

IN SEARCH OF POLITICAL WILL: COMBATING EMERGING SECURITY THREATS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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Abstract: The paper examines how political will may limit state power in tackling new security threats in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). It identifies the multiple security challenges and how these are exacerbated by limited commitment (or a lack of it) by political actors, who could employ proactive or creative policy action or programs to tackle security crises on the sub-continent. Drawing from a repertoire of existing literature and theorizing political and national security, the paper presents a textual analysis of the situation, arguing that military power or capacity is significantly enhanced or limited by the political action of leaders in SSA countries. It recommends, among others, proactive political action and a comprehensive approach, given the complex nature of the situation, in tackling conventional and emerging security threats on the sub-continent.

Keywords: *Political will, Emerging security threats, Sub-Saharan Africa, State actors.*

Introduction

Why is it difficult to contain simple and complex security threats in Sub-Saharan Africa? With the military might of some African countries, including Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Sudan, why are new security threats emerging and becoming monstrous and



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complex? Are the military strength, tactics, and resources at the disposal of African states inadequate to address or resolve the numerous security challenges in Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Mozambique, Nigeria, Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad, and the Central African Republic, to mention a few? Is the military incapable of stopping the asymmetric warfare that much of Africa now faces? Or are we contending with a monster that has eaten deeply because of the decline of political will, and complicity of the political actors, which has rather flavored and nourished these security problems? Attempts will be made in this paper to determine the limits of military instruments if political actions are inadequate.

Sub-Saharan Africa faces a multitude of old security challenges, but more critical are the new ones that render military capabilities and arsenals obsolete or antiquated, or at least shatter the myth of army invincibility. While the military will remain relevant in dealing with conventional warfare or security challenges such as belligerence of groups, insurrection within states, or separatist movements, external aggressions from neighboring armies, and common trans-border threats from visible groups, it will take political action or policy decisiveness to make it happen. The trajectory in recent years has been that asymmetric wars and conflicts, such as terrorism, banditry, and all sorts of anti-state movements in Africa, tend to defy strategies and efforts to contain them.

This paper questions the validity of the claim that regular military approach can tackle the new security threats, arguing that the military will remain central, but that in addition to incorporating elements that would suffice in dealing with the dynamics of the new security age, the military looks up to political leadership, political will, and more effective arsenals that are equipped with capabilities to unravel the mystery surrounding new security threats and effectively mitigate them. The central argument is that the armies in Sub-Saharan Africa may not only need better weapons, but would also desperately need better leaders from the highest decision-making level to the military high command. Even with their adequate training and weapons, soldiers still require effective political and military leadership to tackle security threats effectively. Leadership may fail for various reasons. These include a lack of political will, paucity of ideas or cluelessness at critical times, lack of vision, compromises, and disloyalty to the nation or national interest, or when the leaders themselves are complicit in the security threats.

The New Security Threats in Sub-Saharan Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa - particularly the **Sahel**, Lake Chad Region, Great Lakes Region, and the Horn of **Africa**- faces new problems of insecurity, the likes of which were either not known or uncommon hitherto. The security landscape is complex and multifaceted, presenting new challenges alongside old, menacing problems. Cyber security problems, environmental crises such as climate change, transmission of dangerous ideologies in an increasingly borderless international space, faster and increased trans-border movement of radicalized people and weapons, terrorism, health pandemics, and foreign interference are some of the new challenges. On cybercrime, the increasing reliance on technology has opened up new avenues for loose and criminal use of the cyberspace, including attacks on critical infrastructure and financial systems. Furthermore, climate-related challenges, such as desertification, drought, and rising sea levels, are exacerbating existing conflicts and creating new ones over access

to resources. As for foreign interference, the increased involvement of external actors in African conflicts, sometimes with competing interests, can further destabilize the region.

These new challenges continually have a handshake with old issues, including domestic and regional terrorism and violent extremism, thus increasing the tempo, operation, and sophistication of the old problems. Groups like Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Region and Al-Shabaab in the eastern coast of Africa continue to operate, but leverage the new security loopholes and opportunities, causing more instability and violence in these sub-regions. There are increased inter-communal and ethnic conflicts, leveraging the free or easier flow of dangerous elements and ideologies across state boundaries. Tensions between different ethnic or religious groups, often exacerbated by competition for resources, remain a significant source of conflict. Organized crime is an old security problem, but the globalizing system and its opportunities also present new and creative pathways for such crimes as drug trafficking, human trafficking, and other forms of organized crime that undermine governance and contribute to insecurity.

Maritime security is not spared as piracy and illegal fishing in coastal areas pose threats to trade and economic stability. The maritime security of the West and the Horn of Africa is the worst hit. Other new problems include farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria, in which competition for land and resources between farmers and herders has led to violence and displacement in some areas; weak governance and state fragility, with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, South Sudan, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Mozambique, and the Central African Republic being the main culprits. In these countries, countries, weak institutions, corruption, and lack of accountability contribute to a climate of instability and insecurity.

It is pertinent to note that the new security problems, such as climate change and asymmetric conflicts, and the old ones, such as terrorism, have created a new monster in Sub-Saharan Africa, which is forced displacements of persons, culminating in large-scale humanitarian crisis, both within countries and across borders, and the rude disruption of trade, investment, and economic development. In addition is also the erosion of social cohesion and trust by the people in government institutions and their leaders.

A Brief Theorization of “Security” and “National Security”

The new issues identified in the preceding section are existential threats to national security, survival, or preservation. They are also ominous to sub-regional, regional, and global security order, as evident in the manifestations of cybercrime, terrorism, and global climate change. It is thus the responsibility of the state to rise to the occasion and ensure that security threats that can potentially create national, sub-regional, or regional security problems are effectively contained. In Emily Goldman's words, “national security, whether as a process or as an objective, (is) the protection of core national interests from external threats” (Goldman, 2008). While this is static, national security doctrines may be subject to flux, as it refers to the instrumental goals by which national security interests are protected and the means employed to serve those instrumental goals. This doctrinal change is further informed by the cloud of uncertainty that hangs over security matters because of the ambiguity of the nature of

threats (Goldman, 2008). Some of these threats may extend beyond national borders and become existential threats to nearby states or the entire region.

The traditional understanding of “security” and “insecurity” is changing. First, security for our purposes must be understood as a state in which the people of a polity have protection from any form of harm or hurtful situation, and are guaranteed the good life, which is provided by the state. This suggests the all-encompassing nature of security, as suggested by Barry Buzan (1983), who extended it beyond the traditional military terms. Buzan identified the other elements of security, including the ones that are political, economic, social, and environmental. In recent years, the focus has even shifted to human security, which bears a deeper context and dimension. Buzan developed the concept of securitization, which examines how issues are transformed into security threats through speech acts. How does this work? It is a process by which an issue, previously considered a matter of normal politics, is framed as an existential threat requiring urgent and extraordinary measures. A "securitizing actor" such as a government official or institution would use a speech act to convince an audience or the people that a particular issue poses a severe danger to the nation or sovereign existence. This theory posits that an issue becomes a security threat when it is presented as an existential threat through a "speech act". This process involves an actor declaring a threat, identifying a referent object (something to be protected), and justifying extreme measures to deal with the perceived threat. In his (Buzan's) words: "Security is one of the most fundamental human needs: an irrefutable guarantee of safety and wellbeing, economic assurance and possibility, sociability and order; of a life lived freely without fear or hardship" (Buzan, 1983).

In addition, Buzan, in collaboration with Ole Wæver, developed the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), which analyzes how regional patterns of security are shaped by the interactions of states within specific geographic areas. These complexes are characterized by close interdependencies among states regarding their security concerns (Buzan and Wæver, 2003). These changes have redefined the modern understanding of security. This same approach helps in defining old as opposed to new or emerging security threats.

It is this expanded concept and theory of security that define our discourse and boundaries in this paper. It also fits the context of new security threats of issues in the world and Sub-Saharan Africa in particular, on which this paper focuses.

Conceptualizing Political Will

Some scholars have described this as a nebulous concept that means little but is much used (Post, Raile, and Raile, 2010). For instance, Scheye (2020), who is skeptical about its definiteness, uses the term to describe the inaction or lack of commitment on the part of political actors to address critical national issues, including national security. Scheye opines that beyond the scholarly usage of the word, policymakers and practitioners also use it to describe their own lack of commitment to an issue. According to him, political leaders may refuse to act on an issue it considers unimportant even if the public thinks otherwise. Such leaders would justify their action as based on lack of the political will to do so, the way the Clinton administration argued that its inaction during the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi was informed by a lack of political will. Therefore, beyond the tag or crucifixion scholars make of

political administrations and use “political will” to describe a state or governmental behavior, the actors themselves admit a political will deficit on some national or international issues.

What then is “political will”? It is a context-specific behavior or action in which state actors may exhibit high or low levels of commitment or lack of commitment to tackle issues of national concern. For our purposes, political will is broadened to mean commitment and firmness on issues of national emergency, such as the national security threats identified in the paper. Given that political will is context-specific, given the experience in Sub-Saharan Africa, political will is further understood as the government’s willingness to responsibly tackle national security threats. The SSA experience is such that ethnic and religious politics, corruption, and mismanagement of resources and national priorities underline (enhance or erode) commitments by actors to national emergencies.

Accountability and taking responsibility in a timely, measured, and valuable manner are the determinants of political will, and a sustained practice or attitude of this at the national leadership level, will create a national culture in which showing “political will” will be seen as a national behavior. As it was in the case of Sparta in ancient Greece, when swift but well-planned and strategically mapped out responses to external aggression characterized the leadership attitude, which became a Spartan culture, showing the willpower to tackle security risks should be a national culture in a crisis-prone African continent. The Spartans demonstrated political strength and military marksmanship and considered attack as its best form of defense, thus putting at bay any potential or real external aggression. This is what political will should be, and what African leadership has not demonstrated.

The Emerging Security Threats in SSA

Before examining the peculiar situation in each of the Sub-Saharan subregions, it is important to explain the soft security factors in security threats and their management. Soft security factors include the intangible but potent indices such as human behavior, socio-cultural, religious, as well as economic dynamics and digital means in the security trends in human environments. Soft security factors manifest in the solution if well thought-out and there is a state determination to deploy them. However, in explaining their roles in the security threats, soft security risks play out through such ways as criminal behavior and acts that could be influenced by ideologies, cosmologies and philosophies that define human nature, behavior, and human culture, and could be aided by digital resources. The causes of the security threats are sometimes not clear, with economic, religious, and ethnic or social issues, which are often hazarded or employed as theoretical assumptions and could sometimes be far-fetched or inaccurate, being the underlying factors. In addition, criminal elements and their odious acts often go after soft targets such as women, children, harmless civilians in general, and state infrastructure, while their methods are often unconventional. The main goal is to demoralize or weaken the society or state.

In terms of tackling security threats, soft security is the invisible, behavioral, cultural, or digital methods that deter, detect, and respond subtly, often complementing hard measures. While hard security focuses on military, territorial defense, and physical force, soft security addresses non-military, human-centered threats such as

climate change, disease, economic instability, and cyber issues. Put differently, while hard security uses coercion, soft security would rely on cooperation and development.

West Africa

In West Africa, the major security issues are in the Lake Chad Region in general and the Sahel. Beyond the infamous regional security breach created by Boko Haram insurgency in Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria, the Nigerian state faces a complex array of other security challenges, including banditry, kidnapping, farmer-herder clashes, and separatist movements. These threats are often intertwined with socioeconomic issues, like poverty and unemployment, which can fuel instability. Furthermore, Nigeria is increasingly vulnerable to cyberattacks and other digital threats. The main problem in Nigeria is terrorism. Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) continue to operate, particularly in the Northeast. Their attacks, including bombings and kidnappings, pose a significant threat to civilians and military forces. Hundreds of thousands have been internally and externally displaced, while tens of thousands have died. Economic disruptions are a major consequence of this situation, but they have also caused Nigeria much harm in terms of national image and brand.

Banditry and kidnapping closely follow. Criminal gangs engage in widespread banditry and kidnapping for ransom, especially in the Northwest and other regions. These activities disrupt daily life, harm the economy, and create a climate of fear. The third problem that bears semblance to the first two is farmer-herder clashes. Disputes between farmers and herders over land and resources have escalated into violent clashes, particularly in the North-central part of Nigeria, comprising some states, particularly Benue, Plateau, Nasarawa, and Kaduna. These conflicts have resulted in human carnage, untold hardship, displacement, and a huge refugee crisis (United Nations, 2024).

Another main security problem in Nigeria is separatist agitations in the Southeast. The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), like their predecessor, Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) in the Southeast, seeks secession, leading to unrest and violence. IPOB has been active using both propaganda and violent means to seek the independence of the Igbo-speaking region of Nigeria, claiming political marginalization, social exclusion from the Nigerian state, and ethnic persecution (Okoli and Ogayi, 2018). The Southeast was particularly embroiled in security breaches and the breakdown of law and order that led to security forces-separatists clashes, killings, destruction of property, mass arrests, abduction, and detention of IPOB leader, Nnamdi Kanu, and a total clampdown on the separatists with military force.

Cybersecurity threats are the new monster in Nigeria's long list of security challenges. Cyber or internet crimes, including hacking, fraud, identity theft, internet love scams, and "Yahoo-Yahoo" or "419" (online schemes to dupe innocent persons), have become a horror that is identified as a Nigerian thing. These attacks affect individuals, businesses, and government institutions. The acts have put Nigeria in a negative spotlight and stripped Nigerians of many legitimate financial benefits and schemes that could help its entrepreneurs, businesses, private individuals, and students at home and abroad, government agencies, and the economy at large. The problem with

cybercrime is that Nigeria is seen as a security threat to businesses and financial schemes by other countries or their citizens.

In addition to the vices mentioned above, there are perennial issues that Nigeria still grapples with. These include youth cultism, armed robbery, ritual killings for money and spiritual power, drug peddling and drug abuse at home and abroad, as well as money laundering and arms dealing. All these have exacerbated the internal security problems, and isolated Nigerians abroad in many cases as their host countries consider its nationals as potential or real threats to their economy or social life.

Given that Nigeria is an influential country in the sub-region and Africa, it has set the patterns for its immediate and distant neighbors in some negative ways. Internet fraudsters from Nigeria operate within and outside the country, working with friends and accomplices in other nations. Like drug dealers and human traffickers, internet fraudsters do not work alone. They operate in local and international networks. Some scammers have reportedly confessed to raising foreign national syndicates who work with them abroad (Omeihe, 2025). These operate with them to swindle private and public individuals or institutions at home or abroad.

Like the above, the Boko Haram movement, which started as a local problem in the Northeast, soon became a Lake Chad Basin issue, with Cameroon, Chad, and Niger affected and brought into the fray in no time. Terrorists in the Lake Chad Region work with their counterparts in the Sahel (Mali and Burkina Faso) to pursue a common cause, namely, to create an Islamic State in the Sahel and West Africa. Bandits and kidnappers also work in concert with accomplices in neighboring nations' villages and ordinary villagers across national boundaries, who hide them or supply the bandits with valuable information or intelligence.

It is arguable that while virtual or internet crimes capitalize on state ignorance, as well as poor governance and weak institutions to flourish, on the other hand, terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, and herder crimes seem to have flourished under state negligence, compromise, or complicity. The removal of the civilian government in Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso was popular because of this notion, and the outcry of some former military leaders in Nigeria about the government's complicity in the national security crisis also lends credence to the school of thought that the state is complicit in the security crisis of Nigeria. This will be argued later.

East and Central Africa

These two sub-regions have been the hotbed of violent conflicts in Africa. From Somalia to Mozambique, South Sudan to Sudan, and Ethiopia in East Africa, and from the Central African Republic to the DRC in Central Africa, the two sub-regions have witnessed some of the longest and devastating conflicts on the continent. While some are ethnic based, others would be either fueled by natural resources, social exclusion, or religious extremism. The crisis in the two Sudans is a product of a protracted ethnic and political crisis fueled by self-centered political leaders and ethnic warlords. That of Mozambique, Somalia, and the Central African Republic is a blend of Islamism championed by political and ethnic irredentists, while the 30-something-year-old crisis in the DRC has several elements that are present in Sub-Saharan African conflicts. These include ethnicity, social exclusion, natural resources, poor or weak governance, and state failure.

For over 30 years, the Central African sub-region has been facing a complex security crisis, characterized by persistent instability, armed conflict, and humanitarian emergencies. Political instability, weak governance, and deep social fractures contribute to the challenges, with violence affecting both urban and rural areas. The situation is further made convoluted by cross-border flows of foreign fighters, arms, and natural resources, which fuel the conflict economy. The worst hit is the DRC, the Central African Republic, and the central part of Angola. Institutional flaws, weak governance, and a lack of political will on the part of successive administrations to tackle the crisis worsen the DRC crisis. The problems caused by President Mobutu Sese Seko from the era of slave service to the Belgian and Western imperialists became intractable that even the revolution of President Laurent Kabila and the successive administrations of Joseph Kabila and Felix Tshisekedi could not resolve. Ethnic cleansing in the eastern region, particularly North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri, where Kinyarwanda-speaking Congolese inhabit, further complicates this (Center for Preventive Action, 2025). The social exclusion, coupled with mismanagement of the region and brazen corruption in Kinshasa, has led to the perpetuation of the crisis, the emergence of non-conformist groups and armed groups like the M23 that seek inclusion in the body politic of the country, to put an end to their persecution. This group also claims that it seeks to return its community members, who either have been displaced internally or have been refugees in neighboring countries, to their traditional lands. In most other cases, more than 100 common criminal gangs, in the name of armed groups, such as the Wazalendo and FDLR, led by ethnic genocidaires and economic profiteers, have turned the region into a war zone. The DRC conflicts have led to several political measures by regional leaders to end the crisis. These have included the Nairobi and Luanda pacts.

However, the lip service paid to the solutions, particularly from Kinshasa, has resulted in flops that made military measures inevitable. As expected, when political will is absent, and the deep-rooted and wider causes of the problems are neglected, the military solution, which was the SAMI-DRC, in which several Southern African Development Community and Burundian forces came together with mercenaries, FARDC and Wazalendo to execute military assaults against the M23 and Rwanda, which they claimed was fueling the M23 in its rebellion, failed. SAMI-DRC was made up of military forces from South Africa, Malawi, Tanzania, the DRC, and, interestingly, Burundi. Burundi is Rwanda's twin country with similar social, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and historical characteristics, and has always been an old ally of Rwanda for those reasons. They fought together in the First and Second Congo Wars. They served as sanctuaries for each other during the times of ethnic conflicts in Burundi and ethnic genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda in 1994. Notably, however, Burundi still runs a policy that recognizes ethnic divides, an experience Rwanda officially moved away from many years ago (Amnesty International, 2025; Segun, 2022).

The DRC crisis is even further complicated by identifying and addressing the wrong causes. Rwanda is its main suspect and target, but the government has not addressed the deep-seated apprehensions Rwanda has expressed timelessly about the DRC's harboring of existential threats to its sovereignty and security. Aside the fact that Congo still has active armed troops made up of Rwandan rebels and old foxes,

who perpetrated or identify with the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, Rwanda accuses the Congolese military of enlisting elements of the FDLR in its ranks and leadership, and fight alongside the Rwandese rebels and genocidaires to try to destabilize Rwanda and return it to the pre-1994 political order (Moncrieff, 2025). The DRC armed conflict, fueled by ethnic cleansing in the north, corruption, external pillaging of resources, manipulation by Western neo-imperialists, political instability, and the legacy of past conflicts, has led to a severe humanitarian crisis, widespread displacement, food insecurity, and increased risks of disease outbreaks.

The South Sudan conflict is another major security issue in East Africa. The crisis is a complex and dire humanitarian situation characterized by ongoing armed conflict, inter-communal violence, economic instability, and the impact of the war in Sudan, leading to widespread displacement and food insecurity. Approximately 70% of the population, or 9.3 million people, require humanitarian assistance in 2025. The crisis is rooted in a combination of factors, including political instability, ethnic tensions, economic hardship, and the impact of regional conflicts like the war in Sudan. Other internal problems have been a struggle for power from opposition parties and proliferation of ethic-based political factions.

The conflict in Sudan is one of the most critical in the world now. It has roots in historical grievances, power struggles, and resource competition, exacerbated by climate change and weak governance. The conflict between the Sudanese army (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) erupted in April 2023, after tensions escalated following a failed transition to civilian rule. The power struggle between the two parties is vicious, leading to a famine and claims of genocide in the western Darfur region.

Southern Africa

Mozambique is a Southeastern country in Africa, whose conflict is primarily concentrated in the northern Cabo Delgado province. The conflict, like the ones in the eastern sub-region of the continent, is a complex and evolving situation rooted in a combination of factors, including socio-economic grievances, political instability, and the rise of non-state armed groups, particularly the extremist jihadists led by the Islamic State. Since 2017, this conflict has led to widespread displacement, humanitarian crises, and hindered development. Rwanda and the South African Development Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM) have had to intervene to end the grave security crisis in this country. A violent insurgency led by the "Islamic State Mozambique" and "Al-Shabaab" (unrelated to the Somali group) has targeted towns, villages, and infrastructure in Cabo Delgado. The conflict also intersects with resource extraction, particularly natural gas and minerals, with communities feeling excluded from the benefits of these developments, fueling resentment and grievances. These social and economic inequalities, coupled with political instability, are the underlying causes of the Mozambican security challenges.

Leadership and the Political Will to Tackle the Security Threats

The question is, what is leadership in Africa doing about the spate of insecurity in their political domains? Under their watch, conflicts and security threats have spiraled out of

control. Two schools of thought tend to answer this question. One holds that many of these political leaders have little or no idea about security governance, lack the vision, tact, and the will to provide security in their countries. The other school is that the leaders are themselves stakeholders and investors in the insecurity in their political domains for different reasons.

Answers to this second argument is not farfetched. In 1994 and even before, the political leadership gave the local population the marching orders to kill fellow citizens and effectively supervised the killings of over one million Rwandans within three months. In Myanmar, Armenia, Germany under Hitler, and Nigeria during the Civil War, the government was at the center of the genocides and mass destruction of lives and property. General Sani Abacha, Nigeria's supreme leader from 1993-1998, once said that if insecurity or security crisis persisted beyond 24 hours, the government was the masquerade behind it (Bamali, 2021).

Abacha was no stranger to insecurity and indeed orchestrated some of the fearsome acts of state-orchestrated violence during his time, using a 'killer squad' led by a soldier to perpetrate bomb explosions, disappearances of political critics, and murders. To get a target or make a political statement or point, the state leaders perpetrate some of the worst crimes or create chaos. Idi Amin Dada of Uganda ruled in the 1970s. His multiple anti-state acts in which his 'research bureau' used violence to silence opposition are well documented. Other global leaders whose reckless use of state violence bled their countries and created a cloud of insecurity included Josef Stalin of Soviet Union, Francisco Macias Nguema of Equatorial Guinea, Jean-Bedel Bokassa of the Central African Republic, Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire (DRC), Kim Il-Sung of North Korea, Mao Zedong of China, Papa Doc Francois Duvalier and Baby Doc of Haiti, and Pol Pot of Cambodia. Through policies of genocide, political purges, famine, and other forms of repression, these leaders caused immense suffering and loss of life within their domains.

The examples above show that government or political leaders could be directly complicit or responsible for the insecurity in their own country. They invest in it for several reasons. First, they may seek power perpetuation by sowing chaos in the polity. Chaos requires time, policies, and a heavy government presence to clear, which could allow sufficient distraction and a longer stay in power. Second, these leaders could use the elements of violence to keep opposition at bay, silence critics, intimidate the populace, compel obedience or total submission, or create a perpetual state of fear. In some cases, political leaders could invest in chaos for monetary gains, or ethnic or religious reasons (Chin and Bartos, 2024; Kaledzi, 2022). The intractable Boko Haram and ISWAP crisis in Northeast Nigeria has been explained away to be caused by some political, ethnic, and religious leaders who either protect the interest of the terror groups because of primordial sentiments and attachments, or very senior persons in strategic positions in government who secretly benefit from the crisis (Ajala, 2025).

Thirdly, leadership ineptitude, cluelessness, outright incompetence, and unconcern for issues that require a state of emergency are also possible reasons for the rise of new security threats and breakdown of law and order in some Sub-Saharan African countries. In the DRC, the leadership has made several slips while seeking a solution to the protracted crisis in the eastern region. It engaged some armed groups to fight along with its regular army against another armed group, which seeks social and political

inclusion. This led to the government investing in and encouraging asymmetric warfare in the first place and then strengthening terror groups that would later eat up the state. This led to the spike in the number of armed groups, including those that are ethnic militias that seek to overrun Rwanda, thus perpetuating interstate friction with that neighboring country. Today, the armed gangs have risen to over 120 in number. Secondly, the government engages foreign elements (a.k.a. mercenaries) from Europe to fight insurgents and secure the sites of natural resources. Beyond giving away these precious resources to foreigners, this measure also compromises sovereign existence and could compromise national security. Thirdly, the Congolese government seeks lasting peace in its very rich eastern region but continues the politics of exclusion of its own Kinyarwanda-speaking people, which emboldens M23 to continue to fight. A more determined and disciplined army, the M23 easily overwhelms the ragtag Congolese army and its militia allies. Fourthly, the Congolese government abandons its East African partners and the Nairobi and Angolan peace processes, to engage the Southern African Development Community in assembling a fighting force from six countries to tackle its internal security and force its way into Rwanda to bring down the Kagame government, which it accuses of sponsoring M23 (Moncrieff, 2025).

In more recent times, the Congolese President practically begged a foreign power, the United States, which is known to have invested in its internal crisis since the CIA-led murder of their first Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba, to help in ending the chaos and stabilizing the region. President Tshisekedi offered strategic minerals to the US in exchange for its military support to check M23 and its imaginary enemy, Rwanda. Rwanda is the United States' greatest ally in East and Central Africa (Brugen and Feng, 2025).

The Congolese examples are typical of how not to check new or old security threats, or how to kill national sovereignty. Political incompetence, policy errors, wrong tactics, fruitless military partnerships, and direct invitation of recolonization. So, like complicity in insecurity or investing in it, leadership incompetence is another time bomb. However, a worse time bomb is the lack of political will on the part of African leaders. In 2011-13, the Goodluck Jonathan administration in Nigeria did not take the Boko Haram terror seriously at first. The administration thought the whole drama was another episode of political opposition using the new security threat to bargain or intimidate his administration (Montcloss, 2017). However, by the time the government woke up to the reality in late 2013 and early 2014, the monster had enveloped the serene Nigerian atmosphere, gone beyond the borders, and done a lot of damage to national security, national image, and Nigeria's stature in Africa and beyond. His aides, including security chiefs, were even accused of embezzling most of the allocations to fight the terror (Nnochiri, 2018). The menace ate up the Jonathan administration, and he lost the presidential election in 2015.

It is a popular opinion in Nigeria that the President Muhammadu Buhari administration did not fare any better. He acted well initially and moved the war headquarters to Maiduguri, the center of the jihad. After initial victories, by 2018, Abubakar Shekau, Boko Haram's leader, became invisible, re-emerged the third time after the military announced that he had been killed, and the "tactical wins" became horrific losses when some new security threats emerged. Boko Haram gave birth to ISWAP. Bandits and kidnappers suddenly emerged in North-Central Nigeria and began

a campaign that would outlast the Buhari era. Herders began to replace their sticks with AK-47 and, for the first time in Nigeria's chequered political history, started raiding farms, churches, villages, and towns of harmless people, particularly Christians. These raids went beyond the North-Central Nigerian states of Plateau, Benue, Nasarawa, and Kaduna. Southeastern parts of Enugu and Ebonyi came under attack. Southwestern cities such as Owo in Ondo State, and Ogun and Oyo States had similar tragic experiences.

The Buhari administration was not only slow in responding, but the President himself showed complacency and seemed unconcerned and uninterested. At a point, he claimed that he did not know there were killings in Benue State and that his police chiefs had not briefed him. At another point, he would fly out of Nigeria to attend to other matters at the expense of the tragedies that just happened under his watch. Most times, he would not visit the scene of the incident, but release press statements put together by his media aides. Yet, he would sometimes keep mute or make terse, un-reassuring comments. The President had once even said that Boko Haram insurgents were humans, and Nigerians, and could be treated with dignity and forgiven if they repented (Tukur, 2018). This was seen as too soft on a terror group that had wasted thousands of Nigerians, beheading most of them, including Buhari's troops. Buhari had also been silent whenever herders, whom many people claimed were Fulani, attacked or raided villages and farms and killed people. Miyetti Allah, a Pan-Fulani social group, had berated the public for condemning and accusing the Fulani of seeking total control of the rest of the country, and had also stoutly defended the group, always claiming that they had to hand in the menace (Makinde, 2019). However, the same Miyetti Allah would be silent whenever Fulani herders were apprehended for the vicious acts and would threaten any group that tried to lynch their kinsmen who perpetrated those dastardly acts.

The Buhari administration seemed not tough enough against Boko Haram, ISWAP, bandits, and Fulani herders. However, the administration showed decisiveness against separatist movements led by IPOB and Nnamdi Kanu in the Southeast and Sunday Igboho in the Southwest, where military operations were fierce and uncompromising. This appeared like a case of cherry picking informed by ethnic and religious interests. As herders and bandits ravaged the polity in the north, police action was not only inadequate, but there was also a self-appointed middleman in the person of Sheik Gumi, who emerged and became a loud and active mediator between the federal government and the governments of the states affected and the bandit leaders. It could not be ascertained if the governments paid ransoms in the multiple cases of kidnapped citizens and aliens, but there were numerous instances of captives set free, saying their heads were bought with money, and bandit kingpins shared many videos in which they celebrated their prizes (the monies received during their trade). These kingpins granted interviews to foreign cable networks, including the BBC, in which they mocked the government and justified their acts of terror (Ojewale, 2024; The Sun, 2023).

From the responses of the administration, which were either lame or non-existent, the Buhari administration simply went about other business and showed no political will to tame the monster.

In recent times, food insecurity and poverty have been a problem, caused by the immediate side effects of the economic reform programs, that have led to increased

inflation and sharp decline of the Naira value. These have driven more Nigerians to the edge, so that crime, particularly internet fraud and petty stealing, have spiked. Another threat is increased drug use by the youth, resulting in more mental and emotional health problems in the country.

It is too early to assess the current administration, as it has spent only two years in the saddle. The government is still tackling the inherited security problems. The mid-2010s ushered in a new development in Nigeria. Fighting insecurity is considered in some circles as not being a popular thing, as some people are probably offended because insecurity is the major means of buttering their daily bread. To this end, politicians may not exhibit the will to tackle insecurity because they may lose their godfathers, sponsors, or followers. What will it profit a political leader to end insurgency or banditry and lose power in the end? This is one of the main reasons the political will to combat security threats is lacking, which explains where we are in Nigeria and some other African countries.

Finding the Political Will to Combat Security Threats in Africa

A general human assumption is that change is constant even if people are afraid of it. In politics, the elite are more particularly apprehensive and do not want change, because the status quo benefits them or a change could jeopardize their positions or benefits. This may have explained the dire straits most African countries find themselves in dealing with existing or emerging security threats. As mentioned earlier, security threats in Africa are caused by numerous factors. Poor or inept leadership. Economic, political, and social disparities. Politics of exclusion in a heterogeneous society. Weak security governance and lame institutions. Corruption, mismanagement of resources, and misplaced priorities. Wrong or harmful government policies. External interferences. Climate change and its many side effects on local populations. Lack of a political will on the part of those that should fix the problem, namely, the political leaders.

In the same vein, finding the political will to combat security threats in Africa will also be a complex challenge involving various factors such as governance, socio-economic realities, and homegrown solutions to local problems. While some countries are making progress, others face persistent issues with governance, corruption, and resource management, which hinder effective security responses. One country that stands out as far as political will in tackling insecurity is concerned is Rwanda under the current leadership. From the outset, the Kagame administration has been intentional about security governance. One political measure was the eradication of the active and possible causes of national security meltdown. After the genocide against the Tutsi, the government banned identity cards and any emblems that promoted ethnic division or that could remind anyone of the past Hutu-Tutsi-Twa identities. “I am a Rwandan” or “Ndi Umuyarwanda” was enough for any Rwandan, and this national policy went a long way in making Rwandans see more factors such as similar language, culture and religion that bind them together more than those non-existent divisive elements that were created by the colonialists and the previous pre-genocide regime. The people and their security forces in the spirit of oneness, which the government had created by the national policy of integration, collectively combated the horrific experiences that were witnessed between 1998 and the early 2000s when remnants of the genocidal militia

group, the Interahamwe, were invading and killing people in northern Rwanda (Folarin, 2023).

In addition, the post-genocide Rwandan government, since the end of the genocide, has radically transformed the security forces. First, it changed the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) to the Rwandan Defense Force, integrated the good elements of the previous Rwandan Armed Forces (FAR) into the national military, and sent the army on continuous training and retraining, making them more professional and one of the most organized and disciplined armies on the continent.

Again, in some cases, the military and the police receive similar training, with the police only furthering their training in civil matters and relations, thus making them more people-friendly, knowledgeable, organized, and disciplined. The similar training the police have with the military is to make them capable of handling complex civil and internal security problems that would not require the army's involvement. In some African countries, including Nigeria, the army is almost always involved in even less complex security issues like national elections and mass protests. This leads to the militarization of society, which could escalate or cause new security threats. The Rwandan case is different, as the police can handle these "serious" matters more decently and professionally.

Another unique feature of the Rwandan security template is that all the military groups (army, air force, military police, and marine) pass through the same military academies and training, and are all called the RDF. While they specialize in their different chores, such as air and sea matters, they have the same general combat and defensive knowledge (Folarin, 2023). This gives them the advantage of knowing how to handle all common national security threats.

The Rwandan political leadership often demonstrates sensitivity to minor or major security threats. On every occasion, the President takes to the town hall or national discourse on any major or minor occurrence and addresses them at the highest level. He also involves not only the security chiefs and military, but also the entire nation, as his town hall addresses are televised and broadcast live to the nation. No issue is too small or minor; the leadership rises to and addresses it squarely. This gives hope and courage to the population.

So, which way, Africa? First, there is a need to strengthen governance. This will work by promoting good governance, transparency, and accountability, which are crucial for building trust and ensuring that resources are used effectively for security purposes. Second, socio-economic inequalities need to be intentionally addressed. Investing in education, healthcare, and job creation can help reduce the grievances that fuel conflict. Thirdly, African societies need to strengthen regional organizations such as the African Union and foster cooperation among neighboring countries, which can enhance the effectiveness of security interventions.

Another measure to combat insecurity in Sub-Saharan Africa is investment in early warning signs by developing robust early warning systems that can help identify potential threats and allow for timely preventative action. Most African states are more reactive to threats than preventive against them. Having early warning mechanisms will put threats at bay and promote national security. Furthermore, African governments should do more to support civil society in such a way that they could be empowered to play a role in conflict prevention and resolution. This can help build social cohesion

and resilience. Fundamentally, Sub-Saharan Africa should squarely address climate change because while they are the least contributor to the menace, they incidentally the worst affected. Climate change has led to many African social problems, including erosion, drought, famine, land hunger, food shortage, migration, and conflicts between communities, among other problems. Mitigating and adapting to climate change is essential for reducing its destabilizing effects on the region.

Terrorism and religious or ideological extremism have to be effectively, systematically, collaboratively, and intentionally combated. Getting this done requires effective strategies and a multifaceted approach that includes law enforcement, intelligence gathering, and addressing the root causes of radicalization.

Above all, however, political will is crucial. The difference between stable polities and chaotic ones is not only the availability of resources or dynamic leadership. What is central is the political will of the decision-makers to ensure that their domains are secure, peaceful, and stable. The Rwandan template is appropriate to put nations on the continent south of the Sahara on track. There must be a political will for effective security governance and to address the turbulent issues dogging national security.

Conclusion

This paper attempted to identify new security threats in Sub-Saharan Africa and how the lack of will on the part of political leadership has worsened the existing security situation in some of the countries. It identified compromises, complicity, and ineptitude as the main reasons that many African states have failed to tackle simple or complex security threats. Sometimes, minor security issues become a monster and cancerous, which eats up the post-colonial African state. While external interference may sometimes whittle down political will, vested personal or class interest in some national and internal security matters may be the reason why that nagging national security question has refused to go. African leaders need to work conscientiously and collaboratively to tackle emerging existential threats to national security.

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The authors declare no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethical Standards

The authors affirm this research did not involve human subjects.