An African Vortex:
Islamism in Sub-Saharan Africa

by David McCormack

From the Editor's Desk

In October 2003, the government of Kano State in Nigeria stopped an ongoing polio vaccination program and did not allow it to resume until August 2004. As a result, a polio epidemic which originated in Kano has now spread to 22 African countries, including ten who had been previously free of the disease. There are already more than a thousand registered cases and, with thousands of unregistered infections, experts fear that tens of thousands of African children may be crippled before the epidemic is brought under control. What made that government act in such blatant, indeed criminal disregard of the children's health? The explanation given by Kano officials was as straightforward as it was preposterous and paranoid. The US-provided (but produced in France) vaccine, Kano's hardline Islamist regime claimed, was designed to infect Muslim children with AIDS and make women infertile.

How such medieval religious obscurantism could come to the fore in Africa at the beginning of the 21st century is detailed in this paper by Center for Security Policy research associate David McCormack. While African Islamism has been much in the news of late with the genocidal events in Darfur, much less attention has been paid to the dramatic spread of radical Islamism in sub-Saharan Africa which is home to 250 million Muslims. Yet, as David McCormack shows persuasively, Wahhabi ideology and massive infusions of Saudi cash are rapidly transforming the once syncretic and peaceful Sufi-inspired sub-Saharan Islam into militant Islamism. The likely result, argues the author, is "unmanageable inter-communal strife between Muslims and non-Muslims," and a "hospitable environment for terrorists with an international agenda."

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By David McCormack

Although not widely considered an African faith, roughly one fifth of the world's adherents to Islam reside in sub-Saharan Africa. The religion, well established on the subcontinent for more than a millennium, made vital contributions in the spheres of education, commerce and government. Its largely peaceful spread and incorporation of local traditions, moreover, led to the development of an African Islam characterized by syncretic Sufi practices, tolerance and moderation.

This temperate, progressive orientation has become imperiled in recent years by the introduction of Islamism – a movement intent on bringing society and state into conformity with radical interpretations of the religion. Sub-Saharan Africa has proved tremendously useful in advancing this agenda: its Muslim population of roughly 250 million (for a breakdown see appendix A) provides a massive base from which Islamists can draw support; weak and corrupt governments and economies allow Islamist ideologies to become alluring to African Muslims; and porous borders, a steady flow of illicit arms and obscure financial systems contribute to an ideal operating environment for Islamists with militant appetites.

While numerous terror groups operating in the region are the most conspicuous manifestations of the Islamist advance, these entities disguise the primary method employed by Islamists in their move on Africa. Far from advocating immediate, armed revolution, Islamists have become extremely adept at exploiting local conditions to advance their agenda through political and social warfare. With its long list of socio-political demands, Islamism must necessarily attack the status quo. Hence, Islamism in Africa has resulted in the corrosion of moderate-Islamic and secular traditions.

Islamism's impact to date foreshadows the terrible implications of its continued expansion. It jeopardizes steps toward social progress by legally marginalizing women and non-Muslims, inhibiting democratic government, and violating accepted standards of human rights – phenomena that are unmistakably correlated to the increasing intrusion of shari'a (Islamic law) on African society. Such trends, furthermore, have led to inter-communal violence on a massive scale.

And while much attention is paid to the possibility that poverty encourages Islamism, markedly less consideration is given to Islamism's facilitation of poverty. By creating inter-communal strife and dueling systems of law (one of which, shari'a, is by no means growth-friendly), Islamism discourages the very investment that has the potential to pull Africa out of the economic abyss.

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African Islamism also poses a direct threat to Western interests. An atmosphere permeated with radical Islamic thought has, not surprisingly, begun to create a hospitable environment for terrorists with an international agenda. Already, prominent international terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda and Hamas operate extensively in Africa, while lesser known but nevertheless dangerous groups have emerged to wage jihad south of the Sahara.

The story of Islamism in sub-Saharan Africa is complex and ominous. Moreover, it has largely been unexplored, likely the result of the region's longstanding status as an inconsequential piece of the global security architecture. The nature of the Islamist threat mandates the abandonment of that concept. Islamism is gaining ground in sub-Saharan Africa to the detriment of Africans and Westerners alike.

From African Islam to Islamism in Africa

Islam reached sub-Saharan Africa in the earliest days of the religion and spread slowly over the following centuries.[1] Although occasionally brought by the sword, expansion was largely a peaceful affair facilitated by trade routes linking the region to the Arab world. The process can generally be understood as one of gradual diffusion, which had the effect of overlaying Islam on – rather than wholly eliminating – local belief systems. As a result, the Islam that developed in Africa was characterized by diverse practices, and rigid understandings of the Quran and the Sunnah were eschewed in favor of less doctrinal observances that focused on the believer's personal relationship with Allah – evidenced by the widespread popularity of the tariqa (Sufi brotherhoods).

African Islam has been undermined in recent years by the steady expansion of Islamism – the movement's impact felt in virtually all sub-Saharan Muslim communities. While the historical complexities that allowed the penetration of radical Islam are many, greatest consideration is generally given to two potential sources. First is the mixture of dire political, social and economic conditions that arose from the inability of African states to forge representative governments and strong economies following the collapse of colonialism in the 1950s and 1960s.

While Africa has taken desirable steps in recent years away from its economic and political backwardness, these have not been enough to discourage its Muslim populations from the Islamist lure, as Africa continues to be plagued by unaccountable and corrupt governments and underdeveloped economies. Ironically, where democratic transformation *is* taking place, Islamists have been afforded greater freedom to implement their program, while sometimes painful but important economic reforms have created dislocation used as ammunition by Islamists.

Undoubtedly, poverty, disenfranchisement and general societal disorder plays a role in making African Muslims susceptible to Islamist influences. But to assign this combination primary responsibility for an increasingly extremist African Islam would be

a mistake. Rather, the systematic capturing of the Islamic message by states from the heart of the Muslim world – who introduced radical, intolerant brands of Islam in a quest to find solutions to internal challenges and external rivalries on the global stage – has been the driving force behind the Islamist advance on the subcontinent.

State-sponsors of Islamism have been conducting their jihadist campaign in Africa for more than 40 years, but only began to gain great leverage with their burgeoning petrodollar influence in the 1970s. Despite African Islam's historically temperate tradition, Islamism was met by insufficient resistance to arrest its spread. This phenomenon is explained by the scholar Eva Evers Rosander, who notes that "in relations between African Muslims and foreigners from the Arab (oil) countries, those who have the financial means dictate the Islamic discourse."[2]

Given the initial strength of African Islam's moderation, however, Islamists recognized the need to first promote the Islamization of Africa. Defined as a strengthening of concern for Islamic faith and culture, Islamization has gathered momentum in the post-colonial period, evident in increasingly forceful assertions by African Muslims of their place in the umma (global Islamic community).

The eminent Islamic scholar Khalid Duran has remarked on the inherently benign nature of Islamization, calling it a "quest for authenticity, not a hunt for enemies. It is not a turning against someone, but a turning toward the own self."[3] However, there exists a troubling relationship between Islamization and Islamism.

Islamization lays a foundation of Islamic awareness that is a necessary precondition for the introduction of Islamism. Activity to promote social welfare – a tactic adopted from Christianity – is a primary method used by international Islamists attempting to demonstrate to African Muslims their importance to the umma. The short-term objective of such activity, then, is the creation of distinct Islamized segments of society that can later be leveraged for Islamist objectives.

Once established, Islamized populations are led toward acceptance of Islamism by measures intended to portray the secular status quo as antithetical to Muslim well-being. Islamist fringe elements attempt to foster a mood of defiance among Islamized populations against external influences. One commonly utilized tactic, for example, is to petition that Muslims be permitted to be governed by shari'a. The inevitable opposition to this demand confirms to Muslims their sense of persecution, allowing increasingly radical rhetoric and action to become acceptable. By portraying themselves as defenders of legitimate Muslim rights, Islamists are thus able to wrest control from the moderate center.

The different brands of Islamists have, in Africa, demonstrated a willingness to form short-term tactical alliances with one another, recognizing the imperative of Muslim unity for the immediate purpose of defeating external challenges, often leading to the

development, interestingly enough, of Islamist groups with indistinct doctrinal foundations. It is not unusual, for example, to see those of the extremist Wahhabi creed working with Sufis, nor to see Sunnis receive Iranian patronage. Yet the common goal remains, as once expressed by Moammar Qaddafi, to "make Islam triumph in Africa."[4]

The following is an examination of Saudi Arabia's role, intended to provide an understanding of the methodology commonly employed to promote Islamism in sub-Saharan Africa. This does not mean to suggest that *only* Saudi Arabia is active in the region. While Saudi activities are certainly greatest in scope, other states (particularly Iran and Libya) have descended on the subcontinent in much the same manner, and with great effectiveness.

Exporting Islamism

Wahhabism and its various offshoots made very little contact with sub-Saharan Africa through the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries. As late as the 1950s, Saudi Arabia – Wahhabism's patron – was a poor country surrounded by colonized lands and in no position to have a significant impact on African Muslims except through the hajj (the pilgrimage constrained due to Africa's poverty and geographical isolation) and through limited contacts made by African students studying under Wahhabi inspired scholars at Al-Azhar University in Egypt.[5] While this restricted exposure introduced a rudimentary form of Wahhabism to the region, it was hardly enough to allow the ideology to flourish.

It has long been Riyadh's policy to export the state faith, however, and when oil revenue began to swell the Kingdom's coffers, Saudi propagation of Wahhabism in sub-Saharan Africa commenced in earnest.[*] Common methods employed in this endeavor include the funding of mosques, Islamic centers and madrassas; the facilitation of travel to the Kingdom for purposes of the hajj and educational exchanges; the contribution of humanitarian aid and other charitable work; and the provision of support for "indigenous" Wahhabi organizations. This collective effort has been aimed at assuring Saudi control of the Islamic message reaching Africa's Muslim populations.

Riyadh's program to spread the Wahhabi doctrine in Africa often functions through purportedly nongovernmental organizations. Perhaps the most prominent of these is the Muslim World League (MWL) that, despite its purported nongovernmental status, was created and is maintained by the Saudi government. MWL Secretary General Dr. Abdullah Al-Turki, for example, formerly served as the Kingdom's Minister of Islamic Affairs, and it has been estimated that 99 percent of the League's financing came from Saudi Arabia.[6]

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[*] The impetus for Saudi exportation of Wahhabism has been explored extensively elsewhere – for the purposes of this paper it is sufficient to note that Riyadh's promotion of Wahhabism abroad was a tool for maintaining internal stability as well as a means of gaining ideological/strategic influence vis-à-vis other Middle Eastern states. For an excellent introduction to Wahhabism see Hamid Algar's *Wahhabism: A Critical Essay* (Oneonta, N.Y.: Islamic Publications International, 2002).

Founded in 1962, the MWL advocates "the application of the rules of the Shareah either by individuals, groups or states" and develops "methods of the propagation of Islam in accord with the dictate of the Quran and the Sunnah." Toward these ends, the MWL and its various arms coordinate worldwide efforts of Muslim preachers, construct mosques, promote Islamic education and culture through the mass-media, and extend humanitarian relief to the misfortunate.[7]

MWL work in sub-Saharan Africa was initiated from the time of the organization's founding, paving the way for an attempt at continent-wide Islamist coordination in 1976 with its sponsorship of the first All-Africa Conference held in Mauritania. At the conference the MWL could already claim that it was providing in Africa immense "moral and material support to Islamic organizations in accordance with the principles of our religion which ordains solidarity and brotherhood among Muslims throughout the world."[8] This would become the MWL's leitmotif over the following decades.

Evidence of the MWL's continued commitment to sub-Saharan Africa is found in its sixteen foreign offices located in the region (nearly half of the worldwide total), in addition to 36 (of 70 worldwide) offices of the International Islamic Relief Organization, a subsidiary body the MWL.[9] Through these offices the MWL has done much to advance Islamism. As the Islamist regime established its control of Sudan in the early 1980s, for example, the MWL gave Khartoum two million copies of the Quran for conversion work and assisted in the training of religious teachers.[10]

The World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), established in 1972, is another Saudi maintained "independent" organization – its secretary general Sheikh Saleh bin Abdul Aziz Al Al-Sheikh doubles as the Saudi Minister of Islamic Affairs – actively promoting Islamism, funding at least 48 mosques in sub-Saharan Africa.[11] Much of WAMY's activity, however, is directed toward education. In war torn Somalia, for instance, where youth are particularly susceptible to radical influences, the organization funded the Imam Nawawi educational complex serving 2,300 Somali students.[12]

Saudi Arabia also provides considerable official assistance to African communities. An example of a channel for such assistance is the Saudi Fund for Development (SFD) that commenced operations in 1974 – established to support development projects and programs primarily in Africa and Asia. Between 1975 and 2002, the SFD granted loans to sub-Saharan countries totaling more than $1.9 billion.[13] Additionally, over roughly the same period the SFD provided grants to African countries facing exceptionally difficult circumstances in the amount of nearly $750 million.[14] This assistance, while not explicitly designated as propagation activity, is part of the Islamization process.

Riyadh is also involved in overt propagation of Islam south of the Sahara – according to several Saudi sources, more money is provided to the Ministry of Islamic

Affairs than to Saudi ambassadors for activity in Africa.[15] While it is difficult to quantify the Kingdom's involvement in the region, some anecdotal evidence hints at the scope of its activity. Saudi Arabia has fully or partially funded numerous mosques and Islamic centers – that some accounts suggest number in the thousands – throughout sub-Saharan Africa: examples include the King Faisal Mosque and Center in Guinea ($21.3 million), the King Faisal Mosque in Chad ($16 million), Bamaco Mosque in Mali ($6.7 million), and the Yaondi Mosque in Cameroon ($5.1 million).[16] The funding of these, of course, is often implicitly contingent on the appointment of a Saudi approved imam.

The Kingdom has similarly participated, on a grand scale, in propagation through formal education. A donation of $13.9 million, for instance, allowed the construction of the King Fahd Charity Complex Plaza that serves as an endowment for the Islamic University in Uganda.[17] Similarly, the International University of Africa (formerly the Islamic African Center) in Sudan, established to, in the words of its first director, "fight against the hatred and rancour towards Arabs and Islam which European colonialism has implanted in the hearts of Africans," has received considerable funding from Saudi Arabia.[18] Less conspicuous is Saudi support for innumerable madrassas that are, as explained by one Ethiopian journalist, "jihad factories nurturing potential bin Ladens."[19]

Saudi encouragement of Islamization in the region is marked. The Kingdom has transported and hosted hundreds of thousands of Africans performing the hajj, many of whom have undertaken the pilgrimage at the full expense of the Saudi government. It has distributed inestimable copies of the Quran in strategically important African languages such as Somali, Hausa and Zulu. And in 2002 alone, the Kingdom provided Iftar meals in 31 African countries benefiting more than 430,000 fasters.[20]

Saudi dissemination of Wahhabi ideology has, moreover, taken advantage of technological advances. The recently established Channel Islam International – made possible through the patronage of Prince Bandar Bin Salman Bin Mohammed Al Saud, who serves as an advisor to Crown Prince Abdullah and as Chairman of the Private Commission for Islamic Call in Africa – attempts, with its satellite reach into more than 60 African and Middle Eastern countries, to "sow the seeds of religious education and growth, in meticulous compliance with the teachings of the Noble Quran and of the Prophet Muhammad."[21]

Riyadh's propagation activities in sub-Saharan Africa have met with great success. A number of movements and organizations have been borne of Wahhabi inspiration – from the Izala of Nigeria, to the Al-Falah of Senegal, to the Jamiatul Ulama of South Africa. Often, Saudi Arabia directly funds these groups, as is the case with the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council and the Muslim Association of Malawi.[22] Importantly, the indigenous face of these groups puts them in a particularly advantageous position to advance their program from the bottom up – grassroots methods for the introduction of Wahhabism include the co-opting of local media and the organization of public meetings, among others. The significance of these movements cannot be underestimated.

Not surprisingly, Saudi money often ends up in the hands of militants. Many of the Saudi-sponsored NGOs operating in sub-Saharan Africa have been unmistakably linked to global terrorist groups. For example, the Somalia office of the Saudi-sponsored charity al-Haramain has been connected to al-Qaeda and the group Al-Itihaad Al-Islamiya (AIAI) that has terrorized the Horn of Africa. According to the U.S. Treasury Department, Al-Haramain funneled money to these organizations "by disguising funds as if they were intended for orphanage projects or Islamic school and mosque construction."[23]

By no means should the above case be considered an isolated example. As explained by a Tanzanian Islamist activist discussing the Saudi modus operandi, "Officially [Saudi] money is used to buy medicine, but in reality the money is given to support our work and buy guns."[24] And of course, aside from material support Saudi Arabia's promotion of Islamism creates a climate from which terrorist recruits can easily be gained and in which they can safely operate. Given Saudi objectives, it is difficult to believe this is an unintended consequence of its "benevolent" activities.

The Wahhabi program for the transformation of Islam in Africa has been underway for nearly a half century – its success can be seen in the growing acceptance of Wahhabi and neo-Wahhabi movements across the region. Thanks to Saudi efforts, Wahhabism is now part of the sub-Saharan landscape and poised to continue its advance.

Surveying the Continent

The growing influence of Islamism south of the Sahara is manifest, though it is by no means developing uniformly. Demographic, political, economic and a host of other conditions permit degrees of success that vary greatly from region to region, state to state, and even locality to locality. Yet, similar patterns of Islamism's advance can be observed in virtually all of the subcontinent's Muslim communities. The following case studies, therefore, attempt merely to provide an overview of the range of Islamist achievements in transforming sub-Saharan Africa.

Nigeria

Home to nearly 60 million Muslims – roughly half the country's total population – Nigeria provides an advanced example of Islamism in Africa. Over the last five years, Islamists in the predominately Muslim north have begun to codify shari'a and other Islamist social policies. Such activity has led to widespread violence and instability that threatens the viability of the Nigerian state.

Introduced by Arab traders in the 11th Century, Islam came to dominate the northern part of Nigeria over the following centuries. Despite the religion's distinct influence over government of the region, Nigerian Islam was by no means harsh or rigid (explaining why the north was allowed considerable autonomy under colonial Britain),

with a strong Sufi influence. Rather, it permitted an environment in which Muslims of different doctrinal persuasions, Christians and animists could peacefully coexist.

As Britain began to disengage from West Africa in the 1950s following roughly one hundred years of colonial rule, it was recognized that a functioning Nigerian state – one that incorporated both the Muslim north and the Christian and animist south – would have to be of a secular character. With independence in 1960, a Penal Code was established for northern Nigeria that excluded shari'a from criminal proceedings, allowing its application only to personal law for Muslims – this jurisdiction reinforced by subsequent constitutions adopted in the country including the most recent (the 1999 Constitution).

Significantly, the several military dictatorships that ruled Nigeria in the post-independence period enforced the country's secular character despite attempts by Islamists to impose their designs on the nation. Although they were able to thwart Islamism in the short-term, an environment developed in which Islamist ideologies could be presented as desirable alternatives to the corruption, economic mismanagement and political oppression offered by Nigeria's military regimes. Such conditions helped ensure that when Nigerian democracy was allowed to emerge, the seeds of Islamism sown over the course of the preceding decades would bear fruit.

Saudi Arabia began to actively promote what has become the most popular brand of Nigerian Islamism as early as the 1960s. Over the course of the following decades, Wahhabism became firmly entrenched in the Nigerian Muslim psyche. Riyadh's influence becomes clearer when traced through the careers of two prominent Nigerian Muslim leaders – the Sardauna of Sokoto Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello, often called the first prime minister of northern Nigeria, and his chief advisor Alhaji Abubakar Gumi.

A self-proclaimed pan-Islamist, Ahmadu Bello sought nothing less than Nigeria and the continent's full conversion to Islam, saying "I hope when we clean Nigeria we will go further afield in Africa." To accomplish this, Bello threw his support behind Saudi efforts. From the minutes of the Muslim World League's inaugural meeting in 1962, it can be seen that Ahmadu Bello's name was second in the list of the body's founders, and at the MWL's third meeting in 1963, he was nominated Vice-President of the League. Through this connection, Saudi money designated for religious purposes began to flow to Nigeria. Bello's biographer John Paden notes Saudi gifts in 1963 and 1964 totaling £200,000 for the work of spreading Islam, apart from "unofficial donations, probably amounting to millions of pounds."[25]

More inclined toward Wahhabism was Abubakar Gumi – called by scholar John Hunwick "a conduit through which Saudi/Wahhabi ideas could flow and take root in Nigeria."[26] Unlike Bello, Gumi was trained in an austere legal tradition and was rabidly anti-Sufi – the indicium of Wahhabis in Africa – having lived several months in the Hijaz where he became immersed in Wahhabi ideology.

Gumi's Islamist program began in 1962, when he persuaded the Sarduana to establish a pan-Nigerian Islamic organization – Jamaat Nasril al-Islam (JNI – Association for the Victory of Islam) – that can be considered the progenitor of today's Islamist associations in the country. Immediately at issue was JNI's solicitation, under Bello's direction, of broad-based support that included moderates and Sufis. With Bello's death in 1966, however, the way was cleared for Gumi to fully launch his Wahhabist campaign.

Gumi made great use of mass media in his attempt to transform society along Wahhabi lines. The angry backlash these campaigns elicited from Sufis eventually led to the disintegration of the JNI into a number of competing factions. Gumi's faction, established in 1978 that became the most influential of them all, was the Jamaat Izalat al-Bida wa Iqamat al-Sunnah (the Society for the Eradication of Evil Innovation and the Establishment of the Sunnah), better known as the Yan Izala.[27]

The Yan Izala – in addition to issuing religious edicts – promoted social programs such as the establishment of an Islamic system of education that gained the support of Nigerian Muslims. Membership in the Izala boomed, as politically active Muslims sought an outlet for their ideas (political parties being banned at the time). According to the scholar Roman Loimeier, "the new adherents of Yan Izala absorbed nothing of the old, 'un-Islamic' system of values, but categorically rejected it and instead accepted a new system of explanation."[28]

To hedge Yan Izala's magnetism, the traditionally dominant Sufi brotherhoods were forced to follow a similar path – the Izala and the tariqa each attempting to appear "more Islamic" than the other in a battle to be considered the legitimate defender of Muslim rights in the country – firmly entrenching Islamism in Nigerian political life.

Numerous Islamist movements formed in the same environment that cultivated the Izala. The Ikhwan (Muslim Brothers), for example, led by Ibrahim El-Zak Zaky emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s as a prominent player in Nigerian Islamism, proclaiming that "there is no government except that of Islam."[29] And an even more radical offshoot of the Ikhwan formed in the late 1990s as the Ja'amutu Tajidmul Islami (Movement for Islamic Revival), and is headed by Abubakar Mujahid.

Much evidence exists to show that foreign states other than Saudi Arabia are active in promoting Nigerian Islamism. For instance, the Iranian-sponsored Islamist magazine *Sakon Islam*, published in the Hausa language (spoken by many of the country's Muslims), is a prominent periodical that serves to push Nigeria down the Islamist path.[30] Furthermore, although Sunni, Ibrahim Zak Zaky received extremist training in, and is suspected to have obtained financial support from, Iran.[31]

Despite its spread from the 1960s onward, the extent of Islamism's grip on Nigeria became clear only with the country's liberation from military rule in 1999. This landmark event marked a rapid decline in the power of the central government. Now free

to implement their program at the state level, Islamists in northern Nigeria have embarked on a campaign to transform social and political life to conform to the dictates of radical Islam.

Alhadji Ahmed Sani, governor of the northern state of Zamfara, began the political transformation on October 27, 1999, when he proclaimed that his state would henceforth be governed by shari'a. A great admirer of Saudi Arabia, Sani would model his legal system on that of the Kingdom. The announcement, in fact, was made following solidarity visits from Saudi (as well as Sudanese, Syrian, and Palestinian) officials, and a number of potential judges have since been sent to Saudi Arabia for training.[32] Eleven other states in northern Nigeria subsequently followed Zamfara's lead in implementing shari'a.[33]

Using Zamfara as an example, the impact of Islamism since 1999 becomes apparent. Under Sani's shari'a, public transportation has been sexually segregated and alcohol banned regardless of a citizen's faith. Furthermore, corporal and capital punishment – including flogging and death by stoning – have become institutionalized. And as in Saudi Arabia, a vigilante organization – the Joint Islamic Aid Group – was established to monitor compliance with the new laws. Aside from the new penal code, Sani sought to implement other Islamist policies: disclosing a plan – at an event not surprisingly organized by the Saudi Embassy in Nigeria – to enforce the teaching and usage of Arabic in Zamfara and to begin paying Islamic preachers out of state funds.[34]

Across northern Nigeria, the implementation of Islamist policies has begun to erode accepted standards of human rights. Freedom House notes that these violations contravene not only the Nigerian Constitution, but also the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.[35] Most significantly, the application of Islamism by northern states has created widespread religious tension that resulted in violence on a massive scale. It has been estimated, in fact, that as many as 10,000 people have been killed by such violence since 1999.[36]

The potential for the full application of Islamism in Nigeria has not gone unnoticed by global jihadis. According to Dr. Stephen Morrison of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, "there is a great deal of favorable sentiment toward al-Qaeda in the north," and it is believed that Hizballah already maintains training camps in the region.[37] Recognizing this atmosphere, in a May 2003 tape Usama bin Laden named Nigeria as one of six states "most qualified…for liberation."[38]

In what could be considered a sign of times to come, in December 2003 and January 2004, a group of some 200 militant Islamists calling themselves the "Taliban" waged a brief insurgency, intending to establish an independent Muslim state along Nigeria's border with Niger Republic. Only after several weeks of murder and conquest was the insurrection crushed by the Nigerian army.[39] It has since been discovered that

the Saudi funded charity Al-Muntada Al-Islami, which works primarily in Africa, may have provided tens of thousands of dollars to the rebels.[40]

Al-Muntada has, incidentally, been particularly active in promoting Wahhabi-style Islamism in Nigeria. As explained by a Sufi of Kano state, "before al-Muntada came to Kano there had been little or no inter-religious conflict…Now…we are almost on the verge of civil war." Al-Muntada, he explains, pays for Nigerian clerics to be "brainwashed" in Saudi universities and imposed on Nigerian Muslims through its well-funded network of mosques and schools.[41] Such is the nature of Islamist intervention in Nigeria.

Islamism is well-advanced in Nigeria, does not show signs of abating, and has the potential to engulf the country in full scale conflict. Importantly, disagreements among the many Islamist groups are coming to be seen as less threatening than the rise in opposition to political Islam by non-Muslim and southern power groups. The imperative of Muslim unity thus appears to be trumping doctrinal disputes, and today Islamism is more unified than at any other point in Nigerian history. For its part, the central government has tacitly recognized its own weakness and inability to reign in the Islamist tide, and has espoused only limited criticisms of the actions of the northern states, further emboldening Islamist ambitions. The Nigerian Nobel Prize winner in Literature, Wole Soyinka, has captured the mood best: "The roof is already burning over our head…the prelude to war, civil war."

Kenya

Across the continent, Kenya has been experiencing Islamism in a manner not unlike Nigeria, but on a smaller scale. Islam in Kenya claims three million adherents (roughly ten percent of the population) who reside primarily in the North Eastern province, adjacent to the Somali border, and in Coast province along the Indian Ocean seaboard.[42] Despite the small number of Kenyan Muslims, however, Islamist influences have begun to push Kenyan society and politics in a disturbing direction.

Like much of the rest of Africa, Islam arrived along the eastern coast primarily through commercial exchanges. Unlike in West Africa, however, the Horn's geographic proximity to the Arabian peninsula assured that Islam would arrive earlier (perhaps by the 8th Century), and allowed it to maintain closer ties with the heart of the Muslim world. Still, the Islam that developed maintained a distinct nature, incorporating local religious practices and cultural (mostly Somali and Swahili) attributes, and moderate tendencies prevailed to the present age.

Though emerging from colonialism in 1963, radical Islam's advance on Kenya was slowed by the muscular leadership of Jomo Kenyatta (1963-1978) and Daniel Arap Moi (1978-2002). As in Nigeria, however, such strict rule created a climate in which the Islamist order came to be seen by some as a desirable alternative. With political

liberalization arising in the context of the transition to democracy in 1992 and the first civilian transfer of power in 2002, Islamists were given great freedom to implement their program.

As elsewhere in Africa, foreign states have been active in promoting various forms of Islamism in Kenya. Tehran has been a leader in the Islamist drive. Hardly covert in its push to export the revolution to Kenya, the Iranian Embassy in Nairobi – through publications, lectures, mass media and by sending young Kenyans to Iran for study – stresses, in the words of scholars Charlotte and Frederick Quinn, "the Iranian desire to restore Islam to its former glory, while attacking 'satanic forces' of imperialism and Zionism."[43] Libya has also figured prominently in Kenyan Islamism. By the early 1980s, Tripoli was sending Islamic teachers to Kenya and bringing Kenyan students to Libya for study. So strong was Qaddafi's support for unrest in Kenya that in 1987 Moi ordered the Libyan embassy closed and its staff expelled from the country.[44] And not surprisingly, the hand of Riyadh is evident – WAMY, al-Haramain, and the MWL having been particularly active in Kenya.

The efforts of its foreign sponsors have undoubtedly increased the prominence of Islamism in the country over the last few years. Unlike the loose movements of Nigeria, however, Kenyan Islamism has arranged itself into more structured organizations with immediate political objectives. The Council of Imams and Preachers in Kenya (CIPK) can be thought to be the face of Kenyan Islamism, while the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM) is another large group steering the Islamist movement. By portraying themselves as a counterweights to a government that is secular, pro-Western and hence hostile to Kenyan Muslims, these groups are beginning to seize control of Islam in Kenya.

Among their Islamist activities, CIPK and SUPKEM have opposed the government's efforts to curtail terrorist activity within its borders, establishing themselves as vocal critics of measures such as the Anti-Terrorism Bill. They have condemned the investigation of madrassas suspected of harboring terrorists – CIPK's secretary general contending that the move was "influenced by the American government in its bid to suppress Islam."[45] And they have criticized the government's closing of Al-Haramain and Al-Muntada for suspicion of supporting terrorism, and have petitioned for their reopening.[46]

Kenyan Islamists have found their most effective tool, however, to be the demand that Kadhi courts (Islamic courts) are enshrined in the national constitution currently being constructed, which would thus allow segments of Kenyan society to be governed by shari'a. Opposition to this measure has become the most divisive issue in Kenyan politics. As described by the General Secretary for the National Council of Churches of Kenya, such proposals "are discriminative in nature as they seek to elevate Islamic religious courts."[47]

CIPK's chairman, Yemeni-born Sheikh Ali Shee (trained at Sudan's University of Omdurman), has threatened secession by Muslims in the North Eastern and Coast provinces if Kadhi courts are neglected. Even moderate opposition to the expansion of the courts is portrayed by Islamists as an attempt to suppress Islam. The possibility that the issue be subject to a referendum, for example, was rejected by SUPKEM's secretary general, who threatened that Muslims will fight for Kadhi courts "even if it means going through fire or blood shed."[48]

Such threats should not be considered idle, as political Islam in Kenya appears only one degree removed from violence. Kenya's porous borders, proximity to the lawless and war-torn regions of Sudan and Somalia, and increasingly radical Muslim population have made it inviting to Islamic militants. The 1998 bombing of the American Embassy in Nairobi and the 2002 attacks on Israeli targets in Mombassa demonstrate how Kenya has been used as a soft target by terrorists, due to the large Western presence in the country.

CIPK itself has been closely tied to militant Islam – its support for which is evidenced by the group's organization of violent pro-Taliban protests in 2001.[49] More specifically, according to Jordanian intelligence and statements by UN officials in the region, it is possible that CIPK helped al-Qaeda set up operations in Kenya. Additionally, some CIPK members are known to have been in contact with AIAI militants. And an assessment by the French publication Intelligence Online suggests that "it appears improbable" that the 2002 terrorist attacks in Mombassa "could have been planned without the help of elements gravitating around [CIPK]."[50]

Although not nearly approaching levels of the Nigerian situation (to say nothing of more egregious cases like those of Sudan and Somalia), small signs of Kenyan Islamism's potential to impinge on human rights, especially those of Muslims, are slowly emerging. SUPKEM, for instance, has expressed its desire to disallow women from dressing in a manner that contravenes Islamic morals.[51] And in a possible sign of things to come, a madrassa was discovered in a Nairobi neighborhood where teenage boys were chained, tortured, and indoctrinated with violent anti-Christian ideas.[52]

Education is an area of particular concern. Distrustful of secular schools, Muslims in Kenya have long sent their children to Islamic schools that fail to equip students with the tools needed to succeed in the emerging modern order, exacerbating an already wide education gap between Muslims and non-Muslims that will ensure a continued polarization of society. Efforts to reverse this trend, moreover, have been resisted by Islamists. Offers of funding from USAID for madrassas, for example, were rejected in a campaign led by CIPK and the unregistered Islamic Party of Kenya, whose chairman suggested "an ulterior [read anti-Muslim] motive behind the offer."[53]

Islamists in Kenya appear poised to move their agenda forward through effective political maneuvering of late. In rallying ordinary Muslims to their cause, Islamists have

created a bloc significant enough to have gained support from the country's main opposition party, Kenya Africa National Union (KANU), that has come out against the "harassment" of Muslims – demanding, among other things, rejection of anti-terrorist legislation.[54] The Islamist-KANU alliance has the very real potential to unseat the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) led by President Mwai Kibaki, a vital partner in the war against terrorism in East Africa.

Islamism in Kenya is steadily advancing, disrupting political, social and economic order and progress. As Kenya serves as the lynchpin in the East African security architecture, the instability being fomented there by Islamists has the potential to unleash chaos in an already deeply troubled region.

The Impact of Islamism

Islamism is on the rise throughout most of sub-Saharan Africa, transforming a moderate and integrated Muslim population into an ever more extremist one that is isolated from its non-Muslim neighbors. For African Muslims, the Islamist arrangement will entail an erosion of human rights and lead to intra-faith conflict between moderates and extremists. For African governments, Islamism will present a challenge to central authority and generate increasingly unmanageable inter-communal strife between Muslims and non-Muslims. And for non-Africans, Islamism will mean the continued development – in a region that, ominously, traditionally receives little attention from the Western security community – of a hospitable environment for terrorists with an international agenda.

For evidence, one needs to look no further than Sudan. Long-engaged in a bloody drive to impose the dictates of radical Islam on Christians and animists in the southern part of the country, the Islamist regime in Khartoum has more recently turned on its black co-religionists in the Darfur region in a genocidal campaign aimed at what has been called the "Arabization" of that population. Sudan has become a wasteland where numerous terror groups – including Hamas, al-Qaeda, and any number of others – have found comfortable accommodations. Terrible as the situation is, Sudan only hints at African Islamism's potential for destruction.

Appendix A: Islam in Selected Sub-Saharan African Countries

Country	Muslim Population (in millions)	Percentage of Total Population
Benin	1.45	20
Burkina Faso	6.78	50
Burundi	0.62	10
Cameroon	3.21	20
Central African Republic	0.56	15
Chad	4.86	51
Comoros	0.64	98
Dem. Republic of the Congo	5.83	10
Cote d' Ivoire	6.06	35
Djibouti	0.44	94
Ethiopia	30.53	45
Gambia	1.39	90
Ghana	3.32	16
Guinea	7.86	85
Guinea-Bissau	0.62	45
Kenya	3.20	10
Liberia	0.68	10
Madagascar	1.22	7
Malawi	2.38	20
Mali	10.76	100
Mozambique	3.76	20
Niger	9.08	80
Nigeria	68.62	50
Senegal	10.20	94
Sierra Leone	3.53	60
Somalia	8.30	100
South Africa	0.85	2
Sudan	27.40	70
Tanzania	12.80	35
Togo	1.11	20
Uganda	4.22	16
Total	244.84	-

Source: *The CIA World Factbook 2004* (Washington, D.C.: CIA, 2004).

Note: Countries listed above are those with Muslim populations of more than 500,000. Though not listed due to insufficient data, various estimates place Eritrea's Muslim population at 2.2 million, roughly 50 percent of its total population.

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