

## **Combating Terrorism in Africa**

**by Maxim Worcester**

### **Political and Economic environment to 2015**

The underlying structural causes of state weakness in sub-Saharan Africa – relatively low population densities, problematic population distribution and poor infrastructure will remain ubiquitous through 2015 and beyond, impeding the prospects of significant gains in broad based institution building and development. Much will depend upon two external drivers of development and growth – foreign direct investment (FDI) and aid flows – whose distribution across the continent will continue to be uneven, maintaining a situation in which nodes of promise sit side by side with zones of weak governance and in which some other countries stubbornly refuse to respond to external efforts to stimulate growth and development.

While it is relatively easy to forecast which countries will fall into these different areas, Africa's experience over the past decade underlines the extent to which there is no room for complacency. Likewise many of the new generation of African leaders hailed in the mid-1990s - those from Ruanda, Uganda and Ethiopia, in particular – have since become a source for disappointment, instinctively reverting to methods of authoritarian political and economic control provoked by weak institutions . Others such as Mozambique and Liberia have exceeded expectations and others such as Botswana, Ghana and Tanzania have quietly got on with the business of reforms.

The failures are most likely to include those countries in historically-rooted zones of weak governance such as the Central African Republic (CAR) or the Congo (DRC). Improved mechanisms for managing intra-state conflict should prevent the re-emergence of top-down conflict. However, social transformations connected to globalisation and local demographic pressures will continue to favour violence as the principle means for resolving disputes at a local level. This will be most felt in the Sahelian region, reaching from the Sudanese province of Darfur in the east, across the CAR, southern Chad, northern Cameroon, Mali and Niger. The tri-border area between Sudan, Uganda and Kenya is also at risk of developing into a zone of entrenched social conflict.

While certain continental trends, such as rapid urbanisation and the deepening of the HIV/AIDS crisis seem to imply a homogenisation of the African continent south of the Sahara, the assessment is that Africa will in fact become less homogenous in the medium term. The differences between countries will become more entrenched, despite enduring risks of cross-border destabilisation. The economic and political pre-eminence of Nigeria and South Africa will persist, though both seem set to undergo significant change. Nigeria will seek to strengthen institutions and mediate secessionist tendencies and South Africa will seek to moderate accusations of regional domination. Encouraged by this it is to be expected that the

international community will seek to empower the AU as a peacekeeping force and diplomatic broker, however political divisions between African nations will prevent the AU from developing into a truly effective force.

### **Failed and Fragile States in Africa**

According to the British government's Department for International Development, failed and fragile states are today home to more than 900m people, half of whom live in severe poverty. This poses a significant threat to international security as such states offer a safe haven for illicit trade, drugs-production and weapons-smuggling. Corruption presents an endemic problem and the global result is likely to be regional spill over of the effects of conflict, terrorism and a failure to manage epidemic diseases.

A high proportion of such countries are to be found in Africa. Highly fragile African States are the following:

- Central African Republic
- Chad
- Congo (DRC)
- Somalia
- Sudan

Those displaying signs of fragility are:

- Burundi
- Congo
- Eritrea
- Ethiopia
- Guinea-Bissau
- Liberia
- Nigeria
- Sao Thome and Principe
- Sierra Leone
- Yemen
- Zimbabwe

The problem of weak and failing states is significantly more dangerous than is generally understood as these unstable regions are a breeding ground for organised crime and terrorism. A case study is that of the greater Horn of Africa which includes Sudan, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya and Uganda. Two clusters of conflict emanating from specific states continue to destabilise the region. The first centres on interlocking rebellions in Sudan and affects northern Uganda, eastern Chad and north-eastern Central African Republic. The main culprits are the Sudanese government, which is supporting rebels in these three neighbouring countries; and those states which are supporting Sudanese groups opposing Khartoum. This conflict is driven by the Sudanese wish to prevent a fragmentation of the country. The second cluster links the dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea with the power struggle in Somalia, which involves the secular government, anti-government clan militias and anti-Islamic warlords. Ethiopia's intervention in Somalia in December 2006 temporarily secured the transitional governments position, but this appears to have sown the seed for a future Islamic and clan-based insurgency, with regional implications.

Such states offer terrorists space to train and recruit dissatisfied followers. Given that such countries are “no-go areas” for government troops, they are also a safe haven to retreat to between operations, much as northern Pakistan is today for the Taliban operating in Afghanistan. Furthermore, such states also offer the possibility of financing terrorism through the exploitation of natural wealth.

### **Terrorism in Africa**

The decision by the Pentagon to create a separate Africa Command is the clearest indication that the US Military and other branches of the US Government view sub-Saharan Africa as a growing Islamic terrorist threat. This decision was driven in the main by the realisation that the fragmented nature of the US military intelligence gathering and regional security training efforts were failing to meet the growing threat posed by expanding Islamic networks in East and Southern Africa, the strong presence of radical Islamic groups in Somalia and the growing presence of Iranian-backed groups tied to Hezbollah, at times cooperating with al Qaeda, in West Africa. An essay in Sada al- Jihad , an on line magazine which supports the global jihad, specifically outlines al Qaeda’s interest in expanding into sub-Saharan Africa as the general weakness of central government and high levels of corruption make it easier to operate in Africa than in countries which have effective security, intelligence and military capacities.

Further complicating the strategic situation in Africa are the vast cultural and ethnic differences across geographic boundaries making the gathering and interpretation of intelligence difficult. For example, the Sunni-Salafist groups are seeking to build a network of jihadist groups to establish an Islamic caliphate. Saudi Arabia has been investing millions of dollars in the building of Salafist mosques, often staffed by imams who repudiate the more tolerant Sufi version of Islam historically practiced in much of Africa. This tolerant form of Islam is being swept aside by the militant form of Islam imported from the Middle East with reverberations that will be felt throughout the region.

In contrast to the Sunni-Salafist groups, which are supported by al Qaeda, the radical Shiite Groups are tied to Lebanon and Hezbollah through family and business networks. This grouping is supported by Iran in order to expand its economic reach into Africa. Each year an estimated \$200m is collected from the Lebanese Diaspora in Africa and used to finance Hezbollah.

### **Counter-Terrorism Strategies**

Strategies designed to decapitate networks through removing key figures in the movement are unlikely to force real changes, particularly in terms of Islamic extremism as the ideology of the movement has been disseminated and absorbed to the extent that there is little dependence on individuals to spearhead and focus it.

The fight against terrorism is not a job which can be undertaken by one single agency, it requires team work and input from a wide range of national and international organisations including law enforcement agencies, the military, the intelligence services, the financial sector, the diplomatic service and health organisations. The key to success is Organisation, Cooperation and Coordination.

A pre requisite for success is good governance. This is central to the effective administration of a state's resources, the rule of law, and the development of a strong civil society. Only if such a structure is in place can the war against terror, which is fuelled by dissatisfaction and ignorance, be won.

It is of interest to note that those countries which have good governance are successful in fighting terrorism. Whilst the threat of terrorism remains in Western Europe, it has been countered effectively by a multitude of interlocking measures and international cooperation. Numerous terrorist plots have been uncovered at an early stage thus preventing attacks on innocent citizens and deterring future attempts to create terrorist incidents. Intelligence is the most important tool in this battle, however being able to act in a timely and effective manner on intelligence gathered is equally important.

Diplomacy in the fight against terrorism should not be ignored. Whilst it might be too late for diplomacy in the case of fighting against al Qaeda, diplomatic approaches to other terrorist organisations, especially at an early stage of development can produce results. The IRA, after all, was not defeated solely of the streets of Belfast but in meeting rooms in Ireland and the UK.

Any attempt to fight terrorism in an effective manner must therefore take this into account. In the case of Africa this is probably the biggest problem as in too many instances terrorist organisations are based in regions or countries where good governance and functioning ministries are wishful thinking, in some cases it is the government itself which is a part of the problem.

### **Possible Solutions**

Possibly the concept of good governance is too opaque to be of practical use as many African countries haven't had a widely held and detailed definition of what constitutes good governance. Otto von Bismarck reportedly stated that "politics is the art of the possible". However performance must be judged against objective criteria and these are missing. Thus in a first step it would seem necessary to initiate the drawing up of such criteria with the aim of creating an environment in which necessary cooperation between various agencies and ministries at national and international level becomes possible. This is very much a "hearts and mind" exercise aimed at the public sector and not an easy one.

Parallel to this it should be possible to organise meetings and workshops at a national level, involving the armed forces and security organisations and the Ministry of the Interior with the aim of practising cooperation. Such meetings would undoubtedly result in small but significant successes, thus further encouraging future cooperation. Foreign experts could play a role here by mediating and providing expert advice.

It must be realised that such a radical departure from the manner in which counter terrorist activities are being conducted will be a painful and long drawn out process. It therefore needs to be mentored by a neutral agency such as IGAD rather than the AU in the form of the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism. It also needs to be backed by legitimate national interests with sufficient power to counteract turf wars.

The role model at a national level is the UK's COBRA (Cabinet Office Briefing Room) which is highly effective and able to take the necessary decisions to mitigate terrorist threats. It also cuts through red tape and has reduced time to action significantly, making COBRA probably

the most effective crisis management organisation active in counter terrorism today. It is backed by a well functioning domestic and international Intelligence Service, a respected Diplomatic Service, experienced Police and well trained Special Forces on stand by at all times. Emulating this might take time and a great deal of effort, but it would seem that the combination of good national governance and the ability to bring the power of the state to confront the terrorist threat is the only solution remaining.

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## **Countering Terrorism in Africa – Interview with Maxim Worcester**

**by Dr. Peter Roell**

*ISPSW: How do you see the terrorist threat in Africa?*

**MW:** The potential problems we are facing are compounded by the sheer size of the continent. If you just take sub Saharan Africa, which is larger than the US, Europe, India and China combined and include 34 of the poorest countries in the world then the problem is daunting.

Much of the subcontinent has a strong, traditional Islamic presence and the mosaic of societal structures is little understood. These factors combine to present a set of challenges for intelligence gathering and long-term policy setting. Add to this the number of failed and failing states in the region, many of which are experiencing civil war or serious unrest and the various agendas which the terrorist organisations are pursuing and you have a highly complex and volatile situation.

Osama bin Laden in a statement in July 2006 clearly singled out Somalia as an important jihadist front of the future and that is clearly the case today in 2008. In spite of the Ethiopian intervention the country is in the grip of Islamic fundamentalists and there is much reason for pessimism.

At the root of the problem is the continued failure of the intelligence community to understand the role of the clan, family and sub-clan structure that govern Somali life. The jihadists understand these structures and know how to mobilise, motivate and use these forces to their advantage, particularly in the urban area of Mogadishu. The Somali government thought it had defeated the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) in 2007 when the fighters melted away into the bush in a classic terrorist move only to reappear once the government let its guard down.

Today anarchy rules the streets of Mogadishu and up to 20.000 people are fleeing the city every month. Due to the violence aid agencies upon whom the refugees depend are leaving the country and of the promised 8000 African Union peacekeepers only 2400 are in place and are to all intent spectators.

Ethiopia, well aware that further turmoil in Somalia could spill over into their country is trying to fill the vacuum which is resulting in resentment amongst the Somali population. This opposition to the Ethiopian presence has in turn led to the creation of the Alliance for the Liberation of Somalia (ALS), an unlikely alliance of the ICUs youth and military wing, the al-Shabab, clan heads, Members of Parliament and religious leaders. Whilst al-Shahab and the ICU deny that they have any al Qaeda links diplomats do not share this view and the US Government has placed al-Shabab on its list of foreign terrorist organisations.

Somalia very clearly illustrates the problems we are facing in Africa in the fight against terrorist organisations. We are not dealing with one single terrorist organisation but with alliances of groupings which also include terrorist organisations, some of which are Islamic. Thus the biggest problem we are facing is understanding the dynamics of the situation at a regional, national and international level. Understanding the enemy will become increasingly vital.

***ISPSW: In February of 2008 Henry Okah, a Nigerian activist, was extradited to Nigeria by the Angolan Government. He stands accused of delivering arms to at least 5 organisations in Nigeria. Does this represent arms trafficking or the support of a terrorist organisation?***

**MW:** Well, firstly Okah`s extradition is probably illegal as no extradition treaty exists between the two countries. Besides the arms running charge he also stand accused of being a leading member of MEND, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta. This organisation seeks to ensure that the ethnic minorities in the region benefit from the oil revenues, however more serious is the potential secessionist movement behind this demand.

Like in Sudan, the Nigerian Government fears a fragmentation of the country more than anything else. In the case of Nigeria this is even more significant than in Sudan as all the oil wealth is in this disputed area and memories of Biafra are still very much in the mind of the Nigerian politicians. At all cost do they want to prevent this happening again.

MEND have clearly stated that Okah is for a peaceful solution to the problem of unequal distribution of the oil wealth and consider him a hero of the rebellion against the Nigerian government and the oil industry which they accuse of usurping their oil wealth, destroying their environment and impoverishing the local population.

The Nigerian government makes no distinction between armed or peaceful opposition to the status quo, however, as the case of Ken Saro-Wiwa illustrates. He led a non-violent campaign against the oil companies and was hanged after a flawed murder trial. MEND cannot be compared to terrorist organisations such as al Qaeda. The latter are indiscriminate in their fight to achieve their aims. MEND, whilst violent, focuses its attentions on those who in their view exploit the region. In the eyes of the Nigerian government Okah is a terrorist and a gun runner, in the region he is a Nigerian Robin Hood.

The example of Okah illustrates the problems we are up against in the fight against terrorism in Africa very well. He is very much in the mould of the colonial freedom fighters who ended up running the continent following the departure of the colonial powers in the 60s. Kenyatta

was labelled a terrorist as was Mugabe and let's not forget Nelson Mandela. Today's terrorist often turns out to be tomorrow's respected leader, no more so than in Africa. The Nigerian government would be well advised not to make him a martyr but to use his influence in order to negotiate a solution to the real problems the country faces.

***ISPSW: You advise Governments in Africa in their fight against terrorism. Why do they turn to you rather than say the British or German Government?***

***MW:*** Well, they don't turn to me; they turn to organisations and individuals who can give independent advice. African Governments also receive a great deal of support in their fight against terrorism from western Governments, including the UK and Germany. What independent consultants offer is advice which has no national baggage and which can therefore in certain cases provide more realistic advice than a Government can.

Sudan, for example, is still on the US watch list of countries which support terrorist organisations. Nevertheless, there is still cooperation between the two countries in the fight against international terrorism. It would however be very difficult for the US government, for domestic political reasons, to openly advise the Sudanese government. I also think that it would be quite difficult to provide objective advice in such a situation, I am also sure that any advice given would not be taken at face value as the underlying reason for the advice would be questioned by those in Sudan opposed to US Government policy.

A further reason is the wide spread perception that western societies do not respect Africa in general and Moslems specifically. Add to this the support for Israel by the West, the involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan and you will have some of the reasons why African Governments also turn to independent consultants for advice.

Western governments can and do provide support in training anti-terrorist units in the fight against terrorism and also provide relevant intelligence. At the same time, intelligence agencies in African countries also contribute to the flow of information. What is much trickier is to provide advice on necessary political reforms to prevent terrorism as this can be seen as an involvement in domestic political processes. Here consultants can provide a valuable service.

***ISPSW: Early warning of terrorist attacks is a challenge for all security services. You also make reference to the poor governance record in some African countries, inefficient ministries and lack of effective coordination between government agencies and ministries. How can security experts help resolve these problems?***

***MW:*** Knowing what will happen in advance is obviously part of the solution. In Western Europe the security services have a good track record in uncovering attacks before they take place, as we saw in Germany last year in the case of the suitcase bombers. This however only works if one has informers or the manpower available to conduct discrete observation over a long period of time. This is not a skill which one can acquire overnight, nor is it easy.

It also depends upon cast iron security within the agencies conducting observations. That is not the case in many African countries where the Government itself has no clear agenda in fighting terrorism. In some instances members of the Government are a part of the problem thus making covert observation difficult at best. This is why good governance is a prerequisite

for effective counter terrorist measures. There is no simple answer to this fundamental problem. If there were, we would have found it by now.

Good governance is central to the effective administration of a state's resources (that includes the servants of the state), the rule of law, the creation of a functioning private sector and the development of a strong civil society. Without this in place there can be no really successful anti terrorist programme.

The lack of a well functioning civil service, armed forces and security services also means that crisis mitigation following an attack is largely uncoordinated and ineffective. This can conceivably lead to the response to an attack being more damaging than the attack itself.

Security experts can only help in continuously pointing this out to African governments and making clear what the economic, social and security consequences are of poor governance. They can help in training crisis response teams and also in the learning of basic security procedures. One can provide officers with the necessary command and management skills and the tactical knowledge to be in a position to counter a terrorist threat at the operational and tactical level. Soldiers can be trained to respond to terrorist attacks in a measured manner. Security services can also learn how to gather and interpret intelligence and how to act on such information. The chain, however, is only as strong as its weakest link and currently in Africa that weak link is weak or divided governments caused by a lack of sound governance.

***ISPSW: COBRA in the UK is a model which you believe works well. Could such an organisation work for an African country?***

***MW:*** I see no reason why that should not be the case, in fact it makes a great deal of sense to use COBRA as a benchmark. However I would like to remind you of what I just said about the lack of governance in many African nations, without that in place a COBRA like organisation could not be really effective. COBRA is a decision making authority which receives intelligence, interprets the intelligence and issues instructions to the relevant authorities such as the Police, the Armed Forces, the Security Services etc. It does not micromanage the event but depends upon others to act as it instructs. It depends upon having a range of well trained and loyal people from various organisations who will carry out its decisions.

***ISPSW: You mention the role the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) plays in resolving some of the problems you addressed in your article. How can European experts support this effort?***

***MW:*** Firstly I believe that IGAD can and should play a strong role in bringing better governance to Africa. This to me is one of the most important challenges facing the continent today. As I have said, this lack of governance is the root cause of poverty, inequality, poor health care and many of the other problems which Africa faces today. Lack of governance is the main cause of terrorism and also a hindrance in the fight against terrorism. Africa must take ownership of this development and needs to set its own benchmarks which might very well differ from those set by European nations. European experts can play a supporting role in this process by passing on specific skills which can be used by African governments. In a free economy a corporation can either decide to make a product it might need or to buy it from another supplier or even competitor. Africa cannot buy good governance from Europe; it has



to make good governance by itself. European experts can advise on how best to do so, but no more than that.

*Remarks:*

*Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.*



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