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AL QAEDA IN THE ISLAMIC MAGHREB AND ITS CROSS BORDER CRIMES IN THE SAHEL REGION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper on "Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and its Cross Border Crimes in the Sahel Region" aimed at exploring the involvement of al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb; in cross border crimes in the Sahel region. The Research Methodology adopted was descriptive design that relied on the judgmental sampling technique. Data were generated from secondary sources (books, journal articles, monographs, internet materials etc) in Nigerian libraries, subjected to content validity before analyzing qualitatively. Results of the findings revealed that Salafist ideology, bad governance and ungoverned spaces are the motivating factors for membership of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. The group has taken advantage of aforementioned factors to embark on cross border crimes such as kidnapping for ransom, arms smuggling, drug trafficking as well as terrorism. The Sahelian states have constituted military alliance; G5 Sahel, while United States and France have initiated Trans-Saharan Counter Terrorism Partnership, Operation Several and Operation Barkhane respectively. The results of findings have further deepened the understanding and explanation of Frustration-Aggression Theory. Despite this, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb is still operating unabated in the Sahel region. In order to annihilate this dreaded group and further curtail its cross border crimes, the paper recommends counter ideological approach, good governance as well as

INTRODUCTION

The history of al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) could be traced back to the political instability that erupted in Algeria, following the annulment of the general elections, which Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) won by the Algerian military in 1991. Algerians accepted and voted massively for the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) because of its promises to introduce changes and transparency in the management of the state resources. Prior to the general elections, Algeria had faced economic crisis in 1980s, following the introduction of import substitution industrialization by the ruling party, National Liberation Front (FLN) and the sudden fall in the oil and gas prices at the international market. The state could no long subsidized most of the essential products such as petroleum products, natural gas and agricultural produce nor rendered basic services to the people. As captured by Werenfels (2015), "the ruling party was left without the financial means to continue buying social peace and political legitimacy. This paved the ground for the strong emergence of an Islamist protest party, the FIS, which wanted to replace a regime it perceived as corrupt, repressive, unjust and un-Islamic" (p.53).

Regrettably, the annulment of that elections coincided with the period Algerians who had joined Afghans in fighting Soviet Union returned home. Pham ((2011) hinted that, "...it is believed that between 3,000 and 4,000 Algerians had gone through the training camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan, in addition to the 1,000 who returned home... These Algerian...equated Moscow...with "infidel regime in Algiers which still ruled their homeland" (p.216). The Afghan returnees formed the military wing of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), Armed Islamic Group (GIA). The ultimate aim of the group was to overthrow the military and returned power back to the winner of the election, Islamic Salvation Front (ISF). This Armed Islamic Group, attacked both the military and the civilians who did not sympathize with its cause. They called these civilians apostates who ought to die, in line with Islamic principle. Steinberg and Werenfels (2007) decried that, "its bloody massacre of civilians caused public support for the group to dwindle, and persistent rumours of the group being manipulated by the Algerian intelligence agencies further discredited it" (p.408).

In 1998, Hassan Hattab, a former member of Armed Islamic Group (GIA) came up with a splinter group; Salafi Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC). Hattab's mission was to attack the state, protect the civilians and dissuade Ummah from having anything to do with the "infidel" state. Pharm (2011) hinted that, "the GSPC

directed its attacks at government and military targets...Hattab was influenced by Ayman al-Zawahiri, who by then was the Chief of al Qaeda...Zawahiri...considered that al-takfir applied only to the state and refused to declare the whole society apostate" (p.243). The Algerian military did not give the group breathing space, hence fought it with all the instruments of power within its disposal. Some members were killed while some were arrested and sent to prison. Those who decided to surrender their arms, were given amnesty by the state. As Cristiani and Fabani (2011) put it, "...between the late 1990s and early 2005, the civil war had slowly turned from all-out conflict into a low-intensity insurgency, as the Algerian authorities carried out series of high-profile arrests and successful military operation while offering an amnesty to the remaining jihad fighters" (p.3).

In 2003, the internal crisis that rocked the GSPC led to the removal of Hassan Hattab and he was subsequently replaced by Nabil Sahraoui who was killed in a military operation with Algerian soldiers. Abdelmalek Droukdel, a closed ally of Osama bin Ladan was named the leader of the group in 2004. In order to avoid total annihilation, Droukdel in 2006 consulted with four other Islamist Groups in the region; the Algerian Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (GICM), the Libyan Islamic Combatant Group (GICL) and the Tunisian Islamic Combatant Group (GICT) including other small Islamic groups from countries such as Mauritania, Mali and Niger and formed alliance with al Qaeda. "They then renamed themselves Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)" (Sour, 2015, p.10).

Sour (2015) further explained that:

> AQIM takes advantage of the lack of state presence in the region to establish operation in various countries. They operate over a vast area of the region, covering thousands of kilometers from the eastern part of Algeria to northern Niger to eastern Mauritania, and to Mauritania's border with Senegal. The movement currently made up of 800 fighters, scattered all over this vast desert area...AQIM mainly recruits from amongst the Tuaregs, Arabs, and Moors because of their excellent knowledge of the desert (p.10).

Furthermore, the supreme leader of the group remains Abdelmalek Droukdel who resides in Kabylia while Mokhtar Belmokthar is the brigade commander of AQIM in the Sahel region (Christiani & Fabiani 2011). Geographically, Sahel region covers the expanse stretching from the Atlantic to the Red Sea and encompasses part of "Senegal, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Algeria, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Sudan, and Somalia, more than…80 percent comprised of desert land" (Sour, 2015, p.7).

The porous nature of this desert permits it to serve as a safe haven for AQIM. In December 2007, AQIM murdered 4 French tourists in Mauritania. In February, 2008, gunmen who were members of AQIM opened fire

on Israeli Embassy at Nouakchott, Mauritania. Similarly, in September 2008, 12 Mauritanian soldiers were killed in an ambush by AQIM (Security Council Report, 2011). Goita (2014) also reported that in August 2007, AQIM claimed responsibility for the suicide bomb attack that was directed at French embassy in Nouakchott, Mauritania. In December 2007, AQIM claimed responsibility for kidnapping of 2 Italians and 3 Spanish aid workers in the Sahel region. According to Counter Extremism Project (2017), "the most brutal attacks took place in Mali (Radisson Blue Hotel in Bamako, November 2015), Burkina Faso (Cappuccino Café in Quagadugou, January 2018) and Ivory Cost (Grand Bassam Report, March 2016)" (cited in Dentice, 2018, p.5). Again, AQIM has given material and logistics supports to other Islamist groups in the Sahel, especially Boko Haram in Nigeria. It should be recalled that in 2010, Droukdal, the leader of AQIM announced that he would support Boko Haram with arms and training.

Coke (2014) further maintained that, Boko Haram acquired the skill of bomb making and suicide bombing from AQIM in 2011, which facilitated the attack of United Nations building in Abuja (cited in Werenfels, 2015). The main objective of AQIM is to rid the region of the western influence, especially countries such as France, and United States, which the group described as "apostate unbelievers", and to ensure that states like Algeria, Mali, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia are governed strictly by Islamic law, Sharia (Adeyemi & Musa, 2014). Regrettably, the western interest in the Sahel was not in existence, until the 9/11 terrorist attacks in Washington and the discovery of oil in Libya. France was the only foreign power whose presence detered the Islamist groups before United States followed.

Zoubir (2011) hinted that, "only in the past 30 years, since the emergence of Libya as major concern for Washington, the involvement in the area has increased, driven by energy interests, and more recently, by the growth of terrorist activities in the region" (cited in Cristiani & Fabiani, 2011, p.6). Similarly, scholarly interests in this region, especially the activities of the AQIM are scanty, thereby creating dearth in literature. Literature abounds on al Shabaab in Somalia as well as Boko Haram in Nigeria, surprisingly; AQIM does not attract scholarly attention, despite its heinous activities in the Sahel region. In order to bridge this intellectual gap, pertinent questions need answers:

  (i)   Which theoretical framework can explain AQIM and its cross border crimes in the Sahel region?
  (ii)   What motivate Muslim youths to join AQIM in the Sahel region?
  (iii)   To what extent has AQIM involve in cross border crimes in the Sahel region?
  (iv)   How does international community response to AQIM in the Sahel region?

The first part of this article deals with theoretical framework, while the second section is the material and method of analysis. The motivation for AQIM is the third section while the fourth part is the AQIM involvement in cross border crimes in the Sahel region and the fifth section deals with the international responses to AQIM in the Sahel region. The conclusion and recommendations that constitute the last section is followed by references.

FRUSTRATION-AGGRESSION THEORY

Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer and Scars propounded the Frustration-Aggression Theory in 1939 at Yale University. According to these Yale scholars; Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer and Scars (1939), "the occurrence of aggressive behaviour always presupposes the existence of frustration, and contrariwise always lead to some form of aggression" (p.13). Frustration has been defined as "an interference with the occurrence of an instigated goal response at its proper time in the behaviour sequence" (Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer & Scars, 1939, p.7). In the same vein, Newcome (1968) argued that, "frustration always induces motivation of some kind of aggression which acts as a drive or motive to react, combat or make attack (cited in Breuer & Elson, 2017, p.7). Freud (1927) further maintained that aggression has instinct-dimension. In his instinct theory of aggression, he explained that, aggression is inherited and biological in nature. An aggrieved individual can express his grievance both overtly and covertly. The overt involves outward expression while covert is the inward expression. Freud (1927) cited in Johan (2010), hinted that, "...aggression was a primordial reaction when the individual attempts to obtain pressure or avoid pain was blocked" (p.7). In addition, McDougall (1946) cited in Breuer and Elson (2017) explained that, "... an instinct to engage in combat is activated by any obstruction to the person's smooth progress towards his or her goal (p.6).

Dollard, Doob, Miller and Scars (1939) cited in Dougherty and Pfaltzgraft (1979) highlighted again that, the occurrence of aggression depends on: "(i) the strength of instigation to the frustrated response (ii) the degree of interference with the frustrated response (iii) the number of frustrated response to sequence" (p.283). In other words, the gravity of deprivation (thwarting), the frustrated efforts towards resolution and the number of times that it occurs, determine the rate of aggression. However, the response to frustration can take the form of overt or covert. Overt aggression entails open attack while covert aggression requires secret attack on the perpetrator of the frustration. This brings punishment as concepts, into focus. Johan (2010) explained that, covert aggression occurs if the aggressor anticipates punishment. If there is no punishment, the aggressor operates overtly. "Put precisely...anticipated punishment, which is a primary source of frustration, effects the inhabitation of overt aggression..." (Johan, 2010, p.2). Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer and Scars (1939) equally added that, "act of aggression can be inhibited, especially when their commission would lead to punishment or other undesirable consequences. The expectation of punishment reduces overt aggression, and the greater the certainty and amount

of punishment anticipated for an aggressive act, the less likely is that act to occur" (p.54). There is a possibility that expectation of punishment could intensify aggression. However, if the aggressor hits at the source of frustration (instigator), it is a direct target, but if he hits at the agent of the source, it is an indirect target. Daughterly and Pfaltzgraft (1979) also said that, "...there may occur a displacement of aggressions, in which case the individual directs hostility towards someone or something not responsible for the original frustration" (p.283). Indirect aggression can also occur in a form of self-castigation, especially in an extreme case like suicide.

Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer and Scars (1939) also opined that aggression leads to catharsis; which "is a release of aggressive energy or tension and a reduction in the instigation to aggression" (p.58). Unfortunately, Morlar (1949) disagreed, rather decried that the expression of an aggressive impulse does not result in catharsis, but, on the contrary, "sets up a vicious cycle that lead to further aggression" (p.1).

Relating all this to the subject matter, the weak and fragile nature of the Sahelian states are the major sources of frustration that led to aggression. These states cannot render essential services (road, electricity, water, hospital, schools etc) nor provide its educated citizens job opportunities. The AQIM takes advantage of this failure, and endeared into the heart of the vulnerable once, through provision of those services which states could not do. As International Crisis Group (2015) captured it:

> Regional youths are increasingly restless over slow economic growth, lack of job opportunities and narrow political space. Dissatisfaction and disillusionment are exacerbated by readily available digital images (through smart phones and satellite television) of prosperity and development around the globe. Governments are presented as unwilling or unable to provide for basic needs and aspirations. Routes to active, fulfilling role in society are closed and upward mobility almost non-existent. No one seems capable of responding to the youths' quests for opportunities...The result is weak belief in the state and little willingness – individually and collectively – to reinforce society and state institutions (p.9).

Apart from its inability to provide essential services, especially employment opportunity which is the major source of frustration, states in the Sahel region is economically backward. Sage 2011, Lacher 2012, Dentice 2018, Eizenga 2019, equally attributed the backwardness to the criminal activities of the non-state actor like AQIM, Boko Haram, and Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP) among others. Their violent extremist acts deter foreign investor's even tourists who used to bring foreign exchange, from investing in the region. Some of the tourists are killed while the lucky ones are kidnapped. This is an important issue, which the so-called youths

refused to acknowledge. Despite this, the Sahelian states are poor and underdeveloped. Their leaders are not also working towards revamping their local economy. Infact, there is no argument over this point. Confirming this, Filiu (2010) asserted that:

> The Sahel countries are among the poorest on the planet. Annual GDP per capita is $1,042 in Mauritania, $657 in Mali and $390 in Niger, which ranks last among the 182 states in the United Nations Development Programme's Classification of human development (neither Mauritania nor Mali fare dramatically better; Mauritania ranks 154th and Mali 178th). AQIM can afford low intensity guerrilla activity in such an environment ...because the partnership in crime provides a steady flow of recruits, no matter how low their jihadi commitment (p.9).

The Islamist group, AQIM attributes all this backwardness and its associated poverty to the unfaithfulness of the leaders of the Sahel region. According to Asfura-Heim and McQuaid (2015), a culture of corruption has developed which government positions are seen as a means to generate private wealth. ...In addition to corruption, other important factors – such as govenrment ineptitude, criminality, and general lack of accountability – also inflame anti-state sentiment..." (p.15). Though their argument concentrated in Nigeria, the truth is that all other Sahelian states are the same, none is free of corruption. In order to clean the Sahelian society, AQIM believed that it is only Sharia that can bring the society back to its normalcy. Asfura-Heim and McQuaid (2015) further explained that AQIM, "...believed that Muslim communities were made to suffer because their leaders were not true to faith...it was necessary to engage in active jihad (or holy war) in order to defend the Ummah (global community of Muslim) and spread faith and that a leader who did not enforce Sharia law completely, and wage active jihad against infidels, was unfit to rule"(p.30).The frustration was also evident in the vulnerable returnees from Libya; following the collapse of late Qaddafi's regime in 2011. International Organization for Migration (2013) maintained that, the Libyan crisis resulted in 318,000 third country nationals in 5 countries bordering Libya, such as Algeria, Chad, Egypt, Niger and Tunisia. In Mali, they were 11,230 returnees. However, this figure did not include those that had not registered with International Organization for Migration (IMO). Adeyemi and Musa (2014) further explained that:

> Migrants left Libya under extremely difficult circumstances. They lost their savings and possessions and became victims of extortions and human rights violation. This led to psychological trauma, feeling of shame and embarrassment. Their inability to earn and

provide for their families further compounded their socio-economic situation... In the absence of any gainful employment and with the availability of arms and ammunition at their disposal, the unemployed youths and returnees in the northern part of Mali engaged in crimes of all sought, such as...armed attacks... (p.6).

It is the combination of all these frustrations, emanating from poverty, infidelity and Libyan crisis that lead to aggression against the Sahelian states and its western allies. This further confirms Newcomb (1968) cited in Breuer and Elson (2017) that, frustration always trigger motivation for aggression which acts as a drive or motive to react, combat or effect attack. The dreaded group, AQIM had carried out high profile attacks against Sahelian states. For instance, in September 2010, AQIM attacked the Uranium Company in Arlit, Niger Republic. This resulted in an abduction of 7 employees who are citizens of France. In January 2011, 2 French nationals were kidnapped in Niamey, Niger. They were later found dead, following a failed rescue mission carried out by French soldiers. In the same vein, in February, 2011 Mauritanian soldiers confronted AQIM in Nouakchott, regrettably 8 soldiers lost their lives while only 3 members of the terrorist group were killed (Goita, 2014). On 16th January 2013, AQIM attacked Tengatourine, gas field in Amenas, Algeria. They took over the entire facility that was operated by foreign companies from Algeria, France, Japan, Norway and United Kingdom. In that operation, AQIM held 700 Algerians and 134 foreign national hostages. The attacker demanded immediate withdrawal of French forces from Mali, and also accepted to free a United States' captives in exchange for the release of their Egyptian leader, Omar Abdel-Rahman as well as Aafia Siddiqri, an Iranian top scientist who were in the western custodies. Though Algeria was in a difficult situation, the state refused to negotiate with the terrorist.

Alexander (2013) recorded that, "after…50 hours of fierce fighting, Algeria announced that 685 Algerians and 101 foreigners had been freed by the operation, but the death toll was costly – 11 Algerians and 37 foreign nationals (including 3 Americans, 3 Britons and 10 Japanese." (p.13).   Apart from the direct attack (overt), AQIM also carried out indirect attack (covert) which Dougherty and Ptaltzgraft (1979) described as displacement. In Mali, AQIM vandalized tourist sites, desecrated religious places especially in Timbuktu. Brosche, Legner, Krentz and Ijla (2016), posited that "the destruction of burial tombs in the world heritage site of Timbuktu in Mali in 2012 was motivated by religious-political ideology of Islamic insurgents, according to whom idolatry was forbidden and the influx of foreign tourists was considered harmful (p.9). These attacks on the World Heritage sites were condemned by the United Nations, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). However, AQIM supported Ansar Dine, that did the destruction and justified their action by asking, "what is UNESCO? We don't care about the words of any entity, because God is one without partners. All UNESCO's

calls are just polytheism. We are Muslims and we don't reverse any shrines or idol" (Oumar, 2012, cited in Adeyemi & Musa, 2014, p.5).

Similarly, imposition of Sharia law at the local areas where AQIM controls is another example of displacement. The locals are forced to accept and practice Islamic way of life without any resistance from the people. Like Al Shabaab in Somalia, other Salafist group, especially Boko Haram, ISWAP including AQIM, operate strict Islamic law in their domains. Harnisch (2010) further hinted that:

> The group has banned playing and watching movies, dancing at wedding parties, listening to music (including a ringtone), the wearing of bras by women and branding of animals (especially donkeys). The group also strictly prohibits people converting from Islam and proselytizing for any religion other than Islam... the group has also banned adultery in accordance with Islamic law. The group has carried out numerous public amputation of the hands and feet of those convicted of theft (p.17).

The atrocities of the AQIM cannot continue unabated, hence, there must be punishment. The United States had initiated Trans-Saharan Counter Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP) in 2014; France initiated Operation Several in 2013 to dislodge the Islamist group in northern Mali. Following the successful completion of that exercise in 2014, the name of Operation Several was changed to Operation Barkhane. The Sahelian states, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Chad and Algeria, has formed a military alliance, G5 Sahel, to counter the dreaded sect.

Sage (2011) further explained that, "one of the major objectives of this group effort has been convincing countries including Mali, Niger, Mauritania and Algeria, to increase their cooperation against AQIM" (p.10). Regrettably, "while the governments involved in the French-led counter-insurgency campaign...the G5 Sahel, the terrorists refer to it as the satanic coalition" (Gunaratna, 2015, p.15). Killings and kidnapping in the Sahel region is ongoing, despite punishment from the coalition forces. This confirmed Morlan (1949) assertion that catharsis can never occur whenever there is an expression of aggressive impulse, it rather set up a vicious cycle that leads to further aggression. Punishment, cannot deter AQIM, rather they see their criminal activities as work of God.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper on "Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and its Cross Border Crimes in the Sahel Region" adopted descriptive design that relied on the secondary sources (books, journal articles, monographs, internet materials, conference papers etc) of data collection. These documentary data were sourced from internet and libraries in Nigeria, subjected to content validity before analyzing it qualitatively. The use of qualitative method enabled the

researcher to embark on an in-depth study of AQIM and its cross-border crimes in the Sahel region. The qualitative method also helped in exploring gaps in the extant literature on AQIM. However, the population of this study included; Boko Haram, Al Shabaab, Islamic State of West Africa Province as well as AQIM. Despite the multiplicity of these violent extremist groups in Africa, the researcher decides to choose AQIM as the sample of the study. The choice of AQIM is judgmental in view of the fact that there are abundant literatures on Boko Haram, al Shabaab and Islamic State of West Africa Province. Surprisingly, sketchy materials are available on the AQIM and its Cross Border Crimes in the Sahel Region. Regrettably, the dearths of materials open space for unempirical arguments, which ought not to be in an academic world. It is hoped that this study would bridge the gap in knowledge and present arguments on AQIM in proper perspective.

MOTIVATION FOR MEMBERSHIP OF AQIM IN THE SAHEL REGION

Unarguably, Islam is a religion of peace; therefore, the violent extremism that characterized the modern Islamism has nothing to do with God. It is a creation of wicked ones, whose aim is to perpetuate violence and entrench fear globally. The original Islamic sect that converted the member states of the Sahel region into Islam was Sunni. The Sunni doctrine was peaceful and also blended with African traditional religion. The discrimination between the two was not there and this could be the reason why Islam finally succeeded in entrenching itself in the Sahel, and also dominated the people's way of life. As International Crisis Group (2005) put it, "many clerics, politicians and scholars of religion emphasize the peaceful inclusive nature of Sahelian Islam, pointing to the role that the Sufi brotherhoods have played in forming the regional culture of tolerance. Such description often takes place in the context of comparison to Salafi Movement of Islamic renewal..." (p.4). Problem came, mainly because of the peaceful co-existence of the Sunni members with the African traditional worshipers, who the Salafists regard as infidels. The French colonial masters who colonialized most states in the Sahel (Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Algeria, Tunisia etc) was seen as apostate that need not to step into the Islamic soil. They hate the western world and all the values that it cherishes. It should be recalled that in 2014, a Salafist leader of Boko Haram in Nigeria, late Abubakar Shekau asked:

> ...what is America in the sight of Allah? What is "Israel" in the sight of Allah? What is France in the sight of Allah? We don't fear you at all. We were the ones who carried out all these attacks... How can one fear these American people? If one is indeed a believer, he needs not to. How can one fear these people if one is indeed a believer? This is the speech I have to make, which is a warning for the worse things to come. Better submit to Allah before it becomes too late (cited in Cook, 2014, p.17).

The Salafists believe that constitution is man-made, and must be immediately replaced with Koran. The state system in the entire Sahel region should be merged into an Islamic caliphate that would be ruled by Sharia law. This is because, the state system has disappointed the Muslim Ummah, and hence there is a need to return to caliphate in which Sharia would prevail as the main code of conduct. International Crisis Group (2006) further explained that, "Sharia provided an alternative to a failed model of governance. It also allowed the local political elite to mobilize their followers outside the established framework of the federal police and army..." (p.26). This would bring a new society for the people of the Sahel region in which corruption, despotism, hunger, poverty and underdevelopment would be a thing of the past. There would be equity and justice in the land, since God would be the only supreme leader. As International Crisis Group (2005) captured it:

> The Salafiyya...promotes a return to the original beliefs and practices of the Salaf – the "founding fathers" of Islam – that is the Prophet Mohammed and his immediate successors. In all cases, their vision of the change is based on a literalist reading of the Koran and the Hadiths...Salafis described their activities as a struggle against bid'a, or innovations, and shirk, or heresy. Both are usually understood to have been introduced...by Sufi orders who have cultivated cults of saints, use of protective amulets and... marabout as religious intermediaries.

Regrettably, Muslim youths that hear this group, Salafist, attribute all their disappointment in life to the state, and their collaborators; western allies. The only way out, is compulsory installation of Islamic regime, according to them.

International Crisis Group (2013) posited that, "the involvement of these youth in Salafism seems to be a way to assert their individuality in a society that rejects them and whose values contradict their religious belief" (p.6). The Salafist movement is aimed at bringing a new society for the Muslim world. According to Werenfel (2015), "the essence is to establish an Islamic state that sweeps away the colonial borders dividing the Islamic world and ends the occupation of Islamic soil" by unbelievers (alliance of Jews and crusaders)" (p.59). Unfortunately, Muslim youths are deceived; hence, a close look at the activities of AQIM reveals that, the leadership of the organization in the Sahel region, Belmokhtar is a businessman. He benefits massively from black economy, yet pretends as Islamic fanatic that aims at creating a caliphate. Pharm (2011) alerted that, "...Belmokhtar clearly profited personally from these criminal enterprises...traffic in arms, cigarette, drugs and stolen cars...as well as having a hand in human trafficking..." (p.248). Where is the role of Allah here? The fact is that, "the states of this area are structurally weak, their borders are porous and their control over territory is largely ineffective" (Cristiani & Fabiani, 2011, p.2). This is why the non-state actors like Boko Haram, Islamic State of West African Province,

and AQIM among others prevail over them. The fragility of the Sahelian states could be placed within the content of its inability to render good governance to its people. "AQIM...and criminal elements...are reportedly providing services and humanitarian assistance in remote areas where state presence is reduced or non-existent." (United Nations Security Council, 2012, p.7). AQIM is already a government in most of these Sahelian states, especially the rural area where states' presence is hardly felt. The people believe that AQIM is the only authority that can exercise power over them, the locals also provide AQIM members sanctuary to operate criminal activities, without detect by the legitimate governments. AQIM reciprocates this gesture through provision of protection and essential services such as water, madrasas (Islamic schools), hospitals to the people. As Goita (2014) further explained that;

> AQIM is also attempting to cast itself as an ally and potential protector of local communities. It often fiercely condemns the arrests of locals or civilian causalities, resulting from government raids. By the same token, AQIM is exceedingly careful not to inadvertently target local communities and interests in the Sahel. AQIM's illegal activities also generate income and job opportunities for communities and individuals in the region (p.3)

The truth is that governments in the Sahel region are incapacitated, due to its economic backwardness. According to International Crisis Group (2014), "the poverty and lack of services affecting the Muslim population have caused an intense resentment of the political status quo and have fueled extremist and rejectionist thinking" (p.14). youth unemployment has taken an alarming rate. In Nigeria, there are 170 universities, yet the state is not proud of a single industry. Most of these youths that graduated without job are the ones tormenting the state through banditry groups, Boko Haram memberships as well as Biafra secessionists. As Asfura-Heim and McQuaid (2015) put it:

> Decaying infrastructure, chronic energy shortages and influx of imported products from outside Nigeria, have led to massive factory closures in the north. In Kano, for instance, roughly 75 percent of manufacturers went out of business in the 1990s... frustration and disaffection have driven many young northerners to join "self-help" ethnic or religious groups, some of which like Boko Haram, are hostile to the state (p.17).

Since nature abhor vacuum, alternative must be available. Joining the terrorist group may not likely be their will, in view of the fact that it is a risky venture. Some of them have died in action, while some are maimed for life, yet new recruits are enrolling. Adeyemi and Musa (2014) posited that, "AQIM brought itself goodwill, friendship and

networks by distributing money and medicine, treating the sick and empowering them" (p.5). If this is the case, there is an urgent need for the Sahelian states to redouble its efforts in providing good governance to its people. However, the entire blame cannot be on the state, the criminal activities of the terrorist groups in the Sahel region also discourage investment. As Goita (2014) captured it:

> Ironically, it is AQIM's low-level terrorist attacks and criminal activities that have largely contributed to the worsening economic situation in the Sahel. Tourism once drove a significant amount of business activity in the region, but visitors' numbers have dropped sharply as a consequence of AQIM kidnappings. A key airline that serviced several Sahelian cities, Point Afrique, recently suspended flights, further isolating the region (p.3).

INVOLVEMENT OF AQIM IN CROSS BORDER CRIMES IN THE SAHEL REGION

Contrary to its propaganda that AQIM emerged as a movement that aimed at evolving a purer society, facts available indicate that the organization survives through cross border crimes. The location of the AQIM in the Sahel brigade is between the southern Algeria that bounded by northern Mali, northern Niger and southern Mauritania. Since state presence is lacking, this location becomes a safe haven for them to involve in criminal activities such as kidnapping for ransom, arms proliferations, drugs trafficking as well as terrorism. These criminal activities constitute the major source of its funding. The leader of Sahel brigade is Mokhtar Belmokhtar, whose nickname is Marabolo. The leadership of AQIM had ordered the kidnapping of western tourist, diplomats and aid workers in the Sahel region. Some of the kidnapped victims are nationals of France, Spain, Italy, Austria, Canada, Switzerland, Germany, United Kingdom as well as African states. Sage (2011) posited that:

> Some analyst estimate that ransom paid for western hostages between 2008 and 2010 amounted to £25 million and that the average payment for a western hostage is as high as $6.5 million. If ransoms were paid for the release of three additional hostages in February 2011- one France, one Malagasy and one Togolese – then the overall sum paid to AQIM in the past few years may be significantly higher (p.4).

A British hostage, Edwin Dyer was killed in 2009 by AQIM, because British government refused to pay or release a convicted terrorist from British jails. In April 2012, 42 foreign nationals were abducted by the AQIM at different locations in the Sahel region. Few days later, 24 abductees were released while 5 were killed. The whereabouts of 13 remaining abductees is unknown till date. Similarly, in July, 2010, Michael Germaneau, 78 years old French Engineer was kidnapped and later killed in Niger by AQIM. The former President of France, Nicholas Sarkozy reacted negatively, and further supported Mauritania militarily in order to stamp out this evil

from the Sahel. It should also be recalled that French citizens, Antonine de Leocour and Vincent Delory were killed by AQIM at Niamey, capital of Niger, following a failed rescue mission carried out by France soldiers on 11th January 2011. In the same vein in November 2009, 3 Spanish aid workers were abducted in Mauritania by AQIM who demanded for the payment of 10 Euros, through an intermediary, Omar le Sahraoui. The money was paid to AQIM through Omar le Sahraoui, and the abductees were released (Pharm, 2011). Sahraoui, who is also known as a Desert-Man has been a close ally to AQIM whose work is to negotiate for the release of kidnapped victims. Swiss government also paid $5 million as ransom for the release of 3 of its nationals who were kidnapped by AQIM in Northern Mali. Many other examples could still be cited, the fact is that, "kidnapping for ransom has developed into a highly lucrative industry that has allowed AQIM to become a significant political and military force in the Sahel and Sahara" (Lacher, 2012, p.9).

Similarly, AQIM also involved in arms proliferations in the Sahel region. Though the dreaded group used arms to perpetrate violence, however the quantities of arms in their disposal which they also assist, other terrorist organizations such as al Shabaab, Boko Haram, came as a result of the fall of Qaddafi regime in Libya in 2011. Some members of AQIM fought against late Libyan leader, Qaddafi, and immediately that government collapsed in 2011, they left to their base with those weapons that were in their disposal. According to United Nations Security Council (2012) these weapons included, "rocket propelled grenades, machine guns with anti-aircraft visors, automatic rifles, ammunition, grenades, explosive (semtex), and light anti-aircraft artillery (light caliber bi-tubes) mounted on vehicles...possibility of more advanced weapons, such as surface-to-air-missiles and man portable air defence system were being transferred to the region..." (p.10).

Regrettably, these were the same weapons that they used in fighting the government of Mali, and took over the northern part (Timbutu) of that country. Similarly, AQIM also bought many weapons from the pro Qaddafi Libyan soldiers who escaped to refugees' camps (Choucha, el-Hayet, Remada and Tatatoume) in Tunisia. Weapons that they bought from them included automatic 9mm pistols and AK 47 assault rifles, which they brought into Tunisia. As International Crisis Group (2013) captured it, "Salafis who answered appeals for reinforcements made by association in Ben Guerdane to help distribute food in the refugee camps, reportedly used preaching tents to buy and sell military equipment" (p.17). In November 2011, William Hague, former United Kingdom Foreign Secretary stated that the fight in Libya had created potential for "new recruits for AQIM in the form of former mercenaries" who left Libya and have little opportunities elsewhere. Even Mokhtar Belmokhtar, the leader of Sahel brigade confirmed in his interview with a private news agency, ANI in Mauritania that AQIM had obtained weapons as a result of Libyan crisis (Bowser & Sanders, 2012).

Furthermore, AQIM involved in drug trafficking. The availability of drugs such as cocaine, heroine, cannabis among others in the Sahel, especially the area that is controlled by the AQIM is not doubtful, however, the involvement of the group in drug business is contested. The organization, AQIM does not export drugs to other cartel outside the Sahel region, but available literature (Lacher, 2012, Pharm, 2011, Goita, 2014, Sage 2011) indicated that their members provided protection to the drugs traffickers and directed them on how to escape government securities. They are able to do this because of their vast knowledge of the desert. The drug traffickers paid them for the services that they rendered. For instance, in 2010, Moroccan government arrested 34 drug traffickers who had link with South American Cartels. During their interrogations, the drug traffickers confirmed that AQIM assisted them to evade arrest, while passing through the Sahel region.

According to Pharm (2011):

> The Moroccan Interior Minister claimed that with the arrests, they have established, what he called "an apparent collaboration" between drug traffickers and AQIM, noting that the terrorist group was making money by using its members' knowledge of desert routes, weapons and means of transportation to protect the traffickers (p.248).

Cigarette smuggling is the main business Mokhtar Belmokhtar, their leader in the Sahel region is noted for. Cigarette is not a contrabound product in most North African states, such as Libya, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco. However, the importers prefer collaborating with terrorist group like AQIM in order to assist them in evading security posts. Instead of paying the required import duties at border posts, they prefer paying bribe to members of AQIM who will protect them till they arrived at their destinations. This dreaded group, AQIM has benefited a lot from this transaction than any other business in the Sahel region. Lacher (2012) further explained that:

> Cigarette smuggling has also contributed to the emergence of smaller gangs of smugglers, charged with transporting merchandise from Mauritania, Mali, and Niger into Algeria. Mokhtar Belmokhtar, who later acquired notoriety as one of the leading figures in AQIM's Sahelian Operations, is widely reported to have long run a cigarette smuggling racket across the Sahara (p.5).

In addition, AQIM promotes terrorism in the Sahel region. Pharm (2011) hinted that, AQIM detonated the first suicide bomb in Algeria on 11th December 2007. The suicide bomber targeted the Constitutional Council and United Nations building. This incidence left 41 people dead while more than 170 people were wounded. "AQIM videos strongly resemble video from Iraq in terms of the music, Quranic citations and filming of hits on enemy targets..." according to Pharm (2011, p.246). On 7th February, 2011, AQIM attempted to assassinate, Mauritanian

President, Mohammed Quld Abdel Aziz, through vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device (VBIED). The bomb was detonated on his convoy; however, 9 soldiers were injured, while the President escaped death (Adeyemi & Musa, 2014). Similarly, on 13th March, 2016, AQIM attacked a hotel, Nouvelle Paillote at Grand Bassam's tourist resort in Ivory Coast. That attack led to the death of 16 civilians, 3 soldiers and 24 others injured. "Among the civilian were 8 Ivoirians, 4 French, 1 German, 1 Lebanese, 1 Nigerian and 1 Macedonia (Pearson, 2016). According to SITE Intelligence Group (2016):

> AQIM posted photos of the Ivory Coast attackers and a brief statement claiming responsibility for the attack in Arabic, English, French and Spanish on its Telegram and Twitter accounts. The 3 suicide attackers were identified as belonging to AQIM's Sahara unit and Al-Murabitoon an affiliated militant group based in northern Mali. AQIM referred to the Ivory Coast hotels as the den of espionage and conspiracies (p.3).

Moroccan Security Services had informed Ivory Coast about the pending attack, but the Ivorian government did not take it serious. "The failure of the authorities in Ivory Coast to act upon the intelligence received, raised questions about the level of preparedness by the country for the terrorist attack", according to Gunaratna (2016, p.15). This attack came, as a result of France having a permanent military base in Ivory Coast, which it used in conducting counter terrorism campaign in the Sahel and Maghreb regions. President Alassane Quattara of Ivory Coast responded through restructuring of security architecture in Grand Bassam, thereby renewing confidence among tourists. Nigeria's case is worst. The AQIM has collaborated with Boko Haram to torment Nigerian government and its people. This unholy alliance between the two dreaded organizations can be traced back to 2009. It should be recalled that the Emir of AQIM, Droukdel (2009) had stated that, "we are ready to train your children to use weapons, and will supply them with all we can, including support and men, weapons, ammunition and equipment, in order to defend our people in Nigeria and response against the aggression of the Christian minority" (cited in Sage, 2011, p.7).

Eventually, this speech was made when Jos, capital of Plateau State was in a severe crisis between Muslims and Christians. Boko Haram is proving impossible to defeat because of external helps it gets from sister organizations like AQIM, al Shabaab, including Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Presently there is a splinter group, Ansaru that link with Islamic State, and formally changed its name to Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP), Marc-Antoine (2014) further explained that, "the splinter group Ansaru...is certainly more aligned with the doctrine of Osama bin Laden. It targets are more international and its original name was al Qaeda in the Lands Beyond the Sahel" (p.20). Even Nigerian government knows that the external influence in Boko Haram is

enormous. The external factor is what delay the annihilation of Boko Haram. As United Nations Council (2012) confirmed:

> Boko Haram had established links with al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and that some of its members from Nigeria and Chad had received training in al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb camps in Mali. During the summer of 2011...7 of its members were arrested while transiting through the Niger to Mali in possession of documentation on manufacturing of explosive, propaganda leaflets and names and contact details of members of al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb they were allegedly planning to meet.

Despite this cooperation, Boko Haram days are number, like its predecessor Maitatsine.

International Responses to AQIM and its Cross Border Crimes in the Sahel Region

Attempt to eradicate the menace of this dreaded organization, AQIM has led to series of unilateral and multilateral actions, among states in the Sahel region. Regrettably, none of these efforts has ended the terrorist activities in the region. In January 2010, the then Malian President, Amadou Toure, lamented during the Army Day celebration that, "the problem of insecurity, particularly due to drugs, terrorism and cross border banditry...have generated a profound need to identify their causes and strategies to curb their perverse effects" (cited in Goita, 2014, p.4). Regrettably, this is the same Mali, which Mauritanian military accused of cooperating with AQIM to perpetrate crimes in the Sahel region. Lacher (2012) decried that, "Malian officials' complicity with AQIM and drug traffickers had emerged…a major obstacle to regional security cooperation" (p.13). This constitutes a major hindrance in that fight against AQIM since Malian officials lack trust. Mauritania is the only Sahelian state that has battled AQIM without collaboration with other Sahelian states. Goita (2014) recalled that, "in July 2010, a joint Mauritanian-French Special Operation went into northern Mali to rescue 9 kidnapped French citizen ...though 6 AQIM members were killed; the operation was largely a failure. AQIM later announced in a televised address that it had executed the hostages in retaliation for the attack" (p.4). Algeria has been coordinating other Sahelian states such as Mali, Niger and Mauritania for the purpose of establishing a joint intelligence centre in Algiers. It has hosted African Centre for the study and Research on Terrorism in its capital, Algiers. "however, it is much less welcoming of foreign support beyond the content, which it sees as a possible pretext for foreign powers to establish military base" (Goita, 2014, p.5). The inability to embrace foreign assistance embolden AQIM to operate without restraint. United States of America was not initially interested in the Sahel region. It allowed the entire area to be controlled by her formal colonial masters, France and Spain. American interest in the Sahel came immediately after the 11th September 2001 attacks at New York and

Washington, coupled with her security needs in the Sahel region. Therefore, the need to prevent al Qaeda using Sahel as a safe haven to attack American interest became the major reasons for her intervention. As International Crisis Group (2015) put it:

> The Sahel has been called the "new front in the war on terror." The existence of GSPC in the desert, the belief that the 11 March 2004 Madrid bombings were planned in Morocco... the fact that 25 percent of those accused by the United States of being "unlawful combatants" and held in Guantanamo Bay are from East Africa, all contribute to the general uneasiness about Africa among American counter terrorism specialists (p.26).

In 2002, the Department of Defense (DoD) in collaboration with Department of State (DoS) established Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI). The main target of PSI was the Sahelian States of Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. In 2005, its name was changed to Trans-Saharan Counter Terrorism Initiative (TSCTI). It also expanded the scope of its operation to include other states in the Sahel, such as Senegal, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia as well as Nigeria (as observer). International Crisis Group (2005) stated that the main objective of TSCTI, "is to enhance the capacity of the participating states to control the full expanse of its own territory, importantly including its borders through exposing its military to United States, training... (p.30). The training covered areas like; marksmanship, communication and teamwork, first aid, map reading including the use of Global Positioning System (GPS). In 2005, the Department of State (DoS) leased with the Department of Defense (DoD) and changed the Trans-Saharan Counter Terrorism Initiative (TSCTI) to Trans-Saharan Counter Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP). Sour (2015) posited that, "TSCTP took over the PSI operations in 2005 when it launched a major joint military operation in the Maghreb called Flintlock 2005, a training mission to enhance tactical operations, land navigation and intelligence gathering in Algeria, Senegal, Morocco, Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Chad (p.13).

Hunt (2007) equally explained that the Department of Defense was responsible for the organization of joint military operation and the military training of the Sahelian military. This was in collaboration with United States Special Forces that operate from United States Europe Command Centre (EUROCOM). Despite all these efforts, United States was not regarded as a true partner in the fight against terrorism in the Sahel region. International Crisis Group (2015) decried that, "as the western military presence... increased, so too has the local belief that it is tied to growing interest in the region uranium, gold, and hydrocarbon wealth as well as armed trade" (p.29).

France interest in the Sahel region is anchored on the fact that most Saharan/Sahelian states (Niger, Chad, Mauritania, Algeria etc) were her former colonies. France had signed Defence pact with them before decolonizing

those territories. Therefore, security threats to her former colony is a direct threat to France. They do not need invitation before intervention. Added to this, is the fact that, "...Nigerien uranium mines... provide 30 percent of its nuclear energy needs and are targets of growing international competition, including...China" (International Crisis Group, 2015, p.20). France cannot allow AQIM to operate unhurt in the Sahel region, therefore, it has to deploy all its capabilities to ensure that the dreaded sect is annihilated. The AQIM know about the hatred France has concerning them, especially after it was driven out of the northern Mali in 2013. Marc-Antonie (2014) further hinted that, "AQIM focused on French "imperialism" because Paris supported corrupt regimes in Africa, had intervened in Afghanistan and had banned the wearing of the full-face veil in France" (p.22). Therefore, AQIM also promise to retaliate since "France has opened the gates of hell. It has fallen into trap much more dangerous than Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia" (Alexander, 2013. p.19). This explains why France citizens are victims of kidnappings and killings more than any other western nations in the Sahel region.

These atrocities cannot continue unabated, hence France responded immediately she was invited by the interim President of Mali, Ibrahim Keita to rescue the country from the AQIM, through the establishment of Operation Several in 2013. As Adeyemi and Musa (2014) captured it, "it was not difficult for France to respond immediately to the call for help from Mali... on 11 January 2013, France swiftly responded to the Malian Interim President's pleas for military assistance with air strikes and ground troops with a view to preventing the takeover of Bamako by AQIM and its militant Islamist allies" (p.15).

In August 2014, Operation Several was changed to Operation Barkhane after its successful operation in Northern Mali. The Operation Barkhane was made up of 3,000 troops with its headquarter at N'Djamena, the capital of Chad. The military operation was designed by France to combat Islamist threat in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. Staff of Operation Barkhane were permanent with a good pay package from international assistance. France has also established a permanent military base in Ivory Coast, "which it has used to conduct counter-insurgency campaigns in the Sahel Region and South of Maghreb" (Gunaratna, 2016, p.15). Boeke (2021) also recalled that, "at Barkhane's high water mark, France deployed around 5,100 troops. It has deployed special forces in Task Force Sabre, and also leads the multinational Task Force Takuba, that incorporates special forces from Sweden, Estonia, and Czech Republic" (pp. 11-12).

Furthermore, multilateral response to AQIM needs explanation. It should be recalled that in February 2017, Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (also known as G5 Sahel Joint Force, FC-G55), comprising Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Chad was formed. The G5 Sahel was backed by the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU) and had a total military force of about 5,000 soldiers. Dentice (2018) hinted that, "G5 Sahel joint force aims at fighting terrorism, organized crimes and smuggling through enhanced

cooperation among national armed forces and surveillance of rural areas" (p.7). France and other European countries, especially Germany, United Kingdom and Italy have pledged to support the G5 Sahel force, both in the area of logistic training as well as funding. This was made known on 13th December 2017, during its summit in Cell-Saint-Cloud. Similarly, European Union in Partnership with North African States (Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Sudan) had launched Rabat process in 2006, as well as Khartoum process in 2014 that aimed at curbing illegal migration which AQIM had used in generating fund. However, International Crisis Group (2015) lamented that, "neither process adequately addresses the root causes of migration, which is spurred by not only scant job opportunities, but lack of social mobility and, at times... political freedom" (p.22).

Added to this, the European Union has established military and police training programmes for states in the Sahel region. Germany and Italy have sent troop to Niger, while United States has increased the number of its Special Force in Burkina Faso and Niger (Eizenga, 2019). Eizenga (2019) further posited that:

> Other notable deployments include: 1,000 troops from Germany, more than 1,000 troops from the United States and hundreds from Italy, Canada, and United Kingdom. Taking these deployments alongside the 13,289 military personnel authorized by UN for MINUSMA, there may be more than 20,000 foreign soldiers currently deployed to the Sahel (p.21).

Regrettably, most Sahelian states are against foreign military presence in the region. The fear is that AQIM would intensify its havoc as long as foreign troops stay in the Sahel. As Ouazani (2011) posited, "this concern is felt strongly in Algeria and Mali... because accusations of foreign (i.e. western) intervention have been used as a major propaganda "weapon" by AQIM itself" (cited in Cristiani & Fabiani 2011, p.9).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite military cooperation among the Sahelian states and its foreign partners, the criminal activities of AQIM is unabated. As Cristiani and Febiani (2011) stated, "...today AQIM... represents a major security threat for the countries of the Sahel since this area... is the major theatre of operation" (p.11). In other words, the military operations do not deter the group; AQIM from recruiting new members. Findings reveal that recruits are endeared into the group, mainly because of the Salafist ideology, bad governance and the ungoverned spaces. The group sustains its operation through criminal activities across borders, such as kidnappings, arms trafficking, drugs smuggling as well as terrorism. Findings equally reveal that the Sahelian states have responded by creating military alliance; G5 Sahel Joint Force while Trans-Saharan Counter Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP), Operation

Several and Operation Barkhane were created by United States and France respectively. The truth is that AQIM is still strong in the Sahel region.

In order to annihilate the group, the root causes of their radicalization and motivation must be tackled. First, the Sahelian states should realize that military operation is not working. Lives of the abductees are always sacrificed for the death of an AQIM's member. There is no failed rescue mission that does not result in the death of an abductee. Those that pay ransom for the freedom of an abductee are indirectly empowering the group. The ransom that they raise from the kidnapped victims enabled them to acquire more weapons. As International Crisis Group (2015) stated, "securitization of the region and poorly regulated financial support for unpopular government risk exacerbating trends that feed the rise not only of Jihadi groups but also of transnational criminal networks..." (p.23). Salafism is an ideology that has been implanted in the minds of the adherents. Therefore, it requires superior ideology to counter it. "The ideology of al Qaeda is not a simple affair, and it is a serious mistake to reduce it to Wahhabism... far from being a straight forward product of Wahhabi tradition... is in part... the product of crisis..." (International Crisis Group 2005, p.16). Eventually, Salafism and Wahhabism emanate from Saudi Arabia. It is high time for governments of the Sahelian states to engage the government of Saudi Arabia and their Islamic scholars, including clergies to intervene. Their engagement would reveal to the entire world, the secret of co-existence between Salafism, Wahhabism and other peaceful Islamic sects, especially Sunni in their country. States like Nigeria that has insecurity caused by Boko Haram (a Salafist) and Somalia that has been tormented by al Shabaab (a Wahhabist) would benefit immensely from their disclosure.

Second, the Sahelian states should start providing good governance for its citizens. Muslim youths are attracted to AQIM because its provides for them. Some of them have graduated from higher institutions of learning without job, and their future has already closed, therefore, joining the group gives them a sense of hope. Communities in the Sahel region, see AQIM as government, since it fills the vacuum, which governments create. As International Crisis Group (2014) warned that, "the government needs to realize that if people no longer believe in the state to provide justice and well-being, they will look elsewhere. The challenge is enormous, but the solution is in the hands of the state" (p.47). It is not enough to look for external military support, Sahelian leaders should also look for foreign aids that would be used to salvage the people from poverty, hunger and diseases. Job opportunities should be created for the youths, in order for them to renew their fate in government. Even International Crisis Group (2015) equally advised that, "security approach urgently needs balancing by political measures that address the causes and effects of state instability; bad governance, poverty, local conflicts over resources, corruption, youth unemployment and alienated peripheries" (p.24).

Third, the paper proposes capacity expansion to ungoverned spaces. The ungoverned spaces are the safe haven for the terrorist group, AQIM. Regrettably, the Sahelian states are aware of these places, yet nothing is done. The Sahelian states always embark on defensive strategies. Their mission is to rescue an abductee, a times defend the state capitals from terrorist activities, yet the Islamists are still inflicting harms on daily basis and return to their hideout. It is time to take the war to them at the hideouts, through holistic approach. The local partnership through the present structure, G5 is essential in the new fight while international partners should be ready to assist the Sahelian states with the modern Information Communication Technology (ICT) that would detect whenever the terrorists are hiding. This agreed with Goita (2014) suggestion that, "the United States, European Union, and other donors can provide assistance, communication capacity, and training to restructure and improve security forces...within the Sahel" (p.6).

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