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The Root Causes of Terrorism: Why Parts of Africa Might Never Be at Peace

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INTRODUCTION

Optimistic outlooks have frequently been posited for Africa, often prefaced with state-ments that all that is needed is better governance, free markets, an end to corruption, or some other reform that is easy to say but all-too-often nearly impossible to implement. The unfortunate truth is that it is possible some parts of Africa may never be at peace. There will probably be regions where a semblance of normality might exist, but much of the continent will probably continue to experience strife, disease, competition for diminishing resources and a host of other maladies, some of its own making and some imposed by outside forces. It is these continuing problems, combined with little hope that they will be resolved, that in part disenfranchise the young and fuel the growing extremist movements. Taken together, they are the root causes for African terrorism.

To look at Africa's past is to witness horrific suffering, oppressive governments and an endless string of missed opportunities that, if pursued, would have improved the plight of its peoples. Even if by magic all of the African governments suddenly became capable and responsive to their citizens' needs, if the donor community only funded projects that increased self-reliance instead of dependence, and if the world greatly increased their interest and concern in what was happening in the continent, even if all of these should occur, it is still too late to avert catastrophe. New problems such as global warming have arisen that compound the old problems. Developed nations, steered by the hands of skilled government officials, will have great difficulty navigating the tremendous changes, especially those wrought through alteration of the climate, unfolding before them. To expect many of the African nations, already fragile if not broken, to also succeed without experiencing incredible turmoil, is not realistic.

This article will not dwell on the mistakes of the past. These are already well docu-mented in numerous excellent publications. Instead, the focus will be on the future, referencing earlier periods only as necessary to provide justification for predicting recurring events.

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BIRTHRATE

To walk down the streets of Kampala, the capital of Uganda, is to see a town booming with construction. New hotels, stores and other projects, many with foreign investment, appear almost overnight. One might think, after looking at all of these new structures, such an expansive economy would promise to lift the Ugandan people out of poverty. Maybe it would, were it not for one problem. As rapidly as the economy is expanding, the population is expanding even faster, so any financial benefits from this boom reaching the poor are dispersed so thinly that their impact, for many people, is negligible.

In 2006, there were 27.7 million people in Uganda. Predictions are that by 2025 that number will essentially double to 56 million.[2] While Uganda has the highest birthrate in the world, with a typical Ugandan woman giving birth to seven children, the story is similar, if only slightly less extreme, in many other African countries. Some of the continent's poorest nations, including Chad, Mali, Guinea Bissau, Niger, Burundi and Malawi, are expected to triple in size by 2050. In that same year Nigeria will be the fourth most populated country in the world, and the Democratic Republic of Congo and Ethiopia will also be in the top ten.

No problem represents as great a threat to stability in Africa as the continent's extremely high birthrate. The shantytowns that continue to grow, filled with massive numbers of unemployed, poorly educated individuals, are breeding grounds for crime, and an opportunity for extremists to recruit people to their sundry causes, people who are desperate to improve their lot in life.

The pursuit for land, already enormous, will continue unabated. As family plots become smaller with each subsequent generation, pressures build for additional property, either through deforestation, or by taking that which belongs to someone else. It is perhaps no coincidence that the 1994 genocide occurred in the African country most densely populated – Rwanda. With arable land growing increasingly scarce, conflicts will continue to arise.

Some may point to Kenya and South Africa as evidence that birthrates can be decreased. Kenya, through a massive family planning effort, was able to decrease the rate, but it is still significantly above replacement level, so the population is still growing. As for South Africa, family planning is one of the two main reasons the population is stable. Unfortunately, the other is the AIDS epidemic, which has hit the nation particularly hard and is certainly not a worthwhile "population control method" to be pursued.

There are numerous reasons many African countries have such high birthrates. The two strongest are both cultural and practical: provision of cheap labor, and a source of security in old age. In the first, parents strive to have large numbers of children as they provide relatively inexpensive labor to grow and harvest crops on the family's plot of land. In the second, children are expected to care for their parents when they become elderly and are no longer able to care for themselves.

Giving birth to children is no guarantee, in a continent with an appallingly high infant mortality rate, that enough will survive to help on the farm or take care of parents. To improve the odds, parents have many children, fully expecting some of them

to die young. However, with the introduction of public health services and medical care, many of those children who would have died are now alive and adding to the population pressure.

Proof of virility, especially on the part of the male, is another cultural reason for high birthrates. Some societies even allow a man to divorce a woman if she does not bear him any children. Women, who bear the brunt of both having and raising large families, are generally most amenable to the idea of birth control. However, in many African cultures, a woman's wishes can easily be overridden by a man's desires, and his appearance of virility among peers trumps her idea of a smaller family.

To tell parents they should reduce the number of children they have, is to say the family farm and their security in old age will be placed in jeopardy; the man should appear less virile; and they should trust a government that is notoriously unreliable for delivering on promises. Little wonder it is difficult to get the family planning message accepted. Also standing in the way of effective family planning programs are powerful religious organizations. As an example, the Catholic Church, which is particularly strong in several African nations, preaches against contraceptive medications and devices. The alternative they offer, besides sterilization, is the rhythm method, a difficult and rather impractical way to prevent conception, especially in poorer regions such as parts of Africa.

Strangely, in several instances, governments are pursuing policies of population growth. Such is the case with Uganda, where President Yoweri Museveni feels the country is underpopulated, and that a larger population will bring economic benefits. During a July 2006 speech he stated, "I am not one of those worried about population explosion. This is a great resource."[3] His inability, as well as others like him, to see the tremendous problems unchecked population growth causes, is contributing to the overall inability of Africa to pursue a reasonable course with regards to birth control.

Outside of Africa, the pressure to reduce the rate of population growth in that continent is conspicuously absent. The UN Millennium Development Goals, with the purpose of halving poverty by 2015, do not list decreasing fertility rates as one of their objectives. Additionally, programs sponsored by foreign governments as well as non-governmental organizations rarely appear to make reforms in African countries' birth control policies a requirement for aid. Thus, it is frequently left to the African governments themselves, with little pressure from the outside, to determine their population planning policies. This has led to efforts to decrease the birthrate, as exhibited by Kenya; to encourage an increase in the birthrate, as exhibited by Uganda; and with most countries in between often practicing various degrees of benign neglect of the issue.

Relatively recently, another factor has developed that threatens to increase the continent's population – Europe closing its doors to immigration. Fears of terrorism, failure to assimilate into European culture, and other concerns have caused many countries in Europe to "push back" against African immigration. The millions of Africans who might have fled to Europe, whether to escape conflict in their own continent or to pursue better economic opportunities elsewhere, will be hemmed in. Some might try to make the journey to America or Asia, but that would involve significantly greater distances and proportionately greater risks.

Issues related to the African population explosion will be revisited throughout this article, as it serves for the basis of several other important reasons for unending conflict: loss of land through environmental degradation, increased contact between different cultures, and other factors. One misperception, however, must be cleared up before going forward, and that is the issue of AIDS and population growth. The author has frequently encountered individuals in the United States, including some in the military, who stated they thought Africa's population was decreasing because of AIDS. It is true that AIDS has decreased the rate of population growth, in some countries more than in others. Certain age groups have been particularly hard hit. However, on the whole, the population loss through AIDS does not totally offset the population increase, and so much of the continent is still experiencing population growth.

Massive deaths – through other diseases, such as malaria; through starvation; wars; and other calamities – many attributable to overpopulation, have all taken a toll on the population numbers. Additionally, in some countries, especially in urban areas, there has been some progress in decreasing the birthrate, in part because of improved education (there is an inverse correlation between years of education and birthrates) and in part because of generally greater availability of contraceptives in urban compared with rural environments.[4] Despite all of these factors, the population of Africa continues to grow.

BORDERS MEANT TO BE BROKEN

When the Europeans divided up Africa, borders were drawn with little or no attention paid to who was living where. Straight lines were sometimes placed on the map, which followed neither natural physical nor cultural boundaries. Thus, some ethnic groups found themselves in more than one nation, and rather incompatible ethnic groups, long at war with each other, were now part of the same country.[5] The Somalis are a prime example of the former.[6] They became dispersed among British Somaliland, Italian Somaliland (these two would eventually come together to form Somalia), French Somaliland (later to become Djibouti), Ethiopia (the Ogaden portion incorporated by an Ethiopian ruler) and Kenya. This situation has led to constant conflict as Somali irredentism drives the move to create a Greater Somalia and undo the imposed divisions placed upon them. Somalia's decision to go to war against Ethiopia in the late 1970s was in large measure a response to this forced division of the Somali people.

An example of the second situation, ethnic groups traditionally antagonistic to each other placed in the same nation, can be found in Sudan. The continent's largest country, cobbled together with different groups, has been the site of civil wars between the north, mostly Arab and Muslim, and the south, mostly Black and a mix of Christianity and animism. In the west, in the region known as Darfur, the battles between the tribes of herders and tribes of farmers has resulted in genocide of the latter.[7]

In the Sudan, as in many other African countries where the Europeans brought disparate ethnic groups under a single flag, the tendency has been for one group (not always the majority) to dominate the government. In turn, the rights, economic development and future prospects of the other groups are frequently markedly diminished. Although the borders drawn by the Europeans in many instances may have been

arbitrary and foolish, the governments of Africa have decided to maintain their territorial integrity rather than attempt to right any wrongs. So, the Somali people will continue to be distributed among several nations, and the country of Sudan, though incorporating warring groups, will continue to struggle to maintain its integrity. These scenarios repeat themselves throughout the continent, sometimes with little hope they can be peacefully resolved. There is fighting across borders as separated groups try to unite, there is fighting within borders as forcibly united groups search for separation and independence, and the only thing these groups can agree on is their anger at Europe for having thrust such borders upon them.

PEACE AS A CAUSE OF WAR

Having ongoing border disputes and low-level war can sometimes work to a government's advantage. Such activities provide a useful distraction from the corruption and incompetence of a country's leaders. Citizens might also be hesitant to criticize their government while it is fighting for national sovereignty. Making peace removes those distractions, as well as the willingness not to criticize, and then the people can turn their attention to what is really happening in their own country, and possibly not be happy with what they are seeing.

This is what has happened, at least in part, with Somalia. By making peace with Ethiopia, a long-time enemy of Somalia, the people of Somalia turned their attention to their own government, eventually overthrowing the long-time dictator Siad Barre. The long-term consequence of that action was anarchy, as warlords divided up the country among themselves. Distracting confrontations do not have to be external to the country; they can also be internal. The Sudanese army was still fighting the Second Sudanese Civil War in the south of the country when rebels from Darfur, in the eastern part of Sudan, began to attack police stations, army outposts and other targets. Stretched thin by their fighting in the south, the army was initially unable to respond adequately to the attacks. However, as the civil war between the south and north drew to a close, Sudanese troops were redeployed in order to attack the Darfur rebels. Thus, the peace between the north and south was one of the reasons the genocide in Darfur occurred, as Sudanese soldiers were now able to enter the fray, and in combination with the Janjaweed – armed nomadic herders – have committed innumerable atrocities upon the non-Arabic farming communities of that region.[8]

Peace and war in such situations appear almost to be a zero sum game; peace in one region leads to war in another. It can work the other way, too, as war against an outsider can unify a people who are fighting among themselves. Either way, peace and war can both be tenuous states in a continent where allegiances and alliances frequently shift.

TRIBALISM VERSUS DEMOCRACY

In the West, a national government is supposed to be just that, a government of the nation. Elected representatives are expected to rise above their regional differences for the good of the entire nation. In Africa, democracy often means something quite different. The group that takes power will often emphasize their region above all

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others. Yes, there is certainly partisan politics in America, with pork barrel rewards going to home districts to help influence voters, and the winning party monopolizing political appointments, but there are protections in place for the losers, so that retribution is fairly limited, and certainly not the ethnic cleansing that is sometimes seen in Africa.

In Africa, allegiance is often to the ethnic group, not the nation. Scratch the surface of Rwandan society and it is possible still to find some of the animosity between the Hutus and Tutsis that led to the 1994 genocide, despite government attempts to define all the population as "Rwandans". That animosity is still being played out in the North and South Kivu provinces of Eastern Congo, where the Hutu Interahamwe forces and the Tutsi rebel forces under Laurent Nkunda continue to fight. The allegiance to ethnicity instead of nation is written in the blood of hundreds of thousands of Tutsis and the moderate Hutus who sympathized with them.

With an allegiance to an ethnic group instead of the state, effective governance is severely hindered as the winning group takes all the spoils. The end result is the losing group being markedly disenfranchised, and its people, looking for some sort of say, may turn to violence. It is a situation ripe for a terrorist organization to find the voice the people do not have in the government. The situation has been aggravated in recent years by an increasing religious extremism of some ethnic groups in certain regions. Although often perceived in the west as being mainly a Muslim phenomenon, it is also quite prevalent within Christian communities as well. With subsets of both populations becoming increasingly religious, frequently including aspects of intolerance to other beliefs, it is inevitable that conflict will arise.

A CULTURE OF VIOLENCE

It would be a mistake to assume, based on the numerous ongoing conflicts, that a culture of violence is the norm throughout Africa. However, it would also be a mistake to overlook the fact that such a culture apparently exists in parts of the continent. Noted political scientist Adda Bozeman, who emphasized the need for policymakers to have a deep understanding of foreign cultures, wrote, "Africans are more at ease with conflict in its multiple manifestations than their contemporaries in Europe and the United States . . . whereas conflict and accord, aggression and defence, and war and peace, are commonly perceived as pairs of opposites in Occidental [Western] societies, they are not experienced as mutually exclusive phenomena in Africa."[9]

A significant part of the problem appears attributable to a history of people being rewarded for violent behavior. As an example, young Somali men used to attack other's clans, often to steal their camels. Now in Somalia, when young men rob or force others to pay protection money, they justify their actions as being part of the long history of Somalis using violence to attain what they want. In the past they sought camels, now it is money.[10] Somali literature itself is filled with stories of poets defending their right to use violence to steal another clan's camels. Whether reading such material or watching the street battles of Mogadishu, the people are exposed to a constant barrage of violence where brutal acts not only go unpunished, but are rewarded. A steady diet of such can surely alter the national psyche.

Violence is also the way old scores are settled. When a member of the Somali Mareehaan clan killed a businessman from the Somali Dir clan, the son of the slain businessman took revenge 13 years later, by slaying a businessman from the Mareehaan clan.[11] Note, too, the collective punishment in this example, with the son essentially ascribing guilt to the entire Mareehaan clan and not just his father's killer. Eventually, about 400 people died, with thousands more displaced, as this conflict between clans widened.

Violence is also sometimes seen as the only way to address grievances when all other methods have failed. Had Nigeria, known for its immense corruption, not squandered billions of dollars it earned from selling oil, the people of the Niger Delta, for the most part ignored by the government and living in squalid poverty, might not have resorted to kidnapping foreign nationals. Their desperate acts bring not only attention to their plight, but also sorely needed money to survive.

Violence in the name of religion is also a fairly common occurrence in Africa, just as it is in many other parts of the world. Followers of one religion might describe those of another as apostates, heretics, or infidels; words that dehumanize and make it easier to justify their slaughter. Although there were other issues besides religion involved, the Second Sudanese Civil War pitted the predominantly Muslim North against the predominantly Christian and Animist South. Though a peace treaty was signed in 2005, ill-feelings between the two sides continue to smolder.

Even more divisive than religion in some parts of Africa are the clan-based or ethnic groupings. In the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, though the majority of both Hutus and Tutsis were Christian, Hutus massacred nearly 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus. In Darfur, though nearly all of the people involved in the fighting are Muslim, their other ethnic identities, along with whether they till the land or use it for pasture, trumps their common religious affiliation.

The most striking example of the impact of a culture of violence is the children who have been raised in one. Young boys and girls abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army, a rebel group in Uganda, are often forced not only to witness the barbaric killings of their family and friends, but also to actually partake in the murders themselves. Initially they numb themselves to the heinous acts they are forced to perform, but many of them eventually acquire the same mindset as their captors, and in turn force the next group of abducted children to kill their parents and friends.[12]

It will not be easy to break the mindset of so many people who have witnessed and/or participated in the many brutal acts that have come to characterize certain regions of Africa. A whole generation may have to die off before progress can be made in bringing peace, or at least a positive attitude towards peace, to the next generation before they too become indoctrinated by a culture of violence.

VESTED INTERESTS IN CONFLICTS

There is money to be made from the conflicts in Africa, vast sums of money. Consider Victor Bout, the Russian arms dealer nicknamed the "Merchant of Death", who has been accused of selling large amounts of weapons to various African factions, sometimes even opposing ones.[13] His profits from fueling ongoing conflicts have been

immense, and even when Interpol issued a warrant for his arrest, it is alleged he still did business on the African continent through intermediaries, while he remained in Russia, well protected from Interpol's reach. Letting his guard down, he was arrested in Thailand in March 2008, but remains perhaps the most prominent example that the profit for creating or supporting misery in Africa can often be quite handsome.[14]

It is not just outsiders who benefit from the eternal chaos in Africa, many African leaders have a significant stake in creating new conflicts or sustaining old ones, even if that means their own innocent people suffer. Sudanese leaders not only allow the killing in Darfur to go on, but have been implicated in perpetuating it, apparently with the hope of erasing the agriculturalists for ever from that region, thus allowing their own tribes to benefit from using the land for pasture. Military leaders in some African nations maintain armies of ghost soldiers, essentially lists of people who either do not exist or are not in the army, in order to obtain the salaries of these pretend combatants. Having an ongoing conflict helps justify large armies, and as long as no one looks too hard, corrupt officers will continue to reap the benefits of imaginary forces. After nearly two decades, the Ugandan army has been unable to defeat the Lord's Resistance Army in the northern part of that country. Certainly having ghost soldiers on its rolls did not help the Ugandan army's fighting capabilities.[15]

ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AS A CAUSE OF CONFLICTS

The environmental degradation of large parts of Africa has been enormous. Huge swathes of lands have been deforested, soils depleted or eroded, and air and water poisoned by pollution. Instead of improving, the overall trend for these problems seems to be accelerating. Corrupt and/or inefficient governments, over-population, lack of both financial resources and technical expertise, economic gains to be made by over-exploitation of natural resources, and other factors make it unlikely there will be any significant progress in reversing the environmental catastrophes unfolding on the continent. A relatively nascent environmental movement has begun, but the magnitude of the destruction, and the forces aligned against preservation, at least for now dwarf this movement's successes.

Such devastation presents excellent opportunities for people to oppose, and even resort to terrorism against, domestic governments (seen as allowing and/or corruptly benefiting from the degradation), foreign governments (seen as supporting multinationals and corrupt domestic governments) and multinationals such as oil companies. Additionally, those who benefit from environmental degradation may attack those who are opposing it. Two examples of these various scenarios are:

• Darfur, Sudan – environmental degradation is one of the main causes of the conflict. The northern Arab tribes, who are herders, have to travel further south to support their livestock. Their own northern land has been degraded by drought, desertification and over-population. This has brought them into conflict with the southern non-Arab tribes who are mainly farmers. The Arab northern tribes in this conflict are backed by the government.

• Part of the anger of people in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria can be traced to their living in regions environmentally decimated by oil extraction.

Africa's over-population coupled with its accelerating environmental degradation is a formula for disaster. As more and more people compete for fewer resources, conflict will inevitably occur. With no solutions in sight, the continent appears destined to perpetual misery and conflict for large portions of its populace.

GLOBAL WARMING: ACCELERATING THE ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

Former British Foreign Secretary, Margaret Beckett, stated in 2007, before the UN, "An unstable climate will exacerbate some of the core drivers of conflict, such as migratory pressures and competition for resources."[16] As temperatures rise the world will increasingly see the prophetic nature of this sentence, most likely beginning in one place – Africa.

Of all the continents threatened by global warming, Africa is the most vulnerable. With its many corrupt and inefficient governments, and a lack of financial resources, Africa will be unable to adapt to the progressively rising temperatures the way richer, more developed nations can through construction of reservoirs, pipelines and other projects.[17] There are already numerous signs across the continent of the rising temperatures: approximately 82 percent of the ice on Mount Kilimanjaro, Tanzania, has disappeared; glaciers in Rwenzori, Uganda, have decreased by 75 percent; and Lake Chad's surface area went from 25,000 km^2 in 1963, to only 1,350 km^2 in 2001.[18] The list goes on.

The shrinking glaciers adversely impact agriculture. During normal melts they feed the mountain springs, which in turn are used for irrigation. With less snow, the melt is smaller, and so they cannot support as much farming. Besides the loss of water, global warming in Africa is introducing malaria and other insect-borne diseases into areas that were previously free of these diseases. The previously cooler air in those areas acted as a barrier to the insects. Now, with increased temperatures, the insects have spread disease significantly beyond their initial geographical range.

The loss of land puts increasing pressure on the people. As they start to go hungry, as they start to succumb to diseases such as malaria, which might not have even existed in their area before, they will look for ways out of their predicament, and when a cult leader or terrorist says, "Follow me", they just might do so. The response of the developed world has been erratic and meager at best. Some people in the Western nations, despite all the scientific evidence, continue to question the role human activities, such as burning fossil fuels, contribute to global warming. Unable to produce significant agreements, such as all major economic powers endorsing the Kyoto Protocol, the oil-based economies continue to spew greenhouse gases, essentially sealing the fate of Africa. The irony is that Africa, which is most impacted by global warming caused by the burning of fossil fuels, has the lowest fossil energy use *per capita* of the major world regions.

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POOR GOVERNANCE

African nations run the range from having little or no government, as in Somalia, to true democracies, as in South Africa. In between these two extremes are a variety of govern- ments, often dictatorships masquerading as democracies, and often incredibly corrupt and inefficient. Unable to govern effectively, and lacking transparency so that corrup- tion and inefficiency can be weeded out, these nations frequently provide the perfect culture for extremism or outright anarchy to take root.[19]

It was not supposed to be that way. Following independence from colonial rule these nations burst upon the scene with people anxious to fulfill their dream of choosing their own destinies. Unfortunately, many of these people never had a chance to fulfill that dream, as many African governments became long-term, one-man rule, frequently staying in power through corruption, intimidation, or both.[20] Some examples include:

- Eritrea – Isaias Afewerki has been President since independence in 1993. Many members of parliament and senior ruling party members have been imprisoned *incommunicado* since 2001.[21]
- Libya – Muammar al Gaddafi has been the *de facto* leader since a 1969 coup. Freedom House, a Washington DC non-profit-making organization that assesses political freedom, gave Libya a rating of "not free", its worst possible rating.[22]
- Swaziland – Ruled oppressively by King Mswati since 1986.[23] He lives lavishly, spending huge sums on himself and his 13 wives.[24]
- Ethiopia – Meles Zenawi has been Prime Minister since 1995. Elections have been controversial. Opposition candidates have been arrested, with some remaining in jail.[25]
- Angola – Jose Eduardo Dos Santos has been President since 1979. He came to power under one party rule. Next elections have been repeatedly pushed back.[26]
- Sudan – President Omar al-Bashir has controlled the authoritarian government since a military coup in 1989.[27]
- Equatorial Guinea – President Obiang has been in power since a 1979 coup. His regime is noted for its corruption, oppression and anti-democratic behavior.[28]

Some nations have gone from stability to chaos. Zimbabwe is one such place. The former Republic of Rhodesia, it was an economic powerhouse able not only to feed itself, but to export food as well, earning it the nickname "the breadbasket of South Africa".[29] Today the economy is in shambles, with inflation running at over 89 sextillion percent per year.[30] President Robert Mugabe's corrupt government, coupled with a dis- astrous land redistribution program, has essentially destroyed the country's economy. Dissent, though brutally repressed, is fomenting. Mugabe was supposed to be the person who could successfully transition the nation from White rule to Black. Instead, he sucked dry the country's wealth, perhaps permanently relegating the country's once bright future to being nothing more than a memory. Zimbabwe, like several other African nations, such as Kenya, where crime has increased so much that the capital has been dubbed "Nairobbery", is going in the wrong direction when it comes to develop-

ment. In the wake of these failing societies, first verbal dissent and then physical dissent, as expressed by acts of violence, can be found.

Attempts by Western nations to improve governance frequently fall short of the mark. Democracy is often subverted so that the winning party, which in many cases is the winning tribe, takes over all or nearly all government positions. They have a great incentive to remain in office as the riches flow to them. Defeat at the polls would mean a tremendous loss to their economic well-being, and thus they are willing to do whatever it takes, including intimidation of the opposition, to remain in power. With so much at stake, entrenched African politicians frequently stymie attempts by western nations to change the *status quo*.

An important offshoot of the problem of winning parties appointing all of the government positions, is that it is difficult for a professional, competent, impartial bureaucracy to arise in such a situation. Cronyism and nepotism are used to fill slots instead of merit and, as a result, governments are incapable of implementing fair taxing schemes, creating schools, providing adequate security, delivering healthcare and so forth. This incompetence creates fertile conditions for organizations with ties to terrorists to fill the void.

A CONTINENT SATURATED WITH WEAPONS

Much of Africa is awash with weapons. Rocket-propelled grenade launchers, 9mm pistols, and of course the ubiquitous AK-47, can often be purchased at bazaars, no questions asked. Despite international bans that were supposed to stop the flow of arms into Somalia, weapons there are readily available. Ethiopian soldiers who met massive armed resistance when they entered Mogadishu can testify to the failure of the bans.

The never-ending arms trafficking has resulted in criminal gangs, insurgencies, and terrorists having a ready supply of firepower to kidnap foreign oil executives, abduct children to become soldiers, or blow up American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, as happened in 1998.[31] With so many weapons and explosives readily available, it is inevitable that disagreements in the past, which might have been settled with fistfights or small arms, will now be settled with RPGs and IEDs. The intensity of conflicts is being ratcheted upwards, with weapons dealers willing to sell to both sides being the main ones to profit from the cycle of violence.

For terrorists and insurgents, arms trafficking offers two benefits. First, they can use it to help finance their organization. Second, it provides them with ready access through reliable suppliers to weapons for their own use. Well-financed and well-armed, it is no wonder these organizations have a certain appeal to disenfranchised youths looking not only to belong somewhere, but to fight back at whatever power, be it real or perceived, foreign or domestic, that initially sentenced them to lives of poverty and despair.

There will be no removing the weapons from Africa. The task would be impossible. Instead they will stay, and even multiply in number, and continue to offer to any disgruntled young man a chance for revenge against, say, an imperialist power or multinational company that has degraded the land, made a profit from oil, and not provided a fair share of the money to the neediest people.

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HOW AIDS CAN LEAD TO TERRORISM

AIDS is a disease that has devastated the continent, leaving millions of people dead. At first glance one might think that, despite the tragedy of the disease killing so many, perhaps by decreasing population pressures it will decrease competition for resources and hence lead to fewer people turning toward terrorism to try to get their share.

The reality is quite different. In 2006, there were 12 million AIDS orphans in Sub-Saharan Africa.[32] By 2010, it is estimated that the number will have risen to 18.4 million, approximately 15 to 20 percent of the population of some countries. These children, not as productive as their parents were on the farms, hungry and alone, will look for ways to ameliorate their misery. Anxious for schooling, they might turn to madrassas. There they will be easy recruits for terrorist organizations; their new parents, the radical teachers that fill their minds with hate.

SEEDS OF TERRORISM

It is frequently difficult to distinguish terrorist groups from criminals, insurgents, freedom fighters and other armed entities.[33] Often there is a blend, with terrorists deriving some of their funds through criminal activities, such as drug smuggling or arms trafficking. In the often confusing and corrupt political atmosphere of Africa, such blending of organizational goals – freedom fighting with drug smuggling, terrorism with arms trafficking and so on – seems particularly prevalent.

There are already numerous terrorist groups in Africa. A particularly worrisome turn of events has been the collusion of some of them with al-Qaeda. The Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) is one such entity.[34] The group, founded as an armed resistance against the government of Algeria, started its insurrection when the military regime, fearful that Islamist militants might come into power, cancelled elections.

In recent years, the GSPC began to dwindle in numbers. Perhaps to counter this weakness it "merged" with al-Qaeda, with exact details of this relationship uncertain: is it truly a merger, just a name change by GSPC to garner attention, or something in between? Whatever the actual dynamics of this relationship, by having the name "al-Qaeda" associated with it, western nations have become significantly more aware of activities in Algeria.

Al-Qaeda's simultaneous attacks on the US Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, demonstrate the organization's reach into Africa as well as its formidable capabilities. The attacks also demonstrate America's vulnerabilities on the continent. And it is not just al-Qaeda that America needs to worry about. Numerous other African terrorist groups decry the Great Satan, the one they feel is often in collusion with corrupt governments that ignore the economic hardships of their people.

Many, though not all, of the terrorist organizations in Africa are associated with radical Islamic fundamentalism. The wish to impose Sharia law, the pushback against Western culture and the desire to create a Caliphate in the Horn of Africa as existed in ancient days, all drive the terrorists.[35] The intervention in Somalia by Christian soldiers from Ethiopia adds, to an extent, to the conflict, instead of soothing it as they are perceived as modern day Crusaders.

Thus, the seeds of terrorism are already in Africa, groups waiting to grow as disenfranchised and/or disheartened individuals look for solutions. The walls of the American embassies may be getting thicker, but no amount of cement can form an impenetrable barrier between the ideas of gradual, peaceful change based on capitalism and democracy, and revolutionary, violent change based on religious extremism.

THE CURSE OF RESOURCES

Africa's vast wealth from natural resources has been, by and large, more curse than blessing. Wars have been fought in the Democratic Republic of the Congo over coltan, a valuable mineral used to make electronic components in items such as cellphones and computers. Infamous "blood diamonds" have fueled conflicts, which have resulted in countless civilians dead or maimed in Angola, Côte d'Ivoire and other nations. Then there is oil, a resource that has become almost synonymous on the continent with corruption, poor governance and grinding poverty for the masses, while a small group at the top accumulates immense wealth.[36]

Much of the problem with oil can be attributed to "Dutch disease" and the creation of "*rentier* states". Briefly, Dutch disease is a term coined to describe the decline in the Netherlands of its manufacturing sector after natural gas was discovered there in the 1960s. This economic phenomenon can be thought of as occurring because labor shifts away from manufacturing to the boom sector, in this case, gas extraction; exchange rates move in a direction that makes the country's exports more expensive; and other factors adversely impact the so-called non-boom sectors, which in African nations with oil are usually agriculture and manufacturing.

The other term, *rentier* states, refers to nations that derive their income from "renting" their resources to external agents. In the case of oil-producing nations in Africa, they rent their oil resources to others, such as multinational oil companies and, in return, receive money. At first glance, a *rentier* state may seem like a desirable position for a nation as it receives income from its resources, often with little effort as the agent responsible for extracting the resource, such as a multinational oil company, frequently assumes the expenses and risks associated with production. However, there can also be downsides to being a *rentier* state; many of these associated with money flowing directly from the oil companies to government coffers. Thus, in a country with large oil reserves, the government does not have to tax its people, with the result that people do not feel they have a vested financial interest in their government and the government feels disconnected from the people. The elites who rule the government can use the oil money to maintain their power either by buying the people off with social programs, which at least would improve their lot, or, as often happens in Africa, financing a large security apparatus that maintains the arrangement of a corrupt elite on top through violence and intimidation, expropriating resource-rich land without just compensation and severely limiting freedom of the press.

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AN UNWILLINGNESS TO CONFRONT THE MAIN ISSUES

There are innumerable sincere, dedicated government agencies, NGOs and individu-
als, striving to make a difference in Africa. Many of them have had success, at least on
a small scale. However, despite these efforts, the long-term trends overall point to a
bleak future for large portions of the continent. Much of this is because Africa and the
international community are unwilling to tackle the truly overriding issues.

Population growth is one such issue. In much of Africa, as mentioned earlier, the rate
is extremely high. The massive funding, the successful education campaigns to
persuade people not to have large families, the change in religious doctrine that encour-
ages large families – it is readily apparent none of these are going to occur. Without
tackling population growth, probably the single most important issue related to com-
petition for resources, other efforts to prevent extremism will probably be doomed. A
hungry person who is feeling marginalized will look for a way out of the situation, even
if that means picking up a rifle and subscribing to a life of violence. As the population
continues to spiral upwards, more people will be hungry, especially in less-developed
countries, which do not have the technological resources and/or finances to keep the
Malthusian predictions at bay.

Another area that will lead to competition for increasingly scarce resources, and for
which the international community does not seem up to the fight, is global warming.
African soil is baking and African water resources are diminishing; yet the developed
nations are unable to come to an agreement that will significantly reduce the emission
of the greenhouse gases that are causing these problems.

Yet another area that does not appear likely to change in the immediate future is an
improved distribution of wealth. In many African countries it will continue to be con-
centrated in the hands of a few, often corrupt, people. Without a better distribution of
money earned from mining minerals or pumping oil, the poor will continue to turn to
violence, even extremism, to at least partly right a wrong.

It is not just the economic imbalances within individual African nations that need to
be remedied. How trade is conducted between Africa and the outside world has also
created enormous imbalances in need of correction. Through methods such as
dumping unwanted and/or inexpensive goods in Africa, and applying high import
tariffs to certain African commodities, western nations are frequently part of the
economic problem instead of the solution. Vested interests with powerful political allies
in western nations make changes to trade policies with Africa quite difficult, thus aggra-
vating the continent's poverty.

Few, though certainly not all, politicians, African or otherwise, seem willing to
confront the economic imbalances and social injustices. Instead, it is often left to the
poorest African people to find a way out of their misery. Are the young people from the
Niger Delta, where large amounts of oil are pumped without significant compensation
to the local populace, terrorists when they kidnap a foreign oil executive and demand a
ransom be paid? China is criticized by the West for turning a blind eye to the suffering
in Darfur so that its billion-plus people can continue to rely on Sudanese oil. However,
the West has not done much better in helping the people of the Niger Delta who wallow
in poverty while the nation's leaders live in luxury. Not the US, not China, essentially

no foreign government is intervening to change these corrupt governments. It should thus come as no surprise when the African people themselves decide to turn to terrorism to improve their lives.

Africans have watched as the developed world has threatened to intervene to send its soldiers to prevent bloodshed. The West did intervene in Somalia, with disastrous results. Not only did the mission ultimately fail, but it also angered many of the very people, the Somalis, it was sent to assist. Additionally, it created a great distaste in the American public for further interventions in Africa. Though the United States declared the conflict in the Darfur region of Sudan to be genocide, a military force capable of stopping the killings was not dispatched. A large percentage of American military resources was already tied up in Iraq and Afghanistan, but perhaps of greater significance, the US public was extremely wary about entering any more foreign conflicts, with probably a special aversion, after what happened in Somalia, to possible entanglements in Africa. Thus, despite the rhetoric, Africa knows that besides some pockets of troops as might be sent by AFRICOM, the continent is free to engage in genocide, terrorism and massive corruption with little fear of reprisal from the international community.

AFRICOM'S CHALLENGING ROLE

America's solution, in part, to combat the growing threat of terrorism in Africa, is to create a new military command focused on the continent: AFRICOM. Not just having combat capabilities, this force will also provide significant humanitarian relief, helping to win over the local populace. Unfortunately the new command faces many challenges:

*   Many African governments do not want AFRICOM in their nations, a sentiment shared by many of the countries' peoples.[37] For some politicians there is fear that AFRICOM will pressure them to give up their corrupt ways. The general populations fear just the opposite, that AFRICOM will continue to prop up unpopular governments. And, for nearly everyone, the fear of once again being colonized by a foreign power weighs heavy.
*   Placing American troops in harm's way makes them convenient targets for terrorists. In such a situation it would probably be only a matter of time before an innocent child from a village is killed in the crossfire. The immediate aftermath of such a killing would be websites endlessly playing videos of the heartless Americans gunning down the child, no matter what the actual truth might be. Anti-American sentiment would be profound.
*   By providing additional aid, these nations increase their dependency on the United States. Additionally, it frees the corrupt dictators from using any of their money to help the people. What little accountability of the government to the people that exists is lost, as now it is the Americans in certain regions who are expected to deliver basic services such as healthcare.

There is an incredible irony regarding the deployment of US troops in Africa. With growing Chinese influence on the continent, American troops are also there to show the

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flag, to demonstrate that it is not just China that cares about them, but also the US. However, as America is significantly in debt, and borrows billions through China in the way of bonds, it is in essence the Chinese funding the American military presence there.

Possibly counter-productive from a terrorism standpoint, and an expense that needs to be paid with money borrowed from the Chinese, it might be time to redirect AFRICOM's approach to Africa. One alternative might be the creation of an educational adjunct to AFRICOM, similar to the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, to spearhead the command's efforts on the continent. The Marshall Center's mission statement reads, in part,

> To create a more stable security environment by advancing Democratic Defense institutions and relationships; promoting active, peaceful engagement; and enhancing enduring partnerships among the nations of America, Europe and Eurasia . . .[38]

Such a relatively low-cost undertaking, at least in comparison to establishing bases in Africa, could lead to enhanced understanding between the United States and African nations, paving the way for an increased number of joint activities. It is a relatively low-risk approach, and with the problems inherent in establishing bases in Africa, this should possibly be one of the earliest steps the new command takes.

SUMMARY

There are no optimistic scenarios for much of Africa. Poverty, injustice, war, crime, saturation with weapons, ethnic hatred, diminishing resources, disease, over-population and a myriad of other problems, will continue to plague the continent, resulting in legions of disenfranchised young people looking for dignity and a way out of the misery; affiliations with terrorist organizations offer both.

The developed world will express concern but, unless they are directly impacted, will do little to relieve the root causes in Africa that lead people to choose terrorism. Some humanitarian efforts here, some military assistance there, some words condemning corruption, some words threatening large-scale military intervention, appear to be the extent of the West's reaction, at least overtly, to the growing terrorist threat in Africa.

Perhaps this is not even the wrong approach. With so many seemingly overwhelming problems in Africa, it could possibly be futile for the developed nations to try to manage them all. Judiciously choosing which problems, where and how much to spend on them may be the best strategy. By accepting that not all root causes of terrorism can be eliminated through limited Western aid or military intervention, and focusing on those that are realistically amenable to being solved, terrorism can perhaps be prevented from occurring in some areas where it has not occurred, and reduced or eradicated in some areas where it already exists.

In the final analysis there is only one place capable of resolving the root causes of terrorism in Africa, and that is Africa. While other nations can help, until all of Africa's leaders make a determined effort to eliminate corruption, poverty, disease, obstacles to democracy, huge disparities of income, environmental degradation, social injustice,

barriers to the press and lack of effective family planning, there is no hope that the continent can avoid serving as a breeding ground for terrorists.

NOTES

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