

## The US Role in Combating Terrorism and Extremism in Africa: An Appraisal

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### Abstract

*Terrorism, religious extremism & radicalization have posed a serious challenge to global peace and security. The militant groups in modern times are highly equipped & trained, well-versed with modern technology, recruit & manipulate/brainwash young men and women online through social media and their ability to connect militant groups across the world pose a serious challenge for all nations. The US war against terror started after September 11, 2001 but the war against terrorism and extremism in Africa started even before the 9/11 attacks by Al-Qaeda. Africa holds significance because of its geographical location, proximity with maritime routes & choke points. It is surrounded by Atlantic Ocean, Indian Ocean, Red Sea, and the Gulf of Aden which makes it lucrative for transnational terrorist groups for transit, regrouping, reorganizing, planning and recruitment. Socio-economic deprivation, widespread poverty and illiteracy in some African countries makes it a fertile ground for radicalization, terrorism & religious extremism. This is the reason that over the period of time many transnational groups like Al-Qaeda, ISIS, Boko Haram, Al-Shabab and many others flourished and sought refuge in weak states of West Africa, Sahel and sub-Saharan region. The US increased its role in combating violent extremism in African region after 9/11 attacks and established counter terror mechanisms in states like Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, Eritria, Nigeria and others. The US counter terror approach is multidimensional which includes enhanced diplomatic ties, economic & military aid & sanctions, joint intelligence sharing, counter terror training, weapon & equipment, surveillance and targeted drone strikes against militants. The US government believes that weak or failed states in Africa are attractive for transnational terror groups for shelter, transit, terror financing and recruitment. The American multifaceted counter terror efforts are meant to support the weak states in Africa and to deny the transnational terror outfits from any space in these states. Furthermore, the US wants to establish regional and global strategic partnerships to combat terrorism and extremism in African countries. This study is divided in three parts. The first part would focus on the threat matrix in Africa. This section of the study would highlight the vulnerable areas in Sahel, West Africa and Sub-Saharan region. Second part of the study would discuss the threats emanating from different terrorist & extremist groups operating in these areas. This part of the study would briefly discuss strengths and capabilities of terrorist outfits operating in West Africa, Sahel and Sub-Saharan region. Last part of the study would emphasize on the US role in combating terrorism in Africa. This section would underscore the US efforts, economic aid, counter terror training, close air support for surveillance and targeting, community building and strengthening the institutions in Africa. The last part of the study would also entail a few recommendations for the US for lasting peace and stability in this region.*

**Keywords:** *Terrorism & Extremism, Sub Sahara region, Sahel, West Africa, America, Boko Haram, Al-Shabab, IS, Al-Qaeda.*

## Introduction

The United States of America has played an important role in combating transnational terrorism in the world. It has neutralized global terrorist groups in south Asia and Middle East, decimated their command-and-control structure, killed their top leadership and achieved tactical victory against them. But Al-Qaeda and ISIS despite huge losses in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Middle East managed to survive the US onslaught and shifted their focus to impoverished, volatile African region. Africa is the second most populous and 2nd largest continent in the world. The African continent is spread over 30.2 million km<sup>2</sup> and more than 1.3 billion people live in this part of the world. There are 55 Nations under the banner of African Union which was established in 2001 to coordinate their efforts to uplift this region from poverty, hunger, climate change, extremism and terrorism (Razaq Raj, Kevin A Griffin, 2015). Despite their efforts the African region is suffering from extreme poverty, marred by intermittent civil wars, interstate conflicts because of the scarcity of resources and most importantly terrorism and extremism. Africa is strategically placed and surrounded by many choke points and sea lanes of communication which included the Mediterranean Sea, Strait of Gibraltar, Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, and Atlantic & Indian Ocean (J.F.Williams, 2010). Most of the global maritime trade passes through these key sea lanes of communications, which makes this region important for the US and its allies. The most important reason for the US presence in Africa is not resources but the presence of global terrorist groups which include the ISIS linked Boko Haram, Al-Qaeda affiliated Al- Shabab, Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb-(AQIM) and other terrorist groups. These militant groups have seriously challenged the security of Nigeria, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad, Somalia, Sudan, Kenya, Ethiopia and others. The increasing terrorist footprints in Sahel, West Africa and East Africa compelled the US, France and their local allies G-5 Sahel and other states to enhance Their multilateral counter terror cooperation to eliminate this menace of terrorism and extremism from this region. The next part

of the study would focus on the threat matrix in Africa.

### **Threat Matrix in Africa: *Vulnerable Areas***

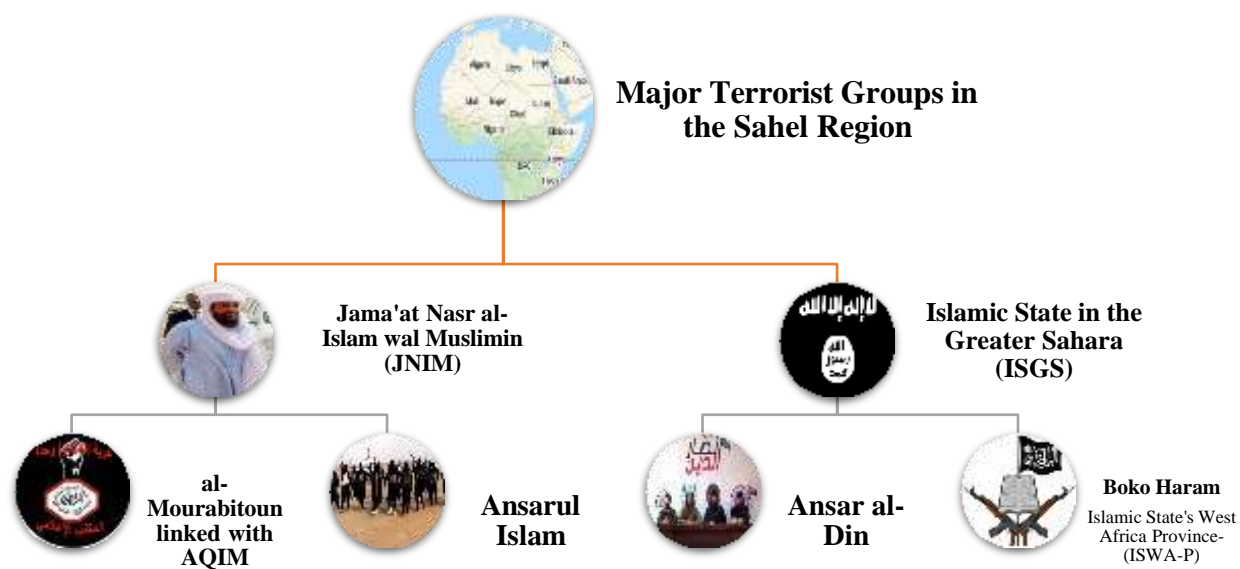
The security situation in some parts of Africa is dire and getting complex day by day. The threat matrix in African region revolves around mainly Boko Haram in Nigeria, Al-Shabab in Somalia, Islamic State in Western Africa Province- (ISWAP), Al-Qaeda and many other terrorist groups operating in Africa. According to an estimate more than 139 terrorist attacks took place during the month of February 2020, however in January 2020 there were only 122 attacks. Most of the attacks took place in Mali, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, DRC and Somalia. In addition, more than 748 people were killed in one month of February which shows a slight increase in the casualties as compared to the month of January 2020 which faced 715 deaths by terrorist organizations (Africa Recorded a Total of 156 Terrorist Attacks Resulting in a Total of 575 Deaths, 2021). Security situation in Africa require greater engagement of the major powers like the United States to help these states to cope up with this menace of terrorism and extremism.

### **Terrorism and Extremism in the Sahel Region/West Africa**

The Sahel region has become the epicenter of terrorism and extremism in the sub-Saharan Africa for many years. The Sahel region is semi-arid and it covers vast areas stretching from Senegal on the Atlantic Ocean coast, through parts of Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Mali, Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and into Sudan and Eritrea in the Red Sea. Most countries in the Sahel region are marred by the civil unrest, climate change, extreme poverty, religious extremism and radicalization (The Sahel: Key things to know as security crisis spirals, 2020). Militants ferociously attack the civilian and military installations with greater impunity. One such terrorist attack took place on March 2018 at the French embassy and Army's head quarter in Burkina Faso.

In these attacks more than 16 people lost their lives and over 80 were injured. The militants are getting stronger day by day and imposing serious damages in the area. These terrorist attacks are considered as unparalleled in terms of their strategy, synergy, lethality and severity. It is necessary that America and its allies must work together with the regional forums to combat this rising threat in West Africa. Though, the French-led G5 Sahel regional counter-terrorism mechanism is there in place (Sebastian Elischer, Rolf Hofmeier, Henning Melber, Andreas Mehler, 2015), but the US support would be crucial in defeating the militancy in West Africa. The attacks on highly secured diplomatic and military installations reveal that militants have become sophisticated and their outreach has also increased in recent times. These terrorist attacks were claimed by a terrorist group Jama'a Nasr al-Islam wa al-Muslimeen- (Nusrat al-Islam) (Mickolus, 2019). The Nusrat al-Islam came into existence in 2017 with the conglomeration of four other terrorist groups in Sahel which included Ansar Dine, the Macina Liberation Front, Al-Mourabitoun and the AQIM. The emergence of Nusrat al-Islam started a new era of instability and turmoil in the area. Al-Qaeda is working as their umbrella organization which is a source of concern for the US and its allies in Africa. After facing huge setbacks, Al-Qaeda is now looking for new allies, safe heavens in Africa to coordinate and plan more transnational attacks against the US or its allies around the globe (George Klay Kieh, Kelechi Kalu, 2012). Nusrat al-Islam has carried out many terrorist attacks against the foreign troops, UN officials, kidnapping for ransom, target killing and suicide attacks against civilian and military targets. Their main areas of operations are Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali (Bukarti, 2018).

Security Situation in Mali is also not conducive and getting worse.



Source: *Aljazeera*

Al-Qaeda and Islamic State militants intermittently target the security forces of Mali and impose heavy casualties on them. In one such attack Al-Qaeda or IS linked militants killed 29 soldiers of the Malian military. The Malian security forces are incapable of controlling their lawless central and Northern parts of the country from where the militants regularly attack main cities and neighboring countries. Though, the French government has deployed thousands of soldiers for counter terror assistance in the Sahel but they are not enough. French military officials themselves have accepted that militants are getting strength day by day in the area and “Nigerien Burkinabe and Malian are losing the equivalent of one battalion per year to the terrorist attacks by Al-Qaeda and IS linked extremist groups” (Militant attack kills 29 Malian soldiers, 2020). According to Mr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas- (UN envoy to Saheland West Africa), security situation is getting worse and there is overwhelming increase in the

terrorist attacks against civilians and military installations. He was of the view that militancy has spiked fivefold in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger since 2016.

Estimated 4,000 people lost their lives in 2019 as compared to 770 in 2016. Burkina Faso is worst hit among other neighbors. In 2016, there were only 80 casualties but in 2019 it has increased to 1,800. The focus of the militant groups has shifted from Mali to Burkina Faso to secure and control the weapons & trafficking routes for illegal activities. According to the UN envoy the militants linked with IS and Al-Qaeda are trying to undermine weak states in West Africa and Sahel (UN envoy: 'Devastating surge' of attacks in Sahel and West Africa, 2020). In December 2019 militants carried out a coordinated attack on a military outpost in Burkina Faso in which almost 35 civilians and 7 soldiers lost their lives. This attacks shows the outreach, confidence and lethality of the militant groups operating in the area. In November 2019, the militants killed 37 employees of Canadian mining firm in the area. The G-5 Sahel with the support of France and UN are trying to meet this challenge (Burkina Faso mourns dozens of victims after double attack, 2019). But again the US help would be crucial. The US greater surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities along with expertise in tackling the IS and Al-Qaeda militants would be a force multiplier for the Sahel security forces. Security situation in Nigeria is also volatile. Nigeria is facing renewed violence and unparalleled terrorist attacks against military targets and innocent civilians. Boko Haram is the most dreaded terrorist group in Northeast Nigeria. Slowly and gradually it has consolidated its position in Nigeria and now it has become a nightmare for the regional peace and security. Boko haram is brutal terrorist organization, fully exploiting the propaganda value of violence. To achieve their objectives, the group broadcast videos of beheadings and throat-slitting to sow fear in the masses. Most of the victims are Nigerian security forces, Muslims who work with the government, women

and children are also not spared by this group (Campbell, 2014). Boko haram's strategic alliance with Islamic State in Iraq and Syria opened the gates for IS in Africa. Now there are many IS inspired and affiliated groups operating in Africa. Since the establishment of Islamic State in 2014, Boko Haram has conducted many devastating terrorist attacks in Nigeria and neighboring states of Chad, Cameroon, and Niger. The most dangerous thing is control of territory by this group. Once a terrorist group acquires physical space, they get recruits, funds, establish command control and training centers. According to a report more than 37,500 people have been killed since 2011 due to violent attacks by this terrorist group. Estimated 2.5 Million people have also been displaced in the Lake Chad Basin (Global Conflict Tracker, 2020). Since Boko haram's alliance with Islamic State the intensity of terrorist attacks has increased in Nigeria. In one such attack the Boko Haram terrorists ambushed a convoy of the Nigerian security forces in which more than 50 soldiers lost their lives (Haruna, 2020). Boko Haram's influence is not just confined to Nigeria only; it has also carried out devastating attacks against the Lake Chad Basin states. On March 2020, Militants linked with Boko Haram killed more than 92 Chadian soldiers in a brazen attack. This is considered as the deadliest attack on the Chadian security forces in recent history. It also shows the capacity and outreach of the militant groups in the Sahel region. The attack took place in a village of Boma in the Lake Chad area which also shares border with Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad. The growing capabilities of the Boko Haram are source of concern for the regional states. It was well coordinated attack in which the Boko Haram militants used heavy weapons to target the Chadian soldiers (Brown, 2020).

Niger in the Sahel region is also facing unprecedented form of terrorist attacks by Al-Qaeda and IS linked militant groups. Niger military is unable to control the worsening security situation in the area despite having support of the US, France and G-5 Sahel Task force for combating terrorism. On December 2019, the militants attacked a military base in Niger and killed over 71 soldiers. This was the most devastating attack in the history of Niger. The geographical proximity with Mali is nuisance for Niger and other West African states. Militant groups from Northern Mali cross with impunity and carry out devastating attacks against civil and military installations in Niger. Same military outpost was attacked in July 2019 in which more than 18 soldiers lost their lives. The center of gravity is a tri-border area called as *Liptako-Gourma region*, which connects Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. Most of the militant activity is taking place in this region and also most of the counter terror operations have also taken place in this area. This area not only provide safe haven for all sorts of militant groups but also suitable place for drug trafficking, Illicit activities such as small arms, motorcycle, fuel trafficking and illegal mining. All these means are key source of funding for militant groups in the Liptako Gourma areas. Terrorists in this region have become more sophisticated and they are carrying out audacious attacks against Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso (Niger army base attack leaves at least 71 soldiers dead, 2019). There is no dearth of weapons supply. Initially these groups used to get weapons from Libya but now the modus operandi have changed. In recent times it has been observed that militant groups seize weapons from military installations in Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali. The Sahel states are unable to secure their arms depots, this has become the most pertinent issue in the Liptako-Gourma region where militants conduct vicious attacks and seize huge arms and ammunition which help them to sustain their terrorist activities in the Sahel region (Kone, 2020).





Source: [shorturl.at/bfntY](https://shorturl.at/bfntY)

### American Efforts to Combat Terrorism in Sahel & West Africa

The US has been involved in counter terror operations alongside Niger since long. In 2018, the US lost four Special Forces personnel in an ambush in Tongo a small town in Niger (Maud Quessard, Frédéric Heurtebize, Frédérick Gagnon, 2020). According to the key findings of the incident, the troops were “significantly outnumbered by a well-trained force” (Leithead, 2018). America is in process to carry out global retreat from Afghanistan, Iraq and West Africa. The purpose of reducing the post 9/11 counter terror campaigns is the emergence of Russia and China. The US want to focus its resources on these two rival states and want to end costly engagements around the world. The US counter terror campaigns in Middle East, Afghanistan and elsewhere pushed the transnational militant groups like Al-Qaeda and Islamic

State to get shelter in African region which is fertile ground for terrorism and extremism because of widespread poverty, failed states, weak governance, rampant corruption, global warming & shrinking resources, fragile counter terror mechanisms and illiteracy. All these factors make African region an attractive destination for militant groups where they can get safe heavens, train their fighters, regroup & reorganize and then carry out transnational terrorist attacks. It is imperative for the US and its allies to maintain strong footprint in the region to provide close air support, counter terror training and advice to the weak security forces of the region. The military campaign in Libya and ouster of Muammar Gaddafi created a power vacuum in the country which also contributed to the instability and turmoil in Sahel and Sahara region. Collapse of Libyan security apparatus allowed the militant outfits to move around centrally located Libya in North Africa which stretches southward into the Sahara and Sahel. Many terrorist groups move in this region with greater impunity. It is estimated that almost 10,000 to 20,000 assault rifles might have been trafficked from Libya to Mali (Yearbook of the United Nations 2013, 2017). The alliance of terrorist groups like IS and Boko Haram, Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb improved the overall capabilities of the local terrorist groups in Africa. Now they conduct high profile, well-coordinated guerrilla attacks against civilians and security forces which has increased violence in the region. Boko Haram, Al-Shabab and other militant groups use Improvised Explosive Devices-(IEDs) which has increased the casualty rate in Africa. The US has effectively dealt with IS and Al-Qaeda in Middle East and Afghanistan. The US can share that experience and expertise with the African security forces especially worst hit countries like Nigeria and Somalia. Withdrawal of the US from Africa would be strategic blunder which may allow local terrorist groups to consolidate their position in the region and then they would conduct global attacks, which may undermine the regional and global security.

The United States of America is leading the war against terror around the globe. Now the focus of the US counter terror efforts is on Africa. Especially the West and East African region because of the presence of numerous terrorist groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda and Islamic State. The threat of growing terrorism and religious extremism is real and pertinent for regional and global security. The US believe that security situation in Sahel region is getting worse and there is an urgent need of effective counter measures. According to a report

*“In the Sahel, terrorist groups – including affiliates and adherents of al-Qaeda and ISIS as well as non-aligned groups – have expanded their operations in north and central Mali and the Tri-Border Region of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger”* (Yearbook of the United Nations 2013, 2017).

This is the reason that United States of America is extending its political, economic, diplomatic and military support to the African nations so that they can curb this menace of terrorism. In that context the US is helping the West African States through annual counter terror drills. In February 2020 more than 1,500 soldiers from 34 countries of Africa along with trainers from the US and other countries gathered in Senegal and Mauritania for annual Flintlock counter terror exercises. Hundreds of Soldiers from terror hits states of Nigeria, Niger Chad, Burkina Faso and Mali participated in an effort to learn the modern counter terror techniques and methods to effectively meet the challenge posed by highly trained Al-Qaeda and ISIS linked militant groups (Petesch, 2020). America has deployed around 6000 to 7000 troops in African region to help these states in their fight against religious extremism and terrorism. Most of the American troops are deployed in Sahel and the Horn of Africa. The US provide aerial support, advice and training to combat terrorism in the

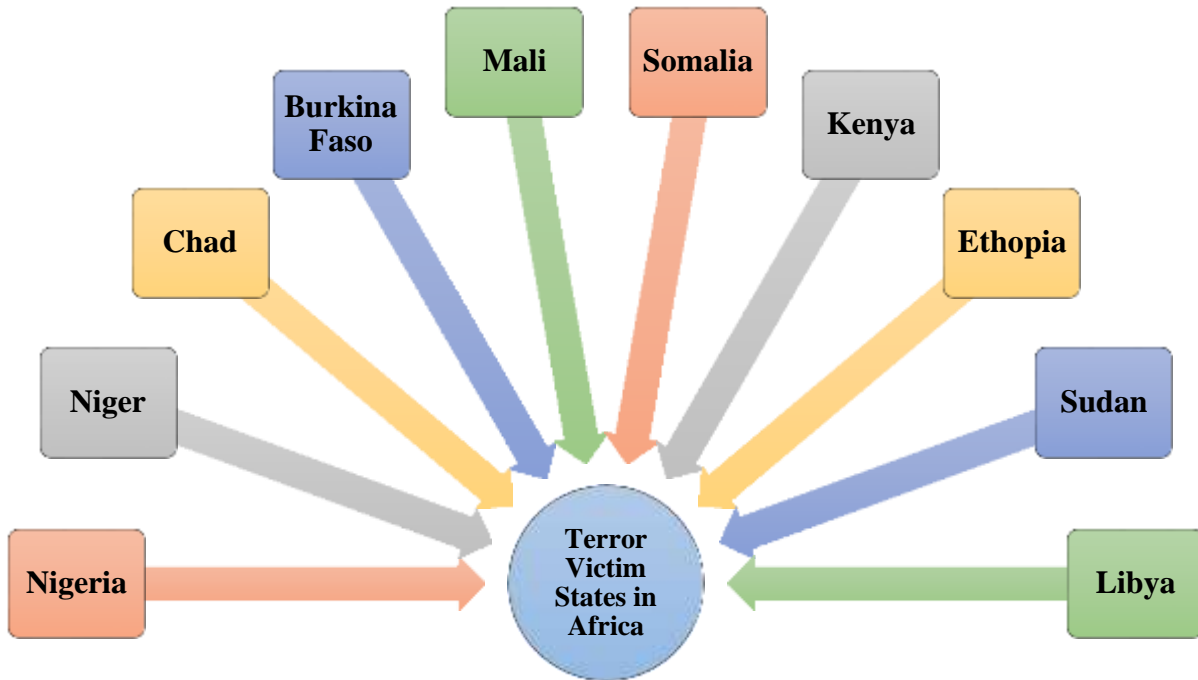
region. America has also established a base for its surveillance and armed UAVs in Niger. In 2013, over one hundred US soldiers were deployed in Niger and later the US Ambassador formally requested for a drone base in Niger to expedite their counter terror efforts in Mali and beyond (Ridley, 2014). This base is also known as Air Base 201 which is located near the city of Agadez, Niger (Thomas Gibbons-Neff, Eric Schmitt, 2019). This Drone base is used for surveillance, reconnaissance and targeting. America also operate another drone base at Dirkou, Niger. But the new base would be for strikes against the militants (Campbell, The Presence of Lethal U.S. Drones in Niger is Expanding, 2018). But the previous the US experience is not good with drone strikes in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Yemen. These drone strikes not only kill key terrorist leaders but at the same time they also kill innocent civilians in collateral damage, which fuel the insurgency and increase the recruitment for militants. The best strategy is to use these drone strikes with utmost care, caution and precision with the support of human intelligence on ground to avoid any civilian casualties.

The emergence of Islamic State's West African Province- (ISWAP) in Nigeria and their increasing terrorist activities would be serious threat for the regional peace and stability. Nigeria holds significance for the US because it is largest African oil producing country. Instability in Nigeria would be detrimental to the regional security and economic interests of the US. This is the reason that America in 2015 decided to help Nigeria to cope up with this emerging threat. The US enhanced its military assistance and deployed over 300 troops to improve counter terror capacity of the Nigerian Security forces to effectively eliminate Boko Haram or ISWAP from this region (Campbell, The Presence of Lethal U.S. Drones in Niger is Expanding, 2018). The expansion of ISWAP and volatile regional security situation, the US also extended its support

to Cameroon, Niger, and Chad to improve their overall capacity so that they can counter this menace.

The US, France and regional partners established a Multi-National Joint Task Force- (MJTF) in 2014 to fight against Boko Haram militants. Initially it was based in Bago in Borno State of Nigeria. But in 2015 the Boko Haram militants swamped the area and now it is based in Chad. The MJTF consists of soldiers from Nigeria, Cameroon, Benin, Chad and Niger. The US and France provide this task force with aerial support, surveillance, intelligence, training and advice ( Angel Rabasa, Christopher M. Schnaubelt, Peter Chalk, Douglas Farah, Gregory Midgette, Howard J. Shatz, 2017). The US government designated Boko Haram's leader Abubakar Shekau as global terrorist and put a bounty of about \$7 million on his head. America has also designated Boko Haram and its splinterfaction Ansaru as Foreign Terrorist Organizations- (FTOs) (John-Mark Iyi, Hennie Strydom, 2018).

The US extended its support through already established regional counter terror programs and funding apparatus which included the Global Security Contingency Fund- (GSCF) and the Counterterrorism Partnership Fund- (CTPF), and also provided bilateral security assistance to many states in the Sahel region. The US provided almost \$400 million in aid to counter the influence of ISWAP in Nigeria and its neighboring states (Blanchard, 2016). It has allocated its surveillance and reconnaissance assets for real time information and location of the ISWAP fighters and their activities. The US advisory support and training proved to be very effective.



Source: Authors own description

Nigeria along with neighboring countries conducted coordinated operations and regained lost territories and reduced the footprint of Boko Haram in few villages. But at the same time it does not mean that threat is over. According to the US Ambassador in Nigeria, John Campbell, “when the soldiers leave the terrorist later return” (Hansen, 2019). There is need of sustained military operations followed by massive reconstruction and development programs to deny the terrorists any physical space in the region. In that context, the US has allocated almost \$30 million for de-radicalization or counter extremism in Africa through USAID. To overcome the challenges faced by global warming, it has also provided considerable humanitarian assistance of about \$200 million for Lake Chad Basin areas (Blanchard, 2016). All these efforts by the US played an important role in containing the

expansion of Boko Haram or ISWAP in Africa. But Boko Haram is still able to carry out devastating attacks against Nigeria and its neighboring states. Which means that more efforts are required to eradicate these groups from this region. It is necessary that, the US must maintain its significant presence in the region, enhance the capacity of local partners and these states must conduct coordinated military operations against all sorts of militant groups, dismantle their command and control structure, curb terror financing, control the proliferation of small arms and carry out massive socio economic deprivation programs to bring structural peace in the region.

### *US-AFRICOM*

America is coordinating its counter terror efforts through the US-AFRICOM. Almost 7000 personnel from many nations are deployed for a variety of operations in Africa. Under the US-AFRICOM banner the security cooperation with West African states entails military support, border management, aid for the capacity building of police force, development and reconstruction aid. The US has also financially supported these African states under Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund and Africa Regional Counter Terrorism program. Countries like Niger, Mauritania, Chad and Burkina Faso were recipients of the US training, weapons and equipment for counter terror, which improved their overall counter insurgency capacity. According to a report, the US-AFRICOM is expanding its operations through the establishment of more military bases in the region from 2021 to 2025 to curb the ISIS, Al-Qaeda and their affiliates in the Sahel, West Africa and Horn of Africa.

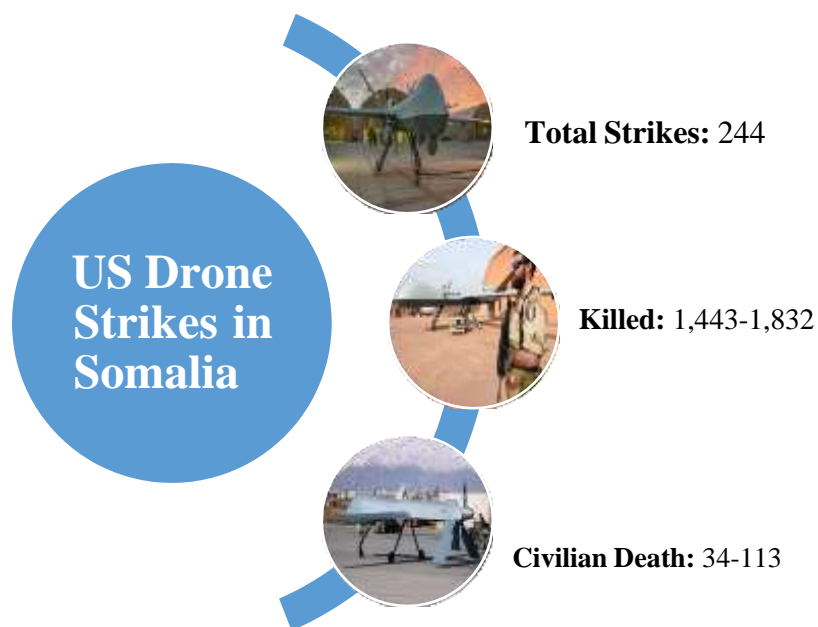
America is planning four new bases in Djibouti, Kenya and Niger to shore up its counter terror capabilities in the region to mitigate the rising trends of violent extremism and radicalization. The US new bases depict that it would remain engaged in Africa for the longer period of time because of the presence of transnational terrorist groups in the region. According to a senior US Army Officer Major General Roger Cloutier, "The bottom line is, the United States is not walking away

from Africa. We're committed and we remain engaged" (Turse, 2020). There is need of sustained military operations because the ISIS linked Boko Haram, Al-Qaeda & their affiliates are seriously posing threat to the regional peace and security (Eguegu, 2020). The US is actively targeting militants in the horn of Africa where Al-Qaeda and its affiliated Al-Shabab terrorist group has increased their violent attacks.

### **Terrorism and Extremism in the Horn of Africa**

Somalia is a war ravaged country, facing extreme poverty, corruption and instability. Somalia has been a lucrative destination for Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups. The threat matrix in Somalia revolves around Al-Shabab militant group which is closely aligned with Al-Qaeda and threatens peace and security in the Horn of Africa. This terrorist group emerged in 2006, and later got strength by the influx of Al-Qaeda militants in Somalia. At the moment this group possess a potent strength of about 9000 plus fighters which means they can seriously disrupt and challenge security of Somalia and other bordering countries especially Kenya (Global Conflict Tracker, 2020). In 2012, al-Shabab militants formally announced its allegiance to Al-Qaeda. It is also reported that Al-Shabab coordinate their activities with other regional terrorist groups like Boko Haram and AQIM (Al Shabaab, 2020). Al-Shabab is a real and pertinent threat to the peace and security of Somalia and its neighbors. This group has the ability and capacity to carry out some of the most devastating terrorist attacks in Somalia and beyond. In 2014 Al-Shabab leader Godane said called Ayman Al-Zawahiri as sheikh and emir of Al-Shabab, which clearly shows their close alliance (Dan Joseph, Harun Maruf, 2018).





Source: *New America Foundation*

U.S. Air Strikes & Drone Strikes in Somalia					
American Administration	Total No. of Strikes	Civilians Deaths	Unknown Casualties	Militants Killed	Total Deaths
Bush	12	26-68	13-21	38-55	77 – 144
Obama	48	1-22	10	338 – 521	349 – 553
Trump	184	7-23	33-37	977 – 1,075	1,017 – 1,135

<b>Total</b>	244	34-113	56-68	1,353 –	1,443 –
				1,651	1,832

**Source:** *New America Foundation*

Al-Shabab militants carried out a massive truck bomb attack in Mogadishu in October 2017 in which more than 500 people lost their lives. This is considered to be the most devastating attack ever in the history of Somalia (Burke, 2017). Neighbouring Kenya suffered the most because of the Al-Shabab terrorist activities. In 2016, a Kenyan military base was attacked by the Al-Shabab militants in which more 180 soldiers lost their lives (Mohamed, 2017). Another major incident took place in 2015, when the Al-Shabab militants carried out massacre at Garissa University in Kenya in which more than 148 innocent students were killed by the militants (Higgins, 2015). In 2013, same militant group attacked and killed over 67 people in the Capital of Kenya (Blanchard, The September 2013 Terrorist Attack in Kenya., 2013). In 2010, Al-Shabab militant carried out a massive terrorist attack in Uganda in which 74 people lost their lives (Rice, 2010). These were some of the deadliest attacks conducted by Al-Shabab militants. It could be assumed that this terrorist group with the backing of Al-Qaeda would be a serious threat to the regional and global peace. It is necessary that global actors especially the US must enhance their support to Somalia so that it can fight the scourge of terrorism and extremism effectively.

### **The US Role in Combating Terrorism in the Horn of Africa**

America is taking some serious steps in the horn of Africa to support Somalia in their fight against Al-Qaeda and Al-Shabab militant groups. The US President Trump has also written to the congress and extended the state of emergency in Somalia. He believes, “The situation with respect to Somalia continues to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States (Rosen, 2019).” The US launched Operation Juniper Shield to fight the scourge of terrorism in East Africa. Under the operation the US military directly helped the local states to enhance their counter terror capabilities (Overseas Contingency Operations Funding: Background and Status, 2019). The US has established a Combined Joint Task Force at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti to support their special operations in the region against militant groups in Somalia. It hosts about 2000 US personnel to help the regional partners in intelligence sharing, coordination and surveillance missions (Turse, *The Changing Face of Empire: Special Ops, Drones, Spies, Proxy Fighters, Secret Bases, and Cyberwarfare*, 2012). The U.S. Air Force in Africa has also played an active role in the war against terror in Africa. It helps the ground forces in their counter terror campaign provided close air support and greater firepower (Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa, 2020).

The US played significant role in combating terrorism in Somalia. It has deployed 500 Special Forces personnel in Somalia to help the country dislodge Al-Shabab militant group from East Africa. Furthermore, consistent drone strikes against Al-Shabab decimated the top leadership and demoralized the group. The US drone strike killed Al-Shahab’s top commander Aden Hashi Ayro

in 2008 and Ahmed Abdi Godane in 2014 (Helene Cooper, Eric Schmitt, Jeffrey Gettleman, 2014). In a press statement the US Pentagon Press Secretary said, “We have confirmed that Ahmed Godane, the co-founder of Al Shabab, has been killed, it is a major symbolic and operational loss to the Shabab” (Helene Cooper, Eric Schmitt, Jeffrey Gettleman, 2014). The United States have shown its firm resolve to eradicate terrorism and extremism from Africa. In Somalia the US have not only deployed considerable number of troops but also supported this war ravaged country with financial and military assistance along with training and advice to eliminate Al-Qaeda and their affiliates Al-Shabab from the Horn of Africa. According to the White House Press Secretary, Josh Earnest,

*“..... even as this is an important step forward in the fight against Al Shabab, the United States will continue to use the tools at our disposal — financial, diplomatic, intelligence and military — to address the threat that Al Shabab and other terrorist groups pose to the United States and the American people”* (Helene Cooper, Eric Schmitt, Jeffrey Gettleman, 2014).

After assuming the office, the American President Donald Trump approved plan by the US military to increase military operations against Al-Qaeda, al-Shabab and their associates in Somalia and elsewhere. Though consistent military operations by Somalia have weakened al-Shabab and regained control of many towns, but it is just a tactical victory. Al-Shabab is still able to carry out deadly attacks in Somalia and elsewhere. The Bush and Obama administrations established AFRICOM to coordinate efforts against terrorist groups in Sahel region and beyond (Harmon, 2014). During the US Trump regime AFRICOM intensified its counter terror efforts against terrorist groups. During

the first few months of 2020, America carried out more than 39 drone strikes against Al-Shabab and Al-Qaeda in Somalia. In 2019, the US AFRICOM conducted 63 drone strikes in 2019 (Eviatar, 2020).



Source: Author's own Description

Which clearly depicts that the US is taking the rise of militancy in Somalia seriously. However, drone strikes alone cannot win the war against terror in Africa. There is need of holistic approach which may focus on the socio-economic uplift of the people in Africa. The US has also funded Partnership for Regional East Africa Counterterrorism- (PREACT) in 2009 which is aimed to

enhance the counter terror capacity of the local partners, military training and support and assistance in law enforcement in East Africa to counter terrorism and extremism comprehensively (Programs and Initiatives: Bureau Of Counterterrorism, 2020). In addition, the US has always support the regional counter mechanisms in Africa. In Somalia the regional countries along with the support of international actors established AMISOM to pool in their resources and jointly eradicate militancy from Somalia. Since last decade the US has spent almost \$6.5 billion in Africa to counter terrorism and extremism (Garamone, 2019). America supported the AMISOM with training, weapon & equipment, logistics, & transportation. The American equipment included armored personnel carriers-(APCs), trucks, communications equipment, generators, tents, night vision equipment, and helicopters for transportation, rescue and close air support (Why the U.S. Military is in Somalia, 2017). The US has delivered \$487 million in humanitarian aid to Somalia in the FY2018 - FY2019 and \$430 Million were allocated for AMISOM in same year. The American funding for AMISOM has been close to \$2 billion in last decade and part from these funds it has also provided half a billion dollars directly to Somalia in security related aid (Somalia: Rebuilding the State, 2019). Despite the US backing the AMISOM could not defeat or eliminate Al-Qaeda and Al-Shabab from Somalia (Lessons Learned in Somalia: AMISOM and Contemporary Peace Enforcement, 2018). They only achieved tactical victories but never achieved any decisive victory against Al-Shabab and other terrorist outfits in the region. It could not assert itself as unified force because of the ethnic rivalries, political expediencies and corruption.

The US appointed a special envoy for Sahel region to coordinate and expedite the political, diplomatic, economic, military and counter terror campaign in West Africa to effectively curb the rising violence by IS, Al-Qaeda and their affiliates (Pamuk, 2020). The newly appointed envoy Peter Pham has already been engaged in African region and he knows the changing strategic dynamics in the region. The US concerns are valid and this is the time that other states must also come forward and counter this emerging threat in West Africa. The G-5 Sahel states, France and US alone cannot win against highly organized, motivated and well equipped militant groups in the region. Well-coordinated global response would help the African states to effectively neutralize militants and bring long lasting peace and stability to this war ravaged region which is also marred by extreme poverty and hunger.

## **Recommendations for Lasting Peace in Africa**

### ***1. Training and Advice: Capacity Building of the Local Partners***

Sustained, synergized global response is required to eliminate terrorist groups. The developed nations must support the African states with training, advice, modern weapons and equipment, close air support for surveillance and precision targeting against terrorists. Local security forces are first line of defense in the war against terror in Africa. These states lack essential capabilities to fight organized, well equipped and highly motivated militant groups in Sahel, Horn of Africa and Lake Chad basin states. The US along with its allies must improve the capacity of these states so they can fight against the militancy in this region effectively.

## **2. Enhance Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance Capabilities**

The US already got base in Niger for surveillance and Reconnaissance against militant groups in the region. It has to expand its Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance capabilities to monitor terrorist activity in Africa, real time information about their movement, location and operations. The US must also improve its human intelligence, through local spies to get accurate information about the militant's location to carry out precision air strikes to avoid collateral damage.

## **3. Massive Rebuilding and Reconstruction: *Economic Revitalization***

Followed by effective military campaign, the US and its allies must help the impoverished states in rebuilding, reconstruction and infrastructural development. Consistent civil wars and terrorist activities devastated infrastructure and societies in some countries in Africa. It is imperative now that these states must be supported through financial aid and other relief packages, so they can rebuild and sustain.

## **4. Institutional Development**

Institutional development is very important for brining positive peace in Africa. The security apparatus must be improved in all states, especially their capacity for counter terror must be improved and enhanced. Political institutions must be strengthened with free and fair elections. Corruption and nepotism must be checked to avoid any mismanagement or malpractices. The institution of judiciary must be free, fair and independent, which can provide quick relief to the needy people. Such steps would establish structural peace in Africa.

## **5. Education and Human Resource Development**



Education and Human Resource development is key to counter terrorism, religious extremism or radicalization. It is necessary for the US and other developed nations that they must support these sectors.

#### **6. Counter Narrative: *Islam Denounce Terrorism***

The militants linked with Al-Qaeda and ISIS use Islam for their motivation, recruitment and operations. However, Islam always denounce terrorism. It is peaceful religious and promote peace and forgiveness. The Ullemas from Muslim world must come up with the counter narrative of the militants with true interpretation of Quran and Hadith with its true meaning, context and sense to protect youth in these societies.

#### **7. Dialogue and Reconciliation: *Addressing Political Grievances***

The US must support the peace initiative from the position of strength. Genuine political grievances of the people in African states must be addressed. First the US and allies must win against terrorist groups and bring the reconcilable groups to the negotiation table. Once the political grievances are addressed then there would be no chance for any militant organisation to make its inroads into Africa.

### **Conclusion**

Africa is facing renewed from of existential threat from different terrorist groups operating under the banner of transnational militant organisation Islamic State and Al-Qaeda. The US global war against terror in Afghanistan and Iraq forced Al-Qaeda and ISIS respectively to find a new refuge in Africa. Due to religious extremism, political and socio-economic vulnerabilities in Africa, it was ideal location for global terrorist organisations to get refuge, reenergize, recruit, plan and

execute against US and its allies in Africa and beyond. The study concluded that Sahel region, Horn of Africa and Lake Chad Basin areas are highly vulnerable and groups affiliated with IS al-Qaeda operate with greater impunity. The trend shows that militants in these areas are getting stronger, their capacity and outreach has also increased. The US is actively involved in Africa supporting the local partners with training & advice, diplomatic and public diplomacy, economic aid, military support thru Special Forces and air strikes, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance etc. The American foot print in Africa has contained these terrorist groups from launching attacks on the US homeland. However, presence of few thousand troops in second largest continent with over a billion population would not be enough. To eradicate terrorism and extremism the US and its allies must bring structural reforms in Africa especially in the most vulnerable areas which includes Nigeria, Somalia, Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Sudan, Libya and Mali. Terrorism and extremism in these societies increased because of the political grievances, extreme poverty & under development, unemployment, ethnic divisions, climate change and shrinking resources, religious extremism and radicalization. The US and its allies must work together and overcome these challenges to bring positive peace in this vulnerable part of the world. America must work on the capacity building of these nations, their forces military and police must be trained enough in counter insurgency warfare to handle growing terrorism effectively. The US must also promote public diplomacy, reconciliation and dialogue among some reconcilable groups. There are some genuine political and ethnic grievances which must be addressed for lasting peace. America, France, UK and other partners must carry out massive socio-economic uplift programs, infrastructure development, and human resource development to deviate young men from joining the terrorist organisations for monetary benefits. Most importantly to contain the spread of radicalization and religious extremism America and its local partners must

come up with counter narrative of the militant's ideology. Muslim scholars around the world must come forward and issue a decree that Islam is the religion of peace, serenity and brotherhood. It not only denounces terrorism but also believe that murder of one person is equal to the murder of whole humanity. Islamic scholars must interpret the injunctions of Holy Quran and Hadith in its true spirit, meaning and context to counter the narrative and ideology of terrorist groups linked with Al-Qaeda or ISIS etc. The study determines the US military muscle, aerial strikes, specialized counter terror operations and power politics in Africa is a short term remedy. It may not eradicate terrorism and extremism from this region unless the US change its approach from hardcore military to human security aspects, which includes better governance, justice, equity, socio economic uplift of vulnerable societies and management of resources for optimal use by all stake holders. This is the best way to bring long lasting peace and stability in war ravaged Africa.

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