

Counter-Terrorism in West Africa: The ECOWAS Experience

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Introduction:

Terrorism has become a major security challenge for Africa with a rising number of attacks, the multiplicity of active terror networks, and the growing links between and among terror groups. Boko Haram, al-Shabaab, AQIM and ISIS are some of the deadliest militant organizations active in African countries. Africa has become conducive for the growth of terrorism in part due to the pervasiveness of the conditions such as poverty, unemployment, under-development, poor governance, and conflicts that promote its growth. However, it is the eradication of Al-Qaeda's base in Afghanistan and West Asia after the United States' war on terror after 9/11 that propelled the growth of these groups in Africa. After being driven out from Afghanistan, it has tried to find the ground in Africa which led to increased activities of AQIM in West Africa as well as its support to other terrorist organizations such as Ansar Dine, Boko Haram, Ansaru, and others through weapons, financial and ideological collaboration. Similar is the case with Islamic State which with losing ground in Iraq and Syria, is keen to establish itself in West Africa.

Many of the African countries on their part have not been able to restrict the terror activities and enforce counter-terrorism measures due to various reasons ranging from insufficient financial resources to lack of political will. Moreover, terrorism cannot be effectively deal with or counter by any single country or organization, it needs collective efforts and multiple actors to act in unison. There have been some efforts to coordinate the approaches by African countries at the regional as well as the continental level to fight the menace of terrorism and also to work together at the multilateral level to counter terrorism. The African countries have devised "some mechanisms and adopted measures to deal with the threat of terrorism. At the pan-African level, the OAU Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism, adopted at Algiers in 1999, had put in place a solid framework. It was followed by a Plan of Action on Prevention and Combating terrorism in 2002, which put forward several measures. The Plan of Action incorporated international standards for combating terrorism, in line with the provisions of the UNSC Resolution 1373 of September 28, 2001. However, the most important instrument is the 2004 Protocol to the 1999 Algiers Convention which mandated the African Union's Peace and Security Council to monitor and facilitate the implementation of these measures" (African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism, 2011). Another important step in this direction is "the adoption of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy on 8 September 2006 by the United Nations General Assembly which is a unique global instrument to enhance national, regional, and international counter-terrorism efforts" (UN News, 2016). African countries have also pledged their support to the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

In this context, the paper examines the threat of terrorism in West Africa and possible reasons for its growth. It further examines the initiatives and mechanisms in place to combat terrorism in the region. While drawing on the ECOWAS experience in dealing with terrorism the paper further explores how it works and could work to deal with this threat.

Terrorism in West Africa:

There are many terrorist groups active in West Africa including Boko Haram, AQIM, and MUJAO. Terrorist activities in West Africa have accelerated with several recent attacks on schools, churches, malls, foreign embassies and other western institutions. Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Nigeria are some of the countries which have experienced violent outbreaks and escalated terrorist attacks. Terrorist organizations like Boko Haram and MUJAO have successfully augmented their capability to launch terrorist attacks across the region that have fundamentally changed the regional security dynamics in West Africa (Watts, 2009).

Boko Haram: West Africa has witnessed growing terrorist activities after the emergence of Boko Haram which with its heinous activities and escalated capability to attack seeks greater attention from the world thereby internationalizing its terrorist activities. Boko Haram has increased its attacks and is focused mostly on targets like security and defence apparatus, law enforcement agencies in addition to public infrastructure, places of worship, markets, religious or community leaders, media houses, and civilians. It has improved capability, strategic and technological sophistication with enhanced training facilities. It attacks by using “improvised explosive devices, targeted assassinations, drive-by shootings, and suicide bombings” (Walker, 2012). It attacked the United Nations headquarters in Abuja on 26 August 2011 and killed 23 people. Internationalization of its terrorist activities has been one of the objectives.

AQIM: AQIM and its sleeper cells are indulged in “several cases of kidnapping and the murder of Western tourists, aid workers, and soldiers, apart from attacks on government establishments, security posts, and foreign diplomatic missions such as in Mauritania”. AQIM’s fundamental support to Islamic insurgents in Mali has strengthened and emboldened them to mount more vociferous strikes. The coup in March 2012 dragged Mali into instability and chaos that generated a power vacuum. It in turn enabled primarily MNLA supported by Islamic groups such as MUJAO, AQIM, and Ansar Dine, to take control of almost two-thirds of the territory of Mali.

MUJAO: It is a prominent Islamic extremist group and an offshoot of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. It has expanded its outreach and acquired sophisticated weaponry and carried out some lethal strikes in northern Mali. “The intervention of French forces in the Mali crisis has seen these groups re-strategize in two principal ways. The first was a retreat into the mountainous region of northern Mali and the second was the adoption of hitherto tactics such as suicide bombings and guerrilla attacks. The MUJAO has also extended its attacks in the neighbouring countries, well demonstrated by the 23 May 2013 twin suicide bombings in Niger” (Kuhne, 2013).

Ansaru: The emergence of Ansaru has added a new dimension to West Africa's unfolding landscape of terrorism. The word Ansaru is an abridgement of what roughly translated as “Vanguards for the Protection of Muslims in Black Africa”. “Ansaru has claimed responsibility for various acts of terrorism in Nigeria such

as the November 2012 armed attack on a detention facility in Abuja; the January 2013 ambushing of Mali-bound Nigerian soldiers at Kogi State; and the February 2013 kidnapping of seven foreign expatriates in Bauchi State. The 9 March 2013 murder of the seven kidnapped expatriates remains the biggest of its kind since the outbreak of violence in northern Nigeria” (Nkwi, 2013).

Hezbollah and AQAP: The expansion and increasing infiltration by Hezbollah and AQAP into West Africa are emerging as a major concern for the security of the region. It became obvious with the arrest and indictment of two Nigerian citizens for accepting thousands of dollars from AQAP to recruit potential members from Nigeria. Besides, terror reconnaissance is helping the Lebanese military outfit Hezbollah in raising funds and recruitment in Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, Gambia, and Senegal. Most of these terror outfits raise funds for their operations by facilitating trans-national organized crimes and trafficking of contrabands.

Islamic State: The IS terrorists recently showed just how dangerous and combative they can be. In early October, soldiers from the US and Niger clashed with militants associated with IS on the border with Mali. The battle resulted in the loss of the lives of four US and five Nigerian troops. “The overall risk for West Africa is very high given its expanse of ungoverned space, which IS is likely to target. Besides, West Africa is also one of the poorest Muslim-majority territories in the world, with generally weak governments and an absence of national identity in specific states” (Nkwi, 2013).

The main objective of these terrorist groups has been “to bring back classical Islam which had existed in the region since the 10th century and to do away with western civilization. They strongly believe that westernization had adulterated classical Islam. To achieve their objective, they have launched attacks on Western installations, the kidnapping of western tourists, the bombing on western embassies, and attacking those who stand in their way to achieving their objective” (Kieh, 2009). The understanding of classical Islam of these terrorist groups needs some clarification. They believe that “classical Islam was established in West Africa long before the jihads of Usman Dan Fodio. The pre-colonial history of West Africa accounts for that by 1066 AD Islam was well implanted in West Africa. Though the Islamisation of northern Nigeria in the early years of the 19 century was through the religious wars and Usman Dan Fodio who had carried such wars ended by carving out the famous Sokoto Caliphate which occupied a large area of the Sahel stretching from Sokoto, through Yola down to Adamawa” (Ajayi & Crowder, 1971). “Most of the leaders of these terrorist groups find relevance in planting classical Islam around these areas. Boko Haram claims that it is out to purify Islam just like the 19-century jihads of Usman Dan Fodio had claimed” (Nkwi, 2013). Boko Haram and Tuareg have used tools of violence to transform West Africa into a hub of international terrorism. They prefer a caliphate to proselytize their version of Islam.

The ECOWAS Mechanism: Regional Security Cooperation in West Africa

ECOWAS has been struggling to achieve its primary goal of economic integration and the creation of a common market among its member states since its foundation in 1975. The political instability and conflict in a number of countries in the region induced it to understand that development cannot be achieved without peace and stability and vice versa. Initially, the ECOWAS treaty had no explicit provision about security and military cooperation role for the regional grouping. However, it soon evolved as a full-fledged supranational

body with the principles for governance and maintenance of peace and security due to perceived military threats or instability which undermined the economic development (Roper, 1998). In the beginning, the ECOWAS leaders proposed to adopt measures to safeguard the political and economic system of the region against external aggression and internal instability. However, the organization gradually progressed into a security community with the adoption of the non-aggression treaty which provisioned the member countries to abstain from threatening and using force against other member states (ECOWAS, 1978). The mutual assistance on defence (MAD) protocol was adopted in 1981 through which the member states committed to give mutual assistance to each other for defence against the threat of any armed aggression and to consider that threat to stability and security against a member state as a common security threat for the entire community (ECOWAS, 1981). The protocol came into force in 1986. The main problem with the protocol was the difficulty in implementation of its provisions due to rivalry between the countries of Francophone and Anglophone camps. The problem arises from the suspicion of Francophone countries about the hegemonic ambition of Nigeria in the region. Most of the Francophone West African countries had strong military ties and were virtually dependent on former colonial master France for their defence and security affairs. "The presence of a rival Francophone security mechanism adversely affected the chances of success of MAD. The Accord de Non-Aggression et d'Assistance en matière de Défense (ANAD) was signed by Francophone West African states in 1977 following the border dispute between Mali and Burkina Faso. Unlike MAD, all the institutions of ANAD including its secretariat were made operational by 1981" (Dokken, 2002). However, the realization that social, economic, and technological development cannot be accomplished in the environment of widespread conflict and socio-political instability induced ECOWAS to expand itself into a regional security community.

Protocol on Conflict Prevention, Management, and Resolution, Peacekeeping, and Security:

The ECOWAS adopted the protocol on conflict prevention, management, and resolution, peacekeeping, and security in 1999. It was the first comprehensive protocol of ECOWAS related to peace and security in the region. The protocol established the legal, institutional and operational structure for regional security and laid the ground for regional security cooperation. It describes the Assembly of Heads of State as the decision-making body on issues related to peacekeeping and security, humanitarian support, transnational crime, the proliferation of SALW, and any other issues introduced by legislations of ECOWAS. The Assembly can delegate power to Mediation and Security Council (MSC).

Mediation and Security Council (MSC): It is responsible for the formulation and implementation of the policies related to peacekeeping and security; prevention, management, and resolution of conflicts. It authorizes all forms of interventions through legal action. According to the protocol, the executive secretary has to take appropriate action in the form of commissioning the fact-finding missions, deliberation, resolution, and mediation among the parties to the conflict. The executive secretary has to also appoint the members of the council of elders; recruit reconciliation missions and fact-finding commissions based on evaluation of the circumstances. He has to also oversee administrative, political, and functional proceedings and allocate logistic facilities for the peacekeeping operations. The executive secretary and MSC are

supported by other bodies such as the Commission of Defence and Security, Council of Elders, and the ECOMOG.

Commission of Defence and Security: It includes chiefs of defence staff of each member states and officials of Ministries of Home Affairs and Internal Security; officials of the Ministry of External Affairs of each member state etc. The commission of defence and security is concerned with the administrative and technical side of security and regulation of logistical prerequisites of peacekeeping missions. The commission supports the MSC primarily in devising the authorization of peacekeeping contingents, determining the working principles, appointing the commander, and deciding the composition of the peacekeeping forces.

Council of Elders: It is an official group of distinguished persons who have experience in the field of security, peace, and social harmony; the council works on behalf of ECOWAS as an arbitrator, negotiator, and peacemaker in the region. This group of eminent personalities is representative of a diverse section of society, including women, ethnic minorities, and people from various social, political, and religious identities to create inclusivity and harmony in peacemaking programs. These personalities are called upon by the Executive Secretary or the MSC when the need arises to deal with a given conflict situation.

ECOMOG: ECOWAS ceasefire and monitoring group also known as ECOMOG is an ad-hoc arrangement generally created when the need arises. Activities and functions of ECOMOG include among other things observation of conflict situation and peace monitoring delegation, peacekeeping and peace restoration missions, support missions for humanitarian activities, agencies to supervise the enforcement of sanctions, including embargoes, preventive deployment of forces, peacebuilding activities, efforts and initiatives for disarmament and demobilization of warring parties, regional policing undertakings to deals with fraud, traffickings and organized crime and such other activities determined from time to time by Mediation and Security Council.

The protocol enumerated various conditions required for the enforcement of the mechanism. It makes provisions for the implementation of the mechanism in case of armed rebellion and violent conflict or threat to the territorial integrity of the member state; internal unrest and conflict between two or more member states; in the condition of serious and large scale human rights abuses and violation of the rule of law; in the event of a military coup or unconstitutional overthrow of a democratically established government or any other condition that may be decided by the MSC. The Assembly of Heads of State and Governments is entitled to the implementation of the mechanism after the recommendation of the MSC at the request of a member state or the African Union.

ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF): The MSC adopted a resolution on 16 January 2008 known as ECOWAS conflict prevention framework (ECPF) which was designed to clarify the strategy for successful implementation of 1999 and 2001 protocols. The ECPF document states that the ECOWAS has “set up several promising organs in the area of conflict prevention to underpin its mandates, including the Early Warning System, the Mediation and Security Council, and the Council of the Wise and Special Mediators.” In fact, the ECPF was framed as “a comprehensive operational conflict prevention and peace-building strategy that enables the ECOWAS system and member states to draw on human and financial

resources at the regional level including civil society and the private sector and international levels in their efforts to creatively transform conflicts”, “a guide for enhancing cohesion and synergy between relevant ECOWAS departments on conflict prevention initiatives” and “a reference for developing process-based cooperation with regional and international stakeholders, including the private sector, civil society, African RECs, the AU and UN systems, as well as development partners, on conflict prevention and peace-building around concrete interventions” (Ekiyor, 2008). Thus, ECPF is the main document of ECOWAS as it comprehensively accommodates different components including early warning system, preventive diplomacy, democratic governance, rule of law, human rights, etc. However, “the implementation of the preventive aspects of the mechanism has at times lacked a strategic approach which is characterized by weak internal coordination, under-utilization, and misdirection of existing human resources as well as the deployment of limited instruments” (ECOWAS, 2008). The ECPF consists of fourteen components concerning conflict prevention, human security, as well as sustainable peace-building, of which the ECOWAS standby force is an essential component.

ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN): The ECOWARN is an observation and monitoring network across West Africa for early detection of a potential crisis and conflict prevention. It monitors various indicators of security threats such as pandemics, natural disasters, and social factors like social unrest and armed conflict. ECOWARN has to alert the ECOWAS Commission, Abuja for any emerging security threats in the region. However, there was a critical disconnect between early warning and effective early response and to bridge this gap the ECOWAS early warning directorate has now established the National Early Warning and Response Mechanism (NEWRM) which is believed to increase the ownership of member states as well as their political will and ability to engage in early response.

West African Civil Society Forum (WACSO): It is a platform for the aggregation of civil society organizations across the 15 states of West Africa. It was founded to channel contributions of civil society towards implementing the regional integration agenda of the ECOWAS. Civil society organizations have increasingly become inevitable and are playing an active role in conflict management.

ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF): ECOWAS achieved a monumental milestone with the formation of the “ECOWAS standby force (ESF) which is a multidisciplinary force composed of military, police, and civilian personnel from the ECOWAS member states. The ESF provides personnel for regional and continental peace and security operations as well as humanitarian support missions” (Cilliers, 2008).

ECOWAS Response to West Africa’s Security Challenges

Incessant state collapses, military coups and violent conflicts in the 1990s and early 2000s in West Africa received a response from the ECOWAS, especially in the condition of the ensuing international disengagement from the conflicts in Africa. ECOWAS undertook military interventions in civil wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, Ivory Coast, Mali, and the Gambia and its tasks included peace enforcement, implementing peace-building programs, and safeguarding civilians. The armed insurgency by Charles Taylor and subsequent civil war in Liberia appears to be a significant step in the transformation of ECOWAS. At that time there was no institution designed to respond to the conflict, and even reluctance of

AU and the United States made the situation worse. The ECOWAS was forced to develop hurriedly an ad-hoc mechanism to take control of the situation. Initially, an attempt was made to resolve the Liberian conflict through peaceful means, and a standing mediation committee (SMC) was established in 1990 with the responsibility of ending the conflict peacefully. After several weeks of unproductive talks, the ECOWAS monitoring group was deployed. Similarly, ECOMOG also intervened in Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau in 1998, to restore peace and stability. The peacekeeping force was sent to Ivory Coast in December 2002 and another peacekeeping operation was initiated in Liberia for the second time in August 2003. The ECOWAS also intervened in Guinea, Mali, and the Gambia for different reasons. The military intervention of ECOMOG forces in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, and the Ivory Coast significantly contributed to the re-establishment of peace in West Africa's troubled region (Obi, 2009). The “organization has achieved mixed results in these interventions with relative successes in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Ivory Coast and abysmal failure in Guinea Bissau” (Kabia, 2011).

ECOWAS should be given due credit for taking reasonable and timely steps to address the dangerous humanitarian crises, collapses of states and contagion spread of conflicts. It has demonstrated coherence, strength, and capability to conduct peacekeeping, and cooperate for sustainable peace-building through several operations, treaties, and protocols. ECOWAS has shown profound ability to revamp the organization according to changing regional dynamics by connecting socio-economic development and as well as security with the purpose of regional integration. It has successfully demonstrated its competence and willingness to work in cooperation with all stakeholders whether regional, multilateral or global like AU, EU, and the UN. The ECOWAS military interventions in West Africa also opened new possibilities and hope for African states by establishing a successful mechanism for conflict prevention and peace-building.

However, an analysis of ECOWAS responses to West Africa's security challenges in the past quarter-century suggests that its conflict management tools are not as strong as its conflict prevention tools. Currently, the ECOWAS Standby Force does not have enough financial and logistical capability to deploy in the condition of a large-scale conflict. ECOWAS built a depot in Sierra Leone in an attempt to resolve the problem of logistics, but it is unlikely to solve the problem. Moreover, it is unclear whether Nigeria will contribute as troops as it has pledged for an ESF mission, given that it is itself facing internal security challenges. It will create a serious problem for ECOWAS as Nigeria is supposed to contribute more than half of the troops in an ESF mission. It was illustrated in the case of Guinea Bissau, where ECOWAS fared quite abysmally with its small peacekeeping mission in the country, ECOMIB. On the other hand, ECOWAS seems to have made significant development in its conflict prevention mechanism. The EU is providing substantial finance for the effective implementation of the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework and to strengthen the institutional capacity of ECOWAS. However, all these developments will have little effect, if member states will not give active support and implement the organizational agenda of ECOWAS. In this context, the contribution and support of Nigeria are particularly important as it provides about 60 per cent of the ECOWAS budget. The future socio-economic and security situation of the country and the ability of ECOWAS to address regional security threats are interlinked.

It is manifest that the region is taking responsibility and ownership for their security. It West African nations have created a vibrant architecture for conflict management and peace-building and ECOWAS deserves admiration for its security structure. The continuous efforts for the institutionalization of peace and security mechanisms and the promotion of good governance, political freedom, and economic development in the region are some significant steps in the right direction. The ECOWAS actions are now also focused on the issues and threats of terrorism, maritime piracy, drug trafficking, the threats of proliferation of small arms, and transnational organized crimes which are directly or indirectly affecting the region.

ECOWAS and Counter-terrorism

The terror activities in West Africa have met with firm resistance from the governments of the region which are affected by it. In this regard, ECOWAS has also played a crucial role and contributed significantly. In 1999, the ECOWAS adopted the protocol on conflict prevention, management, and resolution, peacekeeping, and security (Bolaji, 2010). Subsequently, “it adopted the protocol on democracy and good governance to ensure the rule of law and consolidation of democracy. This was also carried out for greater efficiency in its approach to check terrorist activities in the region” (Onuoha, 2010). One of the crucial points in the 1999 security mechanism is its emphasis on terrorism, to the extent that Article 3 of the mechanism did anticipate and take measures directed at addressing the threat of terrorism even before the official declaration of the Global War on Terror (GWOT) is commendable. Besides, member states of ECOWAS are also signatories to the Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism of the African Union (AU). Further, “ECOWAS has also adopted the Political Declaration and Common Position against Terrorism. Such a declaration has provided a regional counter-terrorism strategy and implementation plan to help ECOWAS member states to fight terrorism. It is believed that this strategy will be beneficial in the progress of the implementation of regional, continental and international instruments in combating terrorism. It will further provide a common operational framework for a community-wide action to prevent and eradicate all terrorists’ related activities in West Africa” (Ewi, n.d.).

The ECOWAS commission with its robust strategy on counter-terrorism has identified “three pillars of counter-terrorism:

1. First, which constitutes the central pillar of the strategy is to prevent terrorism before it occurs based on the concept of Detect, Intercept and Deter (DID).
2. Second, to ensure timely and effective responses to terrorist acts, anchored on military and non-military approaches as well as the criminal justice system. One of the key objectives is to eliminate impunity and ensure that all those who participate, support, finance, and facilitate terrorist acts, whether directly or indirectly, are investigated, prosecuted, and punished to the limit allowed by the law.
3. Third, to restore society and reassert the authority of the state after terrorist attacks.

This strategy is based on regional and international cooperation including mutual legal assistance to meet the shortfalls and disparities in states' capabilities. Above all, it requires cooperation in the areas of intelligence, investigation, prosecution, and counter-terrorism” (ECOWAS Commission).

ECOWAS has worked hard to control the terrorist activities in West Africa especially those of Boko Haram. “After a terrorist attack by Boko Haram in a college in February 2014, ECOWAS quickly met at Abuja, Nigeria, and through its commission strongly condemned the unprovoked attack by the terrorist group which resulted in the deaths of some 50 innocent students. The ECOWAS set up an on-the-spot commission, called the Abuja commission. The commission assured the Government and good people of Nigeria that the entire community stood solidly behind them in that moment of grief and in the collective efforts to rid the country and the region of terrorism, a dangerous cankerworm that had not spared any part of the globe” (Nkwi, 2013). “The members of ECOWAS also reminded themselves that the Boko Haram, which meant ‘Western education is sin’ in the local Hausa language, had killed over 1,200 since 2009, when it launched its violent campaign aimed at imposing the Islamic Sharia law on the predominantly-Muslim north, among other objectives” (Musa, 2012). “The terror attacks by the group have continued despite the efforts by the Nigerian government, including the deployment of troops to the affected region and the imposition of emergency in the worst-hit areas. The previous month had witnessed attacks on churches in northern Kaduna state which also triggered reprisal attacks by Christians and raised the spectre of religious warfare in Africa's most populous state, which was almost equally divided between Muslims and Christians. The latest terrorist attack was a wake-up call, not just on the Nigerian authorities, but on every member states and all the citizens to remain vigilant and more importantly, to join hands with all relevant agencies in the battle against terrorism not only in Nigeria but in entire West Africa” (Nkwi, 2013). “The commission also reaffirmed its commitment and determination to collaborate with all member states and other partners in the struggle to make the region terror-free and to promote the necessary environment for peace and security towards realizing the overarching goal of regional integration and development thereby keeping states within the brackets of political stability. The ECOWAS members further met at Ivory Coast in June to reaffirm their commitment and responsibility towards keeping Nigeria stable out of the chaos of Boko Haram” (Nkwi, 2013). “The ECOWAS urged member states and the international community at Yamoussoukro, Ivory Coast, to assist Nigeria in its efforts to combat Boko Haram. The leaders of the 15-member bloc strongly condemned the terrorist aggression perpetrated by the sect and directed the ECOWAS Commission to participate in the efforts to halt the terrorist aggression” (Bolaji, 2010).

However, the lack of an implementation strategy, a perennial challenge to attaining regional goals, has derailed any efforts towards fighting terrorism in West Africa. Major-General Adu-Amanfoh cautions that “ECOWAS is not adequately resourced to play a central role. ECOWAS, in its small way, can support the big powers and major stakeholders to deal with the threat. The emerging challenge of terrorism calls for comprehensive coordination between local, national, supra-national, and international actors”. The ECOWAS requires the proactive implementation of counter-terrorism strategies with an emphasis on the promotion of good governance to resolve the socio-economic grievances, and the option to use military forces when the situation demands. The member-states of ECOWAS need to adopt such measures at both the national and regional levels to combat terrorism in the region.

Conclusion

The ECOWAS has achieved monumental success in establishing a multidimensional regional organization for peace and security in the West Africa. The policies formulated are well developed, however, the organization has lagged in their implementation. Further, conflict prevention has been given more attention through mediation efforts and early warning systems which are very impressive. However, a major challenge that remained is to turning this early warning into an early response. Despite the positive indication towards democratic principles and ECOWAS of people doctrine, West African states are still grappling with the objective of establishment of constitutionalism and conducting a free and fair election due to poor infrastructure, inadequate revenue generation, and lack of will power of political and military leaders who are more interested in securing their vested interests.

Today, the West African states are facing many security challenges like terrorism, maritime piracy, drug trafficking, transnational criminal activities, armed conflicts, military coup, and others. These challenges have aroused concerns that they could well derail the hard-won economic stability and will also undermine the future development course of these nations. The threats posed by terrorist groups in the region underscores the lack of a counter-terrorism implementation plan by ECOWAS, whose members have though demonstrated a willingness to formulate the policies but have failed to implement them. The ECOWAS Head of States meeting in Accra, Ghana, on the threat posed by Boko Haram on 30 May 2014, after the abduction of nearly 300 schoolgirls in Northern Nigeria, to a certain extent, was reactionary and may be termed as 'having shut the door after the horse has bolted'. Whether the meeting and measures have any meaningful impact on ECOWAS counter-terrorism strategy is yet to be seen.

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