FOUNDATION OF TERRORISM IN KENYA

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The attack on Garissa University in 2015 by the Somali Islamist militant group, Al Shabaab, consolidated Kenya's position as East Africa's most critical theatre in the Global War On Terror[1]. This incident occurred at the tail-end of a series of terrorist attacks mounted by Al Shabaab against Kenya[2]. In this article, the author traces the roots of terrorism in Kenya back to her alignment on the international stage. Central to this thesis is the role of the Cold War strategy of the West in constructing Kenya's status as a target of Jihadist groups. In its confrontation with the Soviet Union, the US assembled an anti-communist alliance riddled with ideological contradictions. America not only backed states and Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) committed to the advancement of Western liberal democratic values but also those committed to a faith-based (mainly Islamist) approach to political and socio-economic organization.

When the Berlin Wall fell, the incompatibility between the secular and faith-based strands in this anti-communist alliance erupted into a global confrontation. While relations between the US and her erstwhile Islamist allies were deteriorating, US-Kenya ties remained cordial. Thus, when Africa evolved into a new theatre for this post-Cold War confrontation, Kenya was an ideal target for Jihadist groups not only because of her enduring relations with the West but also her strategic position in East Africa.

ISLE OF STABILITY IN A SEA OF INSTABILITY

A former British colony, Kenya has always been a hub of peace surrounded by politically unstable countries.

Her neighbour to the West, Uganda, has only recently started experiencing peace throughout the country. Prior to 1986, Uganda was plagued by military coups and an insurgency. Whereas the advent of the National Resistance Movement regime in 1986 restored stability to most parts of the country, Northern Uganda evolved into a theatre of successive rebellions, the most recent being the Lord's Resistance Army insurgency[3].

Sudan, Kenya's neighbour to the North West has always been politically unstable. Until recently, this country was gripped by a civil war revolving around issues of identity and self determination[4]. To the North East, Kenya shares a border with Somalia, a Horn of Africa country with a long history of political instability[5]. Until Kenya picked up its reputation as a hotbed for terrorism, its credentials as a haven for peace were only rivalled by Tanzania, her neighbour to the South. Save for the war with Uganda in 1979, Tanzania has experienced uninterrupted peace in the post-colonial era[6].

The fact that Kenya escaped the scourge of armed conflict would seem to suggest that it had a properly functioning democratic framework that mitigated recourse to political violence. Far from it. Before the era of multiparty politics, Kenya was plagued by sharp political contradictions, on one occasion even boiling over into an attempted military coup in 1982[7]. The fact that these political contestations did not spill over into insurgency implies that there were contrasts in insurrectional culture between Kenya and her neighbours.

Apart from the coup attempt, most of Kenya's politically motivated violence manifested in the form of riots and inter-communal clashes[8]. Thus, what made Kenya distinct during this era were her lower levels of insurrectional development compared with her neighbours. This factor was augmented by Kenya's strategic position and the external interest the country attracted in ensuring that it remained stable.

STRATEGIC POSITION

Historically, Kenya has always occupied a position of strategic significance. Situated along the East African coast, this country was at the centre of a mercantile competition for global power and influence between European and Arab states. Before the construction of the Suez Canal, the only sea route to the East (for the countries of the Western hemisphere) was around the continent of Africa, with Kenya presenting as an ideal 'stop-over'. Between the 15th and 17th century, these strategic attributes attracted Portugal and Oman into a protracted battle for the control of Mombasa, a Kenyan coastal area with the geographical infrastructure for becoming a harbour[9].

Significantly, this mercantile war also laid the foundation for sectarian conflict in Kenya. While consolidating their presence in East Africa, the Omani Arabs intermarried with the indigenous people and introduced Islam. This development paved the way for the emergence of a Muslim minority mainly populating the coastal areas and North Eastern Kenya against the backdrop of a Christian

majority inhabiting much of the hinterland[10]. Whereas this development by itself was not sufficient to constitute Kenya into a hotbed for conflict, it potentially presented the basis for social tensions in the country.

Kenya has also enjoyed a position of economic dominance in East Africa. With Mombasa port, Kenya is in a position to link the land and sea components of her external trade. Access to the sea also offers her an enviable advantage over her landlocked neighbours. Mombasa not only serves Kenya but also Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi[11].

This strategic position generates revenue for Kenya as well as enhancing leverage over her neighbours. Uganda and Rwanda have to maintain cordial relations with Kenya lest she cut off their external trade. It should be noted, however, that Uganda also maintains some leverage over Kenya. With the Owen Falls dam hydro-electric power plant, Uganda not only generates power for her own consumption but also supplies Kenya and Rwanda[12]. In the event economic warfare evolved as a strategy in bilateral relations, Uganda would have the option of cutting off power supply as a response to Kenya closing the Mombasa trade route.

If these countries chose to circumvent Kenya, then they would have to conduct their external trade through Tanzania. Whereas Tanzania also has a fully fledged port at Dar-es-salaam, the Tanzania trade route is longer than the Kenyan one[13]. This factor would translate into increased costs of conducting external trade for Uganda.

The above strategic position allowed Kenya to evolve into a centre for diplomacy in the region. When Uganda was gripped by civil war in the 1980s, the peace talks that attempted to end this conflict were mediated by President Daniel arap Moi of Kenya[14]. More recently, in 1999, the agreement that ended the state of poor relations between Uganda and Sudan was concluded in Nairobi, the Kenyan capital[15].

What bolstered Kenya's position further was her alignment in the international system during the Cold War. Kenya was a consistent ally of the Western bloc in a region of countries shifting between the two global ideological camps. The roots of Kenya's alignment partly lie in her colonial history. Kenya was a British colony. Given the enduring Trans-Atlantic alliance between the US and Britain, this historical connection predisposed her to ally with the capitalist bloc. It is important to note, however, that not all British colonies went on to ally with the West. Tanzania, for example, belonged to the Non Aligned Movement with strong communist connections[16].

Kenya was absorbed into the capitalist bloc due to the sheer extent of her colonial-era relations with Britain and Israel - two key allies of the US. Unlike Tanzania, Kenya had a British settler community which enhanced Britain's interest in ensuring that this country remained stable[17]. Before the creation of Israel, the Zionist Movement considered the option of constituting Kenya into a homeland for Jews. Although this plan was subsequently rejected, scores of Jews immigrated to Kenya and became citizens of this country[18].

With some Kenyans tracing their ancestry back to Britain and Israel, these two countries felt the obligation not only to protect their diasporas but also ensure that Kenya aligned with them in the international system. To that effect, Britain has had long-standing military cooperation with Kenya while Israel's spy agency, Mossad, maintained a foothold in this country[19]. With Britain and Israel consolidating cordial relations with Kenya, it was just a matter of time before America (the leader of the capitalist bloc) enlisted this country as one of its strategic allies in the region. Since the Cold War era, USA has maintained a naval presence off the Kenyan coastline[20].

AMERICA'S COLD WAR STRATEGY

During the Cold War, the capitalist and communist blocs used multiple strategies to outwit each other on the global stage:

Among others, they sponsored proxy wars in the Developing World[21]. The manner in which the capitalist bloc fought its wars would have a profound impact on the shape of global conflict in the post-Cold War era. In its confrontation with the Soviet Union, the US extended support not only to states and NSAGs committed to the advancement of Western liberal democratic values but also those that favoured a faith-based (mainly Islamist) approach to political and socio-economic organization. For example, America backed the Contras who opposed communism partly because of state intrusion in agrarian matters in Nicaragua as well as the Mujahideen of Afghanistan who opposed this ideology because it was incompatible with Islamic law[22].

The above contradiction was not problematic as long as the communist threat still existed. However, with underlying ideological differences in the capitalist camp, it would have been difficult to rule out a new global conflict in the post-Cold War era. This proposition would have been historically supported by the collapse of the anti-Nazi alliance and the onset of the Cold War. During the Second World War, communist and capitalist countries in Europe were united in the fight against Germany. Yet, after the fall of the Third Reich, ideological differences led to the disintegration of the anti-Nazi alliance and the onset of the Cold War[23].

The support the US extended to the Afghan Mujahideen was significant in shaping global conflict in the post-Cold War era. America provided funds and weapons to the Mujahideen through Pakistan, a key ally of the capitalist bloc. The Inter Services Intelligence, Pakistan's intelligence organization ensured that most of this aid went to radical factions of the Mujahideen, mainly that headed by the Afghan war lord, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. Alongside the American initiative was an inflow of support from some Arab countries opposed to communism. Saudi Arabia, a strategic ally of the West was not only a source of funding but also individuals and

groups volunteering to participate in the Mujahideen campaign. Notably, Osama bin Laden, a wealthy Saudi national not only made financial contributions but also recruited foreign fighters in support of the Mujahideen[24].

The Mujahideen insurgency in Afghanistan was significant in raising the profile of political Islam in the world. Given that Muslims from across the world had fought in Afghanistan, the outcome of this war emboldened them to participate in other Islamist insurgencies. Indeed, when conflict in Kosovo in the former Yugoslavia broke out, veterans of the Afghan war travelled to the Balkans to fight alongside the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA); in Algeria, Mujahideen veterans were key leaders of the insurgent groups that emerged to contest the government's nullification of the 1992 elections; and in Somalia, Aden Harsh Ayro, the pioneering commander of Al Shabaab, was also suspected to have had a stint in Afghanistan[25].

In the post-Cold War era, conflict between the secular and faith-based strands of the anti-communist alliance could only have been averted if the two sides did not stand in each other's way on the global stage. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union removed a common enemy that had united them. What remained was a camp riddled with ideological contradictions. Whereas the West espoused liberal democratic principles, the radical Islamist groups were committed to the implementation of Sharia law.

Also, while purporting to promote its coveted principles of good governance, in predominantly Muslim countries, the West did not practice what it preached. Some of the West's allies subverted the course of democracy without strong Western reproach. Democracy was dreaded because it paved way for the emergence of Islamist organizations opposed to the West[26].

From the perspective of radical Islamist groups, therefore, there was every need to violently confront the West on a global scale. It was not only 'desecrating' the symbols at the heart of their ideology but also stifling democracy in Muslim countries.

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1991 presented a flash point around which relations between the West and its former Islamist allies would deteriorate. With Saudi Arabia's territorial sovereignty threatened by Iraqi forces in Kuwait, the US offered its forces to protect the kingdom[27]. But this move was bound to ruffle feathers in some quarters. The Saudi kingdom is host to some of Islam's holiest shrines. Annually, Muslim pilgrims from across the world flock to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina in fulfillment of a cardinal obligation in the Islamic faith. In a way, the presence of troops from a non-predominantly Islamic state would be sacrilegious - at least from the perspective of radical Islamist groups.

As an alternative to the American assistance, Osama proposed that Saudi Arabia be protected by ex-Mujahideen. This arrangement would ensure that the kingdom was not 'desecrated' by infidels or 'non-believers'. His proposal was rejected sparking tensions between him and the Saudi government[28]. This development confirmed (to radical Islamist groups) deep-seated suspicions that most governments in Muslim countries were not promoting Islamic ideals.

On running into conflict with the Saudi monarchy, Osama relocated to Sudan[29]. This development was significant in shaping the confrontation between the West and radical Islamist groups. Although by this time, there were some Islamist rebellions in Africa, these conflicts were localized. For example, the Islamic Salvation Army and Armed Islamic Group insurgencies were aimed at causing regime change in Algeria[30]. However, with Osama in Sudan, Africa was host to a high profile Islamist figure committed to a global confrontation with the West.

Osama's relocation to Africa was underpinned by a number of considerations: First, in Sudan, he found a state willing to accommodate his political agenda. At the time of his relocation, the Khartoum government was headed by General Omar el Bashir. In 1990,

Bashir had overthrown the moderate government of Prime Minister Saddiq el Madhi with the critical support of Dr Hassan al Turabi, the Speaker of the Sudanese parliament and member of the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood. In masterminding that coup, Turabi sought to constitute Sudan into an Islamic theocratic state and use it as a springboard to spread Islamist influence beyond the country's borders[31].

As part of its policy, the Bashir regime escalated the confrontation between the Government of Sudan (GoS) which was dominated by Arab Muslims from the North and rebels of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) who were predominantly Black Christians and Animists from the South[32]. In this direction, the GoS sponsored splinter factions of SPLA to fight SPLA in Southern Sudan[33]. In the early 1990s, the Sudanese conflict assumed a regional dimension. The GoS offered the Ugandan rebel group, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) a sanctuary in Southern Sudan in retaliation for Uganda's alleged support for SPLA. The GoS also supported the Allied Democratic Front (ADF) and the West Nile Bank Front (WNBF), Ugandan rebel groups based in Western and North Western Uganda respectively[34]. Although ADF and WNBF were headed by Muslims, they were spurred by different objectives. Whereas ADF aimed to install an Islamist government, WNBF was motivated by the desire to put elements of the former regime of Idi Amin back into power[35].

What was strange about the anti-SPLA alliance was the inclusion of LRA[36]. The group was headed by Joseph Kony, a Christian and its stated objective was to establish a Christian theocracy, which, theoretically run into conflict with the Islamist agenda of the Bashir regime[37]. This ideological contradiction may have been ignored given that LRA was a thorn in the flesh of the Ugandan government[38]. Besides, it had the capability to fight SPLA[39].

Sudan's confrontation with SPLA and its support for Ugandan rebel groups was also rooted in a wider ideological struggle. The rise

of the Bashir regime alarmed the US into seeking to contain the spread of radical Islam beyond the borders of Sudan. To that effect, America backed SPLA through Uganda[40]. The conflict in Southern Sudan, therefore, was not only the GoS' fight against an insurgent group but it was also a wider Jihad against the US.

Osama's relocation to Sudan not only laid Al Qaeda's terrorist infrastructure in East Africa, it also occurred at a time the US was engaged in the Horn of Africa[41]. Following the collapse of the Siad Barre regime and with it, the upsurge in factional fighting in Somalia, the US spearheaded a United Nations mandated mission to create corridors for providing humanitarian assistance to internally displaced people in this country[42]. The failure by US forces to harmonize their mission with some of the Somali warlords led to an incident where fighters of the warlord Muhammed Farah Aideed shot down an American military helicopter, killing 18 soldiers in the Somali capital. In conducting this attack, Aideed's group received technical assistance from Al Qaeda[43].

It could then be deduced that Al Qaeda's relocation to Sudan and America's intervention in Somalia brought these former anti-communist allies within geographical reach of each other. In turn, East Africa and the Horn of Africa evolved into prospective battlegrounds for settling the ideological contradictions of the anti-communist alliance. Given its proximity to Sudan and Somalia and its enduring relations with the US and Israel, Kenya was susceptible to being sucked into this evolving post-Cold War global confrontation.

TERRORISM IN KENYA

From the above discussion, it is plausible to argue that if Kenya ever got embroiled in tensions and conflict with external connections during the Cold War, they would most likely spring from her alignment in the international system. Indeed, the first terrorist attack in the country fits in with this notion.

In 1980, an Arab group claimed responsibility for the bombing of Norfolk Hotel in Nairobi[44]. This act of terrorism was in retaliation for Kenya's role in Operation Thunderbolt. This Israeli counter-terrorism operation rescued passengers who had been taken hostage by operatives of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command and Baider Meinhoff, Palestinian and German terrorist groups respectively. Kenya was alleged to have acted as a re-fueling ground for the Israeli planes before they proceeded to Uganda for the rescue operation[45].

By siding with Israel, Kenya was absorbed into the wider Jewish-Arab conflict. In future, Kenya would not only become a potential target of Palestinian armed groups but also Arab and Muslim groups sympathetic to the Palestinian cause.

It is important to note, however, that not all tensions involving Kenya in this era related to Cold War alignments. In the 1960s, Kenya-Somalia relations deteriorated due to the Shifta War (The term Shifta means bandits). This conflict was instigated by Somalia which had ambitions of incorporating the Somali-inhabited parts of North Eastern Kenya into Somalia[46]. The scars of this war would later feed into the motivation behind Al Shabaab's attacks on Kenya.

By the time Al Qaeda selected Kenya as a target of the 1998 embassy bombings, this country had the 'right' credentials as an 'enemy' of radical Islamist outfits: First, it enjoyed cordial relations with Israel which Islamist groups consider to be the principle stumbling block to Palestinian statehood[47]. Second, Kenya had close ties with the US, a country which was increasingly engaged in a global confrontation with radical Islamist groups. Bordering Sudan and Somalia, Kenya was also vulnerable to infiltration by operatives from two countries hosting Al Qaeda's terrorist infrastructure in East Africa and the Horn of Africa respectively.

It was against this backdrop that Al Qaeda simultaneously attacked the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania[48]. Whereas the foregoing discussion accounts for the attacks on Kenya, it is perplexing that Tanzania was also targeted. For much of the Cold War era, this country maintained a socialist ideological inclination which constituted it into an unlikely target of groups seeking to attack Western interests. The fact that Tanzania has not been attacked since 1998 implies that the Dar-es-salaam embassy bombing was a one-off operation targeting the pillars of American presence in the country.

On the other hand, the sustained attacks that Kenya has incurred strengthens the connection between the depth of this country's relations with the US and Israel and its status as a target of radical Islamist groups. This explains why hot-on-the heels of the embassy attacks, Al Qaeda masterminded the bombing of the Israeli owned Paradise Hotel and the attempted downing of an Arkia Airlines chartered plane in the Kenyan coastal city of Mombasa[49]. The 1998 and 2002 attacks were a watershed in the evolution of terrorism in Kenya. The manner in which Kenya reacted to these developments linked her internal political contradictions to contradictions driving Jihadist campaigns in the region.

With Somalia evolving into a failed state and a sanctuary hosting radical Islamist groups some of whose operatives were launching attacks inside Kenya, in 2011, the Kenyan government sent 4,000 troops to Somalia to fight Al Shabaab. Dubbed Operation *Linda Nchi* (Defend the Nation), this expedition was not only aimed at shoring up the Somali government but it was also intended to deal with an emerging threat to Kenya's security[50]. *Linda Nchi* led to Al Shabaab losing control of the strategic port of Kismayu which was acting as an important source of revenue for the group[51].

Kenya's intervention in Somalia enhanced the militant group's motivation to attack the East African country[52]. To this effect, Al Shabaab conducted the Westgate Mall siege in 2013 in order to punish Kenya for undermining the

group's ambition of seizing state power in Somalia.

It has already been mentioned that the Shifta War left the Somali-inhabited North Eastern part of Kenya alienated. Given that this area is predominantly Muslim and borders Somalia, it is susceptible to infiltration by Al Shabaab which is at liberty to exploit the population's ethnicity and religious-based grievances for its own ends. Tied in with this contradiction is the fact that the coastal region has been seeking to break away from Kenya citing inequitable sharing of the area's wealth with the central government and the perceived marginalization of the Muslim minority in the country[53].

The Kenyan government has delegitimized the region's secessionist demands by linking some of its leaders to the Al Shabaab insurgency in Somalia. In turn, this political contradiction has evolved into a sectarian conflict of sorts. Predominantly Muslim areas of Kenya stretching from Mombasa to the North East have adopted a siege mentality, perceiving themselves as victims of a repressive state controlled by Christians. This perspective has been strengthened by unresolved killings targeting Muslim clerics in Mombasa. Alleged to be supporters of Al Shabaab, Aboud Rogo Muhammad, Ibrahim 'Rogo' Omar and Abubaker Shariff Ahmed were successively gunned down in mysterious circumstances in 2012,

2013 and 2014 respectively. These deaths sparked riots by Muslims in Mombasa who saw these incidents as religiously motivated and the handiwork of the Kenyan government[54].

In 2014, the ethnic and religious polarization in this volatile region was sharpened by a spate of coordinated attacks on Mpeketoni, a small Kenyan coastal town. These attacks were distinct in the way Christians and non-indigenous inhabitants of Mpeketoni were specifically targeted. Although Al Shabaab claimed responsibility for these attacks, the Kenyan government attributed them to domestic politics[55]. If the latter explanation is true, then a neat connection had emerged between internal and external political contradictions to a point where a foreign NSAG exploited the political situation in Kenya in order to successfully conduct attacks in this country.

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In this article, the author undertook to examine the relationship between America's Cold War strategy and the evolution of terrorism in Kenya. It is asserted that the ideological contradictions in the anti-communist alliance assembled by the US paved way for a global confrontation between the West and radical Islamist groups. Political instability in East Africa and the Horn of Africa made these regions attractive for hosting an

extension of the above post-Cold War clash. Kenya was originally an ideal pawn in the evolving game given its enduring relations with the West and its strategic location as a geographical link between East Africa and the Horn of Africa.

When Al Qaeda started targeting Western interests in Kenya, the East African country reacted by taking a proactive part in pursuing the group and its affiliates in the region. This development elevated Kenya to the status of a primary target of radical Islamist organizations in East Africa. Significantly, this transition has been augmented by the uneasy relationship between the country's central government and the coastal region which has allegedly evolved into a hub for supporting radical Islamist activity in the region.

With the above shifts in Kenya's status, the state can ill afford to only keep an eye on the pillars of Western presence in the country. It now has to secure its entire population and infra-structure. Even if the country were to withdraw its forces from Somalia and severe its relations with the West, the secessionist tendencies of Mombasa and the grievances of the Muslim population would still fuel terrorism in the country. Terrorism in Kenya is now a product of an inextricable link between internal and external political contradictions.

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