

Examining the impact of Global Terrorism: Youth Radicalization in Kenya

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Abstract: This article examines the foundations of youth radicalization, specifically the process by which individuals get cajoled into violent extremism. It seeks to establish what motivates them to join violent extremist group; the recruitment can either be voluntary or forced. It is during the early state of indoctrination that an individual crosses the threshold into violent action. The understanding of the process is crucial in discerning the full operation of terrorism and thereafter devising mitigation strategies.

The ontology and epistemology of this process is still misunderstood with researchers having developed a number of different theories and conceptual models that seek to explain the process. The theories have not been conclusively and empirically tested. The process is however, largely perceived to start with initial exposure through indoctrination, training, and then violent action. There is a general consensus, however, that many people who begin this process do not pass through all the stages and become terrorists. Many people who become extremists still stop short of the violence that is typical of militant jihadists.

This article shows how radicalizers take advantage of poverty, low level of education and perceived marginalization to lure the youth into joining radical groups, among them the Al-Shabaab, Mungiki (criminal gang in Kenya) and Mombasa Republican Council (MRC). In the Kenyan coast a number of youths have joined the radicalized groups. These youths are ready to indulge in violence this has been depicted by how they have been forcibly removing the moderate sheikhs and Imams in the running of mosques and madrassas. This has given room to heightened radicalization on Muslims.

Keywords: Violent extremism, Training, motivation.

I. INTRODUCTION

This article focuses on the globalization of terrorism and its implications on the developing countries. The main focus is youth radicalization in Kenya. Understanding how people get persuaded to become members of terrorist organizations is critical in the design and development of counter-terrorism measures, and without members, terrorist organizations cannot exist. The centrality of appreciating how and why an individual is radicalized and recruited into a terrorist organization therefore forms the basis of addressing the problem. The individual level is where terrorism begins. It is the individual who keeps the organization operational and helps propagate the organization's ideology¹

It is therefore important to know what causes an individual to embrace terrorism. It is more helpful to supplement such profiles with examinations of recruitment patterns. After examining the radicalizing elements that drive an individual to embrace terrorism, it is apparent that there is not one single factor that leads to terrorism, but a series of elements which combine to make an individual more susceptible to recruitment. The fact that millions of people share the same grievances as those who become jihad terrorists and yet do not become terrorists themselves indicates that there is a much

¹ Krueger A., *What Makes a Terrorist: Economics and the Roots of Terrorism*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 2007, pp. 45-49.

more personal element to the individual who embraces terrorism than is often assumed. For such an individual there seems to be certain pathology as to why they chose that route, while others did not.²

There is a lot of academic research material on the general concept of terrorism: its activities and the threats emanating from terror attacks. This article seeks to focus special attention on the body of the terrorist organization, which is the members of a terror group- the terrorists themselves. More specifically, it will focus on what motivates the youth into joining terrorist organizations such as the Al-Shabaab. This focus is based on the understanding that the 'body' (members - terrorists) is crucial to the operations and activities of terrorism. Without the body, the activities would be nil, even with the head (leadership) still in operation. This paper seeks to focus on the important process of recruitment of individuals, in this case the youth in Kenya, into terrorist groups and activities to inform policy on counterterrorism.

II. THE PERCEPTIONS ABOUT TERRORISTS

Conceivably the most glaring misconception about terrorism is the assumption that terrorists are underprivileged, uneducated individuals on the fringe of society. Increasingly, empirical studies of terrorism have demonstrated that such a notion is flawed. Not only is there no empirical basis for this perception, but terrorism also appears to be more of a desirable undertaking than a last resort for many individuals.³ Krueger indicate that terrorists tend to be more highly educated and from wealthier families than the average population.

In understanding the causes that motivates individuals into terrorism, it is important first to understand relative deprivation as a theory of political violence. Part of what makes terrorism complex is the inability to rationalize such extreme acts of violence and often self-sacrifice. What circumstances other than pure desperation could drive a person to become a terrorist? The rationale behind the idea that terrorists are desperate seems logical; rational choice theorists, at least, would posit that if a person is willing to risk his life and/or freedom to commit an act of terrorism, he must have few preferable alternatives. Although academics from various disciplines have focused their attention on answering this question, researchers have offered no conclusive explanation.

The hypothesis is therefore that levels of terrorism may be explained in part as an expression of country conditions conducive to relative deprivation. To examine this theory empirically, one examines whether high unemployment rates, dependent on there also being higher rates of enrollment in tertiary education, are positively correlated with terrorism. When a large group of highly educated individuals enter the work force at low levels, they may feel over-qualified and disappointed relative to what they expected to gain from their education. Presumably individuals pursue higher education with the expectation that additional studies or training will help them find better jobs. As a result, well-educated individuals may feel greater discontent from unemployment than those who did not expect such employment opportunities. This socioeconomic discontent, in turn, may result in political violence. While individual economic indicators alone do not appear to be strongly correlated with terrorism, the interaction effect of an economic variable (unemployment) and a social variable (education) may provide better insight into understanding terrorism.⁴

Many results from studies provide some evidence that within countries where there are recorded attacks, the interaction between unemployment and higher education may be an important indicator. This could suggest that while the effect is not significant enough to drive individuals in a nation to the point of terrorism, in countries where there is already terrorist activity, an increase in these conditions could further increase the incidence of terrorism.

III. THE RADICALIZATION OF YOUTHS BEFORE JOINING TERRORIST GROUPS

The process of radicalization is a very complex phenomenon. Radicalization, particularly in the form of religious (Islamic) extremism is largely attributed to the crisis of the state or its complete absence, the bankruptcy of modern ideologies, the lack of strong institutions of governance, non-social service delivery and most importantly, international connectedness or globalization, where threats to westernization inspire fanaticism to counter westernization. This aspect

² Robert B., "The Myth That Poverty Breeds Terrorism." *Business Week*, June 10, 2002.

³ Krueger, A., and Malečková J. Education, Poverty, and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?" *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 17, 2003, pp. 119-144.

⁴ MacCulloch, R., 'The Impact of Income on the Taste for Revolt', *American Journal of Political Science*,

has and continue to be exploited by anti-western groups, thus islamization takes place before the actual radicalization and subsequent enlistment into terrorist groups.⁵

There are strong structural foundations for radicalization in East Africa. It has continued to spread, building on the economic decline, joblessness, violent conflicts and lack of strong and legitimate states, especially in the Horn of Africa. Al-Shabaab for example emerged in Somalia from the remnants of Al-Itihad al Islamiya (AIAI) a Wahabi Islamic terrorist organization which ascended in Somali in 1980s with the intention of replacing the then government with an Islamic state.⁵³ It is also argued that the strength of political Islam in the sub-region, particularly Somalia lies in its ability to address the needs of certain groups that have been marginalized by both political processes and resource conflicts. Clearly, the international dimension of radicalization is a major consideration. Somalia and Northern Nigeria could be relevant examples. As such, specific domestic and external context does matter and pushed by the embers of globalizations.⁶

Moreover, perceptions of social exclusion and marginality in an environment of a youth bulge are seemingly a recipe for radicalization. These are warning signals that could increase the likelihood for young members of society being lured towards extremist causes. Most importantly, the presence of an extremist infrastructure, the impeccable organizational discipline and widespread social networks of Somalia are factors that influence the youth or make them vulnerable to manipulation. Islamic political and militant outfits, a failure of the moderate forces to deliver credible results, and myopic policies by regional and global powers further enhance radicalization and the influence of violent extremist forces.⁷ In some contexts, some issues are more important than others hence the need to locate the problem in a long and complex process of interaction between multiple drivers.

In many countries of the sub-region the crisis of the state, the failure of secular and moderate forces to deliver credible results could provide a fertile ground for youth radicalization. But other internal and external actors need to be met before this translates to violent extremism. The rise and development of Islamist extremist groups in Somalia is the result of a long process.⁸ In many cases issues of identity, group protection and clan affiliation as well as associated material.

IV. JUXTAPOSING RELIGION AND TERRORISM

The concept of 'religious terrorism' goes back to David Rapoport's 1984 paper analyzing the use of terror in the three monotheistic religions. This seminal paper inspired many similar works on terrorism which sought to explain why violence and religion has re-emerged so dramatically at this moment in history and why they have so frequently been found in combination.⁹ As Scott Appleby's¹⁰ classic work in the field begins by questioning the reason why religion seems to need violence and violence seem to need religion. In this strand of literature, religious terrorism has been raised above a simple label to a set of descriptive characteristics and substantive claims which appear to delineate it as a special 'type' of political violence, fundamentally different to secular terrorism.¹¹ The claim about the special nature of religious terrorism rests on three key hypotheses briefly discussed below.

The first supposition states that religious terrorists have anti-modern goals of returning society to an idealized version of the past and are therefore necessarily anti-democratic and anti-progressive¹² for example, it is argued that the forces of history seem to be driving international terrorism back to a much earlier time, with echoes of the behavior of "sacred" terrorists. Morgan puts it tersely, 'Today's terrorists don't want a seat at the table; they want to destroy the table and everyone sitting at it.

⁵ Khayat M, Al-Shabab Al-Mujahideen and Kenyan Muslim Youth Center strengthen ties, Middle East Media Research Institute, *Inquiry and Analysis Series Report no. 870*, 12 August 2012, p.28.

⁶ Wise R. *Al-Shabaab, Case Study Number 2*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington DC, (2011), p.3.

⁷ Menhaus K. *State Collapse and Threat of Terrorism*, (eds) Taylor and Francis, Routledge, (2004), pp. 35-

⁸ Muhula R, Kenya and the Global War on Terrorism: *Searching for a New Role in a New War in Africa and the War on Terrorism*, (ed) John Davis Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007, pp. 90-94.

⁹ Juergensmeyer M. *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*. California, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003. pp.148

¹⁰ Appleby, R. S. *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence and Reconciliation*. New York: Littlefield, 2001, pp. 89-93..

¹¹ Agbiboa D. E. "Why Boko Haram Exists: The Relative Deprivation Perspective." *African Conflict and Peace-building Review*, .2013b, .pp. 144-157

¹² Cronin, A. "Behind the Curve: Globalization and international Terrorism." *International Security*, 2003, pp. 30-58.

V. ADDRESSING RADICALISM IN COUNTER-TERRORISM EFFORTS

The debate about the root causes of terrorism, however, is not about counter-terrorism. Advocates of the root cause approach are interested in fighting the conditions that create terrorism, not the terrorists themselves. This is why the case for social and economic development in the Islamic world should not be made in the context of counter-terrorism. The development agenda is not about terrorists themselves, but rather those most susceptible to the goals and messages of terrorism. It is precisely within this broader context that an approach that goes beyond the narrow confines of terrorism and counter-terrorism is important. Fighting radicalism rather than terrorism provides a better paradigm and framework for a number of reasons. First, radicalism more accurately reflects the political and ideological dimension of the threat. No matter how diverse the causes, motivations, and ideologies behind terrorism, all attempts at premeditated violence against civilians share the traits of violent radicalism¹³.

Secondly, while terrorism is a deadly security challenge, radicalism is primarily a political threat against which non-coercive measures should be given a chance. There is nothing preordained in the possible transition from radicalism to terrorism. There is an assumption that all terrorists are radicals and at the same time it is important to note that all radicals do not automatically become terrorists. In contrast, a small number of radicals get into terrorism. It is worth noting that most terrorists start by becoming radicalized before joining extremist violence. It is therefore important to focus on radicalization in order to prevent terrorism. Finally, radicalism, unlike terrorism, has social dimensions. There are radicalized societies where acts of terrorism find some sympathy and degree of support. It is impossible to talk about terrorism as a social phenomenon, however. There are no societies that are predisposed to terrorist activities as being proposed albeit mistakenly.¹⁴

VI. CONCLUSION

Kenya is the epicenter for East African economic, political, and humanitarian dialogue. It is a major player regionally and internationally because, until recently, it has been one of the most prosperous and politically stable countries in East Africa. To understand the present decision by the government to opt for national security over humanitarianism, it is important to appreciate that Kenya's major domestic issues, which cause it to bleed through terrorists' activities and attacks hence more wary as a result of heightened vulnerability to external attack. These issues range from weak legal regime, exclusion, political intolerance, marginalization, poverty, restiveness and youth bulge coupled with joblessness. These factors provide ready and already hopeless pool from which terror networks recruit followers. The threat from Al-Shabaab to Kenya's political and territorial integrity is therefore not a threat that Kenya can choose to ignore.

Scholars and security experts have tried to strike a balance and agree on a typology to determine what prompts people, especially the youth to accommodate radical ideas that lead towards terrorism. Poverty and alienation are popular explanations, but they do not stand up to scrutiny. Domestically a majority of radicalized youth come from the margins of society. But in other environments, for example, all of the eight suspects in the botched June 2007 terrorist attacks in London and at Glasgow's international airport were professionals: physicians, medical research scientists and an engineer. All were residents of the United Kingdom. Moreover, the recent past has shown that many dangerous extremists spring from the ranks of the privileged middle and upper-middle.

This paper has focused on the history of radicalization in Africa, narrowing to the history of terrorism in Kenya and the subject of study, which is youth radicalization. It also looked at the multitude of variables capable of provoking the youth to join terrorist groups such as deprivation, poverty, education, marginalization, political exclusion and globalization. The paper also expounded on the efforts, impacts and challenges Kenya is facing in counter-terrorism endeavours. It emerged that when one is analyzing the causes of terrorism, one is confronted with different levels of explanations, the individual and group levels, of a psychological or more often socio-psychological character.

It emerged that radicalization is an important component as terrorist groups cannot succeed in their operations as a vacuum and therefore need to recruit more members regularly to carry out their agenda of terror. It is therefore of great importance for states that are affected by terrorism, such as Kenya, to focus on counter-radicalization measures. Counter-

¹³ Gurr, T. ed R. *Why Men Rebel*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970, p.60.

¹⁴ Graham E. F. *The Future of Political Islam* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003, pp.84-86).

terrorism efforts therefore need to place the breeding grounds for sympathizers at the center of their efforts. Fighting radicalism with human development specifically social and economic development should emerge as a new and leading public narrative and long-term objective for strategic counter-terrorism. This brings the importance of the issue of the social concept of human security which is embraced by the modern school of international security studies.

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