

WHAT TERRORIST MENACE IN EAST AFRICA?

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The Black Continent, which has been a priori marginalised in world affairs, assumes a strategic interest in the matter of the struggle against terrorism. Its role in this combat is generally becoming more and more important. Peter Pham, the director of the think tank *Nelson Institute for International and Public Affairs* even sees the next base of Al-Qaeda as being in Africa. In East Africa, from the Sudan to Tanzania, all the countries are now facing this menace.

East Africa has not only been subjected to terrorist attacks on its soil but has harboured major terrorist leaders, beginning with Osama Bin Laden. What is the extent of the threat and to what degree do these attacks interfere with the development of the region, notwithstanding the antiterrorist struggle that has been undertaken?

The situation is as follows: there have been very murderous terrorist attacks on the ground and heightened incidence of piracy at sea, as well as a persistent threat to Western interests and to the stability of the region. Analysis of the causes for development of terrorism in the region reveals a terrain that it is easy for the radical Islamists to exploit. Confronted with this new breeding ground for terrorism, it would appear to be indispensable for the Americans to establish themselves there and issue a response, in collaboration with international organisations and the African states.

I. Review of the situation: the terrorist strikes

The terrorist strikes are aimed at American interests and the West via maritime traffic and the local populations in many countries of the Horn of Africa.

- **Attacks against American interests**

These attacks are the work of the Al-Qaeda East Africa cell (AQEA). Indeed, Osama Bin Laden claimed responsibility for attacks perpetrated against the Americans in Somalia in October 1993, when terrorist cells were set up by Ayman Al-Zawahiri, who followed Bin Laden to the Sudan in 1991, and Mohamed Atef, a veteran of the Egyptian Special Forces who was the 'military leader' of Al-Qaeda before being killed in Kabul in October 2001. He also claimed responsibility for the first attack on the World Trade Center in that same year. In 1998, the Americans were again the target of attacks on African soil: the detonation of two

bombs inside their embassies in Nairobi and Dar Es-Salaam resulted in dramatic consequences with 253 deaths, including 22 Americans, and thousands of wounded. The attacks were claimed by the Islamic Army for the Liberation of the Holy Places, an Al-Qaeda front organisation.

According to Washington, the AQEA cell represents **the most serious threat to American interests** in the region.¹

- **Sea-going piracy in the Red Sea/East coast of Africa**

Pirate attacks have taken place along the Straits of Bab el-Mandeb and the Gulf of Aden, as well as at sea near the Somali, Kenyan and Tanzanian coasts. The International Maritime Organisation deplores the **strong increase** in the number of such attacks compared to 2006, with 39 attacks recorded on the East coast of Africa since the beginning of 2007, which puts the African coast in the ranks of the world's most dangerous.² One also has to note that 30% of these attacks go unreported by shipping companies, which fear that their insurance premiums will rise if they file a report. These acts are sometimes attributed to warlords close to Osama Bin Laden³, but a number of them are decided upon by local tribal chiefs who are assured of impunity by the decline of the Somali 'state.' These pirates generally operate outside territorial waters and, more recently, in ports. They are often heavily armed (rocket launchers, anti-tank missiles and Kalashnikovs), use advanced technology equipment (GPS, Automatic Identification System radars, and non-armed mother ships sailing in a discrete manner amidst fishing boats and transporting small pirate craft which are released at sea) and operate on the basis of organised human intelligence gathered by personnel in the ports, small patrol boats acting as spotters and overflights in light tourist industry aircraft. The pirates demand heavy ransom when they manage to take sailors hostage. As a general rule, negotiations make it possible to reduce the ransom to around 10% of the sums initially demanded. The objective sought may be to **finance Somali fundamentalists or local clans**.

These assaults destabilise maritime traffic (commercial and tourism). They affect the Westerners directly by **rendering the region inhospitable** and lead to major financial losses (estimated to be \$110 million for the Kenyan ports alone). The attacks in the area of the Gulf of Aden frighten away sailors who want to use the Red Sea and Suez Canal to reach Europe from Asia or vice versa. The only alternative is to travel around the continent, which is considerably longer and more expensive.

The threat is daily and the target is all kinds of ships, so that it is quite considerable. Let us say that the Al-Qaeda networks could take advantage of this disorder to plan an attack in a port, in a strategic canal, to hijack and set afire a ship transporting dangerous substances or to take hostage a tourist boat (an operation which was attempted on November 5, 2005 off the coast of Somalia). The local governments cannot solve this problem, and so **the solution should come from the international community**.

- **Attacks in the Sudan, Kenya, Ethiopia and, principally, in Somalia**

These four countries have been the victims of attacks. In the Sudan, a bank in Khartoum and a Christian church in the Southern Sudan were hit. In Kenya, the police regularly arrest suspected terrorists, and two attacks took place in 2002 in Mombasa targeting Israeli tourists. Ethiopia and Somalia regularly experience this kind of violence on their soil.

¹ US Department of State. *Country Reports on Terrorism 2006*.

² ICC International Maritime Bureau. *Report 'Piracy and armed robbery against ships.'* London, 2007. 68 p.

³ CHARRET, Alain. 'Note d'actualité N°21. Terrorisme dans la corne de l'Afrique : une nouvelle stratégie d'Al-Qaeda ?' Centre français de recherche sur le renseignement. Paris. December 2005.

In 2007, Osama Bin Laden launched a **call to Jihad in the Sudan**: *'It is the duty of Muslims in the Sudan and in the Arabian Peninsula to unleash a Jihad against the Crusader invaders.'*⁴ The number two in Al-Qaeda, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, called for a **Jihad in Somalia**: *'I urge all Muslims to respond to the call for Jihad in Somalia. (...) I suggest ambushes, mines and suicide missions.'*⁵ On September 20, 2006, he again called for Muslims to wage holy war in the Darfur.

In conclusion

- This overview demonstrates **the desire of Osama Bin Laden and the radical Islamists to chase Westerners out of these lands in East Africa and to win over the territory**. We are speaking about organised terrorism linked to Al-Qaeda that is targeting principally Western interests, notably American interests, and intimidating the local populations which are, in their majority, non-Muslim. By their appeals to Jihad, they are clearly laying claim to the lands of Sudan and Somalia, making reference to their wish to restore the Caliphate. The lack of security and poverty in Somalia serve their cause especially well and that is why they maintain this misery by attacking in particular the boats of the World Food Programme (WFP). The attack in Kenya is a message addressed to Israeli Jews to persuade them to leave the country and leave the land of Israel to the Muslims.

- These acts of terror constitute **a major threat**, which can **destabilise the international economy**, via its **maritime routes** and, above all, **regional politics**. More generally, these attacks **interfere with the political and economic development of the region**.

It therefore is appropriate to **bring in an international solution in the framework of the antiterrorist struggle**.

II. The responses of the international community

In order to understand what types of response are possible, one has to analyse **the key factors in the development of terrorism and the spirit of radicalisation that is appearing in the region**.

▪ A strong impulse was provided by Bin Laden himself

Between 1991 and 1996, Osama Bin Laden lived in the Sudan, where he put in place an Al-Qaeda structure: he found sources of financing, educated the leadership and created training camps.⁶ His objective was to turn the Sudan into a base for launching combattants fighting against secular or non-religious regimes. The political context was favourable to him, since, at the time of his arrival, the Sudanese authorities had just been overthrown by a powerful Islamic revolution. That led to the organisation of some attacks against the Americans, as we described above.

▪ Islam in the majority

The geographic proximity of the Horn of Africa to the Islamic world has encouraged considerable development of this religion in East Africa ever since the 7th century. Its followers represent between 10 and 100% of the local population depending on the country. The Islamists came to power in the Sudan in 1989 and in Somalia in 2006 via the Islamic

⁴ AFP dispatch, October 23, 2007.

⁵ AFP dispatch, January 6, 2007.

⁶ See MONIQUET, Claude : *La guerre sans visage*, Ed. Michel Lafon, Paris, 2002, 395 pages ; MONIQUET, Claude : *Le djihad : Histoire secrète des hommes et des réseaux en Europe*, Ed. Ramsay, Paris, 2004, 329 pages ; BAUER, Alain and Xavier RAUFER. *La guerre ne fait que commencer*, Ed. Lattès, Paris, 2002, 320 p.

courts. Moreover, the Islamists have a strong and potentially decisive presence in the political life of Kenya, Tanzania and Ethiopia.⁷

▪ **Weak political context**

Following decolonisation, the African states became independent but powerless. The Horn has been at war. In the past thirty years, all its countries have experienced war and we now see Kenya rocked by ethnic confrontation. The weakening and collapse of these states provides a favourable context for the Jihadists. Moreover, the crucial lack of security in Somalia clearly encourages the recruitment of followers.

▪ **Easy human and financial resources**

The local population constitutes an enormous potential for the recruitment of Jihadists given the continuing demographic growth, the profound misery, the frustrations and lack of education.

Given the conflicts in the region and the porous frontiers, all these countries have easy and quick access to arms and to the illicit transfers of funds. Furthermore, the authorities are corrupt: the 2007 ranking of corrupt states in the world places Djibouti in 105th place, Eritrea, Uganda and Mozambique in 111th place, Ethiopia in 138th place, Kenya in 150th place, Sudan in 172nd place and Somalia, at the bottom of the list, in the 179th place.⁸

▪ **A nearby target**

- Westerners have interests there: they covet the petroleum riches in the Sudan and the mineral riches around the Great Lakes; they use the strategic passage of the Red Sea and send their tourists to the animal parks and the Indian Ocean coastal resorts.

- The Arab targets: *'Their true targets are those which, following the example of the royal Saudi family or Colonel Qaddafi in Libya, block the creation of true Islamic states, preventing the birth of a new Caliphate which could retake the lucrative resources of the Muslim lands.'*⁹ The countries of the Horn also are among lands which the Islamist extremists would like to control.

▪ **Networks that are solidly implanted**

The work that Bin Laden did in the Sudan and in the region during his stay there made it possible to set up a regional network which rapidly 'covered' all the countries of East Africa. Thus, the National Islamic Front (NIF) was created in the Sudan, with a subdivision called the Forces of Popular Defence, which represents the hard wing of the party. This movement is linked to the Muslim Brotherhood. The Islamic Party of Kenya (IPK) directed by Sheik Khalid Balala is financed by the NIF. Its objective is to create similar movements in Zambia, Tanzania, Mozambique and Uganda, thereby covering Southeast Africa. In 1997, Somalia witnessed the birth of the Party of the Islamic Union, whose role is to create a Jihad in Ethiopia. Today it is the Union of Islamic Courts which leads the movement. In Eritrea, two parties are active. These parties have given birth to other groups and a network of radical Islamists has thus developed.

It should also be noted that the United States has put Eritrea on its list of states supporting terrorism,¹⁰ a list which already included the Sudan.

These countries thus provide especially fertile ground for the development of terrorism, and it is both long lasting and complex to solve in the Horn of Africa. The

⁷ BERGEVIN, Olivier, *11 Septembre 2001-11 septembre 2006. Islamisme, Djihadisme et contre-terrorisme cinq ans après le 11-09*. [<http://www.esisc.org/documents/pdf/fr/11-septembre-fr.pdf>]

⁸ TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL. *Indice de Perceptions de la Corruption*. Germany, September 2007

⁹ NAPOLEONI, Loretta. *Qui finance le terrorisme international ?* Ed. Autrementfrontières, New York, 2005, 357 p

¹⁰ Dépêche Jeune Afrique dated August 18, 2007.

international community has no other means **in the short term than to try to limit the risks of attacks** thanks to surveillance operations. But in order to fight **in the long term** against the extremist trend, the Americans must **establish themselves in the area** and **provide the local authorities and organisations with the necessary financial and military means.**

The means of counter-terrorism: what response to make in the face of this terror?

Let us first look closely at **piracy at sea**. The international community has not moved radically against this phenomenon since there has been no bloodshed to deplore. In order to reduce the number of these attacks, the United States is leading a **surveillance mission** in which the forces of Australia, Pakistan, Italy, Germany, Britain and France also participate by, for example, accompanying boats transporting humanitarian aid. But it remains difficult to detect these pirates and still more difficult to catch them in the act. The International Maritime Organisation of the United Nations has asked Somalia to grant all members of a military coalition in charge of securing the area – the antiterrorist operation *Enduring Freedom* – the right to pursue small pirate craft in its territorial waters.

The Americans have given direction to the antiterrorist struggle in the world and are helping the **local governments and regional and international organisations** to fight against the other forms of extremist attacks.

They position themselves as **allies of the countries of the Horn** in this affair, apart from the two countries figuring on their black list. In order to succeed in their global war on terror in this region, they use various tools including **regional information sharing** (regional military seminars, among other items), **police surveillance**,¹¹ **military support**,¹² **financial aid**,¹³ **educational programmes, aid for development, and democratic and diplomatic tools.**

International and local organisations are supporting this programme in parallel. **The United Nations** in particular brought together seventy international organisations in Kenya on October 29, 2007 in order to adopt a **common declaration**.¹⁴ All are working for the struggle against terrorism. **The African Union** is making its contribution to this cause thanks to the creation in 2004 of a body in charge of the matter, the African Centre for Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT), which has the objective of centralising studies on the subject and combining the intra-African and international efforts in the antiterrorist struggle. The **Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD)** brings together

¹¹ The CJTF-HOA : A rapid deployment military and espionage mission ‘whose objective is to locate, interrupt and, in the final analysis, to break up transnational terrorist groups which are operating in the region- denying to them safe havens, external support and material assistance for terrorist activities.’ [Globalsecurity.org].

¹² Official site [<http://www.hoa.centcom.mil/factsheet.asp>]. AFRICOM will take over the command of the Mixed Force in East Africa (CJTF-HOA) in 2008. This force reports to a command established in Djibouti and numbers one thousand eight hundred soldiers positioned in the Horn; its zone of operations extends from the Sudan to Tanzania. Their mission consists fighting terrorism, securing the area and establishing regional stability by using civil and military operations and by military training provided in partnership with the AU.

¹³ WYCOFF, Karl. *Testimony before the House International Relations Committee*, Subcommittee on Africa Washington, DC. April 1, 2004. The East Africa Counterterrorism Initiative (EACTI) comprises military training to improve the security of the frontiers and coasts, a programme to strengthen the monitoring of movements of people and goods across borders, security of airspace, financial aid to combat terrorism, and training for the police. EACTI also has an educational programme to counter the influence of extremism. The programme has a budget of one hundred million dollars.

¹⁴ [http://www.un.org/sc/ctc/pdf/Nairobi_joint_statement.pdf]. Joint Statement, Nairobi, 29-31 October 2007.

Ethiopia, Djibouti, Kenya, Uganda and Somalia, as well as Eritrea and the Sudan. In 2006, it launched a four-year programme, the **ICPAT** (IGAD Capacity Building Program Against Terrorism), in order to act against terrorism. It provides for the strengthening of judicial measures, improving interdepartmental cooperation, strengthening controls at the frontiers, training, exchange of information and of best practices, and promotion of strategic cooperation. This makes it possible to complement the struggle undertaken by the Americans or deal with it from another angle.

Despite the combined efforts of the states and international organisations to fight terrorism, **some limits** on these means have just tarnished the effectiveness of the process. To begin with, *'the insistent participation of Africa in this struggle arises more from its **desire to carry weight in the international arena than to prepare for a local urgent problem.**'*¹⁵ The American programme, though precise and targeted, involves **work without end**, for example, in managing poverty or in eliminating all the terrorist networks, which reappear constantly. On the other hand, their **presence** on Djibouti soil and more generally in Africa is **challenged**. Finally, there are aspects linked to the present economic climate, as mentioned above, certain characteristics against which they cannot fight (the former presence of Bin Laden and his aura, for example...).

By way of conclusion

East Africa is being courted by **two different projects**. On the one hand, the **radical Islamists** would like to restore the **Caliphate** and include there these Eastern lands, while the **Americans** wish to include this area in their global project running from the Maghreb to Central Asia, so as to make possible the development there of a **regional economic ensemble**. This creates evident **tensions** on the ground. But the means used by the radical Islamists, **terrorism, which is organised here and linked to Al-Qaeda, hinder the economic development of the region and harm the building of democratic states**.

The threat is considerable given that it affects the **protection of civil populations, both indigenous and expatriated, the protection of democracies, international trade and, in the end, the stability and security of the region**. Moreover, the elements propitious to the development of terrorism (religious tension, solid extremist networks, weakness of the systems, populations that are easy to recruit) promise **a long lasting crisis**. The struggle against these armed groups requires a **very detailed involvement and a constant and long term investment on the part of the antiterrorist coalition**.

Nonetheless, this terrorist source is **known and contained**: the implementation of an effective and appropriate antiterrorist response by the Americans may perhaps make it possible to **limit terrorist acts**. Today, it is evident that securing Somalia and Kenya are becoming a priority issue to avoid worsening of the phenomenon in this region. The extremist sphere is tending to shift more to the West on the African continent.

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¹⁵ [<http://www.iss.co.za/PUBS/MONOGRAPHS/No74French/Chap3.html>]

