The impacts of counter-terrorism on politics and society in Mauritania and Kenya

Alan Lis

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Main points:

– This paper assesses the impact of counter-terrorism on politics and society in Mauritania and Kenya.

– It presents multiple effects in every each case, describing and analysing similarities and differences between those states. It argues, amongst other things, that counter-terrorism, overall, has not resulted in changing the nature of politics in either country in question, despite providing a ground for further democratization in Kenya, and through strengthening the neo-authoritarian nature of Mauritania's politics.

– Furthermore, assessing the outcomes on societies in both countries, this paper stresses that the most important factor has been of different nature of impacts in both countries: negative in Mauritania, and twofold-both negative and positive in Kenya.

Introduction

After the end of the Cold War, communism, as a main threat and source of instability in the eyes of Western states, was replaced with global terrorism and radical Islam (Jourde, 2007; Jourde, 2007b). Both Kenya and Mauritania have been perceived as states of strategic importance and key allies of Western countries in their struggle against those dangers, and thus both were decided to be targeted with counterterrorism (CT) assistance: Kenya with aid provided mainly by the combination of the US, the UK, and Danish programs, whereas Mauritania primarily with support from Washington. This essay shall describe and compare the impacts of CT on politics and society in those states. However, when analysing the impact on Kenyan society the focus will be put on the Muslim minority, as it was the group targeted with CT agenda.

This essay will present differences and similarities of CT agenda's outcomes on politics and society in Mauritania and Kenya. Yet, it will primarily focus on showing that, overall, CT has not resulted in changing the nature of politics in either country in question. In Mauritania, CT, amongst others, contributed to thwarting democratization pressures, strengthening the neo-authoritarian nature of Mauritania's politics, and eventually contributed to resurfacing of neo-authoritarianism after a short democratic period. Likewise in Kenya, the nature of politics has remained similar, despite CT resulting in the marginalization-inclusion process of Muslims,

thus providing ground for further democratic consolidation. When it comes to impact of CT on societies in both countries, this essay, through analysing the similarities and differences in outcomes of CT, will argue that the most important fact has been of different nature of results in both cases: solely negative in Mauritania, and twofold – negative and positive, resulting in empowerment of Muslims, in Kenya.

The essay will start with a short explanation for the reasoning behind Western donors' assistance for both countries. It will also outline the nature of this assistance. Then, the next section will describe and explain the impact of CT on politics and society in Mauritania, and the subsequent one will analyse the impact on society and politics in Kenya. The order of presented impacts: politics-society in Mauritania and society-politics in Kenya is not random, as an impact on the former influenced the latter in both cases. The last section will compare impacts of CT in both countries.

Explanation for providing CT assistance

Mauritania was regarded by West as a 'potential staging area for transnational terrorist operations' (Stevenson, 2003, p.154), however, its problematic neighbourhood (Cline, 2007; Jourde 2007) was also an important factor. Moreover, it may also be argued that Mauritania was targeted with CT help simply because the US wanted to help Ould Taya and facilitate the survival of his regime, seeing him as a guarantor of Mauritania's contribution to the US counterterrorism efforts. The reasoning behind this argument can be found in Jourde's article (2007b).

The US aid was formulated in including Mauritania in the military assistance programs- the Pan Sahel Initiative (PSI) launched in 2002, and after its broad criticism- in the Trans Sahara Counterterrorism Initiative (TSCTI). Although the latter one was said to expand 'the PSI into non-military counterterrorism activities' (Cline, 2007, 894) the scale to which that occurred cannot be matched with the non-military assistance provided to Kenya.

Similarly to Mauritania, Kenya's geography was of great importance: strategic location has put Kenya on a frontline of Global War on Terror (Davis, 2007). A problematic neighbourhood, in particular sharing a border with Somalia (Aronson, 2013; Prestholdt, 2011), was also of importance. Furthermore, Kenya was seen as a deficient state, fragile and weak (Rotberg, 2003), not able to assure internal security on sufficient level (Bachmann and Honke, 2009).

Moreover, it experienced terrorist attacks on a few occasions, for instance the 1998 US embassy bombings, or Kikambala Hotel bombing and attempted missile attack on a plane in 2002 (Bachmann and Honke, 2009, Whitaker, 2008, Lind and Howell, 2010, Whitaker, 2010, Kazungu, 2018, Aronson, 2013, Prestholdt, 2011). In addition, Kenya at the beginning of 21st century could have been labelled as a transnational democracy - in 2002 it ended a decades-long period of authoritarian rule, and was at the beginning of a process of democratic reforms-what has a significant meaning when taking into account the argument of Eyerman. As he argued (1998), transitional democracies are more vulnerable to terrorist attacks, and thus Kenya, fitting well under that description, was a clear target for CT assistance.

Although Kenya had its own CT agenda before the Western actors began providing their aid, with the beginning of their engagement the CT took on a new life (Aronson, 2013). Initially, donors were providing hard security (military) assistance, and also financially, particularly the US, helped with establishing several bodies aimed at countering terrorism, for instance, the Anti Terrorism Police Unit, or the National Security Advisory Committee (Lind and Howell, 2010). However, as explained below, some CT practices pursued in Kenya worsened the state-society relations. Therefore, the donors' approach was remodelled and hard security assistance, aimed solely at fighting terrorism, was reframed to broader peace and security agenda, which emphasized the need of targeting particular parts of the population, in this case, Muslims, with social development programs and welfare projects (Bachmann and Honke, 2009).

Impact of CT in Mauritania

Politics

Mauritania has experienced a series of authoritarian regimes of both natures- military and civilian- since it received independence in 1960 (Jourde, 2012; Marty, 2002). Since then, the military has been holding a key position within the regime, being regarded as one of its main pillars (Jourde, 2007b; Jourde, 2012). CT- in fact, the military assistance from the US that Mauritania began receiving toward the end of the 1900s- has further strengthened its position. As Jourde claimed this aid contributed to the 'consolidation of its [Mauritania's] coercive and repressive apparatus' (Jourde, 2007, p. 78), what successively allowed Ould Taya, the leader of Mauritania at the time, to thwart domestic democratization pressures for around a decade. However, although the fact of getting external support from the US was of extreme

importance, factors of domestic nature were needed as well for the Taya regime to resist attempts of democratization (Jourde, 2007).

Furthermore, the CT assistance was of particular significance for Taya himself- receiving help from the world's superpower was providing him with symbolic support and portraying as an important partner for the US, further empowering his position.

Jourde additionally argued that the US contributed to the survival of the neo-authoritarian regime in Mauritania. However, the following events there- the ouster of Taya in 2005 and the subsequent two-years democratic period, make Jourde's argument incomplete. His reasoning may be complemented by adding that Washington's CT assistance strengthened not only the Taya regime- indeed it enabled him to resist democratic pressures for a long time, yet eventually, he was ousted- but it specifically contributed to upholding and strengthening the neo-authoritarian nature of Mauritanian politics. As mentioned, Mauritania indeed experienced a two-years democratic period, however, it ended with another coup d'etat run by the military (Boucek, 2008) and since then, the country remains being governed in a neo-authoritarian manner (Jourde, 2012). Clearly, the American CT support cannot fully account for resurfacing of neo-authoritarianism- as mentioned, Mauritania was experiencing authoritarian rule for decades- however, assistance provided to the military and security apparatus undoubtedly has influenced that. The comeback to neo-authoritarianism in Mauritania has also been confirmed by the Freedom House's rankings- it was described as a 'not free' country before the ouster of Taya, 'partly free' during the brief democratic period, and 'not free' since the coup d'etat in 2008[1].

Society

CT, through its contribution to the consolidation of coercive and repressive apparatus, had an impact on society, since this very apparatus, consisting of security and military forces, was used to undermine the position of society by violating human rights and people's liberties in everyday life in the name of pursuing CT. It was a common practice of security forces under Taya to arrest and torture people because of their preferred ideology being different from the one promoted by state (Jourde, 2012). Amnesty International issued a report covering torture in Mauritania (Amnesty International, 2008).

Moreover, political opponents were often harassed and repressed, what was aimed at leaving average people without representation, making them scared and thus preventing from engaging in public life. Arguably, imprisonment of political opposition was a mean of upholding the neo-authoritarian nature of the regime, aimed at thwarting democratization, thus it can be also included in the section above as one of the impacts on politics. Furthermore, the press was often being censored and people were denied their right to a fair trial.

In addition, CT in the form of PSI and TSCTI caused resentment and resistance of society towards the Taya regime (Jourde, 2007) because those programs provided military training to units loyal to the leader. Mauritanians rightly saw this unfairness as favouring those with close connections to the ruling circle, and deepening divisions within the country that arose during decades of authoritarian rule.

Kenya and impact of CT

Society

CT agenda has had a twofold impact on society in Kenya. CT measures taken initially negatively impacted the society, especially Muslim minority, already largely politically and economically marginalized and alienated (Aronson, 2013; Whitaker, 2010), who was particularly targeted with CT policies (Bachmann and Honke, 2009; Whitaker, 2008; Kazungu, 2018). Bachman and Honke claimed that CT measures generated a 'climate of fear amongst Muslim communities' (Bachmann and Honke, 2009, p.108). Even definition of terrorism adopted by the Kenyan government was pointing towards Muslims, as it neglected terrorism based on any other justification, but religious (Aronson, 2013). This unfair targeting that resulted in numerous examples of abuses and violations of human rights, for instance, psychological and physical tortures (Prestholdt 2011; Whitaker, 2008), had caused anger and led to protests, which fuelled social tensions between Muslims and the Kenyan authorities, and deepened antagonisms between them.

The situation worsened when the authorities tried to introduce an anti-terrorism legislation (Suppression of Terrorism Bill-SOT), what constituted a critical moment for the government-Muslims relations (Bachmann and Honke, 2009). Its provisions were said to violate human rights and further discriminate Muslims. Although the unfair treatment described above had already resonated among Muslims, it was the attempted introduction of SOT that prevailed and

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significantly strengthened their resistance, which in turn led to mobilization and stronger cooperation between Muslims' communities, other groups constituting Kenyan society, and human rights movements.

This consolidation and open resistance towards SOT and brutal CT practices have influenced remodelling of the donors approach and their decision to supplement their agendas with 'new security technologies of governing through empowerment, participation, and a new care for those parts of the population who are perceived […] to harbouring or recruiting terrorists' (Bachmann and Honke, 2009, p.100). Mainly due to the Danish Peace, Security, and Development program, Muslim communities were targeted with development activities that further empowered them and made their voice politically important, what was the positive effect of CT. The result and importance of that will be explained in the subsequent section.

Politics

Democracy is more likely to develop if none of the segments constituting society is repressed, and all its parts are free to participate in the political processes. Not denying Whitaker's argument that the Muslims vote became important due to democratization process, transition to multiparty system and certain regulations of election process (Whitaker, 2008), it can be added that development programs provided as part of CT assistance, which along with the consolidation of the Muslim communities caused their empowerment, made their vote politically important. That was significant for Kenya as a new, transitional democracy. Furthermore, it also turned out to be especially important in the elections of 2007, as Kenyan politicians 'fought' for the Muslim vote (Bachman and Honke, 2009). This growing importance attached to the Muslim vote can be called a democratization-inclusion process- from being marginalized, alienated, and disregarded by authorities for decades, Muslim minority became a group of increased political position, on which politicians put their focus before the 2007 elections.

However, CT had also another effect on Kenyan politics. As described above, brutal CT methods used against society and attempted implementation of the anti-terrorism legislation resulted in fierce opposition against the government. Strong focus put on CT practices caused politicians actively advocating them undermine their support at home (Whitaker, 2008, p. 267), and in effect- the opposition' success in the 2007 parliamentary elections. In order to stay in

power, president Kibaki manipulated the presidential election outcome (Bloomfield, 2008). It thus can be said that remodelled CT enhanced prospects for further democratic consolidation through the marginalization-inclusion process, but then, the undermined support caused by the brutal CT provisions made Kibaki manipulate presidential election and therefore contributed to thwarting credible democratization. Indeed, since ending its authoritarian period in 2002, Kenya has been constantly classified by the Freedom House as a 'partly free' country[2], whose military, just like in Mauritania, was strengthened by the CT assistance provided by the US (Whitaker, 2008).

Comparison

Staring with the impact on society, it shall be established that in Mauritania, CT agenda negatively affected the whole society, without strong separation of any particular part of it. Whereas in Kenya, the CT practices have been focused on targeting one particular segment of society- Muslims, what, after all, should not surprise given that Kenya is predominantly a Christian country. Of further importance is that the current wave of terrorism that the world has been experiencing was classified by David C. Rapoport as a religious wave. Not implying that Islam is the only religion that has produced terrorists, as other religions have as well, yet unfortunately 'Islam is the most important religion in this wave' (Rapoport, 2002), that has produced the largest number of terrorists.

Both, the Mauritanian society and Muslims in Kenya, have shared the experience of their rights being abused, liberties violated, and both have been subjected to practices of torture. All those violent methods have been legitimized by authorities with the explanation of pursuing them in the name of CT. Furthermore, in both states, CT practices resulted in deepening divisions- in Mauritania between ruling elite and society as a whole, and in Kenya between Muslims and the government.

Furthermore, CT has caused similar, to some degree, reactions of societies in both countries in question. Of much similarity was resentment and resistance, which Mauritanians and Muslims in Kenya felt towards authorities implying CT practices, however, it should be mentioned that the society's response in Mauritania was not highly effective. Mauritanians failed to consolidate their efforts against CT practices and failed to effectively fight for improvements to their situation. Their reaction did not result in any significant changes, leaving the impact of

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CT on their society of negative nature. Whereas in Kenya, Muslims' anger, protests etc., caused mobilisation of their communities and consolidation of efforts with other actors and in turn resulted in remodelling CT approach, what further strengthened them. All those factors brought around a big alteration- empowerment of Muslim communities, what was the positive outcome of the CT, and the main difference when comparing with Mauritania's case, as it gave hope for further democratic consolidation of Kenya. However, the Muslims' empowerment has not resulted in halting the unfair CT practices. Their rights have continually been violated despite improvements made over a decade ago (Human Rights Watch, 2014; Freedomhouse.org, 2018). Therefore, in spite of CT having impacted Muslims in a positive way, its negative aspects prevailed.

Overall, CT has not changed the nature of politics in either of those countries. In Mauritania, despite the experience of the brief democratic period after the ouster of Ould Taya, the neo-authoritarian nature of politics was strengthened and resulted in Mauritania's quick return to neo-authoritarianism. Since then Mauritania has been governed in that manner. Kenya, however, since it ended its authoritarian chapter in 2002 has been a 'partly free 'country, and as explained above, CT, in spite of its contribution to the empowerment of Muslims and the marginalization-inclusion process that could have influenced credible democratisation of Kenya, undermined support for Kibaki what made him manipulate election, and in turn thwarted democratisation efforts. What is interesting, undermined support for Kibaki can be contrasted with CT strengthening, for the time being, Taya's position in Mauritania. He was then ousted, but, speculating, if it was not for the involvement of his closest in the coup d'etat, he probably would have remained in the office for much longer. It is unlikely that bottom-up pressures would have made him lose the office.

In both countries, CT agenda strengthened the position of the military. Although not as important in Kenya, it was extremely significant in Mauritania, where CT practices were used by the repressive apparatus to prevent democratization efforts. Strengthened military, as explained, contributed to resurfacing of neo-authoritarianism there.

Conclusion

Having explained the Western donors' reasoning behind targeting Kenya and Mauritania with CT assistance at first, this essay then described and analysed its impact on

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society and politics in both countries, in each case providing multiple effects that resulted from CT practices. It also compared the outcomes of CT in both countries. Through analysis of the similar and different impact of CT on societies in Mauritania and Kenya, it showed that both have shared the negative effect, whereas only the latter one experienced positive influence of it, which resulted in the empowerment of Muslim minority. This essay also analysed similar and different outcomes of CT on politics in both countries, arguing that it, overall, has not resulted in changing the nature of politics in either of them, despite giving a hope for that in Kenya, and through its contribution to thwarting democratization efforts under Taya regime in Mauritania, strengthening the neo-authoritarian nature of the politics in this country, and contribution to its return to neo-authoritarianism.

Notes:

1. Due to a large number of reports that would need to be cited, I provide the link to a website where all of the Freedom House's reports on Mauritania can be found: https://freedomhouse.org/country/mauritania

2. Similar as above: https://freedomhouse.org/country/kenya

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alan Lis. Graduate of two British universities: University of York (BA in Politics with International Relations) and University of Warwick (MA in International Security). Erasmus student at the University of Bergen, Norway. His previous professional experience includes, amongst others, working for the Department of Strategic Studies of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister of Poland and Euractiv.pl. His main research interests are international security, terrorism, and hybrid threats.

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