

Understanding terrorism in contemporary Africa

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Review of the book: Terrorism in Africa: New trends and frontiers / Eds. Glen Segell, Sergey Kostelyanets and Hussein Solomon. Moscow, Institute for Africa Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences; University of Haifa, Israel. 2021. 194 p. ISBN 978-5-91298-268-2; ISBN 979-8-48152-268-5

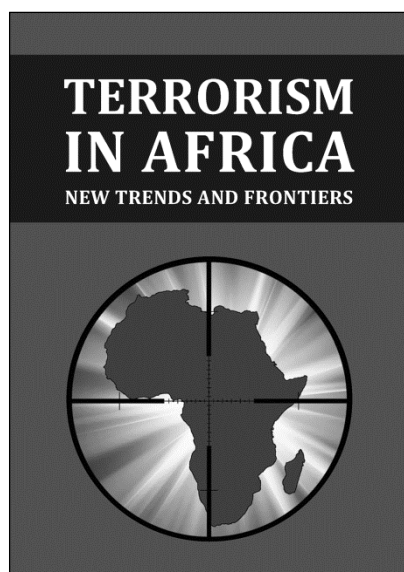
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Captivating right from the title and the preface, the reference to the Ten Commandments and terrorism as Africa's 11th plague fills the reader with curiosity about the issues and perspectives of the book "**Terrorism in Africa: new trends and frontiers**" (Moscow, 2021). Of what analogical relevance are these biblical stories? One of the early books of the bible (Exodus) tells the story of the Israelites under slavery in Egypt. To free them, God caused ten different plagues, no two occurring simultaneously, to force Pharaoh, the king of Egypt to let the Israelites go. The intensity of the plagues and the casualty figures, eventually made Pharaoh yield and the Israelites were allowed to leave Egypt. While in the desert, God purportedly gave Moses their leader, the Ten Commandments - a book of rules or code of conduct by which the Israelites were to order their lives.

Relating this experience to the situation in Africa, terrorism is now the eleventh plague, and it's being suffered by an increasing number of countries on the continent, and not just Egypt. While the Ten Commandments, in this case, are the steps governments in Africa, and Africans ought to take, to overcome this plague and establish stability. Much of these steps are discussed in this book taking into consideration the uniqueness of the different parts/people of the continent. The analogy of the Ten Commandments aptly

captures the main purpose of this book.

This collection of beautifully written chapters presents an antecedence to the rise of terrorist groups on the continent. This book explains derives from the anger of the minority and the poor, and borne from the corruption and maladministration of the continents rulers and which was ultimately fed upon by extremist sects. The book contends too that much of what we know today as terrorism is the result of western interference on issues outside western shores. Thus the decision to intervene is often easy as the direct consequences would not be felt on *home soil* - the CIA's intervention in Afghanistan, and America's intervention in Iraq, bred Arab fighters whose only skill was to fight such that, at the end of these wars (struggles), these fighters diffused to other parts the world, especially Africa, to continue what they did best - fight.

Herein lies a major source of the scourge of the 11th plague whose effect gained momentum across the continent. Today, the manifestation of terrorism with religious motivation has become a feature of life in Africa with a devastating toll on civilians since the end of the Cold War. As authors of the various chapters note, when you are guided by the providence of God as Islamic extremists think, there are no moral constraints on the use of violence.

Add such thought and the unimaginable violence that accrues to today's cyberspace and information technology that create conditions for the faster mobilisation of extremists and their protégés, and we are bound to have an implosion of violence which Africa currently experiences. Managing this combustion has been a herculean task for governments on the continent and the challenges to this effort include;

- Developing Concepts of Operations (CONOPS) against terrorist groups since there are variations on what constitutes terrorism even on the African continent and with the African Union (AU)
- Easy access to new types of weapons.
- Increased terrorist financing and technological advances.
- Improved communication and transportation.

One common feature to terrorism that the book recognises is that terrorism prevails as political processes, dialogue and local/international participation become less likely in resolving thorny issues or long-standing grievances.

Terrorism in Africa sets as its objective, the investigation of new frontiers of terrorism in Africa, built on sound historical evidence and empirical research. In the course of meeting this objective, the book examines the psychological, historical, political and empirical drivers of Islamic extremism and by extension terrorism. Few books are as comprehensive and introspective as this on the roots, drivers and effects of terrorism in Africa, and the various institutional, national and international/collaborative responses to the issue. The book's division into three major themes enables broad analysis from different perspectives.

The **first section** consists of an empirical presentation of the problem in Africa drawing on experiences from Morocco, Cameroon, East Africa and the Sahel. Among chapters in this section, **Dr. Natalia Zherlitsina** from the Institute for African Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, in *Chapter 1* offers a discourse on Morocco's approach to curbing terrorism was certainly an eye opener and most readers would find the narrative here captivating.

Professor Hussein Solomon from the University of the Free State (UFS) (Bloemfontein, South Africa) in *Chapter 2* advocates a re-orientation of terrorism studies in Africa, where the phenomenon should be treated as one that has been on the continent rather than one that was exported. This strengthens and paves way for local solutions to the problem.

In *Chapter 3*, **Dr. Tatyana Denisova**, Head of the Centre for Tropical African Studies, Institute for African Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, visits the problem of religious extremism as a growing phenomenon in Cameroon. As one phenomenon grows, a rival phenomenon diminishes and this has been the lot between the growth of Wahhabism and decline of Suffism. Denisova is of the view that this change has been occasioned by the interference of Boko Haram and the Middle East in the country. This change has serious implications for security in the region as the spread of Wahhabism is often accompanied by the intensification of terrorist activities.

Dr. Anneli Botha from the University of the Free State discusses in *Chapter 4*, the impact of counter terrorism initiatives and provides recommendations accordingly. In line with what most peace scholars aver, Botha recommends that the best counter measure for terrorism, among others, is good governance.

In the **second section** that deals with the challenges of counter-terrorism, **Professor Vladimir Shubin** from the Centre for History and Cultural Anthropology, Institute for African Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, in *Chapter 5* examines the difficulty in peaceful protests changing an oppressive status quo, and how this compels violence in liberation struggles. Discussions here centred around the African National Congress in South Africa.

In *Chapter 6*, **Professor Theo Neethling** from the University of the Free State (UFC) discusses the debacle in Mozambique, and in doing this, he places the angry radicalised youth betrayed by society at the centre of his discourse, and the need for multinational corporations to be more involved in the development of the immediate communities in which they operate. The chapter enthuses that responding to the survival needs of the people is a panacea for keeping the peace.

In *Chapter 7*, **Mr. Willem Els** and **Mr. Richard Chelin**, Senior Training Coordinator and Senior Researcher respectively of the Institute of Security Studies (ISSS), examine extremism in Mozambique, the role of mineral resources in the abominable violence that engulfed the region of Cabo Delgado and the limitations of state security in dealing with the crisis.

The **third and final** theme takes stock of the least visible issue in relation to mainstream literature on terrorism - financing, and communication/propaganda via social media in the sustenance of terror groups.

In *Chapter 8*, **Professor Leonid Fituni**, Head of the Centre for Strategic and Global Studies, Institute for African Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, discusses the changing fortunes of financing terror amid life changing

patterns necessitated by COVID-19's counter measures. The chapter also discusses the adaptations of terror groups in filling in social gaps created by the pandemic in their enclaves of authority.

Dr. Alta Grobbelaar from the University of the Free State, in *Chapter 9*, examines the role of social media in the spread of terrorism and how this can be checked.

Dr. Glen Segell from the University of the Free State, in *Chapter 10*, examines the growth of Islam in Africa and contends that while it was exported from the Middle East over several centuries in the earlier stages, in more recent time, radicalisation and terror are imported by certain local leaders for their selfish ends and this has spread rapidly.

Dr. Sergey Kostelyanets, Head of the Centre for Sociological and Political Sciences Studies, Institute for African Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences argues in *Chapter 11* that Russia has been more effective in Africa's counter terrorism strategies than the continent's traditional Western allies. However, certain issues have prevented Moscow from capitalising on these gains on the continent.

Dr. Moshe Terdiman from the University of Haifa, Israel, in *Chapter 12* examines what the terrain has to offer in the growth of terrorism. The argument made in this chapter is that nature's vital resources such as water are manipulated to project the advantage of the terror group that controls these resources. This strategy is adopted by terror groups across the Sahel from Boko Haram in Nigeria, through ISIL affiliated fighters in the Congo, to Al-Shabaab in the Horn of Africa.

Through these interesting discourses, this book examines the connection between domestic and transnational terrorism which are constantly evolving just as the communication and relationships between the different local extremist groups in different countries do. This is indicative of the herculean task of governments to keep pace, and the need for cross-border collaboration between state security operatives.

Terrorism has grown exponentially on the continent and this is because governments have unwittingly created vast expanse of ungoverned spaces within their territories through bad governance and poor local administration. This has left the youths have poor, hungry and angry hence the appeal of extremist Muslim ideologies that encourage the exercise of violence which they see as getting back at a society that neglected them. For this reason, good governance is a major step to curbing this growing trend.

Understanding these dynamics would serve to inform, plan and predict the future growth of terrorism, and so greatly enhance Africa's counter terrorism strategies. Herein lies the strength of this bold, instructive and well written text.

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