

DOMESTIC TERRORISM IN AFRICA: DEFINING, ADDRESSING AND UNDERSTANDING ITS IMPACT ON HUMAN SECURITY



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Contents

About the authors	iii
Introduction	1
Wafula Okumu	
Part One	
Categorising domestic terrorism	5
Terminology associated with political violence and asymmetric warfare	7
Morten Bøås	
Challenges in categorising domestic terrorism	14
Tom Imobighe	
Transnational and domestic terrorism in Africa: Any linkages?	20
Andrews Atta-Asamoah	
Domestic terrorism in Africa; Ontology of an old war in new trenches	27
Oshita O. Oshita	
Part Two	
Threats and incidents of domestic terrorism: Reasons, experiences and lessons	41
A Historical overview of domestic terrorism in Nigeria	43
Bukola Adeyemi Oyeniyi	
The politics of combating domestic terrorism in Nigeria	55
Olajide Olayemi Akanji	
Domestic terrorism in South Africa	65
Anneli Botha	
Domestic terrorism in Uganda	77
Wafula Okumu	
Domestic terrorism in Kenya	85
Adams Oloo	
Part Three	
Experiences of resolving domestic terrorism in other parts of the world and lessons for Africa	95
Domestic terrorism in Asia and lessons for Africa	97
Sam Makinda	
Domestic terrorism in the United States and lessons for Africa	102
William Rosenau	
Part Four	
Impact of domestic terrorism on Africa's development	111
Economic impact of domestic terrorism in Africa	112
Kunle Ajayi	
Impact of domestic terrorism on human rights in Africa	121
Cephas Lumina	
Impact of domestic terrorism on civilian-government relations	133
Ikenna Obi	

Part Five

Approaches and strategies for dealing with domestic terrorism in Africa	139
Law enforcement approaches and strategies in dealing with domestic terrorism in South Africa	141
Anneli Botha	
Judicial and legal approaches and strategies in dealing with domestic terrorism in Mauritius	153
Satyabhooshun Domah	
The media and domestic terrorism in Africa	174
Ruby Amable	
List of participants	178

Domestic terrorism in Asia and lessons for Africa

SAM MAKINDA

The purpose of this article is to examine the nature of terrorism in Asia and explore if there are lessons that African states and societies can learn from the Asian experience. The paper focuses on South-east Asia, in particular Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Malaysia. It also refers to the role that Australia has played since 2001 to try to help South-east Asian states deal with terrorism.

Conceived within the framework of the 'global war on terror', this paper makes two major claims. The first is that, given the fact that the level of state development in some parts of South-east Asia and Africa are roughly similar, it is possible that African states can benefit by understanding how their Asian counterparts have dealt with, and continue to deal with, security problems, including terrorism and political violence. The second claim, which appears to contradict the first, is that irrespective of the apparent similarities in development trajectories between Africa and Asia, African states need to bear in mind the fact that their security problems have local roots and can be addressed effectively only if their root causes are tackled.

To elaborate on the above claims, the paper is divided into five sections. Section one discusses briefly the spread of Islam and the nature of Muslim groups and movements in South-east Asia. Section two examines the emergence of *Al Qaeda* in South-east Asia and explains how its role in the region differs from that in Africa. The third section discusses the role of *Jemaah Islamiyah* in South-east Asia, and the fourth section the role of Australia in assisting South-east Asian states to pursue multifaceted counter-terrorism measures. The final section suggests the possible lessons that Africa might learn from South-east Asia.

MILITANT ISLAM IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA

Like some parts of the Maghreb or northern Africa, South-east Asia is home to a large Muslim population. Indeed, one of the South-east Asian states, Indonesia, with a population of over 230 million, is acknowledged as the second largest Muslim country in the world after India. South-east Asia has also been home to a variety of militant Muslim groups and movements for many decades. Initially, the relationships among these groups were fairly weak because most of them operated only in their own countries, where they focused on domestic problems. The common theme among these groups was, and has been, the need for the *Sharia* or Islamic law. At different times, some of these groups sought independence from central government control.¹

The Philippines has had violent Muslim separatist movements for more than a century. Until recently, the activities of several Muslim groups were confined mainly to the relatively isolated Muslim-majority regions in the southern Philippines, especially in Mindanao and Jolo. The main militant groups include the *Abu Sayyaf* group, which operates on the islands of Mindanao and Sulu. The other groups are the *Moro National Liberation Front* (MNLF) and the *Moro Islamic Liberation Front* (MILF). The Australian and US governments have provided the Philippines government with military support in its fight against these groups.

Thailand has also witnessed growing incidences of terrorism, both indigenously based and transnational. The fact that a *Jemaah Islamiyah* leader, Hambali, was arrested near Bangkok in August 2003 is one of the signs of collaborations between local Muslim militants and outsiders. In southern Thailand there is a restless

and sometimes rebellious Muslim minority. Indeed, since 2004, there have been numerous clashes between the Thai government forces and Muslim groups, especially in the southern provinces of Yala, Narathiwat and Pattani.

Over the years, Indonesia has witnessed situations where different schools of Islamic thought have competed for followers and public support, but many of them have not called for the establishment of an Islamic state. The more radical groups, which started their activities as anti-Dutch guerilla warfare, were effectively suppressed by the Sukarno (1950–1965) and Suharto (1967–1998) regimes. Some Muslim groups formed opposition parties that sought to defeat President Suharto through the elections. Suharto's regime came to an end in May 1998. One of the opposition groups in Indonesia was led by Abdurrahman Wahid, who became the first democratically elected president after the collapse of the Suharto regime. Another group was led by Amien Rais, who became speaker of the upper house of parliament following the departure of Suharto. Although Wahid and Rais led large Muslim organisations, they pursued a secular political agenda. However, in the past few years, Indonesia has witnessed several bombings carried out by a radical Muslim group, *Jemaah Islamiyah*, as we shall explain later.

Another predominantly Muslim country in South-east Asia is Malaysia. It witnessed a potentially significant electoral swing toward a 'radical' Islamist party, *Parti Islam se-Malaysia* (PAS) in the late 1990s. However, PAS suffered major setbacks in the parliamentary elections in early 2004. The then Malaysian Prime Minister, Abdullah Badawi, who is a respected Islamic scholar, demonstrated Malaysia's 'moderate' Islamic approach to public policy issues since replacing the former prime minister, Mahathir Mohammad.

There are sizeable Muslim populations in sub-Saharan Africa, but no sub-Saharan African state has experienced the type of problems that one can find in South-east Asia, especially in Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand. It is for this reason that the lessons learned in South-east Asia may not be automatically applicable in Africa.

The emergence of radical Muslim groups and movements in South-east Asia in the 1990s has been traced to several developments, some of which served as remote causes, while others served as immediate causes. These include a reaction to globalisation forces, frustration with repressive secular governments, the desire to create a pan-Islamic South-east Asia, resentment against the continuing Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the arrival of terrorist veterans who spent many years fighting against the Soviets in Afghanistan. These factors facilitated the forging of

relations between *Al Qaeda* and domestic Muslim groups in South-east Asia.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AL QAEDA IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA

Southeast Asia and Africa were 'invaded' by *Al Qaeda* at about the same time: in the early 1990s *Al Qaeda* agents established a foothold in both Africa and Asia. Given the fact that the Egyptian cleric Dr Ayman al Zawahiri, who is often described as Osama bin Laden's deputy, is an African, one could argue that the seeds of *Al Qaeda* were planted in Africa before they were transplanted to other parts of the world.

Since the early 1990s, however, *Al Qaeda* agents, or those who claim to operate in its name, have made significant inroads into South-east Asia.² According to a variety of sources, *Al Qaeda's* South-east Asian operatives appear to have performed three primary tasks. The first was to have set up local cells, which were predominantly headed by Arab members of *Al Qaeda* and served as regional offices supporting the network's global operations. These cells are said to have exploited the region's generally lax border controls thus enabling them to hold meetings in South-east Asia to plan attacks against Western targets, host *Al Qaeda* operatives transiting through South-east Asia, and provide safe havens for other operatives. For example, *Al Qaeda's* Manila cell, which is said to have been founded in the early 1990s by a brother-in-law of Osama bin Laden, was particularly active in the early to mid-1990s. Under the leadership of Ramzi Yousef, who escaped to Manila after coordinating the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Centre in New York, the cell reportedly plotted to blow up 11 airliners in a two-day period, crash a hijacked airliner into the American CIA headquarters and assassinate the Pope during his visit to the Philippines in early 1995. Yousef is reported to have been assisted in Manila for a time by Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the alleged mastermind of the 11 September 2001 attacks.³

In the late 1990s, *Al Qaeda's* attention appears to have shifted to Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. *Al Qaeda's* leadership also apparently took advantage of South-east Asia's generally lax financial controls to use various countries in the region as places to raise, transmit and launder the network's funds. It is claimed that by 2002 roughly one-fifth of *Al Qaeda's* organisational strength was in South-east Asia.

Moreover, over time, *Al Qaeda's* South-east Asian operatives are said to have helped to establish *Jemaah Islamiyah* (JI), which has been accused of plotting attacks against Western targets. JI is suspected of having carried out the 12 October 2002 bombing in Bali, Indonesia, that killed approximately 200 people, mostly Western tourists,

including 88 Australians. Although JI does not appear to be subordinate to *Al Qaeda*, the two networks appear to have cooperated extensively.

In addition, *Al Qaeda*'s local cells are reported to have worked towards cooperating with indigenous radical Muslim groups and movements by providing them with money and training. Until it was disbanded in the mid-1990s, *Al Qaeda*'s Manila cell reportedly provided extensive financial assistance to Moro militants such as the *Abu Sayyaf* group and the *Moro Islamic Liberation Front*. Thousands of militants have been trained in *Al Qaeda* camps in Afghanistan or in the camps of Filipino, Indonesian and Malaysian groups that opened their doors to *Al Qaeda*. *Al Qaeda* reportedly provided funds and trainers for camps operated by local groups in Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. Indonesian intelligence officials have also accused *Al Qaeda* of sending militants to participate in and foment the Muslim attacks on Christians in the Maluku and on Sulawesi that began in 2000.

The task of *Al Qaeda*'s operatives appears to have been made easier by several factors. The first was the withdrawal of foreign state sponsors, such as Libya, that had supported some local groups in the 1970s and 1980s. The second was the personal relationships that had been established during the 1980s, when many Southeast Asian Muslim radicals had fought as *mujahideen* in Afghanistan. The third factor was related to the weak central government control, endemic corruption, porous borders, minimal visa requirements, extensive network of Islamic charities, and lax financial controls of some countries, most notably Indonesia and the Philippines.

THE ROLE OF THE JEMAAH ISLAMIYAH (JI)

After the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the USA, it was realised that JI had an extensive pan-Asian network with cells in Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. To achieve its goal of creating an Islamic state in South-east Asia, JI leaders have formed alliances with other militant Muslim groups to share resources for training, arms procurement and financial resources. It has been shown that JI has engaged in joint operations and training with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the Philippines.

In Indonesia, JI has created and trained local radical groups that have been involved in sectarian conflict in the country's outer islands. Shortly after the Bali bombing of October 2002, Australia and the USA designated JI a terrorist organisation. Thereafter the United Nations Security Council added JI to its list of terrorist groups, which meant that all UN member states were required to freeze the organisation's assets, deny it access to funding

and prevent its members from entering or travelling through their territories. However, the Indonesian government has not banned JI because it believes the organisation does not exist. Despite this, the Bali bombing prompted Indonesian officials to arrest several militant Muslims who are believed to be members of JI.

The ideas and concerns that gave birth to JI stretch back to the 1960s, when its co-founders, Abu Bakar Bashir and Abdullah Sungkar, began demanding the establishment of the *Sharia* in Indonesia. The two considered themselves the ideological heirs of the founder of the *Darul Islam* movement, the Muslim guerilla force that fought the colonial Dutch troops and the post-independence Indonesian forces of Sukarno, Indonesia's founding president who ruled from 1950 to 1965. In the 1970s, Bashir and Sungkar established *Al Mukmin*, a boarding school in Solo on the main island of Java. This school taught the puritanical *Wahhabi* interpretation of Islam, which has its roots in Saudi Arabia. The suspected JI activists who have been arrested are said to be *Al Mukmin* graduates. In 1985, Bashir and Sungkar moved to Malaysia where they set up a base of operations and helped send Indonesians and Malaysians to Afghanistan, first to fight the Soviets and later to train in *Al Qaeda* camps. Sungkar and Bashir are said to have formed JI in 1993 or 1994, and to have begun steadily setting up a sophisticated organisational structure and actively planning and recruiting for terrorist activities in South-east Asia.

The fall of Indonesia's Suharto regime in 1998 provided a major boost to JI. Within a short period, formerly restricted Muslim groups were able to operate freely. Bashir and Sungkar returned to Solo, preaching and organising their supporters. At the same time, Jakarta's ability to maintain order in Indonesia's outer islands decreased dramatically, and long-repressed tensions between Muslims and Christians began to erupt. In 1999 and 2000 the outbreak of sectarian violence in Ambon (in the Maluku) and Poso (on Sulawesi) provided JI with critical opportunities to recruit, train and fund local *mujahadeen* fighters to participate in the sectarian conflict. After the violence ebbed, many of these *jihadis* became active members of JI. In 2000, JI carried out bombings in Jakarta, Manila and Thailand.

JI is said to have assisted two of the 11 September 2001 hijackers and its supporters have confessed to plotting and carrying out attacks against various Western targets. These include the 12 October 2002 bombing in Bali that killed over 200 people, the Marriot Hotel attack in August 2003, and the 9 September 2004 suicide bombing of the Australian embassy in Jakarta.

There has been considerable debate over the relationship between JI and *Al Qaeda*. Although some analysts have claimed that JI is *Al Qaeda*'s South-east Asian affiliate, others believe that the two groups are discrete

organisations with different, albeit overlapping, agendas. Whereas *Al Qaeda* focuses on global trends and targets Westerners and Western institutions, JI is focused on radicalising Muslim South-east Asia. Indeed, some JI leaders believe that attacking Western targets might undermine their goal.

Al Qaeda and JI have developed a highly symbiotic relationship in which they benefit from and reinforce each other. It is assumed that they have some overlap in membership, because some of the South-east Asian militants who trained in Afghanistan have become members of both organisations. They have shared training camps in Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Philippines. *Al Qaeda* has provided JI with considerable financial support. They have also shared personnel, such as when JI sent an operative with scientific expertise to Afghanistan to try to develop an anthrax programme for *Al Qaeda*.

The two networks have jointly planned operations and reportedly have conducted attacks in South-east Asia together. Often, these operations have taken the form of *Al Qaeda* providing the funding and technical expertise, while JI has procured local materials and located operatives. Riduan Isamuddin (also known as Hambali) appears to have been a critical coordinator in these joint operations, and his arrest in 2003 may have curtailed JI-*Al Qaeda* cooperation.⁴ Finally, the terrorist attacks in 2003 and 2004 in Morocco, Turkey and Spain indicate that *Al Qaeda*'s anti-Western ideology has inspired individuals and local groups to undertake terrorist acts.

AUSTRALIA'S ROLE IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA

The activities of *Al Qaeda* sympathisers and JI require a coordinated, international response in a region where multilateral institutions and cooperation are weak. It is for this reason that Australia's approach to counter terrorism in the region has taken various forms. Australia recognises that terrorist threats to its interests are most acute in South-east Asia and, therefore, its engagement with regional governments is partly designed to enhance its own security.⁵

The terrorist activities that prompted Australia to get involved in South-east Asia's counter-terrorism strategies include the Bali bombings of 2002 and 2005, the attack on the Marriot Hotel in Jakarta in 2003, the attack on the Australian embassy in Jakarta in 2004, and the continuing insurgency problems in the Philippines and Thailand.

Since the 2002 Bali bombing in which over 200 people, including 88 Australians, died, Australia has established counter-terrorism cooperation with Indonesia and other states in the region, with a view to strengthening their capacity to deal with the problem. It has signed at least 13 memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with Asian, Middle Eastern and Pacific states. The bilateral MOU network

includes the following countries: Afghanistan, Brunei, Cambodia, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Thailand, East Timor and Turkey. Australia has also assisted South Pacific island states to draft counter-terrorist legislation. Moreover, in May 2006, Australia announced a counter-terrorism assistance package of A\$92.6 million over a four-year period to help regional countries strengthen the counter-terrorism capacities of their police forces, restrict the flow of funds to terrorists, and improve travel security. Australia's special forces have also participated in counter-terrorism exercises with the armed forces of Thailand and the Philippines.

However, effective counter-terrorism measures have to go beyond the technical issues like military cooperation and exercises. They need to reduce poverty and address other socioeconomic problems, hence former World Bank president James Wolfensohn's emphasis on development.

Development is defined broadly as referring to both qualitative and quantitative changes in a variety of areas, including the provision of basic needs such as shelter, water, sanitation, education and health. It incorporates human empowerment, especially increased participation by the people in the management of their economic, political, cultural and social affairs. Development includes capacity building, thereby implying the introduction of new ideas, standards, institutions, norms and techniques of overcoming obstacles to human progress. It also includes democratisation, independent judiciaries and open, responsible and accountable governments.

Development, poverty alleviation and social justice can reduce the chances of terrorism by facilitating human empowerment, while at the same time eliminating the conditions that produce political discontent. As Wolfensohn has argued:

The international community has already acted strongly, by confronting terrorism directly and increasing security. But those actions by themselves are not enough. We will not create that better and safer world with bombs or brigades alone.⁶

WOLFENSOHN WENT ON TO ARGUE:

We must recognise that while there is social injustice on a global scale – both between states and within them; while the fight against poverty is barely begun in too many parts of the world; while the link between progress in development and progress toward peace is not recognised – we may win a battle against terror but we will not conclude a war that will yield enduring peace.⁷

Poverty per se does not cause terrorism, but it could combine with other factors to ignite political violence. Poverty combined with the politics of identity can fuel terror. People, like those who masterminded the terrorist

attacks of 11 September 2001, do not have to come from poverty-stricken homes in order to identify with the poor. Those terrorists were rich, but they defined their identities in terms of the aspirations of those who had been denied justice in the Middle East. Development can help people to redefine their identities and to refocus their interests and energies, and thereby reduce the chances of terrorism.

It was in the light of these considerations that, in June 2006, the Australian Agency for International Development (AUSAID) released its White Paper entitled 'Australian aid: Promoting growth and stability'. This Paper sets out Australia's strategies for poverty reduction, sustainable development and steps toward the millennium development goals. For instance, it suggests how Australia will seek to enhance security by reducing poverty, fighting corruption and addressing other social, demographic and cultural sources of insecurity.

Thus, by the end of 2007, Australia's approach to the threat of terrorism and other security problems in South-east Asia was broad and geared towards tackling their root causes. Its multifaceted approach to counter terrorism in South-east Asia has been in place for only a few years, but it has started to show some success. It is a model that could be emulated by African states and their partners in the 'war on terror'.

LESSONS FOR AFRICA

The South-east Asian experience of addressing domestic terrorism provides at least three lessons for Africa. The extent to which each African state can apply the Asian approach will depend on its unique circumstances. The first lesson is that terrorism often has local causes, and this means that unless these specific problems are effectively addressed, the threat of political violence is unlikely to go away. For example, Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand have to deal with local grievances if they are to eliminate the current causes of terrorism.

The second lesson is that much of modern terrorism has transnational links, and this implies that tackling it seriously requires international cooperation. For instance, Indonesia and the Philippines are unlikely to curtail the influence of outside forces on their domestic problems unless they cooperate with other parties that are similarly threatened.

The third lesson, as the Australian involvement in South-east Asia has shown, is that terrorism needs to be addressed simultaneously at various levels: political, economic, social and military. Focusing on one aspect of the strategy, for example the use of military force, is unlikely to resolve the situation satisfactorily.

NOTES

- 1 For a brief but excellent analysis of terrorism in South-east Asia, see, for example, Bruce Vaughn, Emma Chanlett-Avery, Mark E. Manyin and Larry A. Niksch, CRS Report RL34194, *Terrorism in Southeast Asia*, Congressional Research Service, Washington DC, 11 September 2007.
- 2 For a detailed analysis of Al Qaeda's early moves in South-east Asia, see Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda*, London: Hurst & Co., 2002, Chapter 4.
- 3 For a useful analysis of the activities of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, see National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, Final Report: The 9/11 Commission Report, New York: W. W. Norton, 2004, 145–150.
- 4 For detailed information on Hambali, see National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, Final Report: The 9/11 Commission Report, 150–152.
- 5 See Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Transnational terrorism: The threat to Australia*, Canberra: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2004.
- 6 James D. Wolfensohn, A partnership for development and peace, Speech at the Smithsonian Institution, 6 March 2002, <http://wwics.si.edu/NEWS/speeches/wolfensohn.htm>. Accessed on 8 March 2002.
- 7 Wolfensohn, A partnership for development and peace.