The Governance of National Security: Challenges and Prospects

New Strategies to Address Growing Security Threats in Africa and Support the Development Process

A Pan-African Experts and Professionals Meeting on Security and Development

“Terrorism in Africa: Challenges and perspectives”

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Introduction:

Terrorism is a complex international phenomenon that has become one of the major challenges of the moment. Terrorism is not limited to a particular country or a given community. Almost every state of the world is directly or indirectly affected by the effects of terrorism. In this aspect, every country should be involved in the global efforts to fight terrorism.

Several African countries have witnessed the attacks of terrorism in their soil. These attacks have killed innocent people, have destroyed properties and have destabilized institutions and regions. Because of terrorism, there is growing fear and panic in the affected communities. But what is really terrorism? what are the causes and how to combat it? This is the main concern of the document that is divided into three main parts.

I- Terrorism and its characteristics

1- What is terrorism?

Terrorism is a very old phenomenon. It has several kinds of definitions. Its practice has also evolved. During the French revolution for example, the government was accused of being a regime of terror. When people were fighting to recover their independence in the sixties, they were considered by colonizers as being terrorists. Who then is a terrorist?

- Is it a state which declares war against another state?
- Is it a state funding or supporting clandestine groups to destabilize another state, using covert method?
- Is it a state using violence and other means of intimidation against its own population?
- Is it a group of individuals or communities in revolt against their government?
- Is it a community fighting against another community within the same country?
- Is it an individual who uses violent means for vengeance, hate or other reasons?
- Are they groups of individuals using sabotage, destruction and other violent means to get economic advantages, to recover dignity or freedom?
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- Are they individuals considering themselves as excluded from the society, or making themselves as representatives of minority groups, or defending an ideology or a religion group?

All these questions indicate how complex is the concept of terrorism, and also how it is difficult to define. However, in reality all the above cases can be considered as terrorism. It is in fact the use of violence, threat or intimidation as a mean to achieve a given objective.

2- How terrorists are organized?

Terrorism is a clandestine practice, but most of individuals involved in terrorism have also a normal activity. Thus, the difficulty to distinguish terrorists from other normal individuals. Terrorist groups are spread across the world. They have linkages. They communicate and keep in touch. They are organized through international networks. They use new information and communication technologies for their contact, their operations and recruitment. Internet and telephone are widely used by terrorists.

Most terrorist groups are also involved in other kinds of criminality, including drugs, arms and human trafficking; illicit products smuggling; money laundering; hostage taking; piracy, etc. These various activities serve to fund or support their terrorist operations. Most of these activities concern killing, destroying, damaging and threatening. To accomplish their goals, they use various kinds of means, including explosives, arms, bombs, chemical and biological substances, etc.

The most difficult case is the lone wolf. Individuals operating alone are the most difficult to detect or to track. They are generally known after they have committed the act or when the project is well advanced. These individuals may also be in connection with other cells for support.

The complexity of the organization and operation of terrorists make it difficult to efficiently counter terrorism in the world. Most of the time, terrorism occurs when no solution is being found to a given problem or situation. Countering terrorism should then start by examining the major causes of terrorism, then trying to establish dialogue to work on possible solutions. Ignoring the causes and using hard means to eliminate terrorism may not provide long term results. Individuals or groups involved in terrorism may have various kinds of grievances which should be analyzed and understood, using peaceful conflict resolution approaches to terrorism phenomenon.
II- Why there is terrorism?

Terrorism is, most of the time, a violent reaction or response to a given situation. Almost every terrorist act has a cause. The cause may be known or unknown. It may also be acceptable or not.

Some terrorist acts are perpetrated by individuals who feel excluded from the advantages of the community, or who give themselves for the sake of their ethic group or their religion belief. There are other terrorist groups who fight against injustice; or for their values, their dignity and their freedom.

III- How to combat terrorism?

Combating terrorism has become an international concern. This question concerns not only African countries but the entire world. Global efforts are being made to counter terrorism and provide peace and security.

With regard to Africa, combating terrorism should be taken as a priority. Terrorism is not only a threat to security but also to the development process. Countries affected by terrorism are not only threatened but also lose opportunities for development. Special efforts are needed to fight terrorism. Among the various strategies and approaches to be considered include the following:

1- Enhancing the capacity of the intelligence community:

Intelligence is the major weapon to fight terrorism. Intelligence services provide the necessary information to prevent terrorism, to track suspected individuals or cells, and to guide the intervention of the police and the army. To efficiently accomplish their mission, intelligence services should be equipped with the adequate facilities. They should be led by qualified and competent officials, working in networks. Moreover, efforts should be made by the intelligence services to master the use of new information and communication technologies, especially internet, in order to track cyber criminality and cyber terrorism. To be successful, intelligence community should work closely with other national security services to coordinate actions through a national security network, comprising all the security services. In addition, techniques such as community intelligence, education of population and dialogue with suspected agents should be examined and used.
2- Using conflict resolution approaches in fighting terrorism:

Terrorists are human beings, they have needs, feelings and aspirations. They should be taken as individuals with problems. Devoting time to understand the problems leading individuals to become terrorists, should be the first step in this undertaking. This means working on the causes of problems, engaging dialogue with suspected individuals or groups, using participative means to find solutions, recognizing the dignity and needs of every individual and making efforts to use democratic means whenever there is conflict. Moreover, a community or a country where efforts are being made to eliminate injustice, inequality and corruption and also, where economic and social concerns of populations are taken into account, may better succeed in preventing terrorist cases.

3- The use of soft and hard means to counter terrorism:

The diversity of terrorist cases necessitates the use of various approaches. Services in charge of law enforcement and police should play a significant role. Various laws and regulations on terrorism should not only serve to prevent but also to apprehend suspected cases. In addition, whenever it is necessary, army forces can be used at the end to destroy or eliminate cases of terrorism.

4- Collaboration of security services in combat against terrorism:

At the national level, all the security services should work in close relationship to share knowledge, information and intelligence on terrorism. The collaboration should include not only public services but also private security services and those from diplomatic representations and international organizations. The collaboration should also be extended at the sub-regional, regional and international levels. Efforts should be made to use information and communication technologies in strengthening this collaboration. All these services should be connected in virtual networks to facilitate timely decisions from the authorities.
Conclusion:

Terrorism is a threatening phenomenon that should not be tolerated. It not only kills innocent people but also destroys properties and destabilizes countries. Efforts are needed from African countries to analyze the major cases which may result in terrorism. Army forces are not the only means to fight terrorism. Priority should be given to intelligence community, to law enforcement, to the police and to dialogue in this combat. A combination of all the necessary means should be used to succeed in this global combat.