Since the entry of the Kenyan defence forces (KDF) into Somalia, it was expected that Kenya would suffer blows of reprisal attacks from her neighbour. Even before it started, the military expedition was met by a series of threats from the al-Shabaab that it would attack Kenya if it dared send its forces to Somalia. Analysts warned that the country would suffer major terror attacks from the Somali Islamists believed to have connections with al-Qaeda, the global terror group that have previously attacked Kenya. But the KDF’s presence in Somalia has weakened the nerve of the militant group eliminating the imminent danger of a substantive terror attack.

Nonetheless, Kenya has not escaped the fury of the jihadist al-Shabaab. The insurgent group has changed tactics of engagement adopting hit and run attacks inside Somalia and in the region mainly targeting Kenya. Since late 2011, Kenya has succumbed to a sequence of grenade attacks notably in Nairobi, Mombasa, Wajir and Garissa.
marking the resurgence of terrorism in country. Interestingly, these terror attacks, blamed on radical Muslims sympathetic to the al-Shabaab, have targeted Christian churches, revealing thinly veiled religious pockets of violence in the country. The trend is worrying as experts warn of Nigeria-style violence where the Boko Haram sends shrieks of terror targeting Christians. There are growing concerns as increasing radicalization and pro-terrorist attitudes among the Kenyan Muslim population become more evident. This has tendency has been attributed to the infiltration of Somalis through the porous Kenya-Somalia border. Al-Shabaab is said to have established cells in Kenya especially at the coast and the Northern Frontier District (NFD) region where it is recruiting and training Kenyans, some of whom are known to be engaged in the war in Somalia. Additionally, the attacks have lead to the profiling of Kenyan’s of Muslim identity subjected to discriminatory and vigorous security checks.

To Kenya, this recent developments present yet a new security puzzle. It means dealing not only with international terrorism that has ever been so imminent but also taming a budding domestic breed of terrorism. Resolving this new twist to the security question in the country will require a multifaceted approach ranging from eliminating the threat that Somalia is; addressing the grievances the Kenyan Muslim community who are often a neglected lot and; a comprehensive anti-terrorism policy aimed at both thwarting the global terror threats and pulling the plug on the growth of home-grown terrorism.

KDF entry into Somalia

In what was dubbed “Operation Linda Nchi” (Operation Protect the Country), Kenya’s Defence Forces launched a military offensive in Somalia. The operation, in collaboration with the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) of Somalia, aimed at obliterating the intensifying threat al-Shabaab. Plans of Kenya’s direct military involvement in Somalia are alleged to have been formulated as early as 2010 with a strategy to create a buffer zone of Juba in southern Somalia to annihilate security risks posed by the anarchic neighbour. But it was not until mid-October 2011 that KDF are reported to have engaged the al-Shabaab across the border. Since the start of civil war in Somalia in 1991, the horn of Africa country has always posed security risks among other burdens to the region and the globe at large. To Kenya, however, Somalia has always presented a complex security matrix as early as their independence days having hard to deal with irredentist regime of Said Barre claiming the Northern Frontier District in Kenya.
the across the border. The militant group was allegedly reported attacking across the border in Wajir, Garissa and the northern coast. Worse still, they were kidnapping aid workers and tourists in Kenya and demanding ransoms. As a result of the raising insecurity in Kenya, travel bans were imposed to citizens, including from the US and UK, undermining Kenya's tourism industry. Tourism is the backbone of Kenya's foreign exchange and constitutes 40% of her economy.

KDF has allegedly captured and liberated a larger lower region including al-Shabaab dominated towns of El AfeFafadun, Busar, Inda El, Damasa, Dobley, Tabda, Bilisqokani, Hayo, Qatar, Delbio, Ras Kamboni, Burgabo and Kulbio. KDF prides itself in breaking the nerve of the al-Shabaab by disrupting their logistical centers and cutting short their sources of income. The ultimate goal of the mission is to capture the port of Kismayu which is the hub of al-Shabaab operatives. Whether this approach is sustainable and whether the current or the incoming government is able to take over control of the liberated zones is another case.

Terrorism in Kenya

Terrorism as a phenomenon is not new to Kenya. At the height of al-Qaeda, Kenya succumbed to major terror attacks including bombings in 1998 at the US Embassy in Nairobi and in 2002 at the Israeli-owned Kikambala hotel in Mombasa in addition to other minor attacks. It seemed to be caught up in the crosshairs of global terrorism mainly due to its association with Western countries and presence of their installations in country. Religious reasons have also been cited to attract global terrorism in Kenya. On the one side; the country has concentrated its tourism industry at the coast which challenges the local Islamic mores. The beach culture and foreigners affronts the Islamic morals like drinking, commercial sex and dressing; especially women who are supposed cover themselves completely. The situation is further aggravated by the feeling that gains accrued from the tourism industry are not used to benefit the coastal habitants. By the same token, some analysts have also attributed Kenya's propensity for global terrorism to the perception that it has a largely Christian population which hinders “Islamization” of Eastern Africa. Porous borders and poor policing have also played catalyst to the growth terrorism in Kenya with renowned global terrorist sighted or known to reside in the country.

While these factors remain constant, the threat of international terrorism remain more forthcoming than ever, a situation perhaps only pacified by the weakening of the al-Qaeda globally after the death of its leader, Osama Bin Laden. Moreover, the country wakes up to another dynamic presented by a nascent domestic breed of terrorism. The country has suffered relentless grenade attacks across the country worst hit towns being Nairobi, Mombasa and Garissa. Some of these attacks have seen grenades hurled at churches provoking condemnation from religious leaders across the board. These attacks have widely been associated with radical Muslims in the country and bloating Somali community sympathetic of their brothers across the border. Al-Shabaab is also widening their net in the country, taking advantage of impoverished youths in major towns, luring them in to their heinous operation. These terrorists thrive under a highly inefficient law enforcement unit and poor surveillance evident in the Kenyan internal security departments.

Radical Islamism in Kenya

Kenyan Muslim community has always been brisk as a political unit in a persistent struggle against a perceived marginalization. As a minority group, comprising of just above 20% of the Kenyans, they have not been shy to coalesce in various religious-political groupings in search of recognition, politically, socially and economically. It also happens that the larger Muslim community in the country, by default or by design, inhabits some of the most undeveloped areas viz the coastal region and a largely arid North Eastern Kenya. It is not surprising that the community has produced some of the most vocal politicians and activists.
This perceived political and socio-economic deprivation and their religious inclination only serves to create an environment for nurturing radicalization and pro-terrorism attitudes among Kenyan Muslims. In the past, other exogenous factors have been credited for this trend notably the gradual replacement of Sufi dogmas by Salafism and Wahhabism occasioned by influence and financing from Gulf States. This increased radicalization has seen the rise of Muslim-related conflicts and at-tacks in the country. Muslim organizations were responsible for clashes at Mombasa in the early 90s were blamed on the Islamic Party of Kenya (IPK) and United Muslims of Africa (UMA). Actors in such localized conflicts backed up by foreign influence gradually metamorphosised to be involved in international crimes of terror. It could not have taken many by surprise when little known Islamic Liberation Army of the People of Kenya (ILAPK) claimed responsibility for the 1998 bombing of the US embassy in Nairobi.

There have been notable measures to curb such factors particularly pinning down sources of funding and banning collaborating organizations in the country, that have seen a substantial alleviation of radicalization. But the country is back in the woods again with concerns that it is becoming a hotbed of Islamist radicalism and terrorism. Analysts cite the spill over of Somalia growing Islamism and radicalization into Kenya. According to a January ICG Briefing, “al-Shabaab have built a formidable and secretive cross-border support infrastructure and network among Muslim populations in the north east and Nairobi and on the coast, is trying to radicalize and recruit youths, often capitalizing on long-standing grievances against the central state.” Consequences of such radicalization are becoming more apparent after successful grenade attacks, some of which have directly attacked Christians in churches. This poses a looming danger of heightening religious tensions even as these radical forces are felt in other potent conflicts in the country. Though hiding behind the curtains of marginalization, the Mombasa Republican have demonstrated strong links with this radicalism.

Breaking the cycle

Faced with the immediate threat of terror, and the unrest that could be associated with it, Kenyan security apparatus are likely to pull one of their classical reactionary tactics. But a threat of this magnitude will demand more stringent measures rather a frenzy of ad hoc policies. The country need to encapsulate the issue of terrorism and radicalism even as the ongoing police reforms are underway. It will be a challenge to the police without combined efforts of departments in the disciplined, including information sharing, regular surveillance and intelligence gathering.

Some have argued that the government should consider withdrawing from its military presence in Somalia, which is clearly provoking this horrendous attacks. But the Kenyan military involvement in Somalia must not only continue but also be given a new impetus to give the final blow to the root of the al-Shabaab in Somalia. It is in the interest of Kenya’s security that stability be re-established in Somalia on the long-term; to deal not only terrorism but also an array of other security concerns including piracy, money laundering, human trafficking et al. However, this military incursion should be complimented by stringent internal security measures, including a comprehensive anti-terrorism policy to curb the growing concern. In addition to military action, there is also need to engage politically and in dialogue with the entire group particularly if they have control of large segments of the country.

On the long term, the government will need to address pertinent political and socioeconomic deprivation prevalent among the Muslim community. There is also the need to address the basis of their grievances which makes such groups susceptible to radicalism and terrorism. Stifling Islamic movements and institutions will lead to aggravation and will do nothing to address the root causes of Muslim discontent. Though there is an urgent need to curtail foreign funding and influence in such movements, in order to succeed the government need to build an alliance with the
Kenyan Muslim citizenry by addressing their needs and not only based on their religious identity and affiliation.

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