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Southern Africa and International Terrorism
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Introduction

I am very pleased to have been given the opportunity to address this important gathering of African and American policy makers and counter-terrorism experts. While terrorism is not a new phenomenon – a term whose origins commentators have attributed to the *'regime de la terrear'* of the French Revolution – in its contemporary form, it knows no borders and it will certainly remain a collective security issue for some time to come.

Today there are few instances where domestic terrorism occurs in isolation from international linkages. Clearly in the interconnected world of the 21st Century, no country, region, or continent can claim to be immune from the threat posed by terrorism, irrespective of whether we have faced the horror, fear and devastation confronted by the victims living at the frontline. As such forums like this one are crucial, as they provide us with a platform to build co-operation, share experiences and best practice in charting a way forward to effectively deal with this international scourge.

Here I am reminded of the wise words of a former Spanish Prime Minister, Felipe Gonzales, at the March 2005 International Summit of Democracy, Terrorism and Security, on the anniversary of the Madrid train bombings, where he stated that if a dozen or so countries put on the table everything they had on terrorism, we would have 95% of the picture. In this respect we need to set aside the rule of intelligence services that operate on a need to know basis by a need to share the necessary information.

Terrorism in Africa

We on the African Continent are certainly no strangers to the threat of terrorism. We have suffered from prolonged sectarian, colonial, apartheid and state-sponsored violence, which has claimed countless lives. Examples abound and include the atrocities committed against civilians by the Lord Resistance Army in Northern Uganda, the slaughter of innocents in Rwanda and West Africa and the devastating carnage associated with the activities of Renamo and Unita, which flourished under apartheid. Even a democratic South Africa has not been exempt, where in the early years of our freedom terror tactics were employed by various elements, which were successfully dealt with, and a rightwing *Boeremag* (White Power) gang currently on trial.

While our experience has primarily been concerned with the ravages of domestic or intra-national terrorism, Africa has witnessed the ferocity of international terrorism. The bombings in Dar es Salaam, Nairobi, Mombassa, Morocco and Egypt for example are indicative of this. Indeed, the South African Institute for Security Studies estimated that prior to the September 11 catastrophe, between 1996 and 2001, 8% of the 2 483 incidents of international terrorism were committed on African soil, resulting in 5 932 casualties, the second highest causality rate after Asia¹.

African concern with the threat of terrorism has therefore been a longstanding one, which our security agencies have been dealing with for sometime. In fact it has been argued that the genesis of a formalised multi-national, anti-terrorism campaign on our continent began as far back as the early 90's with the former Organisation of African Unity's (OAU) resolutions unreservedly condemning terrorist acts and calling on member states to co-operate in fighting against the threat of extremism of whatever description. These initiatives were taken further in the OAU Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism in 1999, which was subsequently adopted by the African Union (AU).

¹ Cited in Institute for Security Studies Submission to the Portfolio Committee on Safety and Security on the Anti-Terrorism Bill, 2002

This concern with the threat of terrorism is similarly mirrored at the level of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). In this regard, we recognise the critical role that regional organisations can and must play in advancing a continental counter-terrorism agenda and have reconstituted ourselves, within the framework provided by the AU, so as to enable us to effectively deal with the threat within the context of our broader peace and stability initiatives.

Terrorism and Radical Islam in the Region

Southern Africa, from the early 1960's to 1990, witnessed armed liberation struggles in five of some ten former colonially ruled countries – namely Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa in sequence of their freedom. The other five states were all granted independence by the former colonial power, Britain, by peaceful process (Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Swaziland and Zambia).

The recourse to arms against colonial or racist domination was almost universally accepted as just wars, as in the case for example of America's own War of Independence. It is important to note that the decision to take up arms by the liberation movements was not taken lightly but occurred after peaceful avenues to change were effectively blocked by repressive regimes i.e. in the Portuguese colonies, former Rhodesia and apartheid South Africa.

Few incidents of terrorism were carried out by these movements where such acts are understood to represent indiscriminate, violent attacks on the civilian population. It is with this background that I would suggest that the states of this sub-region would view the phenomenon of terrorism plaguing the world today. Whatever the claims of injustice the leaders, foot soldiers and sympathisers of the amorphous *Jihadi* movement of today might refer to, we do not see their cause fitting into the liberation paradigm I have referred to.

Where foreign intervention or military occupation occurs - as with the Palestinian territories, Iraq or Afghanistan - factors such as domestic tyranny and threats against neighbouring states need careful consideration through the United Nations multi-lateral system and international law.

Certainly the use of terrorism against civilian populations within the state itself or anywhere in the world can never be condoned. For such reasons I would argue that the governments of this sub-region, against the backdrop of our liberation struggles and sense of humanity and justice, have found ourselves duty-bound to condemn the atrocities that have paraded under the banner of the *Jihadists*.

Given that Palestine falls within the Middle East theatre, I wish to make it clear that the Southern African liberation movements always saw that struggle for national self-determination and rights and an end to Israeli military occupation, particularly from 1967, as being on a par with the just national struggles that took place in this region.

It is particularly pertinent that the plight of the Palestinians against occupation should be cited here, because without doubt the brutal treatment they suffer has served to inflame, in my view quite understandably, the concerns of Muslim people everywhere, including in this part of Africa. It would be a huge error indeed to ignore the sensitivities of the one and a half billion Muslims on this planet over the cruelties and indignities, witnessed on television, on fellow Muslims in Palestine and in Lebanon in respect of the recent Israeli bombardment of civilian areas or elsewhere.

Leaving aside the rights or wrongs of the Coalition of the Willing's involvement in Iraq, the kinds of atrocities that emerged at Abu Ghraib prison; or the human rights issues concerning Guantanamo detentions; or brutality by British soldiers captured on video at Basra; or the dangerous trends towards Islamophobia and racial stereotyping and marginalisation in the West, certainly create grounds for *Jihadist* recruitment and extremist reactions. Such actions not only undermine human rights and values but result in the

mobilisation of sympathy and rejoicing in some sectors over even the most despicable terrorist outrages.

Whilst the topic that I have been asked to address is *Southern Africa, Terrorism and Radical Islam: Is there a connection, is there a concern?* we unreservedly advocate the need for international co-operation and the need to beef up the capacity required to deal with the terrorist threat, although we might differ over such a term as 'radical Islam'; with similar objections to such terms as radical or fundamentalist Christianity, Hinduism or Judaism being mechanically linked to terrorism. In many instances the discourse around Islam and terrorism is characterised by the incorrect use of value-laden terminology that it often unhelpful in developing an understanding of the phenomenon and its root causes. We need to be very careful about terminology. I intend leaving my friends the Rev. Cedric Mayson and Iqbal Jhazbhay to interrogate that topic in tomorrow's session.

That being said *Al-Qaeda* or other such groupings have been identified as posing a possible international terrorist threat to the Southern Africa sub-region. And while all the evidence suggests that Southern Africa is certainly not a primary target, we remain vigilant, as no country can claim invulnerability, nor can we rule out an opportunistic act against foreign targets on our soil.

So far, the number of suspected operatives and supporters that have been identified are very small, with no infrastructure or established training camps to speak of. More importantly, the Muslim communities of our region reject terrorism, are law-abiding and are productively integrated into the societies of member states, where the virus of extremism, feeding on exclusion does not carry weight, as it has in Europe.

Africa's interaction with Islam

In fact, Muslims have been part of the life of the Continent and region for generations. Their migration to and interaction with the Continent more

broadly can be traced back to the 7th Century, when Islam was first introduced to Africa. This increased through the subsequent Arab entry into North Africa, spreading towards West Africa. Development along the East Coast emanates from the 8th Century or before, as part of the flourishing trade with the Persian Gulf and Oman and accounts for the strong presence from the Horn and along the Kenyan, Tanzanian and Mozambiquan coast.

In respect of Southern Africa, migration and interaction was also facilitated through trade, as evidenced by the links between Muslim traders from the East Coast and the *Mapungubwe* civilization – the largest Kingdom on the subcontinent, encompassing parts of South Africa, Botswana and Zimbabwe – which existed as a thriving and sophisticated trading centre from the 11th Century.

In South Africa, the first significant migration and interaction was in the 17th Century, when Muslims from the Malay-Indonesian archipelago, were brought to the Cape as slaves by the Dutch colonialists. Also amongst this grouping were Muslim leaders and clerics, which the Dutch had banished, such as Sheik Jusuf, who was exiled to the Cape in 1694 and who is regarded as the founding father of Islam in South Africa. The next significant grouping of Muslim immigrants arrived in the mid 19th Century, following Hindu indentured labourers from India brought to work in the sugarcane plantations of then Natal. With the attainment of democracy in South Africa and the ease of travel this migration and interaction continues and today Muslims constitute approximately 1.5 million of a population of 45 million and are found predominantly in the Western Cape, KwaZulu Natal and Gauteng cities, with some settlement in the rural towns of South Africa and our neighbouring states.

The natural coherence of traditional Islamic structures and social models has evolved here over the centuries. Traditions of tolerance, moderation, social and political engagement are deeply embedded in the manner in which our Muslim communities operate.

These communities claim their primary identity as nationals of our states and in fact play an extremely positive role within the national fabric. Not surprisingly with easier entry into our region following our democratic dispensation in 1994, some individuals connected with *Al-Qaeda* targeted Southern Africa as a safe haven. Evidence came to light following some score or so individuals who illegally entered the country and were subsequently deported.

These cases highlighted the role of modern communications and transport infrastructure in facilitating their movement and funds across borders, which were utilised by these individuals and their networks. Let me make it clear that we are not talking about a large number; our security services are on top of the problem and we remain vigilant.

Other challenges include the need to strengthen border security, counter illegal immigration, build capacity in the region, and combating transnational syndicated crime, the forgery of travel documents, money-laundering, and small arms trafficking which so often is connected to terrorist activities.

Giving a voice to Muslim communities

There are many developments that are positive and have played a role in addressing the threat. In particular, we have been involved in proactive efforts to engage our Muslim communities and provide them with direct engagement with government ministers. These include for example the high level forum established by the South African Government with representatives from all sectors of Muslim religious and civil society to discuss the common terrorist threat and their particular concerns.

Other initiatives such as regional and international collaboration have enabled the security services to contain terrorism and reduce its potential impact in Southern Africa.

However, the primary basis of peaceful co-existence of the diverse communities that make up South Africa's democratic society lies in constitutional equality, socio-economic integration, and religious and cultural freedom enjoyed equally by Muslims and others alike.

Some lessons

I would like to draw on this as well as other lessons, which may be useful in guiding the discussions over the coming days.

First, we clearly need to continue to strengthen the capacity of our intelligence and law enforcement bodies. We need to know our societies well enough to predict threats and act against them. We need to be able to deal with those who wish to use our countries as a safe haven by making it difficult for them to travel, obtain documentation, support and finance.

Second, terrorism cannot simply be tackled from an intelligence and law enforcement perspective, which is insufficient in itself. What is required is a holistic counter-terrorism approach, which includes technical and logistical co-operation with a programme to advance development, strengthen governance and democracy and promote human rights and social inclusion.

This enables us to deal with those issues on which terrorist groups attempt to build their support. Alienation, marginalisation, widespread poverty, underdevelopment, injustice and conflict provide the context for terrorists to establish support systems and recruit their followers.

Third, in some African countries, terrorist acts are often a feature of local conflicts even if they have wider consequences. The danger with equating all acts of terrorism with the broader 'global war' is that often these conflicts arise from grievances which have long been simmering such as for example developments in Darfur and Somalia. In these instances, force and repression often results in the escalation of the conflict, hampering peace efforts, making a political settlement difficult. Above all we need to avoid the exclusion from

dialogue and negotiations of problem states, which create possibilities or openings for terrorists. Implosion of neglected states creates a security vacuum, which generates fertile ground for terrorist movements and the space in which to establish themselves.

Fourth, there is a need to avoid destroying the rule of law or eroding international conventions. This must be fundamental. We lose everything, including the moral high ground, if we sacrifice basic principles of human rights. It is hard to explain to Muslim communities why a particular individual was denied a visa seemingly because of his name or religious persuasion.

I wish to elaborate on this lesson:

Our governments and intelligence services must be at pains to avoid demonising Islam and its communities. This will lead to incorrect threat assessments and measures that harass and discriminate against Muslim communities.

Here I wish to make specific mention of the recent withdrawal by the United States of the visa of the well-renowned South African academic and respected social commentator Adam Habib and his family, including his 11 year old son, which has caused an outcry in our country.

We are party to the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1267 listing suspected terrorists and their sympathisers but any action taken must be based on sound evidence. We must studiously avoid flawed decisions that muddy the waters and undermine legal processes.

The law and the human rights principles that underpin it are a key defence and foundation of our liberties. To tear it up, to manipulate or work around it ends in defeat. We have to fight terrorism in accordance with democratic values. The law must be part of the solution and must not exacerbate the problem.

I end with a fifth point. We need to avoid double standards where democracy is enforced, as in Iraq, or where repressive systems exist as acceptable models by the West. It is often the latter societies that have prolifically bred terrorism.

Conclusion

In closing, let me leave you with the particularly instructive comments of the South African President, Thabo Mbeki, at the 56th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in 2001, when he argued that:

'Where we might have used the concept of a global village loosely in the past, on September 11 terrorism taught us an abiding lesson that we do indeed belong to a global village. None within this village will be safe unless all villagers act together to secure and guarantee that safety. All must act to promote the safety and security of one and all on the basis of a shared responsibility born of a shared danger'.

In acting together, we must recognise that we will not end terrorism through police work, better intelligence and improved co-operation, important as they are. We will end terrorism by tackling its warped notions that sees its objective as achievable through abhorrent means. We must address the social and political inequalities that make some people misguidedly believe that terrorism can address their frustrations.

The Southern African sub-region has already established an impressive track record, together with the rest of Africa and our international partners, in so far containing the activities of both domestic and international terrorists. We will ensure that our practical defences are as good as they can be; that our intelligence co-operation and exchange is as mutually beneficial as possible; that our laws are properly designed to discourage and prosecute; and that our police and intelligence services are trained and equipped for the task at hand. Forums such as this one play a critical role in enriching these efforts and we look forward to the outcome of your deliberations and your recommendations.

I thank you.