

Review Article:

Transnational Terrorism & Local Conflicts in Africa: A New Interpretive Paradigm

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ABSTRACT:

This article examines the evolving nexus between transnational terrorism and local conflicts in Africa, proposing an interpretive new paradigm for understanding their mutual reinforcement. The objective is to clarify how global jihadist and other transnational networks embed themselves within localized grievances, and to assess the implications for conflict dynamics and policy responses in a new interpretive paradigm. Methodologically, the study employs a qualitative comparative case study approach, drawing on secondary data, policy documents, and academic literature covering the Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin, the Horn of Africa, and parts of the Great Lakes region. The analysis traces patterns of recruitment, resource flows, ideological diffusion, and tactical adaptation, focusing on how transnational actors instrumentalize ethnic tensions, governance vacuums, and economic marginalization. Using process tracing and cross case comparison, the article identifies recurrent mechanisms such as the localization of global narratives, the hybridization of insurgent structures, and the criminalization of conflict economies. Results indicate that transnational groups do not simply “penetrate” local conflicts but rather, they co-produce new conflict orders in partnership with local elites, militias, and community networks. This co-production blurs the lines between political violence, organized crime, and communal strife, complicating conventional counterterrorism and peace-building strategies. The study concludes that security responses focused narrowly on military containment or decapitations of leadership are inadequate. A more integrated interpretive paradigm addressing governance deficits, localized grievances, and regional economic interdependencies is essential for disrupting the mutually constitutive relationship between transnational terrorism and local conflicts in Africa.

Keywords: *Transnational, Terrorism, ideology, case study, integrated*

1.0 Introduction

Transnational terrorism in Africa has attracted growing scholarly attention over the past two decades, particularly in relation to groups such as al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, al-Shabaab, and Islamic State affiliates [1, 2, 3]. Existing research has largely emphasized explaining recruitment, organizational evolution, and external sponsorship, drawing heavily on models developed for the Middle East and South Asia [4, 5, 6]. In parallel, a substantial body of work has examined Africa's civil wars and communal conflicts through lenses of state weakness, governance failure, and local grievance structures [7, 8]. Yet these two strands of literature often remain analytically segregated to which transnational terrorism is treated as an exogenous overlay, while local conflicts are interpreted primarily through domestic political economy and identity-based frameworks.

This separation has produced an important conceptual gap. Current approaches seldom capture how transnational terrorist projects are reshaped by local conflict dynamics, or how local actors strategically appropriate “global jihad” or other transnational narratives to pursue context-specific agendas [9]. As a result, explanations either overstate the autonomy of transnational organizations or, conversely, reduce them to mere instruments of local elites, offering limited leverage for understanding variation across African cases. “Transnational Terrorism and Local Conflict in Africa: A New Interpretive Paradigm” addresses this gap by proposing an integrated interpretive framework that situates transnational terrorist activity within the micro-politics of local conflict, illuminating the reciprocal, co-constitutive relationship between global networks and localized struggles.

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In Africa [10] lament that colonial powers prescribed independence movements as terrorists in order to continue controlling power, demonize their adversaries, and justify the use of extreme retaliatory measures. For instance, French colonialists in Algeria, the British in Kenya during the 1950s, the Rhodesian government during the 1970s, and the South African Apartheid regime advanced the terrorism tag against adversaries so that they could continue controlling those countries, but to the contrary they failed.

According to the [11] Africa accounts for a substantial portion of global terrorist activity, with notable groups such as Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab, and ISIS affiliates entrenched in various regions. This phenomenon is not merely a reflection of global terrorism trends but is deeply rooted in local grievances, ethnic tensions, and socio-economic disparities that define the African context [12].

Understanding transnational terrorism necessitates a nuanced approach that considers the historical, political, and cultural dimensions shaping local conflicts. Numerous studies suggest that local conflicts can act as catalysts for transnational terrorism by providing fertile ground for extremist ideologies to flourish [13]. The interdependence between these two phenomena underscores the necessity for a new paradigm in analyzing international security dynamics in Africa.

Moreover, the challenges posed by transnational terrorism are further exacerbated by the effects of globalization which has facilitated the spread of ideas, resources, and technologies that empower terrorist organizations. [14] points out, "Terrorism is not just about violence, it is about the conscious manipulation of hope" a statement that encapsulates how local grievances can be exploited by transnational groups to recruit and radicalize individuals. This manipulation creates a dangerous synergy where local conflicts not only persist but also evolve into larger, transnational security concerns. However, conflicts in Africa manifest differently and are not the same in nature.

The new interpretative paradigm in African terrorism is characterized by the merging of

transnational jihadist ideologies with localized conflicts, weak state governance, and criminal networks. This shift moving away from centralized command structures toward decentralized nodes has made terrorism more resilient, localized, and harder to detect, particularly in the Sahel and Northern Mozambique. The rationale of the new paradigm is that terrorist groups like JNIM and ISGS in the Sahel, and ASWJ in Mozambique, increasingly align their ideology with local socio-economic frustrations, such as marginalization, lack of resources, and corruption [13].

In this article, "Transnational Terrorism & Local Conflicts in Africa: A New Interpretive Paradigm," we aim to clarify how global jihadist and other transnational networks embed themselves within localized grievances, and to assess the implications for conflict dynamics and policy responses in a new interpretive paradigm. Through a series of chapters, this volume will provide a detailed analysis of the causes, dynamics, and responses to these intertwined issues. By employing a multidisciplinary approach that draws on theories of international relations, security studies, and regional studies, we endeavor to contribute to a more holistic understanding of the security landscape in Africa.

2.0 Theoretical Framework

This theoretical framework situates "Transnational Terrorism & Local Conflicts in Africa: A New Interpretive Paradigm" at the intersection of scholarship on transnational terrorism, local conflict dynamics, state fragility, and networked violence. It argues that contemporary violent mobilizations in Africa are best understood as hybridized, transnationally embedded phenomena products of global ideological linkages, cross border organizational networks, and local political-economy dynamics. The framework synthesizes four complementary theoretical lenses: (1) transnational networks and diffusion; (2) state capacity, governance vacuums, and political opportunity structures; (3) local grievances, political economy, and strategic interactions; and (4) globalizations and organizational adaptation. Together these lenses explain how international terrorist ideologies and networks interact with local

conflict drivers to produce resilient, adaptive, and geographically dispersed violent mobilizations.

2.1. Transnational Networks and Diffusion

Transnational terrorism scholarship emphasizes that violent non-state actors operate through cross border networks that facilitate recruitment, financing, training, and ideological diffusion [15,16]. Rather than static hierarchies, many contemporary groups function as transnational networks or franchises in which core actors transmit ideas, operational templates, and legitimacy to peripheral affiliates [17]. The network perspective highlights mechanisms diaspora linkages, illicit smuggling routes, online platforms, and porous borders that enable the movement of people, arms, and ideology across the African continent [18,19].

Diffusion theory illuminates processes by which tactics, organizational forms, and ideational frames spread between groups and locales. Diffusion can be rapid via media and social networks or incremental through interpersonal ties and cross border migrations [20,21]. In Africa, diffusion explains how methods pioneered by one group (e.g., suicide tactics, remote external directed attacks, or local taxation regimes) are imitated and adapted by others across linguistic and national boundaries [22]. The franchise model seen in affiliations of local groups to global jihadist brands (e.g., ISIS and al-Qaeda) is a diffusion mechanism that provides local actors with symbolic capital, tactical guidance, and transnational resources while allowing local autonomy [23].

2.2. State Capacity, Governance Vacuums, and Political Opportunity Structures

State weakness and porous governance are central to the trans-nationalization of violent groups. The "state failure/vacuum" literature posits that weak or predatory states create permissive environments for armed actors to operate, extract resources, and build social control [24]. Political opportunity theory from social movement literature suggests that changes in state capacity, repression levels, or international attention open windows for mobilization [25]. In African contexts, chronic under provision of services, contestation over local authority, and delegitimized security institutions create multiple

opportunity structures that transnational networks exploit for sanctuary, recruitment, and governance experiments.

Scholars emphasize that state weakness is not merely absence of capacity but often entails predatory governance where elites manipulate violence and rents producing localized bargains between armed groups and state actors [26]. Such bargains enable transnational actors to embed locally by offering security, dispute resolution, or patronage in exchange for tacit non-interference or profit-sharing. This dynamic helps explain why groups with transnational linkages often orient themselves toward local governance roles, transforming from external proxies into embedded political actors [27, 28].

2.3. Local Grievances, Political Economy, and Strategic Interactions

The "greed versus grievance" debate offers insights into why individuals join violent organizations; contemporary consensus suggests both structural economic incentives and political grievances matter in combination [29, 30]. In African settings, socio-economic marginalization, identity-based exclusion, land disputes, competition over resources like pasture, minerals), and intercommunal tensions provide fertile recruitment pools for groups that can frame grievances through transnational ideologies. This framing often religious or global justice narratives translates diffuse local frustration into organizational recruitment and legitimacy-building [31, 32].

The theory of strategic interaction between armed groups and local populations' stresses that insurgent behavior is adaptive to groups tailor governance, coercion, and service provision to maximize compliance and support [30]. Transnational groups operating locally therefore adopt hybrid strategies mixing violent coercion, client list distribution, and ideological pedagogy to build sustainable footholds. This adaptation is strategic offering services or dispute resolution establishes legitimacy and diminishes incentives for locals to defect to the state, while transnational branding attracts external recruits and funding [33, 34].

2.4. Glocalization and Organizational Adaptation

The concept of glocalization is global ideas adapted to local contexts captures how international terrorist ideologies are localized to resonate with specific grievances and cultural frames. Groups across Africa demonstrate glocalization when they weave global jihadist narratives into local discourses, thereby legitimating violence and facilitating recruitment [36]. Organizational adaptation theory describes how groups evolve structurally and tactically in response to both counterinsurgency pressures and opportunities offered by transnational linkages. For example, adoption of decentralized cells, remote controlled tactics, use of encrypted communications, and cross-border safe havens illustrate adaptive capacity that blurs the line between local insurgency and transnational terrorism [16, 37].

This adaptive capacity is reinforced by technology and illicit economies. Mobile communications and social media accelerate propaganda diffusion and recruitment, while transnational criminal economies such as trafficking, smuggling provide financing and logistical support [38]. Thus, groups become resilient through a portfolio of revenue streams and cross-border organizational strategies, making purely military solutions insufficient.

Understanding contemporary violent mobilizations in Africa require moving beyond binary categories of local insurgency versus international terrorism. The new interpretive paradigm emphasizes hybrid organizations that draw on transnational networks for resources and legitimacy while anchoring themselves in local grievances, governance vacuums, and political economies. The theoretical framework presented here provides conceptual tools and testable propositions for analyzing how transnationalism interacts with local conflict dynamics, and for designing multi-level policy responses that address both the global and local dimensions of violence.

3.0 Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, multiple case study design to investigate how transnational terrorist actors interact with, reshape, and are

reshaped by local conflicts in Africa [39,40]. The methodological approach is interpretive, emphasizing the meanings, narratives, and practices through which local and transnational actors construct violence, legitimacy, and authority [41, 42].

Four conflict affected countries were purposively selected to capture regional variation, differing insurgent histories, and diverse patterns of transnational involvement thus Nigeria, Mali, Somalia, and Mozambique. These cases represent major theaters of jihadist and other transnational militant activity on the continent and provide variation in colonial legacies, state capacity, and local conflict dynamics [43,44]. Within each country, one to two subnational conflict zones were chosen based on sustained militant activity and the availability of primary and secondary data.

Data were collected from two main sources documentary and archival materials which include official government statements, peace agreements, UN and African Union reports, NGO and think tank analyses, and court documents were systematically compiled [45]. This corpus was complemented by academic literature on each conflict and on transnational terrorism in Africa.

Local and international media reports, militant communiqués, propaganda videos, and online statements were collected and coded to trace how actors frame their grievances, identities, and alliances [46]. Triangulation across outlets and languages, where possible was used to mitigate bias.

Meanwhile, data was analysed using NVivo, transcripts and documents were open coded for themes related to actors, grievances, resources, repertoires of violence, external linkages, and framings of legitimacy. Codes were both theory driven which were drawn from literature on terrorism, insurgency, and civil war and inductively generated from the data [47].

Construction of the interpretive paradigm by use of empirical patterns was iteratively related to existing theoretical debates on terrorism, civil war, and hybridity in armed conflict. Through this iterative process, a new interpretive paradigm was articulated

that conceptualizes transnational terrorism in Africa as embedded in, and contingent upon, evolving local conflict orders rather than as an exogenous overlay. Triangulation across document types and media sources enhanced the credibility of findings.

4.0 Discussion

4.1 Historical Background of Terrorism in Africa

Terrorism in Africa has a complex and multifaceted history, shaped by the continent's socio-political, economic, and cultural landscapes. Understanding this historical backdrop is essential to grasp the emergence of contemporary transnational terrorism and its intersection with local conflicts. The continent has experienced various forms of insurgency and terrorism throughout its history. Terrorism in Africa has evolved from colonial era nationalist violence into a modern, decentralized threat, with Sub-Saharan Africa now hosting nearly 59% of global terrorism related deaths. Terrorism is the most significant threat to peace, security and sustainable development across the African continent [48].

Major hubs have shifted from North Africa to the Sahel and Somalia, driven by affiliates of ISIS and Al-Qaeda. Key hotspots include Nigeria, Somalia, and the Sahel region thus, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger. The early forms of insurgency and terrorism in Africa, the key events, groups, and motivations that have shaped the evolution of terrorism on the continent are critical to explore.

4.2 Early Forms of Insurgency and Terrorism

One of the earliest recorded forms of insurgency in Africa was the Maji Maji Rebellion in German East Africa (1905-1907). The rebellion, led by Kinjikitile Ngwale, was a response to the German colonial administration's forced labor policies and land expropriation. Although not typically classified as a terrorist movement, the Maji Maji Rebellion employed guerrilla tactics and violence against colonial forces and civilians.

In the 1940s and 1950s, Africa witnessed a surge in anti-colonial movements, many of which employed violent tactics against colonial powers. For example, the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya (1952-1960) used guerrilla warfare and terrorism against British

colonial forces and civilians [49]. Although not typically classified as a terrorist organization, the Mau Mau's use of violence and intimidation to achieve their goals shares similarities with modern terrorist tactics. Similarly, the FLN (National Liberation Front) in Algeria employed terrorism and guerrilla warfare against French colonial forces during the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962).

4.3 Marxist Inspired Insurgencies

In the 1970s and 1980s, Africa experienced a wave of Marxist inspired insurgencies, often backed by the Soviet Union or Cuba. For example, the MPLA (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola) in Angola and the FRELIMO (Mozambican Liberation Front) in Mozambique employed guerrilla warfare and terrorist tactics against their respective governments and civilian populations.

The 1990s saw the emergence of Islamist extremist groups in North Africa, particularly in Algeria and Egypt. The GIA (Armed Islamic Group) in Algeria and the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, led by Ayman al-Zawahiri, carried out numerous terrorist attacks against government targets, civilians, and foreigners [50].

4.4 The Rise of Transnational Terrorism

The late 1990s and early 2000s marked a significant shift in the nature of terrorism in Africa. Rise of transnational terrorist organizations that included as al-Qaeda, led to increased cooperation and networking among extremist groups across the continent. The 1998 bombings of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, carried out by al-Qaeda affiliates, highlighted the growing threat of transnational terrorism in Africa [51]. The establishment of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in 2007 further solidified the presence of transnational terrorist organizations in Africa. AQIM's activities have been linked to various extremist groups across the Sahel region, including Boko Haram in Nigeria and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) in Mali [52].

4.5 Colonial Legacies and Post-Colonial Struggles

The colonial period in Africa, marked by European domination from the late 19th century to the mid-

20th century, profoundly altered the continent's socio-political dynamics. Colonizers often employed divide and rule tactics, exacerbating ethnic tensions and undermining traditional governance structures. This legacy of artificial borders created by colonial powers continues to manifest in interethnic strife and conflict in many African nations today.

One salient example is the establishment of the boundaries that demarcate modern African states, which frequently disregarded the cultural and ethnic affiliations of the indigenous populations. This forced amalgamation has led to ethnic conflicts, as groups that were historically rivals found themselves within the same nation-state. For instance, in countries like Nigeria, the colonial practice of favoring certain ethnic groups over others contributed to a legacy of resentment and rivalry, culminating in significant conflict, including the Biafran War and subsequent insurgencies. Moreover, colonial administrations employed violent repression to maintain control, setting a precedent for authoritarian governance that persisted post-independence.

The roots of terrorism in Africa can be traced back to pre-colonial and colonial periods, where violence was used as a tool for political and social control. During colonial rule, resentment against oppressive regimes often resulted in violent resistance. The struggle for independence in many African countries saw acts that might be considered terrorism, as indigenous groups sought to defeat colonial powers using asymmetric tactics [53].

The post-independence period further complicated the terror landscape as newly formed governments often faced internal opposition marked by violence. The Cold War era added another layer, where superpower rivalry often fueled local conflicts with weapons, training, and funding. For instance, the U.S. and Soviet Union both supported various factions in Angola's civil war, contributing to enduring instability.

With globalization, Africa became a fertile ground for international terrorist networks seeking to exploit weak state structures and porous borders. The influence of groups like Al-Qaeda in the Islamic

Maghreb (AQIM) began manifesting in the Sahel region, exacerbated by local grievances such as poverty, corruption, and lack of governance [54]. The advent of the 21st century introduced new dynamics with the advent of technology and mass communication. Terror groups increasingly used social media and digital networks both to spread ideology and recruit members, offering a new frontier in the battle against terrorism [55].

5.0 Local Conflict: Causes & Dynamics

Local conflicts are often deeply rooted in ethnic tensions and social fragmentation. These tensions frequently arise from historical grievances, cultural differences, and the perceived marginalization of specific ethnic groups. Ethnic identities can significantly influence individuals' social interactions and political affiliations, often leading to division and mistrust among communities. Social fragmentation occurs as groups become isolated within their own identities, leading to reduced communication and interaction between different ethnic communities. This isolation can perpetuate stereotypes and hostilities, making conflict more likely. As noted by [33] the lack of intergroup dialogue restricts opportunities for understanding and reconciliation, creating an environment conducive to conflict.

In conflict settings, ethnic identity can be weaponized by political actors who leverage these tensions to mobilize supporters. The instrumentalization of ethnic identity not only exacerbates existing divisions but also incites violence, as seen in various international conflicts [56]. Understanding the dynamics of ethnic tensions and social fragmentation is crucial for addressing local conflicts and fostering peaceful coexistence.

5.1 Economic Disparities and Resource Competition

Economic disparities and competition for resources play a critical role in local conflicts. Differences in wealth and access to resources can create significant rifts within communities. When certain ethnic or social groups perceive that they are unfairly disadvantaged in terms of economic opportunities or access to essential resources such as land, water, and jobs frustration can quickly lead to conflict [57].

Resource competition often intensifies existing ethnic tensions. For instance, in areas where natural resources are limited, groups may compete for control, leading to conflicts that are not only economic in nature but also imbued with ethnic motives. According to Collier and [58] the likelihood of conflict increases significantly in regions with high economic inequality and where resource wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few.

Furthermore, economic grievances can be exacerbated by ineffective governance and corruption, further fueling local tensions. Communities experiencing high levels of unemployment and poverty are more susceptible to mobilization for conflict, especially when they feel excluded from economic benefits [59]. Addressing these economic disparities and promoting equitable resource distribution is essential in mitigating local conflict dynamics and fostering stability.

5.2 Political Governance & Role of the State

The interplay between political governance and the role of the state is pivotal in understanding local conflicts. Political governance refers to how power is exercised within a political framework and the effectiveness of institutions in administering public affairs. In contexts where governance is weak or characterized by corruption, inequalities can arise, leading to grievances among marginalized groups. As noted by [60], institutions must provide stability and the rule of law to mitigate conflict; however, ineffective governance can exacerbate existing tensions and lead to violent confrontations.

Weak governance structures, political instability, and systemic corruption are major catalysts of terrorism related mortality [61]. Fragile states, particularly in the Sahel and Middle East, struggle to uphold institutional integrity, rendering them susceptible to extremist threats and transnational security risks. The lack of effective governance not only destabilizes legal and economic systems but also fosters conditions conducive to radicalization, creating spillover effects across borders.

The state's capacity to manage diverse societal interests is fundamental to establishing peace.

Effective governance ensures that different groups have opportunities for political participation and access to justice [62]. When the state fails to represent or include significant segments of the population, it can foster feelings of disenfranchisement and resentment, which can escalate into conflict. For instance, according to [63] political exclusion often drives groups to seek alternative means to assert their rights, including resorting to violence when legitimate avenues fail.

Moreover, the state's ability to provide essential services and maintain order significantly affects local stability. A perceived or real inability to deliver public goods such as education, healthcare, infrastructure, and security can cultivate dissatisfaction and unrest [64]. When citizens believe that their government is not fulfilling its fundamental responsibilities, the resulting frustration can lead to social unrest and conflict.

Furthermore, the state's role can also be seen in how it engages with community identities and interests. Politicians may politicize ethnic or regional identities to gain support, leading to divisions and the exacerbation of intergroup tensions [65]. This manipulation can further undermine trust in governmental institutions and fuel cycles of violence.

The nature of political governance and the roles assumed by the state are critical in shaping the dynamics of local conflict. To preemptively address these conflicts, strengthening government institutions, promoting inclusive governance, and fostering equitable access to services are essential steps toward establishing a more peaceful and cohesive society.

6.0 The Nexus between Local Conflict & Transnational Terrorism

Domestic terrorism is committed by homegrown groups who have no ties or connections outside their States. International terrorists' activities transcend national boundaries or are sponsored by international groups. Local conflicts have often been the breeding ground for the growth of transnational terrorism. In many African states, the intersection between local disputes and international terrorist

networks demonstrates how instability within borders can have far reaching impacts.

Somalia's protracted civil war created conditions ripe for the rise of Al-Shabaab, a militant group with links to Al-Qaeda [1]. The absence of a stable government led to power vacuums that Al-Shabaab exploited, not only terrorizing the local population but also launching cross border attacks in countries like Kenya and Ethiopia. The group's allegiance to global jihadist movements underscores the fusion of local grievances with transnational ambitions [66].

Boko Haram originated from local discontent in northeastern Nigeria but has since evolved into a significant transnational threat. Initially driven by domestic issues such as corruption and poverty, the group pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, thus linking local insurgency to global terrorism networks [52]. Boko Haram's operations have spilled over into neighboring countries, affecting the broader Lake Chad Basin region [67].

The Tuareg rebellion in Mali's northern regions, coupled with the Libyan civil war's aftermath, facilitated the establishment of a sanctuary for AQIM. These local conflicts have allowed AQIM to expand its reach, utilizing local networks and resources to commit acts of terrorism across the Sahel [68]. The convergence of regional insurgencies with global jihadist strategies illustrates the porous nature of terrorism's spread in volatile regions.

Since the fall of Muammar Gaddafi, Libya has struggled with internal divisions and rival factions vying for control. This chaos has provided a fertile ground for ISIS to gain a foothold, exploiting rivalries and engaging in the global jihadist agenda [69]. The situation in Libya highlights the role of state collapse in facilitating the entry and growth of transnational terrorist entities [70].

Local conflicts, fueled by political instability, economic hardship, and historical grievances, create environments where transnational terrorism can thrive. This nexus poses significant challenges for regional and global security, emphasizing the need for comprehensive solutions that address both local and international dimensions of terrorism.

7.0 Response of African States to Transnational Terrorism

Transnational terrorism in Africa has prompted varied responses from national governments, regional organizations, and continental institutions. Most African states confronting transnational terrorism rely on a mix of military, intelligence, legal, and socio-economic measures. Military centric strategies emergency deployments, specialized units, and counterterrorism task forces have been the default response in countries such as Nigeria, Mali, Somalia, and Burkina Faso [[71,72] States have also revised counterterrorism legislation, enhanced border controls, and sought international training, equipment, and intelligence sharing partnerships with external actors [73].

Complementary to kinetic measures are efforts to strengthen intelligence architecture and law enforcement capacities. Several governments have centralized counterterrorism coordination in national security councils, improved criminal justice responses in terms of prosecution and detention frameworks, and launched deradicalization or counter radicalization programs aimed at recruitment prevention [74]. Economic and social policies are sometimes framed as part of a “whole-of-government” approach to reduce grievances that armed groups exploit.

Some states have tried to design targeted Intelligence led operations where intelligence coordination improved such as national fusion centers, civil military liaison, security operations became more precise and reduced collateral damage. For example, targeted operations against specific terrorist leaders have sometimes weakened group command and-control [74].

[71] Chad and Nigeria Community engagement and local defense integration had proven effective in counterterrorism. In parts of the Lake Chad Basin and northern Nigeria, community based vigilante groups and Local Civil Defense initiatives when integrated with formal security oversight, have contributed to early warning and intelligence, improving local security outcomes. But such

arrangements require legal frameworks and oversight to limit abuses.

Employing a “whole government approach” [73] some nations has succeeded to establish Judicial and Deradicalization Initiatives. They have expanded prosecution capacities and begun reintegration programs for low level fighters and returnees, which reduce recidivism when accompanied by social support, vocational training, and counseling. Furthermore, the utilization of adaptive multidimensional campaigns has reduced the recurrence of violence and improved public confidence. This is where governments combined security, humanitarian assistance, infrastructure repair, and governance restoration like localized stabilization programs [71].

Despite these efforts and some successes, shortcomings are pervasive and illustrate structural constraints that blunt state responses. The overreliance on force and human rights abuses remain a challenge. Heavy militarization without concurrent governance reforms has frequently produced civilian harm, rights violations, and grievance amplification thereby undermining legitimacy and fueling recruitment for violent groups [75]. In northeastern Nigeria and parts of the Sahel, indiscriminate operations and abuses by state forces have eroded public trust [71].

Weak institutions and corruption compromise the effective and efficiency excursion of operations. In many states, weak judicial systems, poorly equipped police, and corruption impede sustained counterterrorism effectiveness. Arrests without fair trials, prolonged detentions, and impunity for security abuses reduce the deterrent value of legal measures [72]. In some instances, inadequate border management and mobility of armed groups was a draw back. Porous borders facilitate illicit flows of arms, fighters, and resources; national strategies that do not coordinate with neighbors leave gaps those transnational groups exploit [74].

Political leaders sometimes instrumentalize counterterrorism rhetoric to suppress opposition or centralize power, undermining credibility and diverting resources away from genuine prevention and development priorities [76]. Military units may

lack logistics, intelligence, and sustainment capacity. Many states depend heavily on foreign military assistance, which can be episodic and misaligned with local needs [73].

Transnational terrorism transcends national boundaries, making regional cooperation indispensable. Regional organizations and ad hoc coalitions have developed mechanisms for joint operations, intelligence sharing, and capacity building. The Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) against Boko Haram (Lake Chad basin) and the G5 Sahel Joint Force (Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad) exemplify regional statutory and ad hoc military cooperation aimed at synchronizing operations, reducing safe havens, and pooling resources. Such forces improve operational reach but face coordination, funding, and command-and-control challenges [77].

Regional political and security frameworks like Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) have developed counterterrorism and transnational crime protocols, frameworks for mutual legal assistance, and standby arrangements for crisis response. These frameworks provide legal and institutional backing for cross-border pursuits and extradition [78].

It is imperative for Regional Blocks, Joint Permanent Commissions and other regional bodies like ECOWAS, IGAD, Southern African Development Community (SADC), East African Community (EAC), Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), Arab Maghreb Union (UMA) to enhance intelligence and information sharing. Regional fusion centers and liaison mechanisms have facilitated tactical intelligence exchange, though interoperability and trust remain issues. Language differences, competing national priorities, and divergent threat perceptions can limit timely cooperation [74].

Besides, regional bodies often coordinate training for police and military units, harmonize legal instruments, and support border management initiatives. Donor funded programs routed through regional organizations have improved common standards and interoperability.

However, Regional efforts have had mixed success. Political rivalries, funding shortfalls, and divergent national interests limit sustained cooperation. For instance, the G5 Sahel has faced chronic underfunding and logistical constraints despite political will. The MNJTF has improved collaboration but struggled with integration across national militaries and civilian protection mandates. Moreover, regional operations sometimes lack robust human rights-monitoring mechanisms, which can reproduce the same legitimacy problems seen at the national level (79).

Case Studies of Responses by African States

Nigeria's response to Boko Haram highlights the complex interplay of foreign intervention and local strategy. The Nigerian military, receiving training and support from foreign governments, has struggled with operational effectiveness and human rights abuses [80]. The continued violence has prompted the government to offer amnesty programs to defector combatants. However, the effectiveness of such approaches remains contentious [81].

In Somalia, the AMISOM has played a crucial role in combating Al-Shabaab. Yet, the mission's reliance on external funding and support has raised questions about the sustainability of efforts once foreign troops withdraw [34]. Furthermore, persistent clan rivalries and the absence of a strong central government complicate the efficacy of both military and diplomatic efforts.

Mali's struggles against AQIM and associated groups illustrate the challenges posed by foreign military assistance. The 2013 French intervention, while initially successful in pushing back insurgents, has not led to lasting peace or stability in the region [82]. Local grievances, some stemming from historical marginalization, continue to fuel the conflict, illustrating the limitations of a purely military approach.

The responses of African states to transnational terrorism, significantly shaped by foreign interventions and international policies, reflect a complex landscape of military, social, and political considerations. While external assistance can

provide vital resources and expertise, it is essential for African governments to ensure that responses are tailored to local contexts, fostering inclusivity and respect for human rights. Collaborative frameworks that incorporate local stakeholders and prioritize long term stability over short-term security objectives are crucial for effectively addressing the threat of transnational terrorism in Africa.

8.0 Future challenges and opportunities

Africa stands at a decisive juncture. Over the past three decades many countries on the continent have experienced significant economic growth, expanding connectivity, and stronger regional institutions at the same time, localized violent conflicts, transnational insurgencies, criminal networks, and new security stressors have often coalesced into protracted instability [82, 83].

8.1 Prospects for peace and stability

Several long term trends provide grounds for cautious optimism. Economic integration through initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) can expand intra African trade, create jobs, and strengthen interdependence among states, reducing incentives for interstate confrontation and supporting economic resilience in fragile settings [84]. Demographic transitions a growing, increasingly urbanized youth population can become an asset if accompanied by investments in education, health, and employment [85]. The consolidation of regional security architecture, including the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council and sub-regional mechanisms, offers institutional pathways for preventive diplomacy and coordinated responses to crises [82].

Yet structural drivers of instability persist. Weak governance, pervasive corruption, exclusionary politics, and contested access to land and resources continue to fuel local grievances and create permissive environments for non-state armed groups and criminal networks [86]. Many conflicts in Africa are localized and protracted, driven by competition for natural resources, communal tensions, and predatory governance more than by clear ideological agendas. Transnational terrorist organizations whether affiliated with global jihadi brands or more opportunistic networks frequently

exploit these local grievances to obtain fighters, safe havens, and resources [87].

Advancing durable stability requires integrated approaches that combine security, governance, and development efforts at multiple levels. There is need to foster local reconciliation and governance. Strengthening local dispute resolution mechanisms, improving service delivery, and promoting inclusive local governance can reduce the incentives to join armed actors [88]. States should deliberately set targeted economic inclusion by devising programs focused on job creation, vocational training, and micro-enterprise support in conflict affected areas can address economic drivers of recruitment and criminality [83]. Cross border intelligence sharing harmonized legal frameworks and joint operations backed by regional political commitment can reduce safe havens for transnational actors [82]

However, the emerging threats like climate change poses serious challenges. Climate change is not typically the primary cause of conflict, but it acts as a threat multiplier that amplifies existing vulnerabilities and grievances. Changes in rainfall patterns, prolonged droughts, desertification, and rising temperatures increase competition over water, pasture, and arable land, particularly in semi-arid zones such as the Sahel and parts of the Horn of Africa [89]. These ecological stressors interact with weak governance, inequitable resource access, and demographic pressures to heighten the risk of localized violence and displacement [90].

Declining agricultural yields and pasture quality drive pastoralist farmer conflicts and create focal points for criminal or armed groups to exploit local disputes [89]. Environmental shocks can collapse livelihoods and trigger internal mobility or cross border migration, straining host communities and governance capacities [90]. Recurrent disasters that outpace state response capacity erode public trust and open space for non-state actors who provide services or protection [91]. In view of that armed actors may weaponize resource scarcity, taxing trade routes or controlling water points to fund operations and recruit followers [92].

Policy responses must treat climate as a cross-cutting driver rather than an isolated environmental issue. Early warning systems should integrate climatic, socioeconomic, and conflict indicators to identify hotspots where resource stress could spark violence [89]. Besides, resilient livelihoods and nature based solutions like investments in climate adaptive agriculture, water harvesting, rangeland management, and ecosystem restoration reduce vulnerability and the incentives to resort to violence [91]

Governance and equitable resource management strengthening property rights, market access, and dispute resolution institutions at local and cross border levels mitigates competition and builds legitimacy [90]. Scalable safety nets and contingency financing reduce the immediate socioeconomic shocks of climate disasters that can destabilize communities [86].

8.2 Evolving threats in the face of technology

Technology reshapes both the capabilities of non-state actors and the tools available to states, NGOs, and communities. Digital platforms, encrypted communications, small unmanned aerial systems (drones), and low cost explosives manufacturing technologies increase the operational reach of transnational and local armed groups. Simultaneously, advances in satellite imagery, data analytics, and information-sharing improve early warning, targeting precision, and transparency [93]

Drones and other remote sensing and remote strike technologies democratize force projection. Non-state groups have acquired off the shelf drones for reconnaissance and, increasingly, weaponization, complicating air superiority assumptions and raising civilian protection concerns. Illicit small arms and ammunition remain central to local conflicts; porous borders and covert supply chains sustain these flows despite regional control efforts [93].

Cyber enabled threats span a spectrum from cybercrime and ransomware targeting critical infrastructure to information operations that inflame communal tensions. Misinformation and

disinformation via social media can rapidly escalate local disputes, manipulate perceptions, and hinder conflict mediation. The fragmentation of information ecosystems complicates trust-building and can create parallel realities that violent actors exploit [94].

AI-driven tools for biometric identification, predictive policing, and pattern of life analysis can bolster security operations and humanitarian responses if used ethically and transparently. However, misuse risks including discrimination, wrongful targeting, and erosion of privacy are acute in contexts with weak oversight.

The response strategies for technology driven threats are paramount by harnessing technology while managing its risks requires layered strategies. Digital literacy and counter messaging by empowering communities with media literacy and rapid response reduces the potency of misinformation and violent radicalization online. National and regional frameworks should monitor and restrict illicit acquisition of weaponizable technologies while facilitating legitimate civilian use [94].

Ethical governance of surveillance and AI require safeguards. Implementing transparent safeguards, judicial oversight, and data-protection norms limits abuse of biometric and predictive technologies. Furthermore, there is need to integrating technological tools into humanitarian and peace operations. Satellite imagery, mobile reporting, and predictive analytics can improve displacement tracking, conflict mapping, and targeted assistance when paired with local context and human verification [92].

Stress on the importance of capacity building and public private partnerships. Training security forces, judiciaries, and civil society in cyber hygiene, forensic capabilities, and digital investigation often in cooperation with technology firms strengthens resilience against cyber enabled threats

Climate stress, technological diffusion, and the persistence of localized grievances create compound risks that cannot be addressed by single sector

responses. For instance, a drought induced migration (climate factor) amplified by social-media disinformation (technology factor) can inflame communal tensions and present recruitment opportunities for transnational groups. Policies must therefore bridge humanitarian, development, security, and governance domains.

Across these domains, legitimacy of the state and inclusive governance emerge as decisive factors. Where citizens perceive authorities as responsive and fair, societies are more resilient to environmental shocks, less susceptible to manipulation online, and less likely to turn to armed alternatives. Investments in transparent institutions, accountable security sectors, and locally relevant service delivery pay dividends for stability [86].

Trans-boundary challenges climate impacts, arms trafficking, cross-border militancy, and cybercrime require harmonized regional norms and cooperative mechanisms. The AU, regional economic communities, and sub-regional security bodies should deepen information sharing, joint contingency planning, and standard setting for technology governance [82, 84]. Traditional funding models do not match the speed or scale required for compound risks. Blended finance, contingency climate funds, peace-building instruments that link short term stabilization to long term development, and investment in community level resilience are critical financing innovations [85].

9.0 Conclusion

The future of peace and stability in Africa will be shaped less by inevitabilities than by choices; the political will to build inclusive institutions; the foresight to integrate climate resilience into security planning; and the prudence to harness technology for public good while constraining its abuses. Opportunities of economic integration, regional institutions, and rapidly improving data and analytic tools can all support stability but realizing those gains requires integrated, locally grounded strategies that address the root causes of fragility while anticipating the compound effects of climate and technology. Where policymakers, civil society, and regional actors invest in legitimacy, resilience, and cooperative frameworks, Africa's prospects for

durable peace will improve. However, where they fail to adapt, climate stress and technological diffusion will create new vulnerabilities for both local communities and transnational threats. The complex interplay between local conflicts and transnational terrorism necessitates a multi-faceted

approach to understanding and addressing these issues in Africa. It is crucial for international and local actors to collaborate in finding sustainable solutions that address both immediate security concerns and long-term developmental needs.

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