

AIDING THE WAR ON TERROR

Jude Howell and **Jeremy Lind** have spent the last two and a half years researching the impact of the 'War on Terror' on non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and aid. They have found widespread concern that aid is being used to foster allies – not development.

When President George Bush uttered the words 'you are either with us or you are with the terrorists' in his emergency address to Congress on 20 September 2001, in the wake of the attacks on the Twin Towers, he called upon political leaders to stake their positions in relation to America and its 'terrorist' foes. The sharp dichotomy posed between allies and enemies triggered the most fundamental realignment of global political relations since the end of the Cold War. Since then governments across the world have rushed to introduce a swathe of counter-terrorist legislation, measures and practices, justifying this with the refrain of exceptionality. Civil liberties activists, human rights lawyers and sceptical politicians have in many countries expressed concern at the effects of hasty anti-terrorist legislation on citizens' rights and liberties.

As well as introducing new security laws, measures and policies, the so-called 'War on Terror' has used international development and military aid as a tool to reward and persuade. International development assistance has always been a key part of foreign

policy. During the Cold War period both the Soviet Union and the West used international development assistance to foster allies in Africa, Latin and Central America, and Asia. The global War on Terror regime has highlighted the strategic relevance of aid to the pursuit of global and national security interests at a time when its ideological rationale in the post-Cold War era had almost disappeared.

In February 2006 we were awarded funding, through a major ESRC-funded programme into Non-Governmental Public Action, to look at the impact of the War on Terror on NGOs and aid. It has already been well documented that, in the post-9/11 context, aid has been drawn into the web of the War on Terror, with military and development assistance to key frontline states such as Pakistan, Iraq and Afghanistan increasing considerably. But the harnessing of international development assistance into the prosecution of this 'war' has not been limited to increased resource allocations to strategic states; it has also required a shift in development priorities, in greater engagement between development and

security institutions, the expansion and creation of new programmes promoting security interests; and an explicit ideological linking of development with counter-terrorism.

Our research, which we are finalising for a book due out next year, has found that this intensification of the relations between international development assistance and national security interests has had consequences for civil societies post-9/11. International donor agencies and foundations have come under pressure to scrutinise their relations with southern partners as the latter become suspect of having links to terrorists. Similarly Muslim charities, organisations, mosques and centres have come under the gaze of security agencies, political leaders and the media as being particularly vulnerable to manipulation by Islamic terrorists and as potential sites for the 'breeding' of terrorists.

Civil society has become not only the target of suspicion in the War on Terror, but also increasingly recruited into combating anti-radicalisation and preventing terrorism, both domestically and internationally. Multilateral and bilateral aid agencies as well as foreign policy institutions have all since September 2001 sought, to varying degrees, to engage more resolutely with Muslim communities, establishing projects and programmes focusing on Muslim groups identified as particularly vulnerable to radicalisation.

Though there has rightly been considerable focus in scholarly work and practice on the human rights implications of the War on Terror, less attention has been given to its impact on civil societies and on aid policies and practices. Over the past year we have sought to describe and analyse the effects of this new global War on Terror regime on aid policy and practice as it relates to supporting non-governmental public action around poverty, rights and social justice in aid-recipient countries. The three case studies of Afghanistan, Kenya and India have yielded detailed new material about the effects on non-governmental public action in different political contexts and shifts in aid policy and practice around supporting civil society. They have been supported by the work of scholars from each of these regions, who have visited LSE this year to contribute to the project. ■



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CASE STUDY

In June 2008 **Said Abdalla** (pictured) arrived in London on an ESRC NGPA fellowship based in LSE's Centre for Civil Society. One of three fellows invited to LSE to contribute to Jude Howell's and Jeremy Lind's research into the impact of the 'War on Terror' on NGOs and aid, he met student journalist **Lindsey Hall** and described his life and research.

Said Abdalla meets me on the nearly deserted LSE campus one hazy afternoon in mid-June. At the time of our interview he is in his third week of a fellowship which will see his studies at LSE through until the end of August. His goal is to explore the role of civil society in Nairobi.

Said first learned of LSE's Civil Society Centre while he was working with the Muslim Human Rights Forum (MHRF), a Kenya-based volunteer organisation which aims to raise awareness about the threat the War on Terror poses to human rights. Since January 2007, Said says, around 150 people have been renditioned – transferred in secret from one country to another outside any legal process – by the Kenyan government as they crossed the border, fleeing violence in Somalia. The details remain shrouded in mystery, but

Reuters reports the concerns of human rights groups that detainees have been shipped to detention centres in Somalia, Ethiopia and Guantanamo Bay, where they are being held without trial as suspected terrorists. MHRF has encouraged debate in Kenya on the renditions by publishing an influential report on the 'Horn of Terror', which documented in detail the illegal transfer of the 'terror suspects' outside of Kenya.

The War on Terror poses problems for Kenya, a country struggling to establish a stable democracy. Interference from outside powers like the US is making Said's dream of an independent Kenya difficult to achieve. The War on Terror doesn't help Kenyans, he says, but it does serve as a convenient veil for hiding other motives. For example, Said explains, it gives corrupt politicians an excuse to

say: 'I don't like this guy, so let's freeze his assets and call him a threat.' 'Our fear is that some of these measures are draconian, some of these measures are unconstitutional,' he says. 'There is a "you're with us or you're against us" attitude.'

Of course, there have been incidences of terrorism in Kenya. In 1998 the American Embassy in Nairobi was bombed, leaving around 212 casualties and more than 3,000 wounded – many of them Kenyans. Said was just a young man at the time. He stares into his coffee mug as he recalls that day a decade ago. 'It was really terrible. I was about 300 metres away when it happened. I lost many friends.'

But according to Said, attacks like this have always targeted Israeli and American interests 'leaving Kenyans caught up in the cross-fire'. He passionately believes that this is a global issue, and Kenya should attempt to develop 'a real dialogue between West and East'. Rather than American-backed legislation on counter-terrorism, Said emphasises the need for a truly Kenyan discourse which has human rights as its core tenet.

After the 1998 attack, several Muslim charities in Nairobi were closed down as part of an anti-Islamic backlash. Suspicions of Muslims have deepened since then, prompting Said and his friends to form the Muslim Human Rights Forum in 2005. He hopes a summer at LSE will help him understand exactly how US policies are affecting civil society in his home country. He hopes Obama, whose father was Kenyan, will be more receptive to civil society than Bush was. Rather than huge security budgets, he says, the new president needs to listen to what civil society in Kenya is saying.

Studying at LSE also gives Said the chance to network at an international level, and much of his time in London is spent meeting with UK human rights organisations, including groups that have worked to raise awareness of the regional rendition programme in the Horn of Africa. So far he has been pleasantly surprised by the positive response to his work. It helps that he's doing his research at a time when human and Muslim rights are a hot topic in London; the 42 day detention issue is the subject of heated debate in Parliament and the media, with the final decision just days away at the time of our meeting.

'Nelson Mandela was imprisoned as a terrorist,' Said says, suggesting that we must learn from history and raise the level of dialogue. 'The War on Terror targets superficial, material causes, but the roots of the conflict stretch far deeper.' ■



Lindsey Hall

has just completed her master's in Media and Communications at LSE and now works as an editorial assistant at the *Financial Times*.

Kenyans use a broken door to carry an injured man to an ambulance, following the 1998 bombing of the American Embassy in Nairobi



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