



## A TRANSNATIONAL MULTIFACETED STRATEGY FOR OVERCOMING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN THE SAHARA REGION

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper examines the variegated areas through which violent extremism can be curbed within the identified area called the Sahel. It also analyzes ways through which this can be achieved by transnational cooperation and commitment to dissolving the strength of extremists in the area. The paper adopts the descriptive method and library instrument to generate data, especially documented literature obtainable from books, journals, periodicals, reports, newspapers and magazines. Findings show that the AU Strategy for the Sahel region lists Algeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Sudan as countries making up the Sahel region but for the purposes of its strategy for the region includes Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Nigeria and Senegal on the basis that though outside the immediate zone deserve the same attention. Strategy for curbing violent extremism may involve political, economic, military and sociocultural inertia among other things. The paper concludes that, having a transnational cooperation will ensure lasting peace within the region by creating energetic entrepreneurs in the long run who will bring development to the region against terror and violence. The paper recommends effective fight against poverty and creating job opportunities to deal with idleness of the youth among other things.*

**KEYWORDS:** Transnational, Multifaceted, Strategies, Violence, Extremism, Sahel

### INTRODUCTION

The international system is one that concurrently attracts new belief systems, religious sects, ideas and ideologies that emerge to shape the relationship between people and governments, state and state, people and people among the divergent variegation. Violent extremism has become the order of international system from Al Qaeda, ISIS, AQIM, Al - Shabaab, Boko Haram and Annusra, among others that shape the global geopolitics. This also explains the relationship between super powers such as the United States, Russia and regional powers such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Israel, and on the other hand a neutral group such as the European Union which previously has been dragged into coalition alliance by the United States in fighting American identified terrorists either objectively or subjectively selected.

Violent extremism has without doubt, disrupted political activities in many states within the global system, suspended educational development of some areas where violence has erupted, claimed many innocent lives due to indiscriminate killings and bombings in market places, schools, motor parks, government buildings and many more places considered as targets by the terrorists or extremists.

It is also notable that the fight against violent extremism is cumbersome due to the guerrilla tactics deployed when in war. Violent extremism is better prevented - for if it starts, it becomes



a hard nut to crack. It involves brain-washing to the point one desires to die in combat and complete absence of fear in carrying out the group's objective. Countries like Iraq, Libya, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Somalia, Mali, Burkina Faso, Algeria, Syria, the United States, the UK, among others, have all experienced violence arising from extremist movement, individually carried out or group orchestrated.

Violent terrorism needs not necessarily be curbed by violence right from the start, but may involve de-radicalization, dialogue, fighting poverty, creation of job opportunities and many more areas. Political, sociocultural strategies are all considerable except if all measures prove a failure then other strategies such as military might and force can be applied.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

- **Violent extremism:** this refers to the beliefs and actions of people who support or use violence to achieve ideological, religious or political goals. This includes terrorism and other forms of politically motivated and communal violence. All forms of violent extremism seek change through fear and intimidation rather than through peaceful means. These people feel their actions are justified, for example, by their political interpretations, and/or religious beliefs.
- **Terrorism:** terrorism is an element of violent extremism. Terrorism as defined by Bruce Hoffman in his book "Inside Terrorism" is, "ineluctably political in aims and motives, violence – or equally important, threatened violence, designed to have far reaching psychological repercussions beyond the immediate victims or targets, conducted by an organization with an identifiable chain of command or conspiratorial cell structure (whose members wear no uniform or identifying insignia) and perpetrated by a sub-national group or non-state entity".
- **Insurgency:** on the other hand, refers to an uprising against a government but of a slightly less gravity than a revolution (The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language). For instance, in Mali MNLA seeks independence (insurgency) while Ansar Dine seeks the implementation of Shari'a Law (violent extremism).

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In the writings of Rochford (2017), transnational approach to fighting or curbing violent extremism is the best approach as it is inclusive and effective. The magnitude of the threat of violent extremism still remains and its cross border nature requires an integrated strategy. Violent extremism by its nature has widespread tentacles. The borders are fluid and permeable. Funds may be raised in one country, planning and training of members in another, while the actual operation may be executed elsewhere and all the while the extremists are communicating and/or travelling across borders. Other areas of significance in cooperating to deal with the menace according to Rochford (2017), may include:

- I. The AU should look at these areas for where the most advantage can be gained from the partnership.



- II. The region is quite vast with a rugged terrain. The countries are relatively poor and would do well to pool resources.
- III. Many of the extremist groups have links to international terrorist organizations like AQIM, Al – Shabaab. The best means of combating these influences is by following the money and identifying the sponsors or the means by which these violent extremists' movements are financed.
- IV. Cooperation will give the countries the ability to build on best practices and capacity and leverage on new technologies and cross-fertilization of ideas. It improves efficiencies and strengthens capabilities.
- V. Partnerships help in data exchange and cyber security.
- VI. The partnerships should look into areas such as helping States in the region in establishing a reliable, just and effective criminal justice system that will impart justice without fear or favor. The same should be done in the area of law enforcement and countering violent extremism, terrorism and insurgency.
- VII. It leads to establish a human rights regime.
- VIII. Cooperation helps in countering illegal trade in narcotics.

The Sahara regions have close ties by way of trade and interconnectedness of their economies, migratory systems and networks. A high level of state fragility affects the region. There is also a high level of starvation and hunger, which needs security in food production and supplies (Raj, 2013). It is in line with this that Boeing (2016) argues that “Achieving food security is an urgent step...Drawing up of an action plan with tangible milestones is necessary... A means of achieving this should be the priority of the government of the day.” Organizations like the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), the World Food Program (WFP), African Development Bank (ADB), and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) among others can be invited to partner with the countries involved to review whatever strategies are currently in force, if any at all, with view to revamping them and if none are in existence should help in putting one in place (Barrett, 2010).

They can also partner with governments to give small grants and loans to assist rural farmers in establishing and /or growing their businesses. These organizations can participate in agricultural education for the farmers and teach them how to set up cooperatives and joint mechanized farming associations. In the same manner they can serve as advisors to government in their policy and budgetary planning. They can also partner with countries like the United States and France as well as regional organizations like the AU and ECOWAS. The regional organizations have a comparative advantage, as they are stakeholders in achieving peace in the region, they have experience on the issues as well as the continental mandate. Engaging the AU PSC model and the African Peace and Security Architecture will also serve to the advantage of the regional bodies.

In an intellectual piece, Feiler (2007) believes that it is pertinent to advise the superpowers that it would be advantageous for them to work in consonance with the regional body and seek their valuable input. Previous engagements were marred by what observers described as disorganized engagement between the US and other foreign partners. On the military angle,



the partnership should seek to root out enclaves of violent extremists and terrorists and make them unable to spread their extremist ideologies or recruit fighters; helping partnering countries become proficient in degrading and containing groups intent on violent extremism and terrorism and the networks. Development of law enforcement and security assistance resources. A major element will be first to overcome state fragility in the region especially the lack of government presence in the North. Tuareg rebels, local militia, and various Islamic groups are competing for this vacuum. It is pertinent to combat the level of poverty in the region. A number of countries within the region have remained at the bottom of the poverty index consistently for many years, for instance Mali. Failure to build a legitimate and stable government accounts for a large part of the insecurity in the region. The insecurity fuels the abject poverty and hopelessness being experienced by the youth of which 48% of the population are said to be under the age of 15 thus allowing them to be bound by the spell of extremism and/or criminality. Feiler (2007) suggests that, surveillance and reconnaissance are important in dealing with violent extremism.

In the discourses of Bowman (2007), there is the need to eliminate the smuggling in drugs, weapons, cigarettes, kidnapping and trafficking in persons, that the region has become notorious for. Eliminate official corruption through political settlements and government complicity in the smuggling racket. Another component of this strategy will be stopping the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. Developing joint partnerships to instill and enforce law and order in the region. The region is quite vast with a rugged terrain. The countries are relatively poor and would do well to pool resources. The region is subject to cyclical droughts juxtaposed to the instability in the region. The aftermath is over 400,000 IDPs leading to the unimaginable poverty in the region (Bowman, 2007). Attracting and coordinating humanitarian relief efforts in the region is a priority as the level of poverty is rife. With these seasonal droughts, famine, and regular locust infestations more than 54% of the population of certain countries in the region (namely Chad) are said to live below the poverty line. Food aid is required to help sustain a large portion of the population. Humanitarian aid needs to be coordinated in a manner as to benefit the people. Due to the lack of governance and endemic corruption so far it has failed to improve the lives of the citizenry (Naim, 2009).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theory of International Development Cooperation is being adopted to provide a scientific backing to this paper. The theory was developed by Lauri (1990). Development cooperation of any kind may be developed by bilateral, trilateral and multilateral institutions. Lauri (1990) believes that, there are two major variables that affect cooperation which are: In cooperation, there is a common goal, toward which the interaction is oriented, and which is shared by the actors. In assistance, there may be common goals, but the very action of giving aid is oriented towards helping the other party to realize his/her own goals. Lauri (1990) intellectually posits that:

International cooperation designates all undertakings allowing international actors to achieve jointly fixed goals by sharing certain resources together. Less than integration, yet more than sporadic common efforts, international cooperation denotes to establish relations between sovereign actors willing to share some values together.



It is discernible that cooperation by states in dealing with important issues such as violent extremism is pertinent in the study of international relations, economic relations, social interaction, administration and foreign policy. The assembly of states with the resolve to achieve peace in the Sahel is informed by the desire to maintain security and peaceful coexistence among the teeming population of the region.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

According to Andy (2012), Mali was largely regarded as a bastion of democracy in the region but was affected by a Tuareg rebellion in January 2012. This was mainly as a fall-out of the late Col. Gaddafi's policies whereby he supported extremism as part of his anti-Western campaign. He welcomed fighters (many of whom were Tuaregs) from the region to his army and with the collapse of his regime and the subsequent civil war in Libya a large influx of these fighters, small arms and light weapons permeated the region (Adam, 2012). This caused a lot of instability as the Tuaregs in his army returned to lead an insurrection whereby they created their own state of Azawad. In March and December of the same year the country witnessed two military coups and the Islamist extremists took over the government and only the intervention of the French military brought about the liberation of the country. Algeria, as the military stalwart in the region would be expected to have played a more critical role as a stabilizing factor but has been distracted by its own internal issues. There have been instances where Algeria has played a quiet role acting as a mediator in the CEMOC Tamanrasset Plan in 2009 but will need to step up and articulate a clearer response to the crises in the region (Hugh, 2013).

### **Political Strategies**

**Broad based participation in Democratic Elections:** To overcome state fragility in the region there has to be good governance according to Grindle (2004). The populace must play an active role in the choice of their leaders. Universal suffrage must be made available to those of voting age and in the exercise of this duty democracy must be practiced in a manner that is free and fair. Fair meaning a level playing field where there is a system to have equal representation to all and funding of political parties are regulated in a manner where none has undue advantage especially as to funding of parties or candidates. Good governance and political participation must be developed to fight poverty, unemployment and other reductionist vices that may hamper human development (Kaufmann and Kraay).

The democratic government should be able to have the necessary constitutional checks and balances to eliminate corruption, and ensure rule of law whilst providing the necessary social amenities and infrastructural requirements of the people. The governments of this region also need to observe human rights and the fair and equitable distribution of the dividends of democracy (Kaufmann and Kraay, 2012).

**Adoption of True Secularism:** Secularism is the separation of the State and religion and the giving of equal respect to all religions within a State. While most of the states in the region claim freedom of religion (see for example Constitutions of Sudan, Niger, Chad and Mali) they have a high percentage of adherents to Islam and often governance is done with a leaning to Islamic law despite the constitutional provisions. In the position of John (2009), governments should remain neutral on the matter of religion and should not enforce nor prohibit the free



exercise of religion, leaving religious choice to the liberty of the people. One form of secularism is asserting the right to be free from religious rule and teachings, or, in a state declared to be neutral on matters of belief, from the imposition by government of religion or religious practices upon its people.

The implementation of secularism in African countries is done with a lot of trepidation. Because of the level of religious ardor many misconstrue it to mean a lack of religiosity, which has led to resistance by many groups, even the minority religious groups. Unscrupulous religious leaders and politicians, have also used it as a tool to play on the high level of illiteracy in the area to manipulate the populace by deliberately misguiding the people hoping to use it to achieve their own selfish ends. Secularism needs to be homegrown and made to be adopted by the different states in the region in a way that best reflects their particular needs. This should be a product of evolving needs to suit the peculiarities of the specific countries in the region. Examples of the implementation of secularism can be found in France, the United States of America, Europe, etc. The European version was to protect the people from the authoritarianism of the religious orders of those times while other countries like Lebanon employed a system that would enable it to move towards modernization. Countries like India and America are diverse and have a multiplicity of religions hence the adoption of secularism to enable all-inclusiveness (John, 2009).

Establishing a multi-faceted police force, customs and immigration and ensuring they are well trained and properly equipped to address the menaces of extremism, banditry, kidnapping, and smuggling among many other vices. Ensuring that border porosity is addressed (Musa, 2015). Such a multifaceted task force will monitor and provide intelligence to the regional governments on the activities of clandestine societies as well as combat the growth of such extremist cells before going out of control.

Addressing the demands of the Tuaregs for independence: The Tuaregs have for centuries protested against being marginalized by government and the destruction of their pastoral lands by mining activities which has led to their impoverishment. Having renounced their need for Independence a comprehensive look at their grievances should be looked at with a view to amending the situation or compensating them. It is in line with the above that, the French Foreign Minister Alain Juppé in 2012 posited that, "there will not be a military solution with the Tuaregs. There needs to be a political solution." The Tuaregs were seen by the French Foreign Minister as "a credible interlocutor" differentiating them from the other groups such as Ansar and Al-Qaeda affiliates in the region (Afua, 2012; Thomas, 2012).

Governance: Aim to bring governance closer to the people by way of security, providing social amenities and infrastructure and through the introduction of community policing. There is a need to quickly bring development to engage the youth and as a sign of government's closeness and commitment. This will discourage the young men especially from joining the jihadist movement (Kaufmann and Kraay).

Corruption in government must be tackled to a standstill: According to Mo (2001), corruption affects economic growth, affects areas of health, education, human prosperity and security issues. If corruption becomes endemic in the society, violence becomes inevitable. This way, the people will regain confidence in their governments and avoidable leakages will be plugged to the benefit of all. Those found to be guilty should be brought to book to serve as an example and deterrent to others.



## **Sociocultural Strategy**

Discrediting extremist ideology as a whole. Extremist teaching must be monitored right from the grassroots madrasa schools, Sunday schools and for those who are adherents of native religions through to teachings at tertiary levels, mosques, churches and other platforms especially open air preaching. Monitoring, according to Albrechtslund (2008) can be achieved through surveillance, which means the monitoring of behavior, activities, or information for the purpose of influencing, managing or directing. This can include observation from a distance by means of electronic equipment, such as closed-circuit television (CCTV), or interception of electronically transmitted information, such as internet traffic. It can also include simple technical methods, such as human intelligence gathering and postal interception. Registration of the schools and religious centers should be undertaken and they should be properly monitored by an agency of government set up for that purpose or under the Home or Internal Affairs Ministry. If done at the grassroots stage there will likely not be opportunities for radicalization or the need for crackdowns on religious institutions in the future (Keefe, 2006).

Kosmin and Ariela (2007) have suggested that, to achieve the objective of deradicalization, secular schools should be encouraged as well as youth education and vocational training, governments should be able to draw up development plans for the cities and enhance town planning to be able to make provision for the yearly influx from rural to urban migration, necessary security framework, credible law enforcement and youth engagement programs should be implemented. Sociocultural strategy according to Martin (1978), can be achieved by encouraging well-informed communities by teaching a proper understanding of Islam to counter false teachings; discouraging recruitment by building tight-knit communities; closer monitoring by traditional institutions and local leaders, chiefs and local government leaders as well as ward heads should know families within their jurisdiction and the youth especially, young boys.

## **Economic and Financial Strategy**

Economic and financial strategy is feasible according to Rahman (2013) only by financing projects in a manner one country or organization is not pouring money into a project that might not necessarily be an area of priority in the region for the other partners. Instead a joint program of action should be drawn up with specific goals that are agreed upon and a means of achieving them. This, in the position of Eahman (2013) can be achieved through the African Union Mission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHHEL). MISAHHEL should serve as a coordinating body to enhance performance of funding for the region. In the position of Mosedale (2005), women empowerment through small- term loan schemes like the Mohamed Yunis Micro Finance project for women in Pakistan is crucial. Partnerships all around the world with the aim of tracking down their financial sources and freezing the assets and funding are necessary to be able to stop violent extremism and terrorism. Strict enforcement of money-laundering policies aid in achieving this objective.

## **Military Strategy**

Military strategy is the application of a set of plans and ideas in achieving some certain goals especially as it relates with adversaries (Gartner, 1999). The French led campaign to rid Mali of jihadists in 2013 was greatly applauded. Algeria and its military are the obvious regional spearhead to champion this cause but they have shown great reluctance. The partnership should



try to persuade Algeria to take on a more active, even central, role in the region. The United States set up the Trans-Saharan Counter Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP) as its contribution to instilling peace in the region (Chaliand, 1994). The US Army provides partnership to the region by way of training and multinational military exercises, counter extremism information operations and humanitarian medical assistance. Carpenter (2018) suggests that there should be an effort to: integrate the Tuaregs into the army and other aspects of the national life, counter-terrorism training on Improvised Explosive Devices (IED), training on communication, regulate private security companies and ban mercenaries. With the fall of Gaddafi there has been an increase in the number of mercenaries in the region. Mali was subjected directly to the influence of having these fighters return home only to stage successive coups and destabilize the country. It took the intervention of joint military operations to restore sanity to the country.

Carpenter (2018) also suggested that a concerted effort must be put in place to begin the mop up of small arms and light weapons which have flooded the region. The availability of these weapons have led to an escalation of violent conflict in the region and a means of coercion and waging of war against the states and populace. Carpenter (2018) also believes that targeted sanctions by means of arms embargo, freezing of assets of known warlords and travel bans can be used to discourage corrupt government officials.

**Tightening up loose borders:** The porosity of the borders, in addition to the rugged terrain of the north has made policing very difficult. The various government paramilitary organizations such as the customs and immigration, drug law enforcement agencies, etc. need to be able to exchange information and ideas as well as set up a joint task force to pool resources like helicopters, patrol vehicles for the enforcement of law. Border controls are measures taken by a country or a bloc of countries to monitor its borders in order to regulate the movement of people, animals and goods (Keynes, 1920). There is the need according to Carpenter (2018) to integrate the army, especially the recruitment of the Tuareg, to build national cohesion and joint execution of projects, a credible police force and other supporting law enforcement agencies especially Customs and Immigration to check smuggling of contraband and human trafficking, gather intelligence and provide employment, to be able to keep abreast/overcome the extremists. For this purpose, international bodies have set up organizations and partnerships.

Duina (2018) believes that there has to be cooperation among different regional blocs in order to achieve the objective of reducing radical or violent extremism in the Sahel. In his position, Duina (2018) pointed out that the African Union Mission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHEL) should serve as the clearinghouse for all the various agencies due to the level of corruption, any multilateral approach to bringing about security to the region must look to dealing with corruption in governance. Whatever military or social aid (US has indicated pumping over \$700 million in the last few years) must be closely monitored with a World Bank-led economic plan (Duina, 2018).

In line with the above, Michael (2018) highlighted that, the United Nations has set up MINUSMA (the United Nations Multi-Dimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali; the United States introduced the Trans – Sahara Counter-Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP) IN 2005; the MNJTF- is a regional agency set up to combat the threat of Boko Haram, which falls under this region based on the AU Strategic Plan for the Sahel. Michael (2018) however argued that:





There is need for collaborative support from the ECOWAS, AU, UN, USA and France. These parties need to complement and support one another in the exchange of data, technology and cyber security. A partnership by the countries and agencies listed above will build on best practices, leverage on experience of the other parties, improve efficiency and strengthen capabilities of the partners as a whole.

With a single operational headquarters data and information relevant to the different agencies will not be misplaced or overlooked. Furthermore, for the success of this partnership, there must be a clear vision, hierarchy of command, and proper coordination. Interagency disagreements, and rivalry must be avoided so as not to interfere with succeeding with the objectives of the partnership.

## **CONCLUSION**

If there is effective joint cooperation with a high level of commitment to curb violent extremism within the Sahel, the transnational approach is the best in order to achieve perpetual peace and neutralize the extremist cells. This will go hand in hand with producing energetic entrepreneurs that would in turn bring development in the states against terror and violence.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In order to achieve multilateral cooperation in dealing with the menace of violent extremism in the Sahel, the following recommendations are considerable:

Overcoming state fragility by building up the state capacity and ensuring its legitimacy. Thus, the people should be part of the process of choosing their leaders and the government should reciprocate by providing the people with the necessary social and infrastructural amenities. Combating poverty is of strategic necessity in the region. A large proportion of the population lives in abject poverty and it is the hopelessness of their situation, lack of a foreseeable future that makes them succumb to the ideology of violent extremism.

Providing jobs and other means of engaging the teeming population of unemployed youth is a matter of strategic necessity. A very recent example of the menace of violent extremism occurred on December 12, 2015 in Zaria, Kaduna State of Nigeria where the Chief of Army Staff was to attend an official function and his route was barricaded by Muslim Shi'ite youth who despite lengthy entreaties would not allow the entourage of the Chief of Army Staff through. The resultant skirmish is reported to have led to the death of around 800 Shi'ite youths that day. Videos capturing the initial confrontation and entreaties by the army chief and his lieutenants to be allowed thoroughfare were met with statements by the teeming youths saying that they were willing to die and if they were killed their children would take up their places and they too were willing to die as they were assured places in heaven.

Setting up transnational cooperation between the countries making up the Sahel region to enable the pooling of resources and sharing of information and technology. This way they will all be able to leverage on best practices, economies of scale, shared intelligence to overcome



the menace of violent extremism and the resultant illegal trades and criminal activities that are being run alongside as an enterprise to provide financing for extremism.

Provision of humanitarian support to combat the extreme hunger and poverty. Supplying food aid and proper coordination of distribution in a manner that will best eliminate corruption in its distribution ensuring that it gets to those who really need it. Setting up lasting structures for governance and eliminating corruption by government official. Government officials who participate in illegal activities must be brought to face the wrath of the law.

Elimination of smuggling and trafficking in persons, especially along with the other criminal activities that are engaged in the finance of extremism for instance the trade in narcotics and kidnapping for ransom. Implementation of the millennium development goals to enhance the standard of living of the populace as well as their quality of life. Empowerment of women and youth through setting up of cooperatives, microfinance aid and vocational training. It is a tried and tested model that when women are educated and given a means of livelihood the whole family benefits and are thus able to enhance their overall economic situation.

Countering of extremist ideology by proper education of the youths through secular schooling and exposure to interfaith and intra-faith interactions. The governments in the region should be able to provide a means of social welfare or some sort of safety net/unemployment benefit for the poor. The government of President Muhammadu Buhari within this region promised the equivalent of \$20 dollars per month as welfare check to unemployed youth as a major campaign promise.

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