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*Marko Filijović**

Athens Institute for Education and Research – ATINER

*Emanuele Oddi***

Institute for Political, Economic and Social Studies – Eurispes, Rome

JIHADISM IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: SPECIFIC FEATURES AND THREAT ASSESSMENT

Abstract

This paper analyzes the activities of jihadists in the region commonly referred to as the “Black Continent”. The authors provide an analysis of the development of jihadist ideology across the world, followed by a closer examination of its specific manifestations in sub-Saharan Africa. This research study utilized a model originally developed by Geoffrey Pridmore in 2011 to analyze the insurgency in the North Caucasus. It includes three key aspects that theorists have identified as necessary for the success of the insurgency: the level of will of the actors involved in achieving the envisioned goals; choosing the strategy of the actors involved; and the extent of external support to the actors involved. The research was based on a content analysis methodology, utilizing a diverse range of reliable data sources, including official reports from international organizations, scientific publications, and newspaper articles. The authors concluded that holy warriors in sub-Saharan Africa possess a strong determination to achieve their goals at the local level. However, this willpower tends to decrease when it comes to global ambitions. When examining their strategy, it becomes

* mfilijovic@yahoo.com

** emanueleoddi@outlook.com

evident that they have adopted a primarily indirect approach. Finally, in the context of external support to African jihadist groups, it has been observed that such support does exist. The basic assumption that sub-Saharan jihadists pose a distinct threat to internationally recognized countries in the region, and that they could potentially establish an entity similar to the Islamic State in sub-Saharan Africa, has been partially confirmed. Although they possess a strong will, an elaborate strategy, and specific external support for achieving local goals, it is unlikely that they will be able to constitute something like a caliphate in the near future.

Keywords: Jihad, Jihadism, holy war, Sub-Saharan Africa, Islamic State, Al-Qaeda, terrorism, strategy

INTRODUCTION

About jihadism and terrorist activities carried out by holy warriors a lot has been written and their activities have been widely reported on, especially following the 2001 Al-Qaeda attack on the USA. A huge number of texts about who they were, where they came from and what their plans were, flooded the covers of the world's leading newspapers, overflowed bookstores and inundated public media space. The fight against that threat was talked about practically on a daily basis and hardly anyone back then could not hear about concepts such as holy war, Islamism, Islamic extremism, terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism, or jihadism.

However, after almost two decades, and particularly since the so-called Islamic State (which flourished in Iraq and Syria for a short while) collapsed, some other topics have begun to attract public attention, while the war of jihadists against infidels, as could be noticed, became less and less attractive from the media's point of view. Such a judgment is primarily made based on the fact that, in the last few years, this topic has been discussed loudly only after a terrorist act happened and primarily when it took place on European soil. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the activities of jihadists have ceased or dried up. On the contrary, they are still very active, but in the Western media they have not been reported on in recent times to the extent that it was done before. To be fair, it should also be emphasised that their involvement in some other

parts of the world has not been commented on much in the past, with the exception of the Middle East. For instance, when it comes to Africa or Asia, the topic has usually been given importance only when a major tragedy occurred, one that involved a considerable number of victims (mainly women and children) or produced significant material damage, but even then the comments would be mostly incidental and superficial, without delving into analyses or explanations of what exactly prompted such events, i.e. what led to them, what are the actors' motives and how to prevent similar tragedies in the future. In this sense, the activities of jihadists in Sub-Saharan Africa have been considerably neglected, although they have been present in the mentioned area for a long time and are quite vital. Moreover, they are characterised by numerous particularities, which require a special and more detailed analysis of their activism. It is not necessary solely for the reason these holy warriors have not been given the attention they deserve until now, but primarily due to the characteristics they have. Namely, although Islamic fundamentalist elements in that part of the world are very diverse, their common trait is that they are extremely agile, widespread and often very brutal when carrying out terrorist actions and this makes them an extremely challenging and very complex threat to African countries and their security forces. Bearing in mind the aforementioned, the need to examine the activities of those jihadists in more detail is more than justified and the moment for such an analysis is also quite appropriate. Due to the fact that with the collapse of ISIL, the jihadists were left without a significant foothold, there is a justified suspicion that they will now perhaps first look for it on the soil of the so-called Dark Continent. Several ideas lead to such a view.

The contraction of the Islamic State's territories in Syria and Iraq has not marked its end. It is current in several areas of the African continent. However, when we talk about jihadism in Africa, we refer to a phenomenology of armed insurgency conducted by different groups at war with each other. Recent branches of the Islamic State on the continent are flanked by dated groups affiliated or allied with Al-Qaeda. Although some sporadic episodes of collaboration between the two fronts in the past, rivalries prevail today. The armed formations belonging to the two great families of global jihadism, in fact, often operate in the same areas and conflict with each other. Armed clashes between the two factions persist over time. On the other hand, the operativity and long-term strategies of the two blocks essentially share particularisms. In itself, jihadism today reconciles global geography and local roots, thanks to a decentralized

structure that does not depend directly on a leader. It is a dynamic system, sustainable and capable of adapting to the multiple contexts where there is a favorable environment for its entrenchment: grievances on the part of the population, social tensions, inadequate living conditions, weak or absent state governance, and unprepared police and military forces. In this sense, as a response to the territorial losses in the Middle East, jihadism has increasingly taken root in certain countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, imposing itself as a successful brand. The severity of the situation is vividly evoked by the fact that the Sahel had the highest number of terrorism victims globally in 2023. Additionally, it is worth noting that eleven out of the twenty countries considered most at risk for terrorist attacks are African countries (IEP 2023).

However, in order to adequately examine how and to what extent African jihadists threaten the countries against which they act, it is necessary to first briefly point out what the basic postulates of jihadism are, i.e., what is the main goal of these holy warriors and what are they doing to achieve it? In order to provide answers to these questions, it is also necessary to explain what the position of jihadists was in the religious and political aspect of Islam at its beginning, and what it is today. How has the holy war evolved from a state issue to an ideological one? Only then, using the concept devised by Jeffrey Predmore, can we establish whether African jihadists possess sufficient will, appropriate strategy and external support to carry out their plans.

BASIC CHARACTERISTICS AND THE EVOLUTION OF JIHADISM

Probably the most adequate explanation of what jihadism actually represents and how its evolutionary path has flowed since the beginning of the Islamic faith to the present day, can be found in the book by Walid Phares titled “Future Jihad: Terrorist Strategies against the West” (2006).

The author begins the history of the development of holy war by explaining that the concept of jihad dates back to the very beginnings of Islam as a religion. He explains that jihad was the duty of every Muslim - the so-called *wajib* - and served as a “weapon of Islam” against the infidels in terms of spreading the religion and the state (caliphate). It found the *raison d’etre* in the current events of that era, while its more significant radicalisation came with the decline of the Abbasid power in the 11th century. At that time, the Muslims simultaneously faced enemies on two

fronts – the Crusaders who were invading from the west and the Mongols who were threatening to swarm from the east. For Allah’s followers, such a situation was experienced as something that could end the caliphate forever, and many considered at the time that was happening because Muslims had moved away from the original principles of their religion, i.e., that it was a kind of punishment for their irresponsible attitude towards it. Precisely for this reason, one of the main questions that prevailed within the Islamic world at that time was how to rekindle people and encourage them to be more devoted and dedicated to the faith and thus revitalise the state, which began to collapse rapidly. In this respect, a convenient solution was invented by the Islamic scholar and chronicler Ibn Taymiyyah, who created the doctrine of jihad and takfir, in order to enable the caliph to legitimise the opponents of jihad, by declaring an individual or a group as infidels with the help of a cleric. The term kuffar or kafir was reserved for those who were considered enemies of the state, against whom the ruler declared a holy war and thus drafted the nation (Ummah). What is important to point out in this matter is that the incriminated enemies of the caliphate were not only members of other religions, but also those Muslims who “did not sufficiently” adhere to the original principles of the Quran. The historical moment in which all this occurred obviously left a strong mark, given that the ideas of jihad and takfir persisted throughout the centuries, until the fall of the last caliphate (Ottoman Empire) in 1924. Afterwards, these ideas acquired a new dimension, because due to the process of decolonisation, the collapse of great empires and the ethnic national establishment of the Middle East, no one found it appropriate to take upon themselves a proclamation of a new caliphate. Such a combination of circumstances produced a situation in which the (newly) formed Muslim countries began to accept and implement the obligations established by international law and recognise the legitimacy of international organisations. However, some of the Prophet’s followers met it with open displeasure. Believing that what was happening would cause an increasing degradation of the Muslim world and the Islamic faith, they decided to take matters into their own hands and undertake certain actions. Determined to “return to the roots”, they first revived the ideas of takfir and jihad and declared themselves defenders of the Islamic faith, with the aim of setting off a new wave of the fight against the infidels.¹ Although the people

¹ It is important to note that jihad, as a religious phenomenon, is originally considered as an “effort” to achieve spiritual goals and demonstrate one’s dedication to the faith. It is a

did not give them any official legitimacy, those holy warriors were determined to achieve their goals without choosing means. Guided by the Prophet's original commands, i.e. transferring the interpretations of the holy scriptures and the Quran to modern times, their plan was to restore the former path of Islamic expansionism and accomplish three consistent goals: liberation (*tahrir*), unification (*tawheed*) and caliphate (*khalifa*). Regardless of the fact that their ideas, according to the opinion of the majority of people in the world, are not suitable for the given circumstances, they were determined to carry out their actions in a way that corresponds to the initial principles of Islam. Determined that the basic norms of international law and the international borders established on the basis of them should not be accepted, these holy warriors came to understand that Islam obliges them to adhere to jihad, while they continue to convey the Prophet's last message from God. Within that process, their firm belief is that they are the legitimate heirs of the ancient Muhammadan tradition, and that other Muslims have strayed from the true path of Islam. These "chosen" defenders of the faith persistently claim that their interpretation of the Quran is the only one that should be acceptable and that they represent an authentic Islamic civilisation, constantly emphasising their adherence to the holy scriptures at the forefront. Although such a belief is not exactly in accordance with the original interpretations about who has the right to call for a holy war – which is something numerous and unfinished discussions are still lead about – these self-proclaimed guardians of Islam nevertheless have launched a jihad against the infidels and strive to persevere until their goals are met. In accordance with the envisaged plan, these modern holy warriors first tend to liberate all Muslim countries, i.e., all regions that were once under the auspices of the caliphate, including those areas where numerous Muslim communities in Europe, Asia and Africa live today. After they achieve this, the liberated countries are to be united within defined borders and then the caliphate is to be consolidated (Phares 2006, 78–89).

context-specific term used to describe efforts directed against evil intentions and passions, representing an ideological and moral fight. For example, jihad can be directed against temptations or aspects of one's own personality associated with evil intentions. On the other hand, jihadism refers to the ideological and fundamentalist interpretation of engaging in a holy war against infidels. It represents a rigid concept that emerged later in the history of Islam, taking the form of collective violent repression, armed struggle, or war. The non-Islamic world often associates the concept of jihad with this form.

However, as reported by certain media referring to the statements of some experts who are engaged in the study of this threat, the plan of the jihadists has further developed and improved for several decades and now includes global ambitions. Called simply “Plan 3000”, the latest idea of the holy warriors implies two basic phases: the first, within which the establishment of an all-Islamic state spreading from the Atlantic and Spain to the Urals, is foreseen in order to connect all Muslims into a single unity (which coincides with the earlier plans); and the second, which represents an upgrade of the previous idea, and according to which a global Fatah should be declared by the year 3000, i.e. the beginning of Islamisation of the whole world (Blic 2011).

However, in order for this grandiose project to be accomplished in practice, there is a precondition that the efforts of the jihadists should be consolidated and fortified in some way, given that there are visible organisational and other differences among the “chosen ones”, primarily in terms of selecting the appropriate method for achieving that goal. In this context, Phares’s (2006, 88–89) observations (presented in the book we have already mentioned) point to the conclusion that the necessary consolidation is already underway. Namely, the author basically divided the activities of contemporary jihadists into three groups, each representing a specific strategy. According to the proposed categorisation, he points out that the first is the Saudi Wahhabis who represent the Sunni-Wahhabist network and who is pushing a strategy called “jihad from top to bottom”; then the Muslim Brotherhood, which with its branches advocates the approach of “jihad from the bottom to the top”; and Iranian-Shia jihadists with a strategic concept defined as a “Shia superpower”. Phares claims that they have acted jointly since 1992, when the representatives of these main “currents” gathered in Khartoum² and at that kind of “conference” established an agreement on the formation of an international jihadist network. According to the agreed concept, every local battlefield in the world will be managed by local forces (in Sudan, Syria, Kashmir, etc.) and will have their own local command and organisation, while they will be assisted by the so-called coordinating body, primarily regarding the infiltration of jihadists into Muslim communities and local and national institutions and in the context of raising funds for the holy war. On the other hand, the jihadist international network, led by the coordinating body mentioned, operates globally, and offers logistical and other forms of support to local fighters. It also actively recruits highly skilled jihadists

² The author did not specify any specific reasons for the meeting in Khartoum.

from different national cartels, at all levels of engagement. As highlighted by the author, this carefully selected warrior elite undergoes rigorous training to become a central force capable of intervening anywhere and participating in significant global missions (Phares 2006, 152–153).

In order to carry out this concept in practice, the holy war is fought on several different battlefields at the same time. Moreover, considering the fact that on each local battlefield there is a different dynamic conditioned by the current circumstances, local (sub)plans are continuously being developed. However, as Phares (2006, 88–89; 90–94; 152–153) explains, although fairly well conceived, this mega-strategy is still not fully structured. Even today, it does not have a precisely defined construct, firm rules and organisation, as well as the clearest hierarchy. In other words, it continues to develop in accordance with changes in the international environment, so it is not a rare case that one of the mentioned (sub)strategies represented by the mentioned main currents occasionally prevails locally, i.e., seems dominant. Although in fulfilling the goal of establishing the caliphate and securing its maximum expansion all three are compatible, some of them are more prominent in certain periods and (sub)variations that occur on different battlefields determined by local characteristics (historical, cultural, and other). In addition to confirming the inarticulateness of the Jihadi mega-strategy, they also point to the extraordinary complexity of this threat that the target countries of the holy warriors are facing, which is probably expressed most strikingly and in the widest spectrum in Sub-Saharan Africa.

SPECIFICITY OF THE HOLY WAR IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

As highlighted above, the phenomenon of jihadist-motivated terrorism is increasingly rooted in sub-Saharan Africa in terms of its social and economic impact. According to the “Global Terrorism Index 2023”, among the top 50 countries in the world for the terrorism phenomenon impact (not exclusively in its jihadist matrix), there were 23 African countries. More in detail, 38 out of the 50 deadliest attacks in 2023 were recorded across Africa. These data confirm a long-term trend, which sees the African continent increasingly affected by the jihadist insurgency (IEP 2023).

The spread of jihadist groups through Africa has been possible due to a combination of structural factors. This combination has created a

favourable environment for the entrenchment and radicalization of non-state armed groups. Firstly, most of these were born in armed conflict contexts. In a few cases, the outbreak of insurgency was the source of the conflict itself. A second element that characterizes African jihadist groups is the constant competition with governments, at national and local levels. In this sense, armed groups implement military strategies and propaganda to delegitimize central and traditional political leadership. Delegitimization is achieved through the dissemination of propaganda and direct attacks on local and national political representatives. Although modest in terms of manpower and strategic-military capabilities, today many jihadist African groups operate as full-fledged proto/para-state actors that challenge state authority, not only through the monopoly on violence, but also the provision of basic state services: health, security, education, justice, and welfare (UNDP 2022).

The contexts where jihadist militias are present share certain grievances, such as the absence or scarce presence of central institutions; the widespread economic and administrative corruption; the marginalisation of specific sections of the local population (economic, religious, or ethnic discrimination); and the scarce ability to resolve land disputes. These latter elements overlap with geographical factors. The current world climate crisis, with a tremendous impact on Sub-Saharan African countries, has reduced the availability of natural resources, such as water and land. It has highlighted the inadequacy of governmental redistribution politics. This dynamic has aggravated, or created, previously latent and low-profile conflicts between the different sections of the population engaged in the primary sector: farmers, herders, hunters, and fishers. Although prevalent in certain areas, competition for natural resources alone is not sufficient to lead to armed insurgency. It has exacerbated tensions on an ethnic basis by influencing or being influenced by national socio-economic policies. The second geographical aspect common to African jihadist groups is their constant development along borders. The porous international borders in the regions considered allowed non-state armed groups to take root and set up bases in areas militarily poorly or not at all manned. The ability to act across multiple states is a central element in the evolution of jihadist insurgency in Africa. Thanks to a high level of mobility, jihadist armed groups established along the borders several logistical bases where to retreat, rearm and recover, even after possible military defeats. Despite repeated attempts, the poor coordination between local and international forces has not been achieved to stop

militia floating along the borders. The chance to claim attacks in several countries has amplified the media impact of insurgent groups that are militarily modest (UNDP 2022).

However, this general framework describes some elements of the African jihadist insurgency but does not exhaust its characterisation. Every jihadi militia operates and originates mainly from local dynamics, contexts, and objectives. Secondarily in terms of strategic relevance, they are affiliated with transnational jihadist organisations, namely Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State.

Although at an early stage, the groups related to the two organisations have sporadic cooperation (as in the attack on Gran Bassam in Côte d'Ivoire in 2016), today inner armed conflict prevails in the jihadist front. The two factions, Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State contrast and fight each other bitterly with no holds barred. However, what is relevant is not the logic of a clash between Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State conducted through proxy armed groups. Rather, it is the competition between local armed groups trying to prevail over a direct competitor for the control of territories and (human and natural) resources.

It is hard to map all the jihadist groups operational in Sub-Saharan Africa, as some operate without pledges or official affiliations. In the African jihadist context today Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State are essentially equivalent. Al-Qaeda has received pledges from the federation of groups operating in the Sahel under the acronym Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), the two eponymous groups Ansarul Islam in Nigeria and Burkina Faso, and the Somali group Al-Shabab. These groups, except for Ansarul Islam in Burkina Faso, were founded in the late 1990s and early 2000s and represent the background of historical African jihadist armed militias. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the Islamic State has five provinces (Sahel, West Africa, Central Africa, Somalia, and Mozambique). Except for the Central African and Mozambique provinces, the others originated roughly in 2015 and from a break with groups previously affiliated with Al-Qaeda (UNDP 2023, 47–51).

Beyond these differences, it is possible to separate African countries into at least three macro-categories depending on the context in which jihadist groups operate. The first is the Sub-Saharan African countries where jihadist groups affiliated and recognised by international jihadist groups operate, are rooted and have proven logistical bases (namely Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Somalia, Kenya, Mozambique). The second category is

represented by countries where jihadists do not have military bases, but the militiamen are reported in the country, either for sporadic military activities or financial ones: Mauritania, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Tanzania, and South Africa. Finally, the third macro category includes all the other countries, i.e., those where there are no interceptable activities of jihadist groups.

ANALYSIS OF THE JIHADISTS ACTIVISM IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: APPLICATION OF JEFFREY PREDMORE'S MODEL

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of jihadist activity in the mentioned area, we have selected a suitable model presented by Jeffrey Predmore. This analytical framework was initially utilized in analysing the insurgency in the North Caucasus in 2011. It includes three key aspects that theorists have identified as necessary for insurgency success (Predmore 2011).

The first aspect was noticed as early as 1975 by Andrew Mack and it addresses the issue of the will of the insurgents, because it has long been considered a critical factor in the success of military operations (Mack 1975). In this respect, it can be said that in Africa jihadist insurgents demonstrate heightened will to pursue their objectives over time. It does not mean African jihadists seek predefined and monolithic goals. These armed groups are characterised by high context adaptability, also referring to armed fighting. The general and primary objectives of these groups are essentially local. These goals are related to social, political, ethnic, economic, or religious issues. Grievances which cause insurgency are mostly present before jihadist radicalisation. However, jihadist radicalisation is a useful indicator to test the groups' will: are they still trying to achieve local goals, or have they adapted objectives to the external orders (Al-Qaeda or the Islamic State)? The jihadist rhetoric seems to be a surface framework that encompasses local goals. A strong will to pursue such objectives has allowed armed groups to gain an advantage from the branding process linked to international terrorist organisations' affiliations.

We can find at least three tiers of will that characterise jihadist African groups. The first, the most common to African jihadist groups, is the willpower to achieve essentially local goals related to political and economic marginalisation, resource management or social

redemption. From this perspective, most African jihadist groups operate in circumscribed geographical areas to support a specific social group, defined on an ethnic, religious, or socioeconomic basis. Asserting the local will of jihadist groups is determined only by a single element would be a mistake. Rather, groups' will, and subsequently their military strategies, are defined by complementary factors. At this level, the will of the jihadist groups is to create a geographically restricted area to be controlled and managed in the form of a proto state (UNDP 2023, 61–82).

A will to reach national goals defines a second-tier will, more ambitious in terms of territoriality and strategies. From this perspective today not all African jihadist groups are characterised by the will to pursue national objectives. Here we mean armed groups do not have the will to achieve territorial control on a national level or to attack central government assets (e.g. governmental buildings in the capital).

Finally, the third tier of the will of African jihadist groups is international. We do not consider a symptom of international will attacks against international troops or cross-border incursions. Foreign troops are always present in Africa where jihadist groups operate. Therefore, attacks against the foreign military are a consequence of localised conflicts, instead of the result of the will to strike international targets. Secondly, cross-border attacks are the consequence of jihadist groups' geographical location. Always straddling border areas, attacks in a country different from the group's country of origin are a natural strategic-military evolution, rather than an attempt at territorial expansion.

These different will levels vary over time and overlap each other depending on the changing political, social, and military context. Among those considered, each group has repeatedly changed its goals while maintaining the will to achieve them, adapting its strategies accordingly.

Another important aspect of the analysis of jihadism in Africa is the question of strategy. Namely, as argued by Arreguin-Toft (2001, 99–111), the choice of strategy is of crucial importance for winning a war. He explains that two sides in a conflict, in the broadest sense, have two basic strategies: direct and indirect. As a rule, the stronger counterpart (a state) usually wins when both sides choose the same strategy (direct vs. direct or indirect vs. indirect). However, if the opposing sides choose different strategies, then the weaker side (rebels, insurgents) has a significantly better chance of winning. For example, if the weaker side chooses guerrilla warfare (as a form of indirect strategy), it can defeat a stronger opponent that has chosen a conventional military approach

(as a form of direct strategy). On the other hand, it is also possible for a stronger opponent to increase the chances of victory if they start to change their strategy in time, i.e. start to apply the one chosen by the enemy's side. Then the situation usually turns in their favour. Bearing that in mind, it can be said with regard to Africa that there is a mixed and highly variegated context depending on the area and the armed group involved. The strategy adopted by jihadists in Africa is influenced by several elements. Generally speaking, it is possible to state that a greater rooting on territory (in geographical, temporal, and social terms) corresponds to a more diversified military strategy that frequently includes a confrontation with the governments. Another factor that determines strategies is weapon availability, both in quantitative and qualitative terms (Perez 2022).

Analysing the types of military actions carried out over time by African jihadist groups, it is possible to identify a mixed strategy, which alternates guerrilla and direct conflict. In the first case, attacks are directed against both civilians and military forces (local and international). Armed raids, looting, and ambushes are frequent actions whose specific characters change depending on the geographical context and the enemy faced by the guerrillas. African jihadists employ different tactics and weapons. A common pattern for armed raids is to approach the chosen target with motorbikes. Before starting the attack, the surrounding electrical and telecommunications infrastructure are destroyed, to isolate the target. After this, the militiamen surround the target (an urban centre, a military detachment) blocking any escape routes and initiating the attack using small and medium-calibre firearms. In some cases, mortars are employed. Another guerrilla tactic is the assault on civilians and military convoys. These are conducted in two steps. In the first phase, an improvised explosive device (IED) is detonated. Afterwards, militiamen assault the convoy. Another type of guerrilla action is suicide attacks. These can be stand-alone attacks if carried out in a city or represent the first step of a multimodal attack with firearms. Bombers usually wear explosive belts that are detonated once they are near the target. The damage caused is variable and depends essentially on the techniques and material with which the explosive belts are made. A further type of attack, again attributable to guerrilla terrorist actions, is carried out using car bombs. The car with the explosive can be placed near the target and then detonated. Or it can be thrown at the target by a suicide bomber (Mugeci and Refslund 2021).

Parallel to this indirect strategy employing guerrilla tactics, the more structured African jihadist groups pursue a strategy of direct conflict with the military forces (local and international). This strategy is employed in Nigeria by ISWAP (Islamic State West African Province), in the Sahel by JNIM, and in Somalia, by Al-Shabab (Warren and Hulme 2018). Attacks against military bases or assaults on military convoys in most cases are attributable to isolated guerrilla actions aimed at creating localised and temporary disruptions. However, ISWAP, JNIM and Al-Shabab frequently contest large portions of territory to local and international military forces. This strategy, coupled with the indirect strategy, allows armed groups to cyclically expand and defend territories under their control. From a methodological and research perspective, this type of strategy allows scholars and researchers to define, with a certain degree of precision, the areas that are under the control and rule of armed groups. Secondly, it is possible to identify potential or actual lines of conflict patrolled on one side by armed groups and on the other by armed forces. This type of strategy, however, requires high expenditure in terms of human and military resources. For this reason, it is essentially implemented by those groups that are structured (high number of personnel and weapons at their disposal) and have a high level of mobility in the territories under their control.

Considering these elements, we can state that the spectrum of military strategies implemented in Africa by jihadists is extremely varied. Most groups act through agile local cells that, by their low chances of success in a possible direct and prolonged armed clash with military forces, prefer guerrilla and disruptive actions. Some groups, however, have sufficient resources to sustain prolonged and geographically widespread armed clashes. These groups, namely JNIM, ISWAP and Al-Shabab, therefore alternate between indirect and direct military strategies.

As mentioned before, there is a third aspect. Namely, it is important to emphasise that even when the rebels' will to win is very strong and when an appropriate strategy is chosen, it is often not enough to guarantee the victory of the weaker side. This is referred to by Record (2007), who points out that the last and at the same time the most important aspect of the success of an insurgency is the achieved level of external support. In his book "Beating Goliath: Why Insurgencies Win", he notes that expressed will and a viable strategy is quite important variables of insurgency success that can determine the outcome of a conflict, but that external support is nevertheless essential (Record 2007, 23–66). After

all, this is largely confirmed by the study conducted by Paul, Clark and Grill (2010). Analysing the activities of 30 different insurgent movements, they found that the outcome of a conflict is largely determined by the ability of insurgents to attract tangible support (reflected in personnel, finances, material, and information); but also, by their resourcefulness finding a safe haven. Accordingly, it can be pointed out that African jihadist groups' international affiliations are double-way relationships. More than from an ideological point of view, the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda have chosen, and choose, to recognise provinces in Africa for strategic and propaganda reasons. While it is true that there is financial and military support (trainers) for these cells, most of the relations are of a media-propaganda nature. Today, transnational jihadist groups need African provinces more than these cells need an international affiliation. the correlation from a bottom-to-top perspective, the choice that emerges is not strictly ideological but strategic. Ideological elements are exploited to intercept population discontent and co-opting the political claims of the groups thus apparently subordinated. The affiliation with a terrorist organisation with the media exposure of Al-Qaeda or the Islamic State is an important sounding board for the affiliate's claims and fortifies its reputation among the local population and enemies.

The relationship between Sub-Saharan African provinces and the two international terrorism brands responds to the dynamics of extraversion typical of African societies. These dynamics have developed and consolidated over centuries, regulating the interaction between local elites and the external environment. Here we mean the relationship with the 'global' is exploited to compensate for internal difficulties, acquire legitimacy, and acquire autonomous power management (Bayart 2000). From this perspective, African jihadism appears to instrumentalise extraversion dynamics to increase its sovereignty over the local population, unleashing the external donor logic. In other words, in Africa Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State do not impose affiliations or programmatic lines. Instead, African armed groups play an active role during the affiliation process and the setting of goals and strategies.

From this perspective, the affiliations of African groups to international jihadist brands are characterised by different elements. Al-Qaeda-affiliated groups are armed groups with high levels of rooting on territory, both geographically and chronologically. The local armed group-international brand relationship resolves essentially into franchise and media propaganda activities. The long-term strategies, also from

the military point of view, are therefore not settled and coordinated with the central decisional branches of Al-Qaeda but follow local objectives and wills. This latter dynamic is documented also among armed groups affiliated with the Islamic State. However, in addition to its undisputed support in terms of media propaganda, the Islamic State, compared to Al-Qaeda, has a more direct approach (Perez, 2022). Actions carried out by local groups are claimed through the Islamic State's media. Moreover, counter-insurgency jihadist actions have revealed the widespread presence of non-Africans in the ranks of these groups in a training capacity.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the hypothesis that the jihadist phenomenon in Africa is currently in an expansion phase, both regarding its territorial dimension and its impact in military and social terms, appears to be confirmed. African jihadist groups have exploited the structural grievances of some areas of Sub-Saharan Africa to impose their control over territories. These armed formations have penetrated fragile social and economic contexts, distant from political centres and with little state military presence, gaining the hearts and minds of the local population.

It is possible to argue that in areas where the groups themselves have taken root, they *de facto* act as an alternative to the established power. Jihadist groups arise where the state does not guarantee fair and lasting governance. Social discrimination, political marginalization, poor economic development, and violence by regular armed forces are the elements on which these groups rely, structuring parastatal entities and exacerbating (inter-)ethnic conflicts. The overexposure of these areas to climate change, with the consequent decrease in resources – water and land – contributes to increasing fragility and vulnerability of the populations involved.

Predmore's model application confirms the concrete threat posed by such groups. First, the applicability of this model to the African context is verified. Moreover, the application of Predmore's model is definitely advantageous for a rigorous analysis of the plethora of African jihadist groups that are so heterogeneous. From this perspective, three primary considerations emerge from the Predmore model. Concerning the will of the jihadist groups, it is strong regarding local objectives. However, it decreases and is progressively less firm about the will to pursue national/international objectives/actions. Regarding the strategy implemented, this

is primarily indirect. In other words, guerrilla tactics are put in place to pursue local goals. Only the most structured armed groups sometimes employ, not extensively, a direct strategy. Finally, the external support to African jihadist groups is documented. However, it is important to note that this support does not stem from a global jihadist fight against infidels. Instead, it reveals a symbiotic relationship between local militant groups and international terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, driven by mutual benefits and shared objectives. This revelation sheds light on the intricate dynamics at play within these groups and underscores the complexities of their alliances.

In conclusion, it is imperative to adopt a strategic approach when countering jihadism in Sub-Saharan Africa. While acknowledging the presence of transnational jihadist ideology, it is essential not to overestimate its scope. Instead, efforts should be focused on addressing and defusing the local causes that contribute to the spread of armed groups. During the period spanning from the early 2000s to 2015, a number of emerging threats were unfortunately overlooked. With that in mind, it is crucial for governments to recognize and address the escalating threat. This will enable them to effectively monitor the future trajectory of jihadism in Sub-Saharan Africa and take preventive measures, rather than just proactive ones.

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Марко Фијовић*

*Атински институт за образовање и истраживање
– АТИНЕР*

Емануел Оди**

*Институт за политичке, економске и друштвене студије
– Еуриспес, Рим*

ЦИХАДИЗАМ У ПОДСАХАРАСКОЈ АФРИЦИ: СПЕЦИФИЧНЕ ОДЛИКЕ И ПРОЦЕНА ПРЕТЊЕ

Резиме

Предмет истраживања у раду представљају активности цихадиста на простиру тзв. Црног континента. Аутори најпре пружају кратак историјски преглед развоја цихадистичке идеологије на глобалном плану, након чега следи детаљније испитивање њених специфичних манифестација у Подсахарској Африци. Истражујући ову тему, главни циљ био је да се идентификују јединствене карактеристике и изазови које ова претња представља у поменутом региону. У оквиру студије коришћен је модел који је првобитно развио Џефри Предмор 2011. године за анализу побуњеништва на Северном Кавказу. Он укључује три кључна аспекта која су теоретичари идентификовали као неопходна за успех побуњеништва: ниво воље укључених актера за постизањем зацртаних циљева (висок степен воље за победом или одсуство/недовољан степен воље); избор стратегије укључених актера (директна, индиректна или комбинована стратегија); и обим екстерне подршке укљученим актерима (значајна спољна подршка, ограничена спољна подршка или одсуство спољне подршке). Истраживање је засновано на методологији

* mfilijovic@yahoo.com

** emanueleoddi@outlook.com

анализе садржаја, уз коришћење разноврсних извора података, укључујући званичне извештаје релевантних међународних организација, утемељене научне публикације реномираних аутора из дате области и новинске чланке. Аутори су закључили да свети ратници у Подсахарској Африци поседују снажну одлучност да остваре своје циљеве на локалном нивоу. Међутим, њихова снага воље има тенденцију да се смањи када су у питању глобалне амбиције. Када је реч о одабиру префериране стратегије, установљено је да су афрички цихадисти усвојили првенствено индиректан приступ. Они фаворизују герилски начин ратовања, који се показао као веома ефикасан у постизању замишљених циљева. Изузетак представљају високо структуриране оружане групације које повремено користе директну стратегију – конвенционални војни приступ – али не у значајној мери. Коначно, у контексту спољне подршке афричким цихадистичким групама, примећено је да она постоји. Међутим, иста не потиче од глобалне борбе цихадиста против неверника. Уместо тога, она открива симбиотски однос између локалних милитантних група и међународних терористичких организација попут Ал-Каиде и Исламске државе, вођен обостраном користи и заједничким циљевима. Основна претпоставка да подсахарски цихадисти представљају изразиту претњу међународно признатим државама на поменутом континенту и да би потенцијално могли да оснују некакв ентитет сличан Исламској држави у Подсахарској Африци, делимично је потврђена. Иако поседују снажну вољу, добро разрађену стратегију и ограничену спољну подршку за постизање својих циљева, мало је пак вероватно да ће у блиској будућности моћи да успоставе нешто попут калифата. Па ипак, у областима где су афрички свети ратници значајно утврдили своје положаје, они ефективно функционишу као алтернатива легитимно изабраним властима. Манипулишући ситуацијом у којој влада друштвена дискриминација, политичка маргинализација, спор економски развој и насиље које врше регуларне оружане снаге, они су успели да створе

својеврсне парламентарне ентитете, заостравајући при том (међу)етничке сукобе.

Кључне речи: джихадизам, свети рат, Подсахарска Африка, Исламска држава, Ал Каида, тероризам, стратегија

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