



Aid and civil society in eastern Africa during the War on Terror

- A combination of soft and hard power has been used to prosecute the War on Terror in Eastern Africa
- Advancing foreign security interests is once again an important objective for development aid in the region
- Muslims are a newly important focus of aid in line with the counter-radicalisation objectives of donors
- Muslim leaders and organisations have taken the lead to oppose certain counter-terrorism measures, laws and practices but mainstream civil society organisations have been less prominent in their advocacy
- There is pressure on civil society to clearly define its views and roles in relation to new security interests and threats



Fighting the War on Terror in eastern Africa

Bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 highlighted the strategic importance of Eastern Africa in a shifting global political context. However, it was only after the 9/11 attacks on the US that regional governments came under intense diplomatic and aid pressure to cooperate in counter-terrorism. In Kenya for example, the US has supported the establishment of a National Counter-Terrorism Centre, the passage of a controversial anti-terror bill and tougher anti-money laundering regulations.

The strategic importance of the region is emphasised by the creation of the Combined Joint Task Force Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA), a US counter-terrorism base in Djibouti. CJTF-HOA personnel have operated mobile health and veterinary clinics and built schools in Ethiopia and in predominantly Muslim areas of Kenya. This use of soft power aims at dominating the ideological battlefield and improving intelligence-gathering by winning the trust of local communities. There has been some support for these activities by communities where CJTF-HOA personnel have delivered aid.

However, suspicions linger of the aims of the US military, particularly in the aftermath of the US-backed Ethiopian invasion of Somalia in December 2006. Ethiopian forces quickly routed fighters allied with the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), which the US suspected of harbouring Al Qaeda suspects. Fighting in Somalia has escalated sharply following the military intervention as insurgents step up their resistance to occupation through a campaign of Iraqi-style assassinations and ambushes of Ethiopian troops.

The war has resulted in a realignment of power relations in the region, a humanitarian catastrophe, and increased anti-American sentiment. The Kenyan and Ethiopian governments have been culpable in a regional rendition programme involving the extra-legal transfer of suspects from Kenya to Somalia, Ethiopia and Guantanamo Bay. A newly formed Muslim caucus in the Kenya parliament is currently seeking the return of Kenyan detainees held in Ethiopia. Uganda and Burundi are the only African countries to have sent peace-keeping troops to Somalia to relieve beleaguered Ethiopian troops.

“Fighting in Somalia has escalated sharply”

NGPA Programme

The ESRC Non-Governmental Public Action programme seeks to further understanding of the impact of non-governmental public action in reducing poverty and exclusion, and in social transformation, from an international comparative and multi-disciplinary perspective. The programme looks beyond NGOs to consider a range of formal and informal groups, networks and movements. Building systematically on research to date, the programme develops theory, generates new empirical theory, and fosters beneficial linkages between researchers and users.

Researchers from the LSE Centre for Civil Society, the Kenya Human Rights Institute, the Universities of Nairobi and Dar es Salaam as well as independent scholars have examined the politics and impacts of the War on Terror on aid policy and practice in relation to civil societies in the region. Other objectives of the research were to advance theoretical work on civil society and development and to inform practical strategies for civil society in a shifting political context. This research briefing summarises key points from roundtable discussions held in London and Nairobi to discuss the research findings.

Non-Governmental Public Action

RESEARCH BRIEFING



Varying levels of compliance

The Ugandan and Tanzanian governments passed anti-terror legislation with ease. Restrictions on political and civil spaces coupled with relatively weak civil societies and opposition parties in both countries meant there was little organised opposition to the legislation. In Kenya opposition by human rights activists and Muslims groups as well as some parliamentarians has scuppered an anti-terror bill. Notably, Kenya is less aid dependent and it has been better positioned to resist international pressure while still seeking to benefit materially from increased security and economic aid.

Domestic politics have also mattered to how East African governments have responded to US pressure to cooperate in the War on Terror. The Ugandan government faced little resistance in enacting the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2002, which passed through parliament after less than one day of debate. The Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni used the law to enhance his legitimacy on the international stage at a time when the human rights record of his government was under scrutiny and threatening to undermine aid flows. He also sought to garner greater domestic support by showing that his government was taking action against the Lord's Resistance Army, which has fought an internecine conflict in Northern Uganda for about 20 years.

Pursuit of the War on Terror in the region has thus not been a zero sum game. The co-

operation of governments in the region has varied as they seek to leverage aid, resources, and legitimacy from the US.

Security back on the aid agenda

The history of aid in Eastern Africa is intimately related to the pursuit of security objectives by foreign powers. After the end of the Cold War, aid was used to promote democracy and human rights by governments in the region. However, since 9/11 new security concerns have seeped into aid policy and practice. Once again, aid has become a tool in the exercise of foreign security prerogatives.

Security sector reform and military training remain important objectives of donors, in addition to development. 'Soft approaches' have entailed outreach to Muslim communities to prevent radicalisation. DANIDA, for example, has initiated a community-based project on peace, development and security in coastal Kenya with the goal of preventing youth from being drawn into radical Islam. USAID suggested reforming curricula in madrassas, a move that was strongly resisted by mosque leaders. This attention on Muslim communities has elicited mixed responses. Some groups have seen this as an opportu-

nity to leverage resources to promote moderate Islam while others remain sceptical of donor motives.

Different civil society responses to the War on Terror

Counter-terrorism in Eastern Africa has constricted the spaces for groups to organise and stifled opposition voices. But it has also opened up new opportunities for civil society to engage, particularly Muslims groups that were previously overlooked by western donors. In Kenya and Uganda, as in other many other countries, resistance to new counter-terrorism structures has come mainly from human rights defenders and Muslim groups. Mainstream civil society has been less prominent in their advocacy, which has fed into the perception of the issues as concerning only Muslims. By ceding leadership on these issues, mainstream civil society groups have failed to grasp the broader implications of counter-terrorism for the spaces of any group to organise and mobilise around shared interests. In fact, the first group to be scrutinised under Tanzania's anti-terror law was a Christian organisation. These issues are more poignant given the circulation of discourses that cast suspicion on civil society actors and the merging of civil society regulation with counter-terrorism. Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya have all proposed to create and/or reform the policy and legal framework for NGOs.

Muslim groups have been disproportionately affected by counter-terrorism. Following the 1998 bombings of the US embassies

in the region, Muslim charities were proscribed including the Al Hara-main Foundation in Kenya. Muslim groups again came under suspicion follow-

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ing the Kikambala bombing in Kenya in 2002. Groups such as Mercy International were closed. Others such as the Al Muntada Trust came under intense pressure and scaled back their operations. This has engendered a climate of fear whereby Muslims are giving up their own rights to organise, in some cases by avoiding registration of groups with Muslim names or avoiding registration altogether.