

Is a bigger military a solution to terrorism



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The devastation caused by the attacks on the Westgate Mall and the Garissa University has given rise to a cry by many for a significant increase in the defense budget. Nevertheless, how exactly will increased defense spending on tanks, airplanes, and ships remedy the situation?

The answer is that it will not. To be sure, military action is the appropriate response to the heinous terrorist acts committed on Kenyan soil. However, a larger military would not have prevented that devastating tragedy. In addition, it will not prevent future terrorist actions. Why?

Since terrorists are not traditional adversaries deterred by traditional military force, therefore terrorism should not exist in Israel. The Israeli military has improved equipped than any of the Palestinian terrorist groups, yet terrorism persists. Therefore, the answer is not that simple. Terrorism-by its nature-is not traditional warfare. It is asymmetrical.

Terrorists choose the times and places of their attacks, and they are not on military battlefields. Terrorists do not wear uniforms to distinguish themselves from their adversary. In other words, terrorists are the antithesis of the kind of enemy that the armed services are designed and trained to fight. Terrorism takes the concept of asymmetrical warfare to another level by not even engaging military forces in battle.

Therefore, it is not a question of not spending enough or needing to spend more. The truth is that we spend more than enough (and could spend less without being any less secure). Also, the Department of Defense has a limited role in combating terrorism-the police and intelligence agencies have greater responsibilities.

What we need to do is look at our priorities and reallocate our defense spending accordingly. Although it might not be fair to accuse National intelligence of “ failure” to know about the planned attacks on the Westgate Mall and the Garissa University, we need to focus on how we can do better (realizing that the art of intelligence-gathering and analysis is rarely certain or complete). One area that might require more resources is human intelligence: our ability to penetrate and gather information on terrorist organizations.

It is too easy in the immediate aftermath of such horrendous events and overwhelming domestic support for military retaliation against the perpetrators to raise the battle cry for increased defense spending. It feeds upon our need to strike back at those who attacked us. But it does not address the core problem posed by terrorism. Instead of a hysterical rush to expand the military-which will do nothing to stop future terrorist acts-we need to step back and calmly assess what we could have done better and what we need to do differently. The answer is not more tanks, planes, and ships.