



Contemporary security threats in Africa¹

Darko Trifunovic²

Abstract:

The analysis of potential and actual security threats and challenges leads us to the conclusion that Africa is one of the most endangered continents. Constant confrontations, wars, internal political crises, local and international terrorism, organized crime, illegal trade, and other threats on the one hand and, on the other hand, an inadequate response from both individual states and the international community. Is Africa, a continent rich in ores and minerals as well as other possibilities, a training ground for the dominance of superpowers? Are internal instabilities mainly caused by external influences to ensure puppet governments that do not care about the interests of the state and society they represent, but about the interests of the former and current colonial powers? Analysis of threats and risks from one side is only half the job. The second half is the presence of elements of the National Security System of each country, which must work on prevention, and elimination of the consequences of the actions of the bearers of security threats, as well as on the suppression of the bearers themselves. For the successful functioning of the National Security System, it is necessary to develop a “System” of education in the field of Security Studies based on Security Science.

Keywords:

Africa; security; intelligence; National Security System; Security Science.

¹ DOI: <https://doi.org/10.12700/jceas.2024.4.3-4.231>

² Director, Institute for National and International Security.
ORCID: 0000-0003-3591-9554; galileja@yahoo.com.

Introduction

To be able to consider any threats on the African continent at all, we must know the growing threats that come from outside and the big threats that come from each country individually. In modern history, but also in the past, Africa has been seen as part of the spoils of great powers that are fighting and competing for their dominance. The last few decades seem to have borne the consequences of the new paradigm after the end of the Cold War year after year. More than any other part of the globe, Africa has in the past Cold War period been associated with conflict, insecurity, and human rights atrocities. (Abrahamsen, 2013). With these consequences came the aspirations of the great powers marked by internal political and security crises throughout the African continent. The overflow of the Ethiopian Civil War, the Sudanese Civil War, and Egypt's socio-economic crisis into global politics impacted the Red Sea/Suez Sea Lane, toward comprehensive rejection of foreign great power dominance in Africa. That is occurring because of the decline in great power resources and budgets, and, in particular, because of the declining prestige and influence of those external powers. At the same time, African frustration with imported geopolitical models, including artificial borders, is being matched by the growth, or return, of African philosophical and cultural approaches to governance. All of this, coupled with European³ and North American governance issues, will interact with the global population movement crisis.⁴ Africa faces the following major internal security challenges that most, if not all, African countries face: corruption, terrorism, organized crime, illicit trade, drug trafficking, piracy, violence by extremist groups, and, increasingly, cybercrime.

There are also serious external security challenges with actors within African countries such as international terrorism, foreign mercenary armies, as well as the influence of major powers such as Russia, China, the UK, the US, and France to achieve dominance over minerals, oil, and gas through political means and countries rich in minerals. Turkey, some Arab countries, Iran, Germany, Portugal, but more and more India, which is one of the five most important investors in Africa, should be added to this list of countries that have interests and are present in Africa. How and in what way all these countries reflect their interests is a special consideration, as is the related topic of how and in what way these countries secure their interests. Through diplomacy, economic presence and power, or the use of brute force while controlling the political and security situation in certain countries through puppet dictatorial regimes.

The question arises, whether the countries, especially the powerful ones outside of Africa, which are vitally interested in the exploitation of mineral and natural resources, can and want to develop the security system of each country individually. Are African countries able to independently build a strong national security system that would

³ “The swelling influx into Europe of migrants from the Asian and African continents has prompted debates and raised the issue of their integration in the new milieux and of their susceptibility to radicalization” (Milosavljević, Maksimović, 2021).

⁴ *Trend Analysis 2024: Global Security in 2024: Five Contextual Trends, and 10 Possibilities*, Defense & Foreign Affairs, Volume XLII, No. 1, Alexandria, VA, US, 2024



guarantee the peace and security of the country, and thus of the African region in which that country is located? Is it just political will and the lack of adequate educational institutions in the fields of defence, security, and intelligence? If, hypothetically, every African country developed in terms of security and improved its security system, would such circumstances affect greater political and economic independence? Under such circumstances, it would be difficult to abuse these countries in terms of neo-colonialism. Although African countries are largely underdeveloped, such a situation is in contrast to the natural and other resources that these countries have at their disposal. Historically, but also politically, the great powers that have already been present in Africa for centuries in a way that expands the natural and mineral wealth of African countries have at least a moral obligation to help in the development and education of those countries. One of the logical directions of the development of African countries is the possibility that the political leaders of African countries seek greater cooperation with countries that are friendly towards them and that have never shown any sign or desire for domination. This circle of countries includes countries such as Hungary and Serbia, but also other countries of central and Eastern Europe that have extremely large economic, political, educational and other potentials. To achieve this, it is first of all necessary to provide as much information as possible about possible cooperation and potential so that all parties are familiar with the possibilities and modalities of cooperation. This kind of initiative is not only important for African countries, but also for the aforementioned European ones, which in their prospective development plans will have to consider more and more through diplomacy in the future, but also other possibilities of cooperation.

A Security Educational Challenge for Africa

Every country reacts to security risks and threats with adequate institutions. The role of institutions is that they should systematically and comprehensively monitor all risks and threats to security that come from internal and external threat factors. Analysing the content of subjects studied at all military and police academies in Africa, it is seen that key subjects such as Security Science, Security Analytics, Intelligence and Counterintelligence with work methods, and other important subjects are missing from the teaching cycle. In such circumstances, there are no qualified security managers or intelligence members who can do Security Risk Assessments based on general and special methods of Security Science. (Todorovic, Trifunovic, 2020). For the Security System to exist and function successfully, it is necessary to build it based on the law and the constitution the Act of National Security Strategy. This act must contain internal and external threats and risks, as well as the state institutions that are part of the National Security System to counter the above-mentioned risks and threats, such as the army, police, intelligence, in some cases of total defence concept, and the citizens themselves. Again, knowledge of Security Science is the starting point. From Security Science to Security Studies to the next level such as Security Management and finally Security Systems. The main goal of the entire security cycle, from Security Education, National

Security Strategy, and competent institutions is to achieve the main goal - Security Culture. (Piwowarski, Trifunovic, 2023). Considering that Africa is one of the most unstable continents with a high degree of risk, it is necessary to emphasize the fact that in most African countries there is no highly developed system of education in Security Studies that would enable professionals in adequate institutions of the Security System to deal with internal and external risks and threats. There are three major areas to which all actors of the National Security System must pay attention:

1. Threats and risks
2. Assets and Targets
3. Security Capabilities & Resources (National Security System)

Threats and risks

Threats and risks, as mentioned, come from internal and external risk factors. Although most risks are recognizable and the effects of such activities can be extremely visible, to detect them it is necessary to know Security Science and the methods of this science, both general and special ones that are extremely important for creating Security Risk Assessments. Special Security Science methods are used for data collection, data processing, and assessment of data, analysis, and finally predictions. For example, as a method of data collection and analysis, the hybrid algorithm method is used for an in-depth search of social networks. (Stanimirovic, Miskovic, 2014). It is also important to demarcate the risks and threats that come from the actions of man and nature, which are classified as security threats and risks, and those that come from the technical-technological side, which are classified as safety risks and threats. In the literature, these terms are often confused, and in certain languages, such as Italian, only one term *sicurezza* is used, which means both security and safety at the same time, which is not correct. From the classification of security threats and risks, it is possible to conclude that they are mostly present in Africa. (Z.Dragisic, 2020). We will mention the most common ones:

1. Terrorism (terrorist violence, hostage situations, radical and extreme organizations with religious or political motives, and foreign terrorist groups and organizations).
2. Political threats (political coup d'état, political instability, espionage, migration, and other forms of political violence).
3. Violence and Crimes (local criminal groups, international criminal groups, organized crime, narcotics, weapons, luxury goods, kidnappings, financial crimes, fraud).
4. Insurgency - Military (civil war, sabotage, foreign countries, rebels, and other militant groups).
5. Cyber Crime (hacking, viruses, cyber theft, cyber warfare, and subversion of the state).

6. Threats that come from nature:

(Floods, droughts, viruses, lack of market water, radiation).

Assets - Targets

For state institutions from the National Security System to be able to successfully perform their tasks, they must have a list of objects of ultimate protection. In the first place are the facilities of key or vital infrastructure. (Trifunovic, 2019) We will list the most important objects and systems that can be or are the most frequent targets of attacks, i.e., objects of protection:

1. Critical Infrastructure (Facilities for the production and transfer of electricity, water, airports, vital roads, railways, health facilities and institutions, nuclear facilities including laboratories...)
2. Special Objects (state buildings, courthouses, municipalities, HQ police, HQ army, HQ intelligence, HQ emergency services)
3. General Public (kindergartens, schools, universities, public meeting places, sports arenas, public institutions, super malls, and shopping centres)
4. Financial Systems (financial markets, financial institutions, financial instruments)

Knowledge of threats and risks from both the internal and external spheres enables us to draw up a National Security Strategy based on precise data. This strategy must contain, as stated, threats and risks as well as the identification of objects or assets to be defended. In this sense, the state creates an organization of institutions that are part of the National Security System and determines by law the competence of their actions to suppress the mentioned threats, which foresees physical and technical protection as well as intelligence in the sense of collecting data on risks and security threat carriers.

The National Security System represents a set of institutions that act in peace, war, and emergencies to prevent, protect, and eliminate the consequences of security threats and challenges. This system and its functioning in the operational and tactical sense depends in most countries on the supreme act called the National Security Strategy. Actors of the National Security System are the Army, Police, and Intelligence. Special attention is often paid to other segments, such as the role of NGOs and the role of citizens in the National Security System, where the concept of total defence is implemented, according to which every citizen has his place in the defence of the state. Certainly, the ultimate goal of every country, including African countries, is to develop the concept of Security Culture among their citizens, for several reasons. This concept of Security Culture can only develop if all actors in the Security System work together with functional educational institutions. Perhaps the development of Security Culture in African countries is the most necessary at this moment.

Security challenges in Africa?

COVID 19

One of the biggest security challenges was also medical, the COVID-19 pandemic took African countries completely by surprise. Due to the paralyzed security system and the paralyzed health system, African countries faced this danger completely unprepared. An additional problem is the distrust of citizens in local authorities due to excessive corruption, so citizens did not even listen and act according to the instructions of local governments, but left their homes, moved, and entered into various interactions, which only spread the pandemic even more. While countries in the West have progressed tremendously in the vaccination of their citizens, African governments are still lagging (Dorasamy, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic in Africa has only shown how vulnerable this continent and countries are to security challenges coming from the medical arena. Rift Valley fever, rabies, West Nile, chikungunya, dengue, yellow fever, Crimean-Congo haemorrhagic fever, Ebola, and influenza viruses among many other viruses have been reported from different African countries (Chauhan, R.P.; Dessie, Z.G.; Noreddin, A.; El Zowalaty, M.E, 2020). Although various pandemics and viruses are the ultimate threat to people's safety and health, African countries and their governments do very little to plan and systematically act to prevent the occurrence and spread of these dangerous diseases.

Increasing Russian presence in Africa

In the same way, Russian aggression against Ukraine only showed Russian aspirations toward domination in certain African countries. Russia inherited the narrative of the USSR, which was present in Africa, especially among countries that wanted to free themselves or reduce their dependence on the colonial influence of Western countries. Although Russia was not a colonial power in this part of the world, it increased its presence through political influence, which spread primarily because Russia is the largest arms exporter in Africa (Ramanai, 2023).

And not only that. Russia sent its "private" mercenary armies like "E.N.O.T" and "Wagner" throughout Africa, whose presence was followed by numerous crimes. (Human Rights Watch, 2022). Russia's aggression against Ukraine made Russia, which was the second or third superpower in the world, now the second power in Ukraine. At any cost, Russia wanted to divert the attention of the international community from Ukraine to other parts of the world such as the Balkans, the Middle East, Central Asia, and Africa. Thus, thanks to Russian intelligence connections and networks from Ukraine, the focus of the conflict from Ukraine was transferred to the Balkans, Azerbaijan - Armenia, Hamas, and Israel. In the background of these conflicts, Russia provokes instability with all means including Russian mercenaries who are nothing but an extended arm of the Russian services. From Sudan, Mali, Libya, Central African Republic, Congo, Angola, Burkina Faso, the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Madagascar, Zimbabwe, etc. Russia has almost no direct investments in Africa. By exporting weapons



and demonstrating force through mercenary armies and spreading disinformation, Russia's goal in Africa is no different from the goals of other superpowers. They want to occupy parts of Africa to start massive exploitation. At the same time, with disinformation, they want to eliminate Western countries with an anti-Western campaign they are conducting. The leaders of African countries have no reason to rejoice or celebrate the Russian presence. On the contrary, this is already happening in a large number of African countries. In whatever country Russian exponents appeared, crises and political instabilities have occurred or will occur, which can turn into open bloodshed at any moment. In addition to Russia, new or old actors are certainly Turkey, which is increasingly expanding its projection of power and dominance, especially towards Libya and Somalia. Russian malignant influence, which is extremely visible in Europe, has been detected in Africa for the last twenty years. The Russian Federation and its citizens have never felt democracy throughout their history, that's why Russia's presence in Africa, especially in countries ruled by dictators, only further prevents the development of an already fragile democracy on this continent. Russian influence in Africa brought with it special methods that Russia applies in the target countries, from disinformation, psychological effects, propaganda war, as well as other methods and means of hybrid war.

Terrorism

According to the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), the number of terrorist attacks increased in Africa between 2000 and 2018, rising from 330 attacks in 2000 to 2,365 in 2018.⁵ At the end of 2016, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, leader of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), announced that the group had “expanded and shifted some of our command, media, and wealth to Africa.” ISIS’s Dabiq magazine referred to the regions of Africa that were part of its “caliphate:” “The region that includes Sudan, Chad, and Egypt has been named the caliphate province of Alkinaana; the region that includes Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya and Uganda as the province of Habasha; the North African region encompassing Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Nigeria, Niger and Mauritania as the Maghreb, the province of the caliphate.” Leaving aside the mismatched ethnolinguistic groupings included in each of these “provinces,” ISIS’s interest in establishing a presence in Africa has long been a part of its vision for a global caliphate (Siegle, 2017). The leadership and planners of the Islamic Caliphate have great ambitions in Africa, but also a suitable ground for their operations. The umbrella organization for all jihadists is the Muslim Brotherhood, from which different organizations with different names but with one goal later develop. That goal is the establishment of the Islamic caliphate. The platform that these extreme organizations represent is political Islam, which should be realized in any way, including terrorism, terror, guerrilla warfare, and even wars or internal political destabilization. Religion is politicized and serves as a motive for achieving the goals of the mentioned terrorist

⁵ GTD <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?search=Africa&sa.x=34&sa.y=17>

actors. These terrorist organizations have their groups and subgroups and are identically organized, financed, and trained. They have their operatives in the military segment, political, financial, media, non-governmental, but also support in religious circles. We will analyse the activities of jihadists in several African countries listed by the African Center for Strategic Studies:

- Algeria, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM); Tunisia, Shabab al-Tawhid (a.k.a. Ansar al Sharia Tunisia (AST)) • Okba ibn Nafaa Brigade • Soldiers of the Caliphate (a.k.a. Jund al Khilafah);
- Libya, Ansar al Sharia Libya (ASL) – Benghazi • Ansar al Sharia Libya (ASL) – Derna • Wilayat Fezzan (a.k.a. Fezzan Province) • Wilayat Barqa (a.k.a. Cyrenaica Province; f.k.a. Majlis Shura Shabab al Islam) • Wilayat Tarabulus (a.k.a. Tripoli Province);
- Egypt, Ajnad Misr • Ansar Beit al Maqdis (ABM) (a.k.a. Wilayat Sinai)
- Somalia, Al Shabaab • Jahba East Africa;
- Mali/Burkina Faso/Niger, AQIM (a.k.a. the Sahara Emirate) • Al Mourabitoun • Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) • Ansar Dine • Macina Liberation Front (FLM) • Islamic State in the Greater Sahara;
- Nigeria, Boko Haram (a.k.a. Wilayat Gharb Afriqiyah)
- Kenya, Al Hijra (f.k.a. Muslim Youth Center) • Al Muhajiroun (a.k.a. Emigrants of East Africa)⁶.

Analysis of the activities of terrorist organizations

When we talk about the Islamic State or Islamic Caliphate as one of the biggest bearers of the terrorist threat, we can conclude with a quick analysis:

- It is a serious organization that has its groups and subgroups.
- It is about an organization that equally applies terrorism and guerrilla warfare as a method of achieving its goals.
- It is about an organization and structure that uses or abuses Islam as one of the major world religions as a motive for conducting violence and its goals.
- It has a serious system and methods of recruitment.
- Some of the states sponsoring terrorism function completely normally without international sanctions.
- There is a wide-ranging network of so-called humanitarian organizations that serve as coordination for the terrorist network.

⁶ African active militant jihadist groups, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://africacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Africas-Active-Militant-Islamist-Groups-November-2016.pdf



This terrorist organization has a wide-branched worldwide network from which it is financed in diverse ways, directly from some countries, indirectly through so-called humanitarian organizations, participating in illegal operations of organized crime, including the smuggling of weapons, narcotics, and other valuables. The members of this international terrorist organization are deeply penetrated democratic states, and they use all resources available. They have a wide-ranging network of educators and training camps. They use vulnerable categories such as women and children to achieve their goals. When one territory is observed, whether it is a country or, in this case, as a broader term, the entire continent, appropriate parameters must be taken into the analysis, as is the case with the parameters and characteristics mentioned above. It is a well-known fact that almost nothing competent is being done in Africa from the position of Security Science on the process of de-radicalization with obvious examples such as the case of Kenya and Mozambique. In a world in which polarization of views is all too apparent, and where extremism is sometimes expressed in violent and terrorist acts, understanding the factors and processes involved in radicalization and the occasional transition from extreme views to violent actions, is of crucial importance. This is also imperative when we want to understand the process of de-radicalization and how to counter radicalization into violent extremism (Winter, Morrison, & Van den Bos, 2022). De-radicalization is the opposite process of radicalization. When the circumstances and the bearers, i.e., the subjects of the radicalization process, are determined, then by adequate institutions they are suppressed. This is the weakness of most African countries – institutions, which are paralyzed for many reasons, such as systemic corruption together with incompetence. It should also be emphasized that de-radicalization cannot be successful if it is not conducted and organized by those institutions that are responsible for it. In the case of Kenya and Mozambique, the authorities there believe that the goals of de-radicalization will be achieved through education and influence on those who abuse religion to recruit young people. Such an approach is desirable and correct, but there is a lack of deep analysis of all those who conduct radicalization to apply legal and other measures against them. In some countries, de-radicalization has been successfully conducted by identifying responsible individuals within the radicalization process as dangerous, and state institutions have designated such individuals as personally responsible if radicalization or any incident, including terrorism, occurs. In some European countries, such as Montenegro, the function of National Coordinator for the fight against violent extremism has been established, whose role is to bring the National Platform for the fight against violent extremism and establish a national team of experts dealing with these issues.

In most of the countries where the radicalization of the existing population has occurred, the following elements have been detected:

1. Presence of terrorists;
2. Presence of terrorist groups and organizations;

3. The presence of "states" sponsoring terrorism;
4. The presence of so-called non-governmental organizations that provide logistics to terrorism;
5. Abuse or use of religion as a motive for performing actions;
6. Operational possibilities that imply easy availability of weapons and other dangerous means of terrorist attack.

If all the listed elements in the chain of radicalization or a large part of them are detected on the territory of one state, the institutions in charge must take all those measures and legal possibilities in order to stop their work and activities. For the successful operation of institutions, a model of education in Security Studies based on Security Science is needed.

Conclusion

From traditional risk factors and threats to contemporary ones, the fight against them and their prevention will remain a priority to preserve the peace that Africa desperately needs across the continent. To protect peace and stability, African countries must first provide the knowledge and skills for those who participate in the National Security System. Timely recognizing a security threat and risk is a task of intelligence. It does not end there. In the intelligence cycle, data collection is only one segment, followed by assessment, data processing, and finally predictions. This entire cycle is intended to provide decision-makers with better, more precise information, and an accurate picture of the circumstances and events that can affect the national security of a country. The vulnerability of the state apparatus of African countries is evident in the poor or inadequate education in the field of Security Science and systemic corruption, which mostly paralyzes these institutions. The leaders of the African countries themselves will have to take into consideration these well-intentioned observations, possibilities, and knowledge of how a modern National Security System with all its actors must function so that the state can function normally and develop. When Sir Francis Bacon published in his work, *Meditationes Sacrae* (1597), the saying: "knowledge itself is power", certainly all of us would agree with that. It is precisely this power of knowledge that African countries need in several segments, especially the knowledge that Security Science refers to. Without a safe state and without strong and professional institutions that can protect the state and society from risk factors and threats, all other functions of the state and all other activities, including the economy, cannot be fully productive and produce the expected results.

Conflict of Interest

The author hereby declare that no competing financial interest exists for this manuscript.



Notes on Contributors

Prof. dr Darko Trifunovic is a full-time professor in research and he is a founding member and Director of the Institute for National and International Security. Dr. Trifunovic is Editor in Chief of the “Security Science Journal”. Prof.dr Darko Trifunovic was awarded Doctor Honoris Causa by the University of Public and Individual Security - Apeiron, Krakow, Poland. At the same time, dr Trifnovic was elected as a visiting professor at the Faculty of Security Studies, Skopje, N. Macedonia.

References

- Abrahamsen, R. (Ed.). (2013). *African Political Economy and James Currey. Conflict & Security in Africa*. Woodbridge.
- Central African Republic. (May 3, 2022). *Abuses by Russia-Linked Forces-Killings, Torture of Civilians*. Human Right Watch. Retrieved December 11, 2024 from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/05/03/central-african-republic-abuses-russia-linked-forces>
- Chauhan, R. P., Dessie, Z. G., Noredin, A., & El Zowalaty, M. E. (2020). Systematic Review of Important Viral Diseases in Africa in Light of the ‘One Health’ Concept. *Pathogens*, 9(4), 301. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/pathogens9040301>
- Dorasamy, N. (Ed.). (2022). *Governance challenge during the COVID-19 pandemic in Africa*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dragisic, Z. (2002). *System of National Security of Serbia*. Faculty of Security Studies.
- Milosavljević, Z., & Maksimović, A. (2021). Maksimović, Impact of social and security on the intensity of integration of immigrants to the EU. *National Security and Future*, 3(22), 101-128. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37458/nstf.22.3.1>
- Piwowarski, J., & Trifunovic, D. (2023). *From Security Science to Security Culture*.
- Ramanai, S. (2023). *Russia in Africa: Resurgent Great Power or Bellicose Pretender?* Oxford University Press.
- Siegle, J. (2017). *ISIS in Africa: Implications from Syria and Iraq*, African Center for Strategic Studies. National Defense University.
- Stanimirovic, Z., & Miskovic, S. (2024). A Hybrid Evolutionary Algorithm for Efficient Exploration of Online Social Networks. *Computing and Informatics*, 33, 410-430.
- Todorovic, B., & Trifunovic, D. (2020). Security Science as a Scientific Discipline - Technological Aspects. *Security Science Journal*, 1(1). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37458/ssj.1.1.1>
- Trifunovic, D. (2019). Elements of Critical Infrastructure Resilience. *National Security and Future*, 20(1-2). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37458/nstf.20.1-2.6>
- Winter, D. A., Morrison, J. F., & den Bos, K. V. (2022). *Radicalization and Deradicalization: Process and Contest*. Frontiers in Psychology. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1059592>