Policy Brief

China faced with the proliferation of the terrorist phenomenon in Africa

By Abdelhak Bassou

Summary

The expansion of the terrorist phenomenon in Africa puts China in a dilemma: to remain true to its non-interference policy in the internal affairs of other States, even if Chinese citizens and interests are threatened or; adopt a more interventionist policy to protect its investments in Africa even at the cost of making certain corrections to the principles that have, until now, underpinned its foreign policy.

On the Tanzanian coast near Dar es Salaam, the discovery of Chinese porcelain bowls and coins attest to the ancient relations between China and Africa. A recent excavation of a Chinese coin, dated to the fifteenth century, also confirms the historical nature of this relationship. These ties are thus very old and some date them to Admiral Zheng He's expedition around 1418.

Subsequently, China withdrew into itself and its relations with Africa faded. They eventually resumed in the second half of the twentieth century.

Some date the resumption of Chinese-African relations to May 1956 when diplomatic relations were established between China and Egypt; others argue that it was rather the Bandung Conference in 1955 that revived the relationship. The third date suggested as marking the real resumption of relations between China and Africa is Zhou Enlai's African tour (December 1963 - January 1964) from Egypt to Tanzania where he visited a dozen African countries and gave a boost to Chinese activities in Africa. Suffice to say that the entire period from the Bandung Conference to Zhou Enlai's visit is a renaissance period for China-Africa relations. It was during this period that the Chinese-African People's Friendship Association (CAPFA) was born, and the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs opened an Africa section.

By evoking this relationship, especially its nature, it is clear that it is predominately economic. According to the 2014 statistics, the trade volume between China and Africa exceeded $220 billion and China's investment in Africa exceeded $30 billion, an increase of 22 and 60 times respectively compared to 2000. Moreover, the share of China-Africa trade within Africa's total foreign trade increased from 3.82% at the beginning to 20.5% in 2014.

A better understanding of China-Africa relations, however, requires an understanding of the nature of these relationships, or whether they are purely economic. If yes, should they or can they stay purely economic? Do they need to be strengthened, maintained and preserved for support by political and security aspects? In other words, events and conditions that Africa is now experiencing and that reinforce the destabilization threats, will they have an impact on China-Africa relations? Will they change their nature?

The recent history of relations between China and Africa is dynamic. Since the fifties when it was initiated until now, they have changed in intensity and nature. We can thus distinguish two periods:

• The first period from the Bandung Conference to the beginning of the seventies, marked by political and ideological ties.

- A second period from the early seventies to the present day, noted for the establishment, development and strengthening of strong and close economic ties.

There is not however a strict dividing line between the two periods. During the era of ideological relations, economic exchanges were already taking place. Current relations are, though predominantly economic, spiced with political and security ties. The interpretation of the current economic situation, marked by the resurgence of violence, incites the question of whether or not we are on the verge of a third and new era of China-Africa relations? Should China not, despite its sacrosanct principle of non-interference, strengthen its security efforts?

I. Status of the security context: Terrorism in Africa

1. Terrorism in expansion

The focus here is on African areas where terrorism prevails more than in other areas. Therefore, attention will be given to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and to some countries in the Horn of Africa and the African northwest. In these areas, terrorism embodied in organizations such as Ansar Beit al Maqdis, Daech Libya, Boko Haram, AQIM, MUJAO, Al-Shabaab and others seems to have found asylum.

a) The Al Qaeda Zone: Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso

The Al Qaeda zone, affiliated with Al Qaeda terrorism, mainly covers the area within Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. Until 2014, French operations, first Serval and then Barkhane, seemed to have neutralized these terrorist groups. However, their gradual return is evident and has been increasingly intense since late 2014. The attacks against hotels in Bamako, Mali; Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso; and Grand Bassam, Ivory Coast are the clearest evidence. These groups now lead attrition actions against the States of the region, where African, International, Malian and French forces experience no respite.

In spirit and action, these organizations mingle religious terrorism, banditry and organized crime and are based on four major trends: Ansar Eddine; the MUJAO; Al-Mourabitoun; and residues of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

AQIM is returning to the Timbuktu region; Ansar Eddine is relocating to its favorite area in Kidal and establishing cells near the Ivorian border; and Macina Liberation Front is in central Mali. To the east of the country, in Gao, the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) is especially known for its deadly incursions in Niger.

b) Boko Haram's zone of evolution: Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger[1]

Originating in Nigeria, the Boko Haram organization has pledged allegiance to the Islamic State and has taken the name the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP).

Driven from some areas it occupied in Nigeria, Boko Haram has spread to the Lake Chad region. Despite efforts led by the authorities, Boko Haram is very active not only in Nigeria but also in Chad, Cameroon and especially in southern Niger. These countries, also attacked by MUJAO, are experiencing great difficulties. In the Diffa region in the south near the border with Nigeria, the country is losing some villages to Boko Haram. Neither the army nor Niger's gendarmerie can provide the troops needed to secure the villagers in this region.

The cooperation between these four countries in matters of security also suffers from a lack of appropriate means, namely a lack of coordination and tension on the prerogatives of sovereignty. Moreover, Boko Haram has recently found another destabilization method in Nigeria: It has begun to attack the Shia community.[2]

c) The Al-Shabaab movement: Somalia, Uganda, and Kenya

This area is destabilized by the presence of the Al-Shabaab movement, which is the youth version of old Islamic courts affiliated with Al Qaeda. The death of their former leader, Ahmed Abdi Godan, killed in November 2014 by a US strike and AMISOM military action, has not shaken the organization even after it was kicked out of Mogadishu. It continues to have a large capacity for harm: the attack against the University of Garissa in April 2015 (142 students were murdered by a terrorist commando), or the February 2016 bombing in Baidoa in south-western Somalia. Al-Shabaab even takes action against armies. In January 2016, an attack against the Kenyan military reportedly caused between 100 and 180 deaths, according to Somali officials. The organization is

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(1). See "From the Mediterranean to the Atlantic: a corridor vulnerable to terrorism" by Abdelhak Bassou : http://www.ocppc.ma/sites/default/files/OCPPC-PB1608vFr.pdf

(2). Since 2012, Boko Haram has been leading attacks In Kaduna, the birthplace of sheikh Zaqaziq, head of the Shiite community in Nigeria. In November 2015, Boko Haram claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing against a Shiite procession. The attack killed 21 people among the Shiite community.

growing by creating cells in countries within the region (Uganda and Kenya).

d) Islamic State organization (IS or Daech): Libya and Egypt

In Egypt, the Ansar Beit Al Maqdis organization, which pledged allegiance to the Islamic State organization, also known as Daech, continues expanding its presence in the Sinai where it tries every day to consolidate its presence despite the almost daily operations by the Egyptian forces.

Further east, on the Libyan coast, Daech has troops of over 5,000 fighters after settling in the city of Sirte and installing more cells to the west, in Sebratha, and to the east, in Derna and Benghazi. It is also trying to push its presence further south to Sebha. This area increasingly tends to be the Islamic State's future territory in the event of defeat in the Middle East. From Libya, it would then have access to many gray areas in the Sahara and the Sahel, where the geography would allow it to better challenge the international community forces.[3]

Map showing the location of terrorist organizations in Africa.
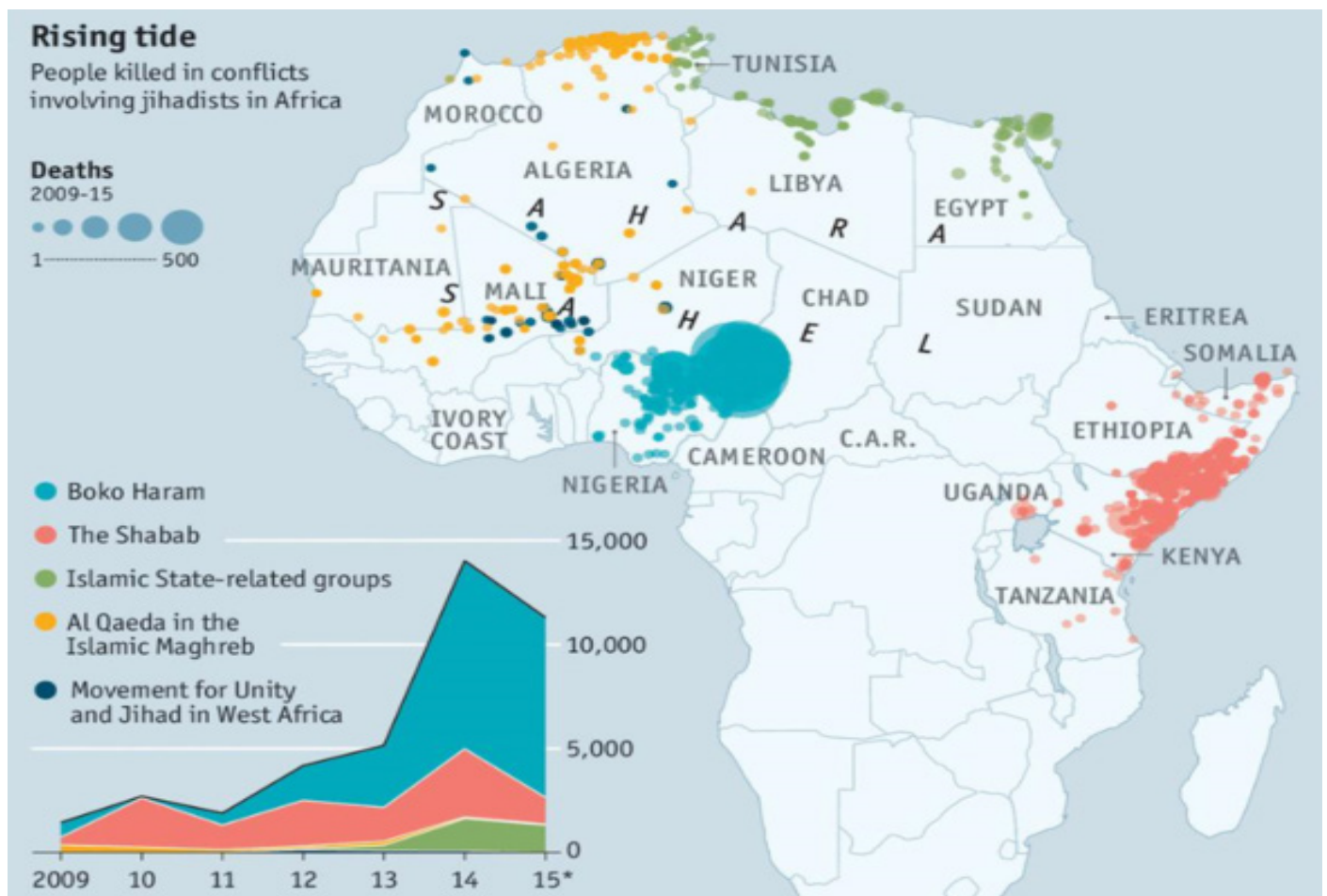
Source: http://www.voicesofyouth.org/fr/posts/ce-terrorisme-qui-d-truit-l-afrique

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(3). Policy Brief From the Mediterranean to the Atlantic: A Corridor Vulnerable to Terrorism by Abdelhak Bassou; http://www.ocppc.ma/publications/mediterranean-atlantic-corridor-vulnerable-terrorism

2. A flagrant lack of means in affected countries

Most states affected by the threats in this region do not seem to have the appropriate and necessary means of control. They announce specific operations against terrorist groups but fail to make sustainable efforts. Consequently, the danger disappears only to return, sometimes even more violent, more intense and more organized. Initiatives are multiplying but do not appear to ensure the required efficiency for such cases. This multiplication of initiatives has dispersed States' efforts, which sometimes are called to fight on several fronts. Niger is part of a coalition of the four countries bordering Lake Chad; it is part of the Sahel G5 and takes part in the operations in the ECOWAS framework. Chad is also part of several African initiatives in addition to participating as reinforcements for the French army in the region. The lack of coordination between the various initiatives and the precarious military means of several countries affected by terrorism make these countries dependent on aid and foreign assistance in their fight against extremist violence. This foreign aid sometimes lacks when it is most needed. For example, the EU's decision to cut its funding to AMISOM by 20% is dangerous, while in parallel the Kenyan President rightly called for an increase in this African force in Somalia.

Tableau montrant le manque flagrant de moyen de lutte contre le fléau.

Country	Defense security measures				
	Military	**Tanks**	**Fighter aircraft**	**Defense budget**	**Navy**
Somalia	Has no significant military. The state is now bankrupt.				
Ethiopia	138,000	440	25	375 000 000 $	
Kenya	24,000	75	20	1 40 000 000 $	2,500 troops 6 patrollers
Uganda	45,000	230	13	405 000 000 $	
Nigeria	80,000	270	35	2 250 000 000$	8,000 troops; 1 plane and 1 corvette
Niger	5,300 +1,400 gendarmes	130	2	70 000 000$	
Mali	4,000 in training + 8,000 paramilitary	20	10 planes	365 000 000 $	
Democratic Republic of Congo	134,000 + 8,000 republican guard	140	5	456 000 000 $	6,700 troops 1 patroller
Central African Republic	7,000 + 1,000 gendarmes	30	6 planes	52 000 000 $	
Cameroon	14,200 + 9 000 gendarmes	130	5	410 000$	1,300 troops 2 patrollers
Chad	22,000 of which 5,000 from the republican guard + 4,500 gendarmes	60	8	200 000 000 $	

Source: "L'Année stratégique 2016: Analyse des enjeux internationaux" Under the leadership of Pascale Boniface, Armand Colin, IRIS and Campus LMD.

The expansion of terrorist activity in the continent, exacerbated by the extent of the porous borders and a lack of resources, hampers the development of African countries including Sahel-Saharan and Sub-Saharan. Economic relations between the continent and the world are consequently affected.

II. China faced with the rise of terrorist violence in Africa

One of the main consequences of instability in a country is the decline in foreign investment. The principal characteristic of capital is avoiding turbulence. In climates of tension and crises, investor countries can only reduce their commitments or face the threats. What should or what will China do confronted with a tense security situation in Africa due to terrorism?

Will it continue to focus on its principle of non-interference or will it confront the threat of terrorism even at the expense of deviating from its original policy?

1. The underlying principles of chinoise international cooperation

Unlike Western powers, where the security response in Africa accompanies and supports all forms of cooperation[4], China links its cooperation policy with Africa to a range of principles developed in its recent history through its various leaders, based on their philosophy of soft power over military power.

a) A policy of soft power cooperation[5]

The ten major programs announced by the President of the People's Republic of China, in December 2015 at the Johannesburg Summit and the 6th Ministerial Conference at the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, illustrate the dominating principle of peaceful development advocated by China. These programs relate to industrialization; agricultural modernization; infrastructure; financial services; green development; the facilitation of trade and investment; reducing poverty and improving the welfare of the population; public health; the exchange between people; and peace and security.

Only one of the ten vectors refers to the concept of security. The insertion of the security component among other components and coming in tenth, breaks with the "hard power" discourse by some other powers, which put the military maneuvers, weapons sales, installation of military bases, and training of security forces ahead of all cooperation programs. Chinese policy does not ignore the security aspect in its relationship with Africa. It tries to ensure it through development. Thus, a recent section of the Xinhua news agency stated that China's assistance might be invaluable to win the security bet. By supporting the economic emergence of the African continent, China brings Africa the most effective contributions against the extremism that leads to terrorism and thus insecurity.[6]

In the same speech, of the five pillars that the President of the People's Republic of China cited as wanting to consolidate in the China-Africa relationship, peace and security ranks fourth: He proposes solidarity and mutual assistance for security.[7] For this, the Chinese President stresses that:

- Poverty is a source of instability;
- Peace is a development gauge;
- Development is the key to all problems;
- The settling of African issues must be through African solutions;
- Treatment of the symptoms must be accompanied by treatment of the root causes of security issues.

China recently declared that it intends to actively participate in African initiatives to strengthen the capacity of maintaining peace and security and support Africa in its efforts to "accelerate development, eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable peace."

Security issues are therefore present in the cooperation between China and Africa. But Chinese action and discourse are so far still marked by the underlying principles of Chinese policy on international relations. The consideration of the security issue remains defined and guided by two principles:

- Non-interference and;
- Security through development

History and all literature on Chinese policy on this subject generally confirm that the Chinese security approach in Africa tends more towards a soft power than hard power.

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(4). See "L'endiguement renforcé: Les politiques de sécurité de la France et des États-Unis en Afrique," Jean-Yves Haine; http://www.ocppc.ma/sites/default/files/OCPPC-Ifri-PN1601.pdf; pp. 17 - 29.

(5). For more information about soft power in China, see: "Le soft power chinois: entre stratégie d'influence et affirmation de puissance" by Barthélémy Courmont, Revue d'études comparatives Est-Ouest, Vol. 43, Issue 01-02, August 2012, pp. 287 – 309.

(6). See: www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2015/03/16/la-chine-s-engage-contre-le-terrorisme-en-afrique_4594119_3212.html

(7). See the speech by Mr. Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China at the Johannesburg Summit opening ceremony for the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation. The issue of peace and security was cited as the fourth point in this speech.

b) Non-interference and respect for sovereignty.

During his speech cited above, the President of the People's Republic of China pointed out another aspect of China's policy in Africa: "African issues must be settled through African solutions." The principle of non-interference is a drawing factor of Chinese policy for international relations in general and on relations with Africa in particular. Indeed after African countries' independence in the sixties, several states on the continent had lost confidence in the former colonial power, the West, which included Europeans and Americans. The Soviet Union also gave the impression of practicing annexation colonialism. China, unlike the others, was like a big brother without any colonizing aims and suffered from the same issues.

2. China facing insecurity and terrorism in africa

a) China is not immune to terrorism in Africa

The consolidation and strengthening of China's position in Africa implies a presence on this continent, a large Chinese diaspora,[8] as well as an important network of agencies and economic, diplomatic and cultural institutions.[9] This significant presence, in number and in its function, needs to be secure. Jihadist terrorism makes no distinction between China and the West. From a political perspective, if the people and governments differentiate between the US, Europe and China, and are sensitive to Chinese discourse on South-South solidarity, jihadist organizations do not recognize this difference. Recent events amply demonstrate:

- In May 2014, ten Chinese citizens were kidnapped after the attack of a construction site in the north of Cameroon. Those kidnapped worked for the state company Sino Hydro, specializing in the construction of hydroelectric dams.

- In March 2015, three Chinese nationals were kidnapped early Friday morning in a quarry near Lokoja, the capital of Kogi State, Nigeria.

- In July 2015, a car bomb attack against a Mogadishu hotel, claimed by the Somali Islamists Al-Shabaab,

killed thirteen including a Chinese diplomat. Two members of the Chinese diplomatic staff were injured.
- In November 2015, three Chinese nationals were killed in the attack at Radisson Hotel in Bamako, including a top executive of the China Railway Construction Corporation.

- Prior to and following the events of the Arab Spring in Libya, in the midst of civil war, China had to assist and evacuate over 35,000 of its citizens working in the country.

- Since 2010, observers began to notice that Chinese companies are increasingly confronted with security risks with Chinese workers abducted and / or killed in Sudan, Somalia, Nigeria or Ethiopia, etc.

This puts China in a dilemma:

- Stay true to its principles of non-interference and non-intervention at the expense of its interests affected by terrorism in Africa or;

- Begin a new policy that enables it to defend its interests and nationals at the expense of revising its foreign policy.

b) Hints of a new Chinese policy: towards more security in relations with Africa

According to experts, China wants to show that it is not only interested in trade, sourcing raw materials, selling its products and finding new business. It wants to show that it shoulders its responsibilities in terms of overall security, especially in Africa. Sending combat units to Mali as part of peacekeeping operations[10] was a big change. China previously only provided military personnel in charge of logistics and medical assistance or police.

Will there thus be a change in Chinese policy in African due to terrorism? A new balance between hard and soft power such as a type of smart power that regulates well-calculated doses and alternate use of hard and soft power based on circumstances?

If it is determined that Chinese assistance to Africa's in

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(8). Different estimates vary on the number of Chinese nationals in Africa. While some sources estimate around one million; other sources suggest millions.
(9). According to Xinhua news agency, China has established over 40 Confucius Institutes in Africa.

(10). See the interview with David Shinn, a former United States ambassador in Somalia and Burkina Faso, by Sébastien Le Belzic, a journalist based in Beijing since 2007 where he runs the site Chinafrica. info. China is by far the largest contributor of persons with currently 2,664 Chinese peacekeepers on the continent. These police officers, experts, logisticians and combat troops are deployed in Mali. In addition, since 2008, two Chinese frigates have been involved in anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden.

the form of hard-security already existed,[11] but in limited forms, that some facts could lead to thinking that the PRC is moving towards a form of perhaps more interventionist cooperation with Africa in the field of security:

• A counter-terrorism law, passed by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress in December 2015, allows the Chinese army to conduct military operations abroad especially in Africa and the Middle East. This authorization may be a sign of China's change of attitude regarding military interventions abroad.

• According to some increasingly persistent information in Western media, the negotiations with Djibouti to install China's first permanent military base in the country is at a very advanced stage.

If this installation were confirmed, Chinese forces would join those of other powers including French, American and Japanese. This facility would be yet another element confirming a new Chinese policy orientation in Africa, where security assistance will take more interventionist forms that exceed the economic framework, in a long-term approach.

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(11)   China reportedly spent about five million dollars between 2011 and 2014 to train and equip a Ugandan and Kenyan unit fighting against Somali terrorists.

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