



# SPECIAL REPORT

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## ABOUT THE REPORT

This report presents the views shared by six regional experts at a U.S. Institute of Peace workshop, “Assessing Terrorism in the Horn of Africa: Threats and Responses,” held on May 28. The meeting was organized by the Institute’s Research and Studies Program as a half-day forum for leading specialists on terrorism, the Horn of Africa, and American foreign policy toward Africa. This Special Report presents case studies on Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia, Eritrea, and Sudan.

The workshop was organized and chaired by Tim Docking, African affairs specialist in the Research and Studies Program at the Institute, with the help of Ken Menkhaus.

**The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect views of the United States Institute of Peace, which does not advocate specific policies.**

## Terrorism in the Horn of Africa

### Summary

For over a decade, the United States has considered the Horn of Africa—Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia, Eritrea, and Sudan—a major source of terrorism. Following the 9-11 attacks against the United States, the Horn has come under increased scrutiny as a strategic focal point in the war against terrorism.

- In May 2003, the Kenyan government admitted that a key member of the al Qaeda terror network was plotting an attack on western targets, confirming al Qaeda’s firm local presence.
- Ethiopian Muslims have not been receptive to Islamic fundamentalism and they lack centralized power. They tend to identify first with their ethnic kin. Muslims and Christians are geographically intermixed throughout most of the country. Islam in Ethiopia has been benign during the past century. But the potential for conflict is present.
- Djibouti’s importance to terrorists derives from its transit capabilities rather than its potential as a base for international terrorist organizations. Events since 1999, however, may have increased Djibouti’s attractiveness to international terrorists.
- Somalia has played a role in Islamist terrorism, albeit a specialized one. It has served primarily as a short-term transit point for movement of men and materiel through the porous and corrupt border between Somalia into Kenya, which has been a preferred site of terrorist attacks.
- Eritrea’s inclusion in the “coalition of the willing” threatens to widen the gap between moderate and radical Eritrean Muslims due to the regime’s use of the “war against terrorism” to eliminate all dissent.
- The government of Sudan stands at a crossroads. It is attempting to move in a new direction through serious peace negotiations with the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) and improved relations with the United States, but those efforts are being hindered by high-ranking officials who remain committed to the radical Islamist agenda.

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- An effective U.S. response to terrorist threats in the Horn of Africa must include increased and targeted foreign aid, improved regional intelligence capabilities, and increased pressure on exogenous forces (especially Saudi Arabia) that stoke the flames of radicalism through Muslim “charities” and religious training programs.

## Introduction

For over a decade, the United States has considered the Horn of Africa a major source of global terrorism. In 1989 the National Islamic Front seized power in Sudan and set out to build an Islamist state—home to radical Muslim groups from around the world. During the 1990s, Sudan openly provided a safe haven to terrorists including Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda, and acted as a gateway for these group to operate in the greater Horn of Africa region.

In 1993, 18 American soldiers were killed in Mogadishu, Somalia, during an attack that some analysts attribute to Islamic terrorists. Five years later terrorists struck in the region again, bombing American embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, killing over 200 people and injuring more than 4,000. In October 2000, the U.S.S. *Cole* was struck by terrorists in Yemen, just off the east coast of Africa in an attack that claimed the lives of 17 American sailors. And in November 2002, al Qaeda-backed terrorists bombed a hotel and attempted to down an Israeli airliner with a shoulder-held surface-to-air missile near Mombasa, Kenya.

Indeed, for years the Horn of Africa, filled with weak, corrupt, and warring states, was seen as fertile ground for Islamists. Yet American responses to the regional terrorist threat—like the cruise missile attack on Sudan in the wake of the embassy bombings—were limited and unsustainable.

Following the 9-11 attacks against the United States, the Horn again came under intense scrutiny by counter-terrorism specialists and it remains a strategic focal point in the American war against terrorism.

In May, 2003, the U.S. Institute of Peace convened a half-day workshop for specialists on terrorism, the Horn of Africa, and U.S. foreign policy toward Africa, in an effort to determine the nature of the threats and responses to terrorism emanating from the region. Six regional experts addressed the group, each following a common analytical framework designed to provide a concise analysis of the threats and responses to terrorism in Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia, Eritrea, and Sudan.

## Kenya: Haven or Helpless Victim of Terrorism, by Gilbert Khadiagala

### State Security Situation

In May, 2003, the Kenyan government admitted that a key member of the al Qaeda terror network was plotting an attack on Western targets, confirming al Qaeda's firm local presence. Although the 1998 bombing of the American embassy in Nairobi demonstrated the presence of terrorists groups, the government took a long time to explicitly acknowledge the local nature of this threat. Yet, ever since a radical Palestinian group was implicated in the bombing of the Norfolk Hotel in Nairobi in 1981, Kenya has been seen as a soft target by international terrorism experts.

Evidence unveiled during the trial in New York of four men linked to the bombing of American embassies in East Africa in 1998 revealed a terror network that had flourished in Kenya, taking advantage of lax immigration and security laws. The core leadership of the Kenyan cell consisted primarily of citizens of the Gulf states, Somalia, Pakistan, and the Comoro Islands who had assimilated into local cultures along the Indian Ocean sea-

board. They, in turn, gradually recruited local Kenyans, particularly from the coast. Due to the corruption endemic in the immigration system, foreign residents of the Kenyan cell obtained citizenship and set up small businesses and Muslim non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

### ***Terrorist Groups and Networks***

In addition to assimilation, the al Qaeda network depends on decentralization and flexibility. For example, when Osama bin Laden's secretary, Wadi el-Hage (who is credited with establishing the Kenya cell in 1994), returned to the United States in 1997 after being interrogated by the FBI, the Kenyan cell replaced him with an Egyptian citizen. Following the embassy bombing, the Egyptian and other key leaders of the Kenyan cell vanished.

Working with the FBI and Interpol, the government made efforts to destroy the al Qaeda cell, apprehending several suspects in Nairobi and Mombasa. For instance, in July 2001, Nairobi police arrested 8 Yemeni and 13 Somali nationals. Similarly, police arrested more than 20 people suspected of having links with al Qaeda in Lamu in November 2001. Despite these arrests, several key leaders of the 1998 bombing, including two Mombasa-based men, remained at large.

Al Qaeda struck again in November 2002 with an attack on the Paradise Hotel in Mombasa and an attempt to shoot down an Israel airliner in Mombasa. The coordinated assault also confirmed al Qaeda's local support and illustrated their ability to evade Kenyan security while transporting arms like the surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) used in the attack.

Indeed, there is growing evidence of an indigenous terrorist movement in Kenya. After the arrest of the Yemeni suspects linked to al Qaeda in Somalia in March 2003, Kenya's foreign ministry acknowledged the involvement of Kenyan nationals in the 1998 and 2002 bombings. The first phase of arrests focused solely on foreigners, in particular, Yemeni, Pakistani, and Somali. In the second phase of arrests, the bulk of the suspects have been local people linked to businesses.

There have also been inconclusive reports of links between the Kenyan cell of al Qaeda and the largest radical Islamist group in Somalia, al Ittihad al Islamiya (AIAI), stemming from the apparent mobility of some of the key leaders between Kenya and Somalia, AIAI's base. With 2,000 members, AIAI is the most powerful radical band in the Horn of Africa, and it has been funded by al Qaeda in the past. Other reports have identified the Dabaab refugee camp on the Somalia-Kenya border as a training ground for Islamic extremists, through a Muslim charity, al Haramain, that has established religious schools and social programs. In 1998, Kenya revoked the registration of Muslim NGOs, including al Haramain, because of their links to terrorism.

### ***Response by the Government***

The slow government response to terrorist threats since the 1998 bombing grew from a denial based on the perception of Kenya as a victim, rather than a source of international terrorism. This denial was also tied to the inability to acknowledge the wider context that led to the growth of terrorism: the erosion of governance structures, notably weak enforcement and gatekeeping institutions. Furthermore, the government has always been afraid to alienate Kenya's minority Muslims who often complain of marginalization. There was, however, a marked shift in policy after Muslim protestors embarrassed the Moi regime by marching for al Qaeda in the wake of September 11 attacks.

The new government of Mwai Kibaki moved to establish mechanisms to meet the growing threat. In February 2003, the government formed an Anti-Terrorist Police Unit composed of officers trained in anti-terrorism. At the same time, the cabinet authorized negotiations between the executive and legislative branches on legislation to detect and punish suspected terrorists. In June 2003, Foreign Minister Musyoka called on parliament to expeditiously pass an Anti-Terrorism Bill. In other measures, the ministry of finance

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established a Task Force on Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism, consisting of representatives from finance, trade, and foreign affairs ministries; the Central Bank; the police; the Criminal Investigation Department (CID); and the National Security Intelligence Service. This team seeks to review existing legislation and recommend a national policy on combating the financing of terrorism.

These measures point to a more proactive policy on terrorism, but their long-term viability hinge on fundamental reforms in the security services, immigration, and port authorities. Reversing corruption in these agencies has only begun, as the government acknowledges the need for institutional reforms. There have also been suggestions to boost the capacity of the Kenyan navy to patrol the Indian Ocean coastline. Following the terrorist attacks on civilian targets in Saudi Arabia and Morocco in May 2003, the government stationed two army battalions on the Kenya-Somalia border to counter terrorism.

### ***U.S. Policy toward Kenya***

Security cooperation has long been an important aspect of Kenya-U.S. relations, underscored by airbase, port access, and over-flight agreements since the Cold War. Despite political disagreements between the United States and the Moi government, the security components of the relationship endured. The relations with the Kibaki government are much warmer, promising to deepen security links. Since 1998, the United States has spent nearly \$3.1 million on anti-terrorism assistance, including training more than 500 Kenyan security personnel in the United States. These programs have been complemented by other initiatives such as the U.S. donation of \$1 million in airport security equipment under the “Safe Skies for Africa” program to improve aviation safety.

Kenya is an important partner in the U.S. Combined Joint Task Force–Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) in Djibouti that seeks to check terrorism. This program envisages the U.S. training of regional militaries in counter-terrorism procedures. Furthermore, as part of the multinational campaign, a special anti-terrorism squad, composed of the German Naval Air Wing, is currently based in Mombasa to monitor ships plying the Gulf of Aden and the Somali coast.

### ***Outlook and Recommendations***

Forging a U.S.-Kenyan partnership on terrorism hinges on whether Kenya is primarily a soft target or a source of terrorism; there is evidence that it is both. Yet confronting these two facets of the problem requires sequencing of different strategies. The policies that have informed security collaboration since 1998 are geared to meet the challenges of a soft target; they are largely protective and preventive, aiming to deny terrorists opportunities to exploit current vulnerabilities. On the other hand, dealing with the sources of terrorism may entail institutional changes that have resonance beyond protection. Measures to check the recruitment of terrorist cells need to recognize the difficulties of quick results in a state with weak state institutions. Without the commitment of enormous resources, it may take a long time for Kenya to rebuild local institutions and address the host of cross-border, refugee, and immigration issues that are central to an effective anti-terrorist policy. Nonetheless a broad-based strategy that captures both the short-term protective and long-term governance components of anti-terrorism could include the following:

- Helping Kenya to build a rapid response capacity to forestall terror and launch pre-emptive strikes. This may entail massive investments in training, equipment, and logistical infrastructure.
- Launching a concerted global attempt to find a working government in Somalia, where warlords have carved up the failed state into lawless fiefdoms.
- Drawing regional actors into coordinated bilateral and multilateral frameworks that involve border surveillance and control and harmonization of security legislation to deal with the threat posed by terrorism.

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## **Ethiopia and Combating Terrorism: An Important Ally with Its Own Priorities, by David Shinn**

### ***State Security and Terrorist Groups***

Ethiopia knows all about terrorism. A Marxist-Leninist regime practiced governmental terrorism after it overthrew Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974. Ethiopian Airlines has a history of airplane hijackings. An Egyptian terrorist organization with the complicity of elements in Sudan tried to assassinate Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak as he arrived in Addis Ababa for an Organization of African Unity summit in 1995. This event hastened a downturn in ties with Sudan. Al Ittihad al Islamiya (AIAI), based in Somalia, and indigenous local groups including the Oromo Liberation Front, the militant wing of the Ogadeni National Liberation Front, and the now quiescent Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromia have carried out kidnappings, assassination attempts, mining of roads, and bombings of bars, hotels, and public buildings. But Ethiopia appears to have remained free of terrorist attacks instigated by al Qaeda and other Middle East terrorist groups.

Muslim Somalia and predominantly Muslim Sudan each have a 1,000-mile-long frontier with Ethiopia. There are few controls along the borders; persons can cross without detection. The export of Islamic radicalism from Sudan was a major concern of the Ethiopian government until the outbreak of conflict with Eritrea in 1998 changed the political dynamic in the region. In order to focus on its new Eritrean enemy, Ethiopia normalized its relations with Sudan. On the other hand, the situation with Somalia remains delicate. Ethiopia has significantly improved relations with Somaliland, the former Northern Province that declared its independence from Somalia in 1991. It remains at cross purposes, however, with the Transitional National Government and several other key groups in Somalia.

Most of the terrorism directed against Ethiopia has links to Islam. Traditionally thought of as a "Christian" country, at least 45 percent of Ethiopia's 67 million people are Muslim. Ethiopia's approximately 30 million Muslims tie it with Morocco for the eleventh most populous Muslim nation in the world. Looked at another way, Ethiopia has more Muslims than Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Iraq, or Afghanistan.

Virtually surrounded by Muslims, Ethiopia historically experienced several Islamic invasions. Recent relations between Muslims and Christians have been generally cordial. Ethiopian Muslims have not been receptive to Islamic radicalism and they lack centralized power. They tend to identify first with their ethnic kin. Muslims and Christians are geographically intermixed throughout most of the country. Islam in Ethiopia has been benign during the past century. But the potential for conflict is present. A few hundred Ethiopian Muslims marched in Addis Ababa to demonstrate in support of Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein during the 1991 Gulf War. Ethiopian security forces quickly dispersed them. After Ethiopia joined the coalition of the willing against Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, police prevented a Muslim demonstration in Addis Ababa. Representatives of the Muslim community expressed regret to a senior Foreign Ministry official that Ethiopia sided with the coalition. Although only one person's opinion, a senior Ethiopian academic recently commented that Ethiopia's religious equilibrium is collapsing and being replaced by a new militancy that is a threat to peace and stability.

### ***Response by the Government***

Ethiopia has a tough, effective security apparatus that dates from the revolutionary opposition's long conflict with the Derg regime. Many security service personnel are veterans of this military campaign. Their tactics are firm, some would say harsh, and they have developed an impressive intelligence capacity. Corruption seems to be minimal in the service. As a result, Ethiopia is not as soft a target as nearby countries such as Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. But its security service is far from infallible. The failed assassination attempt

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against President Mubarak was planned inside Ethiopia for at least a year; some of the plotters married Ethiopian women to improve their cover. Although Ethiopia did not uncover the plot, it did, with Egyptian help, prevent the assassins from harming Mubarak and subsequently tracked down and killed several of the perpetrators.

During the period that Ethiopia had poor relations with Sudan from 1995 until late 1998, it considered the export of Islamic radicalism from Sudan its greatest security threat. Sudan supported a variety of Ethiopian organizations that wanted to overthrow the government. Ethiopia played the same tit-for-tat game. It offered strong support, including military assistance, to the Sudan People's Liberation Movement whose goal was to replace the government in Khartoum. Ethiopia joined Eritrea and Uganda in an American-led "frontline states" policy against Sudan. The policy ended after Ethiopia normalized relations with Sudan. The major external threat, aside from the conflict with Eritrea, then became Somalia, which AIAI used as a base for terrorist attacks in Ethiopia. Ethiopia cracked down hard on AIAI across the Somali border and established alliances with several groups inside Somalia.

In view of Somalia's long-standing goal of incorporating Somalis residing in Ethiopia (and those in Kenya and Djibouti) into a "Greater Somalia," Ethiopia prefers a weak and divided Somalia, especially if a united Somalia results in an unfriendly neighbor. Ethiopia believes that AIAI is linked to al Qaeda and there is evidence to support this claim. Many Somalis, on the other hand, claim that AIAI is not a terrorist organization or, if it has engaged in violent acts against Ethiopia, argue that these acts do not qualify as terrorism. Addis Ababa has every right to retaliate against AIAI when it attacks Ethiopia, but it should not, they say, use this as an excuse to interfere in Somali internal affairs. Most Somalis are convinced that Ethiopia wants only to keep Somalia weak and divided. This breeds Somali hostility and increases the probability of new attacks against Ethiopia from Somalia.

### ***U.S. Policy toward Ethiopia: Outlook and Recommendations***

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This situation presents a policy challenge for the United States, which correctly sees Ethiopia as a reliable partner for combating terrorism and one with which it should cooperate on security matters. This includes the sharing of intelligence, training of Ethiopian security personnel, and cooperation in counter-terrorism programs. At the same time, the United States should engage only in activities that clearly meet American objectives and avoid those that may have unintended negative consequences for the region, especially in Somalia.

American policy should emphasize the shutting down of al Qaeda operatives and supporters in Ethiopia and the region. If it can be shown clearly that AIAI is working on behalf of al Qaeda, the same policy should apply. Indigenous organizations like the Oromo Liberation Front and the militant wing of the Ogadeni National Liberation Front that sometimes use terrorist tactics pose a greater dilemma. These groups are not included on the American Terrorist Exclusion List and have legitimate grievances. The United States may be able to serve as an intermediary to help resolve differences between them and the Ethiopian government. It tried this without success on a couple of occasions with the Oromo Liberation Front. The time may be ripe to revisit the question.

At the most fundamental level, the United States should encourage Ethiopia to improve its links to its Muslim community and urge that state resources be shared equitably among the different religious groups. The United States needs to identify innovative ways of its own to increase outreach to and interaction with Ethiopia's Islamic population. This effort began several years ago when it provided assistance to the Supreme Islamic Council for countering HIV/AIDS. The challenge is for both governments to do more if there is to be real progress in mitigating the root causes of terrorism as it affects Ethiopia and American interests there.

## **Djibouti: Fulcrum of the Horn, by Lange Schermerhorn**

### ***State Security Situation***

"A German terrorist is trained in Yemen, enters Djibouti clandestinely by dhow, is provided safe haven and smuggled onto a cargo ship departing for Europe."

—Helen MacInnes, *Cloak of Darkness*

The possibility of international terrorist activity in Djibouti has long been perceived as high, given its function as the major port of entry for upper East Africa. The government lacks resources to monitor its porous borders, which are regularly breached by the nomadic populations of the Horn. In the 1980s and '90s, ethnic Afar dissidents protesting lack of inclusion in the government claimed responsibility for a number of incidents resulting in civilian fatalities. The government labeled the perpetrators as terrorists and prosecuted those apprehended accordingly.

Djibouti's importance derives from its transit capabilities rather than its potential as a base for international terrorist organizations. Events since 1999, however, may have increased Djibouti's attractiveness to international terrorists: the inauguration of a proactive president in May 1999, one of whose first objectives was to re-stimulate a controversial reconciliation in Somalia that stirred up clan rivalries; intensification of chronic drought and poverty in Djibouti as migrants from neighboring countries increasingly drain resources; Islamic Djibouti's acceptance of more than 800 U.S. military personnel; recent parliamentary elections that, while democratic, constitutionally exclude the losing party from direct participation; rising tensions between Djibouti and Ethiopia, attributable to Djibouti's privatizing of its port in 2000; the declaration in February by President Jacques Chirac that France will "revitalize" engagement with Africa, reversing the trend accelerated in 1995 to ratchet down military presence and civilian aid.

Possible terrorist threats include attacks on U.S. personnel and facilities; disruption of the port and the Addis-Djibouti rail link to damage Djibouti's sole economic asset and upset regional transportation as famine looms once again; stimulating disaffected opposition members to resume active rebellion in Djibouti; and an attack on the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) headquarters as a symbol of regional cooperation supported by Western donors, including the United States.

### ***Terrorist Groups and Networks***

Whether or which terrorist groups operate in Djibouti is difficult to assess. However, the groundwork to support such groups has expanded: in the last five years a new Islamic Center has been opened, supported by Saudi Arabia; reportedly, the number of mosques has grown from approximately 35 to over 100, financed and often staffed from outside Djibouti. The young cleric in the most important mosque in Djibouti City reportedly was trained at the Cairo theological center known for its radical Islamist doctrine. Economic links to individuals in the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.) and Somalia are close as are communal links to families in Yemen.

### ***Response by the Government***

Djibouti has an army, navy (with virtually no ability to patrol the coastline effectively), gendarmerie, and police. In the past the government's strategy has been to rely on clan loyalties, insider's knowledge through the networks that import *qat* (a traditional local stimulant chewed by locals), and a relatively efficient gendarmerie.

Turning a blind eye is, unfortunately, a possible response to the terrorist threat, especially given the lack of resources. Plus, the logistical assistance sought up until 2001 from the United States for the police and gendarmerie, and for training and upgrading

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the commercial side of the joint military airport, was not forthcoming. The challenges for Djibouti are to instill professionalism in and pay on a timely basis its civil service and teachers; develop monitoring systems for borders; create a viable Coast Guard (a key need for Somalia also); refine a licensing and monitoring system for new private schools; invest in secular schools; expand inclusiveness in the government to decrease disaffection among the population; and undertake a whole array of activities to create jobs and reduce poverty—a very tall order.

### ***U.S. Policy toward Djibouti***

***Despite lack of success in gaining U.S. aid, Djibouti continued to permit access for U.S. aircraft, most notably for disaster relief to Mozambique in 2000, without conditions or compensation.***

U.S. relations with Djibouti since the death of 18 soldiers in Mogadishu in 1993 and the terrorist attacks of 2001, while cordial, might best be described as following a policy of “benign neglect.” During the 1991 Gulf War and the UNOSOM/UNITAF operation in Somalia, there was a high volume of transient U.S. military personnel in Djibouti and some U.S. military assistance, which the government of Djibouti actively sought to help it put down a rebellion of ethnic Afar dissidents during 1992–95. The U.S. defense attache in Djibouti withdrew when the U.S. military presence abruptly declined after October 1993 just as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and United States Information Agency (USIA) closed their programs, citing budgetary reasons. Between 1994 and 2000, the U.S. government provided less than \$500,000 in direct aid annually, much of it for small humanitarian military exercises and two military students and nominal amounts for self-help and democracy and human rights programs. Despite lack of success in gaining U.S. aid, Djibouti continued to permit access for U.S. aircraft, most notably for disaster relief to Mozambique in 2000, without conditions or compensation.

The challenges facing U.S. policymakers include the following:

- Appreciating and working with the sensitivities of Djibouti as a member of the Islamic Conference and one of five sub-Saharan Arab League members.
- Understanding that the aid the U.S. government will provide directly or via USAID is probably Djibouti’s one (long) shot at establishing a basis for long-term viability. Therefore, ensuring constructive and timely use of these funds in ways that satisfy Djibouti’s needs and desires as well as U.S. policy objectives is critical.
- Ensuring that the emphasis on counter-terrorism measures does not dilute the policy commitment of the United States to or Djibouti’s practices on democracy and human rights.
- Acknowledging the critical role of the French in Djibouti and working with them positively.

### ***Outlook and Recommendations***

***An injection of financial assistance on the levels agreed could enable Djibouti to pursue the war on terrorism with greater skill and resources.***

Djibouti looks on the war on terrorism as a blessing because it has gained the attention that the United States failed to give the last time it asked, during the 1991 Gulf War. Djibouti to some extent has viewed the United States as a fair-weather friend and thus has negotiated firmly for what it believes to be just recompense for its stalwart stance, especially in the face of opprobrium from some of its Arab League colleagues. An injection of financial assistance on the levels agreed could enable Djibouti to pursue the war on terrorism with greater skill and resources. More important, it will enable Djibouti to undertake infrastructure and social programs essential to its medium- and long-term survival. If average Djiboutians do not see direct benefits in short order, however, they will view assistance from the United States as merely enriching the incumbent government and entrenching it at their expense. While the presence of American personnel, coupled with a reinvigorated French presence, provides an enhanced target for terrorism, it also could serve as a deterrent by providing greater Djiboutian ability and incentive to root out terrorism.



Active engagement with the Republic of Djibouti is predicated on the fact that a stable, American-friendly platform in the Horn of Africa is in U.S. national interests because of the strategic location of Djibouti and also because Djibouti is an independent coastal country with a port facility.

U.S. policymakers should therefore undertake the following efforts:

- Support a viable outcome to Somalia reconciliation and work actively and visibly to achieve it, including motivating neighboring states to play a positive role.
- Consult closely with Djibouti on the disbursal of needed assistance.
- Continue and expand support of regional organizations, with particular reference to IGAD, whose permanent secretariat is in Djibouti, as a tool to improve conditions throughout the Horn.

## **Terrorism in Somalia: Threat Assessment and Policy Options,** *by Ken Menkhaus*

### ***State Security Situation***

Somalia remains high on the list of potential terrorist safe havens. This is due to a confluence of factors:

- Somalia is a collapsed state, where terrorists can operate beyond the rule of law.
- The country's largest radical Islamist group, al Ittihad al Islamiya (AIAI), is very active.
- Somalia's commercial activity in remittances (hawilaad), transit trade, and smuggling; its long coastline; and its porous borders facilitate unrecorded movement of cash, people, and materiel.
- High levels of insecurity have dramatically reduced western physical presence in and intelligence on the country.

Yet to date, Somalia has not been the site of significant terrorist activity: It has not been the site of terrorist attacks; it has not hosted terrorist training bases; it has not proven to be a profitable recruiting ground for al Qaeda; few foreign terrorists appear to have used the lawless country for safe haven; and no portion of the country has fallen under the direct political control of a radical Islamist group since 1996.

There are a number of explanations why Somalia has proven to be a somewhat less permissive environment for terrorism than was originally believed. For one thing, Somalia's lawlessness creates conditions of insecurity—extortion, kidnapping, betrayal—that constitute a risky environment for terrorist operations. The paucity of western targets inside Somalia makes it an unlikely site for attacks. The low number of non-Somali residents make it exceptionally difficult for a foreign terrorist to go unnoticed in the country. Finally, Somalia's essentially pragmatic political culture has to date rendered it infertile soil for radical ideologies of any sort.

Somalia has nonetheless played a role in Islamist terrorism, albeit a specialized one. It has served primarily as a short-term transit point for movement of people and materiel through Somalia into Kenya, which has been a preferred site of terrorist attacks. This occurred both in the 1998 embassy bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam and again in the December 2002 terrorist attack in Mombasa. Some of Somalia's remittance companies have also been misused by al Qaeda for wiring large sums of funds outside the reach of law enforcement monitoring. And since late 2002, there is growing evidence that in at least a couple of cases foreign terrorists such as Yemeni national Sulieman Abdulla have not only moved freely between Kenya and Somalia but have resided in Mogadishu for extended periods of time before being detected.

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## ***Terrorist Groups and Supporters***

Four political actors merit attention as terrorist organizations or as groups that may support terrorism.

- *Al Qaeda.* Al Qaeda does not appear to have a significant operational presence inside Somalia at this time. Al Qaeda operatives have, however, used Somalia as a transit point for terrorist attacks in Kenya. Individual al Qaeda members have been seen in Somalia and in at least one instance resided there for several years.
- *AIAI.* Al Ittihad al Islamiya's political platform is the imposition of Islamic government in all Somali-inhabited zones of the region, including eastern Ethiopia. Its focus has always been on Somali affairs, with little expressed interest in global jihad. The organization is decentralized along clan lines; those cells exhibit minimal cooperation or policy coherence. AIAI earned designation as a terrorist group following attacks against Ethiopian government targets in the mid-1990s by the group's Ogadeni cell. In 1996, AIAI was driven from the district of Luuq by Ethiopian forces, and it has since sought to integrate into local communities to avoid presenting itself as an easy target. AIAI has adopted a long-term strategy to prepare Somalia for Islamic rule by building up its activities in education, media, judiciary, and commerce, and has de-emphasized use of violence as a tactic. AIAI does not appear to have significant ties to al Qaeda and is not an al Qaeda affiliate, but some individual AIAI members do have linkages to al Qaeda, and AIAI appears to receive some funding from sources abroad that could have al Qaeda connections. Two top AIAI leaders, Hassan Dahir Aweys and Hassan Turki, are suspected by U.S. authorities of harboring non-Somali al Qaeda terrorists.
- *Businesses.* Mogadishu's post-war business class has assumed growing political clout in recent years. Some business owners are suspected of being sympathetic to or members of AIAI. No Somali business appears to have been part of the Osama bin Laden business empire, though one—the al Barakaat Group of Companies—was accused of having links to al Qaeda and had its assets frozen by the United States. As a group, Somali businessmen are pragmatic and not likely to maintain affiliation with Islamists if that proves too costly, but a small group of dedicated radicals could use businesses as a cover and source of funding.
- *Islamic charities.* Islamic charities in Somalia—of which al Islah is by far the largest—are the most visible source of aid in the country. Their funding comes almost exclusively from Persian Gulf governments and private sources, and is manifested most commonly in Islamic schools, medical centers, and mosques. Though most of this outreach is legitimate, there are concerns that a few of these organizations may be misused as fronts for terrorists. The Saudi-funded al Haraweyn charity was closed by the Saudi government in May 2003 at the request of the U.S. government, which charged the group with employing AIAI members in Somalia.

## ***Government Response***

Because there is no functioning national authority in Somalia, government response to potential terrorist threats has been weak and local. The war on terrorism is seen by local authorities primarily as an opportunity to garner western aid. Not surprisingly, virtually every political group in Somalia announced a commitment to support the United States in the aftermath of 9/11. The capacity of these local players to actually police terrorist activity in the areas they control is minimal, and their reliability even weaker.

## ***U.S. Policy toward Somalia***

In the aftermath of 9/11, air and naval surveillance of Somalia by the United States and its allies was established to monitor the country for possible terrorist activities. The U.S.

***The war on terrorism is seen by local authorities primarily as an opportunity to garner western aid.***

military presence in Djibouti gives it the capacity for rapid deployment against terrorist targets in Somalia, a move that deters terrorist activity there. The United States has also provided close military support and training for Ethiopia and Kenya's border patrols, with the aim of preventing terrorists from using Somalia as a point of transit into those countries. The assets of the Somali company al Barakaat were frozen as part of U.S. efforts to shut down al Qaeda's financial capacities. Finally, the United States has supported diplomatic efforts to broker a national reconciliation in Somalia that, it is hoped, will yield a government of national unity and a nascent partner in law enforcement and counter-terrorism measures.

### ***Outlook and Recommendations***

Somalia will remain an inhospitable place for foreign terrorists. But as al Qaeda comes under growing pressure elsewhere, it may use Somalia as a safe haven for lack of better alternatives. In that event, it is very likely that businesses and charities will serve as fronts for al Qaeda members and this activity should be carefully monitored.

Somalia will continue to pose a direct security threat mainly as a point of transit through which materiel and people move unchecked into other East African countries. Even with extensive U.S. training and support, Kenya's capacity to patrol its borders will remain weak for years to come.

The main radical Islamist group in Somalia, AIAI, is fragmented and will likely continue to be so. Though designated as a terrorist group, only one branch of AIAI has used terrorist tactics, and that was against the Ethiopian government. It is not clear that the organization shares a common view on political violence as a tactic. There may be opportunities to use diplomatic measures to encourage some AIAI sub-groups to distance themselves from an agenda that supports terrorism.

***Somalia will continue to pose a direct security threat mainly as a point of transit through which materiel and people move unchecked into other East African countries.***

### **Shifting Terrain: Dissidence versus Terrorism in Eritrea, by Ruth Iyob**

"The only way of isolating individual terrorists is to do so politically, by addressing the issues in which terrorists 'wrap themselves up.' Without addressing the issues there is no way of shifting the terrain of conflict from the military to the political, and drying up support for political terror."

—Mahmood Mamdani

### ***State Security Situation***

Since 9/11, Eritrea has been included on the list of countries harboring terrorists, due to allegations that the Eritrean Islamic Jihad Movement (EIJM) was linked to al Qaeda. Inside Eritrea, despite the infrequency of what is conventionally understood as acts of terrorism, the term has recently gained currency as a label for political opponents of the regime, led by Issaias Afwerki. The EIJM was founded in 1980, although its genesis can be traced back to 1975 when a number of Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) members were ejected out of the guerrilla movement accused of being unduly religious. By 1993 when the army of the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF) declared the country to be sovereign, the EIJM had already been in existence for over a decade.

In 1994 the EPLF reconstituted itself as the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) and ushered in an era of a gradual consolidation of President Afwerki's power. In 2001 a number of his old comrades protested what they perceived to be a personalized dictatorship, giving rise to a new opposition group—the EPLF-Democratic Party (EPLF-DP). A decade after independence, the Eritrean political arena hosts disparate groups such as the Eritrean National Alliance or ENA (a coalition of 13 ELF factions), the EPLF-DP, and the EIJM—all in opposition to the PFDJ.

***The EIJM is the only organization that claims to represent Muslim Eritreans' grievances. It is also the only organization that approximates a conventional terrorist organization.***

### ***Islam as Social Protest: Dissidents versus Militants***

The PFDJ, EPLF-DP, and ENA, espouse secular ideologies that range from Afro-Marxism to Maoism and Baa'thism. The EIJM is the only organization that claims to represent Muslim Eritreans' grievances. It is also the only organization that approximates a conventional terrorist organization, as demonstrated by its claims of responsibility for exploded land mines, kidnappings, and the destruction of state-owned economic enterprises. Although the majority of EIJM sympathizers do not subscribe to its brand of militant Islam, they resent the PFDJ's curtailment of Muslim rights to practice their religion as well as the denial of Eritrea's Afro-Arab heritage.

Both the ELF and EPLF leadership(s) rejected Islam as a social identity, which triggered a backlash from members unwilling to subscribe to their Marxist interpretation of religion as the "opium of the people." With the defeat of the ELF by the EPLF (aided by the Tigray People's Liberation Front) in 1981, the majority of practicing Eritrean Muslims found themselves bereft of political representation. Islam as a form of social protest gradually emerged to fill the void created by the secular modernizers. The exodus of Muslim refugees to Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan also created conditions for the politicization of Eritrean Muslims due to their exposure to more radical forms of Islam.

### ***The EIJM: In Process of Becoming***

The EIJM's membership currently includes dissidents from the ELF and the EPLF, social conservatives, defiant Islamic youth, and exiles in the diaspora. Its origins can be traced to the mid-1970s when combatants who objected to anti-religious propaganda were routinely imprisoned and ostracized by party ideologues. In 1981 the Munezemet Arrewad al Muslimin al Eritrea (Eritrean Pioneer Muslim Organization) was founded by ELF dissidents. In 1983 the Jebhat Tahrir al Eritrea al Islamiya Wataniya (Eritrean National Islamic Liberation Front) was established in Sudan. In 1988 the two organizations merged with three smaller groups—Lejnet al Difae al Islami (Islamic Defense Committee), Harekat al Mustedafeen al Eritrea (Movement of Oppressed Eritreans), and al Intifada Islamiya (Islamic Uprising)—to form the EIJM.

The EIJM, although an enduring socio-political entity, is far from a stable and monolithic organization. It has been rife with factionalism since its establishment. In 1988, following the merger of the five groups, a radical faction emerged seeking to displace the moderate founding leaders. In 1993, an even more militant faction, led by Mohammed Ahmed (Abu Suhail), with alleged ties to Afghan mujahedin, broke away. The remaining constituency, led by Arefa Ahmed, retained its focus on local and national concerns. In 1996, a third splinter, al Majlis al Islamiya Leddewa wa Islah fi Eritrea (Islamic Council for Reformation), led by Ibrahim Malek, emerged in opposition to the extremism of the Abu Suhail faction and sought dialogue with the larger political community.

In 2004, EIJM remains an ideologically and socially heterogeneous organization whose members include radical and moderate Muslims, alienated exiles, and secular citizens disillusioned by the justice meted out by the PFDJ. The EIJM's continuity as an organization is fed by the PFDJ regime's unwillingness to contemplate real versus virtual political participation of Eritrea's multicultural citizens.

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### ***Response by the Government***

A culture of impunity has increasingly become visible since 2001, triggering a split within the ruling PFDJ and inaugurating a reformist movement locally known as the G-15. The reformists demanded that the PFDJ cease making arbitrary arrests of hundreds of political prisoners—including those suspected of being "jihad sympathizers." This open acknowledgment of the many arbitrary arrests and "disappearance" of Muslim citizens, which until then had only been raised by the EIJM and ENA, provided a new basis for the realignment of all PFDJ opponents.

On September 18, 2001, eleven of the reformists were arrested and joined the ranks of “the disappeared.” This was followed by a systematic crackdown on all pro-democracy elements and the head-of-state’s adoption of the “Guantanamo” method, that is, the detention of political prisoners deemed to be a risk to the nation (www.awate.com, September 1, 2002).

### ***U.S. Policy toward Eritrea***

The emergence of a faction of EIJM “linked” with al Qaeda has militarized the earlier U.S.-Eritrean alliance (1991–2001), which was predicated upon shared objectives of democratization and development. Eritrea’s inclusion in the “coalition of the willing” threatens to widen the gap between moderate and radical Eritrean Muslims due to the regime’s use of the “war against terrorism” to eliminate *all* dissent. There is growing resentment at U.S. unwillingness to censure the regime even after the more than two-year internment of leading Muslim elders. These elders had sought to mediate between President Afwerki and reformist parliamentarians who had demanded more accountability and transparency from the head-of-state.

Current U.S. policy appears to be a “gentlemen’s pact” between top military brass, leaving gross human rights violations to be dealt with by distant political desk officers in the State Department. The outcome of such a policy has been to encourage the PFDJ regime to eliminate political rivals using “the war on terror” as a justification.

### ***Outlook and Recommendations***

The United States fostered democratization and constitutional rule in Eritrea from 1991 to 2001. In 2001, when democratizing Eritreans demanded constitutional governance, the U.S. decision to refrain from taking an unequivocal stand against the systematic elimination of pro-democracy advocates sent the message that only acts of violence and terror—not democratic reform—will bring about change. Current U.S. policy in Eritrea vacillates between two poles: unconditional support for a regime that joined the “war on terror” and episodic signals of disapproval for the regime’s crackdown on dissent.

U.S. policy should disengage from the increasing authoritarianism of the current regime which has alienated the majority of its civilian—secular and non-secular population. Failure to do so may lead to growing support for more militant elements within EIJM and the ENA.

## **Can a Leopard Change Its Spots? Sudan’s Evolving Relationship with Terrorism, by John Prendergast and Philip Roessler**

### ***State Security Situation***

The government of Sudan has a long history of harboring terrorist organizations and radical Islamic groups. It is the only sub-Saharan African government on the U.S. State Sponsors of Terrorism List and the only one that has officially provided support and safe haven for terrorist organizations. The National Islamic Front (NIF), which changed its name to the National Congress Party in 1999, seized power in a military coup in 1989 and promoted an aggressive Islamist agenda. Led by Hassan al Turabi, the NIF’s mastermind, the new government sought to create an Islamic state in Sudan and to establish the country as the capital of the militant Islamist world. Pursuant to these goals, the NIF developed close ties with radical Islamist groups and terrorist organizations, including Osama bin Laden and the origins of his al Qaeda organization. Sudan openly harbored bin Laden and al Qaeda from 1991 to 1996.

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By the late 1990s, however, Khartoum found itself facing international isolation—led by the United States—and the failure of its Islamist project. Confronted with intense U.S. military and economic pressure, the NIF government scaled down its relations with terrorist and radical organizations. In 1996, Sudan expelled bin Laden. A split among the NIF elites led to Turabi’s ouster as speaker of the National Assembly and eventually his imprisonment. The NIF regime attempted to bolster its image as a moderate government and blamed Turabi for its past relations with terrorist organizations, despite the fact that most of its current leadership had held high-level positions of responsibility, particularly in the intelligence services. Khartoum accelerated the moderation of its foreign policy and distancing from terrorist organizations after the September 11 terrorist attacks.

Today, the government of Sudan stands at a crossroads. It is attempting to move in a new direction with serious peace negotiations with the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) and improved relations with the United States, but remains hindered by high-ranking officials who have held influential leadership positions since the 1989 coup and remain committed to the radical Islamist agenda. These officials cater to a hard-line Islamist constituency, with a strong Arab identity, that makes it difficult for the government to completely sever all ties with groups such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and—in the case of some—al Qaeda.

***For years, the Sudanese government has used its territory to provide safe haven, training bases, and staging areas to numerous terrorist organizations, including al Qaeda.***

***Terrorist Groups and Networks***

For years, the Sudanese government has used its territory to provide safe haven, training bases, and staging areas to numerous terrorist organizations, including al Qaeda, Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ), Hezbollah, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), Abu Nidal, and Gama’at al Islamiyya. Operatives not only moved freely in and out of Sudan, but also established offices, businesses, and logistical bases for operations. Training camps were opened in the east of the country, which sent fighters from Lebanon, Afghanistan, and Algeria across the border into neighboring Eritrea and Ethiopia. Though Eritrea continues to accuse Khartoum of supporting Eritrean Islamic Jihad, the Sudanese regime has scaled down its exportation of radicalism in an attempt to improve relations with its neighbors and its standing in the international community.

***Response by the Government***

The government gave sanctuary, material support, and assets to bin Laden during his stay there from 1991 to 1996. The Sudan government itself was involved directly in numerous terrorist attacks, including assisting and later harboring those who attempted to assassinate Egyptian president Mubarak in 1995. The regime also provided sanctuary and support to a number of regional terrorist organizations, such as the Lord’s Resistance Army (Uganda), Eritrean Islamic Jihad, and Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromia (Ethiopia).

Since the September 11 terrorist attacks, Sudan has made a concerted effort to clamp down on some terrorist organizations in an attempt to improve its relations with the United States. The U.S. pressure that preceded and followed September 11 was the key to Khartoum’s changes. Khartoum arrested individuals that had contacts with bin Laden and offered intelligence to the United States on al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations. At times, Khartoum’s cooperation has been halting, especially when sharing intelligence or handing over suspected terrorists who might implicate high-ranking Sudanese officials in past terrorist activities. Thus, external pressure to join the war on terrorism presents Khartoum with a dilemma: to expose past ties to terrorism and fully cooperate with the United States, or to continue to protect well-connected elites.

In mid-May, the *New York Times* reported that a U.S. official claimed that al Qaeda had opened a training camp in western Sudan. In another sign of the government of Sudan’s changing policy on the terrorist issue, the Khartoum government acted swiftly to arrest the recruits, most of whom hailed from Saudi Arabia, and deported them to their home

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country. Nevertheless, significant questions linger in the aftermath of the incident. The fact that an al Qaeda camp could be reopened in Sudan suggests that there are elements within the Khartoum regime that remain aligned with the most radical of international organizations, and that they are operating around or behind official government policy.

### ***U.S. Policy toward Sudan***

There have been three phases in recent U.S. policy toward the Sudanese government. The first phase (1989–95) could be described as a period of engagement—in which the U.S. government pursued policy change solely through diplomatic engagement, including use of a presidential special envoy. The second phase (1995–99), catalyzed in part by the Mubarak assassination attempt and other evidence of stepped-up Sudanese sponsorship of terror, was one of increased pressure, containment, and isolation after the regime refused to change its behavior and began more directly to target U.S. interests. The third phase (1999–present) came about after the regime arrested Turabi and made some initial changes in policy. At this stage, the United States took some preliminary steps toward increased engagement with the Sudan government, including through the appointment of a special envoy for the peace process, dispatch of a full-time counter-terrorism regime to Khartoum, and more frequent dialogue with government officials.

After the terrorist attacks on September 11 and the opening of a counter-terrorism base in Djibouti, the United States increased its engagement with the Khartoum regime. In May 2003, a U.S. military aircraft landed in Sudan for the first time in 10 years. U.S. secretary of state Colin Powell met with Sudanese foreign minister Mustafa Osman Ismail in May to discuss cooperation on the war on terrorism. The State Department is somewhat pleased with the cooperation to date, but made it clear the steps Sudan needs to take to be removed from the State Sponsors of Terrorism list: it must shut down the operations of extremist groups, including Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and sign a comprehensive peace agreement with the SPLA. Hard-liners within the regime committed to the NIF's original Islamist agenda oppose both policies. Nonetheless, the battle within Khartoum continues as the moderates seek ways to permanently end the civil war and cease links with extremist organizations in order to normalize relations with the United States and completely emerge out of international isolation.

### ***Outlook and Recommendations***

U.S. policy would be best served by not diminishing prematurely the pressure on Khartoum. It should maintain comprehensive sanctions against Sudan and keep it on the list of State Sponsors of Terrorism until Khartoum signs and begins to implement a comprehensive peace agreement and takes further action against the remaining terrorist groups in Sudan. Easing off at this juncture would likely undermine the peace process at a critical stage, and ensure that no action would be taken against the groups still being harbored in Khartoum. Fear of U.S. retaliation remains a central force driving the Sudanese government toward a final peace deal. In other words, mixing the counter-terrorism and peace advocacy agendas in focused, targeted, and creative ways could have a salutary effect on both objectives, leaving Sudan closer to peace and more free of terrorist organizations than at any time since the 1989 military coup that brought this regime to power.

### **Conclusion**

Workshop participants were largely in agreement with the analyses put forward in the six case studies. The group discussion that followed thus focused on several overarching and cross-cutting themes pertaining to both terrorist threats and African and U.S. responses to terrorism in the Horn of Africa.

***The battle within Khartoum continues as the moderates seek ways to permanently end the civil war and cease links with extremist organizations.***

***Mixing the counter-terrorism and peace advocacy agendas in focused, targeted, and creative ways could have a salutary effect on both objectives, leaving Sudan closer to peace and more free of terrorist organizations.***

For more information on this topic, see our web site ([www.usip.org](http://www.usip.org)), which has an online edition of this report containing links to related web sites, as well as additional information on the subject.

***The absence of strong American representation in these places greatly hinders the U.S. ability to assess terrorist threats and to understand the inner workings of complicated groups and important ethnic factions.***

Noting the decentralized and transnational nature of terrorist groups like AIAI and al Qaeda in the Horn, the group underscored the need for a regional counter-terrorism approach.

While several participants noted the connection between weak, corrupt states and terrorism (the “fertile ground” argument), a distinction was made between weak and collapsed states. That is, as pointed out in the Somalia case study, collapsed state environments may indeed be less desirable for groups like al Qaeda than weak states. As one participant pointed out, “At least in Kenya, phones and money machines work,” making the business of terrorism more feasible.

Another theme that repeatedly emerged in discussion, and which has a serious and negative effect on American policy formation, is the general lack of good intelligence from the region. Some workshop participants tied the lack of good U.S. intelligence to the low level of U.S. diplomatic support in the Horn of Africa: in the form of consulates, rather than full-scale missions, in important outposts like Mombasa (Kenya) and Zanzibar (Tanzania), inadequate numbers of embassy personnel (for example, Djibouti), or no presence at all (for example, Somalia). Indeed, the absence of strong American representation in these places greatly hinders the U.S. ability to assess terrorist threats and to understand the inner workings of complicated groups and important ethnic factions, let alone the international networks that are so important to terrorist financing and recruitment.

Participants argued that while some might see increased American outreach to the region as unwise—by proliferating “soft targets,” diplomacy is a mission central to any effective effort at winning hearts and minds. (Indeed, a perceived lack of American commitment to the region fuels local ambivalence toward the United States.) Included in such a strategy should be increased engagement with local Muslim organizations. For, as one participant noted, “Increased diplomacy is much cheaper and more effective than gunboat diplomacy, such as stationing ships off the Somali coast.”

Significant group discussion also focused on the need for the United States to look beyond the immediate problems of terrorism to get at root causes, like corrupt and predatory regional governments, widespread human rights abuses, persistent underdevelopment, and the proliferation of radical Muslim schools—madrassas.

This last point is linked to perhaps the most talked about single overarching theme broached in the workshop: the need to end Middle Eastern (especially Saudi Arabian) support of radical Islamist views and training programs in the region. Numerous participants had experienced the pervasiveness of this phenomenon in the Horn of Africa and its negative effects. Thus, the use of Saudi “charities” to propagate radical Islamist training of children and local Muslim clerics and the financing of radical mosques all contribute directly to the spread of anti-Americanism in the region and potentially to further terrorist activity.



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