

Bomb blasts at US embassies in Africa kill 80

Editorial Board
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At least 80 people have been killed and 1,700 injured by car bomb blasts outside US embassies in the east African capitals of Nairobi and Dar es Salaam yesterday. The explosions which occurred minutes apart at around 10:35 AM local time caused extensive damage to nearby buildings. Rescue workers fear that the death toll will rise sharply as they sift through the rubble for survivors.

The explosion in the Kenyan capital of Nairobi appears to have been caused by a car bomb set off at the back of the US embassy. The blast not only damaged the embassy building but tore through the nearby Cooperative Bank and reduced the seven-floor Ufundi Cooperative House to a pile of rubble. Windows were shattered as far as 10 blocks away.

The latest figures from Kenyan police and ambulance services indicate that 74 people are dead and 1,643 are injured. Rescuers often with very primitive equipment continued to work through the night. Fears are held for the safety of students and lecturers who were involved in secretarial and computer courses at Ufundi Cooperative House.

A second explosion ripped through the Tanzanian capital of Dar es Salaam a few minutes after the Kenyan blast. The bomb is reported to have been triggered in the US embassy parking lot. Fearing further explosions Tanzanian police hastily evacuated other buildings.

CNN reporter Navroz Ahmad described the area in Dar es Salaam: 'The place looks like a war zone. The houses have been blown to pieces and the roofs shattered.' At least seven people died and 72 were wounded.

No organisation or individual has claimed responsibility for what seems to have been a co-ordinated and well organised attack on two US embassies. But the lack of any statement or evidence pointing to a particular group has not stopped the press

from immediately pointing the finger at 'Islamic' or 'Middle Eastern terrorists'.

The list of suspects cited in the media, usually on the basis of unnamed US officials, include the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, which is said to have threatened an attack on American interests because some of its members were recently arrested in Albania and deported to Egypt.

The press has also been quick to pinpoint Osama bin Ladan, a dissident from Saudi Arabia currently living in Afghanistan. According to one report, Bin Ladan is the US State Department's prime suspect for the bombings of US installations in Riyadh in 1995 and near Dharan in 1996 in Saudi Arabia which resulted in a number of deaths. Bin Ladan has denied any responsibility for the east African explosions.

Without ruling out any possibility, it is worth noting that the media and US officials were also quick to blame the Oklahoma City bombing in April 1995 on 'terrorists' from the Middle East. It rapidly became clear, however, that Americans with connections to extreme right-wing militia groups were responsible for the horrific explosion which killed hundreds and injured many more.

Regardless of who carried out the latest bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, long experience has shown that such terrorist acts are utterly reactionary in their consequences. The bombings can in no way be considered a legitimate means of opposing imperialist oppression. The immediate result has been an indiscriminate loss of life and senseless injury -- the vast majority of the victims being African men, women and children.

Furthermore, the Clinton administration has immediately seized on the bombings to dispatch military and police units to both Kenya and Tanzania. A US Foreign Emergency Support Team comprising FBI agents, security experts and communications

experts was sent to Nairobi from Andrews Airforce base near Washington. A second FBI team was being rapidly formed to be dispatched to Dar es Salaam. Another group of at least 40 specialist marines known as the Fleet Anti-Terrorist Security Team was sent to Nairobi.

One of the most reactionary aspects of the bombings is that the US administration will seize on these terrorist acts as the means to prosecute its interests in Kenya, Tanzania and throughout Africa. The continent is already an arena for sharp rivalry between the major powers -- particularly, the US and France -- for control over its rich natural resources.

US President Clinton has been quick to denounce the attacks as 'abhorrent and inhuman,' adding that the US would use 'all means at our disposal to bring those responsible to justice'. The US administration will utilise the bombings to strengthen its ties with police, security and military agencies in Africa. It also has the potential to be used as a pretext for belligerent US military and intelligence operations in the Middle East and elsewhere.

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