CONTEMPORARY TERRORISM: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction

Studying the impact of terrorism on international relations is of vital importance due to the implications not only local and regional but also within the international system. The phenomenon of terrorism is not exclusive to a region or a country, it can affect everyone in indirect ways. In this sense, it crosses borders and does not understand nationalities. The most dangerous thing is the treatment given to it in international forums, multilateral organizations, and the media since it is presented as a threat to security, but to legitimize military actions by Western powers or to delegitimize governments "not prone to the West".

This article is based on a conceptual proposal that helps to understand the phenomenon of terrorism from a non-Western perspective, criticizing the positions of the United States in this regard. The main objective is to deepen the debate around the concept of terrorism, its erroneous link to Islam, and to nationalist and/or revolutionary movements. It is also pertinent to see how it has been legally defined by international law, through resolutions, conventions, and protocols of different multilateral organizations, including the African Union (AU).

Terrorism: an epistemological debate without consensus

There is a vast literature called "Studies on Terrorism" that has tried to develop a theory in this regard, reach a consensus about its definition, address its typology, its links with religion, get deep into the causes behind this phenomenon and how to carry out analysis of statistical data, etc. The heterogeneity of the sources ranges from the definitions provided by scholars and official

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government documents. In the academic field, there is a group of Western experts, from different disciplines – political science, law, history, and international relations – including Alex P. Schmid, Ajai Sahni, Tore Bjorgo, Erica Chenoweth, Ekaterina Stepanova, Jeffry Simon, Harjit Sandhu, Lucien van Liere, David Rapoport, Jeffrey Kaplan and Jean E. Rosenfeld, among others, who synthesize a good part of the scientific production regarding terrorism. In this epistemological debate are also located the definitions assumed by state institutions such as those of the United States, the United Kingdom, France and the European Union, as well as the postulates of multilateral organizations: the United Nations (UN), the AU or the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

Ajai Sahni, Director of the Institute for Conflict Management in New Delhi (India), refers to terrorism as a method that can adopt a wide range of objectives and ideologies, without being linked to any of them in particular (Schmid 2013, 1). For the Swiss historian and political scientist, Alex Schmid – a researcher at the International Center for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), terrorism is a technique and a method, by which defenseless and unprepared civilians are assassinated, in order to influence, harm and exert pressure on a third (Schmid 2013, 18-19, 23). However, the breadth of the concept means that many analysts from various disciplines express different ideas when they talk about terrorism and even more dangerous when they link it to "political violence." There are many manifestations, forms, and types of political violence, of which terrorism is a subcategory. Terrorism must be seen as a type of violence that deliberately (not accidentally or as collateral damage) uses civilians and non-combatants as military targets. As a tactic, method, or form of direct action, terrorism can be used by various actors (Schmid 2013, 5-6).

According to Schmid (2013), within the basic typology of terrorism are: religious groups, ethnonationalism, separatism, racist and right-wing groups, anarchist groups and left-wing revolutionaries, state sponsors of terrorism, isolated groups, and the so-called "lone wolves". As a trend, several authors speak of revolutionary and/or nationalist movements as terrorists. A criticism about it will be deepened afterward.

A set of myths, fallacies, and misinterpretations have been built around the phenomenon of terrorism. According to the Russian specialist Ekaterina Stepanova, from the National Research Institute of World Economy & International Relations (IMEMO) in Moscow, there is a propensity to use terrorism as a synonym for almost all forms of violence in the world and to degrade terrorism to banal criminal activity or overestimating their level of integration with organized crime. At the same time, there is a marked

tendency to equate Islamism or Islamic radicalism with terrorism. Among other elements on which some moderation should be exercised is the idea that terrorists may have access to non-conventional materials or weapons of mass destruction, as well as overestimating the volume of resources they obtain for their financing (Schmid 2013, 17). This issue of financing is controversial, especially in groups with a local impact and less internationalized like Al Qaeda or the Islamic State.

In psychological terms, there is no profile of the archetype of a terrorist, who can be a believer or an atheist, from the "left" or right-wing, an opponent or not of the state. It can be a dictator, a director of a secret police service, a leader of a death squad linked to the secret services, or an undercover local rebel. That's why there is no "terrorist personality" (Schmid 2013, 18-19). Here, as is already recurring, controversial elements are introduced, such as classifying rebel or leftist movements as terrorists. However, terrorists do not accept this label and often call themselves "freedom fighters" – another highly controversial term –, "holy warriors", "soldiers of God", Jihadists, or Mujahedins. Returning to the debate on the relationship between "freedom fighters" and terrorism, Jeffry Simon, from the Department of Political Science and an expert in security issues at the University of California (UCLA), states that:

> What one sees as a terrorist is seen by another as a freedom fighter. The biggest difference between terrorism and guerrilla warfare is that guerrillas usually include (...) large groups of armed fighters to overthrow a government or gain control of a section of the country through a campaign of rural attacks that include direct confrontation with the national armed forces. While terrorism – such as the assassination of government officials – is a tactic of the guerrilla insurgency, which is not its main tactic or means to achieve its objectives, while for a terrorist group it is (Schmid 2013, 20).

However, in the introduction of the book coordinated by Professor Schmid, he outlines the question of what the relationship between terrorism and the national liberation struggle/freedom fighters or resistance against foreign occupation is. In this regard, those interviewed responded that legally there is no relationship since they are different concepts. International Humanitarian Law prohibits attacks against civilians and civilian targets regardless of the cause or justice underlying the conflict.

Another opinion cited by the author is that terrorism is a tactic that violates the rules of warfare and that not all freedom fighters choose to use terrorism. He concludes that this dilemma reflects the highly politicized

nature of discussions around terrorism (Schmid 2013, 20). The example that is always given regarding this controversy is the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but in the Sahel, it is made even more complex by the number of armed groups that operate in the north of Mali, not all of which use terrorism as a method, but every military action reported is classified as such.

In this regard, the Indian analyst, Harjit Sandhu, former Coordinator of the Panel of Experts of the Security Council for the case of Liberia and former Interpol Officer on anti-terrorism issues, stated:

> The freedom fighters have as their point of view the tyrants and their agents. On the contrary, a terrorist spreads fear among the masses and kills indiscriminately to terrorize everyone. Terrorists are usually not fighting for anyone's freedom. Instead, they are fighting for their own chance to be tyrants, hence their disregard for the lives of the people they claim to be liberating (Schmid 2013, 21).

On terrorism, more than 250 proposed definitions have been collected and identified from the most diverse historical contexts (since the 19th century) and that respond to the most diverse political positions. Within the period of the "fourth wave" of terrorism and particularly between 1999 and 2010, Joseph J. Easson and Alex P. Schmid compiled 84 definitions on the subject (Schmid 2013, 99-148), among them those of the Organization for African Unity (OAU), the OIC, the US State Department, the EU and from other various scholars.

It is in this context from which the complexity of establishing a single concept on terrorism derives, due to the lack of consensus on the part of the international community and depending on the political position and ideology of who is assessing it. In this respect, in the report prepared by Special Rapporteur Kalliopi K. Koufa, in 2001, it is stated that the term terrorism carries an important emotional and political charge. It is usually accompanied by an implicit negative judgment and is used selectively. Thus, definitions are confused with value judgments. Violent activity or behavior to which a certain actor opposes is classified as terrorism. On the other hand, the classification of terrorism is rejected when it refers to situations with which an actor sympathizes (Informe del Consejo Económico y Social 2001, 11).

In the multilateral framework, both the OAU and the OIC were among the first instances that defined their position against terrorism, since 1999. The OIC, in its 26th session, held in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, from June 28 to 1 July 1999, approved the Convention of the Organization

of the Islamic Conference for the Fight against International Terrorism. In the first article of the Convention, terrorism is defined as:

> Any act of violence or threat thereof, regardless of its motives or intentions, perpetrated to carry out an individual or collective criminal plan with the aim of terrorizing people or threatening to harm them or endanger their life, honor, liberties, security or rights or exposing the environment, occupying or seizing any public or private facility or property, or endangering a national resource, or international facilities, or threatening the stability, territorial integrity, political unity or sovereignty of independent States (Organization of African Unity 1999, 2).

It also stated in Article 2 that: "the struggle of peoples, including the armed struggle against foreign occupation, aggression, colonialism, and hegemony, aimed at liberation and self-determination in accordance with the principles of international law shall not be considered a crime of terrorism" (Organization of African Unity 1999, 3). This is an important clarification and, like the OAU, this distinction is going to be made between terrorism and the struggle for liberation. At the ninth session of the Islamic Summit (Qatar 2000), the OIC reiterated its support for the high-level international conference on terrorism and underlined again the OIC's concern about the need to clearly distinguish terrorism from the struggle of the people for national liberation and the elimination of foreign occupation and colonial hegemony, as well as to recover the right to self-determination.

In the context of United Nations agencies, 19 anti-terrorism conventions and several Security Council resolutions have been adopted. In particular, resolutions 1269 (1999) and 1566 (2004) indicate that, whatever its motivation, no act of terrorism is justifiable. There is also Resolution 1373, of September 28, 2001, which established the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee. Professor Francisco J. Bariffi, from the Carlos III University of Madrid, points out in this regard that despite the constant references to "terrorist acts", this resolution was unable to determine their meaning, leaving their classification to the States themselves (Bariffi 2008, 128). Bariffi also points out that resolution 1566 (2004), although it did not have the purpose of defining "terrorism", urged States to cooperate fully in the fight against terrorism and, in this way, prevent and punish acts that meet these three characteristics:

> a) Acts, including against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury or to take hostages; and b) Acts committed, regardless of any justification for considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or other similar nature, with the intention of causing a state of terror in the general population, in a group of people or in certain person, intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organization to carry out an act, or to refrain from carrying out it; and c) acts that constitute crimes defined in the international conventions and protocols related to terrorism and included in their scope (Bariffi 2008, 128).

In the same report prepared by Special Rapporteur Kalliopi K. Koufa, analyst Walter Laqueur, president of the International Research Council of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D.C., is quoted as defining terrorism as:

> the use of violence covered up by a group for political purposes; it is directed against a government, but it is also used against ethnic groups, classes or parties. The objectives can range from grievances to the overthrow of a government and the seizure of power (...). Terrorists aim to cause political, social and economic disruption and, to this end, commit planned or indiscriminate killings (Informe del Consejo Económico y Social 2001, 29).

In 1984, the United States Congress released a definition that was recorded in military codes and in US law that stated that "every terrorist act is one (...) that has the intention of intimidating or coercing a civilian population, influencing government policy through intimidation and coercion, affecting government conduct through assassination or kidnapping" (Rad Cliff 2011, 105).

For its part, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) defined international terrorism as:

> the illegal use of force or violence by a group of people (...) who have some connection with a foreign power or whose activities transcend national borders, against persons or property, to intimidate or coerce a government, or the civilian population to achieve social and political objectives (Rad Cliff 2011, 106).

These two perspectives show a clear contradiction between the way in which the foreign policy of the USA itself is managed and its behavior in regions such as the Middle East.

Islam and terrorism: a necessary deconstruction

One of the most widely spread myths about terrorism is its alleged and almost exclusive direct link with religion. Similarly, the positions are divided. According to the academics interviewed by Alex Schmid, some argue that there is no direct relationship between terrorism and religion, or at least that there is not necessarily a connection (Schmid 2013, 23). Others claim that since terrorism is a method of achieving a final goal, that goal can be described in religious terms. Therefore, religious beliefs can be a motivational force for terrorists (Schmid 2013, 23).

Professor Lucien van Liere from the Department of Religious and Philosophical Studies at Utrecht University discusses the role of religion as simplifying and magnifying today's violent conflicts. According to him, it seems impossible to avoid discussing its role. From religious fundamentalism to the phenomenon of terrorism, the use of religious language in conflict zones contributes to instigating violent conflicts. Religion seems to function more as a tool that gives meaning to people within a complex socioeconomic and political context. If social tensions increase, fear increases and violence lurks, generating a religious conflict (Liere 2012).

Therefore, religion can provide a motivation to sacrifice everything, including one's life. Terrorism can be religious, ideologically, and socially motivated, or a combination of these elements. Above all, religious terrorism would be the deadliest because its actions are guided by a supreme power and seen as a way of serving God's will. Religion contains in its texts traditions, symbols, rituals, and myths that are often manipulated to mobilize people. It is also suggested that religious discourse is one of the most important factors for the recruitment of Salafi-jihadist movements (Schmid 2013, 24-25), in what has been called the theory of the "fourth wave" of global terrorism.

This theory was developed by the professor of Political Science at the University of California, David Rapoport, according to which this fourth wave refers to religious terrorism between 1970 and the present time (Rasler and Thompson 2011, 13-17). According to his method of analysis, this stage began with two important events: the Islamic Revolution in Iran (1979) and the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan (1979-89), which mobilized Muslims,

on one hand, to export the revolution from the ayatollahs and the other, to mobilize them against the "infidels", which will later be transformed into "attacking" US targets to withdraw from the Middle East. Other American professors such as Jeffrey D. Simon, Jeffrey Kaplan, and Jean E. Rosenfeld, who focus on the study of religious terrorism, terrorism, and political violence, also add to this approach (Rosenfeld 2011, 1-10, 44-84). Therefore, the fourth wave of terrorism assumed an essentially religious orientation and was centered on Islam, thus introducing the problem of linking terrorism with this religion.

However, Jeffrey Simon later developed his "fifth wave" theory where he argues that there will not be a single type of ideology that will dominate this new stage, where the influential role of technology will be its defining characteristic. This is why Simon calls it the "technological wave" and establishes the internet as the necessary precondition for modern terrorism. Simon points out that no type of terrorist movement has a monopoly on the use of technology and that competing ideologies will achieve their definitions by taking control of it (Walls 2017, 59). In part, this process has been evidenced by the use that groups such as the Islamic State have made of social networks on the Internet, to spread their "message" about Islam.

Islam as a system of beliefs, values, and codes of conduct is not a homogeneous religion. As it spread from the 7th century, it adopted the characteristics of the cultures of the peoples that became Islamized. At present, the initial Arab component has remained as a minority within the Islamic community: UMMA. Therefore, there is no single Islam within the Shiite world, much less within the Sunni variant, which is even divided into four great Koranic schools and multiple Sufi brotherhoods, etc.

This leads to suggest that there are different political tendencies within Islam or within what can be called political Islam. Also, within the Islamic fundamentalist, there are great nuances that range from the reformists – Muslim Brotherhood or the Justice and Development Party of Turkey – to other more radical variants such as Wahhabism, which became the official policy of the Saudi Kingdom or the conservative variant promoted by Iran's Shiite ayatollahs. Therefore, Islamists are not a single or monolithic group (Halverson, Goodall, and Corman 2011, 32), and many of them pursue different ideological goals through political participation and social activism, rather than violence (Halverson, Goodall, and Corman 2011, 6).

Other variants within conservative Islam are made up of minority groups that have no political power and become forces against established governments. These extremist-leaning groups call themselves defenders of an

"authentic" and "legitimate" Islam that they must implement in the societies in which they operate. Its main feature is the use of violence as a fighting method. In this regard, Halverson, Goodall, and Corman define extremists as:

> a group of political actors who seek to impose an Islamist ideology through physical intimidation, coercion and revolutionary violence, against any State or civilian objectives, who do not share the same vision of the 'true' path of Islam, which is typically ultra-conservative and puritanical in nature (Halverson, Goodall, and Corman 2011, 6).

These American authors also state that "in their most radical 'jihadist' or extremist form, Islamists adopt the same violent revolutionary strategies that nationalists had done before them" (Halverson, Goodall, and Corman 2011, 32). Here the main criticism lies in the term "revolutionary violence" because it is directly associated that revolutionary movements are negative processes or, what is worse, it indirectly links extremist or radical groups with revolutionary groups. All this becomes even more complex when the concepts of Islamists, extremists, jihadists, or radicals are used as a synonym for terrorists.

In the Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research, extremism is defined as a form of political expression with the aim of achieving its objectives by any means up to political violence. They may have a far-left, far-right, or religious fundamentalist orientation. In the same way, they include leftist movements within this process, an aspect that is contradictory, reductionist and lacks solid arguments. Then they define religious extremism as a variant of radicalism (Schmid 2013, 630). According to Frank Buijs, Professor of Radicalization Studies at the University of Amsterdam:

> extremism strives for a desired idyllic society, absolutizes the contradiction between the forces of good and evil, and propagates a specific reading of jihad, mainly that it is the duty of every Muslim to use all possible means to fight evil. Extremists are characterized by the idea that there is an irreconcilable contradiction between true believers and apostate rulers, which needs to be resolved through armed struggle (Schmid 2013, 630).

Returning to Halverson, Goodall, and Corman's analysis of Islamic extremism, they also suggest that radical Islamist discourse is linked to certain cultural narratives that indicate how the members of such an extremist group should organize themselves, what goals or objectives they should pursue in line with what they believe and what makes them true followers of the

Prophet Mohamed (Halverson, Goodall, and Corman 2011, 12). Following this logic, extremists claim that the world is corrupt and that the Arab nations and the Islamic world have deviated from the path of true Islam to enter a stage of *jahiliyyah* or pre-Islamic ignorance.

Thus, they define all the leaders of the Arab and Islamic world as "apostates" and enemies of God. This narrative also defines the West – particularly the United States – as the enemy that can only be eliminated by militant jihad. All of this serves as a way to recruit into an ideology that promotes love of death and inevitable victory through martyrdom (Halverson, Goodall, and Corman 2011, 13). With these ideas, it is assumed that, for Halverson, Goodall, and Corman, extremists are synonymous with terrorists, and to a certain extent there is a very fine invisible line that separates both tendencies that do not always have to be related.

Russian analyst E. Stepanova identifies some characteristics shared by most religiously based terrorist groups. Among them is that: terrorist activity depends on the blessing of a spiritual guide; their actions are justified by direct references to the sacred text, which can also be used by more moderate forces. In turn, it identifies religious radicalism as a reaction against cultural modernization, secularization, and westernization, perceived as a threat to Muslim identity. For this reason, for her, there is a relationship between religious/extremist radicalism and terrorism (Schmid 2013, 25-26). But, as other authors have suggested, this relationship does not have to be direct.

According to Israeli academic Assaf Moghadam, Director of Terrorism Studies, in the Department of Social Sciences at West Point Military Academy, religious radicalism (extremist) groups that use terrorist methods are motivated, supported, or justified according to one interpretation of the Islamic concept of jihad. While "jihadist Islamic terrorism" has become the main form of transnational terrorism in recent decades, that does not mean that all Islamist movements (radical Islamists) include jihad as their first priority and are ready to use violence, particularly against civilians (Schmid 2013, 25).

Another controversial concept has been that of associating jihad with terrorism. The term jihad can be translated as fighting vigorously or making an individual effort. It also refers to fighting for the path of Allah and is often used with the synonym of holy war, which occurred at the beginning of the expansion of Islam (years from 750 to 1258) to convert different peoples. Then in the 19th century, there was a jihad movement in West Africa that sought to purify Islam (Batran 2010, 619-640).

In modernity, the term jihad has been controversial because there are different ways of interpreting it. For example, there is the term "great jihad" (*jihad al-akbar*) which is used to refer to the individual struggle of Muslims to do what is right according to Islam: the jihad of the heart and the fight against their own instincts and temptations. There is also the "jihad of the tongue" (*jihad al-lissan* or *da'awah*): speaking in the name of good and avoiding evil. Another meaning is the "spiritual jihad" or intellectual (*jihad al-kabir*): expanding the knowledge of divine revelation through Allah and his prophets. However, jihad as a non-violent spiritual struggle is not found very explicitly in the hadith, while there are 199 references in the sense of war.

This has been interpreted to refer to individual or group armed struggle to propagate Islam against infidels or kafir: "jihad of the sword" (*jihad as-sayf*). Traditionally, this variant is used to describe armed struggle against non-Muslims, not necessarily for purely religious reasons but to defend or liberate Muslims from oppression or offensive jihad to conquer territory and establish Islam. The doctrine of jihad was reinvigorated in the 1980s with the work of Palestinian professor Abdullah Azzam in proclaiming that jihad would become an individual rather than a collective obligation and that every Muslim had to participate in it, morally or financially (Schmid 2013, 651).

Therefore, jihad began to be referred to directly as jihadist terrorism. In this regard, an Indian professor based in the United Kingdom, Sajjan Gohel, from the Department of International History at the London School of Economic and Political Science affirms that:

> terrorists, as well as extremist clerics and radical elements, have labeled the word terrorist as jihad, suicides as martyrs, transforming a violent criminal action as a sacred religious duty (...) who will be rewarded in paradise for their sacrifice. Using religion as a motivational factor have [sic] allowed terrorists to have a reason for their indiscriminate violence (...) and impose fundamentalism as a way of life (Schmid 2013, 27).

Although the narrative of the leaders of terrorist organizations with an ideological basis in the form of a radical interpretation of Islam states that they are carrying out a holy war or jihad, this does not mean having to associate terrorism, as a method of struggle, with jihad, since there are many ways of doing it, like that of the Palestinians. All these stereotypes, misinterpretations, and epistemological confusions have been exacerbated by the politicization of terrorism since the 21st century and the strengthening of Islamophobia through the media.

One of the most used adjectives – misused – to characterize it, has been "Islamic" terrorism, after which most of these events began to be associated with Islam and therefore (dis)qualifying it as a violent religion. Although the main terrorist organizations have had Islam as their ideological and cultural foundation, most of their victims have been the Muslim populations of the countries where they have operated. In practice, the religious precepts with which they intend to legitimize their methods constitute a violation of the principles of Islam and many of its leaders manipulate these foundations to recruit followers, in a context marked by socioeconomic impoverishment, the undervaluation of their culture, and foreign interference.

The positions from Africa regarding the conceptualization and adoption of legal instruments to confront terrorism have been very significant. From the Declaration on a Code of Conduct for Inter-African Relations, where extremism and terrorism were denounced (Organisation of African Unity 1994, 252-253), to the Convention on the Prevention and Combat of Terrorism in 1999. This document was a milestone, as it was the first legislative instrument prepared to combat terrorism in Africa. The main contribution of this concept is the distinction between acts of terrorism and the struggle for self-determination.

In the words of Martin Ewi, an expert on terrorism issues at the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) of South Africa, and Emmanuel Kwesi Aning, Director of the Faculty of Academic Affairs and Research of the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Center, of Ghana, this declaration was a starting point in relation to terrorism since it established the initial bases not only to condemn it but to criminalize it. This was the first attempt, at a continental level, to identify the causes of terrorism and thus initiate a process of inter-state cooperation to deal with this problem (Ewi and Aning 2006, 36). Both authors classify the Convention as:

> a political victory for Africa and a complementary legal instrument for judicial and mutual cooperation, as well as a binding commitment on the part of African countries to take charge of their own security problems and combat the phenomenon of violence and organized crime (Ewi and Aning 2006, 37).

Conclusion

Since the events of September 11, all these theoretical approaches and misinterpretations that linked Islam and jihad with terrorism have increased. This long period of promotion of Islamophobia sought to legitimize military actions by Western powers in areas of geostrategic interest. This military response, after 20 years of "fighting terrorism", has not produced any real results. On the contrary, it has caused the expansion of terrorist activism to areas and countries that had not been affected, such as the Sahel and Burkina Faso, in the last eight years. Since the beginning of this problem, African leaders have increased their political commitment to confronting terrorism, since the Dakar Summit in 2001.

One year later, the Action Plan for the Prevention and Combat of Terrorism was approved at the High-Level Intergovernmental Summit held in Algeria in 2002. The Action Plan sought to give concrete expression to the commitments and obligations of African countries, to combat terrorism and improve their access to the necessary resources for their confrontation. It was intended to provide sound guidelines and strategies for collective and individual state action against terrorism. All these previous conventions, protocols, and agreements constitute the legal framework on which the different security mechanisms on the continent continue to act, including the AU Peace and Security Council.

In 2004, the Protocol to the OAU Convention for the Prevention and Combat of Terrorism was adopted. In this way, the different anti-terrorist policies are articulated, from the continental and national levels. The problems would come later in its implementation in the face of specific events, lack of financial resources, national positions and policies, as well as the interference of Western powers from the military point of view. African leaders continued to implement their own counter-terrorism mechanisms. The next step was the efforts to prepare what they called the Comprehensive African Anti-Terrorism Model Law. This is an attempt to legislate from the AU crimes related to terrorism, a phenomenon that has been increasing in the last decade in the region. All these legal efforts within the African integration and coordination mechanisms have been examples of the search for their own approach, following the rule of solving African problems with the African perspective. Another important element in this sense was the conceptual vision of separating terrorism from other legitimate forms of struggle, which constitutes an epistemological break with the dominant Western tendencies.

Recommendations

- To continue deepening theoretical approaches to terrorism from an African perspective that does not follow Western narratives.
- Deepen the legal aspects established by the different instances and agencies within the African Union and the Regional Economic Communities.
- Promote academic meetings between African intellectuals, politicians, and analysts to contribute to this process of epistemological deconstruction from an African interpretation.
- Promote critical analysis of the problems related to terrorism in Africa – in particular in the Sahel region – and the objective reasons why anti-terrorist policies, dominated by the strategies of France and the United States, have not given concrete results as an increase in terrorist actions has been seen in the Sahel region.

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ABSTRACT

Terrorism has maintained an expansion trend, with only small periods of contraction, which is why it continues to be one of the main global problems in terms of security. Most of the analyzes on these issues by Western academia are permeated by an approach that associates terrorism with "jihadism", with "Islamism" or worse, does not distinguish between armed movements with social or territorial claims and terrorist groups. Similarly, the focus of the fight against terrorism continues to prioritize the military approach, which has not yielded real results. For this reason, it is necessary, once again, to return to the conceptual theoretical debates on terrorism, but from an alternative perspective to the Western academic tendencies that study it, in general, in a biased way. In this sense, the debate focuses on separating terrorism from Islam and from other forms of armed political struggle. In regions such as the Sahel, where there is a multiplicity of non-state armed actors involved, there is a tendency to characterize all forms of political violence as terrorism, which constitutes a conceptual and methodological mistake. From this derives the importance of continuing the conceptual studies that allow adjusting the strategies to be followed and the correct identification of which actors should be considered as terrorists.

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