



## Dynamics within Violent Extremist Organizations: Recruitment, Operations and Sustenance



Source:

### BACKGROUND

Dynamics within violent extremist organizations relative to recruitment, modus operandi and the sustenance of their networks remain a key concern in Africa, but more importantly in peace operations theatres such as Mali, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Central African Republic (CAR). For instance, whereas extremist organizations such as Boko Haram or Islamic State of West Africa (ISWA), Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Al-shabab, and the Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat (GSPC) have been operating across regions in Africa, some for over decades now, insecurities in Mali for example have particularly created more extremist groups such as: Al-Murabitoun (AMB); the Movement for Oneness and Jihad (MUJAO);

Ansar-Al-Dine (AAD); Macina Liberation Front; and the Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MLA), undermining the operational effectiveness of MINUSMA. In Somalia, the problem posed by Al-Shabab is compounded by the Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham (ISIS) whose attacks on persons and properties pose a veritable challenge to African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). Elsewhere in North Africa, and particularly in Libya, the division of the country into the UN backed Government of National Accord and the Libyan National Army led by Khalif Khaftar has allowed the proliferation of more extremist groups including AQIM, ISIS and Ansar al-Sharia.

Described largely as violent extremists and terrorists groups, these groups sometimes differ

in the religious and political ideologies they profess. Consequently, their recruitment strategies, mode of operation and means of sustenance also differ despite some similarities. In West Africa for example, community disappointment in government, peer influence and the lure of business support are leading factors compelling Nigerian youth to be recruited into Boko Haram. The Macina Liberation Front (MLF) in Mali, led by Amadou Khufa has used the Fulani language as a communication tool to recruit over 4,000 youth into his organization. In East Africa, al-Shabaab recruitment is informed by factors including religious identity, socioeconomic circumstances (education, unemployment), political circumstances and the need for a collective identity as well as sense of belonging.

While some of these extremist groups such as Boko Haram and MLF started as non-violent groups, their modus operandi have changed over time including g, kidnapping of humanitarian aid and foreign workers and school children, attacks on mosques, churches, transport terminals, shopping malls and hotels. The attacks on hotels in Mali (Radisson Blu Hotel), August, 2015 and Burkina Faso (Splendid Hotel), January 2016, killing civilians of different nationalities exemplify the dynamics and manifestations of terrorist attacks in West Africa. In Burkina Faso, evidence shows increased attacks on churches—a development that has raised fear and uncertainty among churches, but also among the larger population in West Africa. Specific to mission environments such as Mali, mode of operations have included attacks on military barracks, military and civilian convoys, laying of mines and

On rare occasions, extremists brand their vehicles similar to that of UN to outsmart security and intelligence actors and launch attacks on peacekeepers and civilians. Winning hearts and minds, providing economic support to local populations and marrying into local tribes has also become part of expansion strategies of extremist organizations in the Sahel.

But an important dynamic of extremist organization in Africa relates to the sustenance of their networks, which manifest in forging alliances and mutual partnerships with other criminal networks such as drug trafficking, human trafficking, money laundering and arms trafficking networks. Other sources of their sustenance include illegal exploitation of natural resources, looting and selling of antiquities, imposition of taxes and royalties, livestock smuggling and cattle rustling.

These inter-connected dynamics of violent extremism raise a number of questions such as:

- What informs the changes in recruitment strategies among extremist organizations?
- How do people get recruited in the identified extremist organizations?
- What new strategies can be introduced to prevent and counter the continued recruitment into extremist organizations?
- How can the identified strategies be implemented to achieve preventative and counteractive effect?
- What collaborative mechanisms (local, national and international) are available to prevent extremist groups from operating?
- What other means of sustenance, if any, contribute to the operations of extremists groups?

### About KAIPTC

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