



UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL AND TERRORISM FINANCING IN AFRICA

Humpherey John Mboli

Department of Political Science and International Relations, Taraba State University, Nigeria

Abstract

This study examines the role of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in addressing terrorism financing in Africa, employing the liberal institutionalism theory to explain how international organizations shape state behavior through norms, sanctions, and cooperative frameworks. The research adopts a qualitative methodology, relying on content analysis of UNSC resolutions, reports of monitoring bodies, and policy documents related to counter-terrorism financing in Africa. The study finds three key issues. First, while UNSC resolutions particularly those mandating financial sanctions and anti-money laundering frameworks have strengthened legal and institutional responses across African states, implementation remains uneven due to weak domestic capacity. Second, the persistence of informal economies and porous borders in many African countries undermines the effectiveness of UNSC-led financial controls, enabling terrorist groups to exploit alternative funding channels. Third, limited coordination between international directives and local enforcement agencies reduces the overall impact of counter-terrorism financing measures. The study concludes that although the UNSC provides a critical global framework for combating terrorism financing, its effectiveness in Africa is constrained by structural and institutional challenges at the state level. It recommends that African governments strengthen financial intelligence units and regulatory institutions, while the UNSC should enhance technical support and capacity-building initiatives tailored to African contexts. Additionally, improved regional cooperation among African states and alignment between global directives and local realities are necessary to close enforcement gaps and ensure more effective disruption of terrorism financing networks.

Keywords: Terrorism, Financing, UNSC, Africa

1. Introduction

One of the most enduring and complex dimensions of terrorism are its financing, which continues to pose a significant threat to international peace and security. Terrorist organizations depend heavily on financial resources to sustain recruitment, training, logistics, propaganda, and operational activities. Terrorism financing has emerged as a critical dimension of global security, particularly in regions with fragile governance structures such as Africa. Terrorist groups operating across the continent including Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab, and Islamic State West Africa Province depend heavily

on diverse funding sources such as illicit trade, kidnapping for ransom, illegal mining, and external donations. These financial flows sustain their operations, recruitment, and territorial control, thereby exacerbating insecurity and undermining socio-economic development (Onuoha, 2014; Financial Action Task Force, 2021).

In response to the growing threat of terrorism and its financing, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has adopted a series of resolutions aimed at disrupting financial networks that support terrorist activities. Notably, Resolution 1373 (2001) mandates member

states to criminalize terrorism financing and freeze assets linked to terrorist entities, while subsequent resolutions have strengthened global counter-terrorism financing frameworks (United Nations, 2001). These measures are implemented in collaboration with international bodies such as the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), which sets standards for combating money laundering and terrorism financing globally. Despite these efforts, Africa continues to face significant challenges in effectively implementing UNSC directives. Weak institutional capacity, corruption, inadequate financial regulation, and the prevalence of large informal economies hinder enforcement mechanisms (FATF, 2021; Okoli & Iortyer, 2014). Furthermore, porous borders and limited inter-agency coordination create opportunities for terrorist organizations to exploit financial loopholes. These challenges raise concerns about the effectiveness of international frameworks in addressing region-specific dynamics of terrorism financing. From a theoretical standpoint, institutionalist theory provides a useful lens for understanding how global governance structures like the UNSC influence state behavior through norms, rules, and enforcement mechanisms (Keohane, 1984). However, the gap between international prescriptions and domestic implementation in African states suggests the need for context-sensitive approaches. This study, therefore, investigates the role of the UNSC in combating terrorism financing in Africa, focusing on the effectiveness, challenges, and implications of its interventions.

Terrorism in Africa continues to thrive largely due to the resilience of financing networks that sustain insurgent activities. Groups such as Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab, and Islamic State West Africa Province rely on diverse funding sources including illicit trade, kidnapping for ransom, and informal financial systems. These funding streams enable their operations, recruitment, and territorial expansion, thereby deepening insecurity across the continent. In response, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has developed a global framework to combat terrorism financing. Through resolutions such as 1373 (2001), member states are required to criminalize terrorism financing, freeze

terrorist assets, and strengthen financial monitoring systems. These efforts are further supported by institutions like the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), which provides international standards and guidelines. However, a major challenge lies in the gap between these international frameworks and their implementation within African states. Weak institutions, corruption, inadequate legal systems, and limited technical capacity hinder effective enforcement. Additionally, the prevalence of informal economies, porous borders, and poor coordination among agencies creates opportunities for terrorist groups to bypass financial restrictions. This situation highlights a critical problem: the limited effectiveness of UNSC counter-terrorism financing measures in Africa. There is insufficient empirical evidence on how these global strategies translate into local outcomes, revealing a gap between policy design and practical impact. Consequently, this raises concerns about whether current approaches are adequate for disrupting terrorism financing networks within the African context.

The study will address the following objectives:

- i. To examine the measures adopted by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to combat terrorism financing in Africa.
- ii. To identify the major challenges facing the UNSC in effectively addressing terrorism financing.

Study questions

- i. What are the measures adopted by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to combat terrorism financing in Africa?
- ii. What are the major challenges facing the UNSC in effectively addressing terrorism financing?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Clarifications

United Nations Security Council

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) constitutes one of the six core organs of the United Nations and bears primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. Created by the United Nations Charter in 1945, the Council was conceived as the principal enforcement mechanism of the post–Second World War international order. Distinct from other UN organs, the UNSC possesses binding authority, as its resolutions are legally obligatory for all member states, thereby positioning it as the most powerful institution within the UN system (United Nations, 2023). The Council is composed of fifteen members, comprising five permanent and ten non-permanent states. The permanent members commonly referred to as the P5 are the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, and China. Their permanent status reflects both their decisive role in the establishment of the United Nations and their geopolitical dominance in the aftermath of World War II (Luck, 2006).

Among the most contentious aspects of the Security Council is the veto power vested in the P5. Any substantive resolution may be blocked by a single negative vote from a permanent member, irrespective of majority support. While this mechanism was intended to foster unity among major powers and avert direct confrontation, critics contend that it frequently results in institutional paralysis and erodes the Council's legitimacy, particularly in situations involving conflicting interests among the P5 (Weiss, 2015). The UNSC occupies a central position within the global collective security architecture. Its authority to adopt binding resolutions and sanction the use of force renders it both influential and controversial. Although the Council has played a notable role in peacekeeping, conflict mediation, and the promotion of international justice, its institutional design and decision-making procedures remain subject to persistent criticism. The enduring challenge lies in adapting the Council to contemporary geopolitical realities while maintaining its capacity for decisive action. Absent substantive reform, the UNSC risks diminished credibility and effectiveness in addressing modern security challenges.

Terrorism Financing

Terrorism financing refers to the mobilization and provision of financial resources, assets, or material support to individuals or groups involved in terrorist activities. This concept extends beyond the direct funding of attacks to include any form of financial or economic assistance that indirectly sustains terrorist organizations and their networks (FATF, 2022). As defined by the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism, terrorism financing encompasses any unlawful and intentional act of collecting or providing funds, either directly or indirectly, with the knowledge or intention that such funds will be used to carry out terrorist acts.

Unlike conventional financial crimes, terrorism financing often involves relatively modest sums; however, the consequences can be catastrophic. Even limited resources can support recruitment, propaganda dissemination, travel, weapons acquisition, and the execution of attacks (Napoleoni, 2018). The sources of terrorist funding are highly diverse, ranging from legitimate avenues such as charitable donations, non-profit organizations, and commercial enterprises to illicit activities including drug trafficking, smuggling, extortion, and kidnapping for ransom (UNODC, 2021). To conceal the origin and movement of funds, terrorist groups frequently employ money laundering techniques, informal value transfer systems such as hawala, and the exploitation of formal banking channels (Levi & Reuter, 2023).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Liberal institutionalism, developed by Robert (1984), is a key theoretical framework in International Relations that highlights the significance of international institutions in promoting cooperation among states within an anarchic global system. While it shares realism's assumption that no central authority exists above states, liberal institutionalism challenges the realist view that sustained cooperation is unlikely. Instead, it posits that institutions help reduce uncertainty, manage conflicts, and allow states to achieve mutual

benefits through collaboration (Keohane, 1984). At its foundation, liberal institutionalism acknowledges the anarchic nature of the international system but diverges from realism by emphasizing that states are motivated not only by relative gains but also by absolute gains and long-term interests. States, therefore, often recognize the advantages of cooperation even with rivals across areas such as trade, security, environmental protection, and human rights (Keohane & Nye, 1977). Central to this theory is the role of international institutions, both formal organizations like the United Nations, World Trade Organization, and International Monetary Fund, and informal regimes comprising norms, rules, and decision-making procedures. These institutions help states overcome collective action problems by providing information, lowering transaction costs, monitoring compliance, and fostering repeated interactions, which build trust and predictability (Keohane, 1984).

Liberal institutionalism is influenced by rational choice theory, viewing states as rational actors weighing costs and benefits when deciding whether to cooperate. Institutions shape these calculations by creating incentives and constraints that make collaboration more attractive. For instance, trade institutions clarify market access and dispute resolution, reducing risks and promoting cooperative strategies over unilateral action (Martin & Simmons, 1998). The theory also stresses interdependence: in a world of complex connections economic, political, social, and technological states face higher costs for conflict and greater benefits from cooperation, making institutions increasingly relevant in addressing global challenges such as climate change, financial stability, and public health (Keohane & Nye, 1977).

Another key feature is the emphasis on iteration and reciprocity. Repeated interactions between states encourage cooperation, as defection in one instance may provoke retaliation later. Institutions help structure these interactions, promoting reciprocal behavior and establishing stable cooperation patterns even in the absence of central enforcement (Axelrod & Keohane, 1985). Despite its explanatory strengths, liberal

institutionalism faces critiques. Realists argue that institutions primarily reflect the existing power distribution, serving the interests of dominant states, and that cooperation remains limited in high-stakes areas like military security (Mearsheimer, 1994). Constructivists, meanwhile, contend that liberal institutionalism overemphasizes material incentives and rational calculations, neglecting the role of shared ideas, norms, and identities, which shape the legitimacy and function of institutions (Wendt, 1999). Nonetheless, liberal institutionalism remains highly relevant in contemporary International Relations. The persistence of international organizations and regimes, despite power shifts and geopolitical rivalries, underscores their influence on state behavior. Institutional frameworks continue to guide cooperation in global trade, climate agreements, and arms control, illustrating their enduring impact.

Applied to this study, liberal institutionalism provides a framework for analyzing the United Nations Security Council's role in countering terrorism financing in Africa. The theory explains how the United Nation Security Council, as a central coordinating institution, fosters cooperation among states confronting shared security threats by establishing binding rules, monitoring mechanisms, and information-sharing platforms. Through resolutions such as UNSC Resolution 1373 (2001) and related measures, the Council requires African states to criminalize terrorism financing, strengthen financial oversight, and engage with international bodies like the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). These institutional arrangements reduce uncertainty, lower coordination costs, and provide technical guidance, allowing states with varying capacities to align domestic policies with global counterterrorism standards and pursue collective security objectives. Moreover, liberal institutionalism emphasizes the importance of repeated interaction and capacity-building under United Nation Security Council-led frameworks, which promote compliance and long-term cooperation. By working with regional organizations like the African Union and sub-regional entities, the United Nation Security Council fosters reciprocity, peer monitoring, and norm diffusion, crucial

for effective implementation. Institutions also offer platforms for assistance, sanctions monitoring, and reporting, increasing the costs of defection and enhancing the benefits of cooperation. While challenges such as power asymmetries and enforcement limitations persist, liberal institutionalism demonstrates how institutionalized mechanisms through the United Nation Security Council can influence state behavior, support regulatory convergence, and strengthen Africa's collective response to terrorism financing within an interdependent global financial system.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine the role of the United Nations Security Council in addressing terrorism financing in Africa. The approach is appropriate because it enables an in-depth understanding of policies, institutional frameworks, and contextual challenges that cannot be captured through quantitative methods. Data for the study are derived from secondary sources, including United Nations Security Council resolutions (notably Resolution 1373), reports from the Financial Action Task Force, academic literature, policy documents, and relevant publications on terrorism financing in Africa. These documents provide comprehensive insights into global standards and their application within African states. The study employs content analysis as its primary method of data analysis. This involves systematically reviewing and interpreting textual materials to identify recurring themes, patterns, and gaps related to counter-terrorism financing efforts. Through this method, the study evaluates the effectiveness, challenges, and implications of United Nations Security Council interventions in the African context.

4. Results and Discussion

The study reveals that the interventions of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) have contributed to the development of legal and institutional frameworks aimed at combating terrorism financing across Africa. Many states have enacted laws criminalizing terrorism financing and established financial intelligence units in line with international standards set by the Financial

Action Task Force. However, evidence suggests that implementation remains weak and uneven due to limited technical capacity and institutional inefficiencies (FATF, 2021; United Nations, 2001). Secondly, the study finds that terrorist organizations such as Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab have increasingly adapted to regulatory pressures by diversifying their sources of funding. These groups rely heavily on informal and illicit channels, including smuggling, kidnapping for ransom, illegal taxation, and exploitation of local resources, which are difficult to monitor within predominantly informal African economies (Onuoha, 2014; FATF, 2021). Thirdly, the study identifies weak coordination between international directives and domestic enforcement mechanisms as a major constraint. Although the United Nations Security Council provides a global framework, poor inter-agency collaboration, porous borders, and limited regional cooperation undermine the effectiveness of counter-terrorism financing measures (Okoli & Iortyer, 2014; FATF, 2021). Finally, the findings highlight a mismatch between global counter-terrorism financing strategies and local realities in African states. Standardized policy approaches often fail to reflect socio-economic conditions such as poverty, unemployment, and governance challenges, thereby limiting their effectiveness and sustainability (Keohane, 1984; FATF, 2021).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the role of the United Nations Security Council in addressing terrorism financing in Africa using an institutionalist perspective and qualitative content analysis. The findings demonstrate that while the United Nation Security Council has established a robust global framework particularly through resolutions such as 1373 (2001) its effectiveness in Africa is constrained by weak institutional capacity, poor enforcement mechanisms, and the adaptability of terrorist networks. Groups such as Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab continue to exploit informal financial systems and governance gaps to sustain their operations.

Based on the findings, the study recommends:

- i. African governments should strengthen domestic financial regulatory systems by improving the capacity of financial intelligence units, enhancing inter-agency collaboration, and ensuring full compliance with standards set by the Financial Action Task Force.
- ii. The United Nations Security Council should adopt more context-specific approaches by providing targeted technical assistance, capacity-building programs, and support for regional cooperation frameworks that reflect the socio-economic and institutional realities of African states.

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