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## ISLAMIST TERRORISM IN AFRICA IN THE 2010–2020s: MAIN TRENDS AND PROSPECTS

Andrey E. YASHLAVSKII,  
ORCID 0000-0001-6112-3176, [dossier@mail.ru](mailto:dossier@mail.ru)  
Primakov National Research Institute of World Economy and International Relations, Russian Academy of Sciences (IMEMO), 23, Profsoyuznaya Str., Moscow, 117997, Russian Federation.

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**Abstract.** In recent years, an obvious sign of intensifying terrorist activities by Islamist radicals in Africa has been a steady trend indicating the expanding geography of their extremist actions. Africa turned out to be the region of the world most affected by jihadist terrorism. Moreover, there is an “African U-turn” in the activities of transnational Islamist networks that aim to spread their influence in many regions of the continent. While in the 2010s militant Islamist groups were primarily active in Algeria and Somalia, by the early 2020s the scope of African jihadists’ activities had significantly expanded (mainly in West and Central Africa). At the same time, the Sahel region has become one of the main terrorist hotbeds of jihadist groups on the continent, where the number of violent acts committed by Islamists has doubled annually since 2015. In the article, the author analyzes the causes and specifics of the spreading influence of extremist groups in Africa, examines the significance of internal and external factors that affect these processes, and draws conclusions about the correlation of global and local agendas in the activities of militant Islamists in African countries. The author also makes a prediction that current trends suggest the possibility of new “hot spots” of militant jihadist activities on the continent (in particular, in countries such as Tanzania, Kenya, South Africa) to arise, and the Islamist jihadism in existing hotbeds to intensify.

**Keywords:** Africa, Sahel, Islamism, jihadism, extremism, terrorism, Islamic State, ISIS<sup>1</sup>, IS, Al-Qaeda<sup>2</sup>, Boko Haram<sup>3</sup>, glocalism.

### About author:

Andrey E. YASHLAVSKII, Cand. Sci. (Polit.), Leading Researcher.

## ИСЛАМИСТСКИЙ ТЕРРОРИЗМ В АФРИКЕ В 2010–2020-Е ГОДЫ: ОСНОВНЫЕ ТЕНДЕНЦИИ И ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ

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ЯШЛАВСКИЙ Андрей Эдуардович, кандидат политических наук, ведущий научный сотрудник,  
ORCID 0000-0001-6112-3176, [dossier@mail.ru](mailto:dossier@mail.ru)  
ИМЭМО им. Е.М. Примакова РАН, РФ, 117997 Москва, ул. Профсоюзная, 23.

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**Аннотация.** В последние годы очевидной приметой террористической деятельности радикалов-исламистов в Африке стала устойчивая тенденция к расширению географии своей экстремистской активности. Африка оказалась регионом мира, наиболее пострадавшим от терроризма джихадистов. Более того, в деятельности транснациональных исламистских сетей наблюдается “африканский разворот”, нацеленный на экспансию в ряде регионов континента. Если в 2010-е годы основными районами действий воинствующих исламистских группировок были прежде всего Алжир и Сомали, то к началу 2020-х годов сфера деятельности африканских джихадистов значительно расширилась прежде всего в странах Западной Африки, а также в Центральной Африке. В статье автор анализирует специфику распространения на континенте экстремистских группировок, влияние внутренних и внешних факторов на эти процессы, а также

<sup>1</sup> Terrorist organization banned in the Russian Federation.

<sup>2</sup> Terrorist organization banned in the Russian Federation.

<sup>3</sup> Terrorist organization banned in the Russian Federation.

делает выводы о соотношении глобальной и локальной повесток в деятельности воинствующих исламистов в африканских странах.

**Ключевые слова:** Африка, Сахель, исламизм, джихадизм, экстремизм, терроризм, “Исламское государство” (ИГИЛ, ИГ, *ISIS*), “Аль-Каида”, “Боко Харам”, глокализм.

## INTRODUCTION

The growing global challenges that Africa faced in the first decades of the 21st century, particularly the problem of terrorism and extremism, are the flip side of the continent's increasing political and economic weight in the international relations system observed in recent years. This trend is driven by increasingly active radical Islamist groups, which are associated with transnational jihadist networks while also promoting their own local agendas.

Simultaneously, as Africa's role strengthens on the global stage, the processes taking place there have significant impacts beyond the continent. Notably, in May 2022, the international coalition to combat *ISIS* highlighted the expanding presence of jihadist organizations in Africa as a growing threat to global security.

Islamist terrorism on the African continent is a highly complex, multifaceted, and constantly changing phenomenon, influenced by global, regional, national, and purely local factors. While this paper's scope does not allow for an in-depth analysis of these factors, it aims to highlight the general characteristic trends of this phenomenon in the 2010s and 2020s.

## A NEW HOTPOINT OF EXTREMISM

An obvious feature of the terrorist activity of radical Islamists in Africa is the steady tendency to expand geographically. Over time, this continent “may become the main source of religious radicalism” [1, p. 133], and these fears seem to be coming true. By the early 2020s, the incidence of jihadist violence on the continent had increased 17-fold. According to the UN, “the most striking development of the period under review” (first half of 2021) was that Africa became the world region most affected by jihadist terrorism [2].

Azali Assoumani, President of the Comoros and Chairman of the African Union, told the UN Security Council in March 2023 that terrorism and violent extremism “have really exploded in Africa” in recent years. These issues have generated fear and massive displacement of people, seriously affecting the socio-economic conditions of entire regions [source 1].

While in the 2010s, the main locations of militant Islamist groups' activities were primarily Algeria and Somalia (due to the “echo” of the 1991–2002 civil war in Algeria and the collapse of the Somali state from internecine conflict), by the beginning of the 2020s, the sphere of African jihadist activity had expanded significantly. This expansion primarily impacted West Africa and Central Africa (notably the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Mozambique), as well as North African countries such as Libya and Tunisia.

The Sahel region became one of the main hotbeds of jihadist activity on the continent. The number of violent attacks committed by Islamist groups doubled annually since 2015. In 2019 alone, the region recorded around 2,600 deaths from attacks by violent extremist organizations [3]. According to data published by UN experts in August 2023, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) group nearly doubled the territory it controls in the Republic of Mali in less than a year [source 2]. According to the Global Terrorism Index, the Sahel surpassed the Middle East and South Asia in violence to become the global epicenter of jihadist terrorism, accounting for 43% of the 6,701 deaths in 2022, up from 1% in 2007 [source 3].

American researcher Østebø noted back in 2012, “The rise of Islamist militancy in the Sahel, northern Nigeria, and the Horn of Africa attracted attention to this growing security problem.” He added, “Hopes that historically moderate interpretations of Islam in Africa would be

enough to filter out extremist views from gaining significant traction seem increasingly misplaced" [4].

Groups operating in Africa are affiliated in one way or another with transnational jihadist networks that often compete and are openly at odds with each other.

Since 2014, several militant Islamist groups active in African countries have pledged allegiance (ba'iah) to ISIS, leading to the emergence of several "provinces" (vilayets) of the "Islamic State" in various parts of the continent, including Libya, Algeria, Egypt (the Sinai Peninsula), West Africa (Lake Chad), the Sahel countries, Somalia, Mozambique, and the DRC.

Among the first to pledge allegiance to ISIS in 2014 were various Libyan Islamist groups, and Egyptian terrorists from the Salafist group Ansar Bait al-Maqdis<sup>4</sup>. In 2015, Boko Haram, operating in Nigeria, also pledged allegiance [5, pp. 60-62].

Although these groups operate in different countries and often pursue different goals, and their capabilities and relationships with the central leadership of ISIS differ, a general unifying factor is their dissatisfaction with the socio-political status in their countries. Joining ISIS is seen as a way to change these realities [2].

Paradoxically, the collapse of the self-proclaimed "caliphate" in Syria and Iraq was echoed by the activation of ISIS supporters in Africa, and their importance is recognized even by the leadership of the terrorist network. An editorial in the official weekly of the Islamic State in Arabic, entitled "From Baghdad to Africa," claimed that ISIS had expanded and gone "far beyond the immediate border of the Levant, the Arab region, and even the continent, from Baghdad to Africa!" [6, p. 17].

Moreover, researchers speak of the so-called "African pivot" of ISIS as a fait accompli, noting that starting in 2022, half of the "global operations" declared by this transnational terrorist network were carried out in Africa. For instance, in the first four months of 2022, ISIS

declared more operations in Nigeria than in Iraq. This trend suggests that Africa is not only another center of gravity for the Islamic State but perhaps a new global epicenter of jihadist terrorism [2].

The Islamic State is also linked to relatively new terrorist actors on the African continent, particularly the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). The ADF operates mainly in the east of the DRC and also in Uganda and is estimated to have killed 6,000 civilians in the DRC since 2013. In recent years, the ADF has been linked to ISIS and has called itself Madinah al-Tawhid Waw Mujahideen (City of Monotheism and Holy Warriors) [source 4]. In an attempt to frame its local activities within the context of the "global jihad," the ADF positions itself as the "Central African Province" of ISIS [7, p. 18].

Another new actor among African jihadists is an extremist group associated with the Islamic State, which is active in northern Mozambique. The activities of this group are fraught with the potential spread of the Salafist-jihadist movement to neighboring states, including South Africa and Tanzania [8]. This group, known as Ansar al-Sunna (also known as Ahlu Sunnah wa Jamaah, or ASWJ), declares its affiliation with the "Central African Province of IS" in its propaganda materials [7, p. 21].

Extremist groups associated with IS in Africa (as well as in other parts of the world) compete with movements affiliated with another transnational terrorist network, Al-Qaeda. These include, in particular, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)<sup>5</sup>, which originated from the Salafist Group for Preaching and Jihad that emerged earlier in Algeria. Additionally, several related jihadist groups operating in the Sahel united in 2017 to form the Group to Support Islam and Muslims [9, p. 219].

## ROOTS AND SPROUTS OF TERRORIST ACTIVITY

The expansion and deepening of terrorist activity in various African countries is due

<sup>4</sup> Terrorist organization banned in the Russian Federation.

<sup>5</sup> Terrorist organization banned in the Russian Federation.

to a complex set of reasons, both common to the entire continent and specific to individual regions. It is difficult not to agree with the idea that “the transnational terrorism of the twenty-first century feeds on local and regional conflicts, without which most terrorist groups would never have appeared in the first place. That is the case in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Syria and Iraq, as well as in North and West Africa and the Horn of Africa. Groups like al-Shabaab<sup>6</sup>, Boko Haram, and al-Qaeda in Somalia, Nigeria, and Algeria operate within and profit from local conflicts” [10, p. 5].

Jihadism on the African continent has been growing since the early 2000s due to common characteristics across countries such as weak governance, problematic political culture, corruption, and underdeveloped socio-economic conditions. These factors create a fertile ground for the rise and expansion of terrorist groups, which exploit local grievances and conflicts to gain power and influence.

German political scientists Steinberg and Weber note that the greatest problem of the African continent is the weakness of its states; few manage to control the entire territory that nominally belongs to them [10, p. 7]. Additionally, a number of countries are characterized by noticeable disproportions in regional development. This power vacuum provides numerous opportunities for extremist groups, offering them operational space and a population both for recruiting militants and as a social support base. A very common phenomenon in Africa is the “transparency” of interstate borders. This lack of border control certainly unties the hands of extremist groups, allowing the fusion of Islamist militants with transborder organized crime, including arms smuggling, illegal trade in petroleum products, drug trafficking, human trafficking (including the slave trade), and the organization of migrant crossings. Moreover, the actual terrorist activity of jihadists is not constrained by state borders, further complicating efforts to combat their influence and operations.

<sup>6</sup> Terrorist organization banned in the Russian Federation.

Given the weak role of the state, these circumstances are compounded by the almost inevitable growth of alternative (partially criminal or terrorist) structures. Distribution conflicts concerning access to resources, participation in political life, and the provision of benefits such as education and healthcare facilitate the recruitment of new supporters by jihadists [10, p. 9]. In light of the relative weakness of the state, rampant crime, total corruption, and the ineffectiveness of the Western model of statehood, the demand for the introduction of Islamic legal norms is becoming universal in regions and states where Muslims constitute a relative majority, as noted by the Russian Islamic scholar Malashenko [1, p. 134]. Adherents of Islamist radicalism are trying to exploit this circumstance in their favor. In particular, the “global” jihadist organizations operating in Africa employ a strategy that includes proselytizing Dawah activity alongside enforcing Sharia law on the local population in regions lacking state security forces’ presence and therefore at the mercy of terrorist organizations. With this state of affairs, the territorial and ideological spread of terrorist organizations without a massive counter-effort is almost unavoidable [6].

General reasons for the increase in extremist activity in Africa include factors such as “despair, poverty, hunger, lack of basic services, unemployment, and unconstitutional changes in government,” which continue to lay fertile ground for the expansion of terrorist groups and the flow of fighters, funds, and weapons [source 1].

However, poverty alone cannot serve as an exhaustive explanation for the growth of the extremist threat. Intercommunal conflicts also provide fertile ground for nurturing a terrorist threat. For example, serious tensions between sedentary and nomadic cattle breeders in the Sahel are exploited by militant extremist groups to recruit new supporters [3], which can lead to new rounds of internecine clashes, increasing instability in the already turbulent region. According to the French-Algerian sociologist Ammour, it is no coincidence that in 2013, the founder of

the ISGS, Abu Walid al-Sahrawi, recognized that intercommunal tensions provide an opportunity to fuel social discord, weaken local societies, and establish the authority and legitimacy of militant Islamism. The extremist leader believed that after foreign counterterrorism intervention, extremist Islamist groups should abandon large-scale operations and wait until intercommunal conflicts break out. They could then give these conflicts a religious (Islamic) appearance, thereby strengthening the importance of groups such as the local branch of ISIS: “By triggering social conflict, violent extremist organizations seek to establish their own governance space and present themselves as the most viable entity capable of providing security in the region” [3].

Moreover, Ammour notes that extremist Islamist groups pit communities against each other by imposing their laws through persuasion or coercion and promising poor youth immediate profit and a prosperous future. They then use religious indoctrination to justify their actions [3].

Extremist groups exploit the discontent of marginalized communities to recruit, particularly among young people, who are often driven “into the arms” of jihadists by a lack of economic opportunities, a sense of low social status, and the need to protect property. Additionally, the possession of weapons confers a kind of increased prestigious status [11].

Researchers note that in some cases, terrorist groups effectively use “soft power” tools to secure support. According to Russian researcher Nechitailo, Al-Qaeda-aligned groups in the Sahel “have considerable flexibility in implementing their strategy in the region, which allows them to enlist the support of the civilian population. Their connection with ethnic local communities leads to a gradual, conflict-free integration into the environment, balancing Sharia norms and local traditions” [12, p. 326].

However, over the past decade, Africa has witnessed a steady increase in violence by militant Islamists, much of it directed against civilians. In 2021, a quarter of all attacks associated with this category of radical Islamists (in the Sa-

hel, Somalia, Lake Chad basin, northern Mozambique, and North Africa) were committed against civilians, compared to 14% in 2016 [13].

Religious and ideological factors also play a significant role in the rise of jihadist activity in Africa. Traditionally, Salafism was almost absent from Africa for most of the continent’s history, but a shift in religious practices began in the 1960s and 1970s. Researchers attribute this shift to the influence of reformist “revivalist” movements from the Gulf and South Asian countries, such as Tablighi Jamaat (Society for the Propagation of the Faith), which penetrated Africa, bringing new ideas and resources. These movements, while ostensibly focused on education, social services, and fighting injustice, effectively changed the way Islam was practiced in Africa, challenging local authorities and leading to the emergence of a pan-African Islamist program. Australian researcher Kfir notes, “The threat we see in North Africa and the Sahel has arisen as al-Qaeda and the branches of the Islamic State in West and North Africa recognize that if Salafi-jihadism is to remain vibrant and attractive, it must address local needs as opposed to focusing on the Far Away enemy” [14].

The origins of the first transnational terrorist network structures in Africa (primarily North Africa) are connected with the war in Afghanistan (1979–1989), where fighters from Arab African countries gained combat experience and the ideological baggage of radical militant Islamism, which they brought back to their home countries [15, p. 105].

Modern Islam in Africa is characterized by increased doctrinal heterogeneity and fragmentation, which impacts the actions of Islamic militants. Groups feature selective interpretations of religious tenets, local appropriations, and a lack of ideological coherence, propelling them on multiple potential trajectories that can be difficult to chart [4].

The development of communications has provided a global platform for the dissemination of extremist propaganda. Africanist Bobokhonov notes, “Salafis began their struggle on social

media sites on the Internet. Moreover, the Salafis were the first to join the global network Islam, as they carried out agitation and propaganda of ‘pure Islam’ throughout the 20th century” [16, p. 12].

The capabilities of the World Wide Web, the spread of social networks, and instant messaging have allowed modern Salafist extremists to reach the minds and hearts of their potential followers. Bobokhonov highlights that, unlike the older generation of ideological Salafis who spread their ideas peacefully in mosques, religious schools, and universities, young Salafis united on social media sites both ideologically and politically, taking a hostile stance towards other religious parties and organizations throughout the Muslim world. This led to the formation of a jihadist direction of Salafism in the online space, with its supporters taking to the streets to implement their ideas through armed means [16, p. 12].

In particular, in Tropical Africa, adherents of Salafism did this as part of radical Islamist organizations such as Boko Haram in Nigeria, Al-Shabaab in East African countries, Ansar ad-Din in Mali, and Séléka in the Central African Republic, waging their main struggle against secular states, the Christian population, and Sufi Islam and its historical heritage [16, p. 12]. As in other parts of the world, the method of building an “ideal” Islamic state, from the perspective of militant radicals, is “jihad”, which they understand as an armed struggle.

The events of the “Arab Spring” played a critical role in the expansion of terrorist activity by extremists acting under the banner of “jihad” on African soil. Its echoes are still felt beyond the Arab world itself, including in sub-Saharan Africa. This is particularly connected with the activities of the “Islamic State” (IS), which competes for influence in the jihadist field with the similar and genetically close Al-Qaeda. The network model of this transnational group, which achieved considerable success in the Middle East in the 2010s (primarily in Syria and Iraq), enabled local Islamist movements op-

erating in Africa to come under the formal leadership of IS.

As Russian researcher Kostelyanets notes, the military successes of the “Islamic State” in 2013–2015 in Iraq and Syria “became a serious impetus for the further integration of African Islamists into the international jihad. If Al-Qaeda was moving towards its main goal – the construction of the ‘Great Islamic Caliphate’ – in a roundabout way, by provoking Western countries to occupy Muslim states and destroy the political systems that dominated them, IS immediately began to create an Islamic Caliphate in the Middle East” [15, pp. 108-109].

Most Islamist terrorist groups operating in Africa are characterized to a greater or lesser extent by “glocalist” (combining global and local programs) agendas. At the same time, “an independent pan-African ideology of jihad does not exist”, and the propaganda of groups operating on the continent has a rather narrow common base, according to which all governments in the region (regardless of religious affiliation – whether Muslims or Christians) are “lackeys” of Western imperialism and/or atheism and therefore must be forcibly removed [10, p. 99]. German political scientists Steinberg and Weber rightly note that, regardless of their zone of activity, “jihadists always operate on a continuum between attachment to a locale and transnational aspirations where their actions are often much more strongly determined by the situation in their home country than one might think from their ideological vocabulary with its talk of solidarity with the community of all Muslims (ummah) and common goals such as the liberation of Palestine” [10, p. 10]. Moreover, since the beginning of the 21st century, there are clear signs of the “regionalization” of jihadist activity. This means that terrorist groups are increasingly concentrated in their own region, which applies to both North Africa and the region south of the Sahara.

This trend is also reflected in the “genealogy” of African Islamist groups. Many of them arose as local radical movements and, on a franchise basis, moved under the banner of one or another

er transnational jihadist network, which sometimes leads to internal splits within the leadership of these groups. Leaders may advocate for “joining” either ISIS or Al-Qaeda.

American researchers Bacon and Warner admit that the US focus on preventing the migration of terrorists to Africa turned out to be a miscalculation. They state that “global jihadists” did not move from Afghanistan to the African continent in search of refuge; instead, local Islamist and jihadist groups began to unite and multiply in Africa, eventually entering the orbit of Al-Qaeda and then the Islamic State. This reality led the United States to rethink its counterterrorism strategy, moving away from viewing Africa primarily as a haven for non-African jihadists to counteracting home-grown African jihadist groups [17, p. 76].

An example of how a group that initially emerged with a purely local agenda fit into the context of “global jihad” is the history of the terrorist organization Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), which is active in the Sahel region and emerged in 2015 as a result of the merger of previously existing militant Islamist groups. The leader of ISGS, Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahrawi, was once associated with the left-nationalist Polisario Front, whose declared goal was to end the Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara. During the 1990s and early 2000s, he navigated between emerging militant Islamist groups in the region between the Maghreb and the Sahel. In 2011, the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO)<sup>7</sup> was founded, linked to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). The founders of MUJAO referenced the authority of Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar, the leader of the Afghan Taliban, as well as African historical figures such as Usman dan Fodio (the 19th-century founder of the Sokoto Caliphate) and the reformer Sekou Amadou, who founded the theocratic empire of Massina in what is now Mali [11]. This organization is not unique in its appeals to “ideals of the past”; the Boko Haram group in Nigeria seeks to “restore” the Kanem-

Bornu empire, which once occupied the territory of modern Chad, southwestern Libya, eastern Niger, northeastern Nigeria, and northern Cameroon [12, p. 324].

Sahrawi joined the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) in 2012, becoming a prominent figure in the group. In August 2013, MUJAO, represented by Al-Sahrawi, and the Algerian militant Mokhtar Belmokhtar’s Al-Mulathamun Brigade (Masked Men Brigade), which has close ties to AQIM, announced their merger to form a new paramilitary group, Al-Mourabitoun (Sentinels).

In 2015, Al-Sahrawi unilaterally announced that Al-Mourabitoun pledged allegiance (baʿyah) to the leader of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS), Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. However, a few days later, Belmokhtar rejected this move and reaffirmed his loyalty to Al-Qaeda. As a result, Al-Sahrawi broke away from Al-Mourabitoun, leading to a military clash between supporters of the ISIS and Al-Qaeda factions, resulting in numerous casualties. He then formed the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS). Al-Sahrawi’s oath (baʿyah) was officially recognized by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi only in October 2016, after ISGS operations in Niger and Burkina Faso [11].

## DANGEROUS CONSEQUENCES

The terrorist threat from militant Islamist groups in African countries manifests in several dimensions, including security, socioeconomic and humanitarian impacts, and both domestic and foreign political consequences.

**The security issue.** This is one of the main problems linked to the growing activity of radical Islamist groups in African countries. It can be considered the primary issue upon which other consequences depend.

Terrorist acts such as bombings, murders, kidnappings, and military actions by extremist groups threaten transport infrastructure and various economic activities. Militant raids on populated areas, sometimes capturing them for

<sup>7</sup> Terrorist organization banned in the Russian Federation.

extended periods, highlight the inability of African state authorities to ensure the safety of their populations. This inability to provide social protection for regions subjected to terrorist violence underscores the state's helplessness in the face of violent aggression, which perpetuates constant instability. Additionally, there is a risk that militant radicals will expand into new territories, escalating the situation across the African continent.

The flip side of terrorist activity includes increased use of military force by states, often criticized by human rights activists as violations by security forces, and the emergence of spontaneous militias to counter militant groups [source 5, p. 222].

**Socioeconomic and humanitarian consequences.** The Sahel situation exemplifies the impact of terrorist activity on the humanitarian conditions in African countries. Violence by Islamist groups against civilians has escalated rapidly in this region, leading to a severe humanitarian crisis. In 2017, attacks on civilians comprised a fifth of all violence in the Sahel region (38 out of 187 cases). By 2021, this figure reached 42% (833 out of 2005), making the Sahel the region with the highest level of militant Islamist violence against civilians in Africa, accounting for 60% of such violence on the continent [13].

Examples illustrate the severe humanitarian consequences of terrorist aggression in Africa. In the Liptako-Gourma region (bordering Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger), 2.6 million people were displaced over a decade of conflict. In the Lake Chad Basin, 2.8 million people became refugees, with hundreds of thousands fleeing to neighboring countries

The activities of extremist groups exacerbate humanitarian conditions, create insecurity through terrorist recruitment and control, weaken economies, and spur armed violence, which activates criminal organizations and their illegal activities, further destabilizing the region. The Sahel remains a major transit point for migrants heading from sub-Saharan Africa to North Africa and Europe. Experts predict that continued violence could exponentially increase

population displacement and migration, heightening pressure on northern and coastal African states and European countries [source 6].

**Domestic political consequences.** The turbulence from extremist group activities significantly impacts the domestic political situation in affected countries. Military coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and others from 2020–2023 were often justified by the previous authorities' inability to manage Islamist rebel violence.

**Foreign policy consequences.** Conflicts involving Islamist extremist groups in Africa are highly internationalized. Militants' actions are not confined to single countries; they can easily move across borders and carry out raids in neighboring states. Furthermore, anti-terrorist activities have expanded beyond national boundaries, involving cooperation among African states at regional levels and the participation of foreign actors in combating the rebels.

An example of foreign, non-African participation in the conflict is the involvement of France and the United States in the Sahel region. In 2013–2014, the French armed forces conducted Operation Serval in Mali against Islamist extremists and Tuareg separatists. This operation later evolved into Operation Barkhane, which involved combating Islamist militants in Mali, Chad, Niger, Mauritania, and Burkina Faso, in collaboration with these countries' security forces. The mandate of Operation Barkhane was subsequently expanded to support the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF)<sup>8</sup> in its fight against Boko Haram. Additionally, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) was established. By 2020, France had deployed 5,100 troops in the Sahel region, supported by 15,000 UN peacekeepers.

The United States also increased its military presence in the Sahel, deploying about 1,500 troops and building a drone base in Niger as a platform for striking Islamist groups throughout West and North Africa [source 6].

<sup>8</sup> A multinational formation comprising units from Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria.



This raises doubts about the exclusively counter-terrorist nature of Western countries' intentions, suggesting they may be establishing military bases in African countries for use in their geopolitical confrontations with Russia, China, and others.

Despite Western powers' efforts, the effectiveness of the anti-terrorist fight remains questionable, causing understandable frustration in African countries. This frustration sometimes manifests in demands for foreign troops, particularly French, to leave certain states. Additionally, there is growing interest in cooperating with other actors, such as Russia, in countering extremists.

## CONCLUSIONS

The geographical expansion of Islamist terrorist activity in Africa suggests that new "hot spots" of militant jihadist activity will likely emerge in countries such as Tanzania, Kenya, and South Africa, while existing hotspots will intensify. The combination of global and local agendas will persist, and Africa will continue

to be a primary hotspot of jihadist danger on the global political map.

Preventing the spread of the Islamist extremist threat requires a comprehensive approach, including both forceful and socioeconomic measures to address the conditions that facilitate the growth of extremist movements.

The fight against terrorist groups cannot be confined to national borders; it must involve regional cooperation (e. g., within the framework of ECOWAS in the Sahel countries) and collaboration with world powers.

The split at the regional level, provoked by domestic political processes in several countries, hinders the fight against terrorist rebels. For instance, the threats of military intervention in Niger by the West African ECOWAS alliance, following a coup, not only weakens the fight against extremists but also benefits destructive forces by creating opportunities for exploitation.

Despite the strained relations between the West and Russia, confronting the common terrorist threat could serve as a platform for potential cooperation, albeit in a situational context.

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