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## Africa Poses Weak Link in War on Terror, Says Illinois Wesleyan Professor

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — Although the emergence of a genuinely African type of terrorism is unlikely, the inability of African states to control their own territory and to protect potential targets of terrorist assaults suggests that Africa could be the weakest link in a global war against terrorism, according to a visiting political scientist at Illinois Wesleyan University.

Tatah Mentan is the author of *Dilemma of Weak States: Africa and Transnational Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century*, published in 2004 by Ashgate Publishing.

Mentan was formerly a journalist and teacher in his native Cameroon but fled that country after a period of harassment and intimidation, including several arrests, torture, and continuing threats of violence. He is teaching this year at Illinois Wesleyan as part of the Scholars at Risk Network.

In his book, Mentan explores the connection between terrorism and weak states, focusing on sub-Saharan Africa, which displays many of the same traits that led the rise of international terrorism in the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia.

"The relatively porous nature of national borders of African states and the weakness of the African governments in detecting terrorists means that the continent may well serve as either a transit point or a sanctuary for transnational terrorists," writes Mentan who describes Africa as "the soft underbelly for transnational terrorism."

Mentan contends that Western cultural penetration in most of the sub-Saharan states currently makes it unlikely that terrorists would be successful in recruiting young people from these countries. However, he warns, this situation could change if potential sources of dissatisfaction are not addressed through effective and meaningful aid programs.

"Indeed, the irony of this war against global terrorism is the fact that what we failed to do for African development during the Cold War must now be done with deliberate speed if we are to curb the forces of terrorism and lay the foundations for a strong African link in the chain against global terrorism," Mentan writes.

Mentan argues that, as they wage a global war on terrorism, U.S. policy makers must pay greater attention to Africa, both through aid efforts to help economic and social development but also through support for democratization on the African continent.

Moreover, Mentan believes the U.S. government should work to initiate a dialogue between African Muslims and the American people.

"The U.S. government can only inoculate these young people from the promises and offers of the likes of Osama bin Laden when the bread and butter issues are addressed in their home countries," he concludes.

To discuss his book with Mentan, contact either Ann Aubry or Jeffery G. Hanna at (309) 556-3181.



Tatah Mentan