

American

NEWS & VIEWS

A Daily Newsletter from Public Affairs, American Embassy

August 6, 2010

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Terrorist Attacks, Fatalities from Attacks Declined in 2009

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — The number of terrorist attacks worldwide in 2009 fell by about 6 percent from the previous year, and the number of deaths from these attacks declined by about 5 percent — marking the second consecutive year that attacks and fatalities from terrorism declined.

“Transnational terrorism remains the foremost security threat the United States faces, and the Obama administration has been working to strengthen the nation’s counterterrorism strategy,” Ambassador Daniel Benjamin, the State Department’s coordinator for counterterrorism, said in the foreword to the annual Country Reports on Terrorism 2009, released August 5.

“The administration is formulating policies that seek to shape and constrain the environments where terrorists operate,” Benjamin added. “Central to this approach is taking steps to undermine the appeal of al-Qaida’s world view and to isolate violent extremists.”

Part of that effort, Benjamin says, is addressing the “upstream” factors of radicalization, which involves confronting the political, social and economic conditions that extremist groups exploit to win new recruits and funding. And the United States has been expanding foreign assistance to nations such as Pakistan and Yemen and their communities where violent extremism has made inroads, he added.

Terrorism experts say that a fully functioning terrorist group needs a command center, funding, a source of weapons and munitions, a source for recruits and the means to broadcast its actions and ideology.

The report said that Iran remains the most active “state sponsor of terrorism,” and its support of terrorist groups in the Middle East and Central Asia continues to create instability in those regions. State sponsors of terrorism designations for Cuba, Sudan and Syria remained unchanged in the 2009 report.

As in previous years, al-Qaida, whose core elements are believed to be hiding in the mountainous regions of Pakistan along the border of Afghanistan, is the most formidable terrorist organization targeting the U.S. homeland, the report said. “It has proven to be an adaptable and resilient terrorist group whose desire to attack the United States and U.S. interests abroad remains strong,” the report said.

The 2009 report states that al-Qaida suffered several

significant setbacks in 2009 as the result of Pakistani military operations aimed at eliminating militant strongholds. According to the report, al-Qaida also suffered leadership losses and experienced increased difficulty in raising money, training recruits and planning attacks outside of the region.

SAFE HAVENS

The 2009 report said that terrorists continue operating without regard to national boundaries, and that to effectively counter terrorists, the United States is working to strengthen regional and transnational partnerships.

“Denying safe haven is essential for undermining terrorists’ capacity to operate effectively and is a central goal of U.S. counterterrorism strategy,” the report said. Terrorist safe havens are areas in some countries that are ungoverned, undergoverned or ill-governed where the extremist groups can organize, plan, raise funds, communicate, recruit, train and operate in relative security.

“Physical safe havens provide security for terrorist leaders, allowing them to plan acts of terrorism around the world,” the report said.

TERRORIST ATTACKS DECLINE

According to the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), there were 10,999 terrorist attacks in 83 countries during 2009, resulting in 14,971 deaths. That compares with 11,725 attacks in 2008 and 14,435 attacks in 2007. In 2008, the number of deaths stood at 15,727, which was down from the 22,736 in 2007, the center’s report said.

And unlike the preceding four years, where the Middle East saw the largest number of attacks, the largest number of reported terrorist attacks in 2009 occurred in South Asia, and specifically in Pakistan and Afghanistan, the center said in its annex to the Country Reports on Terrorism 2009.

Overall, nearly two-thirds of the attacks in 2009 were in South Asia and the Middle East, the center’s report said. At the same time, the number of attacks in Iraq continued to decline, which helped lead to the overall decrease in terrorism worldwide in 2009. In Iraq, the center’s report said, the number of attacks fell by nearly a third from 2008 to 2009, and suicide bombings have fallen from more than 350 in 2007 to about 80 in 2009.

The NCTC said that most of the attacks carried out in 2009 were done by extremists applying conventional methods such as armed attacks, bombings and kidnappings. “Drawing on the lessons learned from the Mumbai [India] attack in 2008 ... extremist elements used

suicidal militia style attacks in numerous large scale attacks in 2009," the report said.

Overall suicide attacks declined from 405 in 2008 to 299 in 2009, the NCTC said, with the drop attributed to declining violence in Iraq.

The terrorism report is sent annually to Congress, and a statistical annex is required to accompany it. The report is compiled from a number of U.S. government agencies, led by the State Department, throughout the year, but it does not include attacks on the U.S. armed forces and does not include terrorist attacks within the United States. The report covers the period of January 1–December 31, 2009, Benjamin said during a press briefing at the State Department.

Fourteen Indicted in U.S. for Aiding Al-Shabaab Terrorist Group

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — The U.S. Department of Justice announced indictments against 14 individuals who officially reside in the United States and are charged with terrorism violations because of their alleged support of the Somali terrorist group al-Shabaab. The Justice Department said the indictments unveil a network of support within the United States that raised funds and sent individuals to train and fight with the al-Qaida-affiliated group.

U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder said the indictments "shed further light on a deadly pipeline that has routed funding and fighters to the al-Shabaab terror organization from cities across the United States," according to an August 5 press release from the Justice Department.

The group, which has been seeking to overthrow the Somali government and impose strict Islamist rule on the country, claimed responsibility for the July 11 terrorist attacks in Uganda that killed 76 people who had gathered in public venues in Kampala to watch the FIFA World Cup final.

According to the State Department's 2009 Country Reports on Terrorism, released August 5, al-Shabaab and other extremists inside Somalia have "conducted suicide attacks, remote-controlled roadside bombings, kidnappings, and assassinations of government officials, journalists, humanitarian workers, and civil society leaders throughout Somalia." They have also threatened countries like Uganda and Burundi for their participation in the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) peacekeeping force, which is providing protection for the United Nations-backed Transitional Federal Government (TFG).

The State Department designated al-Shabaab as a foreign terrorist organization in March 2008, and the 2009 terrorism report said that although al-Qaida and al-Shabaab "are not formally merged, they produce mutually supportive rhetoric," including instances where al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden called for the group to overthrow the TFG and to declare allegiance to al-Qaida.

Most of the 14 individuals charged are United States citizens of Somali descent who had lived in Minnesota, Alabama or California. The indictments allege that some of them raised money for al-Shabaab through door-to-door solicitations and direct appeals in teleconferences, as well as "under the false pretense that such funds were for the poor and needy." The funds allegedly were transferred to al-Shabaab through the informal hawala money remittance system (exchanging value across borders through trusted brokers) to recipients operating under false names, the Justice Department said.

In addition, the Justice Department said 10 men were charged with terrorism offenses for leaving the United States to join al-Shabaab.

"While our investigations are ongoing around the country, these arrests and charges should serve as an unmistakable warning to others considering joining terrorist groups like al-Shabaab — if you choose this route you can expect to find yourself in a U.S. jail cell or a casualty on the battlefield in Somalia," Attorney General Holder said in the press release.

Federal Bureau of Investigation Director Robert Mueller said the 14 cases "underscore the need for continued vigilance against those who may seek to harm us and our way of life" and pledged that FBI agents and analysts "will continue to confront this threat with a strong and coordinated effort as we work to protect all Americans."

U.S. Lawmakers Cheer on Young African Activists

By Phillip Kurata
Staff Writer

Washington — Three U.S. lawmakers have urged more than 100 young activists from Africa to continue to challenge their governments to increase their transparency, accountability and ethical standards.

"You are the future of your countries and your continent," Senator Russell Feingold of Wisconsin told the activists. He urged them to continue their work of drawing greater numbers of young people into public service. Africa is a continent of "weak governance" and "pervasive insecurity," the senator said. Feingold, the chairman of the subcommittee on African affairs of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said Africa needs general political reform to accompany the strong

economic growth taking place on the continent.

The young activists were part of the President's Forum with Young African Leaders, held in Washington August 3-5. They were invited to Washington to be honored for their work in bringing about positive social change in their home countries. They met with the members of Congress August 4.

Senator Dick Durbin of Illinois, the chairman of the Judiciary Subcommittee on Human Rights, said he is intent on using his influence in the U.S. Congress to address all forms of human rights violations in Africa, be they incidents of human trafficking, drafting child soldiers or taking political prisoners. He said that there is a "thirst" for African minerals that are extracted from African conflict zones by western companies. He said those companies must be held accountable for human rights abuses to which they may be party. He also said he is backing legislation that will prevent fallen, corrupt African leaders from finding refuge in the United States.

Representative Don Payne of New Jersey compared the ferment for change in Africa now to the activism in the United States in the 1960s, when he fought for civil rights. He praised President Obama for calling this forum 50 years after 17 African countries won their independence.

Senator Johnny Isakson of Georgia took a different tack, emphasizing economic development. He said Africa offers great opportunity for partnership with the United States in the 21st century.

The young activists, many of whom are in their 20s and 30s, responded enthusiastically to the encouraging words from the lawmakers.

A young journalist from Sudan, Alsanosi Ahmed Ibrahim Ali, said the interests of the United States and Africa overlap. "For example, trade between the United States will create jobs in both places. I will carry that message back to Sudan," he said. He added that the Sudanese government paints an unfairly negative image of the United States.

Sydney Chisi, executive director of the Youth Initiative for Democracy in Zimbabwe, works on training young community leaders. He prepares young people to run for office, registers citizens to vote and demands change in government actions and policies.

"Zimbabwe's youth have to be included in decision-making processes," he said. They have to "take it upon themselves" to build a new democracy and governing system, and confront the internal security forces. "It is very dangerous, but somebody has to do it," Chisi said. He said in 2008 he lost four close friends to political

violence.

Assale Tiemoko Antoine, a journalist from Ivory Coast, was appreciative of the honor of being invited to the forum. Antoine spent 12 months behind bars from December 2007 to December 2008 for his reporting on government corruption. He said he hoped that being part of the young leaders' forum will raise his status back home and afford him greater protection from people who would like to silence him.

"You must keep the freedom of independence alive," Payne said. "Many leaders in Africa feel that the people must serve them. I've told that to their faces. They didn't like it. You need to go back home and do work."

Payne was surrounded by many young leaders in the street afterward as they jostled to have a picture taken with him.

African Women Entrepreneurs Honored at AGOA Forum

Corporate Council on Africa hosts networking luncheon

By Charles W. Corey
Staff Writer

Washington — The Corporate Council on Africa (CCA) honored 34 African women entrepreneurs who were attending the ninth annual U.S.-Sub-Saharan Africa Trade and Economic Cooperation Forum — better known as the AGOA Forum, named for the African Growth and Opportunity Act — at a luncheon where they could interact with other business executives interested in expanding trade with Africa.

In an interview August 3 with *America.gov*, Steve Hayes, CCA's president and CEO, called the African Women's Entrepreneurship Program (AWEP) and its affiliation with AGOA "one of the more innovative programs of AGOA in many years. I think it is a very good first step that needs to be expanded to include more women." He said CCA may be taking a more active role in promoting and training African women entrepreneurs as well.

Women entrepreneurs and small business "are far more important than we realize," Hayes said. "I think that a lot of your top entrepreneurs in Africa are women — they are the producers in Africa. This is an acknowledgement of finally recognizing that having African businesswomen's participation is absolutely vital."

Hayes was speaking as he surveyed the packed room at a Washington hotel where the women were talking business and networking with each other and with American business executives.

WOMEN EXECUTIVES

One of those women, Munci Marie Dilu of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who is managing director of Diluton Continental Foods, said the AWEP program puts African women entrepreneurs together with each other and with U.S. counterparts and the U.S. government. She called the program, sponsored by the U.S. State Department, "very informative, and very interesting."

Dilu, who buys and sells African coffee and food products, is looking at ways to use modern technology to improve the quality of her products and find new trading opportunities in the United States.

"How to improve the quality of food is very important because we are behind in Africa. We want to take back some benefits from this program so that we can exchange knowledge with Americans who are farther along in agribusiness."

Dilu was confident that many Americans, and especially African Americans in the United States, would enjoy some of her company's ethnic foods and exotic spices. Conversely, she said she would also like to import U.S. foods into Africa. One big hurdle all entrepreneurs face in Africa as elsewhere, she said, is access to financing.

Another entrepreneur, Flotea Geofrey Massawe, founder and managing director of the Marvelous Flotea Company Ltd., said the forum has provided her with a lot of new information about how to run a business.

With the AWEP program, she said, women are now "far more involved" in learning how to succeed in business. "We are connected and we are linked" to people with the information and technology and training that women entrepreneurs need.

"I have a big chance now of growing my business in terms of buying and selling more" with the American market, she said. Massawe's business produces creative items out of textiles, such as necklaces and jewelry.

Mary Anyango Otiang, managing director of Solomar Investment in Kenya, said she wants to learn how to export fresh fruits and vegetables to the United States, much like she does right now to Europe and the Middle East. "There are so many things about AGOA that I did not know. ... It has taught me a lot."

Otiang is looking for a U.S. partner to invest with her and said a direct flight from Kenya to the United States would greatly help aid the flow of goods between both countries. Overall, she lamented that "there is a weakness of knowledge about AGOA" in Africa that needs to be corrected. "It was accidental that I learned about AGOA

when I went to the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Ninety-nine percent of the SMEs [small and medium-sized enterprises] do not know about AGOA."

Assitan Keita Simpara of Mali told *America.gov* that the AWEP program has been "extremely important. I was especially impressed to learn just how much the U.S. government is doing to bring new business to Africa."

Speaking through an interpreter, Simpara, who is general manager and owner of Kissima Industry, said she is confident that her business will be able to export some goods to the United States. "I am working with a wild fruit in my country to produce different cosmetic products such as shampoo, skin creams and other products of that nature."

Habibatu Sidi Taleb Ahmed, the founder of Habibatu Enterprises in Mauritania, said she is hoping to export her tie-dyed cloth and accessories to the United States. Ahmed said she has met a lot of people who want to do business with her, but like other women entrepreneurs, she also suffers from a lack of financing. She remains "very optimistic" nonetheless.

Sonia Soutonnoma Nikiema of Burkina Faso said she sees AGOA as an opportunity to do business in the United States. A founding member of the Burkinabe Association for the Promotion of Young Girls (ABJPF), Nikiema said her business hopes to export shea butter to the United States for use in cosmetics, food products such as chocolate, and soap. Her business is currently exporting to Europe, but wants to expand into the United States. "We have a lot of capacity, with 4,500 women who can produce shea butter."

Heidi Ilse Van Hase, owner and creative director of Casa Anin in Namibia, said her textile and linen business will have to build capacity if it wants to export to the United States under AGOA.

"There are very many useful contacts that we have learned about in our program," she said, expressing her hope that this information will help in marketing goods as niche products.

"Women have been in business for centuries on a very small scale. ... Now women are becoming stronger and stronger in small enterprises and SMEs, and our governments are realizing that women in business are a very good proposition," she said.

When she goes home, she said, "I see it as my mission to concentrate some of my attention [on women in business] and promote AGOA to the businesses that could qualify for export."

From Washington, the 34 women entrepreneurs and the AGOA Forum moved to Kansas City, Missouri, for two days of agribusiness networking August 5-6.

The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) was enacted in its original form in 2000 to expand U.S.-sub-Saharan African trade by providing trade preferences to those countries that are making progress in implementing economic, legal and human rights reforms.

Russian Company Helps California Protect Historic Fort Ross

Landmark highlights early Russian contributions to America
By Domenick DiPasquale
Staff Writer

Washington — An innovative partnership between an American state and a major Russian corporation will help preserve a California landmark that speaks to the legacy of Russian exploration and colonization in North America during the 1700s and 1800s.

On June 22, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and Russia's Renova Group of Companies signed a formal agreement for Renova to support the preservation of Fort Ross State Historic Park and raise awareness of its historical and cultural importance.

The Russian-American Company, which the czarist government chartered in 1799 to control all Russian exploration, trade and settlement in the North Pacific, established Fort Ross in 1812 as an agricultural and trade base to support Russian outposts farther north in Alaska.

"This agreement highlights the diverse history of California and the importance of the Russian culture to our state," Schwarzenegger said in a statement issued at the time of the agreement signing. His words were echoed by Natalie Sabelik, president of the Congress of Russian Americans, who called Fort Ross "as important as the Spanish missions" to the state's history.

The severe budget crisis that has confronted California — by some estimates, the state faces a \$13.8 billion deficit in its budget for 2011 — had forced the state to consider closing Fort Ross in 2009. Although a total shutdown was averted, the park's operating hours were reduced this year to three days a week. Annual operating costs for Fort Ross are \$957,000, offset only to a small degree by \$148,000 of yearly revenue that the park brings in.

The June 22 memorandum of understanding established a public charitable foundation, the Renova Fort Ross Foundation, to support the park. The California state park system and the Renova Group are working out details on specific projects to be funded.

According to Roy Stearns, the park system's deputy director of communications, the Renova Group has expressed an interest in expansion of the Environmental Living Program through which school children from fourth to sixth grade come for an overnight stay at Fort Ross to experience a historical re-enactment. The 1,370 hectare park hosts between 10,000 and 14,000 such visitors annually.

Other possibilities for support include projects marking Fort Ross' bicentennial in 2012, as well as upgrades to the park's exhibits, which lack climate control and are deteriorating.

Independent of the Renova Fort Ross Foundation, the state park system has prepared a long list of upgrades and renovation projects at Fort Ross in critical need of funding. They range from structural repairs to interactive displays for visitors and the reconstruction of the fort's windmill, which might have been the first built in the United States west of the Mississippi River.

Stearns told *America.gov* the Renova Group has indicated that funding for the Renova Fort Ross Foundation could total as much as \$3 million initially, and up to an additional \$1 million annually for the next three years or longer.

The southernmost of Russian settlements in North America, located along the Pacific Coast 150 kilometers north of San Francisco, Fort Ross thrived from 1812 until 1841 with a small but highly diverse population of Russians, Californians, Native Alaskans and individuals of mixed Native American and European ancestry. Among the first Russian settlers were scientists and innovators who brought to the state its first shipbuilding industry, glass windows, stoves and all-wood housing. In 1841, the Russian-American Company sold Fort Ross to Swiss immigrant John Sutter, whose holdings elsewhere in California became world-famous seven years later for the gold discovery that led to the California Gold Rush, so-called because some 300,000 people flocked to California seeking gold.

The Fort Ross settlement included fortified blockhouses along the outpost's wooden stockade, housing for company officials, artisans' workshops, warehouses and a Russian Orthodox chapel. The Rotchev House, named after the fort's last manager, Alexander Rotchev, is the only structure at Fort Ross to contain original construction. All other buildings at the site are reconstructions; the original Orthodox chapel, for example, collapsed in the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, was rebuilt and then burned down in 1970.

Stearns cited the importance of the Renova Foundation's contribution to preserving Fort Ross.

“Given the current budget situation in California, public-private partnerships like this one are extremely valuable,” he said. “We do public-private partnerships like this one all the time with corporations and nonprofits, but this one is unique in that it involves a major group of companies from a foreign country.”

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