

Terrorism in Africa is the New Name of the Game

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Introduction

For millions of Africans, terrorism had been a deadly experience for decades and centuries long before 11 September attack on the symbols of the US economic, military and political might or the 1998 bombing of the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar Salaam. Therefore, the new interest in terrorism in Africa is neither motivated by the terrorist massacres of ordinary Africans by governments and rebels alike or to eliminate the root causes of this terrorism in the continent. This sudden interest is therefore aims at perpetuating and expanding western oil and strategic interest in the continent. The key words scramble for the mother continent fighting Islamist groups from the Middle East and direct control of the new oil fields along the Gulf of Guinea. For their own short term political interests, some African rulers are eagerly taking advantage of the new scramble to roll back democratisation and entrench themselves in power for life. With the either with us or with the terrorist new rule of the game, many African leaders have decided to jump unto the crusade against terrorism in order to save their skin.

As a result, US antiterrorism initiatives are being designed and troops being deployed along the borders with the Middle East. Most ordinary Africans have no idea or information about this looming danger of the ongoing terrorism war between the US and Islamist groups will spread from the Middle East to black Africa like bush fire. The consequences of the new development could turn certain African countries into Afghanistan and Iraq as bombing targets for harbouring terrorism. The continent could be divided into those with the US versus those with the invisible terrorists. With the multidimensional problems plaguing the continent, the last thing Africa needs is getting caught up in the raging global terrorism war.

This article will look into the nature, background, the players and effects of terrorism in African as well as the implications for the extending the terrorism war into Africa.

The challenge of defining terrorism

The main problem in defining terrorism is that no individuals, groups or government define themselves terrorists or their actions terrorism. Terrorism and its perpetrators are always defined by the adversary. Therefore, world leaders have not been able to agree on a comprehensive definition of terrorism. In its recent report on the topic, UN reminds member states that

Terrorism attacks the values that lie at the heart of the Charter of the United Nations: respect for human rights; the rule of law; rules of war that protect civilians; tolerance among peoples and nations; and the peaceful resolution of conflict. Terrorism flourishes in environments of despair, humiliation, poverty, political oppression, extremism and human rights abuse; it also flourishes in contexts of regional conflict and foreign occupation; and it profits from weak State capacity to maintain law and order.

The report also warns

.. that the current “war on terrorism” has in some instances corroded the very values that terrorists target: human rights and the rule of law. Most of those who expressed such concerns did not question the seriousness of the terrorist threat and acknowledged that the right to life is the most fundamental of human rights. They did, however, express fears

that approach to terror focusing wholly on military, police and intelligence measures risk undermining efforts to promote good governance and human rights, alienate large parts of the world's population and thereby weaken the potential for collective action against terrorism.

With regard to the definition of terrorism, the report complains that

The United Nations ability to develop a comprehensive strategy has been constrained by the inability of Member States to agree on an anti –terrorism convention including a definition of terrorism. This prevents the United Nations from exerting its moral authority and from sending an unequivocal message that terrorism is never an acceptable tactic, even for the most defensible of causes. Lack of agreement on a clear and well-known definition undermines the normative and moral stance against terrorism and has stained the United Nations image. Achieving a comprehensive convention on terrorism, including a clear definition, is a political imperative. The search for an agreed definition usually stumbles on two issues... The second objection is that peoples under foreign occupation have a right to resistance and a definition of terrorism should not override this right.

After long analysis of the various aspects related to the definition of terrorism, the UN suggests

That definition of terrorism should include the following elements: (a) Recognition, in the preamble, that State use of force against civilians is regulated by the Geneva Conventions and other instruments, and, if of sufficient scale, constitutes a war crime by the persons concerned or a crime against humanity; (b) Restatement that acts under the 12 preceding anti –terrorism conventions are terrorism, and a declaration that they are a crime under international law; and restatement that terrorism in time of armed conflict is prohibited by the Geneva Conventions and Protocols; (c) Reference to the definitions contained in the 1999 International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism and Security Council resolution 1566 (2004); (d) Description of terrorism as “any action,... that is intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants, when the purpose of such an act, by its nature or context, is to intimidate a population, or to compel a Government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act”.

1. The US State Department defines terrorism as "premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by sub national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience."

Any scrutiny of these definitions show that the problem of the definition lies in the fact that governments want to both have the monopoly of violence and the monopoly to define what terrorism is. As Brian Whitaker puts it, “terrorism is violence committed by those we disapprove of”ⁱ.

According to Ayatullah Shaykh Muhammad 'Ali Taskhiri, the definion of terrorism does not apply to

- acts of national resistance exercised against occupying forces, colonizers and usurpers
- resistance of peoples against cliques imposed on them by the force of arms
- rejection of dictatorships and other forms of despotism and efforts to undermine their institutions;

- resistance against racial discrimination and attacks on the latter's strongholds
- retaliation against any aggression if there is no other alternative.ⁱⁱ

The fact is that the use of terror and violence is part of both the building and break up of states. From far right to far left and across the political middle, states and other political groups do use violence whenever they see fit. Some times, this is called *raison d'état*. Therefore first political use of the term terrorism can be traced back to state reign of terror in 1793-94 by the leaders of the French Revolution who waged a campaign of terror to purge "traitors" within its ranks. The use of terror was then praised as the best way to defend liberty.

Terrorism in Africa

When talking about terrorism in Africa it is not easy to distinguish between the local terrorism from the global one. Terrorism in Africa has often taken the form of proxy wars in which those who use violence do it on behalf of foreign interests. Foreign interests have been involved in the terrorism violence that killed, terrorised and displaced millions of civilians in South Sudan, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Angola, Mozambique, Mauritania and DR Congo. Even the 1994 genocide in Rwanda and the mass killings and terrorisation of civilians in Burundi foreign interests were implicated. In all those deadly episodes, both governments and rebels alike committed violent acts against civilians. The present reign of terror by the government Sudan and its own Janjaweed militia is one of the latest reign of terror against innocent civilians in Africa. The Janjaweed have not appeared on the list of terrorist groups, because their victims are black Africans. As the executive director of the Institute for Security Studies, Jakkie Cilleirs, argues,

Although most contemporary writing on the subject focuses on the international dimensions or manifestations of terrorism, sub national terror and even state terror has been a long standing feature of Africa. In fact, by any objective standard, Africa is the continent most afflicted by terrorism albeit not yet by international terrorism. .. The US State Departments "Patterns of Global Terrorism" indicates that international terrorism is on the increase in Africa..... It is overwhelmingly of domestic, substrate nature that kills, maims and affects millions of people. Many latter day insurgent movements and government forces have adopted practices that rely heavily on the use of fear and terrorⁱⁱⁱ.

The background of terrorism in Africa

Terrorism in Africa has been as much part of state formation and as in its break up. Thus the most violent terrorism in Africa happens in the context of collapsing and failed states. As most African states are failed states, the resort to terror has been widespread. Senegal, Botswana and Tanzania have been among the most stable and democratic where the use of state terror has been the exception rather than the rule. However, in DRC, Sudan, Mauritania, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia and racist regimes in Southern Africa, state terrorism has been the rule, making these countries fertile breeding grounds for terrorism.

Terrorism is part of the colonial origin and structure of most African states. The state was not created to serve the African people, but to control, exploit and terrorise them for the benefit of foreign interests.

Thus, the people often see the state as violent, corrupt and exploitive and alien system that is ready to terrorize the ordinary people. The relationship between the state and the people is based on mutual suspicion. The clientele origin of the African State made it develop the habit of loyalty toward foreign powers rather than to its own citizens. Accountability is to foreign powers, foreign institutions and interests. Toward its own citizens, the state uses nepotism, corruption and coercion as state policy. The whole system tends to degenerate into ethnic, tribal, clan and family rule. This is because the ruling guys become too corrupt and criminal that they trust no one outside the circle of close relatives and friends. This is what happened under Siad Barre in Somalia, Mubutu in Zaire, Juvenal Habyarimana in Rwanda, Houphouet-Boigny in Cote D'Ivoire.

As Jakkie Cilliers argues that,

What all African states share is a generalised system of patrimony and acute degree of apparent disorder, as evidenced by a high level of governmental and administrative inefficiency, a lack of institutionalisation, a general disregard for rules of the formal political and economic sectors, and a universal resort to personalised and vertical solutions to social problems. As a consequence of the systematic clientelism, the reliance on the award of personal favour in return for political support, and the use of state resources for this purpose, neoprimonial regimes demonstrate very little developmental capacity and do not provide security.^{iv}

Thanks to the state disengagement instructions of the IMF, African states have contracted and become even weaker. This makes them even more prone to resorting to violence to grab and keep power against the will of their people. Apart from the Middle East, Africa has more violent political dinosaurs than any other region in the world.

Those behind terrorism in African

As terrorism in Africa has little to do with hard core life and death political or religious ideologies. Most of the political violence is about access to power as a vehicle for access to scarce livelihood and financial benefits. Through political power one can get education, job and other privileges. The parties in the terror conflicts involve governments, rebels, warlords, criminals and foreign mercenaries. Often the fighting factions do fight proxy wars for foreign governments and multinational companies. During the cold war, both governments and rebels were fighting either with or for the West or the East. Some were fighting for several levels of foreign interests. Renamo and UNITA were fighting both for the West against communism and for Apartheid against neighbouring countries. With the end of the cold war, the battle for Africa was left in the hands of multinational companies that took part in the wars in Sierra Leone, Liberia and DRC. As was the case during the cold war, Africa is turning into a battle ground between the US and the Islamist groups from the Middle East. Donna Milesv quotes Air Force Gen. Charles F. Wald as saying

...although most Americans know very little about the African continent and understand even less about its politics, it's critical that the nation focus on this area now to stem the growth of terrorism. Northern Africa serves as a transit route for terrorists headed to Europe.... East Africa, particularly Somalia, has become a hotbed of al Qaeda elements. Western Africa has witnessed dramatic rises in anti-American and extremist Islamic

rhetoric, particularly in northern Nigeria. And in parts of South Africa, "we have no clue what's going on." ...Calling it "the worst terrorist organization in the world.", Wald said Hezbollah finances much of its activities through Sierra Leone's diamond trade and through arms and narcotics smuggling and human trafficking. Wald warned ...that confronting terrorism in Africa is a long-term proposition, and not one the United States can ignore. "The terrorist activity in this area is not going to go away," he said. "This could affect your kids and your grandchildren in a huge way. If we don't do something about it, we're going to have a real problem on our hands." ...United States can't afford to withhold these investments or to turn a blind eye to events unfolding in Africa. "We have a huge interest in Africa from a security standpoint, from a strategic standpoint, and from the standpoint of protecting our security interests and investment interests.

According to Martin Plaut

The US has already announced plans to help Africa create five rapid reaction brigades to fight terrorism. Military officers from the US and Europe are reported to have met to discuss terrorism and the security of oil supplies in Africa. US officials say the meeting is the first in a series designed to provide the main forum for an exchange of security information about Africa^{vi}.

Among the concrete steps taken by the US in its war on terror in Africa are the

The East African Counter Terrorism Initiative

This initiative includes military training for border and coastal security programmes to control the movement of people and goods across borders, police training, and assistance for regional efforts against terrorist financing. It comprises Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan and Djibouti. The East African counter terrorism initiative is coordinated by the 1800 US troops from their Lemonier base in Djibouti. The strategic importance of the base lies in its proximity to the Arabian Peninsula, particularly Saudi Arabia and Yemen both seen by the US as breeding grounds for anti US terrorism. Although the US has baptised them front line states, these countries are divided by their own internal conflicts. Sudan is at virtual war with Uganda, as the latter accuses the former of supporting the Lord's Resistance Army while the former accuses the latter of supporting the Sudan People's Army. Eritrea and Ethiopia are far from being reconciled after their bloody war.

The Pan Sahel Initiative

In his testimony before the US house of representatives' subcommittee on Africa's hearing on "Fighting Terrorism in Africa, Karl Wycoff, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, declared

Africa is vulnerable to the threat of international terrorism and important in our efforts to counter that menace. While 9/11 is generally regarded as the watershed in the threat from al-Qaida and its allies, the horrible August 7, 1998, attacks on the U.S. Embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania were an even earlier wake-up call. These attacks killed and wounded far more Kenyans and Tanzanians than Americans, the

ostensible target...The Sahel...is also an area of concern. The immense size of these countries, their physical geography combined with weak central authority, and the traditional independence of nomadic life styles, make border control and law enforcement exceedingly difficult. No longer isolated from the rest of the world, the traditional caravan routes in this region now serve as conduits for illegal migration and drugs and arms trafficking, as well as a hideout and staging areas for international and regional terrorists and criminals. The State Department has formulated and implemented the Pan-Sahel Initiative, which is providing training and equipment for quick reaction forces to secure the vast borders of the region. Mali and Mauritania are completing their training cycles, and Chad and Niger will begin training cycles later this year^{vii}.

Counter Terrorism Centre in Algiers.

To demonstrate their participation in the global war on terrorism the African Union has established a Counter Terrorism Centre in Algiers. The danger is not fighting against terrorism but the likelihood that the government will take advantage of the war on terrorism in general and the centre in particular against legitimate pro democracy individuals and groups. It is worth recalling that the civil war that killed more than 100,000 Algerians was triggered by the annulment of the general elections that was won by the Islamic Salvation Front in 1992. In the bloody civil war, violence is used both by the military backed regime and the various Islamic groups such as the Armed Islamic Group GIA, the FIS and The Salifist Group for Preaching and Combat.

The effects of terrorism in Africa

The worse effects of terrorism in African have taken the forms of genocide, widespread killings, ethnic cleansing and the collapsing of states and disintegration of whole societies. Angola and Mozambique have the world's highest number of disabled persons as a result of terrorist land mines. The racist war on the black Africans of South Sudan has left more than 2 million dead and 92% of the population being displaced. The post Mobutu civil war in the DRC has claimed the lives of 3 million people, about one million Rwandan were hacked to death while the world looked on in 1994. Liberia and Sierra Leone experienced one of the most violence against civilians a few years ago again while the international community turned a blind eye. The bombing of the US embassies in 1998 claimed the lives of over 200 Kenyans and Tanzanians plus 12 US citizens. The victims of the bombing are yet to be adequately compensated. Since the Sudanese government shifted its war on its black African citizens from the South to Darfur in the west in 2003, some 70 000 people have lost their lives and 1.6 million are on the run from death, rape and enslavement. In September 2003, Kofi Annan lamented that the "Liberian conflict had unleashed armed groups and criminal gangs which had destabilised the entire sub region. He went on saying that "the armed conflict in Liberia resulted in serious abuses of human rights and humanitarian law, including deliberate and arbitrary killings, disappearances, torture, widespread rape, and sexual violence, arbitrary arrests, forced conscription, use of child soldiers, systematic and forced displacement and indiscriminate targeting of civilians"^{viii}". Therefore, the terrorism that has been killing Africans is a direct result of the crisis of the post colonial state in Africa. As Rene Lemarchand decries:

The African continent is littered with the wreckage of imploded polities. From Guinea Bissau to Burundi, from Congo Brazzaville to Congo Kinshasa, from Sierra Leone to Guinea and Cote D,

Ivoire, failed or collapsing states confront us with an all/too familiar litany of scourges – civil societies shot to bits by ethno regional violence, massive flows of hapless refugees across national boundaries, widespread environmental disasters, rising rates of criminality and utter bankruptcy of national economies^{ix}

The implications of dragging Africa into the US war on terrorism

Martin Plaut reports.

The United States is planning to move some of its forces from Europe to Africa. Draft plans have been submitted to US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, as part of America's attempt to come to grips with the new challenges that have arisen since the end of the Cold War. Dealing with the twin threats of drugs and terrorism is now an integral part of American military thinking. But their thinking is also being driven, in part, by the new oilfields being developed off the coast of West Africa. Earlier this year General James Jones, Supreme Allied Commander of American forces in Europe told journalists that there was a need to tackle what he called the large ungoverned areas of Africa. ...were providing "routes for narco-terrorist training and hotbeds of instability" and also posed a "potential threat for not only the alliance, but our interests as well". "We might wish to have more presence in the southern rim of the Mediterranean, where there is a certain number of countries that could be destabilised in the near future," he said He went on to suggest that American warships, that currently patrol the Mediterranean might in future spend half their time off the coast of West Africa, with what he called "a fairly focussed engagement in that part of the world^x".

Reports suggest that agreements have been reached with Cameroon, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea for the Americans to use their airfields. Nigeria, Benin and Ivory Coast have also been tipped as possible airbases for the US.

During President Bush's last year trip to Africa, the oilfields off the coasts of West Africa were said to be high on his agenda. As the first republican president to visit Africa, Bush declared "We will not allow terrorists to threaten the people of Africa, or use Africa as a base to threaten the world," This declaration did not translate into real action against the regime in Khartoum and its Janjeweed militia even after the US Congress and Collin Powell described the killings in Darfur as genocide. The UN also labelled the situation as acts of genocide. In spite the "never", genocide is being committed right now in Darfur without effective action against the regime in Sudan. In fact, Sudan has been praised by the US for sharing information on terrorism. This suggests the tragedy in Darfur is not seen as violence against civilians. The message is clear: killings black Africans is not terrorism, but a humanitarian crisis.

Roll back of democracy

Any establishment of US and British bases in the continent will surely attract more terrorist groups and weapons into the continent. As happened elsewhere, the US will be forced to cooperate and ally with violent dictators who are already taking advantage of the blind focus on terrorism at the expenses of democracy and respect for human rights. Just like Mosharf in Pakistan has tightened his grip on power, African rulers will do the same. This could lead to the rolling back of democracy and cold war style of

human rights violations with impunity as a reward for being on the side of the US led war on terror. When, with US backing, the Kenyan government tried to pass antiterrorism legislations in 2003, pro-democracy forces and Muslim leaders blocked the bill. They complained that the bill would roll back democracy as well as offend the Muslim community. Kibaki's government was forced to back up and reformulate the bill

Spreading the Middle East conflict more into Africa will be other possible consequences of US military presence in Africa. Other countries will be inspired to intervene and set up bases in Africa. France is already in place in Cote d'Ivoire, Britain in Sierra Leone. The German navy is already stationed off the coast of Somalia and East Africa.

Stefan Mair, Deputy Director of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs argues: Of greater importance for the short-term fight against terrorism in Africa would be state capacity building, in particular in terms of concentrating on the reform and support of the security sector in general and the police in particular^{xi}.

The environmental consequences

Eventual spread of the terrorism war from the Middle East into the continent will open the African environment to more mafia style plundering by warring factions and their foreign backers. Liberian and Sierra Leonean like blood diamond, timber and animal poaching, smuggling and other war related crimes will have grave impacts on the environment. The rich cultural and biological resources will be exposed further to destruction. With the massive discovery of oil, the environmental terrorism in the Niger Delta could spread into Central Africa and the Gulf of Guinea. As Helen Vesperini, reports, "NGOs and religious communities have launched campaign in Europe for an embargo on so called "blood tantalum", from the war zones in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Tantalum is essential in the manufacture of electrical components known as pinhead capacitors. These regulate voltage and store energy in mobile phones, tens of millions of which have been sold in the past few years"^{xii}.

The economic

Economically, direct participation in the Middle East war on terrorism will expose the already fragile African economies to further destruction, even tighter foreign control. Weak regimes and warlords could join forces with foreign multinationals and security companies for the control of the economies. Those countries who take part in the war will be targeted by the anti US groups while those who try to be neutral will be accused of being on the side of the terrorists, which will exposed them to bombing, economic and political sanctions and trade war. They could even be invaded and occupied just like Iraq. With the ongoing discovery of massive oil reserves off the Gulf of Guinea, Africa is becoming one of the most important axes of oil. The Gulf of Guinea is already being referred to as the new Middle East an Equatorial Guinea is nicknamed Kuwait. This will surely provoke and attract anti-western groups from the Middle East to launch attacks against western targets, which will drive off tourists and development NGOs, as happened in Iraq. Thus, dragging the continent into the terrorism war will make Africa into new axes of both oil and international terrorism.

The political and the development of democracy

The most dangerous consequences of spreading the Middle war on terrorism into Africa will be turn the whole continent into a battle field between the US and Islamist groups. Africa has enough problems that the least it needs is to be turned into Afghanistan or Iraq. In such a case many African countries will lose the little neutrality and sovereignty they enjoy now. The recent arrest of mercenaries in Zimbabwe and South Africa, including Sir Mark Thatcher, on their way to topple the government of Equatorial Guinea is a reminder of the weakness of the African regimes and an alarm bell of the increasing terrorist activities of mercenary and private security firms in the continent. A government who tries to stand on the way of those foreign economic interests would be a target for overthrow. Between June 2003 and October 2004, the Mauritanian regime survived three coup attempts by the army. The army is revolting against Mauritania's close relation with the US and Israel after dropping its alliance with the defunct Ba'ath regime of Saddam Hussein. Hundreds of opposition members have been arrested and charged with terrorism, possession of weapons and crime against the state.

Ethnic and religious civil wars

As the target number one for the Middle East terrorism, hosting US military bases will be a red flag to the Islamist groups. The open conflicts could escalate and latent come to the surface between black and Arab Africans along the Sahel. The Arabs will be tempted to take their fellow Arab Muslims. Long oppressed by Pan Arab nationalism, black Africans in places like Darfur, South Sudan, Mauritania and Chad could be tempted to support the US. The Franco US competition over Africa will be sharpened. Signs of this competition can be seen in Cote d'Ivoire and Senegal. In Cote d'Ivoire the rebel controlled north is leaning toward France while the Gbagbo controlled south is moving toward the US.

Conclusion

In the previous pages, I have tried to document that the terrorisation and killings of millions of civilians had been commonplace in Africa long before September 11 while the world looked on. Therefore, terrorism is not new for Africa. What is new is extending the terrorism war between the US led west and the Islamist groups in the Middle East into an already terror torn Africa. I also tried to make the point that the new focus on terrorism in Africa a self serving pretext to open up war fronts on the African borders with the Middle East, hence the Pan Sahel and East African Initiatives as well as to control the new oil fields along the Gulf of Guinea together with other strategic economic resources. African leaders are jumping unto the war on terrorism bandwagon for their own political self interests or for fear of being accused of being on the side of the terrorists. For Africa, this is a dangerous development that could expose the continent to more violence, foreign intervention, economic plundering and the roll back of the democratisation process, which is the least and the last Africa needs. It is the duty of African intellectuals, civil society organisations, pro-democracy political forces, free media and peace loving international groups and networks to join forces to prevent and mitigate the looming danger of Africa being caught up in the Middle East war on terror fire into the continent.

ⁱ Brian Whitaker, *The Guardian Weekly*, Monday May 7, 2001

ⁱⁱ International Conference on Terrorism called by the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Geneva, from June 22-26, 1987

^{iv} Terrorism in Africa by Jakkie Cilliers, Executive Director of the Institute for Security Studies 2003

^v Donna Miles reporting in the American Forces Press Service on June 16, 2004

^{vi} Martin Plaut, BBC 1.6.04

^{vii} Karl Wycoff on “Fighting Terrorism in Africa” hearing on April 1, 2004,

^{viii} Kofi Annan, September 2003

^{ix} Quote in Terrorism in Africa by Jakkie Cilliers, Executive Director of the Institute for Security Studies 2003

^x BBC Africa reporter Martin Plaut, 17 September, 2003

^{xi} Stefan Mair, *African Security Review* Vol 12 No 1, 2003

^{xii} Helen Vesperini; Congo’s Coltan rush, BCC, 01.08.2001