11-20-2020

NATURE OF HOME-GROWN TERRORISM THREAT IN GHANA

Mohammed Zulkarnain
Universiti Sains Malaysia, zulkurunmalay2011@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarhub.ui.ac.id/jts

Part of the International Relations Commons

NATURE OF HOME-GROWN TERRORISM THREAT IN GHANA

Cover Page Footnote

N/A

Nature of Home-Grown Terrorism Threat in Ghana

Mohammed Zulkarnain
Universiti Sains Malaysia
zulkurunmalay2011@gmail.com

Abstract

The present state of security in the West African sub-region raises important issues of the nature of home-grown terrorism (HGT) threats in Ghana. Most studies of home-grown terrorism have focused mainly on the psychological implications of terrorist acts. This paper examines the complexities of the Ghanaian state securities perceive the nature of the threat of home-grown terrorism in the country. Data was collected from representatives of the state security agencies using semi-structured in-depth interviews. Findings indicate that the threat nature of home-grown terrorism in Ghana varies but the most significant is the threat from the recruitment of Ghanaian Muslims by the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The finding helps to gain a better understanding of the difficulty of living under constant home-grown terrorism threats. It also provides an understanding of how citizens cope with and adjust to such threats.

Keywords: Security, Terrorism, Radicalization, Extremism, Ideology, Islam

INTRODUCTION

The increase of radicalization and violent extremism in West Africa has recently created insecurity and humanitarian crisis in most countries. Ghana has been identified as a possible target for attack by recent Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) posts according to a social media report. However, ISIS supporters from the region have also cited Togo and Benin as targets, this development comes as Ivory Coast nabbed a cell with explosives by Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in

2016, after targeting innocent people in Grand Bassam, about 40km from the commercial capital Abidjan (BBC News, March 14, 2016). Though, the threat of extremists and religious radicalization loom large in a digital age, as extremist propaganda spreads online.

The focal home-grown terrorist threat in advanced countries could be best understood as evolving from across the political range, as universal firearms, political divergence and other factors combined with the power of online communication and social media to generate a complex and varied terrorist threat that crosses ideologies. Ghana has a difficult task to keep its citizens from being influenced by radical ideology.

This paper seeks to identify the real nature of home-grown terrorism in Ghana based on state actor's perspective.

BACKGROUND

September 11 of the year 2001 may have been the year that international terrorism hit American soil. However, 2009 was the year when Americans, Europeans, Asians and Africans became targets of domestic terrorism. It is believed that, cases of homegrown extremism have increased over the past years, posing a mounting threat to many countries' security, according to United States House Homeland Security Committee report released in 2016 (Rowland, 2017). The United States US has recorded 39 homegrown jihadist cases across 20 states over the past three years, marking an 8 percent increase from March 2017, the counter-terrorism committee found in its monthly Terror Threat Snapshot. The trend has grown drastically in the year2016. More than 20 percent of the 209 homegrown extremist cases in the United States since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks have occurred over the past 12 months, the committee reported. More than 60 percent of those cases involved arrests related to the Islamic State terrorist group (Johnson, 2017).

In West Africa's case, the source of insecurity in most of the regional countries have to do with unsolvable or unsolved internal ethnic conflicts, power sharing disputes, greater deal of injustice, lack of rule of law, undemocratic and weak institutions, border disputes between countries, religious and cultural differences, poor agricultural reforms among others. Most terrorist groups in West Africa were more or less based on revolutionary agenda, religious antagonism leading to extremism, appeal

to institutional change, claiming recognition from oppressed minority, fragility of institutions, transient or overstaying governments based on ethnic basis for either election or resources and power sharing. There were also failure of social inclusion policies to allow participation, macroeconomic imbalance, lack of effective border control, inefficient crime prevention and unequipped counter-terrorism organizations, climatic conditions, uncontrolled migration through absorbent borders, collusion and complexity in criminal activities by government officials (Fulgence, 2015).

Even though Ghana has not witnessed any terrorist attack, yet the threat from home-grown terrorism remains significant and is constantly evolving. The threat comes not only from Muslim extremists, but could also come from aggrieved, politician terrorists. According to EX AFRICA annual report (2019), Ghana's northern border is under grave threat from militants operating in southern Burkina Faso. With the exception of Nigeria, no aggressive groups have demonstrated a significant operational presence in the sub-regional coastal areas. However, the modes of attacks used by home-grown terrorists seem to have changed, as demonstrated by the 2010 Maiduguri attacks in Nigeria and the attempt on a flight from Amsterdam to Detroit on Christmas day 2009. Nevertheless, threats now come from both organized terrorists and from so-called "lone wolves", who may have developed their radical beliefs based on extremist propaganda and have found training materials and recipes for bombs on the internet. Thus, these developments mean that the international community's efforts to combat this threat need to evolve as well.

Yet, three conditions together or separately could result in a growing terrorist threat defined in the following terms:

1. The threat of homegrown terrorism could be growing if Ghanaian Muslims are increasingly inclined to plot deadly attacks. In the lexicon of the debate, any ordinary Muslims or non-Muslim could be radicalized and committed to violence in greater numbers that is, if more individuals initiate

plotting deadly attacks, despite the high rates of premature detection and implementation failure, more violent attacks could occur in Ghana.

2. The threat of homegrown terrorism could be increasing if the attacks pursued by Ghanaians are less likely to be foiled through premature arrests. Aspiring terrorists, for example, could be increasingly able to safeguard their planning activities and prepare their plots without being monitored and apprehended by authorities.

3. The threat could be increasing if those plots that advance to the execution phase are carried out with greater proficiency: that is, even if undetected plots remain few in number, the threat to Ghanaian lives could grow if the attacks executed by militants are more successfully implemented. This could occur, for example, if militants become better skilled at engaging in pre-operational activity and fabricating weapons (Brooks, 2011).

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Brooks (2011), analysts who speak and write about homegrown terrorism are generally referring to terrorist activity undertaken by radicalized or extreme Muslim citizens or residents of the country the person found himself, because the status of the perpetrator as an American or any citizen is the defining feature of homegrown terrorism, the category encompasses individuals involved in a range of terrorist activities, including training with or joining foreign insurgencies such as those in Afghanistan or Somalia, providing material support to a foreign terrorist organization, and engaging in terrorist attacks within the US.

Moreover, though potentially inspired by a global jihadist movement and its propaganda, these individuals often plan, prepare, and carry out their plots or undertake other activities without the central guidance or assistance of formal terrorist organizations. As such, even when aimed at Ghanaian targets, homegrown terrorism excludes attacks orchestrated and executed by foreign operatives of transnational terrorist organizations, such as the attempted shoe

bombing in 2001 by Richard Reid and the 2009 effort by the Christmas Day bomber, Abdul Farouk Abdulmutallab.

Home-grown Terrorism in the Region

Terrorism in West Africa can manifest in various forms. The most visible symptoms are jihadist fundamentalism and extremism in northern Nigeria and northern Mali. It can take forms of insurgency of armed fighters creating independent territory, armed factionist (Delta Niger), separatists (Tuareg in Mali and Niger) and other terrorism groups taking hostages, kidnapping foreigners, perpetrating suicidal bombing etc. Intergovernmental bodies besides the earlier cited, were established to attempt dealing with terrorism in the region: Financial Action Task force (FATF) was conceived as an intergovernmental body that develops and promotes policies to protect the global financial system against money laundering, to keep an eye on money transfer to prevent possible terrorism financing, proliferation of weapons and mass destruction.

During the workshop organized by FATF and GIABA experts on money laundering and terrorism financing organized in Dakar from 12th to 28th November 2012, it was raveled how sophisticated are the means through which terrorism is financed, funded and supported. It was shown again how linked these West African terrorist groups are with other global terrorism organizations by use of legitimate and illegitimate means to recruit, upkeep and purchase ammunitions and weapons (Fulgence, 2015).

The Case of Boko Haram

Boko Haram is believed to be one of the most violent Islamic groups in West Africa which has left thousands of lives dead since the year 2009. Boko Haram's tactics include suicide bombing, kidnapping, attacks on churches, civilians, security agencies and military bases. They usually grew and have been in northern Nigeria since 2009 and its imminent defying acts that had led to the world indignation were the abdication of 200 Chibbok Girls in 2014.

This sect has been present in Borno, Yobe, Adamawua, Maiduguri states where they had their strong hold. Boko Haram has been resilient as Nigerian military had not been successful

in its operation to eradicate the sect before intervention of neighboring countries. They continued bombing crowded areas in all the country using detonator and sophisticated weapons (Fulgence, 2015).

METHODOLOGY

From the literature review, it is apparent that the subject of the paper is very multifaceted especially when it has to deal with human security. This illustrated that a qualitative method would be far more appropriate than a quantitative approach. Qualitative data provides a rich detailed picture to be built up about why and how people act in certain ways, and their feelings about these actions, its data does not simply count things, but it is a way of recording people's attitudes, feelings and behavior in greater depth (Liamputtong, 2013).

A qualitative method was applied to find out what is the real nature of home-grown terrorism threats in Ghana from three of state security agencies perspectives. The target population of this study is all the state security agencies in Ghana. However, the actual sample for the study is three (3) respondents from the state security agencies these include: The head of Anti-Terrorism Unit of the Ghana Armed Forces, the head of Anti-Terrorism Unit of the Ghana Police Service. And the officer in Charge of fighting terrorism at the National Security Authority. These agencies were chosen because, they are the agencies directly in charge of fighting terrorism in Ghana.

With regards to the material for the collection of data, various kinds were considered but the following were found to be most suitable for the study. Apparently, note taking, and audio recording are some of the approaches available to the researcher in the conduct of the interviews. In-depth interviews were used. In depth interviews are personal and unstructured interviews, and it is used to research subject (Milles & Huberman, 1994). Many researchers like to use semi-structured interviews because questions can be prepared ahead of time. Thus, it allows the interviewer to be prepared and appear competent during the interview. The main advantage of personal interviews is that, they involve personal and direct contact between interviewers and interviewees, as well as eliminate non-response rates, but interviewers need to have developed the

necessary skills to successfully conduct an interview (Fisher, 2005. Wilson, 2003).

Additionally, unstructured interviews offer flexibility in terms of the flow of the interview, thereby leaving room for the generation of conclusions that were not initially meant to be derived regarding a research subject. Nevertheless, there is a risk that the interview may deviate from the pre-specified research aims and objectives, to prevent this deviation it is generally best to tape-record interviews and later transcribe the recordings for analysis. It is important to state that, participation in the study was entirely voluntary.

Targeted participants approached were given an information sheet defining the research project. Interview was conducted for participants who agreed to take part in the study. Meticulous records of the interviews were maintained and the process of analysis was documented in details, this ensured reliability in the analysis of qualitative researchers (May & Pope, 1995). Conversely, raw data collected have no meaning nor show any relationships unless they are subjected to analysis and interpretations. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data which was gathered from the personal interviews, while NVIVO 11 was used to arrange the data.

According to Moore and McCabe (2005) this is the type of research whereby data gathered is categorized in themes and sub-themes to compare. In its most common form, it is a technique that allows a researcher to take qualitative data and to transform it into quantitative data (Milles & Huberman, 1994). The main advantage of the thematic analysis is that, it helps in data collected being reduced and simplified, while at the same time producing results that may in a way satisfy the accomplishment of research objectives (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013).

FINDINGS

What is the Nature of HGT in Ghana? (RQ1)

The question on what is the real nature of home-grown terrorism threat in Ghana resulted in the emergence of one theme as follow:

Threat from ISIS returnees: These are Ghanaians who have traveled back home from ISIS training camp or ISIS

dominant areas which have been affected by war or conflicts.

The response from this section was centered on one theme, that is, threat from ISIS returnees. At the outset, all the state actors perceived the threat nature of home-grown terrorism in Ghana as the threat posed by the youth who are recruited by the ISIS in case they return to Ghana from the Jihadi nations. Although ISIS has little support in Ghana, the state needs to prepare for the return of these ISIS returnees. State Actor 1 stated that, the state should prepare for the possible return of recruited Ghanaians, keeping in mind that, in peculiarity to their return, they may not be eager returnees who are disheartened with ISIS. According to State Actor 1, *the nature of HGT threat in Ghana is the returnees from Arab land especially those from Libya and people from the -so called- Jihadi Nations* (State Actor 1).

In assessing whether ISIS Ghanaian recruiters pose a security threat to the country, state actor 1 looked at the factors that motivated them to join ISIS and the possibility of them carrying out attacks against their target in Ghana. *In Ghana, there are issues that can lead to home-grown terrorism especially now*

that terrorist groups like ISIS have recruited some Ghanaian youth. The recruitment of some Ghanaians into ISIS camp exposes the country to terrorism in general, be it home-grown or international (State Actor 1).

Furthermore, State Actor 2 bemoaned the threat to the level of ISIS asking their recruiters in Ghana to attack some of their target. *The threat nature of HGT as warned by our intelligence is, ISIS could direct some of their recruited Ghanaians to attack foreigners in Ghana if they face difficulty gaining access to their target* (State Actor 2). In addition, State Actor 3 explained the implications for Ghana, which saw several of its citizens, leave the country to join ISIS.

ISIS' connection with some Ghanaian youth is a serious threat that can cause HGT in Ghana (State Actor 3). State actor 3 further explained that, ISIS local recruiters in Ghana lure Ghanaian Muslims into the terrorist organization and provide them all necessary logistics and motivation materials to initiate them into carrying out heinous acts thus: *They (ISIS) use their local agents in Ghana to recruit them, and supply them with*

materials, videos of how they kill people, books and lots more (State Actor 3).

In continuation, State Actor 1 gave details on the recruitment saga. According to this respondent, it endangers security situations in the country because it exposes the country to home-grown terrorism. *The recruitment of some Ghanaians to ISIS camp exposes the country to terrorism in general, be it HG or international* (State Actor 1). Another respondent explained that ISIS takes advantage of the general state of affairs in the country and other general issues within the population. The general state of affairs and issues that are engendering radicalization in Ghana include: political and socio-economic marginalization, political and religious suppression and relative deficiency to recruit Ghanaians. Once they meet the youth, they in turn expose the country to home-grown terrorism. *The fact that ISIS got their way to Ghanaian youth also shows how Ghana is exposed to HGT threat*, said State Actor 3.

Discussion of the Findings

The absolute human security threat facing Ghana now is not from predictable situation, but from Ghanaian terrorist returnees that could attack unceremoniously, using terror at any time and place, with the goal of undermining confidence in Ghana's institutions and the Ghanaian way of life. Due to the universal increase in the number and lethality of potential youth recruited by ISIS terrorist group, it is imperative that state actors become more involved in a strategic vision to recognize, prepare for and prevent potential Ghanaian youth from being radicalized. Almost all the state actors agreed that, Ghanaian ISIS returnees and their local recruiters are the sole threat of home-grown terrorism in Ghana. On the other hand, while assessing whether Ghanaian ISIS returnees pose a security threat to their nation, it is important to look at the factors that motivated them to join ISIS. As an unspecific number of Ghanaians left to join ISIS in 2015.

Some may have returned by now, according to the Nation's Security (Citi FM Online, 2017). Thus, the state actors fear that their return could lead to the creation of home-grown terrorists, especially with the significant progress in the retaking of most of ISIS's occupied territories. According to many news reports, after the Islamic State of Iraq and

Syria (ISIS) lost control over their last major stronghold in Iraq and Syria, many ISIS' foreign fighters are returning back to their home countries (Daily Maverick, 2017).

Nonetheless, in the case of this study, the reactions of the respondents provide important insight into the motivations of individuals to leave their countries of residence or nationality to join armed groups in any terrorist zones. Those Ghanaians left the country without informing anybody even their family to an unknown destination. El-said & Barret (2017) are of the view that more often than not, potential individual terrorists do not necessarily select the group they finally join. Rather, once they reach the territory, some seem to join the group that operates closest to their point of arrival.

By accessing the inspiration behind joining the group one can say that, these ISIS returnees usually depart their country of residence for different reasons. The state actors pointed to an intelligence of solidarity with the suffering of Muslims in countries such as Afghanistan, Libya, Palestine, Iraq and Syria as a robust factor driving recruitment in Ghana. Such conflicts are often alleged as injustices against Muslims, and for some, ISIS is seen as a force for change or squabble, with the group portraying itself as a defender of justice on behalf of the global Muslim community, as avowed by Ashlie & Minteh (2014).

The Ghanaian ISIS returnees may perhaps come back as cynical veterans, fixed in the face of danger and trained in the use of weapons and explosives (el-Said & Barret, 2017). There is also a particular concern that individuals travelling to war zones like Syria may become further radicalized whilst there, and may receive combat training, extremist indoctrination and develop intense social associations, generating friendship networks and perceived mutual loyalties that could be the basis of independent, transnational terrorist cells in the future.

In more general terms, there is inevitably a 'personal' factor that persuades a Ghanaian to become a fighter in ISIS camp while his neighbor, or even his sibling, although exposed to exactly the same environment and conditions conducive to radicalization and extremism, chooses to remain at home. These factors are among the hardest to discover, and although of great

importance to the individual, likely to be the least disposed to any broad-based intervention at the community level (El-Said & Barret, 2017). Meanwhile, it is possible that while in the conflict zone, the Ghanaian foreign fighters may have formed networks with other radicals, acquired very dangerous techniques like suicide bombings and beheadings. It may also be possible for them to establish ties with terrorists around the world. Yet, different countries have different expounding factors that limit the danger. Therefore, Ghana needs the presence of strong and focused security services that can handle this human security situation (Byman, 2015).

On the other hand, el-Said & Barret (2017) argue that not all individuals who go to Syria undergo intense military training, participate in brutal acts, or are subjected to and accept extensive and religious indoctrination that would lead to their further radicalization. They also argue that, not all foreign supporters of a group will agree with a call by its leadership for action outside the usual dominant areas. Nor will their attitude necessarily undergo any significant change as a result of their experience in those areas, or

subsequently in prison, where most have ended up.

CONCLUSION

The threats of home-grown terrorism in Ghana could be successfully overcome if there is a participation of the population in the execution of the security policy. Any person participating in it is called a stakeholder of security. It is also stressed that, participation through state instruments alone is not enough. This is especially true for the strategies of counter-terrorism fight, pointing out that it is a contemporary threat, employing different methods than the Cold War adversaries. Such a threat is unforeseeable, with varying forms and instruments, challenging the efforts towards effective protection, thus posing a serious challenge to modern societies.

REFERENCES

Ashlie, P. M. & Minteh B. S. (2014). Home Grown Terrorism in the United States (US): Causes, Affiliations and Policy Implications. Available at SSRN: 1-33.

Bjorgo, T. & Gjelsvik, I. M. (2014). Norwegian research on the prevention of radicalization and

Violent extremism: A status of knowledge. URL:

https://www.regjeringen.no/contentasset s/dc64dbc441bc4a4db25f320eadd0d1 31/080615-norwegian-research-on-preventing-radicalisation-and-violent-extremism.pdf.

British Broadcasting Corporation BBC News, (2016). Ivory Coast: 16 dead in Grand Bassam beach resort attack http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-35798502.

Brooks, R. (2011). *"Muslim 'Homegrown' Terrorism in the United States: How Serious Is the Threat?" Quarterly Journal: International Security*, vol. 36. No. 2. 7-47

Byman, D. (2015). The Homecomings: What Happens when Arab Fighters in Iraq and Syria Return? Studies in Conflict and Terrorism. Vol.38, Iss. 8

Eikenberry, E., Weinberg, D. A. & Suzano, J. (2016). The Problem with Saudi Arabia's Terrorist Re-education. Foreign Policy Online Porta, retrieved from: http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/02/16/ saudi-arabia-terrorist-re-education/.

El-Said, H. & Barret, R. (2017). Enhancing the Understanding of the Foreign Terrorist Fighters Phenomenon in Syria. United Nations Office of Counter Terrorism. URL: www.org/en/counterterrorism/assets/i mg/Report_Final_20170727.pdf

European Commission (2010). Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council. The EU Counter-Terrorism Policy: Main Achievements and Future Challenges. Retrieved from URL:

https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-is-new/news/pdf/com_2010_386_en.pdf .

EX AFRICA Business Risk Intelligence (2019) The Terrorism Threat to West Africa's Coastal Cities. Special Report 2019.

Fisher, M. (2005). Inferring CO2 sources and sinks from satellite observations: Method and application to TOVS data. *Quarterly Journal of the Royal Meteorological Society, 131*(612), 2961-3012.

Fulgence N. (2015). War on Terrorism in Africa: A Challenge for Regional Integration and Cooperation Organizations in Eastern and Western Africa. J Pol Sci Pub Aff S1:007. doi:10.4172/2332-0761.S1-007.

Jalil, A. (2017). ISIS Today: Are Islamic State Returnees a Risk for South Africa? Daily Maverick Online, South Africa. URL: https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/artic le/2017-05-22-iss-today-are-islamic-state-returnees-a-risk-for-south-africa/#.WfaZwmiCzDc.

Johnson, N. (2017). The Threat of Home-grown Terrorism is rising in the US. Business Insider (Military & Defense)

http://www.businessinsider.com/homegrown-terrorism-in-the-us-rising-2017-5/?IR=T.

Liamputtong, P. (2013). Qualitative Research Methods. Oxford University Press. South Melbourne, Vic 4th edition

Mathew, A. Y. K. (2013). *Preventing International Terrorism in Ghana: Realities and Challenges.* (Master of Arts Degree in International Relations), University Of Ghana, Legon.

Milles, M. B. & Huberman, A. M. (1994). Qualitative Data Analysis: A Source Book. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

Peresin, A. (2013). Croatian Counter-Terrorism Strategy: Challenges, Prevention and Response System. Research Institute for European and American Studies (RIEAS). Athens, Greece. URL: http://www.rieas.gr/images/rieas160.pdf.

Rowland, M. (2017). Terror Threat Snapshot –February 2017. US Homeland Security Digital Library. Retrieved from: https://www.hsdl.org/c/terror-threat-snapshot-february-2017/.

Yussof, B.B. (2012). Terrorism the Threat to Democracy and Security. Retrieved from: http://www.parlimen.gov.my/images/webuser/TERRORISM%20-THE%20THREAT%20TO%20DEMOCRACY.pdf.