Overview of terrorism in Africa

This chapter provides a brief assessment of the threat of terrorism within each of the eight countries reviewed, to place in context the responses by these states to global counter-terrorism initiatives. Although all of the countries under review have committed themselves to the Algiers Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism, the degree to which terrorism poses a threat to human security varies considerably in the different countries.

Africa recorded 6,177 casualties from 296 acts of terrorism between 1990 and 2002, making it the continent with the second most casualties in the world, after Asia. There has been a marked increase in the number of attacks and their intensity (reflected in the number of casualties) since 1998.[46] Although the bombings in Kenya and Tanzania came as a shock, the danger signals were there – especially in Tanzania – and could be traced back to the Gulf War in 1991.

It is important to note that these figures only reflect the number of international terrorist attacks on African soil. In addition to these incidents, many African countries have been plagued by periods of domestic terrorism, with devastating effects on human life, stability and development.

The terrorist threat to Africa is aggravated by the continent's dire hardships of war, hunger and poverty, for two reasons. First, Africa's weak states offer sanctuary and succour to terrorist movements. The absence of effective local authority not only allows the use of African territories by external actors, but also permits the activities of paramilitaries in terrorising the local populations. Second, widespread conditions of conflict and poverty create a breeding ground for feelings of alienation, offering recruits to the cause of terrorist groups. Africa is the kind of environment

46 United States Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, 1998 and 2003.

where frustration and radicalism could thrive: a large number of weak and failing states, porous borders, widespread poverty, political repression and a recent history of liberation movements, where the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate forms of political dissent has been blurred.

The eight countries under review may be classified into three categories – high, intermediate and low – in terms of the extent to which terrorism is perceived as a threat to each territory. Those classified "high" have direct experience or ongoing threats of terrorism, which are a serious threat to the security and stability of that country. "Intermediate" countries have had moderate, but contained experiences of terrorism, while countries in the "low" threat category have had no direct experience of terrorism.

8.1 High threat assessment

8.1.1 Algeria

Tens of thousands of people died and several times this number were wounded, displaced from their homes or disappeared in the events that followed the cancellation of the 1992 elections. In one of its most gruesome episodes, 412 men, women and children were hacked to death on the night of 29 December 1997 in three isolated villages in Algeria's Elizane region. Violence and acts associated with terrorism in Algeria are predominately blamed on armed Islamic groups, namely the *Group Islamique Armee* (GIA) and the *Groupe Salafi pour la predication et le combat* (GSPC). The terror campaign, which has continued since 1992, has recently declined as a result of the increasing efforts of security forces and divisions among extremist groups. Fewer than 900 people were killed in 2003 in violence led by or directed against extremists, including 420 Islamic extremists. This compares with a total number of 1,400 deaths in 2002 and 1,900 in 2001. Official figures recorded 9,418 bomb attacks from 1995 to 2001. Bombings peaked in 1998 with the detonation of 2,864 explosive devices. A total of 245 explosive devices detonated during 2001, claiming 72 lives.[47]

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47 *Associated Press,* Algerian study shows 10,000 bombs exploded in the last seven years, 20 February 2002.

8.1.2 Kenya

In contrast to the other countries under review, Kenya is the only country that has experienced the direct impact of transnational terrorism. In August 1998, terrorists attacked the US embassy in Nairobi, killing 224 people and injuring hundreds of others. This incident was followed by an attack in 2002 in which 15 people died after terrorists drove a car loaded with explosives into the Paradise Hotel, in Kikambala, near Mombassa. On numerous occasions, intelligence reports have indicated that terrorists are planning more attacks in the country, a warning that triggers immediate travel advisories, with serious economic consequences. The government has charged four Kenyans in connection with the Mombassa attack. The involvement of Kenyan nationals in these attacks serves as a warning to Kenyan security officials, as well as those in other countries, that the reasons for the involvement of nationals in international terrorism should be investigated.

8.1.3 Uganda

The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) were held responsible for acts of terror, predominately directed against local citizens, with the intention to undermine confidence in the government. During the campaign, between 1997 and 2001, 48 explosive devices detonated in and around Kampala, killing approximately 50 and injuring an estimated 200 people. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) seldom attacks any strategic target, preferring nocturnal hit-and-run raids on rural communities. The war in the north has left tens of thousands of people dead and has displaced over 1,2 million others.[48] The LRA is known for its three-part strategy of land mines, ambushes on vehicles and attacks directed at remote villages. The group has abducted approximately 20,000 children, half of them within the past year, forcing them to kill as part of their initiation into the organisation.[49]

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48 H Vesperini, The Lord's Resistance Army: Little-known but brutal rebel group, *Agence France Press*, 29 November 2003.

49 *Dow Jones International News,* Combatants stop UN relief in 20 Countries, 11 December 2003.

8.2 Intermediate threat assessment

8.2.1 Nigeria

Nigeria has seen a surge of religious and ethnic conflicts in recent years, at the cost of thousands of lives. Riots, the looting of churches and mosques, and massacres of both Christians and Muslims at the hands of ethnic militia groups have occurred, as well as bomb explosions in Lagos. According to official figures, 892 people died between May 1999, the end of military rule, and December 2001, primarily as a result of ethnic militia groups. Independent sources, however, put the figure conservatively at more than 10,000.[50] Violence, over the past three years, erupted mainly along ethnic, religious and communal lines.[51] There has also been an escalation in attacks by disaffected youths on oil pipelines and facilities and the kidnapping of oil workers for ransom. Attacks on oil facilities and their workforce, often referred to as "commercial terrorism", has had serious economic consequences.

8.2.2 Ethiopia

Ethiopia is also experiencing ethnic and religious tensions. The two main threats to internal stability come from the Oromo peoples and the ethnic Somalis of the Ogaden. The latter declared a *jihad* against the Zenawi regime in January 1996. Primary factions that oppose the Ethiopian government include:

• The Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) – the military wing of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) has fought for the independence of the southern Oromo region from the Addis Ababa government since 1993. In June 2000, the OLF, in a statement, reconfirmed their target selection to include selected transport routes, military targets and economic centres.[52] Changes in the modus operandi and target selection of the

50 Economist Intelligence Unit, *Country report: Nigeria, 2004*.

51 O Awoniyi, Nigeria's Obasanjo at loss on unrest, cleric blames government, *Agence France Press,* 27 January 2002.

52 *Agence France Press,* Ethiopian rebel group claims train attack, 20 June 2000.

OLF led to the assessment that the OLF transformed from a revolutionary movement into a terrorist movement. The armed OLA focus their attacks on Ethiopian government forces.

- The Ogaden National Liberation Army (ONLA), the military wing of the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), predominately direct their attacks against Ethiopian troops.
- Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromia (IFLO), is a faction with links to Islamic groups in Somalia, including Al-Ittihad al-Islamiyya (listed by the United States as a terrorist group, with suspected links to al Qa'eda). The IFLO was formed after a split within the OLF. Reports were also received that Al-Ittihad members participate in attacks alongside both the OLF and ONLF.[53]

8.2.3 South Africa

South Africa's internal security has been threatened by both Islamic and white right-wing extremism during the post-apartheid era. Between 1994 and the end of 2000, over 400 bombings occurred in South Africa. Most occurred in the context of internecine gang warfare and vigilante action against criminal gangs and suspected drug dealers in the Western Cape.[54]

After mid-1996 an increasing number of bombings and assassinations were motivated by a desire to create a climate of fear among the citizens of Cape Town. The bombers began to target central Cape Town's popular tourist spots, as well as state-related targets. While no group ever claimed responsibility for the bombing campaign in Cape Town, the government laid the blame on a vigilante group formed within the Muslim community, People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (Pagad). Through special intelligence-driven joint police and defence force operations, the security forces contributed to a significant reduction in terrorist-related incidents in Cape Town by the end of 2000.[55]

53 *BBC Monitoring Service*, Ethiopian forces, rebels reportedly in "bitter" fighting in east, Somali report, 21 August 1999.

54 H Boshoff, A Botha & M Schonteich, *Fear in the city: Urban terrorism in South Africa,* Institute for Security Studies, monograph 63, September 2001.

55 *Ibid.*

On 30 October 2002, eight bomb blasts rocked Soweto, South Africa's largest black township. Seven of the blasts destroyed commuter railway lines running through the township, inconveniencing more than 200,000 commuters. The eighth blast occurred at a Buddhist temple, forcing parts of the building to collapse. A hitherto unknown organisation, Die Boeremag (Boer force/power), claimed responsibility for the bombings. During 2002 almost two dozen alleged Boeremag members – including serving military officers – were arrested and charged with terrorism-related offences, sabotage and high treason. With the arrests the police seriously disrupted the plans of the Boeremag. However, if the Boeremag is organised in a cell-like structure (which seems likely), it is probable that some individual cells have gone unnoticed.[56]

8.3 Low threat assessment

Ghana and Senegal fall into this category, having had no direct experience of terrorism threats or incidents. Nevertheless, the governments of these two countries have committed to taking preventative measures in line with international and regional obligations, as is shown in the subsequent chapters.

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56 M Schonteich and H Boshoff, *"Volk", faith and fatherland: The security threat posed by the White right*, Institute for Security Studies, monograph 81, March 2003.