

## The Threat of Terrorism to the 2010 Soccer World Cup in South Africa

By Anneli Botha

IN 2010, SOUTH AFRICA will host the FIFA World Cup, a major international sporting event. Although South Africa has previously hosted a number of international sports events<sup>1</sup> and large gatherings<sup>2</sup> that attracted regional and international attention, hosting the soccer World Cup is a markedly different security scenario. The amount of domestic and international attention focused on each World Cup is tremendous. In anticipation of this coming event, it is important to assess the terrorism risks that could threaten the competition. South Africa is not on the same level of alertness toward terrorism than other countries in the region, and it is this degree of comfort that contributes to the country's vulnerability as a potential target. South Africa has experienced domestic terrorist attacks in the past, and during the last decade a number of high-profile al-Qa`ida operatives and other transnational Islamist terrorists have traveled through its borders. These factors demonstrate that South Africa and the 2010 games could be at risk.

### Domestic Terrorism

There are a number of domestic terrorist threats facing South Africa in the lead-up to the 2010 games. Although active or dormant domestic terrorist organizations might have previously focused their attention on exclusively domestic grievances and targets, prior experience indicates that domestic terrorist groups might capitalize on the international attention the games offer in an attempt to achieve recognition for their grievances. Although South Africa's domestic terrorist groups are currently dormant, the country has been confronted with periodic incidents of right-wing extremism since 1994, and also with an Islamic-oriented pressure or vigilante group known as

People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGAD). This latter group initiated a campaign of urban terrorism in Cape Town that lasted until 2000.

### Right-Wing Extremism

Politically, South Africa is currently confronted with a number of challenges, most notably the sudden resignation of President Thabo Mbeki in September. Fear that leadership changes in the country might also contribute to a change in political direction could prompt right-wing extremists to act in conjunction with existing motivating factors such as affirmative action, land reform, and cultural marginalization.

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The Boeremag, or Boer Force, was the last right-wing group that raised concern, yet the manifestation of right-wing extremism sporadically comes and goes and often involves a core group of people who plan and execute their activities in a clandestine fashion. This makes it extremely challenging to come to an accurate assessment of the future structure, reach and activities of right-wing extremist groups.

Since 1994, these groups have tended to use explosive devices directed at the broader infrastructure, including bridges, railway lines and dams. They have also, however, previously planned attacks on soccer games, such as the foiled plot in December 2002 in which Boeremag member Herman van Rooyen rigged a car bomb with 384 kilograms of explosives, together with two bags of nuts and bolts. The car bomb was apparently meant for a game between Kaizer Chiefs and the Sundowns at Loftus Versfeld.<sup>3</sup> Despite these concerns,

<sup>3</sup> “Boeremag Planned to Detonate 384kg Bomb,” *Independent Online* [Cape Town], December 15, 2002.

however, it is still debatable whether right-wing groups would broaden their target selection to include non-South African nationals.<sup>4</sup>

### People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGAD) and Associated Organizations

Although PAGAD and the Muslims Against Global Oppression (MAGO) indicated a prior willingness to target foreign representatives, as manifested in the attack on Planet Hollywood on August 25, 1998, their target selection was predominately domestic. Irrespective of the fact that the violent activities of PAGAD came to a standstill in 2000—as a result of a number of successful operations executed by South African security forces—the threat from domestic Islamist extremists might come in the form of small cell structures, motivated by strong anti-Western sentiments and fueled by U.S. involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan. The underlying reasons and sentiment that led to the structure or changes in PAGAD's target selection still exist. In addition to the fact that local community members have called for a return of PAGAD as an answer to the criminal and drug problem in the Western Cape, members of the Muslim community were previously extremely vocal against the West, in particular the United States and its “war on terrorism.” Although demonstrating against the war in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Israeli occupation of Palestine should not be categorized as a security threat, it is still significant as a manifestation of sentiment.

Furthermore, like many countries, South Africa faces the threat from possible homegrown terrorists who could become attracted to al-Qa`ida's ideology and download military training manuals from the internet. Countering the threat from radicalized small cells is a daunting task.

### Transnational Terrorism

South Africa has not been victim to a transnational terrorist attack on its soil. Nevertheless, South Africa is often categorized as a “safe haven” for

<sup>4</sup> The focus of planned and executed attacks perpetrated by right-wing extremists was to date exclusively directed at the government and the black community in South Africa. Although soccer is associated with the black community, targeting an international sports event would be a new trend.

<sup>1</sup> Among these events were the Rugby World Cup in 1995, African Cup of Nations in 1996, the All Africa Games in 1999 and the Cricket World Cup in 2003.

<sup>2</sup> These include the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 and the Non-Aligned Movement summit in 1998.

transnational terrorists since a number of them have traveled through the country. These individuals include:

- Khalfan Khamis Mohamed, a Tanzanian national and al-Qa`ida operative who fled to Cape Town in 1999 in the aftermath of the August 1998 bombings in Kenya and Tanzania.<sup>5</sup>

- Saud Memon, a Pakistani with suspected al-Qa`ida connections who, according to media reports, was allegedly "picked up" by U.S. officials in South Africa on March 7, 2003.<sup>6</sup>

- In April 2004, the national police commissioner announced that three suspected al-Qa`ida operatives of Syrian and Jordanian origin were arrested in South Africa, after they had stayed in the country for almost a year.<sup>7</sup>

- Haroon Rashid Aswat was implicated in the July 7, 2005 London bombings and for setting up a terrorist training camp in Oregon in 1999. He was arrested in Zambia on July 20, 2005, but prior to his arrest he had lived in Johannesburg for five months.<sup>8</sup>

- Mohammed Gulzar was a suspect in the UK trial of eight men accused of plotting to blow up airliners using liquid explosives as they traveled between the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada in 2006. British authorities alleged that he entered Britain on a flight from South Africa via Mauritius under the name of Altaf Ravat on July 18, 2006 after he had lived in South Africa for a few years. His fake passport also showed a one-day trip to Swaziland on July 13, 2006. Gulzar, however, was acquitted in September 2008.<sup>9</sup>

These examples have raised concern that there could be undetected al-Qa`ida-affiliated terrorists in South Africa. Since the announcement that South

Africa would host the 2010 World Cup was made in 2004, the possibility exists that a "sleeper cell" could be preparing for a terrorist attack on the upcoming games.

#### Security Challenges

There are a number of factors that terrorists could exploit to target the 2010 World Cup. The following includes a list of these factors, in addition to suggested steps that the South African government should take to mitigate the risks.

#### *Availability and Protection of Selected Targets*

FIFA will be responsible for the security at the World Cup in partnership with the South African Police Service. In addition to activity at the stadiums, the organizers as well as private businesses will make provisions for additional entertainment, including: exhibition halls at each venue, big screen viewing facilities close to the stadium, big screen facilities that fall outside the responsibility of FIFA, and sports cafés that will attract spectators. These additional activities and venues bring their own unique security challenges. Terrorists who hope to attract media attention might consider an attack directed at a large concentration of people where the traditional security measures are not in place.

Although hardening potential targets is a clear necessity, it will also be important to inform South African citizens of their responsibilities in acting as the "eyes and ears" of the police. There is already a police hotline, but it may be prudent to establish a dedicated open line of communication for suspicious activities in relation to the World Cup.

#### *Access to Weaponry and/or Explosives*

The ability to acquire military or commercial grade explosives in South Africa increases the danger that terrorists might pose. South Africa is experiencing an alarming increase in Automated Teller Machine (ATM) bombings in which commercial explosives are used. To place this threat in context, ATM bombings have increased by 3,000% in the past three years. Using explosives stolen from mines, an estimated 292 ATMs were blown up across the country between January 1, 2008 and July 12, 2008.<sup>10</sup>

Although the motivation is purely criminal, the possibility exists that an individual or small group of terrorists might buy commercial grade explosives from criminal elements on the black market. Driven by financial gain, criminals with access to commercial explosives might not have a moral objection to selling them, especially when the ultimate aims of the buyer are concealed. The Madrid train bombings served as an example of the link between terrorism and crime.

In addressing this vulnerability, countering rising crime should be seen as part of an all inclusive holistic strategy. Although considerable efforts are taken to counter specific trends—for example, the theft of commercial explosives used in ATM bombings—the potential use of commercial explosives acquired through criminal activities should be factored into security calculations.

#### *Operating Undetected*

A key concern is the ease in which potential terrorists can enter or exit South Africa. The protection and monitoring of formal and informal points of entry are areas of concern. Although counter-measures were put in place at international airports to address this vulnerability, South Africa is confronted with long porous borders that are difficult to monitor and control. The possibility of terrorists using informal points of entry, also used by illegal immigrants from neighboring countries, was confirmed by Haroon Rashid Aswat, who was eventually arrested in Zambia. A sub-regional approach and cooperation between police agencies and immigration in securing land borders is vital. The Southern Africa Regional Police Chiefs Cooperation Organization (SARPCCO), the sub-regional bureau of Interpol, has already committed itself to assisting South Africa.

Corruption also plays a role, particularly in relation to the ability of non-South African nationals to acquire South African identity documents and passports. It is particularly the latter that has led to growing concern within the international community. In contrast to the falsification of these documents, criminals and potential

5 Jean le May and Andre Koopman, "How South Africa Nabbed Embassy 'Bomber,'" *Cape Argus*, October 8, 1999.

6 Azaz Syed and Abbas Naqvi, "Saud Memon Dies in Hospital," *Daily Times*, May 19, 2007.

7 "South African Police Say Key Landmarks Targeted by Al-Qa`idah," BBC, August 4, 2004.

8 "SA-Linked Terror Suspect Detained in Zambia," *Daily News*, July 28, 2005.

9 Ian MacLeod, "Al-Qaeda's Central Leadership Active, Experts Say," *Ottawa Citizen*, April 30, 2008.

10 "ATM Bombings up 3000%" *News24.com*, July 12,

2008.

terrorists have access to blank official passports and have even managed to get passports issued under fraudulent names. For example, in August 2004 security personnel in London recovered hundreds of South African passports.<sup>11</sup> Despite whistle-blowing initiatives and better salaries for government officials, corruption can only be countered through initiatives to rebuild essential values and encourage professionalism.

*Ability to be Incorporated in the Local Community*

How well terrorists can fit into the local community often determines their success. This is accomplished primarily through two methods. The first is marriage with a local national, which also includes getting formally married by fraudulent means. The second is through pockets of support among immigrant communities (legal or illegal). The lack of trust and communal responsibility that exists in South Africa makes this an area for concern.

**Conclusion**

Preparing and hosting the FIFA World Cup in 2010 brings tremendous opportunities to South Africa, from awakening a sense of patriotism, to the creation of new employment opportunities and the building and revamping of infrastructure. Nevertheless, the 2010 World Cup also creates opportunities for criminals and terrorists to achieve their objectives. It is essential that security forces take this risk seriously so that they can mitigate any potential terrorist threats or security weaknesses that arise during the next two years.

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<sup>11</sup> "South African Police Say Key Landmarks Targeted by Al-Qa'idah."