

Terrorism, Humanitarian Complex, and the Imperative for Early Warning System in Africa¹

Al Chukwuma Okoli², Chika Eucharia Eze³

Abstract:

This paper problematizes terrorism as a complex humanitarian crisis in Africa and makes a case for its mitigation through early warning system/ response. This is significant considering the apparent intractability of terrorism in parts of the continent, and its tendency to defy combat-oriented remediation. The paper posits that understanding terrorism as a complex emergency as well as deploying appropriate early warning mechanisms to forecast and respond to it is necessary to mitigating the threat as well as the humanitarian consequences thereof. The policy implication of this is that counter-terrorism protocols and strategies in Africa should seek to leverage and mainstream potentials for digitally amenable early warning system to make good their efficacy and utility.

Keywords:

Complex Emergency;
Early Warning; Early
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Humanitarian
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Humanitarian Crisis;
Terrorism.

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² Professor of Security Governance, Department of Political Science, Federal University of Lafia, Nigeria; ORCID: 0000-0002-1685-3230; okochu007@yahoo.com.

³ Associate Professor, Education Foundation (Guidance & Counseling), Veritas University, Abuja, Nigeria; ORCID: 0000-0002-1518-8558; chikashcj@gmail.com/ ezec@veritas.edu.ng.

Introduction

Africa is currently the world's hub of terrorism. According to Statista (2023), no fewer than 10 million persons have been killed in Africa as a result of terrorism-related incidents. The 2023 Global Terrorism Index (IEP, 2023) reveals that Africa is the new global terrorism destination, with Somalia, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger as its critical hotbeds.

Whilst terrorism has been on rampage in Africa, its humanitarian consequences have also been dire. In effect, terrorism has been a major driver of complex emergencies in Africa (Kiegh & Kalu, 2022). More precisely, it has been a prime precipitator of aggravated humanitarian crisis on the continent. Relevant reports indicate that Africa bears the greatest burden of the contemporary global refugee's crisis, arising principally from the impact of terrorism in different parts of the continent (cf. UNCHR, 2022). The continent also hosts a disproportionate quantum of populations who have been dehumanized and rendered destitute by the impact of such crisis.

Besides human fatalities and displacements, terrorism has been associated with grave socio-economic disruptions. Such disruptions have often led to the collapse of the societal livelihood systems, public utilities, and local economies. Consequently, the affected populations are left with little or no access to safe subsistence, education, health-care, as well as other social and economic opportunities.

The threat impact and import of terrorism alongside its humanitarian complications have been emphasized in the existing scholarship (Kiegh & Kalu, 2022; Okoli & Ngom, 2023). Although terrorism has been widely acknowledged as a veritable cause of complex humanitarian crisis in Africa by a number of studies (OCHA, 2023; Okoli & Ngom, 2023), the place of early warning system in mitigating such crisis remains grossly under-explored. Addressing this important epistemic gap constitutes the major concern of this paper.

Suffice it to note that African Union (AU) operates an early warning mechanism called the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS). Established in 2008 as part of the AU's African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), CEWS is mandated to gather, collate, analyze, and disseminate data on emerging threats to peace and security on the continent in order to enable timely prevention (AU, n.d; Jallow, 2021). Although CEWS was operationalized in the early 2010s, its effectiveness has been undermined by a number of factors relating to warning-response gaps, lack of political will, and challenges of consensus-building within the AU's decision-making mechanisms (Maru, 2017; Jallow, 2021). In effect, the vacuum of effective early warning system in the protocol of conflict mitigation in Africa has persisted, presenting a veritable pretext for an exploratory inquiry such as the present.

Conceptual Premise: Terrorism, Humanitarian Complex/ Crisis, Early Warning System

Three basic concepts form the conceptual thrust of this paper. They are terrorism, humanitarian complex/ crisis, and early warning systems (EWS). This section briefly discusses these concepts in order to situate their meanings and applications in the context of the present discourse. The concept of terrorism is core to the conceptual thrust of the paper, hence the need to begin with it, and deliberately accord it a little more elaboration.

Terrorism is an essentially contested multidimensional concept that is popular for the endless debates about its meaning. Hence, a plethora of intensely debated definitions and typologies of terrorism awash the pages of the global literature on terrorism and counterterrorism (Meisels, 2009). Schmid (2004) who collected 109 definitions of terrorism could not arrive at a grand definition of the concept. Instead, he labelled terrorism as an abstract phenomenon (Schmid, 2004). Coady (2004) acknowledged the existence of over a hundred modern conceptualizations of terrorism, many of which were filled with several contradictions, inconsistencies and shortcomings. Therefore, a clear, unambiguous conceptualization of terrorism that is universally agreed does not exist (Miesels, 2009).

A major reason for the conceptual flux that pervades the definition of terrorism is the fluidity of the term and its alienability to different interpretations which animates the dictum that 'one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter' (Ganor, 2002, p. 287). Secondly, given its divergent multidimensional nature as an extremely complex global security challenge that involves a great variety of groups with often dissimilar origins and motivations (Bjørge & Andrew, 2018), several scholars are poised to conceptualize terrorism from varying analytical lenses (Prabha, 2000; Ganor, 2002). Despite the conceptual ambiguity on the meaning of terrorism, scholars agree that terrorism is the use of non-conventional violence by state or non-state actors to advance a political or ideological cause. This conception is maintained in this paper.

Humanitarian complex has to do with an outcome in conflict or crisis situation characterized by a complex emergency syndrome. In such a situation, populations experiencing armed violence or conflict are, ipso facto, exposed to concurrent dire existential adversities that threaten their subsistence, health and wellbeing (Okoli 7 Iorter, 2014; Okoli, 2023). Such situations may arise from adverse socio-ecological, socio-economic, and socio-physiological occurrences that are either associated with or results from the mortal complications of an escalated conflict or violence. Predictors of emergency complex include famine, food crisis and insecurity, environmental degradation, disease outbreak and prevalence, mass poverty and livelihood crisis, population displacements, destitution, and other forms of socio-existential vulnerabilities. Humanitarian complex is essentialized by complex emergency, an escalated stage in crisis situation characterized by multiple and converging humanitarian conditions. It is pertinent to not that terrorism is inherently a complex emergency

situation. It often brings about multi-faceted humanitarian consequences that threaten human security and societal sustainability.

Complex emergency is the outcome of a multidimensional humanitarian crisis that is so intractable that it requires a holistic response to address. The United Nations defined it as ‘humanitarian crisis in a country, region, or society where there is a total or considerable breakdown of authority resulting from internal or external conflict, and which requires an international response that goes beyond the mandate or capacity of any single agency and/or the ongoing UN country programme. (UNHCR, 2001, paragraph 1). Some defining parameters of a complex humanitarian emergency are acute civilian casualties that necessitate a joint international effort transcending the capacity of a specific agency (USAID, 2000; UNHCR, 2021; 2022). Notable causes of complex emergencies are violent conflicts, war and human-caused ecological disasters that result in the displacement of many people, death, human and material privation that transcend the ability of the state institutions and requires international support in form of aid (UNHCR, 2021, USAID, 2000).

Early warning system (EWS) refers to an integrated mechanism for monitoring, forecasting, predicting, assessing, and communicating hazards in order to prevent or mitigate emergency risks (Oxfam, 2021; Raicon-Pabon et al 2025). It encompasses techniques, institutions, processes, frameworks, and activities designed to stop hazardous situations from materializing into mortal risks and fatal outcomes. A typical EWS works like a cycle which embodies a sequence of activities, namely: surveillance, detection, analysis, prediction, warning communication, and response (de Leon & Borgardi, 2007; Stacey et al, 2025). The essence of EWS is to generate actionable signals designed to influence human behavior towards a certain end. In a specific emergency situation, the signals generated by EWS are expected to elicit a response in a sort of input-output fashion (Kaminska & Bielecki, 2025; Katiyar et al, 2025). In situations of evolving crisis, arising from disaster or grave insecurity, EWS is expected to highlight critical flash-points, fault-lines, as well as situational risk factors in a manner makes for systematic intervention and remediation. It is important to reiterate that an early warning system is made well, not only by the signals it passes on, but more importantly, by the quality of response that it elicits.

A Note on Methodology

This study is an exploratory, qualitative inquiry. It relied on data and information derived from sundry secondary sources, which were synthesized and systematically harnessed into a descriptive discourse. These data/ information were generated from published and unpublished scholarly works, documentary evidence, as well as relevant media and internet sources. Textual and contextual insights derived from the sources formed the substance of the analysis in this paper. The thrust of the analysis is thematically presented in line with the objectives of the study. Essentially, the study was not conceived as an original full-length research paper. Rather, it was designed to be an

argumentative think-piece designed to stimulate and advance scholarly and policy thinking on aspects of the subject matter.

Africa's Terrorism Conundrum: A Complex Humanitarian Syndrome

Complex humanitarian crisis refers to a generalized emergency situation in which an entire community or a region is plunged into dire and life-threatening conditions (OCHA, 2023). Such a situation typically overwhelms the capacity of the affected community or population to mitigate by itself, hence the need for external intervention. Conditions that define complex humanitarian crisis include accentuated poverty and destitution, refugee and internal displacement syndrome, abrupt disruption of social utilities and services, aggravated livelihood crisis, acute food crisis, and sundry socio-economic malaise. One of the critical predictors of complex humanitarian crisis is the inability of the affected population to carry out its normal economic and livelihood activities as well as access basic social services (OCHA, 2023).

In situations of complex emergencies, such as in the instance of terrorism, the affected population is plunged into sudden systematic disruptions which affect the functioning of its social and economic mainstay. This condition of societal disequilibrium flags off dire existential conditions that negate safe and sustainable community life. In such circumstances, too, the capacity of the community to cope with and recover from the associated existential threats is eroded by the mortal vulnerabilities and dysfunction arising from protracted violence and destruction.

The incidence of terrorism in Africa has brought about outcomes that thwart the human security of her populations. This is evidenced in the vicious circles of mortality and other fatal hazards that threaten humanity. A brief empirical narrative would suffice to buttress this standpoint.

According to the 2025 Global Terrorism Index, Africa's Sahel is currently the world's epicentre of terrorism (IEP, 2025). The report also indicates that the region alone accounts for 43% of the global terrorism fatalities (Table 1). Not surprisingly, the report shows that five African countries count among the ten countries most impacted by terrorism. These countries are Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Niger, DR Congo and Mali. Although the rate of terrorism-related deaths across the world fell significantly in 2025, Africa still retains a lead in terms of recorded fatalities, with six of the ten most impacted countries being in the sub-Saharan Africa (IEP, 2025).

Beyond being the world's most 'terrorized', Africa also ranks as the most displaced populations in the world. According to the African Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS, 2023), Africa accounted for 40.3 million of the world's displaced persons as of 2023. Of this displaced population, 77% were classified as internally displaced persons (IDPs), and they mostly live in the African countries of Ethiopia, Sudan, DR Congo, Nigeria, and Somalia..

Rank	Country	Fatality Figures
1	Burkina Faso	846

2	Nigeria	750
3	Niger	703
4	DR Congo	467
5	Mali	341

Figure 1: Terrorism Fatalities in Africa by 2025. Source: Adapted from Global Terrorism Index (IEP, 2025).

The humanitarian situation in Africa as of 2023 has been both alarming and widespread across the continent. This has been associated with a burgeoning vulnerable population in dire need of assistance, rescue, or protection. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA, 2023) estimates that 34.5 million persons in the Sahel are in need of urgent humanitarian assistance. Elsewhere in the Horn of Africa, more than 43 million persons are also in critical need of humanitarian attention (UNFPA, 2023).

The needs of these vulnerable populations vary significantly from one context to another. Generally, all the affected populations need food, shelter, medication, education, and sanitation. But beyond these basic needs, the populations often require higher levels of assistance and protection, especially with regard to liberty, identity, citizenship, and dignity.

For instance, the populations being held in ‘captive’ communities by bandits in Nigeria’s North West and North Central Nigeria (Okoli, Aina & Onuoha, 2023) need to be liberated first before any other forms of humanitarian assistance. Also, women and girls among the displaced or captive populations of the volatile areas in Africa require some deliberate measures to protect them from gender-based exploitation and violence, in addition to being provided with emergency humanitarian supplies. Furthermore, populations that have been rendered literally ‘stateless’ by the adversities of terrorism (particularly those in undocumented asylum) need to be reassured of their citizenship.

Essentially, Africa’s terrorism syndrome is, indeed, a complex humanitarian crisis. It has produced and reproduced existential conditions that negate human survival, liberty, dignity, and sustainability. Mitigating such a mortal threat requires taking proactive measures to forestall conditions that precipitate and promote terrorism and violent extremism in the continent. Among other things, this entails investing in early warning technologies, and mainstreaming such potentials in national and regional protocols and regimes of counter-terrorism/ violent extremism. This concern is addressed in some length in the next segment of the paper.

Mitigating Terrorism and Humanitarian Crisis in Africa: The Imperative for Early Warning/ Response

Terrorism is not an abrupt onset crisis. The same goes for the humanitarian crisis that is often associated with it. As a gradual onset crisis, terrorism develops in incremental

phases and stages. In other words, it is something that begins, becomes, and transforms. The transformational dynamics of a terrorism situation cannot be understood in terms of a linear calculus. It is inclined to assume either escalatory or de-escalatory tendencies as it evolves from the stage of incubation to that of aggravation (Okoli, 2023).

At the stage of incubation, the forces of terror are in their nascence. Oftentimes, the forces of terror at their nascence are merely ideational. With time, the fundamental ideas that would materialize into a terrorist agenda are woven around religious or ideological nuances, which are seeking political expression. It is at this critical stage that terrorism becomes, not only a crisis, but also a warfare. Also, it is at that same stage that terrorism begets and becomes a humanitarian crisis.

The implication of the foregoing is that terrorism needs to be understood as a struggle of the hearts and minds that is in desperate search for religious or ideological validation. Countering such struggle must, of necessity, be sufficiently preemptive and proactive in understanding and counteracting both the propagation and legitimization of the system of ideas and ideals that underpin such a struggle. Negating the forces of terror in their nascence, essentially, requires a conscious and deliberate efforts at ideational and ideological de-suasion, which has to be as potent as the terrorist designs it is seeking to negate.

Africa's counter-terrorism experience has betrayed a fundamental strategic flaw. Terrorism has nearly always been seen as a military threat that must be summarily dealt with, using kinetic techniques. This has informed a counter-terrorism approach that is characteristically ad hoc, reactive, statist, and lethargic. The inadequacy of this approach is that it relies on disproportionately militarist operations that aim at liquidating the terrorism. Although it has hardly attained this goal, it has often sparked wholesale violent complications that occur at huge military and civilian costs. This has, in most instances, engendered dire humanitarian consequences. So, beyond failing to mitigate the root causes of terror, counter-terrorism drive in Africa has sometimes inadvertently created conditions for the escalation of terrorist violence. A review of the Boko Haram crisis in Nigeria may help to situate the discourse.

Boko Haram insurgency has been a protracted crisis in northeastern Nigeria and the wider Lake Chad region since late 2000s. It has become one of Africa's deadliest and most intractable armed violence. The violence has been associated with dire humanitarian emergency over the years. The state response to the crisis, consisting largely in military operations, has had some significant impact in degrading the group's territorial control, it has, nonetheless, remained predominantly kinetic and reactive.

Boko Haram is officially known as *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad*. The group was founded in the early 2000s in North East Nigeria by Mohammed Yusuf, a Salafist radical cleric. Boko Haram literally translates to Western civilization is forbidden. In effect, the group is ideologically opposed to western education and secular governance.

In 2009, Nigerian government launched a crackdown on the movement, resulting in the killing of its leader, Mohammed Yusuf. Following this incident, the group became



radicalized, escalating its vicious operations under the leadership of Yusuf's successor-Abubakar Shekau (Institute for Security Studies [ISS], 2024a). In 2015 Boko Haram attained an international stature and visibility when it pledged allegiance to ISIS. It also witnessed a major fragmentation arising from conflicting doctrinaire and ideological stance of its lead commanders. The outcome of this schism was the rise of two key factions, namely Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad* (JAS).

Boko Haram has been associated with massive humanitarian consequences. It has led to no fewer than over 50,000 deaths and 3.2 million human displacement across Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger (ISS, 2024b). Mainstream operational tactics of Boko Haram include suicide bombings, mass abductions targeting schools and religious congregations, and raids on local farming communities. The sect has sustained itself through a variety of strategies, including cattle rustling, localized extortions, and infiltration of local economies through smuggling, trafficking and allied illicit undertakings (ISS, 2024c).

The state's response to Boko Haram violence has been largely militarist. Combat operations coordinated through Nigeria's *Operation Hadin Kai* and the sub-regional Multinational Joint Task Force's (MNJTF) *Operation Lake Sanity* have been the primary intervention mechanisms. Such operations have succeeded in reclaiming territories from the sect. They have also resulted in disrupting some of their cells and syndicates. Nonetheless, the approach has been characterized by a number of structural weaknesses.

Firstly, it has largely been more reactive than preventive. Characteristically, military action tends to have always followed attacks, instead of early signs of mobilization. Despite the existence of the AU's Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) as well as sundry community-based vigilance formations in Nigeria and Cameroon, aimed at gathering early-warning data, requisite early response matched by timely civilian-led interventions have been lacking (ISS, 2024c). Fundamentally, the warning-response gaps have persisted, largely because of lack of political-will and ineffective civil-military coordination.

Secondly, the excessive militarist response has greatly undermined civilian trust in the counterinsurgency operations. There have been allegations of human rights violations and excessive force by the military. This has estranged communities whose goodwill is necessary for strategic intelligence. Boko Haram appears to have capitalized on this gap to infiltrate military's demobilization and operational camps to spy on troop movements and capabilities (ISS, 2025a).

Thirdly, non-kinetic approach has remained grossly under-prioritized. Extant de-radicalization, demobilization and reintegration initiatives, such as *Operation Safe Corridor*, have been largely underfunded. Going forward, a more pragmatic response needs to combine military pressure and civilian-centered preventive measures. Repositioning community-based early warning networks and connecting them directly to decision-making centres is germane. According to the Institute for Security Studies (ISS, 2024c), only 7% of terrorist groups from 1968-2006 were defeated by military

might; 43% ended through civilian-mediated political processes. The continued resilience of Boko Haram, among other things, reflects its pragmatic adaptability but also the inadequacy of a counterterrorism paradigm based on force. Good early warning system alongside civilian protection and political engagement are crucial. Although they are not alternatives to military response, they are necessary complements in that regard.

The Humanitarian crisis associated with Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria's North East is not wholly provoked by the attacks by the terrorists. The over-militarist counterterrorism operations in the region has added to the state of siege and terror in the region. More importantly, it tends to have ignored the crucial socio-structural factors that underpin terrorist tendencies in that context: high level of ideological gullibility arising from the incidence of civic and religious illiteracy; high rate of social vulnerability resulting from the prevalence of rural poverty, unemployment, and destitution; and culture of restiveness associated with the rising youth bulge (Okoli, 2017). Comparative national indices have persistently placed the northern Nigeria as the most backward section of the country, marked by high incidences of poverty and livelihood crisis. The 2025 report of Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2025) indicated that most states in northern Nigeria has a poverty rate below the national average of 63 percent.

Nigerian authorities were either ignorant of, or indifferent to, the earliest signs of an emergent insurgency in the North East. At a point, Boko Haram threat became a subject of politicization by the chronically fractured national political elites and their parochial followers. So, whilst the terrorists aggrandized in their onslaught against the people of the region, the elites and their followers were engaged in the politically charged debate as to whether Boko Haram was a fact or a hoax.

There was also widespread debate as to whether the threat was a mere political propaganda or not. This pattern has also been evidenced from the manner in which the government has responded to the phenomenon of banditry in the North West. The threat was allowed to fester and culminate into a hydra-headed monster before the authorities began to take it seriously. The incremental evolution of banditry in that context in the early 2000s bore palpable signs of an emergent local terrorism. In its gestation period, it manifested variously as herder militancy and mercenarism, which spread gradually to Central Nigeria and beyond. But the state and federal government looked the other way as the trend bolstered.

The counter-terrorism context in the Sahel has generally been problematic. Jihadists are threatening to overrun the region amid the apparent helplessness of its states (Okoli, 2023). The Malian example may also be instructive. The Malian crisis started in 2012. It began with Tuareg's separatist uprising, which was reinforced by al-Qaeda-linked groups (Ba, 2014). The uprising led to the seizure of northern Mali by the allied militants, necessitating French intervention code-named *Operation Serval*. Despite military intervention of the French, and subsequently the UN, United States and Russian, these militants regrouped in the late 2010s, expanding into parts of central Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger (Ba, 2014).



The Malian situation has assumed new dynamics since 2020s. The country's military junta in power, led by Assimi Goïta, has taken some drastic measures in ostensibly keeping with the prevailing geopolitical exigencies of its times. It has expelled French and UN forces, ceased the 2015 *Algiers Peace Deal* (January, 2024), and exited the ECOWAS platform (January 2025). It has since turned to Russia's Africa Corps for security support (ISSb, 2025). The Malian crisis has, in the main, been orchestrated by *Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin* (JNIM), an affiliate of al-Qaeda's in the Sahel. Working closely with its Maçina Liberation Front faction, JNIM launched coordinated onslaught across Mali in April 2024, eliminating the country's defence minister, seizing military bases and attempting to blockade the capital city of Bamako (UNFPA, 2025). The group also attacked several towns in Western Mali in July 2025 in western Mali. Lately, the crisis in Mali has further spread southwards, with JNIM currently controlling Mali's industrial gold frontiers as well as strategic trade routes to Senegal (Reuters, 2025). The Sahel's global infamy for terrorism is largely JNIM's contribution (Okoli, 2023).

Despite more than a decade of French, UN, and Russian intervention, JNIM has become more resilient and audacious. The group currently wields the capacity to conduct complex urban attacks, often using drones (Reuters, 2025). It has also successfully imposed economic blockades in strategic locations. The impact of the *Russian Africa Corps* has been largely restricted to strategic frontiers and urban areas, leaving the hinterlands vulnerable to JNIM's sporadic violence (Reuters, 2025). Also, the tendency to focus on 'liquidating' fighters after episodic attacks implies that the government forces are always behind the combat curve. The offensive launched by JNIM in April 2025 was both massive and shocking (UNFPA, 2025). Yet, it must have involved months of incremental planning, logistics, and coordination. The fact that these moves went undetected and undisrupted meant a failure of proactive and preemptive response- a veritable predictor of effective intelligence and early warning.

Structures of early warning and community vigilance exist in Mali, but they weak and disconnected from centres of decision-making (UNFPA, 2025). The over-militarist operations and reprisals against the militants and their allied communities have fueled popular grievances in some localities. These grievances have been exploited by JNIM to recruit locals into its cause. This has equally presented the group with a pretext to position itself as a defender in rural areas where state's presence and influence are scant.

The crisis of effective early warning mechanism in the context of Malian crisis has been compounded by the Mali's exit from regional mechanisms like ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) and the *Algiers Accord*. So, invariably, the country has ceased to be part of the continental early warning endeavor under the auspices of the AU. The ruling junta in Bamako tends to have concentrated power in the capital, abdicating control of much of the countryside (UNFPA, 2025). Generally, military rule in Mali has failed to restore the needed legitimacy. On the contrary, JNIM has aggrandized in popularity (Reuter, 2025), using local disputes and state abuse to gain support of the populace.

Essentially, Mali's crisis demonstrates the limits of a purely military response to insurgency. JNIM has appeared to be adapting faster than the Malian government owing to the fact that the underlying socio-existential and early warning gaps have largely remained unaddressed. Without a radical shift from reactive to preventive intervention- and a disposition to political engagement- kinetic operations are bound to engender temporary gains at high human and logistical expense.

To say the least, the inability of the Malian government to address the fundamentals of Tuareg's irredentist nationalism in the North led to the near collapse of the Malian state in 2012 (Ba, 2014). The Malian example buttresses the absence or failure of early warning system in counter-terrorism. Successive Malian governments did not only neglect the signs of time with regard to the jihadist pressures in the country, which date back to the preceding decades; they also mismanaged the situation by ignoring predictions and advisories regarding the emerging alignment between the jihadists and the rebels in the northern region. The outcome was 2012 upheaval that plunged the country into a state of acute and complex emergency.

The point being emphasized in the foregoing is that terrorism situations in Africa could have been better addressed if the affected states had deployed effective early warning strategy in mitigating that. In some of those situations, obvious early warning signs were not seen observed after all. Yet in other cases, the principles and standards of early warning and response have been completely ignored or neglected. In some other instances, the manifest early signs of terror have been mismanaged through irresponsible response that bore trappings of either politicization or excessive securitization. This outcome has been common in Nigeria and Niger where the excessively militarized counter-terrorism posture has tended to complicate the fight against the terrorists, bringing about huge humanitarian crisis.

Evolving a robust system of early warning and response is therefore a strategic imperative for counter-terrorism drive in Africa. This is important because it will help in modifying extant counter-terrorism orientation from being unreasonably reactive to being preemptive and proactive. Such an approach will go a long way in ensuring that terrorism situations are not consciously or unconsciously mismanaged, or left to aggravate, in a manner that creates a cycle of complex humanitarian emergency in the civil population.

Conclusion

Terrorism has been a major predictor of complex emergency in Africa. Such an occurrence has been associated with incredible material and human losses in the continent over the years. This paper problematized terrorism as a complex humanitarian crisis in Africa, and makes a case for its mitigation through early warning system. This is significant considering the apparent intractability of terrorism in parts of the continent, and its tendency to defy kinetic remediation.

Addressing the signs and symptoms of terrorism in Africa is strategic. Even more strategic is the task of preempting and preventing the occurrence and impact of



terrorism. If terrorism is a gradual onset phenomenon, so is its humanitarian threat. With proper and effective early warning system, threat of terrorism can be detected in time. And with effective and rapid early response mechanism in place, the threat can be averted or mitigated. Terrorism and the gamut of humanitarian consequences associated with it can be mitigated by institutionalized contingency mechanisms such as the early warning system.

In this paper, it has been posited that understanding terrorism as a complex emergency as well as deploying appropriate early warning techniques to forecast and respond to its humanitarian consequences is a strategic imperative. Although the efforts at mainstreaming early warning/ response systems in counter-terrorism endeavours in Africa have been rudimentary, sustained capacitation and commitment are needed at the continental and sub-continental levels. Going forward, counter-terrorism protocols and strategies in Africa should seek to leverage potentials for structurally amenable early warning system and response to make good their essence and purpose. With sustained and continued collaboration between AU and the United Nations on early warning, Africa is poised to transiting into a security dispensation where response is more proactive than reactive.

Although the purpose of this paper is to situate the strategic place and import of early warning systems and response in the context of the continental counter-terrorism agenda, its discourse has substantively dovetailed into the nuanced nexus of terrorism and complex humanitarian chaos in Africa. Apart from addressing these set objectives, the paper has set agenda for further focused investigations, especially on the need to de-prioritize excessive emphasis on kinetic response to terrorism. Refocusing from the core military impact to humanitarian consequences, but also stressing the imperative of early warning/ response, points to a worthy departure that future studies on the subject area need to foreground.

Conflict of Interest

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

Notes on Contributor

Al Chukwuma Okoli is a double doctorate (Ph.D, Defence & Strategic Studies; Ph.D, History & International Studies). He is a professor of Security Governance with Department of Political Science at the Federal University of Lafia, Nigeria. Okoli's research and consulting expertise straddle the domains of Conflict, Peace, Statecraft, Development, Gender and Security. He has consulted for African Union, UN Women, UNDP, among other reputable national and international organizations. A triple laureate of the Council for the Development of Social Science in Africa (CODESRIA), Okoli aspires to socially relevant scholarship that bridges theory and practice. He is a member of Amnesty International and Conflict Research West African (CORN-WA).

Eucharia Chika Eze (RIP) was a double doctorate (Ph.D, Psychology; Ph.D, Learning, Support, and Guidance & Counselling). Until her demise on August 22, 2026, she was affiliated with the Veritas University, Abuja, Nigeria, where she was an Associate Professor of Counselling Psychology, awaiting pronouncement as a full professor. Her research interests straddled the domains of school and learning psychology, higher education governance, gender and development, as well as humanitarian intervention. A CODESRIA (Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa) laureate (2019), Dr. Eze was also a religious, affiliated with Society of Holy Child Jesus (SHCJ).

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