



## SENEGAL COUNTERTERRORISM APPROACH

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Perhaps terrorism per se has become one of the key challenges to spreading peace and security, and building statehood and administration throughout Africa. In the recent five years, Africa has sustained an unprecedented rise of terrorist groups, according to the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) 2014. Over the past few years, the African Sahel Region has suffered many security threats because of the increasingly growing problems, which demonized the region infested with a spate of extremist activities and terrorist acts, placing Senegal on full alert.

Insecurity and the snowballing influence of extremist groups place a heavy burden on the governments of Africa, as Africa is expected to be the new arena for the war on terrorism, especially after a large number of foreign fighters have sneaked in through the backdoor. In February 2020, the African Union in Addis Ababa announced that preparation was being made to deploy 3,000 soldiers temporarily along the Sahel Region, where eight years ago, regional forces

confronted the bloody attacks of extremists. The Union affirmed that this helps to deter terrorist groups, in cooperation with the countries of the G5 Sahel and the Economic Community of West African States of which Senegal is a member state.

### **Escalation of Terrorism in West Africa**

West Africa includes 15 countries: Cape Verde, Burkina Faso, Benin, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Niger, Nigeria, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo and Ivory Coast. All of these countries except Mauritania are members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

According to the United Nations, the rate of terrorist attacks on civilian and military targets has increased in recent years. Terrorist attacks have increased five times in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger since 2016 with at least 4,000 deaths in the countries of the region last year, compared to 770 deaths in 2016.

A research study issued by the Egyptian Center for Thought and Strategic Studies reported a noticeable increase in the activities of terrorist groups in 2019, as the

continent was exposed to approximately 3471 terrorist acts, causing 10,460 deaths. Such a formidably terrifying activity of terrorist groups is associated with their new pathways. Given the decline in their activities in the Middle East, the rapid strategic transition to Africa was deemed necessary. As such, Senegal always emphasizes that the African countries have become the biggest victims of terrorism, rolling up their sleeves to raise global awareness of the necessity of coordination to decisively address and counter terrorism.

### **Examples of Counterterrorism Efforts in Senegal**

The Senegalese Ministry of the Interior, in cooperation with Islamic societies and the Sufi orders in the country, has held a number of events and activities to educate and sensitize the Senegalese people on tolerance and peace in true Islam, while exposing and stripping off what is unfairly attached to Islam, such as extremism and violence. Islamic societies held seminars in universities and conference halls to educate youth and hamper their recruitment for the benefit of extremism. Among such constructive seminars was the “Threat of Terrorism Against the Individual and Community” attended by a wealth of counterterrorism scholars and pundits, delivered by Professor Omar Diallo, who paid a visit to the Prince Mohammed bin Naif Counseling Center in Riyadh.

Given the magnitude of the terrorist exploitation of the various media outlets to influence local and international public opinion, the Society for Preachers of Peace and Development held a forum on “Media-Based Terrorism” supported by the Senegalese government, which highlighted key foci on the challenges to journalists and the media, such as: How should the media address terrorism? Do the media serve public opinion or do they serve terrorists when monitoring terrorist acts? How can the media determine when an act or incident should be monitored? When should the media boycott and ignore? If it is decided to monitor a piece of news, which method(s) should first address it? What aspects should be highlighted?

What aspects should be ignored? When should the press and the media be committed not to publish information and news that, if published, could lead to dire consequences? Senegal has identified methods to combat the spread of terrorism, and developed strategic steps within a holistic approach to combat violent extremism and terrorism, including good governance, tightening up security, upholding human rights, enhancing youth employment, eradicating poverty and spreading moderate thought.

### **Senegal Relentless Action and Shouldering Responsibility**

Inasmuch as the terrorist threat is increasingly snowballing, Senegal has made concerted efforts at all levels in close cooperation with its international partners across Africa, France, the United States of America and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, with a view to combating terrorist networks in Africa. As Senegal is within the immediate vicinity of the countries most impacted by terrorism, its neighbor, Mauritania, called for

the necessity of establishing a broad international and regional coalition to eliminate violence and terrorism, especially in the countries of the 5G Sahel. Within the framework of cooperation between the two countries, they agreed, during the visit of the Senegalese President to Mauritania in February 2020, to support their rapprochement to prevent and combat transnational organized crime, especially terrorism and arms trafficking.

One manifestation of Senegal relentless and vigorous pursuit to strengthen international cooperation in the fight against terrorism is the establishment of the third International Forum for Peace and Security in Africa in Dakar, Senegal, dated December 5 and 6, 2016. Senegal has demonstrated its unwavering commitment to the necessity of concerted international efforts to confront and eradicate terrorism; to dry up its sources of financing; to promote peaceful coexistence in communities; to achieve security and stability in Africa. To this end, Senegal presented a model for peacekeeping and security-building in the Dakar Sixth International Forum for Peace and Security in Africa in 2019, which is a forum that Senegal organizes annually with the participation of large countries to benefit from their experiences, such as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United States of America, France and robust engagement by the African countries.

The key theme featured by the forum is “Peace and Security in Africa: The Current Challenges of Pluralism.” The Forum issued conclusions and recommendations in the interest of peace and security in Africa, arriving at decisions to solve the security problems recently witnessed by some African countries. The Dakar International Forum on Security and Peace is a Senegalese initiative that aims to establish peace and security throughout Africa, and opens new horizons for African governments to confront those seeking to undermine the African security.

### **Domestic Strategies**

Many security analysts believe that Africa has become one of the most notorious hotbeds of security unrest and threats in the world. Its geopolitics makes it a breeding ground for cross-continent terrorism, forcing Senegal to adopt a number of strategic plans to reduce the increased risk from flashpoints. In December 2017, Senegal began the trial of 30 people for violence, affiliation with a criminal group in connection with a terrorist group, money laundering, and terrorist financing. They were accused of joining Islamic militant groups in Senegal, a country that is still immune from any attacks by extremists other than its neighbors.

Senegal realizes that the responsibility of pundits is great. Therefore, the domestic strategy has achieved the cooperation of the government with the Islamic communities and the Federation of Imams and Scholars in highlighting Senegal efforts in countering terrorism, and calling the scholars to renew their speeches to address the deviant ideologies of extremism, and to care for their children and reform them.

One of the strategies adopted by Senegal to combat such an imminent danger is providing the Senegalese police forces with training sessions within the framework of a program supported by the United States to combat extremist groups in the region, in which American trainers provided tactical training for Senegalese security officers and policemen. These exercises further helped the Senegalese security authorities to deter and counter terrorism. Senegal participation in the US Department of State counterterrorism assistance program dates back to 1985.

### **Foreign Strategies**

In the face of terrorist groups, Senegal has adopted strategies of ideological, developmental and military aspects that have been well received by countries and have become a role model to follow. Senegal also participates in all international seminars and meetings aimed at countering terrorism, while considering the recommendations developed. Senegal has recently participated in an international conference in Nouakchott for African scholars on the role of Islam in Africa: Tolerance and Moderation in the Face of Extremism and Fighting.

Despite the increasingly growing challenges across Africa, Senegal has adopted the principle “African solutions to African problems”, as the best manner to address the African crises, and to understand the peculiarities of African countries and peoples. Senegal early realization of the fact that Africa has become a springboard for armed groups contributed to its successful counterterrorism strategy. Senegal has become fully aware of the terrorist activity of Al-Qaeda cells throughout Africa, realizing that such terrorist groups benefit from the poor border controls between African countries, the poor law and judicial institutions and the poor, as well as the exploitation of the poor population and religious or ethnic bedrock to recruit such people. All of these clandestine plans were glaringly exposed by Senegal.

### **International Tribute to Senegal Counterterrorism Efforts**

France commended Senegal counterterrorism efforts in the 5G Sahel. The first elements of Operation Serval were deployed in Senegal because it was the first contributor to the peacekeeping mission in Mali. France considered that only the strict and permanent mobilization of the actors in the region could repel the terrorist threat. During the visit of President of Senegal Macky Sall to France on July 12, 2017, the French President Emmanuel Macron praised the Senegalese efforts. France still evinces its desire to enhance economic cooperation with Senegal, and hopes to continue working with the ECOWAS and to continue military and security cooperation with Senegal.

On the visit of US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to Senegal in February 2020, he emphasized that the United States of America considers Senegal an essential ally in fighting terrorism.

The United Arab Emirates appreciates the constructive efforts of Senegal through the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in supporting issues of Islam and Muslims, and to showcase the civilization of true Islam free from extremism and violence. There is close cooperation between the UAE and Senegal in tackling terrorism, violence and groups that claim the lives of innocent people, and supporting the “Dakar Center for Security and Peace”.