



# MANAGING TERRORISM IN AFRICA

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Despite the different interpretations on the origins and a possible way to manage the Islamic terrorism in Africa, a thing is clear: this phenomenon gained importance in the last few years. Data of ACLED show that in 2015 Africa registered 381 attacks, which resulted in 1.394 fatalities; five years later the number increased to 7.108 attacks and 12.519 fatalities (Mroszczyk & Abrahms, 2021). It is not difficult to deduce that Islamic terrorism was not managed appropriately by the African States. It is the case of countries as Nigeria with Boko Haram, Somalia with Al-Shabaab, Mozambique with Ansar-al-Sunna, with links with the Central African Province of the Islamic State.

Some paradigms tried to explain this increase of terrorism in Africa, generally accompanied with brutal violence against civilians. For instance, the Strategic Model of Terrorism emphasizes the circumstance that terroristic groups look for an autonomous political platform; nevertheless, this paradigm seems to have some empirical support (Mroszczyk & Abrahms, 2021). Another paradigm, known as the theory of inter-organization conflicts, tries to explain the increase of violence with the war between Al Qaeda and the Islamic State, officially declared at the end of 2018. Finally, other approaches privilege religious reasons, with a change of the African Islam, from the tolerant Sufi to the radical Salafism, with an important role of Saudi Arabia.

In any case, what Ted Gurr stated in the 1980s is valid also today: about terrorism, there are many good answers, but few responses, in particular due to the scarcity of empirical studies (Gurr, 1988).

Maybe some common determinants might be identified to understand the origins and the subsequent management of terrorism in Africa: a violent State – as in the case of Nigeria, which favoured the transformation of Boko Haram in an armed group -, a perceived ethnic marginalization – as in Mozambique for Kimwani and Makhuwa groups, against Makonde -, a decline of the legitimacy of official authority, as in the case of Somalia, the impossibility to have a concrete opportunity to change government through a transparent mechanism of elections (Rosenberg, 2021).

These short considerations underline the importance of local determinants as relevant elements which can contribute to the strengthening of Islamic terrorism in Africa. As a matter of fact, if one crosses some data with terrorism in Africa, it is possible to deduce that economic indicators have weak relationships with terrorism. For instance, the Gini index does not represent a significant indicator to explain terrorism in Africa. There are countries with a relatively low Gini Index – as Mali (3.9) or Somalia (3.7) – as well as countries with a high Gini index, as Mozambique (5.4) or Nigeria (4.3), where terrorism has deep roots; in parallel, in South Africa, Namibia and Zambia, the three African countries with the highest Gini Index, no terroristic actions or significant groups have been registered in the last few years. The hypothesis of Shinn seems to be confirmed, when he states that reducing poverty has a modest impact on countering terrorism (Shinn, 2016).

Other variables can be considered as more significant for explaining the presence of terrorism in a certain region. For instance, the corruption index, elaborated by the Transparency

International, is high in Somalia, Mozambique, Nigeria, and Mali. In addition, other countries which are facing Islamic terrorism also ranked badly in this specific indicator (as Sudan or Yemen). A decline in the trust of public authorities and the failure in implementing structural economic reforms by the State seem also to be important elements for the affirmation of radical groups, whose main objective is to establish an alternative authority.

Finally, as it has been pointed out (Elu & Price, 2015), the reasons of Islamic terrorism's spread have to be found not only in economic factors, but also in a specific historical past and in existential or identity factors, as those of ethnic, religious or political kind. Such factors represent the actual roots of these insurgent groups.

In front of such complexity, African countries are unable to manage Islamic terrorism. Generally, an armed and violent response is not effective, as many cases, inside and outside Africa, clearly show. Nonetheless, it is difficult to suppose not to intervene militarily, so every kind of choice could result in an aggravation of the situation.

It is what is occurring at the moment in Mozambique. Here, religious tensions – real or supposed – began in October 2017, with the first assault to police posts in Mocimboa da Praia (Cabo Delgado, North of Mozambique). Since then, Mozambican government has been unable to manage the continuous attacks of the insurgents, which resulted, until today, in about 2500 dead and almost 1 million refugees.

In this case too, good questions have not yet received satisfactory answers, especially regarding the reasons and the protagonists of this strange insurgency. Furthermore, probably local reasons should be considered, as:

1. Ethnic tensions among a minority group (Makonde), with strong economic and political privileges, in detriment of majoritarian groups of Cabo Delgado (Makhuwa and Kimwani);
2. The prohibition, for informal sourdoughs, to exploit gold and diamond mines which nourished hundreds of Kimwani and Makhuwa families, delivering them “to a narrow political and military elite” belonging to Frelimo, in general of Makonde origins (GITOC, 2021);
3. The permanent use of violence, in accordance with a line of continuity between the colonial and the post-colonial period.

Violence has been concentrated, especially in the last few years, in the North of Mozambique, with very serious cases of violations of human rights. Just to give some examples, it is possible to remember here the ProSavana program (closed in 2020 by the local government), which intended to convert 11 million hectares belonging to small farmers in a plantation of rice and soyabean destined to be exported towards Asian markets, in a logic of land-grabbing which is characterizing many African countries. A project of heavy hands in Moma (Nampula Province), begun in 2007, which received various accusations of violations of human rights, including towards children, besides its devastating impact on environment (ROSC, 2014). Finally, probably the worst episode is that of the Montepuez Ruby Mining, a private company of Anglo-Mozambican capitals, which had to pay about 8 million dollars to community members of Nthoro (Montepuez District), in order to compensate “horrendous human violations” against informal workers (almost all of Kimwani origins), causing the death of about 18 of them (Gemfileds' Quest, 2019). In this context, the gas plantation by Total and other international multinationals in Cabo Delgado represents only the last element which caused the deception of many people regarding the creation of working posts as well as an improving in local life conditions which until today has not occurred (Neething, 2021).

As in the cases of Nigeria or Somalia, in Mozambique too the difficulty in managing this insurgency rests on the fact that Mozambican State did not understand the deep roots of this phenomenon this unexpected complexity had, as its first consequence, that the government underestimated the importance of this problem. Thus, it tried to solve the problem through a

militarily solution, contracting mercenary companies, as Wagner from Russia and DAG from South Africa. Nevertheless, since this strategy did not give good results, now Mozambican President, the Makonde Nyusi, is trying to revitalize a public company, the Agency for the Development of the North, substituting an old Makonde general with the former Secretary of State in Cabo Delgado, Armindo Ngunga, as a president of this agency. But all these measures will not probably produce any positive effect, since the most serious issue, now, does not seem to be related to a simple economic situation of poverty. On the contrary, the distance from institutions perceived by local populations, especially of Makhuwa and Kimwani ethnicities, is so big that every attempt to come back to a normal and peaceful situation seems impossible.

The general impression is that Islamic terrorism in Cabo Delgado is now so rooted and sustained by a part of local population that every government's choice might be wrong, with the risk to deteriorate an already difficult situation.

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Received: March 08, 2021

Accepted: May 30, 2021

Cite as: Bussotti, L. (2021). Managing terrorism in Africa. *Problems of Management in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 16(1), 4-6. <https://doi.org/10.33225/pmc/21.16.04>

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