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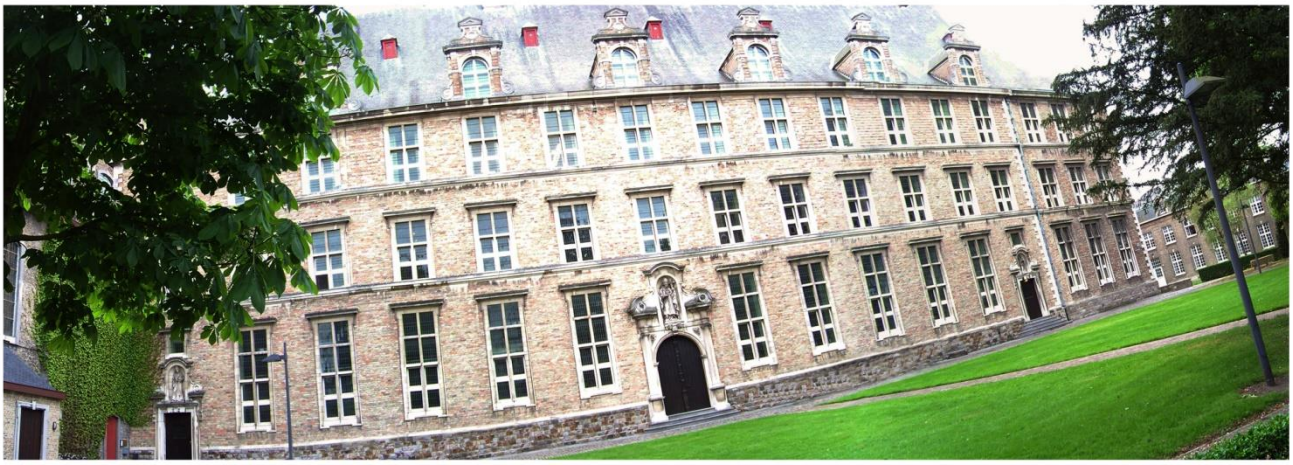
Regional Responses to Terrorism
A Comparative Study: The Arab League and the African Union



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Abstract

This research paper explores reactions by regional organisations to terrorist threats that have transgressed national borders and have gained regional magnitude. The study is shaped as a comparative analysis of two regional organisations that encompass territories currently affected by some of the most violent and resourceful terrorist groups on the globe. The first case study focuses on the League of Arab States and its response to the threat posed by the Islamic State, while the second case study assesses the African Union's response to Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab. The scope of the research is to identify specific responses generated by the two organisations – as reflected by the discourse of their representatives, their legal framework and the actual measures they implemented – and to assess their effectiveness in eliminating the terrorist threat. The results of the analysis indicate that, although both organisations are intent on combatting terrorism, the AU has developed stronger legal and operational tools than the LAS to achieve this. In view of these findings, the paper provides several recommendations to strengthen the efforts undertaken by the two organisations and proposes further relevant avenues of research.

Introduction

Terrorism has become one of the wicked problems of the 21st century globalised world. The technological and informational boom has given terrorist organisations access to knowledge, human and technical resources that even 50 years ago would have been very difficult to obtain. Taking advantage of these new developments, terrorist groups have proliferated across borders and taken states by surprise with their capabilities and speed of action. Hence, terrorist threats are no longer confined to national borders, but concern the international community.

This expansion is not exclusively geographical, but also ideological. General Malik of the Indian Army has neatly described this development, asserting that "*terrorism is not definable within regional boundaries, nor within traditional moulds of rationality. Terrorist groups do not owe loyalty to any national flag, religion, or ethnic society. They extinguish innocent lives as if they are legitimate victims"* (Malik, 2009). This is not to say that any of these bases for identity cannot represent the reasoning behind terrorist action; on the contrary, they are the foundation of many terrorist motives. However, once one of these criteria becomes the driving force of extremist beliefs, the other dimensions of identity seem to fade away. Such is the case with Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab in Africa, where the religious component prevails, abolishing considerations of citizenship. The interconnectedness of terrorist groups defies borders as well. Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram both operate in Africa and they are both linked to Middle Eastern organisations: Al Qaeda and IS (Islamic State), respectively (Kingah, 2015).

The move of organised violence beyond traditional concepts of armed conflict, territory and weaponry requires a new approach to peace and security. The emergence of terrorist threats as regional, rather than national phenomena, indicates a need for regional responses. In light of this, the present paper will try to answer the research question of how do regional entities respond to transnational terrorist threats. The research will therefore focus on efforts undertaken by the Arab League and the African Union to combat IS, Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab.

The present paper is shaped as a critical analysis of the response generated by regional organisations to acts of terrorism carried out by IS, Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab. The strategy used for conducting the analysis relies on a comparative study of two regional organisations, of which affected countries are members, which have high stakes in the resolution of the conflict. The chosen regional entities are the AU and the LAS (the League of Arab States) because they face similar terrorist challenges, albeit in slightly different contexts, but take different courses of action. The comparative approach is valuable because it determines similarities and contrasts between the selected cases and

thus allows for the production of comparable results that help reconcile different theories. Furthermore, it can produce fruitful results given limited time and resources (Collier, 1993).

The research method employed is qualitative because the phenomenon assessed is shaped by a highly varying and subjective factor. What is meant here is that, in the end, human motivations and agendas drive the collective action of regional organisations, which is the concern of this paper. The findings are based on secondary data provided by the regional organisations' declaratory and regulatory documents, their websites, press releases, news and interviews from mass-media, as well as academic papers, among others. In that sense, the research is mostly empirical as the theoretical framework is built on observations of discourse, legal texts and actions taken by the AU and LAS. It is, however, also conceptual to the extent that deductions about the effectiveness of these responses and possible outcomes are made. Having expatiated on preliminary concerns, the paper now presents certain theoretical issues before discussing the main findings, conclusions and recommendations.

Theoretical considerations

An appropriate and comprehensive analysis of the LAS's and AU'S reaction to terrorist activities destabilising regional security requires the formulation of a theoretical framework that scrutinises in accurate detail the components of their response. The break-down into specific classifications of regional responses allows for a more explicit and clear account of the issue at hand (De Lombaerde, 2011). In light of that, the research supporting the analysis identified three key reactions to the terrorist threat posed by IS, Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab. These represent the independent variables of the study which determine the dependent variable – the response to terrorist threats. The first independent variable is the political discourse which resides in speeches and general rhetoric of the organisations' representatives, as well as official documents and various declarations. This variable is relevant for several reasons. Firstly, it illustrates the mind-set in which action is taken and the motives for taking such action. Secondly, in cases where inaction can be observed, it provides a good indication of the earnestness of the regional organisation. However, more importantly, discourse and rhetoric are essential elements of the analysis because they facilitate certain courses of action and legitimise them. Conversely, they are also shaped and transformed by unfolding action (Elingson, 1995).

The second determinant factor encompasses the institutional design that provides the basis for action taken by the regional organisation. This includes the institutional

structures and their adjacent legal framework that lays down their competences. The institutional capacity of the examined organisations is a key factor determining the conditions under which anti-terrorist policy is implemented, its effectiveness and accountability (UN System Task Team, 2013).

Thirdly, the paper looks at the operational instruments employed for achieving the goals of the regional organisation in tackling terrorist threats. These include any kind of military and non-military coordinated action aimed at diminishing and even stopping the expansion of terrorist groups. Ultimately, this is the core variable which underlines the response of regional organisations to terrorist threats as it pinpoints concrete actions taken towards the achievement of the policy goal. It concerns the actual implementation of anti-terror policies designed to ensure regional peace, security and stability and sheds light on their effectiveness and (partial) outcome.

Findings

Discourse

The League of Arab States

LAS discourse, be it oral or written in the organisation's documents, condemns terrorist actions carried out by IS, Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab and largely aligns with UN and Western calls for action, especially those proposed by Washington. A clear example is the meeting that took place between Arab League foreign ministers in September 2014 in Cairo, where a tacit agreement was reached to ensure LAS cooperation with US and Iraqi missions. Although it was not included in the final text of the meeting, diplomatic sources revealed that the ministers endorsed a US aerial campaign against IS (The Irish Times, 2014). The meeting thus indicated a willingness to cooperate with the international community and support regional and national efforts to combat the militant fractions that have violently overrun large territories in Syria and Iraq (Noueihed & Fahmy, 2014). The representatives' endorsement of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 2170, which requests that states "*act to suppress the flow of foreign fighters, financing and other support to Islamist extremist groups in Iraq and Syria*" (United Nations, 2014), is a testimony to that. Additionally, the Secretary-General of the Arab League, Nabil Elaraby, declared at the meeting that the LAS must act "*militarily and politically*" and that there is a need for a "*clear and firm decision for a comprehensive confrontation with cancerous and terrorist groups"* (Associated Press, 2014). Furthermore, he criticised the passiveness of the organisation and the political friction between member states, which impedes the organisation from adopting a common voice and a common strategy. In spite of that, the LAS chief noted that *"While some Arab states object to allowing the*

Arab League to intervene in their internal crises, the floodgates are opened to foreign intervention, including militarily" (Aljazeera, 2014).

A later summit, which was held on 26 March 2015, further underlined the organisation's view that it can play an important role in the region in countering attacks by terrorist groups. Possible regional courses of action were highlighted in the final communiqué, which stated that "*coordination, efforts and steps to establish a united Arab force*" should be undertaken (Mourad & Bayoumy, 2015). The Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi regarded the creation of a joint military force as a historical and critical decision that would safeguard Arab national security, considering the "*unprecedented unrest and threats endured by the Arab world.*" However, there is criticism that this proposal was made at a time when a Saudi-led military force continued to bomb Shia insurgents in Yemen, which indicates that Shia Arabs from Mesopotamia to the Levant are practically precluded from having a voice in the League. Although it is reasonable to argue that a joint military force will increase the effectiveness of the organisation (previously regarded as weak and inactive), one must also consider the fact that such an approach will only cause greater division in the Arab world. It is hard to believe that the road to peace can be paved with less comprehensive and inclusive approaches such as a one-sided military force (Bröning, 2015).

The African Union

Although the AU has had a legal framework in place to combat terrorism since 1999, the policy issue became more significant in 2010, when the Assembly underscored in one of its Ordinary Sessions in Kampala the "*need for renewed efforts and increased mobilisation to combat the scourge of terrorism*" and invited the Commission to take the necessary steps in this direction (Europafrica.net, 2010). However, there is wide criticism that the AU recognised and took action against the terrorist threat posed by Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab six years too late, when the groups became a trans-border phenomenon having transgressed into Chad and Cameroon. Conscious of its delayed response and failure to react to these threats in their early stages, the AU Commission appointed in 2013 a panel of experts to propose a plan of action and assess the effectiveness of the ASF (African Standby Force). The resulting report, although initially kept secret, eventually made public and disclosed the reasons for failure, out of which three main ones can be distinguished: "*the unpredictability of pledges made by member states; a lack of support due to gaps in procurement, human resources and experience with mission support systems; and a failure to develop the African Standby Force's own resources, including financial resources*" (Strydom, 2015).

In light of the need to take more extensive action to combat terrorism, the AU PSC (Peace and Security Council) released a communiqué on 29 January 2015, which sets forth the regional and international efforts to be undertaken against Boko Haram. In this document, the terrorist attacks, killings, kidnappings, hostage taking, sexual violence and other abuses are repeatedly condemned by the organisation and presented as potential crimes against humanity. The communiqué also acknowledges the devastating effects of these crimes, most notably massive internal displacement and population flows from Nigeria into Niger, Cameroon and Chad, which constitutes a large burden for receiving countries. This is, therefore, perceived as a threat to the entire region and continent, which highlights the need to provide support to the affected member states, strengthen operational capacity and take the necessary measures on a regional level to neutralize Boko Haram (AU Peace and Security Council , 2015). Only two days later, the AU Assembly also adopted a Declaration of Support to the LCBC (Lake Chad Basin Commission) countries and Benin, calling on member states and other international stakeholders, such as the UN, to contribute to regional efforts in establishing the appropriate legal framework for cross-border military operations against Boko Haram. (Dlamini-Zuma , 2015)

In addition to military and security steps, the AU Commission Chairperson reasserted the PSC's declaration that a successful neutralisation of Boko-Haram also implies maintaining sustained efforts to improve livelihoods, to ensure jobs and education and to guarantee the protection of human rights. For the attainment of this goal, she encouraged countries in the region to double their efforts (Dlamini-Zuma , 2015). Another report issued by the AU Commission Chairperson reiterated the declarations made by Heads of State and Government at the 20th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Union that *"the operationalization of the RDC [A/N: Rapid Deployment Capability] of the ASF would significantly facilitate the promotion of African solutions to the problems facing the continent, and enhance the ownership of, and leadership by, the continent's efforts to resolve conflicts and crises in Africa"* (Dlamini-Zuma, 2015). This statement conveyed that the implementation of this policy would give the regional organisation political credibility and would enable it to contribute more actively and substantively to collective security, as envisioned by the UN Charter. In regard to Al-Shabaab attacks, the leader of the AU's AMISOM (African Union Mission to Somalia) mission, Maman Sidikou, declared, following the killing of three AU soldiers by the group, that the mission would react very rapidly to the new tactics developed by Al-Shabaab and that it is taking all the necessary measures to prevent such events in the future (Al Jazeera, 2014). Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud emphasised the regional nature of the threat posed by Al-Shabaab, which demands a regional response. This can be attributed to the fact that the group has a common cause with allies across regional borders and an ideology that does

not take into account national citizenships, and to the mobility of its leaders and recruits through the "porous" borders of Africa. The head of state thus called for a corroborated effort within the legal framework of the AU to "*uproot these evil forces*" (Smith, 2013).

More recently, in communiqué released on 20 February 2015, the PSC openly condemned the attacks carried out by remnants of Al-Shabaab on unarmed and innocent civilians at the Central Hotel in Mogadishu, despite the progress made in ensuring peace and security in Somalia (AU Peace and Security Council, 2015).

Comparative analysis

The analysis of the discourse on terrorism propagated by representatives and official texts of these organisations clearly indicates that terrorism is considered a threat to regional security and must therefore be tackled on a regional scale. Although there are calls for action against this threat by both regional organisations, the AU seems to have a more coherent and inclusive discourse on the topic. The high internal political division and the divergence of national interests which characterises the LAS makes it more difficult for this organisation to adopt a cohesive approach to combatting terrorism. The fundamentally different views of its member states, which mainly derive from the heterogeneity of sectarian religious beliefs, cannot be easily coagulated as to guarantee representation to the entire LAS community. For this reason, decision-making is often slow or even fruitless. On the other hand, although AU member states have a more unified approach, which is clearly articulated by the organisation's institutions, their response to specific threats comes quite late. This is, arguably, due to the weak governance of member states and the lack of institutional capacity to identify and react to terrorist threats in a timely manner. The fact that only a fraction of the AU budget is funded by member states also illustrates the low commitment of national governments to the supra-national body (Strydom, 2015).

Institutional design and legal framework

The League of Arab States

LAS countries have signed a document that deals directly with the threat of terrorism: the Arab Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism. The text of the Convention defines terrorism and terrorist offences and imposes obligations on member states not to commit, finance or aid any form of terrorist actions. The signatories also vow to take preventive and suppressive measures against terrorist groups. To strengthen this agreement, the Convention also provides that the countries shall cooperate towards this end by exchanging information, assisting in investigations and exchanging expertise, but

also by coordinating their judicial efforts, such as extradition or protection of witnesses. The text also provides means of implementation for these endeavours (League of Arab States, 1998).

In addition to this legal framework, new institutional developments have also addressed terrorist threats in the context of collective security. The reforms, which started over 20 years ago to strengthen the organisation, have given rise to a new body – the Peace and Security Council - established in 2006 (Sheeran & Sir Rodley, 2013). This body is composed of five member states represented by their Foreign Ministers and its competences are determined by Article 6 of its Statute. The duties that fall within the scope of regional peace and security are cooperation to confront transnational threats such as organised crimes and terrorism, proposals to establish Arab peace-keeping forces and proposals for extraordinary meetings held by the Council in case of aggravation of conflict in one of the member states. It is thus observable that the PSC has no decision-making power and that it can only advise the LAS Council on which course of action to take (Winther, 2014).

The African Union

AU efforts to combat and prevent terrorism can be traced back to 1992, when the organisation adopted a Resolution on the Strengthening of Cooperation and Coordination among African States, which pledged to fight extremism and terrorism. Two years later, member states signed the Declaration on the Code of Conduct for Inter-African Relations and rejected all forms of terrorism and extremism, regardless of whether they are expressions of sectarianism, tribalism or discrimination based on ethnicity or religion. By signing the Declaration, they also condemned all terrorist acts, methods and practices as criminal and agreed to enhance cooperation in combatting them. These efforts were formalised in the 1999 Convention on the Prevention and Combatting of Terrorism, which entered into force in December 2002. This document requires member states to criminalise terrorist action in their national legislation, defines the areas of cooperation and establishes state jurisdiction for anti-terror operations and the legal framework for extradition and extra-territorial investigations, as well as mutual legal assistance (AU Peace and Security Department, 2014).

The Convention was further consolidated by the adoption of an additional Protocol in 2004, which has barely raised the minimum number of ratifications required to enter into force (15 out of 15 in May 2015) (Strydom, 2015). It recognizes the growing threat of terrorism and the increasing connections between terrorism, drug trafficking, transnational organised crime, money laundering and illegal arms' trade of small arms and light weapons. When enacted, the Protocol will streamline the activities of the AU

PSC, which has been created with the aim of coordinating and harmonising continental efforts in the fight against terrorism (AU Peace and Security Department, 2014).

In order to implement the obligations set forth by the Convention, an AU Plan of Action on the Prevention and Combatting of Terrorism has been developed, which lays down measures in the areas of police and border control, as well as legislative, judicial and practical measures that address security challenges and terrorist funding, and facilitate exchange of information. The Plan of Action also established the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism, set up in 2004, to centralise information, research terrorism and terrorist organisations and develop capacity-building programs (AU Peace and Security Department, 2014).

A further step was to appoint an AU Special Representative for Counter-Terrorism Cooperation in 2010, who is tasked with providing on-the ground support to member states. The Representative's responsibilities include mobilising countries to fight terrorism, assessing their situation and, in collaboration with the national authorities, to determining priority security issues. The member states are further aided in implementing the legal provisions on counter-terrorism by the African Model Law on Terrorism, developed by the Commission and endorsed by the Assembly in 2011 (AU Peace and Security Department, 2014).

Article 4 of the AU Constitutive Act lays down obligations to intervene militarily in a state on the basis of its inability or unwillingness to protect its citizens when gross violations of human rights occur. This article, therefore, addresses issues which are sometimes connected to terrorist activities: atrocity crimes and the responsibility to protect (Strydom, 2015).

Comparative analysis

Although LAS states have signed an enforcing document on the prevention of terrorism, it has been regarded as a threat to human rights due to the very broad nature of its definitional parameters. A report issued by Amnesty International heavily criticised the Arab Convention, maintaining that *"Many of the provisions of the Convention do not conform with the obligations of member states of the Arab League under the UN Charter and international human rights law, and the Convention fails to recognise and maintain many other rights and obligations enshrined in human rights and humanitarian law"* (Amnesty International , 2002). First of all, the Convention is problematic in the sense that the definition of terrorism leaves space for wide interpretations and does not set the necessary safeguards to prevent abuse. This stems from the fact that essential terms for understanding the scope of the document, such as 'violence', 'terrorist purposes', 'terrorist elements' and 'terrorist groups' are not defined in any way. Furthermore, the

text poses a real danger of breaching freedom of expression, as it provides that media channels used by security forces can be strengthened in case of a suspected terrorist threat. This allows for excessive collection and exchange of private information about innocent citizens, as well as the use of means that violate the right to privacy, under the pretext of ensuring security. Another grave breach of human rights is the fact that rightful and humane extradition, detention and the right to a fair trial are not guaranteed. In the absence of such safeguards, suspects risk exposure to torture, cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment, and even the death penalty. The Convention also provides national executives with dangerous levels of power, as it does not require judicial review, prior judicial authorisation or any form of judicial surveillance, nor does it allow for the possibility to challenge the lawfulness of detention. Regarding refugees and asylum seekers, instead of protecting them, the Convention makes it possible to reject or prohibit displaced persons from entering the country if they are suspected of being 'terrorist elements.' Such a provision clearly opens avenues for abuse and undermines the maintenance of regional peace and security. Ironically, other Convention articles are gateways to impunity for certain perpetrators, namely those who committed crimes that fall under the jurisdiction of the international community or those who have been granted amnesty in the requesting state (Syrian Human Rights Committee, 2004).

Within the broader context of regional peace and security, which falls under the umbrella of the PSC, the body's exclusively advisory role means that its recommendations are not always enforced, which may preclude an effective response from taking place.

The AU's framework for combatting terrorism takes a 'softer' approach, less open to abuse than that of the LAS, which relies on exchange of knowledge, pooled resources and cooperation in prevention, and which is primarily serving the protection of citizens. This also means, though, that the legal instruments provide a limited scope of action, confined to information gathering and the establishment of information networks. Moreover, the Protocol to the Convention, which is designed to ensure the implementation of anti-terrorist measures, has obtained the necessary number of ratifications only 10 years after its adoption (Strydom, 2015). By this point, Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab had already caused major crises in AU member states. The real power of the AU to maintain regional peace resides in Article 4 of the Constitutive Act, which is a pioneering legal instrument for guaranteeing the responsibility to protect within the legal framework of a regional organisation (Kingah, 2015). The practical obstacle against the effective implementation of these regulating documents is that, although sovereignty is not listed as an exception to intervention, many states do claim it to deter action on a

supra-national level, in spite of them lacking genuine qualities of statehood. In this sense, states do remain the main actors fighting terrorism (Strydom, 2015).

Operational Instruments

The League of Arab States

The LAS Cairo meeting in September 2014 was the first time the organisation's leaders proposed the creation of a joint military force in support of the US's campaign against IS. The proposal was transformed into an agreement by LAS leaders at a meeting in Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt, on 25 March 2015. The Egyptian President regarded the meeting as reinvigorating the Arab organisation and claimed that it was successful in identifying the reasons behind regional security threats. Although at that point the implementation of the policy had not been decided upon, casting doubt over the composition of the force, the decision was perceived as credible because it was announced by the Egyptian President, who led the military takeover of his country in 2013. Regarding participation, the expectations formulated in the meeting were that it would be voluntary (Kirkpatrick, 2015). The move to establish an Arab force was seen as an effort to gain independence from Washington, considering that in the past, LAS had relied on NATO troops (Mora, 2015).

At the summit, it was also decided that the force would be engaged at the request of member states facing a national security threat and to combat terrorist acts. Although no details on its structure have been released, it was suggested that it would comprise of 40.000 troops – double the size of NATO's Response Force: a naval, air and land operations command and a majority of units coming from Egypt and Morocco, followed by Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Sudan. Funding for the Arab units shall be provided by their origin countries, while the set-up and management of the force will be covered by the oil-rich Gulf countries (Mustafa, 2015).

However, the talks uncovered that the force would primarily be used to stabilise the crisis in Yemen and that it would take a long time for it to develop to the extent that it could be effectively deployed in Iraq and Syria to fight IS (Bradley , 2015).

The African Union

The AU has already established an ASF, which operates under the auspices of the Protocol relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council, based on stand-by arrangements from the five African sub-regions. This means that the member nations provide multidimensional capabilities, including military, police and civilian, which are prepared to be rapidly deployed if needed. The force's main responsibilities are monitoring, peace-keeping, conflict prevention, the implementation of Article 4 of the

Constitutive Act and civilian protection (AU Peace and Security Department, 2015). Action to fight against Boko-Haram's insurgency in north-eastern Nigeria has already been taken with the creation of the MJTF (Multi-National Joint Task Force) comprised of troops from Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, Niger and Benin. These units are based within their own national borders and coordinated from the capital of Chad (Aljazeera America, 2015). The MJTF was launched on 25 May 2015 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, as a follow-up to the PSC communiqués, which mandated it to operate for 12 months. The strength of the mission was also increased from 7,500 to 10,000 troops (AU Peace and Security Department, 2015).

In order to tackle Al-Shabaab, the AU has shifted the scope of a previous peacekeeping mission – AMISOM – to the abatement of the threat posed by the terrorist group and other armed opposition groups (AU Mission to Somalia, 2015). The mission was originally established in 2007 with a mandate of only 6 months, but the AU obtained authorisation from the UNSC in October 2014 to extend its operational term until November 2015 (AU Mission to Somalia, 2015). The mission is structured into five components, each having a specialised objective and functional operations. AMISOM Police is tasked with training, advising and monitoring the Somali Police into an effective force that respects international standards (AU Mission to Somalia, 2015). The scope of the mission's humanitarian work is quite limited, but it mainly focuses on the facilitation of humanitarian operations, such as securing all humanitarian corridors and facilitating the repatriation and reintegration of refugees (AU Mission to Somalia, 2015). The military component is the largest one and it is comprised of troops from Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Burundi and Sierra Leone, each being assigned a Somali sub-regional sector. The mandate is to conduct peace support operations, stabilise the situation in the country, create the necessary conditions for the conduct of humanitarian activities, protect Somali federal institutions and secure national infrastructure (AU Mission to Somalia, 2015). The Civilian mission is designed to assist the Federal Government in re-establishing functioning state institutions and in delivering public services. The scope of its activities encompasses humanitarian, political, gender, civil affairs and developmental dimensions (AU Mission to Somalia, 2015). Lastly, AMISOM Maritime cooperates with international actors in conducting maritime operations, such as ensuring vessel security, transporting humanitarian aid and securing Mogadishu's Coastline (AU Mission to Somalia, 2015).

Comparative Analysis

Unlike the AU, the LAS agreed on a plan to create a common force only two months ago. With no concrete strategy on how to deploy and coordinate the troops, the organisation still has a long way to go before it can take effective military action against IS. There is

also scepticism about the effectiveness of such a force, if created. If one looks at the performance of joint Arab forces in previous conflicts, a lack of trust and information-sharing is observed. Without this component, amplified by a lack of joint training, it is unlikely that the force will be able to conduct successful operations (Mustafa, 2015). The UN is also reluctant to delegate regional peacekeeping powers to LAS because, although the organisation can deliver more appropriate regional responses, its absence in the military intervention in Libya reflected the sensitive nature of its power politics. In the Syrian conflict, member states support different factions – be it the regime or the opposition - in accordance with their own national interests. These highly divergent views represent an externalisation of the countries' interpretations of Islam, which leads to incoherence and lack of regional cooperation and provide terrorist groups, such as IS, with the opportunity to take over large territories (Vanhullebusch, 2015). Moreover, in contrast to the AU, which operates on several different plains of action, the LAS has no alternatives to military force in tackling terrorist acts and their outcome.

Despite the AU having more comprehensive and already operational plans that target each terrorist group specifically, the organisation has not yet managed to implement them to their full potential. In regard to the Boko Haram threat, MNJTF soldiers will secure the Nigerian side of Lake Chad, which represents only 10-15% of the area in which the group operates. This means that the force's contribution will not be decisive and it will still be Nigeria's responsibility to eliminate most of the threat (Fessy, 2015). Moreover, it may increase the risk for a regional insurgency due to its unclear timeline and ambiguous mandate. The task of searching and freeing victims kidnapped by Boko Haram implies a semi-permanent presence along the Nigerian border which, apart from having the potential to undermine the country's sovereignty and angering its leaders – as it previously happened with the deployment of Chadian troops in Cameroon - also provokes Boko Haram. This is a likely scenario, as the terrorist organisation has declared that it will only attack those who attack it and threatened to extend its insurgency to cooperating countries (Matfess, 2015).

AMISOM's efforts, on the other hand, have been deemed more successful and, actually, instrumental in helping Somali forces to push Al-Shabaab out of most of Southern Somalia and major cities. The mission created a relatively secure environment, which has enabled the development of a Somali peace process and the progressive establishment of accountable local institutions. As a result, AMISOM will now enter the second stage of its mandate, namely to deploy across the entire country and to help expand state authority (AU Mission to Somalia, 2015). Nevertheless, the AU's intervention in Somalia might lead to Al-Shabaab's regional expansion; the group is now targeting Tanzania and Uganda

because the two countries have deployed troops against it under the AMISOM umbrella (Matfess, 2015).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The research showed that both organisations assessed have responded to regional terrorist threats, making use of discourse, the institutional structure and legal framework, as well as operational instruments. However, they have done so to different extents. While the LAS has officially displayed a willingness to combat IS, its institutional bodies, legal provisions and operational instruments are much weaker than those of the AU. The incoherence and lack of coordination prove that the conflicting agendas of member states impede coordinated action. The LAS's most powerful countries, such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, use brutal means to supress terrorists, which only angers the opposition and motivates it to respond violently. As long as the LAS lacks political and military cohesion among its members and merely represents an association of authoritarian and corrupt leaders, it will be disqualified from providing a legitimate and sustainable solution (Metzger, 2014). Therefore, the Arab League must first build democratic legitimacy for its response to terrorism to be effective. This would unequivocally imply strengthening the Arab Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism so that it can meet international standards of human rights protection and precisely define terrorism and related notions. A more short-term solution would entail a shift in discourse from just condemning terrorism and instead calling for concrete actions that are also implemented. In this sense, the LAS could promote initiatives to prevent Arabs from joining extremist factions, request member states to impose stricter border controls and facilitate a more effective tracking and prevention of funding of fundamentalist groups (Metzger, 2014).

The AU, on the other hand, although it has two military missions targeting Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab, respectively, should learn from its mission in Somalia the lesson that a regional military force alone does not suffice to eliminate terrorist threats. AMISOM's scope was extended from a strictly peacekeeping mission to several operational areas and this should also be the case for the fight against Boko Haram. Since military action has shown signs of amplification and expansion of terrorist attacks, the AU should formulate clear mandates for its joint operations, leaving no room for interpretation and avoiding the indefinite militarisation of the region. What could truly improve the effectiveness of both missions would be to directly address the roots of insurgency, such as economic underdevelopment, social and ethnic cleavages and political marginalisation, among others. Without improvements in these areas, the AU countries will continue to be exposed to violent upheavals (Matfess, 2015).

In conclusion, the AU's response against Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab has been more effective than the LAS's response against IS. However, in both cases, terrorist activities are far from being eradicated, with certain sub-regions facing increasing violence. Therefore, there is much room for improvement and the recommendations provided in the preceding paragraphs could form part of the solution in the quest for regional peace and security. In this sense, alternatives to militarisation could represent a valuable avenue for further research.

Acronyms

AMISOM: African Union Mission to Somalia
ASF: African Standby Force
AU: African Union
IS: Islamic State
LAS: League of Arab States
LCBC: Lake Chad Basin Commission
MJTF: Multi-National Joint Task Force
PSC: Peace and Security Council
RDC: Rapid Deployment Capability
UN: United Nations
UNSC: United Nations Security Council

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