Could the Kenya's Civil Society Organisations be a Panacea to the Country's Violent Extremism and Terrorism?

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Abstract: Since the late 20th century, the world has been dogged by the horrific attacks by the terrorist groups. In response, several international counterterrorism rules and policies on security measures have been developed and adopted by the states. However, despite the enactment of various measures, there has not been a remarkable progress in the elimination or prevention of violent extremism, radicalization and terrorism attacks. Through a literature review, this paper examined the roles that the Kenyan civil society can engage into in order to eliminate and prevent the violent extremism and terrorism being experienced in the country. Among the identified initiatives include advisory and educative roles, engaging with extremists, legal roles, advocacy, research roles, conducting moderated inter and intra-faith debates, and capacity building. Therefore, the government and the international community should accord the necessary support to the civil society organisations.

Keywords: Civil Society, Terrorism, Counter-terrorism, Violent Extremism, Radicalisation, Global War on Terror.

I.   INTRODUCTION

The horrific terror attacks on the US embassies in Nairobi and Da es Salaam in Kenya and Tanzania respectively saw the entire world concerned about the threats posed by terrorism. Later, following the September 11th 2001 bombing of the US World Trade Center, the Global War on Terror was declared. Majorly, the initiatives involved the development of international counterterrorism rules and policies on security measures. However, despite the enactment of various measures, there has not been a remarkable progress in the elimination or prevention of violent extremism, radicalization and terrorism attacks. Ramakrishna (2014) noted that while the use of the force as well as the law enforcement measures that include better intelligence gathering, efforts to cut off terrorist financing and arsenal pipelines, communication among the various states security agencies, tightened border security, and improvements in prison management structures were crucial ingredients of a comprehensive counter-terror initiative, they were by themselves insufficient. For instance the violent Islamist extremism has continued to stage attacks in all continents. Indeed, the notorious Al-Qaeda terrorist group has a linked militant network including the Al-Shabab, Jemaah Islamiyah and Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and which have sprouted into other countries across the globe.

One of the indirect strategies towards the fight of radicalisation and terrorism is the involvement of civil society organisations. According to The Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (2014) civil society is a social sphere that is separate from the market and the state. Civil society covers non-state non-profit, voluntary entities coined by individuals in a given social sphere. It, therefore, defined civil society as a wide gamut of organisations, groups, associations, movements and networks that are independent from the government and work independently or together to advance common interests through collective actions. Ginkel, van Deventer and van Broekhoven (2010) noted that civil society reflects the dynamics and diversity of the society it embraces, and it is not a single sector. Its activities revolve around the interests,

representations, social groups, inherent tensions and conflicts. The notable organisations that comprise civil society include non-governmental organisations, movements, networks, community-based organisations, organised labour, professional associations, the private sector, local authorities, and faith-based groups, and which are noted to be formal and legal representing certain societal interests. The Change Institute (2008) stated that a civil society is an arena of uncoerced collective actions around shared interests, purposes and values.

Michaelsen (2008) noted that the civil societies and the non-governmental entities could extend their vital roles in conflict prevention to the prevention of terrorism. According to The Change Institute (2008) the United States of America recently realised that its approaches on the war on terror had a key gap and refocused the focus on the role of civil society. As noted by The Change Institute (2008)many organisations such as the European Union have recognised that countering extremism and terrorism cannot be attained through security measures and legislations alone, but calls for a broad-based collaboration which involves local level involvement and support. This approach is informed by the realisation that the identification and solution to the factors leading to violent extremism are core issues in the win against terrorism. Ramakrishna (2014) posited that indirect approaches that emphasize the primacy of non-military actions such as socio-economic reforms and good democratic governance were crucial in dealing with insurgencies.

The United Nation General Assembly's 2006 Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy stressed and affirmed the commitment of Member States to encourage civil society organisations to engage, as appropriate, on their contributions to the efforts to implement the policy (OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2007). On the same vein, Adoba (2015) noted that this Global Strategy expanded its focus from a security perspective to development and human rights issues concentrating on extremism and terrorism prevention, and capacity building. While the United Nations' focus is on a more comprehensive approach, van Ginkel (2012) stated that other multilateral entities such as the European Union, states and new collaborative steps such as the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF) were committing to prevention agenda. These initiatives are aimed at countering violent extremism. For instance, in November 2005, the European Union adopted its Counter-Terrorism Strategy that is based on four pillars namely: prevent, protect, pursue and respond. The GCTF is currently focusing on five main themes that include countering violent extremism, adherence to the rule of law, and three working groups focusing on capacity building in the South-East Asia, Sahel and Horn of Africa regions.

Further, after an almost a decade since 11th September 2001 bombing of the US, Mariner (2010)reports that a conference of the International Center for Counter-Terrorism involving over 150 participants from several countries was held in The Hague to review the legal as well as the policy developments in the fight against terrorism. After reviewing the international law framework for countering extremism and terrorism, it was appreciated that there was the need to involve the civil including non-governmental organizations, faith-based institutions and community groups among other actors. The conference agreed that the civil society organisations were useful, especially where their activities are not labelled as counterterrorism, but rather aimed at supporting the goals of preventing extremism and terrorism.

Problem Statement

Since the 1998 bombing, Kenya has introduced new counterterrorism measures in its encapsulation into the Global War on Terror. It has enhanced the intelligence collection, policing as well as surveillance of suspect communities. The country has also received assistance and training following its greater cooperation levels with foreign security and intelligence agencies. Notably was the special training rendered through the United States' Anti-Terrorism Assistance Program in its 2005 budget. Other initiatives include the development of a Joint Terrorism Task Force in 2003 and the National Security Advisory Committee, and National Counter-Terrorism Center in 2004. Despite these measures, Kenya has been a theatre for other attacks targeting both locals and foreigners in the country (Lind & Howell, 2008). The frequently witnessed terror attacks saw police and foreign security agencies swoops on suspected Muslims through surveillance, arrest and interrogation. These actions led to the accusation of government by the civil society over human rights violation, leading to a strained relationship. On the other hand, the government accused the civil society as the main avenues through which the extremists obtained financial assistance. On this background, this paper sought to establish the various roles that the civil society can play in the prevention of violent extremism and terrorism.

Objective

To establish the various roles that the civil society can play in the prevention of violent extremism and terrorism in Kenya

II. METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out through a desk research where the relevant literature was reviewed. Specifically, the author drew literature on key works from the conference debates and presentations, public policy institutions and academia, where the concentration was on the practice, contemporary dynamics and roles of civil society in the context of counterterrorism. Besides, case-studies on the roles that the civil societies from other states were engaged in the prevention of violent extremism and terrorism were used.

III. RESULTS

Roles of Civil Society Organisations in the Fight and Prevention of Violent Extremism and Terrorism

Advisory and Educative Roles

The civil society can offer policy advice as well as expertise on terrorism prevention aspects, which in many instances are unavailable to the government (OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2007). The civil society is a catalyst for ideas and opinions that are crucial in building strong and vibrant communities. Rosand, Millar, and Ipe (2008) noted that the civil society may provide input on specific technical issues, engage directly with legislators on the potential effect of the current or proposed counterterrorism mechanisms. To effectively execute this task, the civil society needs to be allowed to have a sense of ownership of the problem and the mechanisms. The law enforcement can give the civil society the relevant information necessary to understand the reality of the threats for them to provide concrete alternatives to counter-terrorism measures and polices considered to be ill-conceived (Michaelsen, 2008).

In their educative roles, civil society are vital in explaining that human rights and adherence to the rule of law remain a useful framework in developing effective counter-terrorism initiatives (Michaelsen, 2008). They can provide this information to the students, youth workers and the law enforcers. The promotion of rule of law and protection of human rights are important ingredients in the building of a strong democratic society where people are free to exercise their rights and take part in political processes. The civil society can collaborate with the law enforcement agencies in developing targeted programs of cooperation in areas such as an increased awareness and understanding of the communities' diversity. Also, religious leaders and academics can deliver the right teachings about the Islam from a Quranic perspective to counter the extremists' narratives that the religion supports terrorism (Bangladesh Enterprise Institute, 2014). The avenues that the civil societies can use to disseminate the message countering the ideological aspect of radical narratives include books, posters, booklets, leaflets and CDs/DVDs.

Engaging with Extremists

Engaging into dialogue with groups engaged in terrorism activities may not be possible with the governments. However, the civil society can manage to engage groups involved in violent extremism and terrorism through dialogues. As noted by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (2007) such engagements should not be construed as affording any form of support to those groups, rather it is executed through a human-rights approach. A successful case was given by van Ginkel (2012) who noted that the Jesuit clergy in Colombia had benefited from their engagement with extremist groups by continuing a dialogue on non-violent solutions to any conflict. The clergy adopts a conflict transformation technique where political and societal solutions to violence are negotiated and communicated among all involved parties. Owing to the peace building and conflict prevention efforts, especially in the oil-rich area of Magdalena Medio, the communities have developed policing initiatives to protect their villages and companies from attacks or intimidation by terrorist groups.

Legal Roles

According to the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (2007) the civil society can engage on legal issues surrounding the terrorism and counter-terrorism, and immensely contribute towards the strengthening of national and international legal frameworks in counter-terrorism. Mostly, the civil society's legal roles will focus on the rule of law and human rights. They will offer their views on the complementarity and use of different legal frameworks such as the international human rights law, international humanitarian law, and domestic criminal law. Hayes (2017) noted that in their peace building, conflict resolution and humanitarian assistance efforts, the civil society also negotiate legal frameworks intended to mediate conflicts including international laws against designated terrorist groups and policies prohibiting any support for them. They also guide on the definition of activities that are of terrorism in nature,

accountability of perpetrators, redress for unlawful counterterrorism practices and victims of terror attacks, and application of the various laws and policies (OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2007).

Advocacy

The civil society executes this role by condemning any act of violence against innocent people irregardless of the motives for such attacks (Michaelsen, 2008). Also, in their advocacy role, they can draft letters and issue statements to the violent groups condemning their terrorist tactics. Another approach to the advocacy role is engaging with the media in the bid to set right the public discourse around violent extremism and terrorism. Through the media, the right and reliable information is issued while also challenging negative and unbiased portrayals of certain communities, and engaging in public debates on public security issues (OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2007). For example, Rosand, Millar, and Ipe (2008) give a case where the civil societies in Indonesia have involved a famous music star to produce an album that promotes Islam as a peaceful religion. This effort has been effective in countering the wrong information and distortions being propagated by the terrorists about Islam as a religion of terrorism.

Research Roles

Michaelsen (2008) and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (2007) pointed out that civil society offers a high quality research work in areas of terrorism and political violence as well as the core causes for prevention efforts. Rosand, Millar, and Ipe (2008) noted that through its independent research on several issues including the impact of the counterterrorism policies and laws, and environment conducive to the rise of terrorism help guide the policy.

Conducting Moderated Inter and Intra-Faith Debates

Rosand, Millar, and Ipe (2008) noted that religious leaders, as an element of civil society, can significantly contribute to addressing the conditions necessary for the spread of terrorism and violent extremism through their work within as well as among the different communities of faith. As they represent different faiths, religious leaders should promote inter and/or intra-religious debates, tolerance and understanding among religions. For instance in Indonesia, the Muslim civil society actors initiate moderated intra-faith debate to get view on various contestations, and eventually reach a compromise (Ramakrishna, 2014). In the case of Kenya, the Imams and Islam leaders should ensure that the Muslims get the right teachings of the Quran.

Capacity Building

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2018) noted that in many countries across the world, the youthful generation was at a risk of being used by terrorists and other armed groups in order to run away from their socio-economic challenges. The civil society plays a crucial role in assisting the young people identify alternative ways of leading a successful life. For instance, the Think Peace Mali that is collaboration among the community leaders, religious leaders, celebrities and chiefs are showing the young generation alternative avenues to attaining a successful and fulfilling life.

Capacity building efforts by the civil society can be achieved through their technical expertise, independence and reliability in implementing much of the technical as well as other counterterrorism-related assistance. The on-the-ground availability of the civil society has seen the capacity-building assistance from donors channelled through them. Therefore, Rosand, Millar, and Ipe (2008) argued that any capacity building effort on counterterrorism-related issues is enhanced by bottom-up approach as opposed to the top-down technique. Therefore, civil society can help other capacity-building actors and ensure that the necessary follow-ups are done for sustainability. Among the common capacity-building and counterterrorism-related initiatives being undertaken by the civil society include strengthening respect for the rule of law and human rights and promoting good governance.

IV. CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that violent extremism and terrorism remain serious threat to the global peace and prosperity. Several national and international security measures, rules and policies have been developed, but the terrorist groups are still sprouting. The Kenyan government has faced vicious criticism by the local civil society owing to its cooperation on the Global War on Terror counterterrorism objectives, with an argument that the actions are against the human rights. Such exchanges between the government and the civil society have both affected the humanitarian roles of the latter while the

state has not been successful in preventing radicalization and terrorism. The paper has established that civil society can be of great contribution in curbing the rise of violent extremism and terrorism since it is able to adopt holistic approaches that address the conditions necessary to the spread on terrorism. Therefore, the states should liaise with the civil society and support them in their efforts to prevent radicalisation and offer humanitarian assistance.

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