Assessing Policy Responses of African and International Actors on the Threats of Transnational Terrorism to Africa's Security and Stability

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Abstract

Global Insight aims to provide members of the policy community with concise but trenchant analyses of topical issues. Comments and suggestions are invited.

The contemporary state of global affairs is faced with one of the most spiteful phenomena in human history. Transnational terrorism and the global war on terror (GWOT) have come to define the age in which we live in. Transnational terrorism is everywhere from the United States of America to Australia, from Kenya to France, from Indonesia to Turkey and it seeks to redefine the international state system and the legitimacy of sovereign states to protect their citizens. In Africa, transnational terrorism has made its existence felt on the security and stability of the continent owing largely to other pressing socio-economic and geo-political factors. Having said that; this policy brief seeks to examine policy responses by African and international states and non-state actors on the menace of transnational terrorism. In order to achieve its objectives, this brief will analyse policy responses by African and international actors using the various levels of analysis that are available in international politics, namely the individual, state, systemic and the global level of analysis. On the individual level it will look at responses by former US President George W. Bush, President Barack Obama and President Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya.

While on other levels, it will assess policy responses by the US, Kenya, the African Union, ECOWAS and the United Nations.

1. Introduction

Terrorism is a global phenomenon that is easy to identify but difficult to define. Scholars and academics all over the world define it based on their socio-economic and political conditions. Those affected by social and economic problems conceptualize terrorism as conflict in the society between the affluent and the destitute while those experiencing the manifestation of terror tactics to gain political benefit consider it as a political phenomenon. Hence in all its attempts one might infer that the word 'terrorism' is interpreted to suit different interests[1]. For the African continent transnational terrorism is a challenge that is posing serious threats to the collective security and stability of the region as it has been demonstrated by the activities of al-Qaeda and its network of affiliates such as Al-Shabaab, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Al-Qaeda in Sinai Peninsula, Boko Haram and more recently by ISIL[2].

The global war against transnational terrorism (GWOT) is perhaps the defining conflict of the 21st century because transnational terror organizations function both operationally and ideologically at local, national, regional and global levels. In the case of Africa, transnational terrorism cannot simply be confronted from an intelligence and law enforcement perspective only but it requires a counter terrorism (CT) approach that incorporates technical and logistical cooperation with a program to advance development, strengthen governance and democracy while promoting human rights and social inclusion. Such a focus will assist policy makers to deal with those issues which terrorist organizations find appealing for building a support base and recruiting cohorts such as alienation, marginalization, widespread poverty, underdevelopment, porous borders, injustice and conflicts[3].

2. Policy Responses to Threats of Transnational Terrorism by State and Non-state policy makers

2.1. Individual Level of Analysis

From the individual level of analysis, former U.S. President George W. Bush takes the lead because he perceived transnational terrorism as an empirical threat to global security and stability. Thus, following the terror events of September 11, 2001, the attention of US policy makers firmly refocused its agenda upon the African continent which emerged as a new key front in the global war on terror (GWOT)[4]. President Bush funded in June 2003, the East African Counterterrorism Initiative (EACTI) which was designed to strengthen the counterterrorism capabilities of partner nations in the region. In 2005, he launched the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Initiative (TSCTI) which later became the $500 million Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) program.

President Obama on his first term in office argued that the principal threat to Africa's security and stability no longer comes from a centralized al-Qaeda leadership, but from decentralized al-Qaeda affiliates and extremists such as Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram and AQIM, many of which have agendas focused in countries where they operate. As a result he created the Counter-Terrorism Partnerships Fund which aimed to train and equip African governments for counterterrorism initiatives. Furthermore, as a strategy to fight threats of transnational terrorism in the country, Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta whose country has been at the forefront of African initiatives to combat terrorism directed the recruitment of the country's coastal youth into the National Youth Service Empowerment Program that intended to train the youth in skills that will enable them to earn a livelihood, in the hope that they will deviate from joining extremist groups like al-Qaeda and Al-Shabaab.

2.2. State Level of Analysis

As a result of the threat that transnational terrorism is posing to Africa's security and stability,

the United States which is the champion of the GWOT has bolstered the launch of a number of counterterrorism (CT) initiatives in Africa that aim to address and respond to threats of transnational terrorism. The first of these US-backed counterterrorism initiatives was the establishment of the Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) in Djibouti in October 2002, under the US Central Command (CENTCOM). This was followed by the East Africa Counter-Terrorism Initiative (EACTI) established in 2003 and by the creation of a dedicated African military command, the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) which embraces a holistic approach to security challenges facing Africa such as the threat of transnational terrorism. In 2009 U.S. policy makers established the Partnership for Regional East Africa Counterterrorism program (PREACT).

Kenya established the National Security Intelligence Service following the US embassy bombings of 1998 and also became part of the US Anti-Terrorism Assistance Program (ATA)[5]. In addition, the Kenyan government created an anti-terror Police Unit (ATPU), a Joint Terrorism Task Force, a National Counter-Terrorism Center and a National Security Advisory Committee. Currently, Kenya is working closely with local, regional and international parties in the fight against threats of transnational terrorism through initiatives like the African Union mission in Somalia (AMISOM).

2.3. Systemic Level of Analysis

Outside of the United Nations system, numerous regional and sub-regional institutions have also assumed a leading role in counterterrorism operations. In 1992, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) adopted Resolution 213 with stated objectives of strengthening cooperation and coordination between African states in order to enhance the effectiveness of its initiatives against the menace of transnational terrorism[6]. In 1999, the OAU later (AU) formed the Convention on the Prevention and Combating

of Terrorism which rejected all forms of extremism and terrorism and required that all parties to the convention criminalize terrorist acts under their national legislations. The convention was followed by the creation of the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT), which served as an institution for the AU Commission to boost the capacity of the continent in terms of preventing and combating terrorism in Africa[7].

In September 2002, the African Union (AU) Plan of Action on the Prevention and Combating of Transnational Terrorism was adopted by member states and it established a legal framework and a roadmap for African countries to implement international counterterrorism measures in line with the OAU Convention, as well as the UN Security Council's Resolution 1373 of 2001. Resolution 1373 of 2001, required that each individual UN member state should establish a prescribed legal framework in its domestic laws and create necessary institutions for preventing and combating terrorism and cooperate fully with other nations on a global scale in these efforts[8]. In 2004, AU members adopted the AU Protocol to the Organization of African Unity Convention, which convened on the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union.

Additionally, each region and sub-region within Africa has its own dynamics and terrorist threat levels, which require specially formulated regional initiatives to modify the sub-regions' responses to the menace of transnational terrorism. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is often cited as being the most engaged and effective of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in Africa in terms of counterterrorism programs[9]. ECOWAS has established a Warning and Response Network which serves as an information sharing initiative for addressing security matters such as threats of transnational terrorism and other political and human security issues within the framework of conflict prevention[10].

3. Global Level of Analysis

Counterterrorism has been on the agenda of the United Nations for decades and it is said that the organization remains best positioned in terms of coordinating overall global counterterrorism efforts. Eighteen universal instruments against transnational terrorism have been amended within the framework of the UN system and member states through the General Assembly (GA) have been increasingly coordinating their counterterrorism strategies[11]. Furthermore, the UN Secretary-General established in 2005 the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF) to enhance coordination and coherence of counterterrorism activities within the UN system. In September 2006, UN member states embarked on a new phase in their counterterrorism efforts by agreeing on a Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (GCTS) in the General Assembly. This strategy signaled for the first time the coming together of all UN member nations on a common strategic and operational framework that is designed to combat terrorism.

4. Recommendations

The following recommendations are essential for consideration by all actors of international politics in their attempt to prevent or combat the menace of transnational terrorism to Africa's security and stability:

The UN should support the African Union (AU) in its efforts to solve current regional conflicts in order to prevent emerging terrorism cells from gaining ground in the continent.

The world leaders should also assist Africans in their economic and social developmental processes, in order to eliminate the factors and local conditions that could prompt the African youth to join transnational terror organizations and spread extremist ideologies.

The US should continue to increase assistance to African states in all forms, whether legal, institutional or logistical, so that the continent is able to combat and prevent the menace of transnational terrorism on all grounds.

Finally, the UN and other world powers should provide technical assistance that would enable the ratification of international conventions on terrorism and enable the training of African prosecutors and judges to improve their legal arsenals.

5. End Notes

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