THOUGHTS ON TYPES OF SECURITY THREATS TO KENYA
by
PROFESSOR MACHARIA MUNENE

United States International University, Nairobi,
gmmunene@usiu.ac.ke

As a state, Kenya is increasingly under multi-faceted threats, which come in many forms and from many sides. Recent spate of violent terrorist attacks in Nairobi and Mombasa raise serious questions on the state of security in the country and the government's role to ensure that Kenya's feel safe and can trust their own security personnel. These situations of insecurity have perpetuated a malign and perceived situation of constant threats. The security threats continue to make Kenyans feel insecure. There are times when the threat is subtle and deceptively so benign that most Kenyans would not notice it. There are other times when the threat is brutal, brazen, and open. The more serious threats are at the conceptual/intellectual level from where they control the minds and attitudes that guide the physical, material, operational threats. Such control and "guidance" makes it difficult to respond to crisis effectively. Some threats are from within or domestic, others are foreign induced to serve external geopolitical interests.

When combined, domestic and foreign threats at mental or attitudinal levels, Kenya finds itself in a tight corner and often unsure of itself. Foreign threats pervade the entire body of politics, mentally infiltrate institutions, and appear to control national thinking so much that decisions on Kenya's well-being appear to be made by foreigners. Whatever the type or source of threat, Kenya's security is put to question and this should be of concern to all Kenyans.

The national interests to be pushed depend on a country's understanding of what its core interests are, and three stand out. First is the fact of independence, meaning ability to make independent decisions. Second, is ensuring the survival of the state as a geo-political entity and to protect it from external and internal challenges or enemies who come in different guises. For this reason, states

finance and train the military, the police and other security operators. Third, is to advance and protect the way of life of its people so that they become and remain comfortable, feel secure, and have strong attachments to the state in which they live. The way of life is political and socio-economic and includes the form of government and cultural values that the people identify with. Kenya suffers many of the maladies common in mainly African countries. Among the current challenges is one of internal acceptance by all its peoples as to whether they are actually one people who happen to have diversity or they are actually different peoples who had been unwillingly lumped together. The evident confusion on the recently introduced devolved system of governance poses this very problem and if it is not resolved, serious threats to the Kenyan state arise. That lack of clarity is an identity problem inherited from the colonial experience of dividing people into subjects of different colonial states.

The problem of identity is extra serious when it comes to the many people on the borderlines of two or more countries. Peoples along the Kenya-Tanzania border, the Kenya-Uganda border, the Kenya-Sudan border, the Kenya-Ethiopia border, and the Kenya-Somali border tend to have divided loyalties or are not clear as to which country they belong. Convincing such people that they owe loyalty to one country and not another is problematic and can be a source of constant friction. If they owe loyalty to the neighbouring country and yet they live in Kenya, the implication is that they do not accept the sovereignty of Kenya. The challenge is on how to re-orient such people to accept a country in which they live but also believe that it is not their country.

Kenya also suffers the problem of extra-territoriality, a disturbing and growing phenomenon in Africa. To attract investors, countries tend to bend so much backwards that they compromise aspects of security. In the process, the state ends up giving more power and rights to foreigners than to its citizens and the consequence is perpetual insult to the sovereignty of the concerned country. In Kenya, for instance, some foreign establishments claim virtual sovereignty where Kenyan officials have little say in enforcing laws. The problem of extra-territoriality infringing on sovereignty is widespread and threatens the state and its citizens.

Kenya has also had to deal with external challenges. These included the handling of multiple and conflicting international obligations which appear to mature at the same time. As a willing member of such organs as the UN, AU, and ICC, there are times when the organizations have different perceptions of what should or should not be done. As an independent sovereign state, Kenya has to decide which of the obligations is in its best interests after carefully examining the issues. Failure to do that, or inability to do that, is itself a threat to Kenyan security and claims to independence.

It is also in the national interests of a country to protect its image and avoid semblance of excessive weakness. Being seen as a malleable country and easily manipulated diminishes its standing and believability and therefore its ability to deliver on its commitments. There is, therefore, value in displaying *symbolic toughness*. This is the refusal to accept visible dictates that are clearly against the interests of a given country. Some of the dictates are actually aimed at embarrassing the country. When that becomes apparent, it is up to those responsible for running the country to adopt the posture of *symbolic toughness* by refusing to comply, and then give cogent reasons for doing so. The government therefore needs to take a multifaceted approach to addressing security issues affecting the country.