitled to counsel and to challenge the legality of their detention (Zayas, 2005, p. 24). Moreover, *terrorism* perhaps be linked with transnational organized crimes like drug trafficking, money-laundering and trafficking in arms, as well as illegal transfers of nuclear, chemical and biological materials, leading to commission of serious crimes like murder, extortion, kidnapping, assault, hostage-taking and threatens security of states, political and socio-religious intolerance. These violates the Chapter 1: Article 1 (3) of the UN charter, and as such needed to be suppressed as an essential element for the maintenance of international peace and security.

---

---

## The History of Terrorism in West Africa

Historically, *terrorism* was an old war tactic (Matusitz, 2013). Different accounts of terrorism have existed before the word itself was invented. Many ancient writers in antiquity advocated for tyrannicide (i.e. the killing of tyrants) as a way to have an ideal society and to please the gods. Besides, Regicide (i.e. the killing of kings) happened quite frequently during the Roman age.

Another early terrorist group were the Sicarii (66-73 CE), a Zealot-affiliated religious sect fighting against Roman occupiers in Palestine and Jerusalem (the City of David), Jewish traitors, and Jewish moderates who had sold their souls to Hellenistic influences. The Sicarii opposed the law that Jews pay taxes to Rome and refused to acknowledge the power of the Roman Emperor (Vitellius). They were persuaded that political change could come only through violent acts. Hence, they adopted *terrorism* as their tactic. For example, after investigating a target's routine every day, hiding nearby a temple's entrance, they knew the perfect time to cut the target's throat. In fact, *sica* (the first four letters of the group's name) means "short sword." The Sicarii's most fundamental justification was that all means were legitimate to achieve political and religious liberation. They wanted to show the world, who they were, but eventually the terrorists lost and committed mass suicide in Masada in 73 CE, which coincides with the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem by Titus (the Emperor's son).

During the middle ages, in 11th century Persia, 'the Assassins' were religious sects striking terror against the empire of Saladin and resisted the armies of the Ottoman Empire. As Chaliand & Blin (2007) noted in their pioneering work, *The History of Terrorism, from Antiquity to Al Qaeda*, the word "assassin" allegedly comes from the drug *hashish*. Suicide missions were customary, and some Crusader leaders were so frightened by the Assassins that they paid tribute to them; in exchange, the Assassins would not attack them. The word 'assassination' were invented to describe this tactic. A major part of the Assassins' beliefs were paramount righteousness of their cause and procedure. To slay or be slain were seen as a positive gesture because it was done in the name of Allah and secured a place in paradise after death. As the Qur'an explains it, "Allah has purchased off the believers, their persons and their goods; for theirs in return was the garden of Paradise: they fought in His cause and slayed and are slain: a promise binding on Him in truth" (Qur'an 9:111). This text and belief in ultimate justification and reward have been adopted by many contemporary Islamist terrorists. Mamdani (2004) however argued that Islamists like Al-Qaeda subscribing to Political Islam skewed the interpretation of this text to prosecute their own agenda.

It is significant to note that, the word *terrorism* was coined during the French Revolution's Reign of Terror in (1793-1794). During the Reign of Terror, a campaign of large-scale violence was embarked upon by the French state; where between 16,000 and 40,000 people were killed. It is not surprising, then, that the French National Convention proclaimed in September 1793 that "terror is the order of the day." Maximilien Robespierre, a frontrunner in the French Revolution, in 1794 declared that "*terror is nothing other than justice, prompt, severe, [and] inflexible.*" In 1798, the French released the supplement for the dictionary of the *Académie Française*, an elite

---

French learned body on matters dealing with the French language. In this supplement, the term was explained as the “système, régime de la terreur” (i.e., “government of terror”). The English version of the word *terrorism* was attributed to a British man’s depiction of the bloodshed he had witnessed from afar in France, during the revolution. However, Sir Edmund Burke in his comment on the French Revolution warned about the advent of “thousands of those hell hounds called terrorists” (as cited in Matusitz 2013, p. 1- 2).

Furthermore, the evolution of *terrorism* became an issue on the international agenda in 1934, when the League of Nations took the first major step toward making the act highly illegal and punishable. In doing so, it drafted a convention for the prevention and punishment of terrorist acts. Terrorism could also be traced to the rise of radical political ideologies (nationalism, anarchism, communism and Marxism) and weapons technologies led to the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary in 1914 which precipitated the World War I. (Adeyemi, 2015).

*Terrorism* began to make headlines again in the 1970s and reached a pinnacle in the mid-1980s. For instance, from 1975 to 1984, the average number of reported terrorist attacks increased from ten per week to nearly ten every day. Li & Schaub (2004) examined international terrorist incidents within 112 countries from 1975 to 1997 Middle East had the highest proportion of international terrorist incidents. Europe ranked second. Africa, Asia, and the Americas experienced considerably fewer international terrorist attacks -approximately 69%, 65%, and 33%, respectively, in comparison with the Middle East. Moreover, it is instructive to note that the rise of guerrilla tactics by non-state actors led to the rise of ethnic nationalism and anticolonial sentiments which were against British, French and German empires in Algeria, Kenya, Cyprus and South Yemen. Hijacking of planes, bombing of specific targets, the use of human hostages; increasing number of ideologies and religious groups that engaged in attacks and killing of innocent civilians for political gains made terrorism to gain media publicity. For instance, George Habash (the founder of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) statement that “at least the world is talking about us now” (Adeyemi, 2015, p. 22) when he compared the level of media coverage on the hijack of an E1 AL Airline to the battles of Israeli soldiers (Adeyemi & Musa, 2015).

Finally, apart from the international terrorist attacks like the September 11, 2001 (9/11) launched by the Al-Qaeda upon the United States in New York and Washington D.C., the 1994 Bojinka plot, the 1998 U.S. Embassy bombings in East Africa, the 2003 Casablanca bombings and the 2001 Singapore plot as well as the incessant cases of bombings in India, Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Pakistan, the devastating effects of terrorists attacks and destruction of properties in West Africa by Boko Haram sect in the northern Nigeria, and those of the Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in Mali needed an urgent attention.

## **Methodology**

The methodological section of this research study attempt to explain how the research themes were investigated and the logic of selecting the four groups.

---

This research study was largely desk-based research. Data collection sources to investigate the research themes used, were both primary and secondary. The primary sources were largely recorded tapes of some leaders of the four terror organizations. The secondary sources included journals articles, policy briefs, books and internet sources. The four (4) cases chosen for this study were; Al - Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the Boko Haram (BK), Ansar Al-Din, and the Movement of Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO). The logic behind the selection of these cases were the nature of their threat in West Africa. For example, AQIM and Boko Haram which were organized around the ideology that Western education is forbidden. Their devastating effects of these terrorists' organizations operation in West Africa and their allegiance to *Da'esh* commonly referred to as Islamic State in the Levant (ISL, or IS) are a cause for concern. Moreover, AQIM, Ansar Din, and Mujao have merged with the notorious Maktar bel Moktar led Al-Morabitoun group in carrying out surgical bombings in Radisson Blu hotel in Bamako, Hotel Splendid and Cappuccino Café in Burkina Faso and the Machine gun attacks at Grand Bassam in Ivory Coast (Adeyemi & Musa, 2015). In addition, the methods of recruitments and motivations into the four cases are very attractive particularly because of lack of economic opportunities and higher levels of unemployment which makes recruitment appealing to the teeming youths in West Africa. Thus, it is easy to access food, shelter and compensation paid to families in an event of paying the ultimate price.

Lastly, the countries of West African sub-region have a peculiar vulnerabilities. First, they shared faultlines of artificial boundaries and porous borders that facilitate illegal movements across borders in the region, the weak border management capacity of most countries and the large ungoverned spaces within the region. These makes it difficult to detect movement by surveillance, thereby making it possible for the four (4) terrorist groups to crisscross the region with relative ease. Second, the approved border crossings in most of the countries of the region do not have the needed capabilities to man border posts, and the vast number of unapproved, but often used, routes on each border undermines the efficacy of control efforts. West Africa yet again, suffers from a proliferation of small arms and light weapons which occurred as a result of the "Gaddafi Spawn" (Zoubir, 2012) and has also seen an increase in transnational organized crimes.

## **1. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)**

### **Origin and Development:**

AQIM was an outgrowth of the Algerian-origin Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), which was active during Algeria's civil war (1992-2002) as the Armed Islamic Group (GIA). The GIA became the GSPC in 1998, through the instrumentation of Hassan Hattab, a commander in Kabylia (North-Eastern Algeria), who opposed the GIA's policy of indiscriminate massacres of civilians. His position was also shared by several other GIA groups and by the leader of al-Qaeda, Osama Bin Ladin, with whom Hassan Hattab had been in contact. In a first communique in September 1998, Hattab proclaimed that 'All those, in Algeria, who consider themselves part of Salafist Islam must join the ranks of the GSPC' (Guidère 2007, p. 61) thus placing his new group in Al-Qaeda's ideological matrix. Indeed, among the objectives in its charter, the GSPC

---

sought was yet, although GSPC claimed to espouse al-Qaeda's global Salafi Jihadism, its fight was against Algeria and limited only to its territory, with no mention, whatsoever, of a struggle against any foreign power (Guidère 2007, p. 63). In fact, despite his willingness to support Al-Qaeda, Hattab did indeed want to restrict the struggle within an Algerian framework. As a result, after the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, Hattab was excluded from the GSPC leadership and replaced by Nabil Sahraoui, who was himself succeeded, after his death in June 2004, by Abdelmalek Droukdel. Droukdel then, began a policy of rapprochement with Al-Qaeda which led, in January 2007, to the transformation of the GSPC into AQIM, following successful Algerian counterterrorism operations, the GSPC established a safe haven in northern Mali and changed its name to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb in 2007.

AQIM and other violent extremist organizations (VEOs) pose a greater threat to the Sahel, Maghreb and beyond. In fact, the region's mostly Muslim population generally rejects the violent extremist ideology espoused by VEOs. Still, several terrorist groups - such as AQIM, the Movement for Oneness (Unity) and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), Ansar al-Dine (Mali and throughout Sahel), Boko Haram, and Ansaru (Nigeria), Ansar al-Sharia (Tunisia), and the al-Mulathamun Battalion or Brigade (Algeria) - operate in the Trans Sahara Counter Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP) countries. These countries are commonly used as havens than as theaters of operations. They have expanded geographically to include Algeria, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal, and Tunisia. Burkina Faso was added in 2009, for a total of 10 TSCTP countries spanning the Sahel (Warner, 2014, p. 17). With weak government institutions, inadequate public service delivery, porous borders, resource constraints for counterterrorism operations, and occasional lack of willingness to confront terrorist groups, the region has several vulnerabilities that can be exploited by these terrorists' organizations. Of these groups, AQIM poses the greatest threat to regional and West African interests.

However, it was during that period, too, that the GSPC started from 2003 an ongoing deployment into the Sahel. Up the 1990s the southern part of Algeria had been essentially considered a corridor for Algerian jihadists, who used it to provide the northern Islamist groups with weapons. This zone was already under the control of Mokhtar Belmokhtar who had been, from 1994, emir of the southern GIA groups, before rallying to the GSPC in 1998, which, subsequently, appointed him head of its Sahara-Sahel region. In 2003, the situation changed again when 32 Western tourists were taken hostage in Algeria by a GSPC group led by Saïfi Lamari (known as 'Abderrazak Al-Para' because of his previous service in the Algerian army) and by his right-hand man, Abdulhamid Abu Zeid. Seventeen of the hostages were freed by an Algerian military operation, one died from sunstroke but the 14 remaining hostages were taken by their kidnappers to Northern Mali where they were eventually released after payment of a ransom of some €5 million.

It is from that moment that the GSPC really started its deployment into the Sahel. Thus the hostage-taking and the subsequent ones were mainly used as fund raisers for the Algerian Islamist hideouts, which were supposed to receive 60 to 70% of the ransoms. Actually, at that time, GSPC was fundamentally an Algerian based-organization.

---

In early 2002, Mokhtar Belmokhtar was visited by an Al-Qaeda emissary Abdelwalid Ahmed Alwan, a Yemeni who subsequently went to Batna in eastern Algeria, where he met Saifi Lamari, then the local GSPC representative there. In short, although the Yemeni envoy was killed in September 2002 by Algerian security forces, physical contact between the GSPC and Al-Qaeda had been already established. At the same time, Belmokhtar met Saudi envoys as well, who conveyed a message from Bin Ladin asking Belmokhtar to welcome jihadists. Belmokhtar gave his agreement, in principle, for a rapprochement with Al-Qaeda through Abou Younis al-Mauritani, a Mauritanian contact and former Afghan jihadist, who was close to Bin Ladin.

Subsequently, to unify all armed Islamist groups in North Africa and the Sahara-Sahel region, under its banner, the GSPC made contact with GICM (Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group), GICL (Libyan Islamic Fighting Group), GICT (Tunisian Islamic Fighting Group), and with many other active Islamist groups in Mauritania and Mali.

Indeed, the GSPC's goal now was not only to bring together all the Islamist groups under its leadership, but also to redefine their roles within a common global struggle conducted at regional and international levels, rather than as local struggles (Guidère 2008, p. 15-16).

In January 2007, Ayman Al Zawahiri, Al-Qaeda's second-in-command, announced that the organization had accepted the GSPC's allegiance, which then took the name of AQIM. Since then, AQIM, which had around 1500 activist extremists, has been essentially divided into two branches, one in North-Eastern Algeria and the other in the Sahel.

## **Methods of Operation:**

### **A. AQIM in Kabylia (North-Eastern Algeria):**

The first branch, entrenched in Kabylia, has been under the direct authority of the AQIM supreme emir, Abdelmalek Droukdel. Droukdel was a former GIA bomb disposal expert who had been promoted to be the commander of the Abou Bakr Al-Seddik Katibat, in the Khemis El Khechna region, east of Algiers. As a matter of fact, Droukdel's experience within GIA from 1993 to 1998, and then within GSPC from 1998 to 2004, did not make him the obvious choice as GSPC commander. Nevertheless, Droukdel was elected as the organization's leader by all the emirs of the group before Belmokhtar could arrive at the meeting where the election took place. The result has been a very intense and on-going antagonism between the two men, which would weigh heavily on AQIM's future.

The Kabylia terrorists, in northern Algeria, contained 600 - 900 jihadists, living in clandestinely and avoiding contact with the local population. They operated quite separately from their counterparts in the Sahel but since 2005 AQIM's units (katibats - 'battalions') are essentially financed through ransoms from hostage-takings. These target mainly people perceived to be close to the Algerian regime or local businessmen. It is a strategy that allows the groups to cope with the Berber particularism of the Kablyli region which, historically, has been hostile to both the Algerian regime and to arm Islamist groups.

---

Politically, the FFS (Front des Forces Socialistes - Socialist Forces Front) and the RCD (Rassemblement pour la Culture et le Démocratie - Rally for Culture and Democracy), two deep-rooted local opposition parties, have long been politically dominant. In this regard, FFS dominate these areas and ensures that ‘...the Algerian regime and jihadist groups equally rejected by the local population’. However, the lack of cooperation between the local population and the Algerian security forces here explains, to a large extent, the jihadists’ longstanding presence in the region. Indeed, any other attitude of the local population would have been perceived, especially by the jihadists, as support for the Algerian regime. Also given the fact that Kabylia is mountainous woodland, difficult to access, AQIM’s isolation from and modus vivendi with the local population has allowed it to maintain its presence there.

On the other hand, despite numerous incursions, it has not succeeded in settling in RCD-dominated areas. The RCD, although opposed to the Algerian regime, is also an ‘eradicateur’ supporter, strongly committed to the elimination of Islamist terrorism. This is why it has favored the creation of paramilitary defense groups and militias, known as ‘Les Patriotes’, who were actively involved in the fight against armed Islamist groups in the region. However, following the violent riots of the Berber ‘Black Spring’ of April 2001, when massive demonstrations erupted after a teenager was killed whilst in gendarmerie custody and which were brutally quelled by the regime, the gendarmerie were removed from the region in response to popular demand. This, however, resulted in an unanticipated general rise in insecurity and created a further complication in the fight against AQIM and in the region being placed under military curfew from 2001 to 2005.

In order to limit the risks of defection and surrender, the northern branch of AQIM jihadists in Kabylia live completely isolated from the surrounding society, forbidden to read newspapers or to listen to the radio. Moreover, in order to discourage them from submitting to the authorities, reprisals are taken against any jihadists – and even against their relatives – who do submit under the terms of the regime’s Civil Concord and National Reconciliation programme.

In fact, despite the belief, widespread amongst the Algerian security forces, that, ‘These groups take advantage of the social misery of youth by trying to convince young men to join their ranks’ gaining new recruits appears to be one of the main problems facing AQIM in Algeria. Indeed, the violence and massacres endured by the Algerian population in the 1990s, which led to the rejection of jihadist groups by the local Kabyle population, have significantly reduced their recruiting capacities, particularly as the reconciliation policy has intensified the need for new recruits.

## **B. AQIM in the Sahel Region:**

AQIM’s Sahelian branch, in 2011, consisted of core-unit with just under 500 men, together with local participants who were paid to carry out operations for the organization. However, the Sahel was to prove to be a major challenge for the movement. Initially, their population was around 40 Algerian jihadists led by Mokhtar Bel Mokhtar, who had wanted to turn it into a rear base area threatening the Algerian regime. However, following the April 2003 hostage-taking in Algeria, his forces were joined by the kidnapers, including the Tarek Ibn Ziyad brigade, led by Abderrazak Al-Para and then, after his capture by Chadian forces, by Abdulhamid Abou Zeid.

---

Isolated from Algeria by the Algerian army, these reinforcements were essentially Salafist Algerian Arabs in a region primarily inhabited by Tuaregs - Berbers practicing Sufi Islam - a much more complex environment than in Kabilia.

Sufism is, for Salafists, *Bida'a* - an innovation founded neither on the Qur'an nor on the Sunna and which, therefore, would correspond to 'witchcraft' or blasphemy. Consequently, as explained by Moulaye Zeini, a specialist in arms-trafficking in the Sahel, 'In such a context, AQIM could only have a small religious influence on the local population, even though the organization used religion to anchor its position in the region'. In this regard, 'AQIM's groups had no ideological appeal for Mali's northern populations'.

Yet, they also took advantage of the poverty and misery of the local population as well as of the weakness of the Malian state. So, in compensating for the absence of the state, AQIM has been able to gradually fit into the social and economic landscape of northern Mali. Indeed, flushed with the ransoms gained from hostage releases, AQIM's units, who used to buy their food and necessities directly from local shops, often paid two to three times the normal price for the commodities they bought, thus providing real social benefit to the local population.

Furthermore, they also helped local people with minor services, such as transport of with the ill to the nearest medical services. In addition, the generalized corruption in the Sahara-Sahelian region encouraged AQIM's engagement with trafficking and smuggling of all kinds, particularly drug trafficking. Even if the armed groups were not directly involved in drug smuggling itself, they, nevertheless, provided, protection to each convoy transiting through the territories under their control against payment of a fee. Finally, aware of the limits of their adaptation strategy, they interfered very little in local religious practices. A former jihadi has explained that, for them, there was no difference between Muslims, Sufi Malekites, or others. Taking a more global view of the Islamist struggle, he claimed that NATO killed more Muslims than any other foreign organization for the victims were always Muslim. Thus, in emphasizing this global perspective, AQIM expected to foster mutually supportive socio-political dynamics with the local population.

Moreover, when AQIM, Ansar al-Din, and MUJAO took control of Northern Mali, Abdelmalek Droukdel, AQIM's supreme emir and head of the Algerian northern branch of the organization, who was more pragmatic than ideological in his approach, sent a letter to the brigades deployed in the Sahel in July 2012, ordering them not to apply *shar'ia* law too strictly and to avoid destroying Sufi mausoleums as that would shock the local populations. For him, the most important issue was to concentrate first on inculcating faith, through preaching - through *ad-da'wa* (Anon, 2013) (The Unification of Salafist and Sufism ideologies of Islam).

In 2005, AQIM multiplied its attacks in the Sahel, particularly in Mauritania, and its kidnappings of Westerners, whose ransoms yielded tens of millions of Euros. However, its priority targets were mainly Algerian with targets in the south of the country, particularly against Algerian border police and customs posts. Defectors from the groups have explained that targeting customs and border-guard posts had allowed them to reinforce links with local smugglers (Mokkedem 2010, p. 117-137) and that the ransom money was initially intended to buy arms and ammunition

---

for the GSPC in northern Algeria. Thus, when Abderrazak Al-Para, at the time the second-in-command of the GSPC, moved to the Sahel, after the April 2003 tourist kidnappings, he intended to buy arms with the ransom money for the northern group. Furthermore, in 2006, a major arms convoy was intercepted by the Algerian Air Force in the Ouargla region which was intended for GSPC in Kabylia. In short, although the AQIM is a branch of Al-Qaeda and is supposed to lead jihad against all surrounding countries and the Western world, its operations are primarily directed against Algeria.

## 2. Boko Haram

### Origin:

*Boko Haram* is an Islamist movement which operated in north-eastern Nigeria and came to prominence in 2009. However, its true historical root harks back to 1995, when Abubakar Lawan established the *Ahlulsunna wal'jama'ah hijra or Shabaab group* (Muslim Youth Organization) in Maiduguri, Borno State (Taiwo & Olugbode 2009; Adisa 2012). It was a fringe group under the leadership of Mallam Mohammed Yusuf, a fiery Islamic scholar resident in Maiduguri, the headquarters of the organization since 2002, and who had not fully committed to violence before 2009. Through subtle and open harassment, *Boko Haram* was goaded into an open confrontation with the Nigerian state and violently suppressed in July 2009. The group's official name is *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad*, this Arabic inscriptions means "People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad". The name '*Boko*' originally means 'fake' but came to signify Western education, while '*Haram*' means 'forbidden'. Loosely translated from the local Hausa language, this means "Western education is forbidden" (Chathia, 2011, p. 1). Yusuf built a mosque and madrassas at Maiduguri to attract youthful recruits who are influenced by the Koranic phrase like: "Anyone who is not governed by what Allah has revealed is among the transgressors" (Chathia, 2011, p. 1). Its political goal was to create an Islamic state, and the school became a recruiting ground for jihadis to fight the state. For instance, in 2009, Boko Haram carried out a spate of attacks on police stations and other government buildings in Maiduguri. It promotes a version of Islam which makes it "haram" for Muslims to take part in any political or social activity associated with Western society. This includes voting in elections, wearing shirts and trousers or receiving a secular education.

### Muslim identity in Borno State:

Muslim identity and thought in Nigeria derive from the Sufi brotherhoods of Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya, primarily as a result of the historical role of the Kanem-Borno Empire and Sokoto caliphates in the spread of Islam. The Sufi orders and the Izalatul Bidi'a wa Ikhamatis Sunnah (People Committed to the Removal of Innovations in Islam; hereafter Izala) are the two dominant contemporary Muslim foci of identity in Nigeria.

---

## Methods of Operation:

Thereafter, it went underground, rebuilt, and resurfaced in October 2010 with a remarkable prison break at Bauchi and has since changed its tactics to targeted assassinations, drive-by shootings, suicide bombings, and massive deployment of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), vehicle-borne IEDs, and, lately, kidnapping and hostage taking. In addition, the group resorted to burning of school buildings, attacking telecommunications base stations, killing of foreigners, slaughtering as opposed to shooting of opponents, and killing of health officials at routine vaccination clinics, as well as random shooting of pupils and teachers at schools. The message of the movement has transformed over the years. Before 2009, it was characterized by the blistering speeches of its leader Mohammed Yusuf. This period was characterized by proselytisation (*dawah*), which included verbal assaults on secular authority, traditional and modern - democracies. However, from 2010 onwards, Boko Haram committed itself to asymmetric warfare. Since its re-emergence the group had tried to mimic and adopt the tactics and strategies of global Salafist movements such as Al-Qaeda. Although heavily influenced by the message of Al-Qaeda and external developments, Boko Haram's grievances remained local at inception; however, there have been attempts to link local grievances to international developments in Mali and beyond.

## Operational Tactics:

Following the death of Yusuf and the mass killings and arrest of many of its members, the sect retreated and re-strategized in two ways:

First, was the adoption of Yusuf's hardline top deputy; Abubakar Shekau, alias "Darul Tawheed", who incidentally became the sect's new spiritual leader. Second was the redefinition of its tactics, which involved perfecting its traditional hit-and-run attacks and adding new flexible violent tactics. As the sect retreated and regrouped, the new leadership began mobilizing, recruiting, and radicalizing members using martyrdom videos of the July 2009 revolt. They issued several radical messages in leaflets and audio and video tapes to the media, stating an intention to wage war on secular authorities and "enemies", as well as claiming responsibilities for deadly attacks. The sect has continued to perpetrate acts of violence against diverse targets, such as state security personnel, community and religious leaders, politicians, worship Centre's (Churches and mosques), the UN building in Abuja, telecommunication facilities, and media houses.

Exact casualty figures of attacks since the July 2009 anti-government uprising are hard to come by. Nigeria's Chief of Army Staff Lt. Gen. Azubuike Ihejirika claimed in November 2012 that the Islamic sect had killed no fewer than 3,000 people since it began its terror campaign (Iroegbu, Adedapo & Shittu, 2012). This figure is not inclusive of those allegedly killed by security forces while fighting the sect. Innocent people, including women and children, have been killed as a result of these attacks. There are other inestimable costs to the nation due to these attacks, such as discouraging local and foreign investments, disruption of social and academic activities, destruction of property, and internal displacement of persons. Their activities have equally undermined religious harmony. For instance, suicide bombing attacks on churches by the sect

---

have precipitated reprisal attacks on Muslims by Christian youths in Kaduna and Plateau states (Akogun et al. 2012; Alechenu, Chiedozie & Onwuamanam 2012; Wooden 2012).

Other consequences include the fracturing of family structures (creating widows, widowers, and orphans) and damage to the country's image. These attacks have occurred mainly in Maiduguri, the capital city of Borno State. However, several such attacks for which the group has claimed responsibility have occurred in Adamawa, Bauchi, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Kogi, Niger, Plateau, and Yobe states, and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Although the terrorist organization has concentrated its attacks mainly in northern Nigeria, it is speculated that it may extend its attacks to the Christian-dominated South as security agencies firm up counter-insurgency operations in the northern states (Onuoha 2012b, p. 9).

Tactics such as targeted assassination, drive-by-shooting, use of IEDs, and suicide bombing have been used in the campaign of terror. The choice of any of the above-mentioned tactics usually depends on the context, chosen target, and objective to be accomplished. The tactic of open armed confrontation is a key operational tactic Boko Haram has perfected since the July 2009 revolt. This is a modification of its traditional tactics of hit-and-run, which require appreciable numbers (10-60) of selected operatives engaging security forces in gun battles. The new method involves deploying large number of members to mount surprise attacks on security establishments (stations, barracks, or prisons) or 'soft' civilian targets (markets and churches), where there is usually a large number of forces or people who can overpower its operatives if it adopts any other means.

Targeted assassination is another Boko Haram tactic. It is adopted when the terror organization is after a person(s) listed as an "enemy". The usual mode entails the assigned operatives trailing the target to a place where the individual is most vulnerable to being successfully killed. Boko Haram members usually use cars or motorbikes in going after such targets and shoot at a very close range (usually at the head, chest, or abdomen) to ensure that the chances of the victim surviving are very slim. In this way, Boko Haram has been able to kill several civilians, politicians, religious leaders, security agents, and community leaders that were outspoken against its ideology and activities. A notable example was the killing of engineer

Modu Fannami Gubio, the governorship candidate of All Nigerians Peoples Party (ANPP) in Borno State for the April 2011 general elections. On 28 January 2011, Gubio, a cousin of then incumbent Governor of Borno State Ali Modu Sheriff, was killed along with Sheriff's younger brother and six others in his residence in Maiduguri by Boko Haram operatives (Idris 2011b).

Drive-by-shooting is a method that is very similar to targeted assassination in that some of the targets killed in the past have been executed through a process that involves operatives riding on a motorbike. It became a common tactic after the July 2009 revolt, and by mid-October 2010 no fewer than 21 people, including a top politician, had been killed by suspected members of the terrorists' riding on a motorbike (The Nation 2010). One possible reason for adopting drive-by-shooting is to kill targets that have proven very difficult to track down to a spot where execution will be easy. It is a flexible method often adopted when operating in a built-up area or to kill target(s) that operate largely in the city Centre. The convenience of this method is that

---

---

the target can be shot at a very close range and the killers can easily man oeuvre their way out of the city without being apprehended by security agents.

The use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) is another tactic that gained prominence after the July 2009 revolt. Such IEDs are configured in ways such that they can be detonated when thrown or can be set off through a timer or a remote control. Usually, the terrorists' selects a particular place to plant the IED where it will have maximum effect upon explosion. They have been planted along roads, bridges, and rail lines, or deposited in bags or containers that are left behind in public places, including churches, drinking establishments, lecture halls, car parks, and bus stops. The size of the IEDs has ranged from small contraptions stuffed into used drink cans, to large containers such as drums fitted into the boot of a car if the intent is to mount a suicide attack.

The US Joint IED Defeat Organization revealed that Nigeria witnessed a nearly fourfold jump in the number of IED attacks in 2011. Nigeria saw 196 bomb incidents in 2011, compared with 52 incidents in 2010 (Straziuso, 2012). The operational sophistication Boko Haram has attained in constructing IEDs is one of the main reasons why security experts believe it is receiving enhanced foreign support in the area of training and acquisition of explosives, possibly from AQIM. The IEDs are usually constructed using powerful explosive substances, such as trinitrotoluene (TNT), pentaerythritol (PETN), and ammonia (fertilizers).

The use of IEDs is one of the greatest challenges the security forces are confronting in regard to the terrorists'.

Particularly worrisome among the new tactics of Boko Haram is the adoption of suicide terrorism. Suicide terrorism refers to a form of extremely committed violence, carried out by someone who is intent on or deceived into taking his or her own life alongside killing or destroying the chosen target, in furtherance of a political, religious, or ideological goal. Seen in this light, the terrorist is fully aware that if he or she does not die, the planned attack will not be implemented. Thus the perpetrator's ensured death is a precondition for the success of the mission (Ganor 2001; Gunaranta 2002; O'Connor 2011). The method of suicide terrorism adopted by the Boko Haram (BK) is suicide bombing, which refers to any politically or ideologically motivated violent attack perpetrated by a self-aware individual(s) who actively and purposely causes his or her own death through blowing himself or herself up along with the chosen target.

Boko Haram is adept in mounting suicide bombing. It has relied mainly on vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED), twice on body-borne improvised explosive devices (BBIED), and once each on a motorcycle-borne improvised explosive device (MBIED) and a tricycle (popularly known as *Keke*) 3-borne improvised explosive device (TBIED). Examples of each of the suicide bombing modes are,

It has been noted that "between June 2011 and November 2012, the BK has staged at least 29 suicide attacks in northern Nigeria, with Borno State witnessing the highest number of attacks" (Onuoha 2012b, p. 7).

---

Other acts of suicide bombing have been staged since then in northern Nigeria. While quite a number of these suicide attacks failed woefully, some were partially successful, and the majority has been largely successful when assessed on the basis of the number of lives lost, property damaged, and the international visibility they earned BK. Its diverse targets of suicide attacks included security establishments (stations and barracks), international organizations, churches, mosques, telecom offices, and media houses. It is believed that some of the cars used in the suicide bombings were stolen.

### **Four factors could account for the adoption of suicide terrorism by BK:**

- a. the emergence of a more radical and hardline leadership in the aftermath of the July 2009 revolt;
- b. the increased counter-insurgency measures put in place by the government to curtail its traditional tactics of open armed confrontation or placement of IEDs;
- c. improved funding from various sources within and outside Nigeria; and,
- d. more importantly, the BK's bond with foreign terror groups, leading to increased fanatic indoctrination of its members by experienced ideologues skilled in evoking visions of martyrdom to radicalize recruits.

### **Development:**

There are three distinct and yet overlapping phases in the evolution of Boko Haram.

The first phase is what can be termed the Kanama phase (2003-05), when a youthful militant jihadist group waged war on the Nigerian state but was repelled with casualties on both sides. This group was led by Muhammad Ali, a Nigerian who was radicalized by jihadi literature in Saudi Arabia and prominent Wahhabi scholars Ja'afar Mahmud Adam and was believed to have fought alongside the *mujahideen* in Afghanistan. Mohammed Ali influenced Muhammed Yusuf, upon his returned from Saudi Arabia in 2005.

The second phase began with the collapse of the Kanama uprising and ended with the suppression of Boko Haram proper in July 2009. This period, called the *dawah phase*, was devoted to intensive proselytization, recruitment, indoctrination, and radicalization of its members. This phase involved extensive criticism of the extant secular system; debates with opposing *ulama* (clerics) on the propriety or otherwise of Western education, Westernization, democracy, and secularism; and unceasing criticism of the corruption and bad governance under Governor Ali Modu Sheriff (2003-2011) of Borno State as well as the conspicuous consumption and opulence of the Western-educated elite in the midst of poverty.

Dawah is a major feature of radical Islam. It is "[an] Islamist term which denotes a combination of propaganda, education, medical and welfare action - and its practitioners. Yet the da'awa

---

has an importance beyond that of being a possible cradle for violence. It is bringing about change in many Muslim societies, and sometimes plays a role indirectly in politics” (Sivan 2003, p. 27).

The third phase began with the 2009 suppression of the movement and the killing of its leadership in gory and barbaric form by Nigerian security agencies. Boko Haram went underground, re-organized, and resurfaced in 2010 with a vengeance. They not only targeted their perceived opponents, but indiscriminately attacked security officials, politicians associated with the ruling All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) government in Borno State and resorted to bombing high profile targets in Abuja such as the Nigerian Police Headquarters as well as UN offices, in June and August 2011 respectively. As the military crackdown intensified, they became desperate and more militant, thereby resorting to more desperate measures, which they had despised in the past.

### **Boko Haram Narratives:**

The main planks of the narratives were framed, though not exclusively, around the following issues or variants of them. However they are based on a Jihadist Ibn Taymiyyah, a puritan *Salafist* scholar’s teachings:

(1) The concept of *taghut* (idolatry), including secularism, democracy, and partisan politics;

To oppose any form of executive, legislative, or judicial function derived from a secular constitution rather than from Islamic Shariah law

(2) Western education and Westernization - Fears of Saudi Arabia Monarchy; I have a book that discusses the knowledge of geography, geology, and sociology. These branches of knowledge are not knowledge but full of unbelief (Yusuf tape, June 30 2006)

(3) Working for an un-Islamic government; and

(4) Repudiation of the charge of Kharijism (i.e. apostasy) levelled against Boko Haram by the local *ulamas*, especially Yusuf’s former colleagues in the Wahhabi group in Borno (By labeling other Muslims as unbelievers, unable to distinction between sin and unbelief, their quarrelsomeness, and predisposition to easily kill for even minor infractions) formed the base of the fight with the local Borno Izala in the run up to the 2009 crisis.

## **3. ANSAR AL-DIN**

### **Origin and Development:**

Ansar Dine is the new power player in northern Mali. This Islamist rebel group, in June took de facto control over a swath of the Sahara, raising diplomatic eyebrows across the globe for its destruction of the U.N. World Heritage Sites in Timbuktu, the threat that it could pose to

---

West Africa and global security interests, and the humanitarian crisis manifested by an estimated 420,000 displaced persons.

Ansar Dine, which roughly translates to “defenders of the faith,” is a rebel group that emerged in Mali in March 2012 that seeks the installation of a strict interpretation of sharia law. It gained partial control over the northern stretches of Mali alongside another rebel group, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), on March 22, when the government in Bamako was overthrown in a military coup.

### **Development:**

Ansar Dine is led by Iyad Ag Ghaly, the former senior commander of a rebel military group in Mali in the 1990s who has also formerly served as a negotiator for the release of Westerners kidnapped by al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), of which his cousin is a commander. Known as a powerful, if informal, powerbroker in northern Malian politics for decades, reports indicate that Ag Ghaly created Ansar Dine after his failed attempts to wrest control of the MNLA for himself.

Though based in Mali, Ansar Dine is a truly transnational outfit. Ag Ghaly allegedly received Salafist religious training from Pakistani “missionaries” in northern Mali in the 1990s, views that were abandoned then rekindled during his diplomatic service in Saudi Arabia years later. Ansar Dine is believed to be financially backed by Qatar, and the group is believed to draw its membership from a range of nations including Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, Afghanistan and Algeria. Global in reach, Ansar Dine recently brought its efforts online by releasing a propaganda video and establishing a presence in jihadist chat rooms.

With Ansar Dine operating in a largely ungoverned expanse of the Sahara, the security experts in Niger, Mauritania, are concerned that, northern Mali could become an out of the way haven for affiliates of al Qaeda (AQIM). Yet despite the potential threats it poses, Ansar Dine’s newness, coupled with constantly shifting alliances in the region, have made a clear understanding of the group hard to come by. With that in mind it’s worth asking what Ansar Dine is, what it wants, and how the rest of the world is responding.

### **Methods of Operation: (So, what does Ansar Dine want?):**

The group’s stated goal is the imposition of strict sharia law throughout Mali. After having taken control of the three major cities in the north, including Kidal, Timbuktu, and for the most part, Gao, Ansar Dine has banned alcohol, smoking, Friday visitations to cemeteries, watching soccer, and women are now required to wear veils.

### **Networks and inter-linkages:**

But part of the challenge in gaining a broader understanding of Ansar Dine lies in the fact that the group’s allegiances are constantly shifting amongst at least four other main players in northern

---

---

Mali: the MNLA, AQIM, the West African jihadist group MUJAO, and the Malian army. To that end, a Malian newspaper described the north of the country as “total confusion; it is difficult to know who controls what!”

a). Ansar Dine cannot be understood without mention of the MNLA. The MNLA is composed primarily of nomadic Tuaregs, the historic inhabitants of northern Mali, who have periodically rebelled against Malian authority over the north of the country. When Malian president Amadou Touré was ousted in a putsch in March 2012, the MNLA consolidated power in the vacuum left in the north. Ansar Dine then brokered a parasitic alliance with the MNLA that Mali expert Jeremy Keenan describes as the MNLA taking over a town, and upon its seizure, Ansar Dine entering behind them and “start[ing] bossing everyone around about sharia law.” Allied with Ansar Dine, in April the MNLA proclaimed the creation of a new state called the *Islamic Republic of Azawad*, a claim the African Union rejected as “null and of no value whatsoever”.

That marriage ended in a quick and messy divorce: Ansar Dine’s vision for the installation of sharia didn’t mesh with the MNLA’s desire for secular statehood. On June 26 and 27, 2012, Ansar Dine made public proclamations that it had chased out remaining MNLA elements from all major northern Malian cities, and was in control of the entirety of the region. For its part, the MNLA currently denies any affiliation with Ansar Dine, and has accused the Western media of portraying more of a connection between the two groups than actually exists. At present, the MNLA claims that its departure from northern Mali was strategic and was made so as to “prepare our new war strategies.”

b). An important ally of Ansar Dine is the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO). Appearing in March as a self-proclaimed offshoot of AQIM, MUJAO’s goal is to provide “all kinds of material and military support for young Muslims determined to raise the banner of Islam.” Many residents of MUJAO-occupied towns like the group because it has provided social services not offered by either the MNLA or the Malian state. The group draws its membership from across West Africa, and it was reported that MUJAO’s Gao branch recently welcomed some 200 recruits from countries including Burkina Faso, Senegal, and the Ivory Coast. Other reports condemn MUJAO for recruiting children.

c). Primary amongst the other local actors Ansar Dine deals with is AQIM, which has real (if nebulous) associations with both Ansar Dine and MUJAO, as well as the cadre of South American drug traffickers using West Africa as a cocaine trafficking alleyway to Europe. Ansar Dine is further having to confront the remaining soldiers loyal to the Malian army, some of whom are now defecting and siding with Ansar Dine. For their part, some Malians in occupied areas have rebelled against Ansar Dine’s presence. Their protests have largely been directed against the harsh application of sharia law.

Looking forward, Ansar Dine’s hold on the northern Mali shows no signs of easing. The current Malian government, in a shambles in the aftermath of the March 2012 overthrow, is unlikely to have the ability to force a military solution to the problem.

---

Another approach for ousting Ansar al Din could come in the form of a transnational African military coalition. Led by calls from Benin's President Boni Yayi, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has considered deploying an intervention force, though others worry that a West African-led intervention would have a greater destabilizing effect throughout the region than the crisis itself.

Also to deal with Ansar al Din, the reality is that any external (Western allied i.e. outside Africa) military intervention would be exceedingly difficult and potentially injudicious. Though, the U.S. has recently said that "all options are being considered," such an incursion would likely only add fuel to Ansar Dine's ideological fire. Despite its hazards, the best option is to support Mali and West African regional organizations such as ECOWAS as they craft a solution that has the potential for long term stability, and one that is in the best interests of the people of the region.

In fact, the disappearance of the Qadhafi regime and the subsequent sudden emergence of Ansar al-Din had a decisive impact on AQIM's position. Its alliance with the Tuareg-based movement decisively reinforced AQIM's position in northern Mali by providing it with access in to the social environment there. This effect was enhanced by the fact that the Tuareg salafi-jihadi group was led by a Tuareg hero, Iyad Ag Ghali, thus facilitating AQIM's new ties with the local population. MUJAO was to offer AQIM similar benefits of social access amongst the population living between Gao and the Mauritanian border. Both developments, furthermore, fell squarely within the meta-strategy proposed for al-Qaeda by Abu Musa al-Suri, one of the most influential of its ideologues who had argued for worldwide Islamist resistance (Da'watal muqawamahalis la-miyyah ad-'alamiyyah). It also coincided with the views of **Abu Bakr Naji**, whose book,

*The Management of Savagery*, had been published online by al-Qaeda which encouraged different jihadist groups to integrate themselves with their social environments in order to win a lengthy struggle. It was to counter this strategy that Algeria was so anxious to promote dialogue with Ansar al-Din.

#### **4. Movement of Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO)**

##### **Origin and Development:**

Malian Islamist group MUJAO, which claimed twin car bombings in Niger on Thursday (May 23, 2013), is an offshoot of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) which advocates jihad in West Africa. MUJAO came into being on December 10, 2011. It kidnapped three (3) European volunteer workers of Spanish and Italian nationalities in the late October 2011 at western Algeria. MUJAO was founded by Mauritania'n Hamada Ould Mohamed Kheirou, alias Abou Ghoum-Ghoum, who worked with Omar Ould Hamaha, a Malian from the northern town of Kidal, and a former lieutenant of an Algerian jihadist, Mokhtar Belmokhtar, the leader of AQIM in the Sahel. MUJAO is considered to be the least ideological but more like a criminal group, living from trafficking. Hicham Bilal, a commander quit the group in November, 2012, lambasting its leadership of drug smuggling. On December 7, 2012, it was added to the UN list of Al Qaeda groups. This newly formed group of West African jihadists was referred to as *Jamaat Tawhid*

---

---

*Wa'l-Jihad fi Garbi Afriqiya* translates in English as “Movement for Oneness (Unity) and Jihad in West Africa” (MOJWA). It existed in northern Mali and exported its activities to Niger and Mauritania (Cristiani, 2012). Moreover, MUJAO was full of defectors from the ranks of AQIM, who involved in a campaign of kidnapping, intimidation and attacks against targets in the three Sahelian countries (Amnesty International, 2012).

### **Methods of Operations:**

MUJAO, before French and African armies intervened in the country in January 2012, and had claimed a number of abductions in the northeast of Mali and that of one of seven French hostages held in the Sahel. Also, it was active in neighboring Algeria where it claimed several attacks on Algerian forces.

MUJAO in May 2013 carried out double attack outside the territory of Mali and Algeria. A pair of suicide bombers killed 19 people including 18 soldiers in attacks that targeted a military barracks and a French-run uranium mine in northern Niger. The attacks were first of their kind in the West African. The first attack occurred in a military barracks in the town of Agadez in northwestern Niger. Five suicide bombers carried out the attack in Agadez, which killed 18 soldiers and a civilian. Gunfire between the attackers and Nigerien troops was reported after the initial explosion. Four members of the assault team were killed, while the fifth is said to be holding four Nigerien soldiers' hostage.

The second attack took place at the Somair mine in Arlit, which is just north of Agadez. A suicide bomber who was dressed as a soldier detonated his explosives near a group of workers at AREVA, the French company that runs the uranium mine, and about twenty (20) people were killed.

In addition, in March 2012, it abducted the Algerian consul and six (6) members of his mission in Gao. It executed the vice-consul in September, but Algiers never confirmed the report. Again in October 2012, it abducted five (5) of the Nigerian nationals and a Chadian who were working for aid groups in the south east of Niger. The Nigerians were freed, but the Chadian national was shot during the abduction, and died of his injuries.

MUJAO's activities further became pronounced when the Movement for the National Liberation of the Azawad (MNLA), Tuareg separatists group launched an offensive against the government in northern Mali in January 2012, but AQIM, MUJAO and Ansar Dine soon overpowered them. The Islamist coalition eventually seized control of the entire northern half of Mali, and Gao became MUJAO's main base. However, MUJAO, AQIM and Ansar Dine, who shared out northern Mali among themselves and have maintained close links, were chased from the region's big towns by the French military, which allied with African troops to take on the Islamists in January 2014. But they still make their presence felt and MUJAO claimed several suicide attacks in the regions of Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu.

---

## MUJAOs Networks and Inter-Linkages:

It must be noted that MUJAO originally emerged as a reaction to AQIM's strategy of socialization with the local population, especially towards the Tuaregs. The AQIM leadership had decided to accommodate the local population in order to have it join the organization, especially through a strategy of promoting Targui leaders to key positions in it. The most emblematic symbol of this policy was the promotion of Abdel Krim Al Targui, a targui salafist jihadi, who also happened to be a cousin of Iyad Ag Ghali, a prominent Tuareg leader - at a time when Algerians dominated the AQIM leadership.

This had caused considerable resentment amongst lower-level commanders and fighters who were Malians, Mauritians, or from the Sahel and had fought loyally with AQIM. The AQIM leadership had also refused to create an Arab Malian group, which had added to the resentment.

Thus, the strategy of promoting Tuareg, few of whom had joined aggravated these tensions and intense rivalry between Mokhtar Bel Mokhtar and both Abou Zaid and Droukdal on the one hand, and close to the Sahelian jihadist on the other, discreetly encouraged them to form an organization of their own, which, although separated from AQIM, would have the same goals as the parent organization. Mokhtar bel Mokhtar's aim was to weaken the positions of his rivals while enhancing his own. It is significant that Omar Ould Hamaha, his brother-in-law and colleague, was to become a major MUJAO leader when it was formed in 2011. It was essentially composed of former AQIM fighters and new West Africans closed to Mokhtar bel Mokhtar. They were to unite with his own group in 2013, to form the 'Al-Mourabitoun movement' but the important point was that, although a separate organization, it shares the same goals as AQIM.

The most important ally of AQIM in the Sahel region, however, was to be the Ansar Al-Din movement created by Iyad Ag Ghali. He is a Tuareg from the Ifoghas tribe, one of the most powerful Tuareg tribes in the Sahel. Ghali is a major figure for the local Tuareg population, because of his role in the Tuareg rebellions of the 1990s, rebellions in which Algiers played a major role as mediator, to whom he therefore became a major concern. After the rebellions failed, Iyad Ag Ghali swore never to lead a sectarian rebellion again, but instead find a cause that would unite the Northern Mali population and thus achieve success. Iyad Ag Ghali became an intermediary between Western powers, Algeria and AQIM over the kidnappings in the Sahel, and, as a result, came into contact with Mokhtar bel Mokhtar and Abou Zeid. It is also at this time that he was appointed Malian Consul in Saudi Arabia where he converted to Wahhabi-Salafism.

Back in Mali in 2010, he broke off relations with the Malian government and, although tempted to take the leadership of the Movement National de Libération d'Azawad (MNLA) in 2011, Iyad Ag Ghali rather decided to create his own movement, Ansar Al-Din, along Salafist lines. Essentially formed of Tuareg, Ansar Al-Din entered into alliance with AQIM, a vital alliance for it, given that Ansar Al-Din is a local organization led by a major local figure.

Yahia Abou Hamam, supreme commander of AQIM in the Sahel, explained that those who

---

oppressed Muslims oppressed the Tuareg, and it is, therefore, normal for AQIM to support Ansar Al-Din, especially since the group adopted the same religious ideals. The major difference between the two groups resides in the extent of the struggle in which they wish to engage; Ansar Al-Din wants to establish an Islamic state along Salafi lines in Mali, without necessarily fighting the West, whereas AQIM has a more global strategy, that of Al-Qaeda. Nonetheless, the three organizations - AQIM, Ansar Al-Din, and MUJAO - were to come together in January 2012 and, after defeating the MNLA, were to take control of northern Mali.

## Conclusion:

In sum, the four (4) cases use similar tactical operations. These include, abductions, hostages taking, and demand heavy ransom from organizations and governments which they used to run their operations. More so, they use same strategic tactics like acting invisible, springing surprised attacks, recruiting non-Muslims, and uses of suicide attacks with advanced explosives (commercial explosives). Again, they mount attacks on motorbikes and cars, and employed simultaneous attacks. Besides, all the cases operate a centralized structure of leadership where operations and commands are issued. Weapons for attacks include knives, arson, bombs, guns and engaged in shootouts with security agencies, and armed robbery. It is therefore imperative to enhance the preventive efforts and ensure that all hands are on deck to avert any of such attacks. Obviously, the most significant issue then is to beef up security, create enough awareness in the minds of government leaders, security operatives and the consciousness of the citizenry about their *modus operandi*. It is however fair to argue that, there is hardly a viable debate on the evolution of terrorism to the level of an existential threat in the West African sub-region, nevertheless security must be enhanced at all the international borders. Media including cybercrime activities must be used to engender all-inclusive engagement so as to eschew the politicization of the issues. Finally, heads of institutions who are within the category of “Soft targets” and those who provide them security must be sensitized and exposed to other forms of preservation techniques so they can, by their actions and increased awareness, reduce the vulnerabilities of their institutions.

## References

- Adeyemi, A. E. (2015). *Terrorism and Transnational Security Threats in West Africa: A Global Perspective*. Milton Keynes, UK: Xlibris.
- Adeyemi, A. E. & Musa, M.N. (2015). *Terrorism and Political Violence in West Africa: A Global Perspective*. Milton Keynes, UK: Xlibris
- African Commission on Human and People's Rights. (2006). Report of the Brain Storming Meeting of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. Banjul, The Gambia.
- Ajulu, R. (Ed.). (2005). *The making of a Region: Revival of the East Africa Community*. Midrand: Institute for Global Dialogue.
-

- Alexy, R. (2002). *Theory of Constitutional Rights*. Oxford: Oxford Press.
- Alford, R. (2000). "The proliferation of international courts and tribunals; international adjudication in ascendance." *American Society of International Law Proceedings*, Vol.94, p. 160-165.
- Benedek, W. (Ed.). (2006). "Understanding human rights: manual on human rights education." Antwerpen: Intersentia.
- Cheng, B. (2006). *General Principles of Law as applied by International Courts and Tribunals*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chidi, A.O. (2003). Complementary, competition, contradiction: the relationship between the African Court on Human and People's Rights and regional courts in East and Southern Africa. Gaborone-Botswana: Paper presented to the conference of Eastern and Southern African States on the Protocol Establishing the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights.
- Chothia, F. (2013). "Profile: Who are Nigeria's Ansaru Islamists?" BBC: Africa. Pp 1-4.
- Diehl, P.F. & KU, C. (2003). The dynamics of international law: the interaction of normative and operating systems. In: \_\_\_\_\_. (Ed.). *International Law: Classic and Contemporary Readings*. 2nd ed. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Diehl, P.; Ku, C.; & Zamora D. (2003). "The Dynamics of International Law: The Interaction of Normative and Operating Systems." *Cambridge University Press Journal*, Vol. 57, n. 1, p. 43-75.
- Ebobrah, S.T. (2008). "A critical analysis of the human rights mandate of ECOWAS Community Court of Justice." Copenhagen: Danish Institute for Human Rights.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2009a). "Litigating human rights before sub-regional courts in Africa: prospects and challenges." *African Journal of International and Comparative Law*, Vol.17, n. 1, p. 79-101.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2009b). "Human rights developments in sub-regional courts in Africa in 2008." *Africa Human Rights Law Journal*, Vol. 9, n.1, p.312 - 335.
- Economic Commission for Africa. (2006). *Assessing Regional Integration in Africa II: Rationalizing Regional Economic Communities*. Addis Ababa: Economic Commission for Africa.
- Evans, M.; Capps, P.; & Konstadinidis, S. (Ed.). (2003). *Asserting jurisdiction: international and European legal perspectives*. Oxford: Hart Publishing.
- Evans, M.; & Murray, R. (Ed.). (2008). *The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
-

- Freeman, M. (2002). *Human Rights: An Interdisciplinary Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Polity.
- Hagen, A. (2014). "Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: Leaders and their Network." AEI's Critical Threats Project, Pp: 1-31, [www.CriticalThreat.org](http://www.CriticalThreat.org).
- Helfer, L. (1999). "Forum Shopping for Human Rights." *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, Vol. 148, n. 2, p. 285-400.
- Heyns, C. (2004). "The African regional human rights system: The African Charter." *Pennsylvania State Law Review*, Vol. 108, n. 3, p. 679-702.
- Heyns, C. & Killander, M. (Ed.). (2007). *Compendium of Key Human Rights Documents of the African Union*. 3rd ed. Pretoria: Pretoria University Law Press.
- Koroma, A. (2003). *Asserting Jurisdiction by the International Court of Justice*. In: Evans, M.; Capps, P.; Konstadinidis, S. (Ed.). *Asserting jurisdiction: international and European legal perspectives*. Oxford: Hart Publishing.
- LEC/PB/1/LECIAD. (2017). "Policy Brief". *Addressing Terrorism in West Africa: Options for Consideration*. PP: 1-7
- Levitt, M. (2004). "Hizbullah's African Activities Remain Undisrupted." RUSI/Jane's Homeland Security and Resilience Monitor. Pp: 1- 4
- Mamdani, M. (2004). *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, The Cold War, and the Root of Terror*. New York: Three Leaves Press.
- Matusitz, J. (2013). *Terrorism & Communication: A Critical Introduction*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publication.
- Marc-Antoine, P. (2014). "Boko Haram: Islamism, Politics, Security and the State of Nigeria". *West African Politics and Society Series*, Vol. 2, Pp: 1-285.
- Miller, J. (2014). "Al-Shebaab in East Africa". AEI, [www.criticalthreat.org](http://www.criticalthreat.org).
- Simon, J.D. (1994). *The Terrorist Trap*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press
- Sluka, A. J. (ed.) (2000). *Death Squad: the anthropology of state terror*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania press.
- Zulaika, J. & Douglass, W. (1996). *Terror and Taboo: the follies, fables, and faces of terrorism*. London: Routledge.
-

## About the Author

**Dr. Samuel Yaw Appiah-Marfo** is a scholar of Conflict Analysis and Resolution and specializes in international peace and conflict. He is a lecturer at Ghana Institute of Public Administration (GIMPA) at the Department of Public Management and International Relations. Email: kundity@hotmail.com and yappiah-marfo@gimpa.edu.gh.