Preface

This book was first conceived by the author on the premise that terrorism in Africa was underestimated and was a potential blind spot for international efforts against terrorism. However the author is a non-African specialist and a tyro in African studies and affairs; the more the author studied and researched and the more he worked in African countries, the more it became apparent that terrorism itself in Africa was neither underestimated nor unduly neglected by international anti-terrorist efforts.

However – and this forms the realigned premise of the book – there has been and there still is strategic under-focusing upon the East and West dimensions of terrorism in Africa, and an overall misunderstanding of the nature of terrorism in Africa. There are reasons for this, simple enough to state, but the factors giving rise to these reasons are complex, and they will be addressed by studies of selected terrorist groups, their activities and their modus operandi in Africa, and by the counter measures deployed by international anti-terrorist efforts.

The strategic under-focusing will be shown and progressed in the book through a chronological approach. The scene is set in describing how Bin Laden and Islamic extremist terrorism established their presence in one of the countries considered in the East–West African dimension. Then the text moves on to the international stage in describing the post 9/11 reaction of international efforts against global terrorism, including pan-African efforts, and their oversights in strategy. (In fairness, such oversights were near inevitable given the context of the cataclysmic nature of the focus of the new terrorism of the post-9/11 era). Having addressed the global reaction, there will be overviews of the terrorist threat and activities of terrorist groups within the individual countries forming the East and West African dimension – firstly the countries of East Africa with a collective summary, then of the countries of West Africa, again, with a collective summary. Then, moving on to the second decade of the post-9/11 era, the cataclysmic events of Mali will be described in detail, followed by an analysis of intelligence lessons learned, with possibly ominous indicators that the turbulence in Mali may not be over, and that whilst the two parts of the East–West African
dimension of terrorism may constitute separate threats, there are more links between them and more cooperation between the terrorist groups involved than was originally perceived by those engaged in international efforts in anti-terrorism. Finally, and continuing in the second decade of the post-9/11 era, the escalation of piracy off the coasts of East and West Africa and the issue of terrorist involvement will be described as a further factor in the East and West African dimension of terrorism.

In short, the approach is a chronological account combining overviews of post-9/11 terrorism within the individual East and West African countries, with each region collectively compared, contrasted and summarised, complemented by incisive observations of individual specialists such as Jakkie Cilliers, Jennifer Giroux and Professor Ibaba, whilst also drawing upon confidential contemporary law enforcement, military, governmental and security service sources. These will be synthesised to explain the misunderstandings of the nature of terrorism in Africa itself and how terrorism in East and West Africa has been under-focused.

Given the extreme problems facing African states in general and the specific African countries covered in this book, the extent and levels of efforts in combating terrorism by African countries are commendable. The same cannot be said for non-African states in their respective approaches to terrorism in that continent.

‘History is written at a pace which leaves one breathless’ – so wrote a historian in the preface to his history of Europe, referring to the cataclysmic period the twentieth century.1 As with dealing with contemporary history, the difficulty of writing about contemporary terrorism is finding an appropriate halting point in time with – sadly – attacks and violence still occurring. The early years of the second post-9/11 decade have appeared as good a halting point as any in a complex period of terrorism. As emphasised, the approach has been that of chronology, which is one of the ‘four constants’ of intelligence analysis. Therefore this book, besides analysing the mis-focusing and misunderstandings of the nature of terrorism in African, will serve as an account of terrorism in East and West Africa during the first and early second decades of the post-9/11 period.

It is anticipated that the book will be useful for students of terrorism in serving as an updated compendium and modest reference work of the myriad of terrorist groups active in Africa.

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The author has been able to draw upon confidential sources from law enforcement, government officials, and representatives of the military and security services. For obvious reasons their respective identities remain undisclosed, and they are sourced and referenced accordingly. Whilst at times some of these sources may have been critical of the various efforts and the actions of their organisations or agencies, the criticisms were made in good faith, and their commitment and dedication in fighting terrorism was, and is, beyond reproach. For this reason the author holds them in the highest respect.