The Dynamic Nature of Terrorism, Violent Extremism and Countering Violent Extremism in Eastern Africa

Author: *Francis N. Muongi*

Corresponding Author*: Francis N. Muongi*

Abstract

The dynamic nature of terrorism in Eastern Africa is a thorn in the flesh of its inhabitants. Violent extremism is on the rise and the respective governments are struggling to contain the menace. Efforts to counter terrorism have been undertaken and are still underway albeit with many setbacks. The region is still prone to terrorist attacks. The Al Shabaab is the dominant terrorist group in the region. The group has capitalized on the vulnerabilities in the region such as porous borders, corruption and terrorist sympathizers. The word Al Shabaab is an Arabic word, which means "the Youth". These terrorists have caused fear and psychological torture to the people of Eastern Africa by their killings and gross human rights violations. The terrorists do not have any regard to Natural Law that dictates that it is immoral to kill. Consequently, the respective governments in Eastern Africa have waged war against the terrorists. International law gives States the right to defend themselves against external aggression. Indeed, nations in Eastern Africa, rightfully, defend themselves in order to safeguard national and regional stability, and thus Maintain peace, justice and order.

Introduction

This article interrogates the dynamic nature of terrorism, violent extremism and efforts to counter violent extremism Eastern Africa. The countries involved include Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda and South Sudan. The region is fraught with challenges that are posed by terrorism. These countries are sovereign states that are governed by the rule of law and have a duty to protect their citizens from terrorism.

The word terror has negative undertones and so is with terrorism. Terrorists are the people involved in terrorism. Nonetheless, they hardly see themselves as terrorists but as liberators, (self-proclaimed) armies, freedom fighters or such like 'noble' definitions. According to them, they are victims reacting against those they don't agree with be they governments or communities. The word terrorism is derived from the Latin word terrere, which forms the root of the English word terrorism. Terrorism thus means "to frighten". Terrorism is designed to cause far-reaching psychological effects to the targets and also to the general population. It is also important to note that terrorism is perpetrated by non-state actors rather than by a state (Moghadam, 2006: 3-4). However, this assertion is arguable in that some states commit terrorist acts, and thus the word terrorism should be redefined.

The Tanzanian Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) sections 3, 4 (2) and 4(3) highlights some definitions of terrorism. Section 3 of the PTA defines a "terrorist act" as "an omission". Section 4 of the PTA highlights that "a person commits a terrorist act if, with terrorist intention, does an act or omission" that "may seriously damage a country or an international organization" through destabilization and intimidation of the constitutional order (Hubschle, 2007). Therefore, terrorism as an act or omission should be countered in order to avoid damages to a country or an international organization.

The dynamic nature of terrorism

The world is changing and so is the nature of terrorism. Technological advancements have resulted to more sophisticated and discreet ways of planning and executing violent extremism. The nature of violent extremism is now well orchestrated. The terrorists have identified and capitalized on the vulnerabilities facing the Eastern African countries and thus manage to strike with relative ease. It

should be noted that terrorism is not a 'weak weapon' of the 'weak' but their best possible choice. Terrorism has a dynamic nature in that it does not require massive financial capabilities or training and can be done with negligible resources. A single terrorist is therefore capable of inflicting numerous deaths and damages. Violent extremists are ready and willing to wear suicide vests, blow themselves up and cause deaths of many people and lead to massive destruction of property (Bell, 1978: 98).

Al Shabaab has cast a dark shadow over the relative peace that has prevailed in Eastern Africa. This group of terrorists hails from Somalia, which is categorized as a fragile state. The leadership of the group drew from across clans in Somalia, which had a common vision of uniting Somali-inhabited areas of Eastern Africa under an Islamist caliphate (Ploch, 2010: 6). Along the Somali coast, the militant Islamist movement known as Al Ittihad Al Islamiya (AIAI) which is the Arabic name for "the Islamic Union" managed to penetrate into that region with a goal of establishing a pan-Somali Salafist emirate (Dagne, 2005). In addition, Marchal (2009) posits that Al Shabaab was established by the Al Qaeda former commanders who had ties with AIAI group of terrorists. Al Qaeda is a terrorist group that launched its operations and facilitated training of new recruits in Sudan. This was after they attacked the country and caused deaths and injuries to the people. Variably, the Muslim Brotherhood, Hezbollah, Hamas, and some Palestinian terrorist groups have managed to launch attacks in the region (Balance, 2006).

Our valiant and brave soldiers have done their best to secure the region. Nonetheless, Al Shabaab has employed intimidation and terror tactics that have instilled fear among the populace (Human Rights Watch, 2010). The terrorist groups are involved not only in guerilla-style attacks but also do engage in conventional military tactics. They have used these tactics to attack the Transitional Federal Government (TGF) of Somalia and also the African Union (AU) forces. The Al Shabaab group use sophisticated weaponry in their attacks including grenades, mortars and automatic weapons. They also use guided surface-to-air missiles known as man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS). At one time in 2007, they used a type of missile known as SA-18 to shoot down a cargo plane in Mogadishu (United Nations Security Council, 2007).

Approaches to counter violent extremism in East African countries An African scholar namely Dagne (2004) indicates that there exist internal indicators that make Africa to be a major player in the war against terror. He noted that abject poverty

and rampant corruption in many parts of Africa provide avenues for terrorism to thrive. Besides, factors such as political, ethnic and religious tensions are seen as catalysts that enhance terrorist activities. It is for this reason that the respective governments in Eastern Africa need to adopt a holistic approach to counter violent extremism. The governments, for example, can address the scourge of corruption, which in turn would result in the creation of jobs and thus mitigate unemployment. Creation of job opportunities would ensure that the youth, who are susceptible to joining the terrorist groups due to abject poverty, are gainfully employed.

Kenya has witnessed several terrorist attacks including, for example, the Al-Shabaab terrorist attacks on innocent people in Lamu County who, among them, included the Kenyan Defence Forces (KDF). In his address to the nation on countering terrorism, the President of Kenya, Uhuru Kenyatta, declared a major security operation to wipe out Al-Shabaab. He observed that "no one has a right to take other people's lives or cause fear. When we get the terrorists, we will not jail but bury them". He further called on the residents of Lamu County to cooperate with the security officers and give information that would aid in the fight against terrorism (Daily Nation, July 18, 2017). This counter terrorism message was aimed at condemning and finding a solution to the menace. In the same county of Lamu, eight people, among them four police-men and four pupils, died on (?) when a police vehicle hit an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) that had been planted by the terrorists in Mangai. Additionally, some pupils from Arid Zone Primary School were reported to be missing after an Al-Shabaab attack (Daily Nation, June 28, 2017). Therefore, the order by the President to kill the terrorists was meant to deter and prevent more attacks in the county/region.

To ensure regional stability, the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) moved into Southern Somalia on 16th October 2011. Thereafter, the African Union (AU) request for the KDF to be integrated into the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) was granted. By (?) KDF accounted for 26% of the AMISOM forces. The forces managed to drive out Al Shabaab out of Kismayu. In retaliation for deployment of the KDF in Southern Somalia, the Al Shabaab attacked the Westgate Mall in Nairobi in 2013. After the capture of Kismayo by the AMISOM, the Al Shabaab financial capabilities were significantly reduced which helped to counter their terrorist activities (Unuoha, 2013).

In Uganda, measures have been put in place to counter terrorism. In 2002, Uganda enacted an anti-terrorism legislation that provides the legal basis for prosecuting

suspected terrorists (Ploch, 2010: 59). Part III of the anti-terrorism legislation states that "Any person who engages in or carries out any act of terrorism commits an offence and shall, on conviction: a) be sentenced to death if the offence directly results in the death of any person; b) in any other case, be liable to suffer death (The Anti-Terrorism Act, 2002). Uganda has contributed the majority of the African Union (AU) peacekeepers in Somalia. In this way, the country has helped tackle the problem of terrorism in the region. In addition, through the deployment of soldiers, Uganda has made efforts to counter the terrorist activities posed by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebel group in East Africa as well as in Central Africa (USA Department of State, 2009).

This notwithstanding, Uganda experienced a bombing attack in 2010. In response, the government charged more than 30 people who were connected with the attacks. These included 14 Ugandans, 10 Kenyans, six Somalis, one Rwandan and a Pakistani (Simon, 2010). The government of Uganda stepped up its efforts in countering any such recurrence of bomb attacks by equipping its military and police force with skills and weapons. The Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Johnnie Carson, argued that the Al Shabaab's terrorism beyond Somalia indicated that the threat had risen. He pointed out that the Kampala bombings were a "wake up call" for the alertness of the international community in its fight against terror (Carson, 2010).

On 7 August 1998, the United States of America (USA) Embassy in Kenya was bombed by terrorists who detonated a large bomb that killed at least 213 people and injured thousands more. Kenyan hospitals admitted an estimated 5,000 wounded people (Driscoll, 2001). On the same day, another bomb blast occurred in the USA embassy in Tanzania that killed 11 people and injured 85 (Keller, 2005). Following these two terrorist attacks, key suspects who included Osama Bin Laden's personal secretary, Wadih el Hage, and a Comorian citizen, Fazul Abdullah Mohammed who had trained with Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, were apprehended. The two suspects and their four accomplices were sentenced to life in USA prisons (Ploch, 2010: 5).

On the international arena and precisely after the 2001 terror attack on the USA, President Bush administration declared a "war on terror". This initiative had a direct implication to the Muslims who lived in East Africa. They began to experience human rights violations and became subject to intrusive legislation. Such legislation was the 2002 Tanzania's Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) (Mbogo, 2002). In addition, in 2005, the government of Tanzania stepped up its efforts in countering terrorism. This led to the establishment of a National Counter-terrorism Centre that

was mandated   to share and analyse data among agencies and coordinate response when terrorists attack. With the financial assistance from the USA, courses were offered in criminal investigation, crisis response, small arms trafficking, among other related courses (Ploch, 2010: 57).

Conclusion

The deadly implications of the dynamic nature of terrorism have been felt near and far. The Eastern African countries have been left to grapple with a regional security that in turn affects the global security. Respective governments in the region have made counter terrorism efforts but more needs to be done in order to seal loopholes in the security architecture. These governments have the legitimate authority to implement legislations made to counter terrorism. The AMISOM forces are doing their best to fulfil their mandate and thus should be supported in their peacekeeping efforts. Corruption should be comprehensively addressed if the region is to secure its borders and stem terrorism. Unfortunately, the region continues to contend with the reality of Al Shabaab attacks, a factor that should motivate every citizen to keep vigil and share information on any suspected terrorist activities with the relevant security organs of state in order to secure the region.

Recommendations

It is imperative for the Eastern Africa governments to work with all stakeholders such as the civil society and the local people in order to share information that would pre-empt and prevent terrorist attacks. Corrupt government officials, regardless of their rank, should face disciplinary actions and made to return all stolen money that can be used to, for example, to create jobs and thus alleviate abject poverty in general, and specifically, engage poor citizens, particularly the idle youth who are easily enticed to join the terrorist groups for economic gains.

It is incumbent upon the governments in Eastern Africa to strengthen security systems within and without their borders. Due to the fact that many borders are porous, the security personnel should always be vigilant and resist potential compromise by terror groups. In addition, governments in the region should refrain from politicizing or discrediting the work done by AMISOM and should fully support its operations in Somalia. In conclusion, Eastern African countries should

work together, share intelligence and support one another and fight, as a unified entity, to counter terrorist groups and their terror activities.

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About Author;

Francis Ngugi Muongi was born in Kikuyu, Kiambu County in 1987. He received the Bachelor of Arts (B.A) degree in Philosophy in 2014 from Consolata Institute of Philosophy, Nairobi which is affiliated to the Pontifical Urbaniana University in Rome. He later received the Master of Arts (M.A) degree in Peace Studies and International Relations in 2017 from Hekima Institute of Peace Studies and International Relations, Nairobi which is affiliated to the Catholic University of Eastern Africa. His Masters' Thesis topic was on "Reclaiming justice for Kenya's post-election violence victims". His current research interests include terrorism and counter-terrorism strategies, conflict studies, peace support operations, and security research among other related topics. He has worked as a Brother with the Catholic Church for six years in the promotion of human rights, peace and justice in the Eastern and Central African region. He also holds a Certificate of Records and Information Management in January 2018, a Certificate of Basic First Aid Course in February 2014. He has done a French course at Alliance Francaise, Nairobi. He is computer literate with excellent IT skills and has proven SPSS research skills (Statistical Package for Social Sciences).