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Terrorism and Africa

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For the United States, the 11 September 2001 attacks opened a new chapter in the increasingly United States-dominated post-Cold War world. America's perceived invulnerability to a terror attack was instantly terminated, forcing the world's most well-armed state to rethink its global and domestic defence strategies. The United States response was impulsive and simplistic as president George Bush divided the world into those who are 'for us' and those who are 'against us.'

Informed by the mischievous and fanciful Huntington thesis, postulating that the world was entering a war between democracy and Islam (or between 'the West and the rest'), Washington divided the world between good and evil in an effort to mobilise sympathy for a process of retaliation against the alleged perpetrators and state sponsors of the 9/11 attack. A knee-jerk military response led the United States into an assault on Afghanistan to neutralise the apparent support base for the 9/11 attackers, followed by an ill-conceived invasion of Iraq. Washington's naive analysis failed to grasp that globalisation's architecture promotes violence, anarchy, and nihilism. Bush's Machiavellian response merely reinforced the division between the haves and the have nots, while confirming the determination of the United States to impose its will on states on the wrong side of globalisation.

Washington's subjective definition of 'terrorism' hampers a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, and limits constructive responses. A more useful, and less disparaging approach would seek to define the application of violence on globalisation's new battlefield as asymmetrical warfare, or fourth-generation warfare (4GW). The over-reaction to 9/11 also included a proliferation of the United States defence budget, along with the development of an unaffordable homeland security programme that cannot, in the long run, guarantee full domestic security for American citizens. The United States has pronounced a global war on terrorism (GWOT), demanding maximum support and active participation from the international community. Washington's definition and identification of 'terrorism' and 'terrorist groups' has been circulated, along with admonishments to join the United States in this global war. Given the lack of stability in some parts of Africa, the United States has sought to mobilise African governments to participate in this global war.

Africa and 9/11

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For Africa, poverty, as before 9/11, remains the main threat to Africans in an ongoing struggle to develop the continent. However, the attacks on the United States embassies in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi on 7 August 1998, as well as the hotel attack in Mombasa in 2002, signalled the possible existence of a terror network on the continent. The African Union's (AU's) response has been to condemn strongly all acts and forms of terrorism. The AU has stressed that terrorism violates the Charter of the United Nations as well as the principles and values which form part of the Constitutive Act of the African Union. At the same time, the AU has

long advocated a comprehensive approach, focusing on root causes as the best response to terrorism. AU member states have been encouraged to sign on to international instruments and agreements specifically designed to combat terrorism. Most African states have also signed and ratified international counter-terrorism agreements, especially those outlined in the annex to the 1999 OAU Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism. The AU's efforts to counter terrorism have been advanced by the setting up of the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT) as a formal institution of the AU Commission to strengthen the capacity of the union in countering terrorism on the African continent. The AU's constitutive act and the Peace and Security Council (PSC) protocol form the legal foundation for the AU's efforts to combat terrorism. Furthermore, the AU has initiated contacts with other regional organisations and international institutions, with a view to strengthening international co-operation in developing effective counter-terrorism strategies.

Comprehensive framework

During October 2004, the AU's Second High-Level Intergovernmental Meeting on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism in Africa, which convened in Algiers, stressed the need to differentiate between acts of terrorism and legitimate African struggles for liberation and independence, as recognised in international law. The meeting also provided a comprehensive framework for Africa's response to terrorism, outlining the following elements:

- the AU's PSC collects and analyses information on terrorism and terrorist groups operating in Africa;
- the PSC is tasked with developing training programmes with the assistance of international partners;
- the ACSRT is to centralise information, and study and analyse terrorism;
- member states are urged to support the centre and establish national focal points to liaise with the centre;
- all African states are urged to sign, ratify, or accede to the 1999 OAU Convention, and to all regional and international instruments relating to the prevention and combating of terrorism;
- African states are encouraged to pass appropriate national legislation and establish institutional frameworks for the prevention and combating of terrorism;
- African states are encouraged to adhere to the 1999 OAU Convention and the Plan of Action on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism in Africa; and
- the AU promotes regional co-operation in preventing and combating terrorism through information exchange, legal assistance, extradition agreements, and trans-border control.

Potential base

Washington has identified Africa as a future potential base area for attacks against the United States itself because of the proximity to the Arabian peninsula, the failed state of Somalia, and the large number of countries in Africa where the government's control is weak and policing poor. Widespread poverty and general disorder offers terrorists the opportunity to establish bases and support systems and to recruit active group members. Poor financial management and control provides opportunities for terrorist organisations to exploit opportunities in Africa. In response, the United States has initiated a number of international counter-terrorism (CT) programmes and activities, intended to counter the growth of terrorism in Africa. In terms of the Antiterrorism Assistance (ATA) Programme, the United States has sought to assist foreign governments in support of CT activities. This has led to a number of United States-led programmes on the continent, such as the East African Counterterrorism Initiative (EACTI), and the Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI). Last year, the United States and nine North African states (Algeria, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and Tunisia) participated in a three-week training exercise ('Exercise Flintlock 05') intended to prepare African security forces to deal with threats of terrorism.

The initiative formed part of a larger United States programme, the Trans Sahara Counter Terrorism Initiative (TSCI), designed to empower African governments to police their own countries better. The programme was motivated by a United States belief that North Africa was increasingly becoming a region for recruiting, financing, and organising groups willing to engage in terrorism. Moreover, there are suggestions that North Africans, especially Algerians and Moroccans, are participating in the war in Iraq on the side of the insurgents, and thereby raising the possibility of the transfer of combat experience and skills back to Africa. United States funding in 2006 for TSCI is expected to total over US$60 million, as Washington seeks to expand counter-terrorism capacity and influence in North Africa. The focus of United

States approach has been on border protection, training for security forces, and information sharing.

During October 2005, the AU's ACSRT sponsored a counter-terrorism workshop in co-operation with the United States's National Defence University. Aimed at building a counter-terrorism capacity in Africa, the workshop participants included representatives from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Southern African Development Community (SADC), East African Community (EAC), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC), and Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). Discussions included an overview of effective CT strategies; assessment of existing African policies and strategies; identification of gaps in existing strategies, and suggestions for a plan of action and an improved African CT capacity. The workshop produced a programme of action including the following: ongoing liaison with the ACSRT; the development of capacity within the ACSRT; the alignment of an AU CT programme with the AU Peace and Security Agenda.

The Algiers workshop was followed by a conference on bio-terrorism held during November in Cape Town. Organised by the Interpol General Secretariat, the conference sought to lay the foundation for a comprehensive strategy to counter any bio-terrorism attack on the African continent. The conference produced a broad consensus on the need to enhance information exchange and inter-departmental co-ordination, to improve CT strategies and responses. Agreement on other issues included the use of Interpol's global police communications system, I-24/7, to enhance information sharing, the need for regular threat assessments, mobilisation of regional police chief's co-operation organisations, development of effective early warning systems, establishment of appropriate national legislation, and preparations for the management of a bio-terrorism attack. Thus the United States intervention in Africa, as well as the continent's response itself, has been largely confined to a traditional security approach.

The long-term approach

A conventional military strike is the most obvious and forceful possible CT action, and a clear demonstration of a state's determination to counter terrorist actions. However, the major limitation of a military strike is that terrorist targets are small, and difficult to locate and destroy effectively. The United States and British military actions in Afghanistan and Iraq have used massive military force in an effort to eliminate a terror network, or in the case of Iraq, a potential network. However, this massive application of military force resulted in only a short-term success in the war on terrorism. Washington's exaggerated response to 9/11 has produced more instability in the Middle East, new high levels of insurgency in Iraq itself, and more global instability and uncertainty. United States long-term planning envisages a war 'unlimited in time and space', directed at extremists in dozens of countries around the world. Future engagements are expected to include highly mobile, covert counter-terrorist units, rather than the large-scale conventional engagements in Afghanistan and Iraq. The shopping list for phase two in the global war on terrorism includes an increase in special forces, psychological warfare experts, doubling the deployment of unmanned drones, new high-speed naval attack craft, special teams to detect and defuse weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), the conversion of submarine-launched missiles for conventional strikes, and the development of a new long-range bomber force. However, the increase in Washington's military options and firepower are unlikely to have an effective and lasting impact in addressing the terrorism issue.

First lesson

A more effective and comprehensive approach to CT is to address the issues on which terrorist groups build their support. An endless spiral of defence spending and preparation will not provide the answer – this is surely the first lesson of 9/11. The challenge is to shift the terrain of contest from the military, where terrorists can always win (given the range of potential targets and the ease of targeting by a suicide bomber), to the political, where appropriate programmes and actions can over time dry up support for terrorism. The central objective of any CT strategy should be to prevent individuals from becoming the human sacrifice of extremist ideologies. The overemphasis on a military solution to a terror threat is provocative and largely counterproductive. In 2003, United States secretary of defence Donald Rumsfeld circulated a memo in the Pentagon in which he solicited views on the question of whether or not the United States CT approach was in fact exacerbating the problem rather than offering an effective remedy. The steady proliferation of suicide and related attacks in Iraq should have provided the obvious answer to Rumsfeld. Moreover, according to United States state department statistics, 'significant' terror attacks have increased significantly over the last few years. In addition,

the centre of gravity for international terrorism has shifted from Afghanistan to Iraq, despite the massive United States military deployment there. A global terror network based in Iraq is being expanded, while co-operation among a range of militant groups worldwide is growing.

Another debate within United States policy-making circles has focused on how long the global war on terrorism will take to complete, with answers varying from ten to 50 years. The duration of GWOT thus remains unclear, but what is clear is that a heavy-handed, military-focused approach is only likely to show short-term success. The most recent Pentagon study calls for an expanded military capability, based on special forces, and improved surveillance and intelligence, along with a range of new high-tech weapons systems. These instruments are to be applied to what Washington now calls 'the Long War,' which includes simultaneous engagements with terror groups throughout the world in co-operation with 'international partners.' Backed by a planned increase of United States defence expenditure to over US$500 billion within the next two years, Washington is seeking to co-opt 'moderate' governments into the GWOT.

Increasing threat

British official forecasts predict an increasing terrorist threat from Africa over the next decade, with more and more terror groups establishing bases on the continent and using financial institutions to transfer funding. At the same time, London appears cautious about United States suggestions that North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) assets be deployed more widely, including to African theatres of operation. Washington envisages NATO's involvement at the sharp end of CT strategies, while European governments are more inclined to view NATO as a post-conflict stabilisation organisation. One of the key elements of the Pentagon strategy is a new emphasis on mobilising allies, rather than the United States acting unilaterally. However, the emphasis is still on Washington dominating the process, based on a simplified approach of 'us versus them.' Thus the United States and its co-opted allies are preparing to wage a long-term war on terrorism, applying an essentially security-dominated approach based on hi-tech weapons and related technologies.

However, Africa is under no obligation to sign on to the United States-led war on terrorism, or to accept partnership in this process. Rather, African states should be seeking to define the new security dilemma more objectively, and to develop a more effective and appropriate response. An effective African CT approach should be based on long-term thinking, informed by a clear understanding of the human dimension of this form of conflict. The application of overwhelming force risks alienating the moderates, while strengthening the extremists and their willing followers. Any effective CT approach should focus on human security and expanding stakeholding, as well as civil society participation, in developing a response. Moreover, the underlying causes of conflict should define the strategy, and drive the long-term approach. Terrorism is a tactic, and is not only associated with one particular group, or organisation. Dehumanising the 'other' in an attempt to justify a radical military response is counterproductive and short-sighted. A softer approach to security will over the longer term prove to be far more effective. At the same time, soft security does not imply appeasement, or the condoning of any terror attack. Rather it is part of a multi-level approach towards containing this form of activity. The legitimate participation in political processes intended to create a shared future for all members of society provides the foundation for long-term stability and a defusing of radicalism. The passive supporters of terrorism are brought into the political process through democratic practices and procedures, thus undermining the recruitment base for radicals.

The use of terrorism is the option of disaffected and alienated elements rooted within the poverty of the developing world. The foot-soldiers with nothing to loose who are participants in this form of warfare come from a world where one-third of the children suffer from malnutrition, one-third of the women are illiterate, and the majority have to survive on less than US$2 per day. The prognosis for this condition is that the rich will get richer, while the poor are likely to stay poor, and largely excluded from the material benefits of modernisation and globalisation. Extremist ideologies are generally practised only in countries where a large proportion lives either just below, or just above the poverty line. Poverty thus provides the vehicles for terror attacks. However, economic development provides the foundation for social stability and the hope for a better life, eliminating the appeal of extremism.

Economic development

Economic development, along with a concomitant drive for greater democracy, undermines extremism and provides hope for developing societies. In effect, terrorism can be eradicated over the long term, by addressing poverty and injustice.

Participants in terror attacks are essentially products of their environment, and they turn to violence because they have no other means to express their frustration. Perpetrators of 4GW are in many cases seeking justice, rather than vengeance. They are, in effect, the victims of the aggressive neoliberal ideology driven by globalisation which produces profits for some, but not justice for all. No amount of security or military action will succeed unless the environment which gives birth to violence is fundamentally altered. The lack of opportunities for meaningful political expression and democratic change provides the generic root of violence. The profiling of participants in terrorism is a stop-gap measure; rather, the focus should be on the social conditions which encourage this action. Without changing the environment, profiling will prove to be an endless task, as the social conditions will constantly produce more extremists and frustrated individuals. Huntington's hyperbolic 'global clash of civilisations' encourages the simplistic, security-centred over-reaction to asymmetric warfare. In reality, the conflict is not between civilisations, but within the globalised world, created by profit-driven modernisation and technological advancements. The war is within civilisation, as participants compete for space in a networked and obsessively material world.

Policy considerations

In the African context, the danger lies in adopting a United States-centric CT system with an overemphasis on hard security. Rather, a more holistic approach should include a short-term CT strategy, based on the AU's resolutions and protocols, and a programme to advance economic development, strengthen governance and democracy, promote respect for human rights, and provide mechanisms for ameliorating ethnic and religious tensions.

In addressing this issue:

- African governments should develop an Afro-centric approach to dealing with the problem, informed by a comprehensive assessment of the phenomenon, and the 12 internationally accepted conventions and protocols relating to terrorism.
- Any national legislation to deal with terror acts should be based on the conventions and protocols, avoiding excesses which could threaten human rights and democratic freedoms.
- Africans should determine their own threat assessment and CT capacity, based on shared security, self-reliance, and improved communications.
- An Afro-centric approach would not necessary endorse the United States state department's list of 'terrorist' organisations. Rather, a more circumspect response would seek to apply a more holistic approach.
- The short-term approach will require a strong conventional CT approach, linking Africa's efforts with the United States's Terrorist Interdiction Programme (TIP), which uses computer data bases to identify terrorists who cross international borders. Other areas for interaction include: co-operative research and development (R&D) programmes, intended to enhance explosives detection; 'Rewards for Justice' programmes, intended to pay rewards for information on terrorist activities; support for the Convention on the Suppression and Financing of Terrorism, intended to cut off funding for terrorist groups; and co-operation with the United States-based Computer Security Institute (CSI), which can assist in countering cyberterrorism and promoting critical infrastructure protection (CIP), and the United States state department's Terrorist Finance Working Group (TFWG).
- Collection, analysis, and sharing of intelligence is a key CT tool, and in effect is the first line of defence against terrorism. Closer co-ordination between African intelligence agencies in this context would be advantageous. The African system could mirror the United States's Information Sharing and Analysis Centers (ISACs), to facilitate the timely exchange of critical information.
- United States-led CT programmes in Africa should be moderated to include the softer elements to address this problem. In this context, the concept of proportionality should guide policy-making and CT actions.
- The medium-term objective should be to build an African approach and information-exchange mechanism, through the AU (rather than Washington), in advancing a comprehensive continental CT strategy.
- Efforts to address terrorism will require commitment, careful co-ordination, and a long-term effort backed by political will, if this problem is to be contained on the African continent.
- In the long term, Africa's efforts should concentrate on building a new global economic and political architecture, and an acceleration of the 'democracy project', if 4GW is to be effectively contained within the globalised world.

Relevant websites

Patterns of Global Terrorism:
http://www.usemb.se/terror/rpt2002/africa
Foreign Terrorist Organisations
http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/fs/37191.htm
Global Terrorism Analysis
http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism
US Institute of Peace
http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr113.html
Terrorism in Africa
http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/rm/2004/31077.htm
Risk Advisory
http://www.riskadvisory.net
MI5
http://www.mi5.gov.uk/
International Security
http://www.fco.gov.uk/
IRMI - Terrorism Implications for Business
http://www.irmi.com
Travel Advice
http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/
Cyber-terrorism
http://cybercrimes.net/Terrorism
Business and terrorism
www.londonprepared.gov.uk/

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