



Book review: George Klay Kieh Jr. and Kelechi A. Kalu (eds), *Insurgency, Terrorism, and Counterterrorism in Africa*¹²

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Insurgency, civil war, terrorism and violent extremism are amongst the principal security concerns in the twenty-first century threatening international peace and security. In 2001, the 9/11 attacks against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in the United States (US) were followed by the spread of terrorist attacks globally and also in Africa. Though jihadist violence was not typical on the continent at the dawn of the 21st century (Bacon and Warner, 2021, p. 76), Africa has recently become the global epicentre of jihadist violence. Emerging insurgencies in Somalia and Nigeria, transnational terrorist networks such as Al-Qaeda, and the emergence of new affiliates of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) are posing significant challenges and African states are yet to find effective strategies to counter them.

'Insurgency, Terrorism, and Counterterrorism in Africa,' edited by George Klay Kieh, Jr. and Kelechi A. Kalu, examines insurgency and terrorism in Africa, as well as countermeasures and potential remedies. It is presenting the evolution and transformation of numerous insurgent groups and terrorist organisations, while examining associated counterterrorism regimes with their potential human security impacts across various communities and contexts. The book primarily aims to interrogate both domestic and external factors that make insurgency and terrorism as profitable and effective vehicles for non-state actors when expressing grievances and enforcing interests against incumbent African regimes.

Terrorist organisations and violent extremist groups tend to take root in marginalised areas, exploiting local grievances to radicalise and recruit disillusioned Africans. The book argues that social injustice, poverty, inequality, economic deprivation, and irresponsible external intervention within such marginalised lands or "ungoverned" spaces lacking any governmental authority and control, create conducive environments for anti-government forces and jihadist terrorists to spread extremist ideologies and win locals' support against governments and elites usually considered unfair, corrupt, and oppressive. By utilising case study method, the book puts an emphasis to examine the dynamics between insurgency and terrorism in Africa and beyond, while critically examining their relations with different counterterrorism regimes and strategies through

¹ DOI: 10.12700/jceas.2025.5.2.360

² George Klay Kieh Jr. and Kelechi A. Kalu (eds), *Insurgency, Terrorism, and Counterterrorism in Africa*. Lexington Books, Lanham, 2023, xii + 242 pp. \$100. Hardback. ISBN: 978-1793649362.

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an interdisciplinary and multi-theoretical perspective. The contributors to this volume delivered valuable perspectives on various terrorist organisations such as Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, Al-Qaeda, and ISIS, while also gave insights into regional and global counterstrategies and provided policy recommendations to address urgent challenges that African states are currently facing.

Disillusioned by corruption, economic negligence, political marginalisation and oppression under authoritarian regimes, people in multiple African countries have increasingly applied insurgency, violent extremist ideologies and terrorism as instruments for shaping state-society relations (Keih and Kalu, 2023). After giving an introduction and conceptual guidance on insurgency, terrorism, and counterterrorism in Chapter 1, the editors carefully contextualise the subject by arguing that the historical background of terrorism is rooted in the colonial era and the “totalistic” colonial state practice of drawing hegemony on the excessive use of terror (Keih and Kalu, 2023). Accordingly, while human insecurity is considered to be deeply rooted in the colonial era, political oppression and violence as an instrument to subjugate African people continued to unfold across postcolonial Africa. After independence, the unreformed and unstructured African state “continue to underperform in its basic function of providing physical security for persons and properties that have resulted in the persistence of insurgencies and terrorism in the region” (Keih and Kalu, 2023, pp. 33-34). Moreover, political oppression and state-sponsored terrorism after state independence in Africa also contributed to massive insurgencies and terrorist organisations to evolve and seizing on ethnic and socioeconomic malaise as well as community grievances so as to radicalise and recruit amongst African citizens.

After laying the ground pillars of the subject, the editors briefly examine some of the major non-state actors in Africa utilising insurgency and terrorism to achieve their political ends but also puts an emphasis to present counterterrorism strategies whether it comes to national frameworks such as in Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Africa or regional counterterrorism regimes. In Chapter 2, Kelechi A. Kalu examines why African states in the postcolonial period remained economically marginalised and politically unstable. It is further explained why African states struggling with terrorists and violent extremists, and governments in the West are usually reluctant to end protracted conflicts due to economic and strategic benefits. Relatedly, the effects of terrorism and persistent insecurity in selected African countries on multilateral and bilateral official development assistance from Western countries are analysed to demonstrate the changing positions of African states in strategic partnerships with Western countries.

In Part II, the principal insurgencies in Africa, such as Al-Shabaab in Somalia and Boko Haram in Nigeria are investigated. The unresolved political and security crisis in the Horn of Africa and the conflict in Somalia as a key driver of regional insecurity and instability have always been of importance to the international community. Numerous international operations and reconciliation efforts have been made since the early 1990s, but due to the multiple internal and external features of the conflict, they failed to



produce sustainable peace and governance. Community-based perspectives utilising soft power approaches were then adopted (see Colletta and Muggah, 2012) within international conflict resolution efforts as an inevitable reflection to past failures and practices focusing predominantly on hard power initiatives such as military intervention and punitive strategies. Accordingly, in Chapter 3, while giving a summary of the historical background of contemporary power struggle, Mohamed Haji Ingiriis examines the nexus between the armed conflict and power-sharing in Somalia and argues that agreements lacking any genuine local engagement will sustain conflict and insecurity in the country. Based on ethnographic observations, it is also highlighted how essential it is to understand clan structures and give ethnic and religious groups and opposing parties equal access to power if one is to end conflict in Somalia. Consequently, the Chapter deepens our understanding on the role of power-sharing in Somalia (and beyond) where the political power competition between regional states and the federal government, and the armed conflict between Mogadishu and Al-Shabaab have until now impeded genuine peace efforts.

In Chapter 4, Sylvester Odion Akhaine identifies the internal and external drivers of the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. Since 2009, the insurgency has apparently become one of the deadliest terrorist organisations globally. Though religious and cultural antagonism with Western countries is widely referred as an explanation for Islamic fundamentalism in Northern Nigeria, economic deprivation, political marginalisation, regional inequalities, corruption, and inter-ethnic tensions are also key factors in the protracted instability. Given high rates of poverty and unemployment in numerous African countries such as Nigeria, marginalised and disillusioned citizens sometimes join criminal networks and terrorist groups voluntarily for economic benefits. Accordingly, the Chapter critically examines the multiple explanations for and internal drivers of the Boko Haram phenomenon and explaining how foreign influencers and political elites in the country shaped the events, sometimes for their benefit. In this regard, the author also devotes attention to the “merchandisation” (Kieh and Kalu, 2023, p. 100) of the conflict and the broader implications of the insurgency on the broader Lake Chad Basin.

After a detailed examination of the situation in Somalia and Nigeria, the book turns to the historical evolution and transformation of Al-Qaeda in Africa and the rise of ISIS on the continent showing how global jihadism has infiltrated several African countries in the last two decades. In Chapter 5, Al Chukwuma Okoli investigates the implication of transnational terrorism for Africa, the dynamics of jihadist extremism in West-Africa and the mutations and alignments of the Al-Qaeda network which has become a major security concern for certain West- and North-African countries since the 9/11 attacks. The real value of the Chapter lies in its effort to demonstrate the strategic adaptation of mainstream terrorism organisations in Africa and to explore how Al-Qaeda used changing alliances between numerous groups to expand on the continent. The Chapter interestingly presents asymmetric adaptation strategies which helps to understand how Al-Qaeda succeeded to become a regional focal point having the most terrorist affiliates

across the continent.

In Chapter 6, Angela Ajodo-Adehanjoko gives an account of the emergence of ISIS in Sub-Saharan Africa and the political instability and humanitarian crisis it generated throughout the continent from Nigeria to Mozambique. Due to territorial losses in Iraq and Syria, new caliphates have been established in Africa during the 2010s. Since then, the organisation is on the rise at an alarming rate and deadly attacks were perpetrated against different targets, primarily in the Sahel. The success was amongst others a result of its effective online presence or “online jihad” (Kieh and Kalu, 2023, p. 138) that was part of its strategy to attract recruits, connect followers and act globally. Consequently, the Chapter examines propaganda tools that ISIS adopted and explores some of the factors that contributed to the emergence of the organisation on the continent. In this regard, as was also shown in a Kenyan context (Githigaro, 2024), the author argues that counterterrorism operations with hard power and military priorities adopted in many African countries as part of a countering violent extremism (CVE) strategy, provided an enabling environment for ISIS to operate and recruit. ISIS has obviously taken advantage of the security vacuum in Africa, weak governance and poverty, leading to various affiliates across the continent. Before listing some policy recommendations for preventing the further incursion of ISIS into the continent, the Chapter thoroughly examines their brief evolution, focusing on the structural transformation of the Boko Haram insurgency and the emergence of the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), and the Islamic State in Somalia (ISS), to name a few.

In Part III, the book turns to regional and external influences and counter-terrorism regimes. Following a summary of regional counterterrorism approaches let them be from Europe (EU) or Southeast Asia (ASEAN), in Chapter 7, Clayton Hazvinei Vhumbunu soundly assesses counter-terrorism measures developed by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) within its Counter-Terrorism Strategy adopted in 2013. Institutional frameworks, operational capacities, the role of external contributions, just to mention a few aspects, along with the three pillars of the Strategy and the inherent limitations of the regional conflict prevention and management framework such as coordination failures, capacity deficiencies, lack of nonmilitary approaches and human rights abuses by national authorities are comprehensively assessed.

Though more regional organisations in Africa and associated counter-terrorism regimes as well as relevant strategies of foreign influencers such as Russia and France should have been included in the volume, in Chapter 8, the book turns only to the exploration of the US foreign policy and soundly explores the pillars of its counterterrorism strategy in Africa. George Klay Kieh, Jr. addresses the Pan-Sahel Initiative, the East-African Counter-Terrorism Initiative, the Trans-Saharan Counter-Terrorism Partnership, the African Coastal and Border Security Program, the U.S.-Africa Command (AFRICOM), just to name a few. It is further highlighted how the GWOT and the US strategy to prevent transnational terrorist networks from using politically



unstable African countries as a base to spread extremist ideologies and perpetrate terrorist attacks shaped US counterterrorism efforts on the continent and what challenges have arisen throughout the last decades. The US as an advocate for the liberal peace concept, promoted democracy, human rights and free market economy in African countries, though its moral authority has been widely controversial since it has also been accused of supporting repressive semi-authoritarian and authoritarian regimes, establishing neocolonial and paternalistic relations (Kieh and Kalu, 2023) with African states in order to maximise economic gains and maintain strategic strongholds on the continent. Therefore, it is demonstrated in the Chapter how contradictory the US foreign policy has become in the postcolonial era and how this was heightened by the “cynical disengagement” policy (Kieh, 2014, p. 191) of Washington leading to the recurrent American retreating from Africa in the post-Cold War era.

In Chapter 9, the editors proffer suggestions how to address and resolve the root causes of insurgency and terrorism in Africa. The book highlights that not only political elites, but communities and citizens should make collective efforts to deal with the complex socioeconomic and political complexities and security issues so typical across the continent. Relatedly, as the book underlines, the reconstitution of the postcolonial African state, effective control over “ungoverned spaces,” and the rethinking of nation-building strategies are fundamentally needed to achieve social inclusion and avoid competing loyalties amongst various ethnic and religious groups (Kieh and Kalu, 2023, p. 214 and p. 218).

The book reflects to the changing global security landscape by recognising the essential roles different actors in the security domain such as states, nonstate actors, international organisations, individuals and communities take. This deeply researched book is timely and relevant, and the volume makes a significant contribution to the scholarly debate centred around insurgency and terrorism in Africa. The book highlights the necessity to go beyond traditional military campaigns and address underlying causes of insurgency and terrorism with non-military approaches. This book is primarily for scholars and policymakers, but anyone interested in insurgency, terrorism and the complex African security landscape will greatly profit from reading this book. It offers sound explanations for the rise and proliferation of insurgencies and mainstream terrorist organisations on the African continent. Additionally, it presents and evaluates the multiple counterterrorism strategies developed by states and regional organizations. This book’s strength lies amongst others in its approach focusing not only on non-state actors, but also on state responsibility in deteriorating human security and how counter-productive government actions may contribute to the increased support for anti-government forces in marginalised communities suffering from persistent insecurity and political negligence.

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