



Africa Policy Brief

Issue No. 7, March 2016

Counter-terrorism in the Horn of Africa: New security frontiers, old strategies*

Prof. Peter Kagwanja**

The US-led 'war on terror' dramatically changed America's security strategy towards Africa. But more fundamentally, it threw the Horn of Africa on the centre stage of global counter-terrorism. A double-edged blade, counter-terrorism has at once catalysed peace processes and intensified insecurity, with Islamic radicalism at the core of the regional storm. Governments utilised the threat of terrorism for political ends, defending old security paradigms that prioritised regime stability over human security. Africa integrated counter-terrorism into its emerging security agenda, but insufficient funds, operational constraints and poor coordination with international initiatives have hampered meaningful progress. Washington, laudably, launched a robust counter-terrorist campaign, but its high-handed military-heavy style put fragile democracies at risk while lapses in its overall policy risk triggering proxy wars. This essay examines the impact of counter-terrorism on security in the Horn of Africa. It argues for stronger coordination between national, regional and international initiatives to curb international terrorism.

* This policy brief was first published by Institute for Security Studies (Africa Security Review Vol.15 No. 3, 2003)

** Peter Kagwanja is the founding President and Chief Executive of the Africa Policy Institute (API). He is a Kenyan intellectual and expert on security, governance and strategic issues.

Introduction

Terrorism has been elevated to the foremost threat to global security. The bombings of the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in August 1998 and the attack on the Israeli-owned Paradise Hotel in Mombasa in November 2002 confirmed the Horn of Africa as the continent's most insecure region and a soft target of terrorism. Vulnerability to terrorism has thrust the region into the international spotlight as one of the main theatres of the global anti-terrorist campaign. But like a double-edged sword, the US's 'war on terror' following 11 September 2001 is at once stemming the spread of terrorism and accentuating insecurity in the region's volatile countries – Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia (including the self-declared Republic of Somaliland), Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda.

Insecurity in the Horn has deep roots in the political use of terror by state and non-state actors. As such, liberation movements, guerrillas, bandits, criminal gangs, cattle rustlers, pirates and vigilantes, as well as state terror, have long been included in the nomenclature of terrorism. But the spread of Islamic radicalism in the 1990s gave 'Terrorism' an indelibly Muslim face in the Horn. As observed by Alex de Waal, Islamism has transformed the Horn into a veritable arena of conflict between jihadists and their enemies,¹ evoking the Huntingtonian 'clash of civilisations' between the West and the rest in the reordering of global security and power relations.² A medley of endemic poverty, chronic underdevelopment and a deep sense of marginalisation, in the light of the negative forces of economic globalisation, proximity to and historical linkages with the Middle East, have transformed the region into an incubator of radical Islamist ideas and local cells of international terrorist networks.³

But counter-terrorism has had a mixed impact on the security situation in the Horn. Broadly, efforts against terrorism opened new security frontiers, engendering a re-ordering of priorities and a fundamental rethinking about security in the Horn of Africa.⁴ The dynamics of 'the war on terrorism' catalysed peace deals in Somalia and Sudan, but also fostered restrictive security paradigms which have perpetuated conflicts and stoked civil wars in the region. The campaign against terrorism also gave new impetus to old security perspectives that privileged state stability, enabling regimes to instrumentally utilize terrorism for political ends. On their part, local extremist groups, redefined as 'terrorists', formed strategic alliances with Islamists aimed at securing aid and sanctuary and imported into the local theatres of war tactics of jihadists such as beheading victims.

¹ See A de Waal (ed), *Islamism and its enemies in the Horn of Africa*, Shama Books, Addis Ababa, 2004.

² S Huntington, *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1996.

³ C de Coning, Poverty and terrorism: The root cause debate? *Conflict Trends*, 3, 2004, pp 20-29.

⁴ M Tadese, New security frontiers in the Horn of Africa, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, briefing paper, June 2004, p 5.

Responses to terrorism by African governments threatened the stability of fragile states with hastily introduced counter-terrorist laws that threatened human rights and widened religious fissures. Disaffection with the US's blanket definition of terrorism within Africa has resulted in poor coordination between regional and international counter-terrorist initiatives, making counter-terrorism one of the weakest links of Africa's peace and security agenda which has emerged in the aegis of the African Union (AU) from 2002.

In line with the increased focus on Africa in the US security strategy, the Horn was redefined as a particularly risky region that became a focus of Washington's counter-efforts against terrorism, including the East Africa Counter-Terrorism Initiative (EACTI) and the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA). But Washington's high-handed approach to counter-terrorism has imperiled fragile democracies in countries like Kenya.⁵ Its recent policy lapses in backing warlords as a counter-terrorist strategy in Somalia have also escalated insecurity and heightened the risk of a full-scale war and further terrorist attacks against the neighboring countries.⁶ This essay explores the response to terrorism at the national, regional and international levels, and assesses the impact of 'the war on terror' on the overall security in the Horn of Africa.

Terrorism's soft target

Long before 9/11, local resistance backed by the Omani Arabs shrunk the Portuguese Indian Ocean Empire (1498-1699), itself seized and sustained through terror, to modern Mozambique.⁷ As pointed out by Walter Laqueur, Mau Mau in Kenya in the 1950s was one of the many local groups that used a mix of terrorist tactics and guerrilla warfare against the British colonial power.⁸ The detention of the leaders of the Irgun and Stern Gang – two Israeli groups that used terrorism to fight for a state of Israel – in Kenya in the 1940s marked the Horn's earliest encounter with conflict in Palestine. Ever since, terrorism in the Horn has been linked to the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East.

In 1973, a shadowy Islamist organisation called Black September assassinated Cleo A Noel Jr, the US ambassador to Sudan, and his deputy chief of mission, George Curtis Moore. In a revenge attack on Kenya for allowing an Israeli rescue mission to use its facilities to foil the 1976 hijacking of an Air France plane and its 258 passengers, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) bombed the Jewish family-owned Norfolk Hotel in Nairobi on 31 December 1980, killing 15 people and injuring 80 others. In 1986, Libyan terrorists also severely wounded an American embassy communications

⁵ J Barkan, Kenya after Moi, *Foreign Affairs*, 83(1), January/February 2004, pp 87–100.

⁶ International Crisis Group (ICG), *Can the Somali crisis be contained?* Africa Report No 116, 10 August 2006.

⁷ G S P Freeman-Grenville, *The East African Coast*, Oxford University Press, 1962, pp 86-110.

⁸ W Laqueur, *The new terrorism: Fanaticism and the arms of mass destruction*, Oxford University Press, 1999, p 23; Eric Otenyo, New terrorism: Towards an explanation of cases of Kenya, *Africa Security Review*, 13(3), 2004, pp 75-84.

technician in Khartoum in what appeared to be a revenge attack against the US bomb strikes against Libya. Analysts suspect that Islamic terrorists had a hand in the killing of 18 US army rangers in the Blackhawk Down episode in Mogadishu in 1993, prompting the US to pull out its troops from the country in March 1994.⁹

The bombing of US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam on 7 August 1998 and the foiling of another planned attack on the US embassy in Kampala pushed the Horn to new levels of insecurity. Some 263 lives (among them 240 Kenyans, 11 Tanzanians and 12 Americans) were lost while 5,000 Kenyans and 86 Tanzanians were injured in the attacks.¹⁰ Yemeni terrorists also hit the *USS Cole* just off the East African Indian Ocean seaboard in October 2000, killing 17 American sailors. At least 15 people died when suspected al-Qaeda agents bombed the Israeli-owned Paradise Hotel in Mombasa on 28 November 2002. Within minutes, terrorists using shoulder-fired SA-7 missiles narrowly missed an El Al passenger plane taking off from Mombasa airport. There have also been frequent terrorist alerts in Djibouti, Pemba, Zanzibar and the archipelagos of Comoros. These attacks put radical Islamism into sharp focus as an emerging security threat in the Horn.¹¹

Islamism and insecurity

There are a number of reasons why the Horn of Africa has become a battleground for jihadists and their foes. First, the region's geographical proximity and bonds of history with Middle East facilitated the movements of terrorist agents within and across the two regions.¹² Second, countries in the region are either predominantly Muslim or have significant Muslim minorities: Comoros (98 per cent) per, Djibouti (94 per cent), Eritrea (50 per cent), Ethiopia (50 per cent), Kenya (10 per cent), Somalia (including the self-declared Republic of Somaliland, 100 per cent), Sudan, Tanzania (35 per cent) and Uganda (16 per cent).¹³ This exposed them to sectarian conflicts and international terrorism. Third, paradoxically, the expansion of democratic space from the 1990s emboldened activism inspired by radical Islamic ideas among disaffected Muslim minorities, particularly at the coast – forlornly described by the Kenyan scholar Ali Mazrui as a region trapped 'between globalisation and marginalisation'.¹⁴ Fourth, a mix of widespread poverty, chronic underdevelopment and a deep sense of marginalisation, accentuated by

⁹ P L Bergen, *Holy War Inc*, Phoenix, London, 2001, p 22; ICG, *Countering terrorism in Somalia: Losing hearts and minds?* Report No 95, 11 July 2002, p 7.

¹⁰ Barkan, *op cit*, pp 87–100.

¹¹ See De Waal, *op cit*.

¹² R Rotberg (ed), *Battling terrorism in the Horn of Africa*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington DC, December 2005, p 2.

¹³ P N Lyman & J S Morrison, *The terrorist threat in Africa*, *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2004, pp 75–86.

¹⁴ A Mazrui, *The Kenya coast: Between globalization and marginalization*, in J Hoorweg, D Foeken & R A Obudho (eds), *Kenya handbook: Culture, resources and development in the East African Littoral*, Hamburg & London: Lit Verlag Munster, 2000.

the negative forces of economic globalisation, enabled Islamists to export their ideas and to win allies among impoverished Muslim minorities and desperate refugees.¹⁵

Islamism in Sudan and Somalia

In 1989, the National Islamic Front (called the National Congress Party after 1999) seized power in Sudan, marking the ascent of militant Islamism as a powerful force in the Horn of Africa. Sudan became a new epicenter of the militant Islamist world, providing shelter to Islamist fighters, including Abu Nidal, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, *Gama'at al Islamiyya*, Hamas, Hezbollah and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. In 1991-1996, Osama bin Laden used his base in Sudan to consolidate his networks and to support terrorist groups in Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt and other sub-Saharan countries.¹⁶ Khartoum not only provided aid and shelter to extremist groups such as the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromia in Ethiopia, the Eritrean Islamic Jihad, and the Ugandan Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), but also covertly aided *Gama'at al-Islamiyya's* abortive attempt on President Hosni Mubarak's life in Addis Ababa in July 1995. In 1993, the US added Sudan to its list of state sponsors of terrorism while the UN Security Council placed the country on sanctions in 1996-2001. Suspecting Sudan of sheltering the al-Qaeda agents who masterminded the 1998 bombings of its embassies in East Africa, the Clinton administration fired cruise missiles into its *al-Shifa* aspirin factory.

However, Sudan's Islamic government actively sought and partly obtained peace with Washington immediately after 9/11. US backing was crucial in the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (GPA) between Khartoum and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLA/M) in January 2005. But US-Sudan relations dipped following Khartoum's proxy war in Darfur – which has killed some 200,000 and created over 2 million refugees – and its rejection of a UN peacekeeping force to replace the weaker and under-funded AU peace mission (AMIS) by October 2006.

Analysts raised alarm that the collapse of the Somali state in 1991 would enable al-Qaeda to turn the territory into its new front as a significant recruiting or training site. But Somalia merely served as a transit point to Kenya for al-Qaeda agents such as Ali Mohamed (a key figure in planning the bombing of US embassies in 1998 and the Paradise Hotel in Mombasa in 2002), Suleiman Abdullah, Wadih el-Hage (who set up al-Qaeda's Kenyan cell) and Fuzul Abdullah Mohamed, a Comorian national who became the cell commander.¹⁷

Although Somalia did not become a sanctuary for al-Qaeda fighters driven out of Afghanistan by the US and its allies after 9/11, the spotlight has turned to local Islamists

¹⁵ De Coning, op cit, pp 20-29.

¹⁶ J Cilliers & K Sturman, *Africa and terrorism: Joining the global campaign*, Monograph Series No 74, ISS, Pretoria, 2002, p 2.

¹⁷ T H Kean (chair) et al, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States*, New York, 1994.

alleged to have linkages with al-Qaeda.¹⁸ The al-*Ittihad al Islamiya*, which emerged as the vehicle of Islamic extremism and a pan-Somali ideology, encouraged attacks on Ethiopian government targets in the 1990s and has been blamed for violent attacks on foreigners.¹⁹ In October 2003, militants killed an Italian nurse, Annalena Tonelli, and two British teachers, Richard and Enid Eyeington, followed by the killing of a Kenyan aid worker, Florence Cheruiyot, in April 2004.²⁰

In June 2006, the Islamists coalesced around the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) edged closer to power when they defeated a US-backed alliance of warlords and gained control over Mogadishu. Somalia's neighbours like Ethiopia and Kenya are bothered by the growing power of al-Ittihad's hard-line radical Islamists and are determined not to allow the emergence of a version of the Taliban-ruled Afghanistan on their doorsteps. The Somali conflict is threatening to boil over, with leaders of Somalia's Transitional Federal Government accusing Egypt, Eritrea, Libya and Iran of supporting the Islamists, although Egypt has denied the charge.²¹

Islamism in East Africa

The spread of Islamism at the East African coast in the 1990s witnessed the rising terrorist violence. In Kenya, the government refused to register the Islamic Party of Kenya (IPK) formed by a fiery Muslim cleric, Sheikh Khalid Balala, to articulate the grievances of Muslim minorities. IPK youths killed three police officers in protests in Mombasa. On 13 August 1997, 500 Islamic youths raided and razed the Likoni police station in Mombasa to the ground, killing six police officers and making away with 30–50 guns and 3,000–5,000 rounds of ammunition. Some 100 non-Muslims were also killed and 100,000 others displaced in Mombasa and its environs.²² In May 2003, the government announced that a key al-Qaeda member was plotting an attack on Western interests, confirming the presence of international terrorist cells with local allies.

Tanzania also experienced a surge of Islamism organised around the Baraza *Kuu za Waislam wa Tanzania* (National Association of Koran Readers in Tanzania, or Balukta), which was created in the 1980s to advance the course of Islamic militancy. Balukta forged clandestine ties with Iran and Sudan, which the government accused of giving military training to its nationals to topple the government and for fuelling riots in April

¹⁸ M Tadesse, *Al-Ittihad: Political Islam and black economy in Somalia*, Addis Ababa, 2002, pp 16-20.

¹⁹ Ibid, p 142.

²⁰ ICG, p 6.

²¹ Somali prime minister accuses Middle East trio of backing terrorists, Voice of America News, 29 July 2006.

²² Africa Rights, Violence at the coast: The human consequences of Kenya's crumbling political institutions, *Witness*, 2, October–November 1997, p 15.

1993.²³ Militants were not only behind violent takeovers of moderate mosques in Dar es Salaam and the firebombing of a tourist bar in Stone Town in 2002, but were also responsible for the violence that marred elections in Zanzibar in 2000 and in October 2005.²⁴ One of the pillars of Islamic militancy is cleric Sheik Ponda Isi Ponda, who founded the group *Simba wa Mungu* (God's Lion), an underground organisation accused of orchestrating attacks on foreigners and moderate Tanzanian Muslims.²⁵ Al-Qaeda operatives such as Khalfan Khamis Muhammad, one of those convicted in connection with the 1998 US embassy bombings, and Qaed Sanyan al-Harithi, another al-Qaeda agent killed in Yemen in 2004, were linked to Sheik Ponda.

Islamic charities from the Gulf region have been accused of aiding radical Islamic activities and funding terrorism in the Horn. Funds from the African Muslim Agency (a Kuwaiti organisation engaged in the construction of mosques, schools and hospitals), the CIFA Development Group (a joint Tanzanian-Saudi investment venture established in 1995) and the Saudi-based petroleum company Oilcom were said to be used to purchase arms and to bribe corrupt members of the ruling *Chama Cha Mapundzi* party to turn a blind eye to the spread of Wahabist Islam.²⁶ The *al-Haramain* Islamic Foundation, the single Muslim charity which set up religious schools and social programmes for refugees in the Somali-dominated Dadaab refugee camps in northern Kenya, was also accused of sponsoring terrorist activities.²⁷ *Al-Haramain* worked closely with *al-Ittihad* cells in the camps to provide training and political education to Somali refugees along the lines of Pakistan-style *madrasa* classes to prepare them to 'defend Islam and the Somali nation'.²⁸ *Al-Ittihad* agents exploited gaps in Kenya's banking system and used the trust-based *hawilaad* or *hudi* banking system widely used by the Somalis in diaspora to move funds into the camps.

Islamists also supported local extremists groups. After 1993, the LRA in northern Uganda received weapons, ammunition, fuel and other essentials from Sudan's militant Islamists. Aid to the LRA was meant to undermine Uganda backing the SPLA. In September 2000, 13 leaders and hundreds of members of Kenya's neo-traditional Mungiki sect were converted to Islam in what analysts saw as a strategy to access assistance from Muslim charities and sanctuary from vocal Islamic clerics.²⁹ But Mungiki not only rhetorically speak of creating a 'nation guided by the Sharia', but its militants stridently used terrorist tactics inspired by Iraqi jihadists.³⁰

²³ Tanzania outlaws Muslim fundamentalist group, Reuters, 29 April 1993; Tanzania: Government orders Sudanese nationals to leave, Inter Press Service, 26 April 1993.

²⁴ Zanzibar polls will go ahead, BBC, 28 October 2005.

²⁵ A Ousman, The potential of Islamist terrorism in sub-Saharan Africa, *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 18(1-2), Fall 2004, pp 65–105.

²⁶ Tanzania: Al Qaeda's East African beachhead? *Terrorism Monitor*, 1(5), 7 November 2003.

²⁷ Author's interview with an NGO official, Dadaab Camp, Northern Kenya, August 2002.

²⁸ P Kagwanja & M Juma, Securing refuge from terror: Refugee protection in East Africa After September 11, in N Steiner, M Gibney & G Loescher (eds), *Problems of protection: The UNHCR, refugees and human rights*, Routledge, New York and London, 2003, pp 225–236.

²⁹ P Kagwanja, Power to Uhuru: Youth identity and generational politics in Kenya's 2002 elections, *African Affairs*, January 2006.

³⁰ Mungiki leaders convert to Islam, *Daily Nation*, 3 September 2000.

National and regional responses

Governments across the Horn utilise the 'war on terror' to further their political ends, closing channels of peace talks to end conflicts. Ethiopia branded the Oromo Liberation Front, the Ogadeni National Liberation Front and the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromia as 'terrorist' groups. Eritrea's president, Isseyas Afewerki, also labelled his more democratically-minded former colleagues in the nationalist trenches terrorists. Similarly, Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni branded as terrorists both the LRA and the Allied Democratic Front (ADF) – blamed for the orgy of bomb throwing in pubs, taxi parks, markets and other public spaces in 1997-1999 that killed over 50 people and injured 160.³¹ Museveni also invoked the Anti-Terrorism Act against Kizza Besigye, his worthy rival for the presidential slot during the 2006 polls, in a move aimed at weakening his bid for power.³² While this utilisation of terrorism blurred the line between legitimate acts of resistance and terrorism, many governments rejected to enter into peace talks as a way of resolving conflicts.

Operational and legislative responses

Governments also hastily introduced counter-terrorism legislations as curbs against terrorist incursions. In 2002, Tanzania ratified seven of the twelve international counter-terrorism instruments and passed the Prevention of Terrorism Act which criminalised support for terrorist groups operating within its territory amid fierce protests by human rights activists and opposition parties.³³ Uganda ratified all the twelve international conventions and protocols on terrorism and enacted the Anti-Terrorism Act (formerly known as the Suppression of Terrorism Act) in May 2003. While the legislation imposed a mandatory death penalty for terrorists and potential death penalty for their sponsors and supporters, it has been accused of prioritising local rebellion over the international terrorist threat. The newly elected government of Mwai Kibaki ratified all the twelve international counter-terrorism conventions and protocols and published the Suppression of Terrorism Bill on 30 April 2003. But parliament shelved the law due to strong resistance from Muslim lobbies and human rights groups who, eager to fiercely defend their newly won civil liberties, criticised the draft bill as a breach to the Bill of Rights. However, Kenya enacted the Witness Protection Bill in September 2004 to protect witnesses in terrorist cases.³⁴ Largely driven by the need to be on the right side of the Bush Administration's 'war on terror', most of these laws failed to effectively resolve the palpable tension between the values of democracy and the imperatives of counter-terrorism.³⁵

³¹ Terrorism in Uganda, Privacy International, 19 December 2004.

³² Uganda journalists face anti-terror laws, <www.cpu.org.uk/pfnews.html>.

³³ Tanzania's Muslims fight terror bill, <www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/2482199.stm>.

³⁴ *Daily Nation* (Kenya), 24 September 2004.

³⁵ Tadese, *New security frontiers*, op cit, p 5.

The initial denial based on self-perception as victims rather than hosts to terrorist that characterised Africa's initial response to terrorism has gradually given way to some bold steps to curb terrorism.³⁶ In February 2003, Kenya formed a special counter-terrorist unit consisting of officers picked from the police force. The unit teamed up with the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Interpol to unearth and eliminate the cell set up by Osama bin Laden's secretary, Wadi el-Hage, in 1994.³⁷ Tanzanian police also worked together with the US to arrest those responsible for the 1998 bombing in Dar es Salaam.

Kenya stationed two army battalions along the common border with Somalia from May 2003. But insufficient boats and personnel to patrol the Indian Ocean coastline and ports has given a free hand to terrorists and pirates to continue making forays into the region.³⁸ Since 1991, Somalia has no coast guard or navy, making its coastal ports ideal entry points for al-Qaeda agents. Piracy targeting passenger and cargo vessels for ransom or loot has sharply increased from two attacks in 2004 to 35 in 2005.³⁹ A plan to boost the capacity of the Kenya Navy to patrol the Indian Ocean coastline is yet to get off the ground.

Kenya also established an inter-ministerial task force focusing on Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism. The task force reviewed existing legislation and recommended ways of formulating a national policy shutting down channels of financing of terrorism.⁴⁰ In 2003, Kenya invoked the NGO Co-ordination Act of 1990 to deregister an array of Muslim NGOs accused of having linkages with terrorist groups. These included *al-Haramain* Islamic Foundation, the *al-Muntada al-Islami* (which funded several *madrassas* and health facilities at the Kenya coast), the World Assembly of Muslim Youth, the *al-Ibrahim* Foundation, Wakalatul-Rahmah offices, and the al-*Najah* Islamic Centre in northern Kenya.⁴¹ The High Court threw out petitions to reverse the decision while the government deported al-*Haramain's* Sudanese director, Sheikh Muawiya Hussein in January 2004.

Counter-terrorism and Africa's security agenda: A weak link

The emergence of a continental framework to guide Africa's response to terrorism got under way in the late 1990s. In April 1998, six African states in the League of Arab States -Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia – endorsed the Arab Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism in Cairo, Egypt.

³⁶ K Mbugua, East Africa: A haven or hapless victim of international terrorism, *Conflict Trends*, 3, 2004, pp 31-37.

³⁷ K Njoroge, Arm that responds to terror threats, *East African Standard*, 26 February 2004.

³⁸ Author's participation in a meeting with Tanzania's Department of Intelligence, 22 March 2006.

³⁹ Cited in Mohamed Olad Hassan, Somalis rally in support of prime minister, <www.chron.com/dis/story.mpl/ap/word/4083621.html>.

⁴⁰ Author's interview with a Kenya government official, Nairobi, May 2006.

⁴¹ P Mayoyo, Kenya Muslims say no to US school funds, *East African*, 23 February 2004.

Countries from the Horn joined 46 member states of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), which adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism in Algiers, Algeria, in July 1999. The summit also agreed to establish an African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT).

America's allies in Africa hastily convened a conference on terrorism in Dakar, Senegal, on 17 October 2001. The conference was attended by 27 African governments including some from the Horn. President Abdoulaye Wade, the host, viewed the conference as Africa's chance to "team up with the world coalition against this evil". But other leaders had more modest expectations.⁴² The summit adopted the Declaration against Terrorism, which merely reaffirmed Africa's commitment to the 1999 Algiers Terrorism Convention. More tellingly, the declaration expressed Africa's deep concern that the US 'War on terror' would "have the least possible adverse impact on the development of Africa", particularly on its security.

A meeting on the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution convened in New York on 11 November 2001 reiterated Africa's existing commitments -including the OAU Convention's definition of 'terrorism', which carefully excluded freedom fighters. This reflected Africa's unease with America's blanket definition of terrorism. But when it dawned on African states that America would readily use its power with full force, they immediately fell into line in cooperating with its counter-terrorism.

With the inauguration of the African Union (AU) in Durban, South Africa, in July 2002, counter-terrorism became a key agendum of Africa's peace and security vision. Counter-terrorism also became one of the priorities in the strategic framework document of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), which the AU adopted in July 2002. A high-level meeting of the AU in Algiers on 11-14 September 2002 endorsed the twelve UN instruments on terrorism and developed a plan of action on the prevention and combating of terrorism in Africa.

The AU Peace and Security Council (PSC), launched in May 2004, also sought to coordinate continental efforts in preventing and combating of international terrorism in all its aspects. Further, the Algiers convention came into force in December 2002 following ratification by 30 of the 53 AU member states, while the ACSRT itself was inaugurated in October 2004.⁴³ The implementation of Africa's counter-terrorism priorities in the Horn falls on the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), defined as one of the five regional pillars of the AU's peace and security architecture. However, Africa's counter-terrorist framework needs to be attuned to the post-9/11 security realities.

⁴² M Malan, The post-9/11 security agenda and peacekeeping in Africa, *Africa Security Review*, 11(3), 2002, pp 54-66.

⁴³ Organisation for African Unity (OAU), OAU Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism, Algiers, Algeria, 14 July 1999.

IGAD counter-terrorism plan

Two separate meetings tried to raise the profile of counter-terrorism among IGAD Member states – Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda. IGAD's 9th summit held in Khartoum, Sudan, in January 2002 stressed the urgent need for action on counter-terrorist at the national, regional and international levels.

On 24-27 June 2003, IGAD also convened its conference on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism, which further elaborated the AU Convention on Terrorism and adopted a six point implementation plan. The plan set the benchmarks, standards and indicators to measure performance and compliance with regional and international obligations. These priority areas included:

- Developing a common regional policy framework rooted in the broader international strategy; measures to counter the financing of terrorism;
- Enhancing operational capacity to tighten border controls; establishment of a regional database and terrorism centre;
- Respect for human rights and the rule of law in counter terrorism strategies; and
- Cultivation of public support for combating terrorism.⁴⁴

IGAD's meeting on combating terrorism and trans-national organised crime held in Khartoum on 17-19 January 2004 resolved to institute annual workshops to enhance the capabilities of member states to combat and eliminate terrorism.⁴⁵ But shortage of funds, weak capacity and coordination between its own policies and strategies and those of the international actors has hampered the implementation of IGAD's ambitious counter-terrorist plan.

International response: The US 'war on terror'

Africa is widely perceived as being a sideshow in the 'war on terrorism'.⁴⁶ But there has been a dramatic shift in US security policy towards Africa. A July 2004 report of the Africa policy advisory panel concluded that "the threat of terror to the US interests in Africa is concrete, rising and discernible. The probability of another attack on Americans on African soil is high."⁴⁷

⁴⁴ See Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Implementation Plan of Action for Combating and Preventing Terrorism, p 3, para 2:1.

⁴⁵ IGAD, Khartoum Declaration on Combating Terrorism and Transnational Organized Crime, Khartoum, Sudan, 19 January 2004.

⁴⁶ A de Waal & A H Abdel Salam, Africa, Islamism and America's 'war on terror', in De Waal, op cit, p 239.

⁴⁷ S J Morrison & P N Lyman, Countering the terrorist threat in Africa, in WH Kansteiner & S J Morrison, *Rising US stakes in Africa: seven proposals to strengthen US-Africa policy – A report of the Africa Policy Advisory Panel*, CSI, Washington, DC, May 2004, p 104.

The Horn of Africa has come to occupy a central place in the US war on terror. “Although we are concerned about attacks everywhere in Africa, we consider East Africa and the Horn ... to be at particular risk,” the US deputy coordinator for counter-terrorism, William Pope, told a meeting in Kampala in April 2004.⁴⁸ The region is the focus of two of US’s counter-terrorism initiatives in Africa: the East Africa Counter-Terrorism Initiative (EACTI) and the Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA).⁴⁹

The Combined Joint Task Force – Horn of Africa

In October 2002, the US launched the CJTF-HOA in Djibouti. The CJTF-HOA started with some 1,800 American soldiers and civilian personnel who occupied the former French Foreign Legion facility at Camp Lemonier in Djibouti – the only American military base in Africa, which has also received Western forces from France, Germany, Italy and Spain.

The CJTF-HOA is tasked with combating terrorism in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, Somalia and Yemen, as well as the entire Indian Ocean coastline and the waters of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. But its strategic focus stretches farther afield in the Arabian Peninsula. The US Central Command also backs the CJTF-HOA to achieve its mission: detecting, disrupting and defeating transnational terrorist groups; countering the resurgence of international terrorism; and enhancing the long-term stability of the region.

The CJTF-HOA has focused on training with allied forces and the troops of Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya. It has also refurbished schools, clinics, provided medical services and carried out poverty alleviation projects as part of America’s grand strategy to win the hearts and minds. The task force has also established a temporary military facility outside Dire Dawa in southeastern Ethiopia to train the country’s anti-terrorist battalions.

The task force has also facilitated the sharing of intelligence with regional countries, with its commanders claiming that it had captured ‘dozens of terrorists’ and averted at least five terrorist attacks.⁵⁰ The American military base in Djibouti indicates that the US is in the Horn for a long haul. But, paradoxically, it is a potential source of insecurity as a tempting target for al-Qaeda attacks. This places an extra burden on the US to maintain stricter surveillance.

⁴⁸ W Pope, Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Opening remarks during the East Africa Counterterrorism Initiative Conference, Kampala, Uganda, April 21, 2004, <www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/rm/2004/31731.htm> (8 August 2006).

⁴⁹ Other US counter-terrorist initiatives are: the Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI), the West African Initiative, the Southern African Initiative and the North African Initiative.

⁵⁰ Cited in D Shanin, *Fighting terrorism in East Africa and the Horn*, p 41.

The East Africa Counter-Terrorism Initiative

The unveiling of the US\$100 million EACTI in June 2003 signalled the region's centrality in the Bush administration's counter-terrorist priorities. The bulk of this money has gone to 'hard' aspects of counter-terrorism, including US\$50 million for security programmes administered by the US Department of Defence for military training for border control and security of the coastline, police training and aviation security capacity. Another \$10 million was allocated to the Kenyan Anti-Terror Police Unit.

The State Department's Terrorist Interdiction Programme also worked with regional governments to develop comprehensive anti-money laundering/counter-terrorist financing arrangements, including setting up a computer system in selected airports in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. Only \$14 million went to the 'soft' aspects set aside for winning hearts and minds through support for Muslim education, thus revealing the military bias in the 'war on terror'. Despite this, Washington has been less than satisfied with what its operatives view as a lukewarm response to the 'war on terror' by its African partners. In March 2004, it accused Tanzania of not setting up enough measures to deal with terrorism.⁵¹ The US also threatened to terminate military aid to Kenya (estimated at US\$3 million per year) if it ratified the treaty for the International Criminal Court without exempting US servicemen under article 98. This hardball style has threatened the stability of emerging democracies, with some of these countries charging that aspects of the war on terror are undermining their sovereignty.⁵²

The US and its allies have issued frequent alerts against travel to the region, pushing weak economies to the ropes. The Kenyan economy lost UK£108 million in 2004 following the UK's decision to impose travel bans on visitors to the country.⁵³ Pragmatic and nuanced approaches by the US and its allies are needed to ensure that counter-terrorism does not imperil the security of its weaker African partners.

Whither counter-terrorist policy in Somalia?

Washington has backed a strategy of financing an alliance of warlords in Somalia to halt the growing power of hard-line jihadi Islamists in central and southern Somalia who are suspected to have al-Qaeda connections and be sheltering its agents. Between US\$100,000 and US\$150,000 per month went into organising and structuring militia forces aligned to the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-terrorism (ARPCT) to fight the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), particularly the two top leaders of *al-Ittihad Islamiya*, Hassan Dahir Aweys and Hassan Turki.⁵⁴ But the approach has badly backfired when in June 2006 the UIC fighters crushingly defeated the warlord's

⁵¹ War on terror: US forces in Tanzania, <www.why-war.com/news/2004/03/15/waronter.html>.

⁵² Barkan, op cit, p 99.

⁵³ W Nick, The horrifying result of US ban in Kenya, *East African Standard*, 16 March 2004.

⁵⁴ Kagwanja & Juma, , op cit.

alliance and took control of Mogadishu after heavy fighting in which over 300 people were killed and some 1,700 injured.

US counter-terrorist intelligence erred by reading too much ideological import into what is essentially a localised struggle for power and prestige among rival clans in southern and central Somalia, fuelled by the failure of the Transitional Federal Government to unite all the clans. While Islamists in the Islamic Courts were emerging as a powerful force, it was not clear that they were al-Qaeda proxies. In fact, far from being an outright al-Qaeda breach-head, the UIC has in it many moderates with well-trained militias and independent sources of funding who have no ambitions of creating a version of Taliban state in Afghanistan.⁵⁵

The victory of the UIC has left Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in an extremely vulnerable position, casting a dark cloud on the future of the IGAD-brokered peace deal in October 2004. It has also strengthened the hand of Islamists, heightened inter-clan feuds and the risk of the country's return to full-scale civil war. United by a common fear of a possible rise of a Taliban-style Islamist regime on their doorsteps, Somalia's neighbours – particularly Ethiopia and Kenya, which have in the past suffered attacks by Somali militants – consider the UIC as a threat which must be stopped in its tracks. This has increased the threat of proxy war across the Horn.

Events in Somalia have popularised the view that the White House and Pentagon are pursuing a parallel Somalia policy into which the State Department has no input, a view given weight by the removal and transfer to Chad of the Kenya-based US official handling Somalia for the Bush administration and vocal critic of the Somalia policy, Michael Zorick.⁵⁶ Prior to his transfer, Zorick had warned that payments being made to warlords were fuelling conflict in Somalia's capital. The backfiring of the strategy has led to serious soul-searching about the direction of US counter-terrorism in the Horn.

Conclusion: Making counter-terrorism work

In response to the growing security threat that terrorism has posed in the Horn of Africa, African governments and regional organisations have joined the US-led 'war on terror'. But, ideologically charged counter-terrorism is becoming a sword that cuts both ways – at once catalysing and supporting peace processes and undermining democracy and stability in weaker states. Governments are utilising terrorism to breathe new life into old security paradigms that prioritise regime survival and state security rather than human security.

While the extensive use of terrorist tactics by local extremist groups has intensified insecurity, the trend to pin the terrorist label on these groups is blurring the line between

⁵⁵ Author's interview with Somali analysts, 7-9 August 2006; Kagwanja & Juma, op cit.

⁵⁶ Author's correspondence with a Nairobi-based analyst, 30 July 2006.

international terrorism and the parochial dynamics of localised resistance and struggles for power and prestige, thus complicating the search for peaceful solutions to conflicts. Further the present military-heavy counter-terrorist strategies have eclipsed the need for 'soft' options including robust poverty eradication measures to forestall the spread of Islamists ideas and terrorism. Old-style high-handed approaches associated with global actors undermine human rights and imperil weak democracies.

Coordination between national, regional and international counter-terrorist initiatives is needed to ensure that these initiatives do not undermine an already fragile security situation in the Horn of Africa. Governments in the region must re-commit themselves to counter-terrorism by strengthening counter-terrorism laws, police and intelligence, tightening border controls, coastline surveillance and anti-money laundering measures to detect, deter and diffuse terrorist threats, but strike a healthy balance between these measures and the values of democracy and human rights. Governments should also refrain from underhand manipulation of terrorism in ways that undermine peace processes.

African institutions, particularly the AU, IGAD and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), must unwaveringly pursue a counter-terrorism campaign within the broader framework of the emerging continental peace and security agenda. They should work with international partners to boost regional abilities to deal effectively with the security threats posed by terrorism, always ensuring greater coordination between African efforts and those of international players like the US. Otherwise, the parameters of the war on terror will continue to be set by the imperatives of global insecurity with little attention to local security realities.

The US appears to be battling with internal inconsistencies and lapses in its counter-terrorist policy, especially in Somalia, sending conflicting signals to local partners and stoking the embers of internal conflicts and heightening the risk of proxy wars across the Horn. Quieter and more nuanced and pragmatic strategies are needed to effectively confront the complex threat of terrorism. Hard security approaches currently identified with Washington's policy can only exacerbate insecurity and put Africa's weak democracies at risk. Continued funding of existing initiatives is central to pushing back the frontiers of terrorism and regional insecurity in the Horn of Africa. But nothing short of a holistic and well-coordinated counter-terrorism policy that ties together poverty eradication, conflict resolution and peace-building strategies can successfully drain the marshes in which extremism and terrorism have thrived in the Horn of Africa.