

Africa is breeding future bin Ladens

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Susan E. Rice

What has Africa got to do with Osama bin Laden or terrorist networks? Just this: Africa is the world's soft underbelly for global terrorism. If America intends to win—and not just to fight the war on terror, it cannot view Africa as separate from the comprehensive, global war.

Terrorism directed against the United States is alive and well in Africa, as was obvious after the 1998 embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania. Qaeda and other terrorist cell are active throughout East, West, North and Southern Africa. These organisations plan, finance, train and execute terrorist operation in many parts of Africa, not just Sudan and Somalia.

Terrorist organisations take advantage of Africa's porous borders, and weak law enforcement, judicial institutions and security services to move men, weapons and money around the globe. They manipulate poor, disillusioned populations, often with religious or ethnic grievances, to recruit for their *jihad* .

And what is America doing about it? Not nearly enough.

President George W. Bush has defined well the necessity of a comprehensive, long-term response to the glo-

bal threat. He has rightly coupled robust military action with efforts to build a durable coalition, improve the collection of intelligence, seize terrorist assets, defend the homeland and disrupt terrorist organisations around the world.

But two critical pieces are missing from the comprehensive strategy.

First and most urgent, the United States must help those countries in Africa that have the will to cooperate in the war on terror but lack the means. Mr Bush was right to offer them help, but does not yet have a strategy in place.

After the East Africa embassy bombings, the US government finalised the first continent-wide strategy to combat crime, terrorism and narcotics flows in Africa. Africa received, for the first time, an annual share of the State Department's global anti-crime, counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism budgets. It was a start. But given the global battle faced today, these resources are woefully inadequate.

The United States needs to invest tens of millions of dollars annually to help a large number of African coun-

tries control their borders, improve intelligence collection, strengthen law enforcement and build effective judicial institutions.

Second, over the longer term, America needs to change the condi-

tions around the world that breed terrorism. Islam is a fast-growing religion in Africa. That in itself is not a concern. But the fact that some of Islam's most radical and anti-American adherents are increasingly active from South Africa to Sudan, from Nigeria to Algeria, should be of great concern.

Africa is an incubator for the foot soldiers of terrorism. Its poor, young, disaffected, unhealthy and undereducated populations often have no stake in government or faith in the future. They harbour an easily exploitable discontent with the *status quo*. For such people, nihilism is as natural a response to their circumstances as self-help.

Fighting this battle will not be swift or cheap. America needs to lead its partners in the developed world, both in the public and private sectors, to invest on a scale previously inconceivable.

The United States will have to open its markets completely to goods and services from the developing world, provide much more trade and investment financing, bridge the digital divide, bolster democratic institutions,

invest more in debt relief, increase assistance for education, build health infrastructure, treat the infected and find a vaccine for HIV/AIDS.

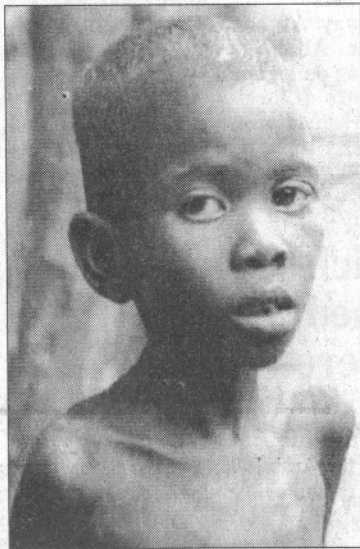
Without progress on these fronts, future bin Ladens will find a growing constituency for their radical form of Islam, whose chief tenet is hatred of America.

The United States cannot bear this burden alone. African peoples and African governments will have to provide the leadership to forge a better future. Without this, all well-intentioned efforts will fail. But mutual commitment and sustained investment can, achieve mutual security and, eventually, even mutual prosperity.

Unfortunately, these are by necessity budget-busting times. Africa is already being cannibalised to fund Pakistan's and other new programmes. Thus, after several years of progressively increasing resources, Africa will likely get less than last year.

Now is the time to reverse that trend. The United States needs to fight this war big, but also needs to fight it smart.

The writer was the US assistant secretary of state for African affairs from 1997 to 2001



The lost generation