

# Africa's Gleneagles mirage and the Jihad moment

Were the London bombing attacks on the opening day of the Gleneagles G8 Summit as much an attack on Africa as on Britain? **Francis Kornegay** explores this and whether the bombings shifted focus away from African issues.

It is hardly surprising that the London bombings raised questions as to whether focus was taken away from African issues. This is the second time that jihadist attacks have been mounted at a time when Africa and the global South's developmental agenda of redress was supposed to take centre stage among the world's leading industrial powers. The first time being the attacks on the World Trade Centre on 11 September 2001 which occurred in the aftermath of an international political momentum that built up following the World Conference Against Racism (WCAR), the Genoa and Okinawa Summits at which African leaders first began engaging the G8 leaders on the vexed issues of North-South relations, and the Doha developmental trade round.

The 9/11 attacks brought the world's

spotlights onto the jihadist challenge of militant political Islam. This radically shifted the international agenda away from the geopolitics of North-South redress toward the overriding preoccupation of the Bush administration with its 'War on Terror' campaign.

This, in turn, became a convenient anchor for the foreign policies pursued by the other major powers. They began redefining their security interests within the anti-terrorist template as a way to avoid having to make difficult to unlikely political accommodations with dissident nationalists linked to actual, or potential, Islamist mobilisation. A case in point is Russia's war of suppression against Chechen nationalism and Beijing's Han Chinese anti-Uighur campaigns in predominantly Muslim Xinjiang as well as the Kashmir flash point between India and Pakistan.

The post 9/11 militarisation of the 'War on Terror', reflected in the internationally-supported US intervention in Afghanistan and the Anglo-American invasion and occupation of Iraq, threatened to further marginalise Africa and the South's economic agenda. These military campaigns became increasingly intertwined with an escalating global 'resource war' of geo-strategic one-upmanship in gaining access to oil and liquefied natural gas reserves. Some have argued that Bush's anti-terror war may have been a convenient cover for a resource war aimed at simultaneously pursuing post-Cold War containment against Russia and China in oil and gas-rich Central Eurasia.

Meanwhile, Africa has become caught up, as an important front, in this anti-terrorist-cum-resource war. This has taken various forms – from the US use of Djibouti in the Horn of Africa as a staging port for its Persian Gulf and southwest Asian operations to the support of Sahelian and North African governments against insurgents like the

Algerian Salafi Group for Preaching and Combat, to a growing naval presence in the oil-rich west African Gulf of Guinea. American engagement in the Sahel and Maghreb is taking place at a time when the European Union (EU) has become home to a growing legal and illegal population of North African immigrants with whom the London bomb attackers – like those in the Madrid train bombing – may be linked.

The North African link to an Islamist terror threat in Europe, arguably exacerbated by the Iraq invasion and occupation, underlines the EU's very real pragmatic geopolitical interest in stabilising Africa and the trans-Mediterranean. British Prime Minister Tony Blair's Commission for Africa, forming the basis of the Gleneagles 'moment of opportunity for Africa', became the EU's vehicle via the G8. It has taken several years since 9/11 for the Heads of State and Government Implementation Committee (HSGIC) of the AU's Nepad to painstakingly refocus the G8's attention on Africa. The London attacks failed to derail what African and G8 leaders had already determined would – or should – mark the beginning of a sustained commitment to implement the continent's economic development and recovery blueprint.

The attacks may have emphasised, however, the extent to which – far from winning the so-called 'War on Terror' – the West and the US, in particular, may be losing it, thereby fuelling the jihadist momentum within the real battle. This is the struggle for the hearts and minds of Muslims the world over in what amounts to a Global Islamic Civil War nested within the South's larger struggle to redress the imbalance of power and resources favouring the industrialised North. Olivier Roy, in his *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*, is seen as interpreting these developments as 'Islamist radicalism's' attempt to 'Islamize an existing



space of anti-imperialism and contestation...'

Yet, the two struggles – the civil war within Islam that sustains itself through the US-led military response and the South's demarches in its economic and global governance tug-of-war with the North – are fundamentally at cross purposes. For jihadism tends to play to the North's Anglo-American led militarism, trumping momentum toward North-South political accommodation on the terms of global economic power-sharing time and again.

The jihad failed to derail Geneagles, but was there very much to derail? Some say Blair, coming into the presidency of an embattled EU as chair of the G8 sought to break away from or balance the UK's joined at the hip anti-jihad military alliance with Washington. The bombings put that on the backburner but, even with Blair's magnificent display of multi-tasking, switching from crisis control in London to international statesmanship 500 miles away, was there

ever a real hope for the South?

A 'real deal' would have to factor in an asymmetrical trade agreement coupled with a healthy dent in, if not abolition of, northern farming subsidies, always a sure way to lose an election in Europe and America's introverted democracies. All that was really on the table was the \$50-billion worth of debt-aid-relief, already more-or-less agreed which hardly begins to offset what Africa loses annually in the absence of a trade/subsidies accord. The Doha prognosis is not good.

It would seem reasonable that the quid pro quo ought to involve a truly massive interim aid-debt cancellation-investment package in the hundreds of billions per annum range, to offset the lack of a trade/subsidies deal which, when arrived at, could be phased out as the North-South economic playing field levels out. But, in the name of such an offset, the G8 cannot even commit to spend 0.7% of their GDP on aid as

recommended by the United Nations for achieving the MDG's.

This is a situation begging for pan-African multilateral debt repudiation. Otherwise, while much of Africa could slide into the mire of state failure and collapse, the G8 cooption gambit of incorporating 'universal countries' like South Africa and its IBSA partners India and Brazil along with China and Mexico, into some notion of a G13, may emerge as the 'moment of opportunity' consolation prize. This would involve giving greater voting weight to Asian economic powers in the IMF in order to forestall an 'Asian IMF'.

Given the fleeting mirage of the 'Geneagles moment', there turned out to be, unfortunately, ample room for the tragedy of London's 'jihad moment' after all, with hardly a blip on the derailment radar screen.

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