

## Africa, root causes and the ‘war on terror’

Jakkie Cilliers\*

*Africa is severely affected by sub-state terrorism – a phenomenon that is deeply rooted in the crisis facing a number of African states. While the importance of root causes in so-called sub-state terrorism is generally accepted, this issue is hotly contested internationally in debates on terrorism. In fact, both sub-state and transnational terrorism have essentially local causes and linkages, and therefore much of what is categorised as terrorism should be treated more appropriately as insurgencies. Recent events in Somalia are of particular concern, as Western responses to the war on terror may further complicate the domestic situation, with self-fulfilling results. Great care should be exercised by African states in adopting either the language of or the prescribed solutions for transnational terrorism as part of the ‘global war on terror’.*

\* Jakkie Cilliers is the executive director of the Institute for Security Studies.

## Root causes and sub-national terrorism<sup>1</sup>

Although the events of 11 September 2001 have come to be acknowledged as a watershed in the international community's concern with the issue of terrorism, these events did not occur in isolation. They do not reflect a sudden new threat, but represent the symbolic reaffirmation of a trend that has been evident for several years. Where terror had previously been an uncomfortable adjunct to anarchism, liberation wars, counter-insurgency campaigns and the battlefields of the Cold War, the events of that day took terrorism to a new, global level. Hence the modern focus on the impact and potential threat of transnational terrorism, or, more accurately, terrorism that threatens the dominant political-economic system. This new focus was originally reflected by the security interests of the United States, but is increasingly being reflected by the interests of what is generally known as the 'West'.

It should be obvious that Africa is the continent most affected by domestic or sub-national terrorism, if not (yet) by its transnational variant. The use of terror has been both a deliberate strategy and an unintended consequence of most liberation wars, secession movements and insurgencies. These would include the armed campaigns run by the vast majority of liberation movements that today govern many African countries – for example the Rwandan Patriotic Front, the 'movement party' in Uganda, the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front, the *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola*, the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (the dominant party within the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, EPRDF) and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front.<sup>2</sup> Most insurgent movements combine guerrilla warfare and terrorism with the ultimate objective of being able to first seize control of those population groups on the fringes of state control and eventually to encroach upon the heartland of government support itself.

While the analyses of these classic insurgency wars take cognisance of root causes and political mobilisation, this is not the case with international terrorism and so-called 'terrorist organisations' – where such linkages are hotly contested. Yet closer analysis would indicate that virtually all terrorist campaigns of international significance have domestic roots and are firstly fuelled and driven by domestic injustices in a particular country or region that can be accentuated and politicised. Once framed within an appropriate belief system and supported by the right leadership and organisation, an incipient insurgency may adopt terror as its major weapon, particularly if it is confronted by a strong state such as Israel or the US. Sometimes this is the result of assistance from organisations that fall under the al-Qaeda umbrella, but generally insurgency with a high terror component consists of an intricate thread of issues. In southern Afghanistan the recent escalations in violence, which saw the worst fighting since the overthrow of the Taliban, mask a very complex situation that includes considerations such as narcotics, corruption, tribal tensions, warlordism, illegal armed groups, Arabs, Iranians, and

Chechens – all of which are interrelated. Eventually the leitmotif is often simply that my enemy's enemy is my friend – and these considerations should give cause to pause in the establishment of simplistic linkages and categories.

Sub-national or domestic terrorism is rife in Africa. This particular brand of terrorism is partly a hangover of the process of decolonisation, but is more intimately linked to the failure to effect sustained development and to consolidate accountable and effective governance. It is reflected in the public mind by the activities of the Mai Mai in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in northern Uganda, the activities of warlords in Somalia, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Peace, the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat in Algeria, or the Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone. These were all movements that relied heavily, but not exclusively, on the use of extreme violence against innocent civilians in pursuit of their objectives. As a result, some analysts would classify them as essentially terrorist organisations since they have employed terror as a systematic and widespread strategy. To a lesser or greater degree, the roots of their violent campaign originate deep in inequality, identity issues, poverty and marginalisation from the political centre. No balanced account, for example, would oppose the view that the LRA benefits greatly from the exclusion of the northern Acholi tribe from profiting from Kampala's largesse – or that the origins of the Mai Mai can largely be found in the beleaguered Kasai population's requirements for self-defence and protection.

Tip O'Neill, long-serving Irish-American speaker of the US House of Representatives, famously remarked that 'all politics is local'. He was not rejecting international issues, but exaggerating the point that resolving daily concerns is what makes politicians, and societies, successful. Despite the exhortations by bin Laden and others towards a global jihad we may still find that 'all terrorism is local' – that terrorism largely stems from local issues, whether the perpetrators want to send a message to rulers or advance nationalist, social or religious claims. The rhetoric of global terrorism is difficult to sustain and to translate into action without linkage to a specific situation such as foreign occupation or the nature of governance in a country such as Saudi Arabia. So Bin Laden may urge on his followers, real and potential, by pointing out that it is a matter of dishonour, of disgrace, that Christian Spain, a country once controlled by Muslims, today has a gross domestic product (GDP) slightly larger than all the twenty-two Arab states together: "Spain is an infidel country, but its economy is stronger than our economy because the ruler there is accountable. In our countries, there is no accountability or punishment, but there is only obedience to the rulers and prayers of long life for them."<sup>3</sup> In fact, his message reinforces the essentially domestic origins of his mission towards a global jihad – the absence of accountability, justice and equitable development in many Arab states.

Empirical support of this view was provided by Robert Pape in his analysis of suicide attacks from 1980 to 2004, when he found that 95 per cent of attacks worldwide were

motivated by resentment of the presence of foreign combat troops – hence they were primarily motivated by domestic political goals related to control over territory rather than by something intrinsic in ‘radical Islam’, as Western analysts often argue.<sup>4</sup>

Terrorism does not ignite spontaneously. Grievances exist all over the world – and require intense politicisation, leadership, organisation and resources. But we cannot ignore the so-called root causes of terrorism, which are reflected in the extent to which local people protect individuals and groups that the international community view as terrorists. Any dispassionate analysis of events in Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, Somalia and elsewhere indicates that these are not terrorism campaigns but insurgencies that are rooted in the protection provided by local communities in the West Bank, Gaza, South Lebanon, large sections of Syria, much of Iraq, southern Somalia, the shantytowns around Nairobi, southern Afghanistan and western Pakistan, and will require a massive effort by governments, civil society, the religious community and business to overcome. The use of terror is inevitably part of insurgency, but is in itself inadequate.<sup>5</sup>

## **International and transnational terrorism**

At the other end of the spectrum to domestic or sub-national terrorism is the scourge of international or transnational terrorism. Today, some analysts make a distinction between the two latter categories. International terrorism is used to describe those acts instigated by another state that have clear international consequences. This would include incidents where terrorists cross national borders to strike foreign targets, select victims or targets (such as diplomats or businessmen) because of their connection to a foreign country, attack aircraft on international flights, or force aircraft to fly to different destinations. According to this distinction, international terrorism was more prevalent during the Cold War since the bipolar nature of the prevailing balance of power provided a degree of protection to immediate retaliation, with countries forming part of much larger opposing alliances. Terrorism is ‘transnational’ through the nationality or foreign ties of its perpetrators, its location, its victims, and its ramifications beyond national boundaries. Most important of all, transnational terrorism is not directly linked to or instigated by a state, but thrives in the absence of effective state control over those territories where it may operate from. The best-known example is, of course, al-Qaeda.

Al-Qaeda (The Base) was never one organisation, but rather at inception a configuration of 25 affiliated organisations. In recent years this network has moved further away from central direction and planning, splintering into any number of decentralised, self-directed operations or local nodes. Some of this was a deliberate strategy to protect itself from infiltration and detection, but much of it reflected the success of the US in dealing with the network. Regime change in Afghanistan did much to disrupt the global hub of the al-Qaeda network. Today local cells appear to operate with a large

degree of operational autonomy – a move facilitated by electronic connectivity. Hence the bombings in London in July 2005 and in Egypt and Indonesia three months later appear to have been initiated by small, local groups largely operating on their own, but with assistance, encouragement and ideological support from various al-Qaeda-associated hubs. These cells are very difficult to detect in advance of an attack, even in countries with well-developed and capable law enforcement systems such as Britain. They do not operate under the control or direction of al-Qaeda, although they may have benefited directly or indirectly from al-Qaeda funding, assistance or ideological guidance.<sup>6</sup>

The obvious problem with the distinction between international and transnational terrorism is the difficulty of tracing support by governments to terrorist incidents and organisations. For example, today much effort is spent in the US and by Israel to establish a clear linkage between the attacks by Hezbollah on northern Israel and the weapons provided from Syria and Iran for this alleged purpose. Even the alleged linkages with the Soviet Union of the previous wave of anti-Western terrorists, for example the US's Weather Underground, Germany's Baader-Meinhof Gang, Italy's Red Brigades and Japan's Red Army Faction of the sixties and seventies, remain contested.

Different to the disparate but localised causes that feed into insurgency and domestic terrorism across Africa, transnational terrorism in the 21st century is interpreted through a single ideology, that of radical Islam, which is able to feed off the authoritarianism and corruption of key Arab states such as Saudi Arabia. In doing so, it interprets the global divide between the capitalist, rich Western millions and the poor, marginalised billions – particularly those in dominantly Muslim societies where the impact of globalisation demonstrates global inequality and the moral and cultural divide between Muslim and non-Muslim. As Thomas Friedman<sup>7</sup> notes: in closed, authoritarian societies the divinely inspired text that is the Qur'an is not open to any literary criticism or creative reinterpretation. It is a sacred book to be memorised. It is not adapted to the demands and opportunities of modern life, yet provides an interpretation of the general state of impoverishment of the five per cent of the world population that are Arab and, to some extent, of the much larger portion that are Muslim. Friedman writes:

Where Islam is embedded in authoritarian societies, it tends to become the vehicle of angry protest – Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan. But where Islam is embedded in a pluralistic, democratic society – Turkey or India, for instance – those with a more progressive outlook have a chance to get a better hearing for their interpretation and a democratic forum where they can fight for their ideas on a more equal footing.<sup>8</sup>

Clearly, in dominantly Muslim countries the vast majority of moderate Muslims serve as a balance in the interpretation of religious text in an extremist fashion. Francis

Fukuyama supports this analysis by exploring the social dynamics that have exploded onto the world stage as transnational terrorism: “It would make no more sense to see contemporary radical Islamism as an inevitable outgrowth of Islam than to see fascism as somehow the culmination of a Christian European cultural tradition.”<sup>9</sup> His view is that “radical Islam does not come out of traditional Muslim societies, but rather is a manifestation of modern identity politics, a byproduct of the modernization process itself”.<sup>10</sup> Peter Neumann, director of the King’s College Centre for Defence Studies, puts it as follows:

Different to the USA, Europe has a large population of second- or third-generation Muslim immigrants – estimated at 15-20 million – who often find themselves torn between the traditional values of their parents (which they often resent) and the demands and promise of Western society (which they find hard to access) ... [T]he presence of such a large pool of young, alienated Muslims presents Salafist jihadists with opportunities for recruitment and radicalisation which do not exist elsewhere.<sup>11</sup>

Since 9/11 radical Islamic terror cells have been uncovered in most major Western European countries, including the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands and Belgium. While these countries are believed to be the main centres of activity, structures have also emerged in countries such as Poland, the Czech Republic and Bulgaria, not previously seen as likely bases for al-Qaeda-inspired groups.<sup>12</sup> This analysis leads Fukuyama and others to believe that Europe is the next major battleground between radical Islamism and liberal democracy – which is amply demonstrated by the foiled attacks at Heathrow international airport in August 2006.

In the aftermath of the Bali bombings and the recent spate of bombings in Mumbai, India, others would argue that the transnational terror battleground has shifted further east. The reality is that no one is safe. Each country and region has its own unique circumstances that contribute to its vulnerability, and in certain circles in the US sub-Saharan Africa is considered one of the main future battlegrounds.

## **The relationship between insurgencies and transnational terror**

For a long time there has been little perceived connection or relationship between these two poles, between domestic terrorism/insurgency and transnational terrorism. Yet, as indicated earlier, transnational terrorism has developed out of domestic insurgencies. This is particularly evident in northern Africa, where counter-terrorism strategies have done much to intensify an already brutal campaign and to internationalise domestic challenges.

In the 'war against terror', perception is as important as reality and governments manipulate the extent and impact of al-Qaeda mercilessly, often with self-fulfilling results. The most celebrated instance was, of course, the alleged link between the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq and Osama bin Laden. At the time of the build-up to that invasion these linkages were limited, but today, Iraq has become what Robben Island was during the liberation struggle in South Africa – a school. Transnational terrorism and terrorists have become a major export product of that beleaguered country, to the detriment of Afghanistan, peace in the Middle East and, possibly, the Horn of Africa. Many leaders, such as President Yuwiri Museveni of Uganda, have tried to accentuate and emphasise the linkages between bin Laden and domestic terrorist groups such as the LRA and the West Bank Nile Front, while others such as the National Congress in Khartoum have sought to deny that it is, today, anything but a cooperating partner in the war on terror. In Mauritania the now deposed president, Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya, arrested 21 people for their association with the Mauritanian Group for Preaching and Jihad (GMPJ) in what many describe as action against his opponents rather than al-Qaeda, to which GMPJ is allegedly affiliated.<sup>13</sup>

Today the gap between domestic and transnational terrorism appears to be shrinking in some areas as links are established (or created by leaders anxious to benefit from US support in the war on terror) between local movements and transnational terrorists. Globalisation has become an important enabling factor in the spread of transnational terrorism – although its real impact may sometimes be overemphasised. On the one side the Internet, cell phones and international travel provide a facilitating environment through which cells and units can liaise, coordinate and network. Even the lack of infrastructure and collapse of government services do not restrict the electronic connectivity that permit cells or individuals in a country such as Somalia to connect to collaborators in London or Washington. Satellite or cell phone-based Internet access does not depend upon sophisticated infrastructure on the ground. On the other hand, television and other media provide the demonstration effect through highly publicised acts such as bomb explosions and aircraft hijackings. The intimate focus on the effects of Israeli and Hezbollah terrorism in areas such as the West Bank and Gaza serves to mobilise and instigate others to do the same and also to violently protest against these Israeli excesses.

Peter Neumann argues persuasively for a balance in the view that globalisation and the Internet have spawned 'do it yourself' transnational terrorists:

The fact that terrorist structures are looser and based on personal relationships rather than formal hierarchies does not mean that they have become completely irrelevant. Indeed, there continues to be a strong correlation between the overall sophistication of a terrorist attack and the degree to which its perpetrators were able to capitalise on the finance,

weapons, training and skills provided through existing structures. Marc Sageman's extensive research on al-Qaeda's global networks demonstrates that it was essential for groups of potential recruits to know a 'link to the jihad' – typically someone who had gone through one of Bin Laden's training camps in Afghanistan – in order for a fledgling cell to be integrated into the wider network. Without such access, he maintained, wannabe terrorists remained just that.<sup>14</sup>

## **Transnational terrorism, weak and failed states**

US-based analysts contend that, in retrospect, the terrorist threats in a number of countries in the Middle East and in the Maghreb, as well as the US embassy bombings in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi, were a preview of the attacks on the Twin Towers and elsewhere on 11 September 2001. This has led to something of a revisionist history, with many now convinced that al-Qaeda's presence in Somalia has been extensive, persistent, and more pervasive in terms of transnational terrorism and the threat that this poses to the West than originally presumed.

Although the bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 came as a surprise, danger signs had been evident before then, going back to the First Gulf War in 1991.<sup>15</sup> For example, on 25 January 1991 the US State Department ordered all non-essential government personnel and the families of embassy workers to leave Tanzania because of the threat of terrorism tied to the Gulf War. Apart from the widespread use of terror by local, national and regional groups, a global campaign had been under way for several decades by the time that the attacks on the World Trade Center in 1993 and 2001, as well as on other symbolic targets in the US, would focus the world's attention on the new threats of the post-Cold War era. These seminal events reflect public evidence of an intensifying global security problem that will demand a global response, including one from Africa and its constituent individual states. If any confirmation was needed of the centrality of the Horn of Africa in international terrorism, these were provided by the bombing of the Paradise Hotel in Mombasa in 2002, attacks on an Israeli airliner using SA-7 Strella surface-to-air missiles later that year, and an attempted attack on the US embassy in Nairobi employing light aircraft that was foiled by Kenyan authorities in 2003. While al-Qaeda was not responsible for all these incidents, al-Qaeda cells located in and operating from Somalia participated in all, and their ability to do so was facilitated by ethnic groupings that spill over poorly demarcated and porous borders. Located in a failed state, al-Qaeda cells were invisible to external security and intelligence agencies, and they could locate sophisticated weapons and globally communicate from that country with impunity. According to Thomas Dempsey, the Director of African Studies in the Department of National Security and Strategy of the US Army War College:



The case of Somalia suggests that failed states do, in fact, offer an effective venue for operations by evolving terrorist hubs. The environment in such states can provide what may be the greatest level of protection available to terrorist organizations from counterterrorism operations by military forces or law enforcement agencies. The case of Somalia also suggests that the violent and chaotic conditions within failed states may reduce dramatically the impact of local attacks by terrorist nodes, but will not preclude terrorist hubs from operating in their new, evolved mode to inspire ideologically or assist financially or materially the operations of geographically distributed nodes.<sup>16</sup>

In an earlier paper on terrorism in Africa<sup>17</sup> I argued that it is often the absence of governance that provides the opportunity (or necessity) for armed organisation in much of the continent and warned about the potential that the continent has to develop into a major battleground in the war on terror. My argument, in that paper, was based on the limited ability of African countries to effect law and order and a target-rich environment that provided many opportunities to attack high-value Western targets. Recent developments in Somalia have provided that thesis with new urgency, even if it may be the heavy-handed way in which the US has sought to prosecute its war that serves as a major catalyst in this tragic development.

The Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), which now controls most of southern Somalia, is an established and accepted presence in local communities, with a demonstrated social welfare policy. They initially brought stability to Mogadishu and removed a political class of clan-based extortionists and criminal dealers in everything from drugs to people, and who have divided and ruled the country since the collapse of the central state in 1991. In doing so, the UIC aligned themselves with a popular revolt against warlords and achieved what international military interventions and peace talks have failed to accomplish in fifteen years and through a similar number of peace talks.

Numerous rounds of internationally sponsored peace talks eventually resulted in the establishment of a Transitional Federal Government (TFG) headed by President Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed in 2004. Abdullahi Yusuf is one of the original warlords who ousted dictator Mohamed Siyad Barre and then resorted to carving out clan-based fiefdoms and brokered power through brutality, extortion and destruction. Having removed Barre, Abdullahi Yusuf together with others (of whom General Muhammad Farah Aidede is the best known) proceeded to divide and ruin Mogadishu, displacing hundreds of thousands of people as they seized fertile lands, demolished infrastructure and pursued ephemeral alliances. Abdullahi Yusuf and others were eventually driven from Mogadishu by yet other warlords<sup>18</sup> until the latter's defeat by the UIC on 4 June 2006. Alarmed by reports of external fighters entering Somalia to fight on the side of the Islamic Courts and their long-standing concerns about the linkages between Sheikh Hassan Dahir

Aweys<sup>19</sup> – whom the US regards as a religious hardliner with connections to terrorist organisations – the Pentagon and/or CIA decided to support a group of warlords as the Alliance for Peace and Anti-Terrorism. So, in the eyes of the beleaguered inhabitants of Mogadishu, the US aligned itself with what could only be described as a group of terrorists against the only system, the Islamic Courts, that had brought a degree of relief to instability, exploitation and brutality. Commenting on these developments the UN Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN) wrote: “Ultimately, the perceived role of the US provided a popular focus for resentment and served to strengthen the Islamic Court’s position.”<sup>20</sup>

The potential impact upon the region is catastrophic, and may, if not checked, open up the Horn as the latest battleground between the US and Islam with disastrous consequences for its peoples, regional stability, democracy and the consolidation of African development, peace and security. At the time of writing the UN Security Council is circulating what could at best be described as a half-hearted resolution considering a peacekeeping mission in Somalia. Given the current events in the Middle East, inevitably the under-resourced African Union and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) will be left to try and pick up the pieces in what can, at best, be a stopgap peacekeeping mission in a situation where the UIC has rejected the call of the TFG for foreign troops in Somalia.

On the one side we have Ethiopia engaged in a proxy war with Eritrea and several decades of conflict between Ethiopia and Somalia over the Ogaden. On the other side, there are two Western allies, Ethiopia and Kenya – both of whom are deeply concerned about the impact of a fundamentalist Islamic regime on their own stability and the region as a whole. Squeezed between Egypt, Yemen, Eritrea and Sudan – none of which it enjoys good relations with – Ethiopia feels particularly vulnerable and as a weak state has little penchant for solutions other than military. Both sides are trying to raise the ante with Somali Prime Minister Ali Mohamed Gedi stating that “Osama bin Laden has training camps in Somalia and is intent on plunging the country into further chaos”<sup>21</sup> – a claim subsequently hotly denied by the UIC.

The US has for some time been concerned about the dangers that failed states present as potential springboards for international terrorism, on the basis that organisations could avoid the reach of criminal justice systems and of military counter-terrorist forces – hence the location of the Joint Task Force Horn of Africa in neighbouring Djibouti and the launch of the East Africa Counterterrorism Initiative. US analysts quote the earlier example of Liberia and Sierra Leone and, of course today, Somalia, as classic instances.

To the US, Somalia represents a terrorist haven. Ironically, this poor lawless country may emerge as the next potential Afghanistan – not through domestic developments, but through the impact of US-led interventions and the potential that al-Qaeda could see to

establish a new home base and further stretch the ability of the international community to respond. According to Thomas Dempsey:

Various terrorist groups have operated in Somalia since it experienced state collapse in the early 1990s. The most prominent of these groups include Al-Ittihad al-Islamiyya (AIAI), Al-Qa'eda itself, and a small, recently emerged, extremely violent jihadist cell led by Aden Hashi 'Ayro. AIAI seems to have acted as a terrorist hub for other groups active in Ethiopia, while the 'Ayro group has operated as a terrorist node in the evolved two-cell network model. Al-Qa'eda has demonstrated and suspected links to AIAI and 'Ayro, and appears to have developed Somalia as a key hub for attacks throughout East Africa.<sup>22</sup>

Further examples of the linkages between poor or absent governance and terrorism were provided in the allegations of al-Qaeda's connections to the illegal trade in rough diamonds mined in Sierra Leone and then smuggled and sold in Liberia. These first surfaced in the public domain in November 2001 when the *Washington Post* carried a series of articles to this effect.<sup>23</sup> The argument was that the trade in diamonds generated direct profits to support al-Qaeda's activities and permitted it to launder money in a venue that made identifying and freezing al-Qaeda assets very difficult for Western counterterrorism experts. Participation in the trade also furnished al-Qaeda access to the booming illegal arms market that was associated with the illicit diamond trade and with the ongoing violent conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone. These reports were subsequently corroborated by several other sources, including the testimony in the trials of those responsible for the bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, during US congressional hearings in 2003 and, in October 2004, by the Chief Prosecutor for the Special Court for Sierra Leone.<sup>24</sup> In this manner al-Qaeda was able to use the cover of violently chaotic conditions in these two countries to launder money and buy arms, evading the effective surveillance or sanction by the international community including US counterterrorism forces. Similar to the extent to which violence in Liberia and Sierra Leone was made possible by the global illegal arms market, various UN and other reports have documented the extent to which weapons have been flooding into Somalia in recent years. That some of these arms were destined for organisations with al-Qaeda links is self-evident.

## Conclusion

International terrorism is not the most important global security challenge, although the threat of catastrophic terrorism (such as the explosion of a nuclear device in New York) would have disastrous global repercussions. A recent study by the Oxford Research Group<sup>25</sup> makes the following trenchant point:

Contemporary threats are often interconnected ... [I]nternational terrorism or armed conflict cannot be dealt with in isolation from extreme poverty or environmental degradation. These are all global issues, which threaten human security as well as state security, and they recognize no national borders. 9/11 demonstrates in the most dramatic way that rich Western countries cannot insulate themselves from developments taking place elsewhere. Poverty is not just a development issue; HIV/AIDS is not just a disease; climate change does not just affect poor countries; terrorism does not just happen in failed states – these have security implications for every country.<sup>26</sup>

In examining these issues the authors present four groups of factors that they consider to be the root causes of conflict and insecurity today and the likely determinants of future conflict: climate change; competition over resources; marginalisation of the majority (i.e., the developing) world; and global militarisation.

This does not mean that efforts to address these ‘root causes’ will resolve the challenges presented to the international community by domestic and international terrorism. But we cannot deny the extent to which they provide a facilitating environment for the threats of terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, failed states and organised crime. For example, efforts to engage with terrorism must address the issues of governance in a number of Arab-speaking countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran and Syria, and African countries with substantial Muslim populations such as Sudan, Somalia, Nigeria, Algeria, Morocco, Libya and Egypt. This cannot happen by the imposition of democracy through external force of arms, or the election of governments to the liking of the US, but are prerequisites for progress in many areas, of which the war on terror is but one.

Earlier this essay argued that domestic terrorism is already endemic to Africa and that the future threat potential in the continent lies in a complex mixture and intermingling of sub-national and international terrorism. Should events in Somalia replicate those in Afghanistan, Africa may, however, come to play a central role in international terrorism through the application of a heavy-handed military response to a deep and severe political, social and developmental challenge. The motivation, means and targets all exist in that impoverished country should great care not be taken in the design and role of outside intervention forces, whether under IGAD, AU or UN auspices.

The fact that the present global preoccupation is with terrorist groups that have what US President George W Bush has termed ‘global reach’ simply reflects the dominant interests of the US. In Africa – particularly in Algeria, Sudan, Somalia, Uganda and the DRC, and previously in Sierra Leone and Liberia – terrorism has become a recurring feature of essentially local conflicts. On the one hand, the extent of the use of terror across the African conflict as a deliberate strategy renders the normal use of the term virtually meaningless. On the other hand, the danger, from the perspective of many, is

the tendency to conflate all into a global war on terrorism, often with the real intention by governments and others to use that opportunity to suppress political demands for self-determination, political engagement or recognition of certain rights. Caught in between are millions of Africans, terrorised by gangs, rebels and governments alike. Perhaps the trend towards conflating domestic terrorism with transnational terrorism is the only practical way forward, although with little comfort to many affected victims.

African governments have always faced a dilemma in balancing donor agendas, legitimate national security interests, and domestic support for democracy and human rights. The events of 11 September 2001 have shifted these balances, not always with predictable results. US and international support for tough action by African governments may result in an escalation of conflict and further polarisation where democracy is fragile and governance weak. In Africa with its disaffected millions, more so than anywhere else, security measures alone will not end the violence. If much of the focus on international terrorism in Africa is at the behest of the dominant division of international power, it has limited relevance to ordinary people. Anti-terrorism legislation forced down the throats of countries with weak or non-functioning criminal justice systems is of little more than symbolic value while African economic failure continues to erode regime legitimacy and foster an ideological vacuum and disaffection at every level amongst an increasingly youthful population.

Multiple initiatives and measures are needed to combat the terrorist threat against African nations. It is self-evident that without a functioning, nationally recognised central government, failed and weak African states provide a safe haven and facilitating environment for domestic and international terrorism alike. No military operation can make these countries safe if it is not linked to a process that is ultimately aimed at the construction of a working state with a government in control of its territory, both urban and rural, and its land, sea and aerial borders.

It is, of course, not only an issue of the 'strength' of the state, but also the nature of the African state that should concern us in any discussion on stability and security. It is a statement of the obvious that Africa requires governments that are not only accountable to their citizens, but are also subject to restraint and oversight by other public agencies, including civil society. Without credible systems that can effectively restrain the overwhelming power of the executive, key African regimes will remain shallow, corrupt, vulnerable to personal rule and abuse and incapable of guaranteeing basic civil liberties or providing the basis for development and stability. The systemic evidence of the dismal record of imposed macroeconomic policy restraints on African governments in the absence of 'domestic' agencies of restraint and accountability is beyond contestation.<sup>27</sup> Imposed reform from beyond the continent, even in countries as weak as many in Africa, has proven a failure without strong domestic ownership and local agents of change within and outside government.

## Notes

- 1 The author would like to thank Anneli Botha from the Institute for Security Studies for her comments on an earlier draft.
- 2 Despite the efforts by the National Party government to argue the contrary, the African National Congress did not adopt or apply an armed campaign that relied on terror to liberate South Africa. It did adopt, and put into practice, a strategy of sabotage and eventually mass mobilisation. The practice of necklace murders in the 1980s was one particularly horrifying way of making sure that potential collaborators were intimidated. But then necklace murders were not indiscriminate since the victim was suspected of being a government sympathiser and the act was not directed against innocent civilians.
- 3 A statistic from the 2003 Arab Human Development Report picked up by bin Laden in a taped message of 4 January 2004. Quoted by T L Friedman, *The world is flat – The globalised world in the twenty-first century*, updated and expanded edition, Penguin Books, London, 2006, p 489.
- 4 R Pape, *Dying to win: The strategic logic of suicide terrorism*, as quoted by Scott Shane, Terrorism has a global impact but is often rooted in local disputes, *International Herald Tribune*, 17 July 2006, p 3.
- 5 Others have made a similar point. See, for example, M C Fowler, *Amateur soldiers, global wars: Insurgency and modern conflict*, Praeger Security International, Westport, 2005.
- 6 T Dempsey, *Counterterrorism in African failed states: Challenges and potential solutions*, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, Carlisle, 2006, p 8.
- 7 Friedman, op cit, p 487.
- 8 Ibid, p 559.
- 9 Identity, immigration, and liberal democracy, *Journal of Democracy*, 17(2), National Endowment for Democracy and The Johns Hopkins University Press, April 2006, p 12.
- 10 Ibid, p 6.
- 11 PR Neumann, Europe's jihadist dilemma, *Survival*, 48(2), Summer 2006, International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, p 73.
- 12 Ibid, p 72. Following the bomb attacks in Mumbai on 11 July 2006 there is speculation that al-Qaeda is trying to activate the large Muslim community in India against the Hindus and that the organisation may already be active in Kashmir.
- 13 GMPJ is linked to the hardline Algerian Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC).
- 14 Neumann, op cit, p 77.
- 15 The 1981 bomb explosion when a terrorist linked to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) planted a bomb in the historical Norfolk Hotel, then owned by a Jewish family, predates even this.
- 16 Dempsey, op cit, pp 15-16.
- 17 Terrorism and Africa, *African Security Review*, 12(4), Institute for Security Studies, Pretoria, 2003.
- 18 According to IRIN these include Muse Sudi Yalahow, Muhammad Qanyare Afrah, Osman Hannan Ali 'Atto' and Muhammad Dhere. Somalia: The challenges of change, 6 July 2006, p 2.
- 19 He was subsequently elected as president of the Supreme Consultation Council of Islamic Courts in Mogadishu. He appeared on a list of 'suspects' as a suspected collaborator with al-Qaeda and his assets were frozen post-9/11.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 As quoted by Zainab Osman, Bin Laden planning chaos in Somalia, IRIN, 3 July 2006. Gedi was responding, in mid-July, to an audio recording by the al-Qaeda leader that said a US-backed bid to deploying foreign troops to Somalia would be part of a crusade to crash Islamic rule. He added that the government would forcibly expel any foreigners found to have al-Qaeda ties from Somalia.
- 22 Dempsey, op cit, p 12.
- 23 D Farrah, Al-Qa'eda cash tied to diamond trade and Reports say Africans harbored Al-Qa'eda', both in the *Washington Post*, 2 November 2002 and 29 December 2002 respectively.
- 24 Dempsey, op cit, p 9.
- 25 C Abbott, P Rogers & J Slaboda, Global responses to global threats – sustainable security for the 21st century, Briefing paper, Oxford Research Group, Oxford, June 2006.
- 26 Ibid, p 5.
- 27 See, for example, P Collier, Learning from failure: The international financial institutions as agencies of restraint in Africa, in A Schedler, L Diamond & M Plattner (eds), *The self-restraining state: Power and accountability in new democracies*, Lynne Rienner, Boulder, Colo, 1999, pp 313–330.