

Terrorist Groups and Extremist Activity in Tanzania

Shama Shah, February 2020

Country Profile

Tanzania, officially known as the United Republic of Tanzania, includes the islands of Mafia, Pemba and Zanzibar, with the latter being a semi-autonomous region. 99% of the Tanzanian population are of African ethnicity, whilst 1% are of Asian, Arab and European descent. The majority of the Tanzanian population is Christian (61.4%), whilst 35.2% are Muslim and 3.4% either follow folk religion, have other religious views or are unaffiliated with any religion; the island of Zanzibar is predominantly Muslim. As of 2018, Tanzania spent 1.21% of its GDP on military expenditure, ranking it at 106 in the world, far below the Number 1, Saudi Arabia, at 8.78% (The World Factbook, 2020).

Terrorist Attacks

Unlike its neighbors Kenya, Uganda and Somalia, Tanzania has suffered far fewer acts of terror on its soil. The most notable (and certainly deadliest) attack was the 1998 bombing of the American Embassy in Dar Es Salaam by the Al Qaeda. According to a declassified summary document by the FBI, 11 people lost their lives in this attack (The trail of evidence - FBI executive summary, 2015). According to Jane Mayer, author of *The Dark Side*, the motive behind the attack was clear - it was due to the U.S. involvement in the extradition (and alleged torture) of four members of Egyptian Islamic Jihad. The members had been arrested in Albania two months preceding the attack, for an alleged series of murders in Egypt (Mayer, 2008). Apart from this one major attack, there have been numerous small-scale attacks in Tanzania, the most recent being the 2014 attack on an Indian restaurant in Arusha that wounded 8 people (Arusha blast: Tanzania restaurant hit by bomb, 2014).

Perpetrators

The Tanzanian authorities have yet to formally acknowledge the group's level of activity in the country, however they have linked many of the local attacks to the Al-Qaeda and Al-Shabaab (Al-Qaeda's East African affiliate arm). Aside from these two groups, reports do not indicate a presence of another terrorist group in the region. ISIL are not active in the region, but it is theorized that they provide some of support to local terrorists. In fact, the UK Government state that the offenders may be local criminal gangs (Foreign Travel Advice: Tanzania, n.d.).

The lack of formally identifying and investigating the perpetrators means that there is a gaping breach in intelligence, which could mean a higher risk of future attacks. International agencies are aware of this, and have warned their citizens residing in Tanzania to be vigilant on a number of occasions.

Motives and Extremist Activities

Reasons for extremist activities and attacks in Tanzania are not straightforward. They vary from religious to political motifs. It is nonetheless safe to say that domestic Islamist militancy is the major drive for terrorism and extremist activities in the country. Tanzanian

Islamists are not essentially inspired by the global jihad movement. Their reasons stem from more intimate and personal reasons. A look into Tanzania's history shows us that conservative Islamist political voices were marginalized in the past and Muslims did (do) not enjoy the same benefits from development efforts and private sector investments as their Christian countrymen. Other areas that have led to extremist behaviors have been the high rates of unemployment, especially amongst youth, not to mention the uncertainty and dispute over the status of Zanzibar (LeSage, 2014). The Al-Shabaab take advantage of low unemployment rates and frustrations faced by the youth, making it easier to recruit them into their cause.

It is also feared that the growing presence of Al-Shabaab in Kenya presents a serious risk of the radicalization and ultimate recruitment in Tanzania. In fact, a report stated that a Tanzanian national was involved in the deadly attack on Garissa University College in Kenya in 2015 (Dang, 2019).

Speculating the reasons for the fairly minimal attacks in Tanzania

There could be a couple of reasons as to why Tanzania has so far managed to escape major attacks. The most noteworthy being the fact that Tanzania, although part of the Africa Union, is not part of AMISON (African Union Mission to Somalia) and have not sent any troops into the country. The majority of the attacks in Kenya are due to Kenya's presence in Somalia, which is highly disapproved of by the Al-Shabaab.

Perhaps another reason that Tanzania do not face the wrath of terrorist groups, is that they do not participate in the U.S. led coalition against ISIS. They have also not labeled ISIS or Al-Shabaab as a terrorist organization. This could then mean that they have not actively fought the groups, and have therefore lay relatively low under their radar.

While not the most plausible of reasons, the Tanzanian authorities seem to have managed to thwart a number of potential attacks by confiscating firearms and other contrabands, for example in a 2013 raid that also lead to first largescale arrest of Al-Shabaab operatives (Tanzania: Extremism & Counter-Extremism).

A poll showed that in 2013 and 2014, 8% of Tanzanian Muslims had a favorable view of Al-Qaeda, whereas 75% had an unfavorable view of the terrorist group (Schmid, 2017). There have been reports that in 2008, local citizens and mosque-goers had been in physical altercations with the Al-Shabaab, who at the time tried to impose their ideological views on the populous. This goes to show that although a small pocket of individuals are in favor of extremist philosophies, the majority of Tanzanians are not, which creates an almost vigilante approach to managing the spread and eventual attacks in the country.

Finally, a fairly strong argument for the low number of attacks could be the fact that Tanzania amended their Prevention of Terrorism act in 2016, to include the death penalty of those found guilty of supporting terrorism. This measure undoubtedly would deter anyone who was on the fence as to whether they'd want to participate in acts of terror (Tanzania: Extremism & Counter-Extremism).

In Conclusion

As Tanzania face a very likely growing threat to its national security by extremist groups and ideologies, it must be willing to spend a lot of resources on counter intelligence, the military, local security forces and counter-terrorism measures. Intelligence services, law enforcement and civil societies must be thoroughly prepared for the eventuality of an attack, and government policies should be amended to strongly chastise terrorists and their sympathizers.

Although the fight against extremist ideologies is long and almost impossible to conquer, Tanzanians can come together to mitigate the violence these groups perpetrate on their fellow citizens.

References

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