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Security and Sustainable Development in Africa: What Role for AFRICOM in the Continent

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Introduction

Security as an issue that concerns regional and international organizations has always been considered separately from aspects of the economic and the sociocultural systems, while it should be at the heart of all of them. We cannot have a well performing economy without being harbored in a stable geopolitical region. Furthermore, the economic failure proved to be one of the main motives to extremism and violence. It is the same for environmental issues. Desertification, drought and other unfavorable conditions contribute to the spread of violence, human trafficking and mass migrations. There is no difference when it comes to cultural issues; they are the source of indoctrination to achieve domination over other ideologies, religions or ethnic groups. The outcome in all cases is the spread of violence which targets institutions and might lead to a total failure of the state.

In his book *People, States and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations*, Barry Buzan, as a major theorist of the Copenhagen School considers non-military aspects to be extremely important in understanding security. Along with the two other pioneering figures of the school Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, they suggested an inter-subjective approach to that. In their book which is considered to be the founding frame of the Copenhagen School, they introduced five major sectors that should be analyzed: military, environment, economy, society and politics (Buzan *et al.*, 1997).

Critical Security Studies as a field of study rejects the idea of putting the emphasis on conventional approaches. It actually incorporates many theories such as Marxism, Feminism, Critical Theory, Critical Constructivism and Post-structuralism (Browning & MacDonald, 2011: 238). The Welsh School as an approach relates the study of security to the Critical Theory (Peoples & Vaughan-Williams, 2020). Its perception of security could be combined with the way theorists of the Copenhagen School perceive it in an attempt to offer a stronger challenge to the mainstream of security studies (Floyd, 2007: 327). After the Cold War, the field of security studies has witnessed major changes. Military security had paved the way to new theories which incorporate other sectors and threats such as the economy and the environment (Floyd, 2007: 327-328).

The structure of this paper explores the link between security (peace) and sustainable development. It shows how the lack of security and the collapse of institutions can have an immediate impact on the development of a given region with enduring consequences.

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This study tackles the UN 2030 sustainable development agenda and its goals (SDGs) with a special focus on SDG number sixteen. It examines security challenges in three African geopolitical regions (North, West and Horn). It tries to provide an understanding to the role of the US troops deployed in those regions under the command of AFRICOM and evaluates the overall situation in the light of the widespread of extremism and violence. The assessment takes into consideration the conduct on the ground based mainly on a dataset provided by the US Department of Defense (DOD) through its Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS) in addition to the AFRICOM Posture Statements to Congress and the Global Terrorism Index for 2021 and 2022.

1. UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and SDG Number 16

Before setting the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and its seventeen SDGs, the United Nations has been through decades of mobilization attempts. Since the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, till the 2015 Paris Agreement on Climate Change, agendas were decided and goals were set. Therefore, a platform for follow-up was established to monitor the implementation of the SDGs worldwide¹.

The Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit convened in June 1992 adopted the so called Agenda 21 to achieve a global partnership that seeks to work for the betterment of both humans and earth². The year 2000 witnessed the Millennium Summit in New York where eight Millennium Development Goals MDGs were introduced to fight against poverty³. Two years later in South Africa, the World Summit on Sustainable Development adopted the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development⁴. The latter enhanced the world's commitments based on Agenda 21 and the Millennium Declaration.

A process to develop MDGs into SDGs was triggered at the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. During the conference, countries adopted the conclusions drawn by "The Future We Want" document in which they established the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development⁵. One year later, the UN General Assembly established an open working group with the aim of setting the SDGs proposal. After the January 2015 negotiations, the 2030 Agenda was finally adopted in the UN Sustainable Development Summit in September of the same year⁶. The year of 2015 was extremely important in the history of sustainable development for major breakthroughs were achieved that year. Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (March), Addis Ababa Action on Financing for Development (July), Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (September) and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change (December)⁷.

Nowadays, the Division for Sustainable Development Goals (DSDG) of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) has a central role in carrying out the 2030

¹ 17 SDGs, History, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. [Online]. Available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

² Agenda 21, Conference on Environment and Development, United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 3-14 June 1992. [Online]. Available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/publications/Agenda21.pdf>.

³ The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). United Nations, Millennium Summit, 6-8 September 2000, New York. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/environment/newyork2000>.

⁴ World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), United Nations, Johannesburg Summit, Johannesburg, South Africa, 26 August - 4 September 2002. [Online]. Available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/milestones/wssd>.

⁵ Future We Want - Outcome Document, United Nations, Conference on Sustainable Development. Rio+20. [Online]. Available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/rio20>.

⁶ Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Sustainable Development Summit 2015, 25 - 27 September 2015, New York. [Online]. Available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>.

⁷ 17 SDGs, History, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. [Online]. Available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

Agenda⁸. Since 2016, an annual SDG Progress report is presented every year by the UN Secretary General. It is set on the global indicator structure and dataset introduced by local and national systems in addition to data gathered at the regional level⁹. Every four years, the UN Secretary General appoints a group of researchers (15 experts) with the mission of producing the Global Sustainable Development Report for the General Assembly's SDG review deliberations¹⁰.

Sustainable Development Goal number sixteen (SDG16) seeks to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development,” and to “provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.”¹¹ It calls for global peace given that by the end of 2020 the “world is witnessing largest number of violent conflicts since 1946 and quarter of the global population lives in conflict-affected countries.”¹² It also shows that by May 2022, a record of “100 million people had been forcibly displaced worldwide.”¹³ In the light of the above mentioned pleas, two major questions raise, what role can AFRICOM play in the region to meet these aspirations? And above all, how can we assess its performance after more than a decade of presence in the continent under this new structure.

2. SDGs and Security Challenges in Africa

Security challenges in Africa vary from one region to another. Several reasons helped in the widespread of religious extremism in the whole continent. One of the main reasons to the actual situation is the so-called “Arab Spring” and the collapse of many regimes which strongly ruled over the people for many decades. Environmental issues related to climate change and global warming caused mass migration inside and outside the continent. Totalitarian regimes which were backed by some western powers were also at the origin of the issue. The ruling elites in such countries were deeply involved in corruption at the expense of establishing solid grounds for well-performing economies which would eventually benefit all types of social reforms.

Before presenting the security challenges in the three regions which are concerned in this study, it is important to make reference to Barry Buzan's and Ole Wæver's Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT). Buzan and Wæver stress the importance of distinguishing between the regional and the global levels. They argued that “Units (of whatever kind) must have a fairly high degree of independent actor quality. Regions, almost however defined, must be composed of geographically clustered sets of such units and these clusters must be embedded in a larger system, which has a structure of its own.” Regions for them have “analytical, and even ontological, standing,” but they lack “actor quality.” (Buzan & Wæver, 2003: 27).

Buzan in his *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era* defines a region as “a distinct and significant subsystem of security relations that exists among a set of states whose fate is that they have been locked into geographical proximity with each other.” (Buzan, 1991: 188). Security complex for him refer to “a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that, their national

⁸ Division for Sustainable Development Goals, United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs Sustainable Development. [Online]. Available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/about>.

⁹ Sustainable Development Goal Indicators, Sustainable Development Goals. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistics Division. [Online]. Available at: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs>.

¹⁰ Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) 2019. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs Sustainable Development. [Online]. Available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/gsdrgsd2019>.

¹¹ Goal 16, United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs Sustainable Development. [Online]. Available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal16>.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another” (Buzan, 1991: 190). This implies that the challenges which states of the same region are likely to face are almost identical. Thus, security within a given region is interdependent.

2.1. North Africa

The region of North Africa was hit by the 2010-2011 popular uprisings (Arab Spring) which originated in Tunisia after the incident where street vendor Mohamed el-Bouazizi set fire on his body reacting to police misconduct. After days of the upheavals, President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali who came from a military background fled to Saudi Arabia. The wave headed east to neighboring Libya where it ended up with Colonel Kaddafi being ousted, chased and finally assassinated by some French-backed militias. After reaching Egypt, it paved the way for the domination of the Muslim Brotherhood after a three-decade controversial rule of President Hosni Mubarek. Algeria, Morocco and Mauritania were three other North African countries which were hit by the “Arab Spring” but could handle the ramifications.

This situation left an enduring impact on the region’s stability, mainly after the collapse of the Libyan regime. In an attempt to encounter the NATO intervention which backed the protesters in Libya, Kaddafi mobilized his supporters and opened the military facilities to them. Amidst this situation, all types of arms were in the hands of Libyans including tactical offensive missiles. Terrorist groups which were already struggling in neighboring Algeria found refuge in Libya. Individuals from Libya and Tunisia joined other newly formed groups and set their own agenda on waging attacks in the whole region. Belligerents in northern Mali were not kept away from the events. Several reports linked the spread of heavy weaponry in Northern Mali to some mercenaries who were brought by Kaddafi to fight on his side during the 2011 events.

Mercenaries were believed to come mainly from sub-Saharan Africa. The reported countries were: Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Niger, Mali, and Sudan with possible involvement of others from Asia and Eastern Europe. They were suspected of being veterans of internal conflicts in the Sahel and West Africa. They represented a deadly threat despite the existence of the African Union’s 1977 Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa (Smith, 2011). However, some experts explained that Libya has an important black population and that explains their presence in the regular army. Thus they were being mistaken for mercenaries (Smith, 2011).

The use of mercenaries in Africa was not exclusive to the Kaddafi regime, the Americans were there too. Erik Prince, a US former Navy Seal and the founder of the notorious Private Military Company called Blackwater, was actively doing business in Africa. He was involved in both security and economy-related issues in Somalia, Libya, Kenya, RDC and Guinea (Aty & Elaggoune, 2019: 176). The Russians were also present in the region, the private firm called Wagner Group was involved in conflicts in Libya, Central African Republic, Mozambique, and Mali (Walsh, 2022). AFRICOM itself relied on private contractors in Niger (Aty & Elaggoune, 2019: 169-170). The rise of terrorist groups like Boko Haram during the last decade, paved the way to the revival of PMCs (Adamo, 2020: 3)

In Egypt, the outcome of the unrest was different. The Muslim Brothers were in charge but faced a fierce opposition which ended up in ousting the first civilian president in the history of the country (Hughes & Hunter, 2013). The coming to power of the former Minister of Defense Abdel Fattah al-Sissi did not go according to the usual procedures of the “peaceful” transition of power. That period was marked by religious fanaticism which led to extreme forms of violence mainly against army personnel and police forces. The rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) opened doors to the emergence of several affiliates in North

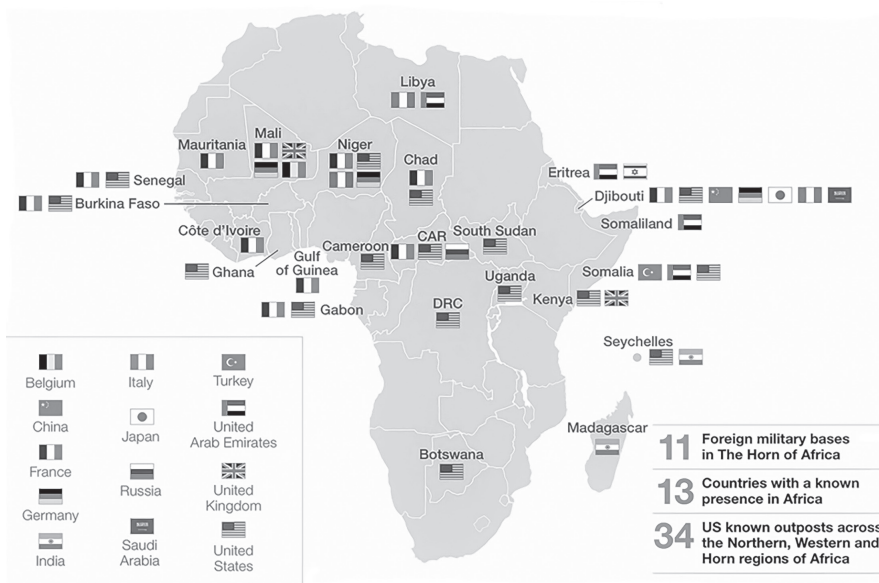
Africa, mainly in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia. Ansar al Sharia in Tunisia played an important role in recruiting for ISIS, several AQIM-affiliated splinter factions pledged allegiance to the organization too (Siegle, 2017: 22).

2.2. West Africa

The expression *France-Afrique* was first used by Ivory Coast president Félix Houphouët-Boigny in 1955 but changed into *Françafrique* by the French activist François-Xavier Verschave in 1998 (Bovcon). West Africa has always been France's *pré carré* due to the long history of the colonial presence in the region. The historical, cultural and economic bonds were strengthened even after the liberation wave of the mid-twentieth century. With French being the official language in most of the region's countries and the currency being the *CFA Franc*¹⁴, a political and economic hegemony left an enduring legacy in West Africa.

The West Africa region has always been in turmoil. It witnessed a number of intrastate conflicts which led to extreme forms of violence along with interstate conflicts which forced countries to resort to wars. These circumstances were behind the backlash against the political regimes in several countries. Not only that, it was behind all forms of poverty, food shortage, disrupted medical services, illiteracy and ineffective educational systems, and lack of appropriate infrastructures. The overall situation led to the failure of several states to provide favorable living conditions to their citizens. Furthermore, some states lost control over vast territories like the case of Mali, Nigeria, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad and Cameroon.

Ilustração 01 – Foreign Military Presence in Africa



Source: Atta-Asamoah, Andrews (2019), "Proceed with caution: Africa's growing foreign military presence." *Institute for Security Studies*. 27 Aug. 2019. [Online]. Available at: <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/proceed-with-caution-africas-growing-foreign-military-presence>.

¹⁴ The CFA franc and the Comorian franc are the two currencies of the franc zone, a group of fifteen countries that depend on three central banks: the Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO), the Central Bank of Central African States (BEAC) and the Central Bank of the Comoros (BCC). [Online]. Available at: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3674201.

Foreign interventions in the region were inevitable. According to (Ilustração 1), US troops are on the ground in Niger, Chad, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Ghana and Cameroon. The French are in Mali, Niger, Chad, Mauritania, Senegal, Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast. The German troops are stationed in Mali and Niger while the British are present in Mali along with the Belgians. Many of Al-Qaeda affiliates are behind the attacks on Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, while Boko Haram is at the origin of the violent incidents around Lake Chad according to the infographic compiled by Africa Center for Strategic Studies (see Ilustração 5 and Ilustração 6).

2.3. Horn of Africa (HOA)

The Horn of Africa (HOA) has been suffering from food shortage and hunger caused by the hostile climate for decades now. This is no longer considered as the only threat; political instability and sectorial violence are also a major threat to the whole region. The al-Shabaab Islamist group and its affiliates are now behind the vast majority of the violent attacks. They are actively involved in the indoctrination of thousands of youngsters who were not provided with any other alternative. Till a near past, the main source for funding jihadi activities was piracy. It is not the case any longer for the HOA is under some sort of scramble to secure vital interests mainly that the region is extremely strategic.

The Horn of Africa has always been characterized by being unstable at all levels. The main reason lies within the inclination towards regional politics aiming at compounding internal conflicts and insurgencies. This is also due to the involvement of external powers and international state actors on one hand and the border disputes on the other (Red Lines: Upheavals, 2021: 4). The damaging conflicts caused by regional instability paved the way to regional alignments. If this can be considered positive, it should be noted that it gave power to unrepresentative and/or militarized governments (Red Lines: Upheavals, 2021: 6).

The Horn of Africa is now being the crossroads of the world's most influential powers. In Djibouti, troops from France, USA, China, Germany, Japan and Saudi Arabia are present. The Emiratis are in Eritrea, Somalia and in the *de facto* state of Somaliland. While the Israelis are based in Eritrea, and the Americans and the Turks are active in Somalia (see Ilustração 1). As for the Greater Horn, the Anglo-American presence in Kenya is explained by the spread of the al-Shabaab affiliates there.

3. AFRICOM and the Geopolitical Context

Due to the growing strategic importance of Africa, President George W. Bush directed the creation of the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) on 6 February 2007¹⁵. AFRICOM is one of eleven DOD combatant commands. It was created on 1 October 2007 (started initial operations) and became operational on 1 October 2008. The task force that is headquartered in Stuttgart, Germany, has a geographic and functional mission which is providing command and control of the troops in peace and war¹⁶. As part of seven joint service geographic combatant commands, it is in charge of all US military operations and activities to “protect and advance U.S. national interests in Africa.”¹⁷ It is responsible for all DOD's operations, exercises, and security cooperation in Africa¹⁸.

¹⁵ History of U.S. Africa Command, United States Africa Command. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.africom.mil/about-the-command/history-of-us-africa-command>.

¹⁶ About the Command, United States Africa Command. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.africom.mil/about-the-command>.

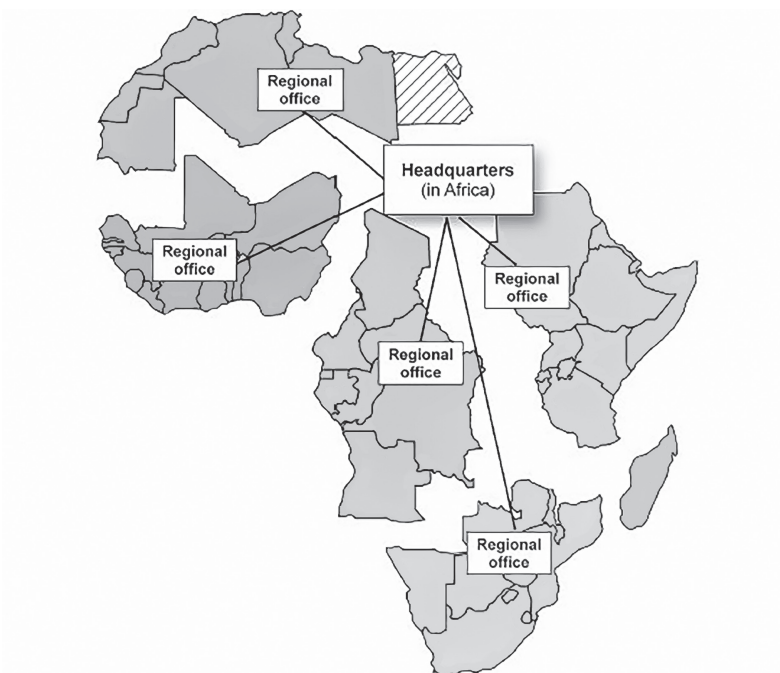
¹⁷ General Michael E. Langley Combatant Commander United States Africa Command, United States Department of Defense. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.defense.gov/About/Biographies/Biography/Article/3131109/combatant-commander-United-states-africa-command/>.

¹⁸ About the Command, United States Africa Command. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.africom.mil/about-the-command>.

The command's overall responsibility area covers fifty-three African countries (11.2 million square miles), over 800 ethnicities, more than a thousand languages, large natural resources, and around 19,000 miles of coastland¹⁹. "U.S. Africa Command, with partners, counters transnational threats and malign actors, strengthens security forces and responds to crises in order to advance U.S. national interests and promote regional security, stability and prosperity."²⁰ reads the mission statement. As for the personnel, the command has around 2,000 between military, federal civilian employees, and contractor employees²¹.

About 1,400 work at the command's headquarters in Stuttgart, Germany. Others are assigned to U.S. Africa Command units at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, and RAF Molesworth, U.K. The command's programs in Africa are coordinated through Offices of Security Cooperation and Defense Attaché Offices in approximately 38 nations. The command also has liaison officers at key African posts, including the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States, and the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping and Training Centre in Ghana.²²

Ilustração 02 – DOD's Original Conception for Establishing Regional Offices in Africa



Source: United States, Government Accountability Office. "DOD Needs to Reassess Options for Permanent Location of U.S. Africa Command." Report to Congressional Committees. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-13-646.pdf>.

Being under the leadership of General Michael E. Langley as the sixth Commander since August 2022, the Command has six main components with different assignments. They are, **1** – U.S. Army Southern European Task Force, Africa (Vicenza, Italy). **2** – U.S. Naval

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

Forces Africa (Naples, Italy). **3** – U.S. Air Forces Africa (Ramstein Air Base, Germany). **4** – U.S. Marine Corps Forces Africa (Stuttgart, Germany). **5** – Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti). **6** – U.S. Special Operations Command Africa (Co-located with U.S. Africa Command at Kelley Barracks in Stuttgart)²³.

Table 01 – U.S. Africa Command’s Components and Subordinate Units and their Respective Missions and Objectives

Team	Headquarters	Mission/Objectives
U.S. Army Southern European Task Force, Africa (SETAF-AF)	Vicenza, Italy	Conducts sustained security engagement with African land forces to promote security, stability and peace
U.S. Naval Forces Africa	Naples, Italy	Improves the maritime security capability and capacity of African partners
U.S. Air Forces Africa	Ramstein Air Base, Germany	Conducts sustained security engagement and operations to promote air safety, security, and development in Africa
U.S. Marine Corps Forces Africa	Stuttgart, Germany	Conducts operations, exercises, training, and security cooperation activities throughout Africa
Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa	Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti	Conducts operations in the region to enhance partner nation capacity, promote regional security and stability, dissuade conflict, and protect U.S. and coalition interests
U.S. Special Operations Command Africa	Co-located with U.S. Africa Command at Kelley Barracks in Stuttgart	Aims to build operational capacity, strengthen regional security and capacity initiatives, and eradicate violent extremist organizations

Source: Compiled based on United States Africa Command Official Webpage. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.africom.mil/about-the-command>.

It is worth mentioning that the command which is supposed to be operating on the African soil is headquartered mostly in Europe between Germany and Italy. At this point, two important questions raise. Firstly, why the command’s headquarters are located elsewhere rather than being in Africa? Secondly, is it mainly that most African states refused to host it to avoid its political cost? It was until 27 April 2021 that Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari asked the United States to move the headquarters to the continent (Felix, Akwagyiram and Heinrich, 2021). In a virtual meeting, Buhari told the US Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken: “Considering the growing security challenges in West and Central Africa, the Gulf of Guinea, Lake Chad region, and the Sahel weighing heavily on Africa underscores the need for the United States to consider relocating AFRICOM headquarters from Stuttgart in Germany to Africa, and near the theater of operations.” (Blinken, 2021).

4. Conduct on the Ground

AFRICOM’s Posture Statements provide details on the approaches to how security/military issues were handled in Africa. It always defines Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs) as an imminent threat to the US interests in the region. The statements of 2018 through 2022 have always focused on issues related to development. Words and expressions such as: agriculture,

²³ Ibid.

financial services, financial independence, manufacturing, infrastructure, logistics, economic growth, economic and educational opportunities, construction, health care, and assistance have been permanently drafted in all the statements. Did these approaches and strategies which were set by AFRICOM target the continent's development at any time? If so, were they adequate and efficient?

What the 2018 Posture Statement called "Theater Strategy" was based on partnerships with African states to counter the challenges. It is based on the 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS) which says that "the United States seeks to partner with African states that exercise sovereignty over their whole territory, are integrated into the world economy, able to provide for their citizens' needs, and capable of managing threats to peace and security." (US Africa Command, 2019: 6).

The 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) was meant to reinforce US AFRICOM approaches to work by, with, and through African partners to "degrade VEOs, interdict transnational extremist and criminal activity, and increase the institutional capacity of partners to do so with limited foreign assistance." (US Africa Command, 2019: 6). The campaign plan was mainly directed to the regions of East Africa, North Africa, Sahel, West Africa, along with the Gulf of Guinea and Central Africa (US Africa Command, 2019).

The 2019 Posture Statement set foundational strategies to implement its campaign plan. It aimed at strengthening partner networks, enhancing partner capability, developing security in Somalia, containing instability in Libya, and supporting partners in the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin. The strategic approach targeted what the posture called achieving and maintaining influence in several regions to ensure strategic access. The Americans saw China as a "strategic competitor which uses economic and security outreach to foster investment incentives, jobs, and infrastructure growth in return for access to Africa's strategic locations, natural resources, and markets". Therefore, their efforts should be considered through "the lens of competitor influence and coercive activities, which seek to gain advantages over the U.S. by moving faster in economic and security markets where we are constrained by our values and law." (Africom, 2019: 34).

The 2020 Posture Statement came with the opening expression "A secure and stable Africa is an enduring American interest." This year's strategic approach focused on three major issues. First, the conviction that Africa's challenges should never be resolved just by using US military power and that AFRICOM had to "partner for success" with a different network which involves "African nations, strategic allies, US government agencies and departments, and multinational coalitions". The aim was preventing and relieving conflicts in the continent. Second, conducting the security activities to protect and maintain US interests (Africom, 2020: 7). The third issue was to "pressure on the malign networks of global and regional competitors" (Africom, 2020: 8).

The strategic approach of the 2021 Posture Statement was characterized by and revolved around the label "An Ounce of Prevention and Cheap Insurance for America" (Africom, 2021: 7). It focused on the "strategic competition" of the Chinese and the Russians. The Chinese have their diplomatic and economic tools to "increase their global reach and influence", while the Russians have their Private Military Companies (PMCs) which have a "destabilizing influence in Africa" (Africom, 2021: 5). The campaign plan focused on four objectives: 1 - Gain and Maintain Strategic Access and Influence, 2 - Disrupt VEO Threats to U.S. Interests, 3 - Respond to Crises to Protect U.S. Interests, 4 - Coordinate Action with Allies and Partners to Achieve Shared Security Objectives (Africom, 2021: 7). The Posture Statement concluded "a secure and stable Africa is an enduring American interest" (Africom, 2021: 15).

The 2021 Posture Statement included details on the efforts to provide COVID-19 aid in 43 states, including the delivery of around \$500M in medical supplies (Africom, 2021: 2-3). This statement was characterized by the use of the same events and even the same expressions as in the previous years' postures. The following is one example of that: "Russian PMCs almost certainly downed an unarmed, unmanned U.S. aircraft in Libya in November 2019 using a sophisticated Russian air defense system" (Africom, 2021: 5).

The low-cost campaign approach introduced in the 2022 Posture Statement needed resources to "protect previous and future gains" especially as the strategic competitors "increase their investments" (Africom, 2022: 5). Along with the bilateral security cooperation and assistance programs that focus on African partner nations' priorities, the AFRICOM approach targeted four "enduring" objectives:

First, maintain America's strategic access and influence on the continent. Failure to achieve this objective means failure everywhere else. Second, counter threats to U.S. persons, facilities, and interests, whether they be from violent extremists or other malign actors. Third, prevent and respond to crises that can range from disaster relief to threats against our embassies. Finally, we do all this with a lean, purpose-built combatant command and a coordinated, Diplomacy-Defense-Development effort that teams with allies and partners to achieve shared security objectives, and advance shared principles (Africom, 2022: 5).

In its "Frontlines in Flux in Battle against African Militant Islamist Groups", the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS) provided detailed dataset on the evolution of extremist groups and the attacks they have waged for the period of (2010-2018). What the document called "constantly shifting threats" by the three major terrorist groups (Boko Haram, ISIS and al-Shabaab) was due to the surge of attacks in the Sahel on one hand and the declines in activity on the other. Figures shown in (Ilustração 05) and (Ilustração 06) which are mentioned below show data on Africa's active militant Islamist groups for 2010 and 2018.

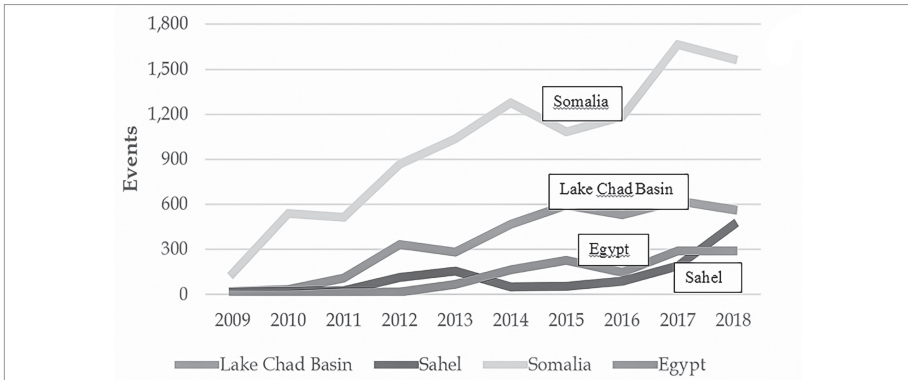
The document when analyzed provides an understanding of the role played by AFRICOM and gives indications on whether it can be assessed positively or not in the light of the widespread of extremism and violence in Africa. It shows that Somalia, Lake Chad Basin, Sahel and Egypt are the four main regions where the militant Islamist groups' activities boomed. As shown in (Ilustração 03), unlike Somalia, the graph for the three other regions shows a considerable increase in the activities since 2011. This can be explained as being among the ramifications of the "Arab Spring" given that the increase took place shortly after its outbreak.

The death toll was heavy, even among civilians. Figure (Ilustração 04) shows that Somalia was the most to suffer from the attacks involving Islamist groups. Unlike the peak of the activities which was in 2017 (see Ilustração 03), the peak of the fatalities was during the year of 2015 owing to the fact that many affiliates were created and started conquering more territories (see Ilustração 04). Although it was hit by less terrorist activities, Egypt suffered the most when we consider the fatalities. This is due to the fact that President Mohamed Morsi who belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood was ousted one year earlier while his supporters were subjected to severe security measures. After the coming of General al-Sissi to power, militant Islamist groups' activities doubled, mainly in Sinai as shown in (Ilustração 03).

The total number of African states suffering from attacks perpetrated by militant Islamist groups jumped from five in 2010 to thirteen in 2018. Likewise, the number of militant Islamist groups jumped from five in 2010 to two dozen in 2018 (ACSS, 2019). The major attacks against civilians were perpetrated by al-Shabaab and Boko Haram. It was until 2015 that the Islamic State (ISIS) as a new actor joined the scene. AQIM and its off-shoots were active during 2012 and shortly after they waged important attacks with an immediate media

impact like the Tiguentourine attacks on the gas facility in In-Amenas, southern Algeria²⁴. After that, they lost the field to ISIS and its affiliates. It was until 2017 where their activities increased again due to the crisis in Mali as demonstrated in (Ilustração 03).

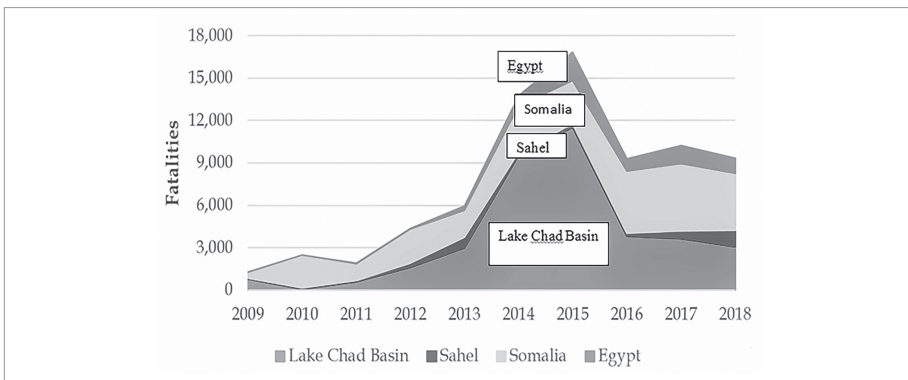
Ilustração 03 – Trends in Militant Islamist Group Activity in Africa



Source: ACSS (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project).

The review of attacks involving militant Islamist groups shows that violent events went from 2,927 in 2017 to 3,050 in 2018 to plateau the upward trend. The events jumped from 288 in 2009 to reach 3,050 in 2018. Violent attacks waged by the al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) affiliates and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) went from 192 in 2017 to 464 in 2018 (ACSS, 2019). There are four major theaters where extremist activities are taking place, they are Somalia, the Lake Chad Basin, the Sahel (mainly central Mali and bordering regions), and Egypt. During the last decade, al-Shabaab group has been present in almost half of the violent events in the whole continent.

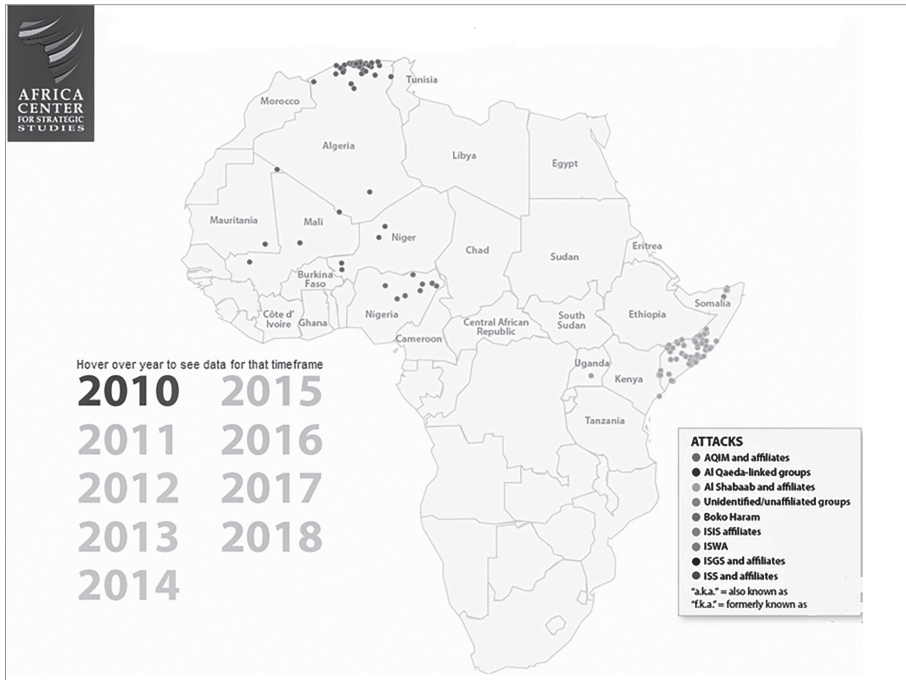
Ilustração 04 – Trends in Fatalities Linked to Militant Islamist Group Activity in Africa



Source: ACSS (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project).

²⁴ In January 2013, at least 37 foreign oil contractors were killed after al Qaeda militants attacked the Tiguentourine gas plant and took dozens of workers hostage. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/cnews-us-sahara-crisis-idCABRE90F1JJ20130121>.

Ilustração 05 – Africa's Active Militant Islamist Groups in 2010



Source: ACSS (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), Daniel Byman, Thomas Joscelyn, SITE Intelligence Group, The Soufan Group, Startfor, Terrorism Research & Analysis Consortium (TRAC) and Aaron Y. Zelin).

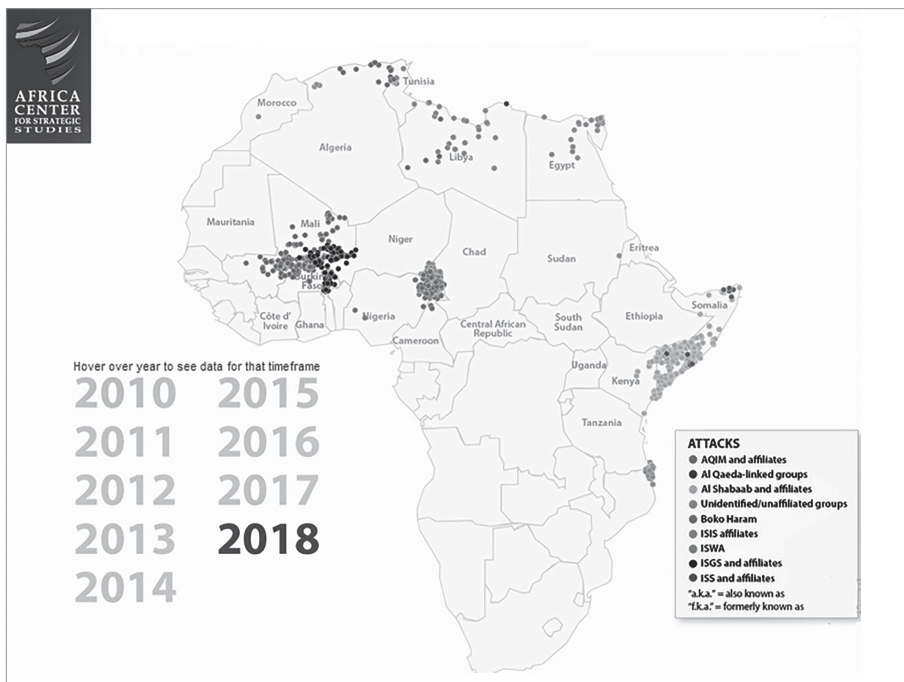
Fatalities related to the attacks dropped from 9,744 in the peak during the year of 2015 to 18,856 in 2018. It is mostly related to the drop of the attacks involving Boko Haram. Nevertheless, fatalities in the Sahel doubled between 2017 and 2018 from 529 to 1,112 respectively. It is the same for the Islamic State of West Africa (ISWA) which is a Boko Haram affiliate. The fatalities went from 520 to 960 during the same period. However, fatalities in the Lake Chad region witnessed a decrease by 15 percent during the year of 2018 (ACSS, 2019).

As for attacks against civilians, they witnessed a considerable growth since 2010. They represented 21 percent of all extremist groups' activities in Africa compared to 17 percent in 2015 and 8 percent in 2010. Boko Haram was responsible for 1,107 attacks which left 11,403 fatalities. For the attacks which targeted civilians in other regions in 2018, it was the Islamic in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and the Macina Liberation Front (FLM) in the Sahel, Ansaroul Islam in Burkina Faso, and Ahlu Sunnah Wa Jamâ (ASWJ) along with al-Shabaab in Mozambique. During the last decade, al-Shabaab was on top of all militant Islamist groups when it comes to attacks against civilians with a total number of 1,233 causing 2,058 fatalities (ACSS, 2019).

The 2021 Global Terrorism Index (GTI)²⁵ which analyses the impact of terrorism for 163 countries shows that five African nations rank among the top ten. These countries are: Somalia

²⁵ The Global Terrorism Index (GTI) is a comprehensive study analysing the impact of terrorism for 163 countries covering 99.7 per cent of the world's population.

Ilustração 06 – Africa's Active Militant Islamist Groups in 2018



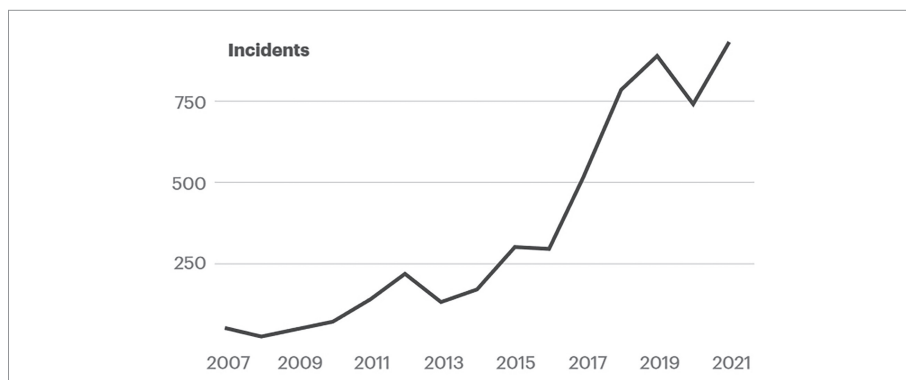
Source: ACSS (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED)), Daniel Byman, Thomas Joscelyn, SITE Intelligence Group, The Soufan Group, Startfor, Terrorism Research & Analysis Consortium (TRAC) and Aaron Y. Zelin).

(8.398), Burkina Faso (8.27), Nigeria (8.233), Mali (8.152), and Niger (7.856). The three major regions which have higher index are those included in this study (North Africa, West Africa and HOA). The index scores on a scale of 10 and comprises four indicators: incidents, fatalities, injuries and property damage. The 2021 GTI covered 49 African states in which 20 had no impact of terrorism. The scores of the other 29 countries varied between 0.29 and 8.398. The whole continent's average index was 2.61, but if we count only those countries which had incidents it increases to 4.41. The top 17 countries with the highest impact have an average of 6.40. However, the top five average index is 8.19, which is considered as a very high score (IEP, 2021).

Militant Islamist groups who are active in Africa were tackled by the Global Terrorism Index 2022 report. The key findings show that three out of ten states which suffer the most from terrorist activities in 2021 were located in the Sahel. Considerable increase in terrorism fatalities was recorded in Mali (174), Niger (81) and Burkina Faso (74). Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) was considered to be the fastest growing terrorist group. It was behind 351 deaths in 2021 which is a 69 per cent rise. For the trends in terrorism, fatalities in the Sahel represented 35 per cent of global terrorism deaths in 2021, while it was around one percent in 2007 (IEP, 2022: 4).

The GTI report is produced by the Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP) using data from Terrorism Tracker and other sources. The GTI produces a composite score so as to provide an ordinal ranking of countries on the impact of terrorism. The GTI scores each country on a scale from 0 to 10; where 0 represents no impact from terrorism and 10 represents the highest measurable impact of terrorism. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/maps/global-terrorism-index/#/>.

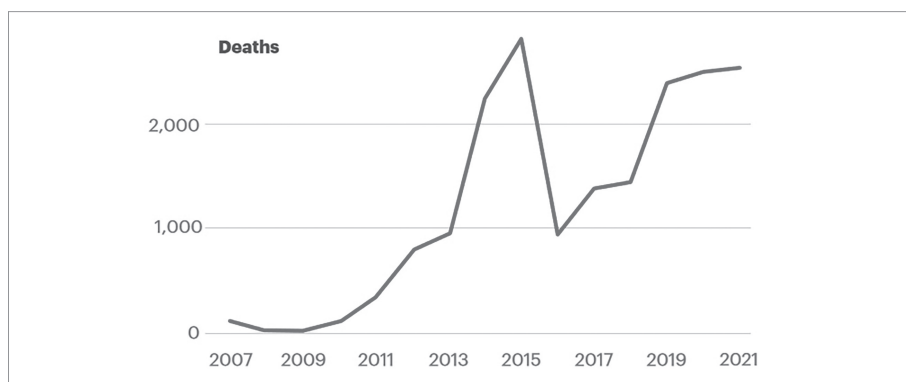
Ilustração 07 – Incidents from Terrorism in the Sahel (2007-2021)



Source: Global Terrorism Index 2022 (Dragonfly TerrorismTracker, IEP calculations).

During the last fifteen years, violence increased in the Sahel. There was a 1000 per cent rise in fatalities between 2007 and 2021. The main reasons are complex and systemic. They vary between “poor water utilization, lack of food, malnutrition, strong population growth, and weak governments.” Terrorist organizations target police, military and domestic governments in conflict environments. In non-conflict environments however, they target water and food utilities and infrastructures. Islamic State in West Africa (ISWA) is the most lethal organization in the region (average 15.2 people per attack in Niger). Most terrorist activity is focused in border regions given that governments have no full control there (IEP, 2022: 5).

Ilustração 08 – Deaths from Terrorism in the Sahel (2007-2021)



Source: Global Terrorism Index 2022 (Dragonfly TerrorismTracker, IEP calculations).

The African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT) which is a structure of the African Union prepares quarterly, mid-year and yearly bulletins and reports on Africa terrorism trend analysis. The 2022 mid-year terrorism trend analysis shows the devastating atrocities which targeted civilians, security and military establishments, and vital infrastructures. “From the Lake Chad Basin (LCB) to the Sahel region, from the East and Horn of

Africa to the Great Lakes region, and from the North Africa and the Maghreb to the Southern Africa region, terrorist and violent extremist groups escalated the level of the complexity and sophistication of attacks.” the document says (ACSRT, 2022: 40).

Conclusions

The conduct assessment of the US forces in Africa under AFRICOM since 2008 shows that it is not in accordance with its declared mission. It is rather in compliance with advancing US national interests in the region. US interests prevailed over promoting regional security, stability and prosperity which are at the heart of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and mainly SDG 16. The troops which conduct all types of exercises, programs, and partnerships, did not prevent violence and extremism from increasing to unprecedented levels. The strategic approaches and campaign plans presented in the Posture Statements have witnessed a total failure, albeit some other factors had their impact too. When the Posture Statements are juxtaposed to the dataset provided by the ACSS which is an academic institution within the US Department of Defense established and funded by the US Congress, we notice that Militant Islamist group activity in Africa escalated. This escalation is embedded in the plea issued in SDG 16 and AFRICOM is not making any breakthroughs given that the statistics refute all claims of a positive outcome.

The overall US Africa strategy has several issues related to the fact that there is no long term commitment towards the region and its multiple layers of vulnerability. The presence of the US troops was a destabilizing factor rather than a partner that was supposed to bring peace and stability to the region and help overcome all problems related to sustainable development and the 17 goals set by the United Nations. The troops became a source of attraction for the extremist groups in the continent as they once did with involvement in Mogadishu, Somalia. AFRICOM says that it uses “broad-reaching diplomacy” among other tools. However, it did nothing but taking over the role which was inherently played by the Department of State. It also says that it employs development which is not one of the tasks that are usually assigned to militaries mainly in a region which faces a set of recurrent crises and economic challenges. The presence of the US Africa Command in the continent proves that providing militarized solutions to issues which are exclusively about development would not be efficient. AFRICOM’s components and subordinate units have implemented defense approaches within communities which have always been at bottom of the United Nation’s Human Development Index (HDI). Such kind of issues should have been addressed within a framework that considers the continent’s social and economic fragility and aims at allowing for greater opportunities. They should have also been dealt with taking into consideration the UN efforts and the SDGs set in Agenda 2030 as the overall framework.

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