

# Counterterrorism Strategies: A Comparative Analysis of Ethiopia and Kenya

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## Introduction

The contemporary international system, and particularly the Horn of African sub-region, is faced with enormous challenges of maintaining international peace and security. International and domestic terrorism pose one of the major security challenges that confront many countries. This has forced many countries to institute counterterrorism strategies to deal with terrorism and terrorists. This paper critically assesses the counterterrorism strategies and mechanisms instituted by Ethiopia and Kenya to deal with the threat of terrorism. The role of the United States (US) is also analyzed.

Counterterrorism strategies in Ethiopia and Kenya are driven by the United States (US). The two countries have had strong diplomatic and military cordial relations since the Cold War era. The US has supported the two countries militarily and economically. US foreign policy makers also seem to view the two countries as occupying a strategic geo-location in the Horn of Africa and have kept in a friendly engagement.

## Theoretical Argument and Hypothesis

The period preceding 9/11 revealed that states prefer to pursue counter-terrorism policies without recourse to international regimes. At that time, state counter-terrorism policies were characterized by their national particularity, and focused on domestic terrorists. The development of counter-terrorism policies reflected domestic political processes and different national approaches, and could be explained by different self-conceptions and institutional practices. Despite the end of the Cold War, there remained significant constraints upon multilateral cooperation against terrorism. Where cooperation occurred, states preferred small groupings of like-minded states, often operating at the regional level, through ad hoc mechanisms, or reacting to events. Of course, states had cooperated multilaterally in some ways and had, for example, negotiated 12 international conventions on terrorism-related offences in UN platforms.<sup>1</sup>

The Horn of Africa is filled with weak, corrupt, and warring states including one failed state, Somalia, which is seen as fertile ground for Islamists fundamentalists and terrorists. Yet, the international community's response to regional terrorist threats was limited and unsustainable. Following the 9/11 attacks against the United States, the Horn of Africa once again came under intense scrutiny by counter-terrorism policy makers specialists and remains a strategic focal point in the American war on terrorism.<sup>2</sup>

The failure by states to reach a consensus on a definition of terrorism has hindered development of universally acceptable counterterrorism strategies. This study will define terrorism as conceptualized by Stapley (2005). Stapley defined terrorism as the use or threatened use of violence on noncombatant populations to create and exploit fear in a larger population for political reasons.<sup>3</sup>

Like definition of terrorism no consensus has been arrived at in defining counterterrorism. This paper will conceptualize counterterrorism borrowing from Norton (2006:37), who observes that counter-terrorism may be defined broadly as "those state actions that aim to suppress terrorist violence, utilizing any or all tools of statecraft including the use of military force, criminal law measures, intelligence operations, regulatory controls, and diplomacy." Thus, It can be seen as a preventive and responsive mechanism to terrorists activities.<sup>4</sup>

One major determinant of counterterrorism strategy is the regime governance structures within a state. Krueger (2007) and Crenshaw (2001) argue that democracies are easier targets for terrorists compared to autocratic regimes. Democracies also find more hindrance in their response to terrorists activities due to the open nature of democratic society coupled with scrutiny from human rights groups and the media. Kenya, which is a fairly good democracy compared to Ethiopia which is an autocratic regime, has had to deal with human rights groups that opposed anti-terrorism laws. Specifically, labeling the laws as merely towing to the US drive and its national interests. On the other hand, Ethiopia has been able to ruthlessly crack down on suspected terrorist because of the closed nature of its regime.

## Hypothesis

Regime type determines how terrorists' target and subsequent counterterrorism strategies implemented by the government and international community.

## Ethiopia and Kenya

The two countries are part of the strategic Horn of Africa sub-region. The Horn of Africa sub-region is situated at the southern end of the Red Sea, near the Strait of Bab al-Mandab, across from the Arabian Peninsula. It provides a prime spot from which to project power and provide rear area support for military

<sup>1</sup> Aldrich, R.J. (2002). "Dangerous Liaisons: Post-September 11 Intelligence Alliances." *Harvard International Review*, 24(3): 50-54.

<sup>2</sup> Dagne, Ted. 2002. *Africa and the War on Terrorism*. Specialist in International Relations foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division. CRS Report for Congress. <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/7959.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Stapley, Craig 2005. "Terrorism: Its Goals, Targets, and Strategies" *Unknown Magazine*.

<sup>4</sup> Norton, Bensahel, N. (2006). "A Coalition of Coalitions: International Cooperation Against Terrorism." *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 29: 35-49.

intervention in the Middle East and Persian Gulf. It is believed that the Horn of Africa is a potential breeding ground for terrorism. Indeed, in recent years, as Chau (2007) observes, the Horn of Africa has emerged as an important staging area, training center, and a favored place to target U.S. interests. On August 7, 1998, the Al Qaeda terrorist group targeted the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. In June 1995, members of the Islamic Group, an Egyptian extremist group, tried to assassinate President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.<sup>5</sup>

Chau adds that most of the Horn of African countries overwhelmingly expressed their support for the U.S.-led efforts on the war against terrorism shortly after the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington. Some Horn of African countries are sharing intelligence and are coordinating with Washington to fight terrorism in the sub-region. The governments of Kenya and Ethiopia are working closely with U.S. officials to prevent fleeing Al-Qaeda members from establishing a presence in Somalia. The Horn of Africa may not be as important to the United States in this phase of the war against terrorism as Pakistan, but in the next phase of the terror war the Horn of Africa may prove to be key.<sup>6</sup>

The CIA World fact book estimates the population and religious composition of the two countries to be as follows:

#### **Ethiopia**

- Population: About 85 million people.
- Religion: 60% Christians 32% Muslims
- Landlocked country no navy.

#### **Kenya**

- Population: 39 million.
- Religion: 80% Christians 10% Muslims.
- Indian Ocean has navy

#### **Threat of Terrorism in Kenya**

Kenya is perceived as a soft target for terrorist activities. There are many Western interests in Kenya, which form a good target for terrorists. On August 7, 1998, mid-morning explosions killed 213 people, 12 of whom were U.S. citizens, at the U.S. embassy in Nairobi, Kenya, and eleven people (non-Americans) at the U.S. embassy in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. As many as 5,000 people were injured in Nairobi, and 86 in Dar es Salaam. On August 20, 1998, President Clinton directed U.S. military forces to attack a terrorist training complex in Afghanistan and pharmaceutical factory in Sudan believed to be manufacturing precursors for chemical weapons.<sup>7</sup>

The terrorists activities in Kenya have for a long time been perceived as the work on external forces, however, 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.<sup>8</sup>

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).<sup>9</sup>

Kagwanja (2007) further observes that 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. One can hence argue that 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.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Donovan C. Chau, *Political Warfare in Sub-Saharan Africa: U.S. Capabilities and Chinese Operations in Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa*, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, March 2007.

<sup>6</sup> See footnote 5 above.

<sup>7</sup> For more, see Dagne, Ted. 2002.

<sup>8</sup> Kagwanja, Peter. "Global Cop USA Seeks More Presence in Africa," *Nation (Nairobi)*, July 20, 2007, available from <http://africapi.org/siteimages/Africa%20Policy%20Brief%20No.%2029%202007.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> See footnote 8 above.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

## Challenges

The Kenyan parliament has been unable to reach a consensus on enactment of the Anti-Terrorism Bill and the Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism. Muslim human right groups opposed two bills in legislation as being imposed by the US. This has blurred the fight against terror due to weak legal framework.

### U.S.-Kenya Relations on Counterterrorism

From the 1990s to today, USG initiatives have mutated from the African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI) to the African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance program (ACOTA) and now the Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI). The U.S. has been relatively active in the Horn of Africa for example the U.S. led UN Unified Task Force engaged in Operation RESTORE HOPE (December 1992 to May 1993) in response to the Somali humanitarian crisis after civil war erupted with the fall of the Siad Barre regime. U.S. forces continued participating in the UN Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM II). In October 1993, the U.S. led Task Force Ranger (composed primarily of Special Operations forces) engaged Somali militia forces in Mogadishu, which resulted in the deaths of 18 American soldiers. As a result of American deaths, U.S. forces withdrew in March 1994, but later returned in February 1995, to complete withdrawal of UN forces the following month.<sup>11</sup>

U.S. and Kenyan forces have conducted regular training exercises known as "Edged Mallet" since 1999 along the northern coast. According to the US Department of Defense (DOD), the exercise is designed to strengthen military to military relationships, increase interoperability, familiarize U.S. personnel with the environmental and operational characteristics of Kenya, demonstrate amphibious capabilities, refine and maintain operational readiness of participating forces, and promote rapport and understanding between Kenyan and U.S. personnel. Since 1980 and, more recently early 1990s, the United States has had informal military access to Kenyan facilities in exchange for military assistance. The defense approach has facilitated this access to Kenya, demonstrating one of the benefits of this type of approach. In addition to its military to military relations, the history of U.S. engagement in Kenya's political, economic and social spheres has created a sound ally for the DoD in East Africa, strategically significant due to Kenya's useful position astride the western Indian Ocean as well as its support for Western interests in the region.<sup>12</sup>

As early as January 2002, the U.S. military directed intelligence assets to conduct surveillance and reconnaissance missions over parts of Somalia. U.S., British, and French aircraft were known to have taken photographs of suspected terrorist (specifically, al Qaeda) training sites and facilities. Later that year, DoD

established the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA), which arrived in the region in December and went ashore to a former French Foreign Legion outpost, Camp Lemonier, in May 2003. Nearly from the onset, CJTF-HOA operations have included humanitarian missions (infrastructure and water resource projects), medical missions (such as dental and veterinary), as well as military training missions. DoD, thus, spent little time solidifying its position in the Horn of Africa for future counterterrorism missions, which is a tangible onset of the defense approach. Before CJTF-HOA landed ashore, simultaneous terrorist attacks struck the Kenyan port town of Mombasa in November 2002. Al-Qaeda used a car bomb to attack the Israeli-owned Paradise Hotel (killing 18) and unsuccessfully attempted to shoot down an Israeli charter aircraft using surface-to-air missiles. In the wake of the Mombasa attacks and a heightened state of security, plain-clothed U.S. Marines were deployed in May 2003 throughout the Kenyan capital of Nairobi in the vicinity of embassies and soft targets such as foreign residences and an outdoor shopping center frequented by Westerners. U.S. and British Marines also conducted missions along Kenya's borders with Sudan and Somalia. In this case, U.S. policy was reactive again favoring the defense approach to counterterrorism.<sup>13</sup>

Security cooperation has long been an important aspect of Kenyan-U.S. relations, underscored by airbase, port access, and over-flight agreements since the Cold War. 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 (CJTFHOA) 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.<sup>14</sup>

Counterterrorism is viewed with mixed perceptions and emotions in Kenya. The political context of tends that shape local views. In Kenya, for example, political opposition in the forms of human rights campaigners and coastal Muslims has prevented counterterrorism legislation from passing. The aggrieved view such measures as forms of victimization and denial of due process of law, which in turn illustrates their exclusion from political power.

<sup>11</sup> Brown, John. 2006. The United States Army in Somalia 1992-1994. pg. 7-10 available at <http://www.history.army.mil/brochures/Somalia/Somalia.htm>

<sup>12</sup> Kagwanja, 2007.

<sup>13</sup> Donovan C. Chau. 2008. *U.S. Counterterrorism in Sub-Saharan Africa: Understanding costs, cultures, and conflicts*. Pg. 24-28. Available at: <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB821.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Kagwanja, 2007.

## Terrorism threat in Ethiopia

In June 1995, members of the Islamic Group, an Egyptian extremist group, tried to assassinate President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The eleven-man assassination team had been given safe haven in Sudan where they prepared for the assassination. The team was divided into two groups: nine were sent to Ethiopia to carry out the assassination; and two remained in Sudan to plan and direct the killing of Mubarak. The weapons used in the assassination attempt were flown into Ethiopia by Sudan Airways, although the Sudan government denied complicity in the foiled attempt.<sup>15</sup>

Ethiopia is a Marxist-Leninist regime that has practiced governmental terrorism since the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974. Ethiopian Airlines has a history of airplane hijackings. 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.<sup>16</sup>

Recent relations between Muslims and Christians have been generally cordial. Ethiopian Muslims have not been receptive to Islamic radicalism and 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 there is potential for religious conflict. A few hundred Ethiopian Muslims marched in Addis Ababa to demonstrate support for 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.<sup>17</sup>

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 operational 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.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Donovan, 2008. p. 26-27

<sup>16</sup> Douglas, Farah. 2004.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Naison Ngoma, "Civil-Military Relations in Africa: Navigating Uncharted Waters," *African Security Review*, Vol. 15, No. 4, December 1, 2006, p. 99.

## US- Ethiopia Relation on Counterterrorism

In December 2006, the Ethiopian military launched an intervening attack into Somalia after the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) overtook the fledgling Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG). Perhaps unknown to the ICU, the US DoD has been on a quiet campaign to capture or kill al-Qaeda leaders in the Horn of Africa since the 1998 embassy bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. For several years, DoD has been training Ethiopian troops for counterterrorism operations in camps near the Somalia border, including Ethiopian Special Forces known as Agazi Commandos. The U.S. military used an airstrip in eastern Ethiopia to mount air strikes against Islamic militants in neighboring Somalia, launching two AC-130 gunship strikes on January 6 and 23, 2007. Furthermore, it is believed that there was significant sharing of intelligence with the Ethiopian military on ICU positions, including the use of American satellite information. In addition, a U.S. Special Operations unit, Task Force 88, was believed to have been deployed in Ethiopia and Kenya and ventured into Somalia.<sup>19</sup>

The final example of U.S. counterterrorism in SSA is the aforementioned formation of AFRICOM, which deserves further discussion here. Announced in February 2007, AFRICOM achieved initial operating capability as a sub-unified command in October 2007 and is intended to achieve full operating capability (as a stand-alone command) in October 2008. Much of AFRICOM's mission area will center on war prevention and a so-called "Phase Zero" strategy of engagement, which encompasses preventing conflicts at their inception using all available means such as theater security cooperation and allied capacity building.<sup>20</sup>

A final example of the development approach was initiated in June 2003. The United States announced a \$100 million commitment for the East Africa Counterterrorism Initiative (EACTI). EACTI provides counterterrorism equipment, training, and assistance to six countries in the region: Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya.<sup>21</sup>

## Conclusion

If Ethiopia and Kenya, with the support of United States, are serious about dealing with terrorism in the Horn of Africa, the first step must be to greatly enhance human intelligence on the ground. The Horn of Africa is a society in which telephones are rare, Internet communications is severely limited those in the capital and business deals depend largely on familial relationships. Thus, high-tech monitoring systems are of little use. People must be on the ground, not just in the capital but also in rural and remote areas in order to map the connections and trace financial patterns that can be used by terrorists. Conditions that favor al Qaeda's operations in Horn of Africa include: corruption;

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<sup>19</sup> Donovan C. Chau, 2008. pg. 20-21

<sup>20</sup> Donovan C. Chau, 2008. pg.1-3.

<sup>21</sup> Donovan C. Chau, 2008. pg. 10-12.

conflicts over natural resources that are little studied or understood; lack of government control in vast areas; the emergence of sophisticated organized criminal networks and the failed State of Somalia need to be dealt with promptly as they are the ideal operating grounds for terrorists and other groups that pose significant threats Ethiopia, Kenya and U.S. national security and the stability of much of Horn of Africa.

There is also a need to deal with fear that counterterrorism is being used in some of the Horn of Africa countries for regime survival and state security rather than to actually prevent terrorist attacks from occurring. This is seen to undermine the democratic gains that have been released since the introduction of political pluralism in most of the countries in the sub-region