



# Terrorism is international



## And it has a foothold in Africa

With the long-anticipated transfer of authority in Iraq underway, worldwide attention remains focused on Baghdad. And that's just what some of our most dangerous enemies — holed up far from Iraq — are counting on.

During the past two years, combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have triggered a steady stream of media reports and images. Fallujah, Tikrit, Karbala and Najaf — places known by very few Americans before the war on terrorism — have become the stuff of everyday conversation. In fact, they've assumed such a large place in our vernacular that we'd do well to wonder: What other faraway places are likely to be burned into our national consciousness two or three years from now?

I recently put that question to a trusted source with a knack for seeing beyond the crisis du jour. "Africa," he said, using it as a one-word prelude to a new stream of strange-sounding names, along with one — Mogadishu — that remains painfully familiar. He then shared with me information from a closely held preliminary report prepared by the Partners International Foundation, a nongovernmental humanitarian organization ([www.partners-international.org](http://www.partners-international.org)). The report, he emphasized, isn't meant as a definitive assessment of al-Qaida's activities in Africa; rather, it is intended simply to trigger a formal, comprehensive follow-up inquiry to validate the report's preliminary findings.

Thus far, however, the report has attracted little interest beyond the special operations community. To its credit, the U.S. military is tracking some sub-Saharan developments through the Combined Joint Task

Force-Horn of Africa, headquartered in Djibouti, and the U.S. European Command has shown increased interest in potential adversaries' activities on the African continent. But these largely long-distance monitoring efforts fall far short of the action that's needed — active, onsite intelligence-gathering and other direct forms of military and political engagement with the countries involved — if the Partners' report is accurate. And, admittedly, that's a big "if."

Other than references to information drawn from published reports of African governments and to sources inside those governments, there's little indication of how most of the material in the report was gathered. Further, the report contains no evidence corroborating its conclusions. Nonetheless, the report does lay out in painstaking detail what its authors claim are a series of largely unnoticed power struggles taking place throughout east and central Africa, most notably in Somalia. There, the report states, at the intersection of Africa and the Middle East, al-Qaida established a presence in 1993. Eventually, Somalia became a springboard for delivering aid, and the group's radical beliefs, to receptive, disaffected segments of the Somali population and those of its neighbors.

In time, al-Qaida was joined by extremists from Saudi Arabia, homegrown Somali extremists and elements of previously established organized criminal groups. The strength of this unholy coalition is best evidenced by its occupation of former Somali military underground facilities in the southern part of the country, which the report says are being used as weapons storehouses, training sites and bases for planning terrorist operations outside Somalia.

With a steady stream of funds

flowing through informal hawala channels to al-Qaida coffers, the terrorist organization lays claim to at least 16 training sites, warehouse complexes, short-wave broadcast operations and command centers stretching the length and breadth of Somalia, according to the report. But Mogadishu holds the distinction of being the primary base for terrorists in Somalia — and for good reason.

First is the fact that al-Qaida operatives and their cohorts in terror and crime undoubtedly realize that U.S. military ground forces are stretched to the breaking point trying to keep the lid on Iraq. There's also the fact that, from al-Qaida's perspective, Mogadishu is an ideal safe haven: Neither the Pentagon nor the American public would be likely to embrace the idea of returning U.S. combat forces to Mogadishu absent a clearly defined, imminent threat to America's security interests.

So the next time you see a 3-inch report in the mainstream press about Christian militiamen battling Muslim farmers in Kano, in the predominantly Muslim state of Nigeria, or hear about a massacre of Fur tribesmen in the Darfur region of Sudan by government troops and Arab militiamen, you'd be well advised to consider that report in the broader context of the underlying religious and ethnic struggle it probably represents.

The United States and its remaining partners in the international war against terrorism must take decisive action against African-based terrorist cells. Otherwise, we're likely to find ourselves bogged down in a series of Afghan- or Iraqi-style conflicts throughout sub-Saharan Africa. ■

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