

# THE EMERGENCE OF TERRORISM IN EAST AFRICA

## “WHY EAST AFRICA HAS FAILED IN THE FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM”

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**Abstract:** There is numerous research conducted on the issue of terrorism in Africa and across the globe. A lot of the research has been centered on the root causes of terrorism with minimal attention given to ways of how to curb the menace of terrorism. East Africa has been a victim or terror attack, with Kenya and Somalia being the most affected. The increase of militia groups who base their ideologies on extremist perception, have threatened the stability of the East African Community. In addition, terrorism has rendered East African citizens a target of terror groups, who wish to instill fear and instability. In the continuing search for an effective way for countering terrorism, there is a need to heed to the call of applying a comprehensive approach and analysis to include; how East African countries can fight terrorism effectively. In this light, this paper looks at terrorism in East Africa and the strategies put in place to fight terrorism by covering the following issues: How terrorism is defined; what drives terrorist ambitions; The East African situation; Challenges in counter terrorism efforts; and lastly we give our recommendations on the way forward.

**Keywords:** terrorism, terror attack, East African citizens, terror groups, East African countries.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

H.H.A. Cooper, the author of *Terrorism in Perspective* defines terrorism as “the international generation of massive fear by human beings of the purpose of securing or maintaining control over other human beings. Caleb Carr- a military historian, says that terrorism is as old as human conflict itself. (Cooper, 2001:883)

Caleb Carr, makes a strong argument that international terrorism is equivalent to war. He states that terrorism, “is simply the contemporary name given to, and the modern permutation of, warfare deliberately waged against civilians with the purpose of destroying their will to support either leaders or policies that the agents of such violence find objectionable. (Carr, 2002)

According to Jessica Stern, terrorism can be distinguished from other forms of violence by only two characteristics: First, it is aimed at noncombatants; and second, it is intended to instill fear in the target audience (Stern, 2003: 20)

The definition of terrorism is problematic as noted by Israel Adoba (2014), “from a study of 109 definitions of terrorism, the most common elements were: violence, political motivation, engendering fear or terror, using a threat, psychological effects and victim-target differentiations.” (Israel, 2014)

**1.1 Types of terrorism:**

State Terrorism refers to instances where State agencies, have committed terrorist acts in an attempt to produce or maintain political objectives. This type of terrorism has been used by states for repression of their own citizens, political opponents, and minorities, as well as against conquered peoples and enemies in war (Maxwell, 1988: 14).

State-sponsored terrorism is a tactic used by radical states as foreign policy tool. This kind of terrorism is considered, as "a cost-effective way of waging war. Terrorism activities sponsored and launched by a country against another using violence and lethal force with a view to achieving long term political or strategic objectives are aimed at destabilization and weakening of a government or a central authority to the breakup of the existing social and political system, in the targeted country (Maj. Afsir. 1991)

Nationalist Terrorism is driven by desire to form a separate state for their own national group, often by drawing attention to a fight for "national liberation". Nationalist terrorism is difficult to define, since many groups accused of the practice insist that they are not terrorists but freedom fighters fighting for a good cause (Henry, 1985:174)

Religious terrorism is the use of violence to achieve what they see as divinely commanded purposes, they target broad categories of those they perceive enemies in an attempt to bring about desired changes. Religious terrorists can use limitless violence against anyone who is not a member of the terrorist's religion or religious sect (Paul, 1974:45).

Anarchist Terrorism is designed to force the government to change its policy on particular issues. From the 1870 until about 1920, revolutionaries seeking to overthrow established governments launched a wave of bombings and assassinated a series of heads of state. An example is President William McKinley, killed in 1901 by a young Hungarian refugee influenced by anarchist sentiments. Terrorism experts argue that signs of a new interest in anarchist violence arise out of the recent wave of protests against globalization (Maxwell, 1988: 58)

**1.2 Strategies of terrorist:**

Over the years we have seen terrorist groups use a rather complex plot involving multiple attackers and various weapons, all coordinated to occur simultaneously and to cause severe mass destruction of property as well as loss of life. These extremist groups engage in terrorism activities because it frequently delivers the desired response. There are several examples of severe attacks carried out by terror groups globally. The October 1983 suicide attack against the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut, for example, convinced the United States to withdraw its soldiers from Lebanon Terrorist groups, employ tactics such as shootings, kidnappings and hijackings, bombings, and suicide attacks to drive their agenda to target governments and their citizens, which in most cases can be surprisingly effective. (Thomas, 2004).

These groups pursue five strategies achieve these goals (Office of Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State, 2005)

In an attrition strategy, terrorists persuade the enemy that they are strong enough to impose considerable costs if the enemy continues employing a particular policy that are considered not favorable. Three variables are likely to figure in the outcome of the terrorists agenda towards their target: the state's level of interest in the issue under dispute, the constraints on its ability to retaliate, and its sensitivity to the costs of violence).

Terrorists groups use intimidation strategy to convince the population that the terrorists are strong enough to punish disobedience and that the government is too weak hence cannot stop them. Intimidation is mostly used when terrorists wish to overthrow a government in power.

Provocation strategy is used to prompt the target to respond to terrorism with indiscriminate violence, which radicalizes the population and moves them to support the terrorist. The strategy is often used in pursuit of regime change. Spoiling strategy involve attacks as an effort to persuade the enemy that moderates on the terrorists' side are weak and untrustworthy; this undermines attempts to spearhead peace settlement.

Terrorists groups engaged in outbidding strategy to use violence to convince the public that the terrorists have greater resolve to fight the enemy than rival groups, and therefore are worthy of support.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Political Determinants:

A review of existing literature has shown how political factors like government repression may lead to terrorism. Berrebi and Ostwald in their research used variables like government repression are political rights and civil liberties and established a direct correlation (Berrebi & Ostwald, 2011).

Certain studies have shown that terrorism has a strong link with social injustice at the hands of the government rather than poverty. New man for instance has shown how unstable and undemocratic societies form weak governments causing the people to suffer and re-sought to violent means. Corruption and social exclusion would also fall into political category since this is a direct result of government action, and would then be considered a form of repression. Human rights violations, including dispossession and humiliation, may also result in people having severe grievances against the government. Most of the experts on terrorism have agreed on the central principle that terrorism is a form of political action by those oppressed in the society. It is a strategy rooted in political discontent, used in the service of many different beliefs and doctrines that help legitimize and sustain violence. Terrorism ideologies associated with nationalism, revolution, religion, and defense of the status quo have all inspired terrorism (Newman 2006).

According to Boix however, groups re-sought to political violence in an unequal society in which assets are not distributed fairly among people. In such scenarios the potential terrorists re-sought to apply violence to overturn the existing political and economic system (Boix, 2004).

### 2.2 Economic and Social Determinants:

Several researchers have established a link between terrorism and economic conditions in a state. However, the results are mixed. O'Neill on one hand has shown how poor societies often make for weak states, which may not have the capacity to prevent terrorist activity or recruitment. Such societies also lack the capacity for the types of education program that might reduce support or attractiveness for terrorism. O'Neill also argues that states that lack legitimacy and control over the economy and other traditional levers of power provide the space and oxygen for terrorist's groups to flourish (O'Neill, 2002).

Gurr (1968) has also shown how poor economic conditions and lack of economic opportunities are related to the emergence of terrorism and political violence. The author argues that poverty and income inequality normally feed frustration, hatred and grievance which make political violence in the form of terrorism more likely. The presence of widespread poverty makes the opportunity cost for individuals involved in terror activities low. This form of economic deprivations tends to ease the recruitment process by terrorist organizations especially among those who are economically marginalized (Gurr, 1968).

According to a research carried out by Ehrlich and Liu, the researchers found a direct correlation between exclusion and social inequality with terrorism (Ehrlich and Liu, 2002). The analysts determined horizontal inequalities (particular, poverty and inequality especially when affecting distinct national, religious, cultural, and/or ethnic groups)—provide a breeding ground for recruitment. The researchers also argue that a combination of social tensions and heterogeneity can result in social upheaval, extremist politics, and civil war (Ehrlich and Liu, 2002).

## 3. TERRORISM IN EAST AFRICA

Bashir argues that in the region of Sub-Saharan, East Africa is the most vulnerable to terrorism. These inhumane acts of terrorism have either been carried out by and against a country's nationals for a domestic cause or they have focused on extra-national "or extra-regional" targets, such as Western targets in the region (Bashir, 2007).

According to Rosand, Millar and Ipe they allude that Kenya, Somalia and Ethiopia have been worst hit by terrorism by both AL Qaeda and Al-Shabaab groups. The region of East Africa was the first to be attacked by Al Qaeda, the group further proceeded on to established a base in Somalia in the 1990s, soon after some of the Somali fighters who had joined the anti-Soviet struggle in Afghanistan returned home (Rosand, Millar and Ipe, 2009).

The Daily Nation reported that terrorist activities in East Africa have intensified following resurgence of the extremist sect-Al-Shabaab. That has been responsible for a long list of attacks within East Africa, with the worst attack being at Nairobi Westgate Mall. The Westgate attack is so far East Africa's worst act of terror after the 1998 United States embassy bombings in Nairobi that left at least 252 dead and more than 5,000 people injured the Dar-es-salaam bombings and then the July 2010 Kampala bombings (Daily Nation, 2016)

The region carried a huge burden of fighting terrorism within its borders. The past interventions put in place to fight terrorism within the region demonstrated there is need to introduce more comprehensive strategists to manage and spearhead counter terrorism. This paper analyses the challenges faced by authorities in fighting terrorism in the region of East Africa. It also examines the vulnerability of countries in the region to terrorism and the capacities of East African countries to respond with a particular focus on Kenya and Somalia.

### 3.1 The Evolution and Transformation of Al-Shabab in Somalia:

According to Fergusson Al-Shabab was formed as a radical offshoot of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU). The militant sect Al Shabaab has not given up its ambition to control greater Somalia and expanding its presence in the territories of East Africa. In the early 1990s, Al-Qaeda made efforts to work in the collapsed Somali state, but often found the violent civil war were overwhelming, so much so that its operatives were unable to make significant progress (Fergusson, 2013).

However, the sect used Somalia as part of a regional base for attacks against U.S. and UN peacekeepers and strikes in Kenya against U.S. and Israeli target. Al-Shabab in the Horn of Africa has its presence felt in five countries: Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Tanzania and Uganda and is working hard to extend its presence and impact across the region. Somalia is a battle-weary country with no central government and a long, unguarded coastline. Based on its coastal location on the Horn of Africa (HOA), Somalia has long served as a passageway from Africa to the Middle East. This aspect makes Somalia a desirable for transnational terrorists. Al-Shabaab has an extensive network of sympathizers, informants, and other collaborators throughout Somalia and several sources considered Al-Shabaab to be everywhere in East Africa.

BBB News Africa reported that the extremist Islamist group, which controls about half of south-central Somalia, grew out of the anarchy that crippled Somalia after warlords ousted a longtime dictator Mohammed Said Barre. The group is estimated to have about hundreds of fighters, mainly recruited within Somalia but also from Western countries (BBC News Africa, 2013).

According to Wise, the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia in December 2006 marked a watershed in the development and radicalization of Al-Shabab. First, it provided Al-Shabab with the opportunity to draw on deep-seated Somali hostility towards Ethiopia to recruit thousands of nationalist volunteers, second, the invasion forced Al-Shabab to adopt an effective guerrilla-style operational strategy as a means of resisting Ethiopian advance into the South and third the invasion allowed the group to become even more radical, while at the same time severing its ties to other Somali organizations (Wise, 2011).

### 3.2 Al-shabab in Kenya:

According to World Bank Kenya has been a primary target and has faced a continuing terrorist threat from Al-Shabaab, for several reasons. This is because, of the geographic, historical, regional, political, economic and socio-cultural factors which include Islamic radicalization amongst the youth in the region. In Kenya, the threat of terrorism remains high in border counties of Mandera, Wajir, Garissa, Lamu and the country's capital Nairobi as well as the coastal town of Mombasa, with Al-Shabaab being the main perpetrators. However, from 2011 to date, the attacks in Kenya seemed to have taken a different course with Al-Shabaab seemingly taking over the reins of control as far as terrorist activity targeted at Kenya is concerned (World Bank 2010).

According to Cannon most terror acts in Kenya have been against Western targets in the country. In response to many terror attacks, the authorities have had success in its counter terrorism operations. However, those operations are short-lived as there are continued terror attacks after periodic short cessation of hostile attacks (Cannon, 2016).

The World Bank reported that Kenya has seen an upsurge in violent terrorism by the Al-Shabaab militants. Since the Operation Linda Nchi began, Al-Shabaab vowed retaliation against the Kenya. Al-Shabaab has staged a number of attacks with the coast being most affected. Kenya has experienced a number of hostile attacks with the most notable ones being the Westgate terrorist attack that has been dubbed as the worst attack, the west gate siege lasted 80 hours and resulted in at least 67 deaths and 175 people were reportedly wounded in the mass shooting. In 1998 the Al Qaeda bombed the United States Embassy in Nairobi, killing over 200 Kenyans and wounding over 1000 others. 1980 terror attack at the Norfolk hotel in Nairobi owned by a Jewish block company a total of 20 people perished and more than 80 were wounded (World Bank, 2010).

#### 4. GOVERNMENTS EFFORTS TO CURB TERRORISM

##### 4.1 A case study of–Boko Haram-NIGERIA:

Terrorism is globally becoming a household word as there is no nation that is completely absolved from its effect. Terrorism in the world at large has risen greatly and the global community in a bid to stave-off this act which has constituted a threat to global peace and stability unanimously agreed to counter terrorism in all its forms and to also bring its perpetrators to justice (Aderonke, 2015).

Radical Islam is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria, especially northern Nigeria. Following independence in October 1960, the violent confrontations that took place between a sect of Muslim fanatics known as the Maitatsine uprisings and the Nigerian Police Force in Kano and Maiduguri afterwards did not come as a surprise to those who understand the complexity of the religious situation in northern Nigeria. Since 2009, Boko Haram has been at the forefront of many violent attacks in Nigeria. The attacks, which show evidence of increasing sophistication and coordination, are strategically targeted at Nigeria's ethnoreligious fault lines as well as national security forces in a bid to hurt the nation's stability (Agbibo, 2013).

The term Boko Haram is derived from a combination of the Hausa word for "book," boko, and the Arabic word for "forbidden," haram. Put together, Boko Haram in its literal sense means "Western education is forbidden" (Walker, 2012). However, the group prefers "Western culture is forbidden." The difference, as one of the senior members of Boko Haram noted, is that while the first gives the impression that we are opposed to formal education coming from the West which is not true, the second affirms our belief in the supremacy of Islamic culture, for culture is broader, it includes education but not determined by Western education.

Boko Haram's ideology is embedded in the deep tradition of Islamism and is but one of several variants of radical Islamism to have emerged in northern Nigeria. Its adherents are reportedly influenced by the Koranic verse (TMQ 5: 44): "Anyone who is not governed by what Allah has revealed is among the transgressors". As per its name, Boko Haram is strongly opposed to what it sees as a Western-based incursion that threatens traditional values, beliefs, and customs among Muslim communities in northern Nigeria (Agbibo, 2013).

The Nigerian government is committed to making the country unattractive for global terrorism sponsors who are seeking to recruit willing folks to swell their ranks. As such, the government declared a zero tolerance policy towards all forms of terrorism and terrorism acts. During the civilian administration of Chief Obasanjo, proactive measures were taken to fight back terrorism, for example the Odi and Zaki Biam response by the government was a clear indication of its willingness to fight terrorism and insecurity in Nigeria (Human Rights Watch, 2001). Sadly, the present political leadership seems to lack the will to combat terrorism despite the presence of well effective intelligent networking and structures put in place to counter terrorism. However, many innocent Nigerians continue to lose their lives through terrorist strikes, leading to a lack of confidence from the population in the authority's effort in the fight against terrorism.

President Obasanjo further sought parliamentary approval on 10<sup>th</sup> April 2002 to outlaw certain armed groups and associations in Nigeria. Among other things, the Bill seeks to prohibit any group of persons, association of individuals or quasi-military group to retain, organize, train, or equip any person or group of persons for the purpose of enabling the group of persons or association of individuals to use or display physical force or coercion in order to promote any political objective or interest; ethnic or cultural interest; social, occupational or religious interest (Human Rights Watch, 2003). A major criticism against the Bill deals with its ambiguous and unclear stance on parallel organizations usurping police functions or any armed organizations allegedly created to curb crime and criminality. The Bill is a good start to controlling and curbing ethnic and vigilante militarism in Nigeria, but it is, nevertheless, silent on which groups or associations qualify for proscription and which do not. The establishment and endorsement of vigilante groups by legal statutes on the one hand, and on the other a federal law calling for the proscription of these associations and groups create conflict for law enforcement and foster an environment where crime and terrorism can thrive.

Nigeria has also entered into pacts with foreign nations like the United States of America, France, United Kingdom, Israel and other countries in the fight against terrorism. In the past, the United States of America, Britain and Israel had assisted Nigeria in technical areas especially in the area of investigation and forensic science. It has severally made overtures to Boko Haram with the view of reaching a dialogue and a truce by sending the former President Olusegun Obasanjo to the group, of which failed. Continual efforts are still being pursued with the view of dialoguing with the sect for peace. The Nigerian Government has also established Almajiri Schools in the Northern States with the view of using it to educate the youths in the zone and thereby reducing Boko Haram foot soldiers (Aderonke, 2015).



In order to combat the growing threat of Boko Haram, the Nigerian government, with the aid of the international community, must implement effective policies which will deter the groups recruiting efforts. In addition, the Nigerian government must be encouraged to make much needed political measures such as fighting corruption, reducing poverty and improving human rights. Should these steps be taken, the main factors which have been attributed to Boko Haram's survival will be eliminated and bring a stop to the group's ambitions in the region. In order to fight Boko Haram, drastic political changes must be made by the Nigerian government to address government corruption and human rights. In turn, the international community should provide Nigerian military and police units with the training needed to effectively target terrorism. Investing in modern technology by the Nigerian Government is key, as it would assist the security agencies in combating terrorism (Aderonke, 2015).

## 5. CHALLENGES IN THE FIGHT OF TERRORISM

Among the various challenges that have hampered counter terrorism efforts of African states, the most identifiable and common to East Africa region are:

### 5.1 Globalization:

Globalization is the process of interconnectedness, through which events happening in one place influence other parts of the world. After the Sept. 11th terrorist attacks against the US, the very discourse of international relations and global politics has been transformed (Khan, 2004).

Globalization has created soft borders that facilitate the mobility of terrorists, their finances and their ideas, which has crippled counter terrorism efforts by most African States. Al-Qaeda (in Arabic: "base") is not a terrorist organization in the traditional sense, with a well-defined hierarchy, but rather a decentralized global network of Islamic extremists. Terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda use globalization to promote and ensure its durability as an ideology and a concept. So far it has achieved this by staying in the news and launching new attacks (Stibli, 2010)

### 5.2 Secrecy and propaganda:

Given the lack of a unified definition of the term terrorism, makes terrorism to be relative differing according to given perceptions at any given time and place. This aspect of terrorism has hindered counter terrorism efforts, as there is no agreed perception of terrorism. As argued earlier, there are those who view the terrorists of today as the heroes of tomorrow-how then can we have an effective fight against terrorism in such instances? The reporting of terrorism on international media has tended to advance the course of terrorism, as they are largely seen as heroes by their sympathizers, and inspires some to emulate their acts. It is difficult to put a face on terrorism as it is mostly conducted as a clandestine affair, and most of the time the face of terrorism we have is through videos recorded by suicide bombers. Which are often released after they have carried out the attacks and they are also dead. This aspect has made it difficult for authorities to arrest and prosecute them (Elly Oulld Mohammed Vaal, 2015).

### 5.3 Political interference:

"It is possible that acts of terrorism are motivated by political incentives, as terrorist attacks raise the target's attention. In general, the recourse to acts of terror for political reasons is a response to the practices of dictatorial regimes, the usurpation of citizens' rights and denial of freedom." Elly Oulld Mohammed Vaal, 2015).

### 5.4 Lack of restrictive policies and regimes:

Failed states are the most fertile fields for terrorist groups, with failed states like Somalia providing an operating base for the Al Shabaab group (Bundotich, 2013).

Failed countries are marked by lawlessness and the lack of rule of law. In areas lacking the rule of law and respect for human rights, where people feel as though society has left them behind, terrorist organizations are able to fuel a sense of disillusionment and feed upon these injustices in an attempt to justify their actions (Mission, 2014).

### 5.5 Africa's underdevelopment:

The African Union has made commendable advancements in implementing its counter terrorism Agenda. However, African Union's development challenges such as poverty, high unemployment, deplorable healthcare systems, and its lack of financial and technical capacity have hindered its implementation of the counter terrorism agenda. Many African

governments despite their recognition of terrorism as a derogation of human rights, they have not prioritized implementation of counter terrorism policies because they still have pressing needs as a result of under development. For instance, the Kenyan government was highly criticized for its high budget allocation for the ministry of defence at the expense of what most people view as more pressing needs like poverty alleviation and improvement of health care systems. Moki argues that most countries prioritize on their development issues due to their limited resources (Moki, 2010)

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion we recommend several measures that African countries should undertake in order to combat terrorism.

Firstly, In Africa, the response to terrorism also requires greater international cooperation to improve the capacities for States to respond to and protect against acts of terrorism. African countries ought to cooperate in information sharing between national and international security agents. A lot of attacks that have taken place in the recent past could have easily been halted, if there had been openness of information sharing among inter-government security agents. Especially the national security agents should act vigilantly upon the notifications they receive of planned attacks and take all necessary measures to ensure such plans do not succeed.

Secondly, Aderonke notes that in the case of Nigeria, the international community should provide Nigerian military and police units with the training needed to effectively target terrorism. Perhaps such military support should be extended to countries in East Africa that have also been in the forefront in the fighting terrorism. Investing in modern technology by the African Governments is key, as it would assist the security agencies in combating terrorism.

Thirdly, African governments ought to prioritize implementation of counter terrorism measures. As noted by Moki, despite the African Union having a counter terrorism agenda, most countries have not made that a priority as they are preoccupied on underdevelopment issues. African countries ought to have counter terrorism as part of their development agenda, because terrorism touches on national security which is critical in achieving development in any sense.

Fourthly, African countries should adopt restrictive policies and laws on terrorism. Bundotich argues that failed states are the most fertile fields for terrorist groups, with failed states like Somalia providing an operating base for the Al Shabaab group. Therefore, it is upon the governments in Africa to make legislative reforms that clearly out-law terrorism activities, and to ensure the perpetrators of terrorism face the full force of the law.

Fifthly, international media ought to exercise care and precaution in reporting of terrorism. Mohammed Vaal argues that the reporting of terrorism on international media has tended to advance the course of terrorism, as they are largely seen as heroes by their sympathizers, and inspires some to emulate their acts. Celebration of terrorism is a handicap to the fight against terrorism. Africa and the world must by all means shun from the celebration of terrorism, if there is any expectation to advance in the fight against terrorism. Therefore, it is mandatory that events of terrorism should not be sensationalized, but given unbiased reporting that does not celebrate the perpetrators.

In conclusion, we sum up with what the former Secretary-General of the UN, Kofi Annan identified as the five elements which are the principle and comprehensive strategy to counter terrorism in Africa: First, dissuade disaffected groups from choosing terrorism as a tactic to achieve their goals. Secondly, deny terrorists the ability to carry out their attacks. Thirdly, deter them from supporting terrorists. Fourthly, develop capacity to prevent terrorism; and lastly defend human rights in the struggle against terrorism

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