



The Changing Dynamics of Terrorism and Violent Extremism in Africa: Towards Effective Prevention and Counter-Terrorism Strategies

Executive Summary

The HORN Institute organized an international conference on terrorism and violent extremism on April 24 – 26, 2018, in Nairobi (Kenya). The theme of the conference was *The Changing Dynamics of Terrorism and Violent Extremism in Africa: Towards Effective Prevention and Counter-Terrorism Strategies*. The conference provided scholars, practitioners, government officials and other policy-makers an opportunity to discuss the scourge of terror in all its complexities and to share the lessons learned by drawing on own experiences in countering this threat. There was a general consensus that, effectively addressing terrorism and violent extremism requires maximum coordination by all relevant agencies involved in this fight: governments, non-governmental organizations, regional bodies, research and learning institutions as well as community organizations.

Background

The Mogadishu terror attack on October 14, 2017, that left more than 500 dead is a sobering reminder of terrorists' capabilities, resilience and dynamism, not only in the Horn of Africa but also across the world. Terrorism is a global phenomenon that is threatening the

social fabric of many societies. In recent years, increased international cooperation in the fight against this scourge, has progressively weakened the ability of terrorists to execute attacks. Yet the resilience of terrorism and violent extremism means that state and non-state actors should continue to work collaboratively to bring to bear available tools and resources especially in the realm of security, economics, politics, and religion to fight terrorism and violent extremism in all its forms.

The goal of the conference was to discuss policy reference frameworks, and policy recommendations for fighting radicalization, terrorism, and violent extremism, discuss the changing trends in conflict and terrorism activities in the Middle East and its impact on the security of counties in the Horn of Africa region, Africa and the world at large, and share research findings by those in academia and practice, from international organizations, government, public and private sectors so as to inform policy, practice and scholarship. Dialogue included discussing the successes, failures and shortcomings in the war against terrorism, and establish ways in which findings can be mainstreamed into policy actions by governments and international organizations.

Challenges were also addressed relating to returnees, ex-combatants, and victims of terrorism and violent extremism and a platform was provided for exchange of new ideas and experiences on countering terrorism and violent extremism.

Key findings

- **Kimani**, Special Envoy, and Director, National Counter Terrorism Centre, noted the potential and the willingness of certain individuals or groups to militarize, or instrumentalize their opposition to others for social, cultural, or political gain. He also cited politics (especially poll-related) and terrorism (jihadist) as two forms of identity based violence. Dr. Kimani cited the emerging form of extremism, which involves opposing the idea of Kenya as a diverse society, as another trend in terrorism and violent extremism.
- **Madeira**, Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, and Head of AMISOM, argued that peace and security are two sides of the same coin, and preconditions for any meaningful sustainable development. Stating, “no peace, no security; no security, no development,” he noted that terrorism and organized crime continue to threaten peace and development on the continent, and people cannot thrive in unstable environments. He also said that the threat of terrorism is real, and has grown and changed in the last two decades, with a rise of terrorist cells on the continent being observed.
- **Ileri**, Associate Professor, United States International University (USIU), Kenya, found that most stories framed the coverage as human interest. By using this frame to tell the stories of the terror attacks, he argued, the media evoked the sympathy of readers. Most of the coverage was also episodic, and relied on official government sources.
- **Campbell**, Kwame Nkrumah Chair of African Studies, University of Ghana, argued the ‘war on terror’ as a business model with contractors and sub-contractors. And noted that terrorism seems to be a moving target in Africa. Prof. Campbell also noted that Africa is a resource-rich continent and argued for better use of these resources, such as reconstruction and development of the continent and its people.
- **Seid**, noted that terrorism in Africa and the world is not a new phenomenon, and traced the history of violent extremism on the continent. He argued that, historically, violent extremism has been attributed to other religions too, not just Islam, and cited Jewish Defense League, the Lord’s Resistance Army, and Hindu Yuva Vahini as examples. He argued that attention must be paid to the history so as to enhance understanding of ideological underpinnings of terrorism.
- **Ali**, Director, Arigatou International and Chair, the HORN Institute, noted that one of the biggest challenges in the prevention and countering of violent extremism is the lack of a solid definition of ‘terrorism.’ He argued for the interrogation of the categorization of this concept because terrorism could be viewed as encompassing resistance movements like the Mau Mau (Kenya), and African National Congress (South Africa). This, he said, affects both the scholarship and practice of counter terrorism and violent extremism.
- **Mwanzia**, observed that extremist groups exploit widespread grievances relating to poverty, joblessness, exclusion, injustice and repression to radicalize and recruit youths. Further, he emphasized the need to understand the drivers, push and pull factors, trends, patterns and processes of violent extremism, and called for effort to diminish the appeal of radical ideologies and messages.
- **Duckworth**, Associate Professor, Nova Southeastern University, USA, argued that formal

schools can build the critical thinking skills of learners through inquiry-based education to help counter violent extremism involving schools, communities, and nations. She concluded that these groups (young Muslims and other learners in formal schools) should not be overlooked as catalysts for changing the narrative.

- **Bryson**, Analyst, Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, UK, compared Islamic extremism to mainstream Islam. She looked at four types of content: mainstream, Salafi-Jihadi, Islamist, and counter-narrative, arguing that the understanding of the abuse of scripture by extremists is essential to undermining their claims to religious legitimacy. She found that certain religious ideas and concepts, such as caliphate, tawhid, and jihad can be interpreted using both violent and nonviolent lenses. Bryson also found that jihadi texts focus on violence, politics, and Sharia, while mainstream ones focus on personal piety and daily religious practice.
- **Muna**, Ph.D., Lecturer, Kenyatta University, Kenya, noted that the emergence of social media has created opportunities that terror agents exploit. The terrorists use Internet to diffuse radical ideologies, recruit, and build online terrorist networks, and targeting vulnerable populations, especially the youth. He cited the trend in which violent extremists are using the Internet to target university students, and universities as recruitment hubs. Dr. Muna noted that youth in universities are attracted to radical ideologies in order to satisfy a need to belong and seek retribution for perceived historical injustices.
- **Maluki**, Ph.D., Lecturer, University of Nairobi, Kenya, cited the increasing calls for a change of tact by governments, from hard to soft approaches, to reduce radicalization and violent extremism in Kenya as a changing dynamic; Kenya continues to lose young people to terror networks. He also attributed Kenya's increasing focus on soft power approaches to the failure of hard power to reduce radicalization of youth in the country. He noted that radical youth are found in ungoverned spaces where the State is yet to act on issues that connect one to citizenship, such as provision of identification cards. When this happens, there is room for extremism.
- **Nzau**, Ph.D., University of Nairobi, Kenya, noted that young people, who are usually involved in violent activities, have a role to play in preventing violent extremism. He explored the inter-religious approach to preventing violent extremism, and discussed how youth have been engaged through interfaith platforms to prevent them from getting radicalized. Young people serve as major targets of various narratives and have increasingly stood out as core actors in its violent manifestations.
- **Wario**, Ph.D., Lecturer, Egerton University, Kenya, found that the UN framework, a global design that informs counter-terrorism at regional and national levels, is root cause oriented, and therefore, multidimensional. He also noted that IGAD employs ideological push-backs, non-coercive strategies, the disenfranchised and owners of war.
- **Mwachofi**, Lecturer, University of Nairobi, Kenya, argued that the Kenyan government's CT strategy employs a majorly militaristic and criminal-justice approach. He also observed that the strategy is mainly influenced by the USA and the global war on terror. He outlined the government's CT structure in three ways. The first as legal: this comprises of the Prevention of Terror Act of 2012 and the Security Laws Amendment Act of 2014. They were termed as persecutory as they legitimized ethnic profiling of Somalis and Muslims. The second as policy: Operation *Linda Nchi* that sent the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) to Somalia, Operation *Usalama Watch* that led to massive and arbitrary arrests of Somalis in Nairobi, and the *Nyumba Kumi* Initiative that promotes community participation on vigilance. The third being administrative: this

involves renewed coordination of all departments dealing with security, intelligence and defense. It also involves reshuffles of security personnel and creation of new CT agencies such as ATPU and NCTC. Singo also singled out the following challenges to the implementation of Kenya's CT efforts: corruption, human rights violations, reliance on external funding, fragmented Kenyan society, and a rise of militias.

- **Somo**, Deputy Chief of Party, Niwajibu Wetu (NIWETU), Kenya, noted that research is key in addressing CVE issues as the environment is constantly evolving. He also highlighted the need to invest in skills and knowledge training and questioning whether CVE efforts are reaching the right people. He also noted the willingness of women to take the lead in prevention and countering violent extremism.
- **Zeuthen**, Team Leader, RUSI Kenya, Denmark, Martine noted that more women, as well as educated people were being radicalized, and that finance, not ideology, was motivating their decision. She also underlined the changing political context in Somalia and Kenya and the uncertain future of AMISOM in Somalia.
- **Shajkovci**, Ph.D., International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism, USA, linked human rights to terrorism, and said respecting human rights is seen as one of the ways of preventing violent extremism.
- **Sabala**, Ph.D., Political Officer, IGAD Liaison Office, Kenya, argued that the rampant violations of human rights of terrorists, suspected terrorists, and ordinary, law-abiding citizens in countering terrorism seem to have their origins in the counter terrorism laws that States have developed. He placed the violations on the rhetoric after 9/11 terror attack which conflicts with the conventional understanding of war where two groups are pitted against each other as a case of violence.
- **Okuto**, Ph.D., Lecturer, Africa Nazarene University, Kenya, stated that the primary role of the State is to protect its citizens and uphold human rights laws. She looked at the responses of the Kenyan government to terrorism with regard to: security aspect, area of intelligence, legal policy frameworks, amnesty to returnees and terrorist financing alongside community participation, and what these efforts have achieved. She focused on security and intelligence. Amongst the hard responses were the creation of the Anti-Terrorism Policing Unit (ATPU) and the NCTC in 2013, and the Kenya Defense Forces' Operation *Linda Nchi* initiative. The government also posted the army along the border and intensified border controls. She also argued that although the country still lacks a strong intelligence network, information from the intelligence agencies has contributed to enhanced security, and numerous terrorist activities have been thwarted in the recent past.
- **Nkomani**, Zimbabwean Ambassador, and Dean of The African Diplomatic Corps noted that everyone is affected by terrorism. He said it is critical that responses of an international nature be fashioned to counter this challenge. He also said building inclusive societies in which everyone feels respected and has a sense of belonging will go a long way toward alleviating terrorism.
- **Madeira**, Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union (AU), and Head of AMISOM Ambassador Madeira indicated that the AU has a counter-terrorism strategy, noting that the African regions namely: South Africa, East Africa and Central Africa also have similar strategies except for North Africa. East Africa is one of the most affected and vulnerable regions in the African continent. Somalia is the most affected country on the continent. Furthermore, Somalia and Yemen influence each other further exacerbating insecurity in the Horn of Africa He observed that the ideologies of Wahabism and

Salafism have been spread in these two countries and are deeply entrenched, with neighboring countries often being used as bases for their insurgency.

- **Momou**, Nigeria High Commissioner Ambassador Sheidu, cited that Borno State is the epicenter of Boko Haram-led terrorism in Nigeria. He said that many internal factors give rise to recruitment into terrorism in Nigeria, and argued that there is a need to look at root causes and find solutions to the issues. He noted that Lake Chad has become a beehive of Boko Haram activities, and the shrinking of the water body has contributed to this. The jihadist group has brought destruction, displacement, and unemployment to people living around the lake, using unconventional strategies, and that their destruction continues to be felt in Nigeria.
- **Amutabi**, Ph.D., Vice Chancellor, Lukenya University, Kenya, argued for the use of both informal and non-formal approaches to gathering intelligence, to improve existing early warning systems. He said effective security systems are supposed to be proactive rather than reactive, and called for the need to sensitize stakeholders and involving the community in intelligence gathering, this would boost the work of the security organs. He identified the lack of skills and knowledge amongst officers as a challenge, highlighting the need for capacity building efforts.
- **Handa**, Ph.D., Head of Research, National Defense College, Kenya, argued for better protection of Kenya's critical infrastructure (including roads, airports, power, water and fiber optic cables that are essential for the provision of vital services in the country whose destruction would have a negative effect of the country). Dr. Handa underlined the need to conduct risk assessment, categorize assets, and identify threats and vulnerability of assets. He also noted that there is

subjectivity in risk assessment. In undertaking risk assessment, it is important to categorize assets, identify threats, assess vulnerability of the assets and put in measures to reduce vulnerability. These include a combination of preventive, defensive and offensive strategies.

- **Henry**, Ph.D., Lecturer, Kenyatta University, Kenya, spoke about the current trend in which more women and girls are being radicalized. She attributed the radicalization of women to globalization noting that women have access to information and new networks, as a result of technology. She also observed that male chauvinism and patriarchy excludes women thus creating an opportunity for women to seek inclusion in other fora like radicalization which offers recognition and appreciation.
- **Speckhard and Shajkovci**, researchers at International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism (ICSVE), USA, noted that ISIS attracted over 40,000 fighters to Syria using propaganda films and exploited social networks to identify the needs of potential recruits and meet them. The researchers underlined that ideology was key in recruitment by violent extremist groups.
- **Okereke**, a Senior Research Fellow, National Defense College, Nigeria, noted that the shrinkage of Lake Chad has created new insecurities related to environmental stress, resource based conflicts, and forced migration in the Lake Chad basin.
- **Jacobs**, a Research and Strategy Officer, Hayat-Rased, Jordan/USA, noted that there is rising radicalization in Jordan whose effects were being felt beyond the country. Women, the study found, were more at risk of radicalization in Jordan. Some of the factors that contribute to this are patriarchy, violence towards women in the home and the need for empowerment by women (the country has lowest female labor force participation globally).

- **Abdalla**, Director for International Institute of Islamic Thought, USA, noted that deradicalization is a process that requires mutual trust and patience and that doctrine revision brings about genuine transformation. Further, he noted that former jihadists are the best advocates for transformation and influencing others.
- **Karanja**, former Deputy Commander of AMISOM, Kenya, gave a background to the rise of al Shabaab, how it operates, its impact on the region, and how to defeat it. He noted that the rejuvenation of Somalia's economy is key in fighting al Shabaab who had changed their tactics, moving from direct confrontation with AMISOM to using guerrilla tactics including female operatives

Conclusion

The conference on terrorism and violent extremism, themed towards effective prevention and counter terrorism strategy, provided scholars, practitioners, government officials, and other policy makers an opportunity to discuss the critical issue of terrorism and violent extremism that has plagued many nations in recent years. Further, it allowed participants an opportunity to share lessons learned by drawing on own experiences in countering this threat. Among ideas discussed were the causes, courses, consequences and most importantly, some of the key strategies employed or proposed in countering the scourge of terror and violent extremism. Notably, participants pointed to identity politics, repression, alienation, poverty, and joblessness, lack of economic opportunities, and exploitation of long standing grievances as some of the underlying factors that create vulnerable populations from which extremist profiteers seek to recruit.

They also highlighted trends on recruitment into radicalization of women, girls, and young educated people: returning foreign fighters, policy shifts from overconcentration on hard power approaches to soft power or a mix of both thereof; a move toward doctrine revision, and the critical role of counter-narratives in challenging terrorist propaganda. Further, schools and curricula play a vital role in shaping minds to serve both as a tool against terrorism ideology but, in making them invulnerable to extremist persuasion either in person or through cyberspace.

Exploitation of social media technology was noted as one of their most efficient terrorist highways to vulnerable youth. Defeating this threat, however, requires coordination by all those agencies involved in the fight: governments, regional bodies, non-governmental agencies and organizations; remaining vigilant in protecting critical infrastructure; addressing the legal huddles that characterize prosecutions of foreign fighters; sharing intelligence and information; denying terrorists and extremists space – physical or virtual; purposeful development and deployments of counter narratives; deliberate on national and international long term strategies for economic growth; political and social inclusion; and empowering local communities among others. Suffice to say that only through a critical and objective assessment of the terrorist and extremist risks, the root causes of their actions (both underlying and proximate), and an eclectic employment of counter-terrorism and counter violent extremism tools, that we can develop more effective strategies in countering what is arguably the biggest threat to global peace and security today.

Recommendations

Participants of the three-day conference recommended:

- The policy debate on prevention and countering terrorism should be expanded to cover a wider range of issues including political and religious extremism, ethnic identity and their linkages to extremism, community resilience and the criminal enterprise, to complement military and intelligence.
- All security agencies must remain vigilant, up-to-date innovative strategies and policies, and utilize evidence-based and policy-driven research to address terrorism and violent extremism.
- Terrorism should be defined properly, both conceptually and operationally, as doing so will help get the policies right. To this end, more research is needed, and scholars in this field have to lead the way in collaboration with policy makers.
- Extremist groups exploit widespread grievances relating to poverty, joblessness, exclusion, injustice and repression to radicalize and recruit youths to violence. These issues must be addressed to prevent and counter terrorism.
- The West should accept part of responsibility for the current turmoil in the Muslim world and craft a more comprehensive strategy in dealing with the problem of terror.
- It was alarming how often terrorist and extremist groups used narratives referencing religious scripture, showcasing the need for a religious response as well, in addition to economic, cultural, and political counter approaches. Thus, extremists' use of scripture should be challenged using the same, not shied away from.
- Accessibility of mainstream Islamic Content, particularly online, should be improved, especially to at-risk youth.
- African countries have to rethink the whole notion of informal early warning initiatives. Further, a reward mechanism for actionable intelligence should be created.
- Kenya needs to learn lessons in Critical Infrastructure Protection from other countries, and forge regional partnerships for cross-border infrastructure protection.
- There is need for 'narrative revisions' about Islam, but this task cannot be accomplished only by experts in religious jurisprudence. Educators, sociologists, historians, and experts in media and cultural studies, should also be included in order to influence the content and delivery of narratives that generations to come would receive.
- Reinventing economics and politics of Lake Chad is key to addressing the terrorist threats and vulnerabilities in the Lake Chad Basin area.
- Individuals who have the credibility and willingness in their community to dissuade individuals from using violence by supporting non-violent forms of expression should be identified.

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