

Africa: Vital to U.S. Security?

Symposium organized by the National Defense University

November 15-16, 2005

Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, D.C.

Panel on Terrorism and Transnational Threats - Causes and Enablers

An African Perspective
on the Global Fight Against Terrorism

by

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The views expressed in this paper are personal. They do not reflect necessarily the position of the Algerian Government or that of the African Union.

Report Documentation Page

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.

1. REPORT DATE 15 NOV 2005	2. REPORT TYPE N/A	3. DATES COVERED -			
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE An African Perspective on the Global Fight Against Terrorism		5a. CONTRACT NUMBER			
		5b. GRANT NUMBER			
		5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER			
6. AUTHOR(S)		5d. PROJECT NUMBER			
		5e. TASK NUMBER			
		5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER			
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) NDU-INSS Fort McNair Washington, DC 20319		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER			
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)		10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)			
		11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)			
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release, distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified	UU	11	

I am honored to participate in this panel to exchange views with other members and bring to the debate important aspects of the African perspective on the fight against terrorism.

Today's debate is indeed important.

Our world is now facing multiple challenges. New threats, including transnational terrorism, have emerged and new security fronts have opened up in a context of great uncertainty at the regional as well as global levels.

In view of the new configuration of international relations and the decreased regulatory capacities of states, the issue of the stability of state entities, and of international peace and security have become extremely complex. The threat is present and the risk real.

Today, transnational terrorism is having chain reaction destabilizing effects, creates chaos, threatens our societies and undermines the foundations of our institutions.

That is why I would like to address some areas of reflection most likely to contribute to our debate and to suggest in this respect some ideas which could guide a concerted action to combat terrorism.

Transnational by virtue of its very nature, terrorism has a strategic dimension and, as such, represents a form of violence deeply entrenched in globalization. Terrorism is a complex and diffuse threat which cannot be dealt with without a consistent and resolute commitment by all components of the international community.

I am convinced that in order to properly address this issue, we need to start with a shared analysis of the nature of terrorism, its transnational networks, and its implications for peace and security in the world. The fight against terrorism is a responsibility common to all States and requires clarity of principles and objectives.

Therefore, combating terrorism implies that terrorist crime must be identified and qualified as such in national legislations as well as in international instruments. As we have repeatedly stressed, there are no good and bad terrorists, just as there are no first- and second-degree terrorism, and there are no domestic and international terrorism. There is only a transnational and reticular terrorism which exploits weaknesses in the global system.

Consequently, by taking advantage of disparities in how different countries view terrorism and by displaying a capacity to adapt to the mutations of our times, terrorist groups with the support of international networks make use of judicial deficiencies and constraints related to the territorial competence of states to consolidate their logistical bases.

We should recognize that, with everything that the tragic events of September 11 have demonstrated, our methods to combat terrorism are still inadequate. Therefore, we have to design new instruments to defeat a scourge that is unprecedented in contemporary history.

Responding to the terrorist threat is everybody's business

It is necessary to cut terrorists once and for all from their supply bases, their relays, resources and ramifications by depriving them of the sanctuaries that they have been using, here and there, resorting to the cover provided by an abusive, accommodating and complacent asylum policy. Dealing with terrorism in a selective and discriminatory fashion, once deemed acceptable, must not be tolerated anymore.

One of the conditions for a successful cooperation between countries resides in a transparent exchange of information on terrorist groups and their networks of logistical support networks, communication, and weapon supplies. This is a fundamental requirement because

globalization in its current form has opened the door to hitherto unknown threats and facilitated an unprecedented increase in terrorist acts.

This is the reason why it is imperative that the response to the terrorist threat become everyone's business and that it be expressed by a greater mobilization of international public opinion and of demanding and multidimensional forms of cooperation by states in the framework of regional and multilateral organizations.

From this point of view, criteria of effectiveness, efficiency, and equity take on added significance for a globally concerted antiterrorism fight. Thus, the attention of the world community and civil society should particularly focus on:

- the imperative necessity to base the fight against terrorism on clear principles as a condition for a full commitment by all States and the international community and for the required effectiveness of that fight;
- the need to improve the operating methods of counter-terrorism institutions in order to enable them to give greater coherence to the global mobilization against this scourge;
- the urgency to establish a world fund with the aim of increasing anti-terrorist capabilities;
- the requirement to assimilate terrorist acts to crimes that violate international law.

Needless to say that in order to achieve these objectives, greater efforts should be made to put an end to the prevailing amalgam and confusion and greater support should be given to the collective effort put on values common to all peoples.

It is such a global vision which inspired Algeria in her fight against terrorism. This fight has a sense and a perspective. Today, it is included a huge national enterprise of revival and reconciliation.

At present, our efforts aim to strengthen the conditions for stability, security and development not only in Algeria, but also in our immediate neighborhood, namely in Europe, in the Mediterranean and in Africa.

Countering terrorism: What has Africa done so far?

In this context, I will mention the efforts made by the African countries. The adoption on July 14, 1999, in Algiers of the OAU Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism is an instance of the commitment of Africa to combat the scourge of terrorism.

At a time when the international community was not yet prepared to consider the terrorist phenomenon in its global and transnational nature, the African continent adopted a Plan of Action on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism in Africa with the aim of building institutional capacity and strengthening operational capabilities of member States to enable them to better face a threat that is diffuse and difficult to apprehend, by virtue of its demonstrated global nature. As the Convention emphasized, the Plan of Action provides “the most viable and comprehensive strategies for the prevention and combating of terrorism in Africa, particularly in the areas of police and border control, legislative and judicial measures, suppression of the financing of terrorism, exchange of information, and coordination at the regional, continental and international levels.”

Additionally, the African countries, through the Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism, underlined the importance of regional cooperation and implementation of continental and international instruments, stressing intra and inter- regional cooperation in facilitating exchange of information, mutual legal assistance, concluding extradition agreements and complementing the actions of member States.

The establishment of the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT) in Algiers is an important step in that direction. When fully operational, the ACSRT will provide the African countries with the means to lead a more effective fight against terrorism. Under consideration also is the creation of a Counter-Terrorism Unit (CTU). Headquartered at the African Union in Addis Ababa, the CTU will be mandated, under the authority of the Commissioner for Peace and Security, with the follow-up of the Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism and its additional Protocols, as well as with the recommendations set forth in the 2002 and 2004 Plans of Action. The CTU will work directly and regularly with the ACSRT. It will receive national reports from Member States and will be entrusted with establishing lists of individuals and organizations involved in terrorist activities in Africa and leaders of transnational financing and logistical support networks. The Counter-Terrorism Unit will also be the focal point of the African Union.

Indeed, Africa's commitment to combating terrorism should, similarly to its economic revitalization and its efforts to manage and settle conflicts, help define the outlines of a new collective security system consistent with a system that needs to be imagined and designed at the international level.

This means that States should undertake sustained actions of promotion of democratic practices and good governance.

Since the issue of the eradication of terrorism remains vital to the point of seeming to fashion international relations, Africa is fully committed to and engaged in the global antiterrorist enterprise.

The handling of the issue of the prevention and combating terrorism by the new structures put in place by the African Union is of particular significance because antiterrorist action on the Continent can thus be

coordinated and harmonized and be given the required perennality to cooperate actively with her partners.

Common endeavors: United States cooperation with Africa

In this respect, I would like to refer to the cooperation between the United States and the African countries by mentioning two United States initiatives (Pan-Sahel Initiative and Trans-Sahara Counter-terrorism Initiative, respectively PSI and TSCTI) and the East African Counter-Terrorism Program destined to support the efforts of the African countries.

These initiatives and programs are crucial for the prevention and the fight against terrorism. They have a strategic importance for the stability and security of the African countries. They are also an expression of US concerns and show that Africa is vital for US security and its long-term and global interests in the region.

However, while the United States have displayed greater awareness of the seriousness of the threat early on, current levels of cooperation should be increased and qualitatively improved. Thus, cooperation should be better structured. Ways and means to improve reconfiguration of such cooperation should be considered as well.

I am glad to note the great attention given to all these issues by the NDU Africa Center for Strategic Studies. The Center's topical seminar on trans-Sahara counter-terrorism planned to be held in Algiers on February 20, 2006, is significant in this regard.

We appreciate very much the commitment of the United States towards the fight against terrorism in Africa and its contribution to the economic and social development of the continent. U.S. support of New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) is of critical importance. Its continued effort to deepen its understanding and develop an accurate

reading of the African realities is crucial for the partnership between Africa and the United States, in this cooperative enterprise in the fight against terrorism. This will help greatly to address the roots and consequences of transnational terrorism and its projections in Africa and the United States of America, and elsewhere around the world.

In so doing, combating terrorism will be more efficient if it includes a vigorous fight against international organized crime and a search for satisfactory resolution of economic and social problems, including poverty and HIV-AIDS. The security challenge can no longer be viewed separately from the challenge of development.

This is why I think that the fight against terrorism must be affirmed in its political, economic, diplomatic, operational dimensions and aspects related to judicial mutual assistance, exchange of information, intelligence, as well as access to specific equipments.

The bilateral, regional, as well as multilateral cooperative efforts must be guided by universal principles of impartiality, transparency, good faith, and equality of treatment. We have to maintain the bilateral, the regional, and the multilateral within the same continuum for a collective security capacity to be effective and efficient.

The Critical role of the United Nations

The fight against terrorism must be the product of an effort of permanent concertation and coordination moved by a political vision universally shared and considered within a collective security policy. This would require a central incentive. This means that the United Nations should play the role that is expected of them and take, with the support of States and civil societies, the initiative in this area on renewed and clear

bases and in the framework of an appropriate and comprehensive judicial mechanism.

The offer of analytical support to the African States for collection and dissemination of information on the link between terrorism and related criminal activities, such as drug trafficking and money laundering, is part of the international effort to strengthen the institutional capacities of the Continent in view of the increase of organized crime activities.

Penalization of terrorist acts, the proposal to consider them as crimes subject to international law, the refusal to consider any political motivation to legitimize such acts and the adoption of requirements for granting political asylum are all measures required to set in place an efficient and good-faith cooperation.

Of course, the enterprise of fighting terrorism led by the Security Council of the United Nations has started to bear fruit. However, efforts are needed if we want to reach satisfactory solutions generated by future concerted actions involving a maximum number of countries.

For the fight against terrorism to be genuinely universal in its operating conditions, its deployment and its objectives, it must necessarily reject any abusive assimilation of terrorism with any religion, civilization, or national cause, and ban the policy of double standards.

I believe that the international community should have an effective controlling power, possibly including the ability to remind member States of their obligations. Already, the establishment of the executive direction of the Security Council Counter-terrorism Committee is a step in that direction.

In other words, in order to defeat terrorism and extremism in Africa and elsewhere, we need to have a basis of principles which enables us to understand the stakes and face the great challenges of regional and collective security. I believe that this is the way for the world community to

set the conditions for a strong and lasting mobilization against the scourge of terrorism. Such an effort must be strengthened at each country's level by the extension of democratic practices, respect for human rights, as well as the implementation of good governance and consolidation of the rule of law.

Where do we go from here?

In a changing world full of heavy threats, the design of the global fight against terrorism is crucial. This fight needs to be founded on a strong convergence on the issue of managing international risk and should rest as well on promoting development on renewed bases.

Therefore, it is important to be aware of transformational signs around the world so that we may better understand the complexity and the ubiquity of the terrorist phenomenon and of the tensions that it generates and that are at the heart of the tragedy being confronted around the world today.

Our objective is to build an integrated response to transnational terrorism which now finds fertile grounds in all countries, namely in Africa, a continent that is vulnerable and less prepared to face the new threats.

Africa is also confronted, in particular, by other social scourges whose alliance with terrorism and organized crime is increasingly visible. Kidnappings and sequestrations are a source for concern whether they are tied to criminal activities or directly generated by crises or conflicts which unfortunately continue to afflict some States on our Continent.

International cooperation for the prevention and combating these new forms of violence, which are as much violations of human rights as they represent a threat to the stability of States, should be strengthened

and greater resources should be devoted to providing assistance to the victims of such violence and their families.

Implementation of appropriate judicial instruments in this framework, and in the framework of combating terrorism, requires clear political willingness, a commitment to contribute to setting up a regional and multilateral network of technical assistance directed to the most vulnerable states, and a mobilization of financial resources and means commensurate to the challenge and the threat posed by transnational terrorism to peace and security in the world.

This issue also leads us to raise the urgency of setting up appropriate frameworks for concertation and coordination between the United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee and the Council for Peace and Security of the African Union.

The collective and solidary counter-terrorism effort in Africa still faces quite a few obstacles. A significant deficit in training and fighting capabilities needs to be urgently resolved thanks to the mobilization of African resources and international cooperation.

The major challenges facing us are those of security, development, and effective handling of interdependencies. To do that, we will need to strengthen and increase our capacities to govern and regulate, in conformity with the rule of law, and harmonize and complete them through a collective capacity able to modify the forces that generate tension and uncertainty around the world.

Such are the requirements for a significant contribution by Africa to an efficient global and coherent fight against transnational terrorism.

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