The Al-Shabaab in Somalia: Implications of State Failure and the Growth of Terrorism

Aakaa Esther Doom

Department of Mass Communication, Benue State University Makurdi, Nigeria

&

Michael Aondona Chiangi

Barrister and Solicitor of the Supreme Court of Nigeria

Abstract

The collapse of Somalia and the growth of terrorismhas formed a significant subject of scholarly and expert discourse in the past three decades.This paper examines the emergence and resurgence of the most dangerous Islamist militant group, Al-Shabaab, due toSomalia's government collapse. Al-Shabaab is responsible for the assassinations of international aid workers, civil society figures, journalists and government officials in Somalia, and for blocking the delivery of aid from western relief agencies during the 2011 famine that killed tens of thousands of Somalis. The analysis hereidentifies critical factors responsible for the growth of terror in Somalia,including the weakness of government and law enforcement institutions, the proliferation of arms, the porosity of borders, and the steady growth of fundamentalist Islamism. As a result, Somalia has become a haven for terrorists and a recruitment and training ground for Al-Qaeda. TheUnited States and neighbouring states of Kenya and Ethiopia have launched counter-terrorism operations to bring lasting peace to Somalia and the Horn of Africa. Unfortunately, none of these operations have been successful as the group has become more resilient. With the election of a new president in Somalia, this paper examines the need to prioritise and intensify military operations against Al-Shabaab,while engaging with leaders of the group to test whether home-grown political engagements might be feasible and explore initial confidence-building steps that could reduce the violence and help bring peace to Somalia and the Horn of Africa.

Keywords: Al-Shabaab, Terrorism, State Failure, Somalia, Al-Qaeda, Counter-Terrorism

1. Introduction

The growth of Islamist terrorism in Africa in the post-9/11 era and sundry criminal activities have become a disturbing phenomenon in recent times with dire implications for the security and development of the continent.InSomalia, terrorism, piracy and inter-clan skirmisheshave ravaged the economy since the collapse of the government in 1991. Failure of the Somali state to exercise effective sovereign control over all its territory further exacerbates the problem. Somalia has become a fertile ground for recruiting and trainingAl-Qaeda operatives and a launching space for attacks in neighbouring countries, as was the case in the United States (US)embassy attacks in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998. Al-Qaeda-linked Somali terrorist group, Al-Shabaab, haswreaked havoc in Somalia and neighbouring states of Kenya, Djibouti and Tanzania, and the peace-keeping troops of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), which have been working in collaboration with the US intelligence and logistic outfits.

The ravaging consequences of governmental collapse, poverty and hunger have aggravated the predicament of the state of Somalia, as these factors represent the permissive conditions for the recruitment, training and transit of terrorists within and out of Somalia. Other factors include the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, often smuggled across the largely unmanned coastal and land borders. These realities provide an enabling setting for terrorism to take root and flourish, particularly given the steady rise of fundamentalist Islamism and the increase in the number of jihadi elements within Somalia, as well as the established links of these domestic elements with the broader global jihadi network (Tadesse, 2001).

In light of the foregoing, this paper examines the emergence and growth of Al-Shabaab in Somalia and the task of the new leadership in bringing peace to Somalia, particularly in the wake of the failed counter-terrorism operations by the US, Ethiopia and Kenya. Consequently, the paper recommends a mixture of military and political engagements to end the violence.

Thus, apart from the preceding introduction, this paper captures the following topics: a conceptual discourse on state failure, state failure and the growth of terror, critical drivers of terrorism in Somalia, Islamic fundamentalism and the birth of Al-Shabaab in Somalia, the resurgence of Al-Shabaab attacks, counter-terrorism operations in Somalia and their assessment, the new leadership of Somalia, and the challenge of combating Al-Shabaab.

2. A Conceptual Discourse on State Failure

The concept of state failure generally lacks an objective definitiondue to the uncertainties regarding the appropriate indices for measuring the threats they present (Chan, 2013:398). Other nomenclatures employed in the same class include state weakness and state collapse, although the main focus of this paper is not to examine the various usages of the term. Consequently, providing a generally acceptable definition of state failure is bound to be problematic due to the fluidity of thebasic characteristics of the phenomenon.The earliest usage of the phrase 'failed state' in academic literature was by Gerald Helman and Steven Ratner, whoused it to describe the difficulty of a state to sustain itself as a member of the international community (Helman & Ratner, 1992:3). The learned authors popularised this concept throughout the 1990s. They sought to demonstrate the dire security threats posed by the failed states to international security.

In simple terms, if a government begins to lose the ability to discharge its obligations to its citizens and the international community, then state failure begins to manifest. Giorgetti describes the preceding situation as "a long and multi-shaped process, in which states may go through different stages of 'failure' which can encompass diverse public functions..." (Giorgetti,2010:482). It can therefore be regarded as the "product of a collapse of the power structures providing political support for law and order, a process generally triggered and accompanied by anarchic forms of internal violence" (Thurer, 1999:73). There is, consequently, a precipitous correlation between security and state failure as seen in some definitions.

For instance, Rotberg (2004:1) maintains that states are considered failed "when they are consumed by internal violence and [cannot deliver] positive political goods to their inhabitants". The foregoing definition implies that the primary good expected of a state is the provision of security within its territorial space. When this is done, it can trigger other public goods, including the maintenance of law and order, education and healthcare, economic growth etc., the absence of which becomes difficult for a state to sustain itself. Other indicators of state failure include lack of good governance, loss of territorial control, criminal or gang violence, the activities of warlords, and lack of medical and educational services, including the decline in Gross Domestic Product per capita (Moritz, 2013:1).

An important issue to note is that although state failure is a product of systemic dysfunctions within a state, it is regarded as an international problem as its consequences can hardly be contained within the borders of a singlestate. In other words, the security problems of a failed state can spill over into the territories of neighbouring states, as seen in the terrorist activities of Al-Shabaab in Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Djibouti and the Horn of Africa although the group was formed in Somalia.

The collapse of the governmental structuresof a state is a necessary but notsufficient condition of state failure. In other words, there must also be "a requisite breakdown of public institutions and services at the local level and a fundamental *defacto* absence of control over territory" (Chan, 2013:401). Moreover, as Giorgetti(2010:474) notes, to qualify as state failure, the implosion must be "long-lasting … [covering] several to all the functions of a state, not solely their governmental functions". Indeed, not only does failure include an ineffective government, but it also affects the bases and structure of the state, its population, and territory and capacity to perform national and international obligations.

Consequently, Somalia has been rightly described as "the first significant governmental collapse since the cold war"due toa decades-long orgy of armed conflicts and intractable political violence (Chan 2013:395). According to Rotberg (2005:131), Somalia is "the model of a collapsed state: a geographical expression only, with borders but with no effective way to exert authority within those borders".Moreover, as Jhazbhay (2003:77) notes, Somalia has become only a geographical expression with clearly defined borders but lacksthe capacity to exercise sovereign authority within such borders; a situation of statelessness where rules exist without rulers.

3. State Failure and the Growth of Terror

After the 11 September 2001 attacks in the US, a clear link was established between terrorism and failed states, as they provide terrorists with havens to operate without fear of apprehension and prosecution. Terrorists operate freely in states where governmental control is weak, failing or virtually non-existent. Such states provide sanctuary to plan and execute attacks on neighbouring states and beyond effectively. These entities are thus presented as direct and indirect security threats against which the international community must be on alert.

State failure was hitherto considered a mere phenomenon of "containable humanitarian catastrophe, with little or no global impact beyond the immediate regional threats it represents" (Chan, 2013:396). However, the terrorist attacks of 11 September radically changed the narrative as failed states have become "the bogeyman of the international order, the nightmare that ... [keeps] ... senior officials awake at night" (Stewart, 2011). Terrorists and other non-state actors reside and use the territories of failed states as operational bases from which to plan and launch attacks (Yoo, 2011:108). Dulapsummarised global concerns about the relationship between state failure and terrorism as follows:

> First, their lawlessness allows terrorist organizations to conduct activities without fear of capture or punishment. Failed states are too weak, distracted, and corrupt to find and eliminate terrorist groups within their borders. Second, state failure allows terrorist organizations access to resources they need to conduct their activities, including money and recruits. Failed states are often havens for criminal activities, such as drug trafficking and diamond smuggling, that terrorist groups use to finance their operations. Third, failed states offer terrorists the cover of state sovereignty. While terrorists take refuge behind the borders of a state that is, at least in principle, a sovereign nation, they avoid capture by other states, whose governments may be reluctant to cross international boundaries to catch them. At the same time, those terrorists may believe that other concerned states have little hope of cooperating with the barely functioning governments of failed states on counterterrorism operations (Dulap, 2004:460).

Terrorists exploit the anarchy and disorder inherent in failed states, including weaknesses of the government and all the elements contributing to state collapse, to enhance their operations. Poverty, corruption, the absence of state apparatuses critical to the rule of law, the absence of economic controls and regulations for business activities, and porous state borders provide fertile

ground for the growth of terrorist activities (Puccetti, 2021:2). In most cases, individual terrorists can only seek sanctuary in failed states to avoid detection and capture.

In the case of Somalia, the country has become both a hiding place for international terroristsand a transit route for arms to neighbouring Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia and other parts of Africa (Menkhaus, 2004:70). In March 2003, the US armed commandos snatched one Suleiman Abdallah, a suspected Al-Qaeda member who was hiding in Mogadishu, and took him out for interrogation (Bloomfield, 2013:17). The militant Islamist group, Al-Shabaab's affiliation with Al-Qaeda and its first major attack outside Somalia, when suicide bombers killed an estimated 75 people in Uganda in July 2010, point to a stark link between terrorism and statefailure.

4. Critical Drivers of Terrorism in Somalia

The collapse of Somalia in 1991 led to the Balkanisation of the various alliances, factions and clans that existed in Somalia during Said Barre's regime. This createda bitter struggle between splinter groups for access to the central government that changed Somalia into a largely ungovernable space, especially following the involvement of foreign jihadists andAl-Qaeda. As a result, state institutionscollapsed, and the security of Somalia deteriorated. Different clans and groups became autonomous entities, each with a carefully defined enclave in which they set rules, levy taxes and exploit the population in what has been termed "the economy of plunder and violence" (Little, 2003:150-151; Vinci, 2006:77).

Amid the chaos, Al-Qaeda were busy recruiting operatives in Somalia and leveraged the discord to operate freely in the region. Al-Qaeda attacks on the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 were reported to have been facilitated by Islamists in Somalia. The Somali Islamist group, Al-Itihaad al-Islaamiya (AIAI), was identified as Al-Qaeda's main ally in those attacks and was subsequently listed as a terrorist organisationby the US (International Crisis Group, 2005:16).

On 28 November 2002, Al-Qaeda launched another attack on the Israeli-owned Paradise Hotel in Mombasa, Kenya, and attempted to attack a passenger plane at Mombasa International Airport. It was believed that the attackers took refuge in Somalia and clandestinely crossed the borders where they attacked and then returned secretly (International Crisis Group, 2005:1). The group also planned other attacks on the US embassy in Nairobi with a light aircraft in 2003, but was thwarted by security officers in Kenya (International Crisis Group, 2005:9).While Somalia

served as a "transfer and safe haven" to the terrorist agents, Al-Qaeda provided funds and logistics. Al-Qaeda also provided "expertise for [the] attackers, advanced weapons for attacks, and function[ed] as a source of ideological inspiration for [them]" (Dempsey, 2006:15).

Consequently, there is a general consensus that Somalia has become a transit point and a shield for Al-Qaeda terrorists in the Horn of Africa (International Crisis Group, 2005:11). Somalia has been linked to terrorist attacks in the neighbouring states of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania as a place of co-ordination for terrorist attacks (Osondu, 2008:46). This has also been facilitated by the porosity of Somali borders, which has featured prominently in many discussions of conflict and crime in Africa. These porous borders are essential for illegal activities such as drug trafficking, firearms smuggling, and other regional cross-border crimes (Little, 2003:102).In addition, there are reports that foreign Islamic fighters are entering Somalia through its many porous passages to join forces with Islamic militant groups currently fighting to control the central government of Somalia, including numerous young radicals from the Somali diaspora (International Crisis Group, 2007:4).

Furthermore, the proliferation of armshas also been identified as a key driver of terrorism in the region. Somalia has a huge market for the sale and purchase of arms, which terrorist groups have taken advantage of for their operations. The weapon issue has been partly traced back to the Siad Barre regime, especially during the Cold War, when the Soviet Union and the US supplied him with weapons. The accumulation of weapons gave the regime the courage to perpetuate a dictatorship that ultimately plunged Somalia into a calamitous tragedy (Bryden, 1999:136). In addition, Barre's government had a policy of arming clans loyal to his government against opposition clans. These were not part of the Somali armed forces, but clan militiamen recruited to defend the government in the event of an attack, most of which were eventually used against the same government (Elmi &Barise, 2006:35). Thus, even after the fall of the regime, a significant portion of those weapons were still in the hands of warlords and militias. Some ended up in the hands of independent unemployed youths, later becoming tools of theft, piracy and terror (Ahmed &Green, 2007:117). More recently, however, independent actors from countries such as Pakistan, United Arab Emirates, South Africa, United Kingdom, Australia and Djibouti have been implicated in trafficking arms to Somalia (Osondu, 2008:46).

Other critical drivers of terrorism in Somalia include the high rate of poverty, weakness of institutions of government and law enforcement, the proliferation of Islamist fundamentalist ideologies, the proximity of the state to the Middle East, the incessant conflict between the Islamists and the clan militias, and the booming enterprise of pirates, all of which have characteristically predisposed Somalia to terrorism.

5. Islamic Fundamentalism and the Birth of Al-Shabaab in Somalia

The fall of Somalia led to the resurgence of the AIAI, which was formed in 1983, heavily funded by Osama bin Laden and equipped with foreign militants to train and fight alongside members of Al-Qaeda, to establish an Islamic State (IS) in the Horn of Africa (Hammer, 2007). The decline of the AIAI in the mid to late 1990s was preceded by the emergence of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), which incorporated former AIAI members and radical jihadists (International Crisis Group, 2006:9). Determined to wrest power from the warlords and the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), the Courts began to recruit and build a powerful military force through the massive accumulation of weapons and the training of fighters (International Crisis Group, 2006:11).

The ICU exploited the frustration and desperation of ordinary Somalis on the one hand and the elite's disillusionment and loss of confidence in the system on the other. Thus, by early 2006, these sentiments had peaked, and the ICU wasted no time in capitalisingon this to push itself into reckoning (International Crisis Group, 2007:3). The early infiltration of the courts by powerful jihadist elements, mainly the radical elements of the AIAI, who became key figures in the ICU, made it a powerful politically motivated and ideological institution that propelled fundamentalist Islamism to new heights. Islamic courts seized control of Mogadishu and other cities from warlords in a bitter battle in June 2006 that claimed the lives of hundreds of civilians. The military wing of the courts, known as Mu'askarMahkamat (Islamic Courts Camp), later changed its name to Jamaa'a Al-Shabaab (meaning Youth Group).

Al-Shabaab was made up of fighters from the former Islamist militant group AIAI and other members who fought for or were trained by Al-Qaeda. The group was led by the late Aden Hashi Farah Ayro; a Somali operative believed to have been trained by Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan (Britannica, 2015). Thus, unlike the ICU, Al-Shabaab took a more extreme and radical stance

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and espoused a puritanical version of Islam. The group was instrumental to the victory of the ICU in the 2006 Battle of Mogadishu; it fought with warlords sponsored by the US to clear the Somali environment of Al-Qaeda elements and their collaborators in Somalia, and to prevent the spread of militant Islamism (International Crisis Group, 2006:12).

The victory of the ICU in the battle strengthened Al-Shabaab to acquire weapons that previously belonged to warlords. During this time, the ICU became particularly powerful as it brought a semblance of order to Somalia sufficient to win the loyalty of the majority of Somalis. Moreover, the rise of Al-Shabaab as a body responsible for maintaining internal discipline and order transformed the courts into apolitically motivated and highly organisedinstitution (International Crisis Group, 2006:10). The ICU had control of most of the major cities of Somalia, including the capital ofMogadishu, until the last days of December 2006, when the Union of Islamic Courts was defeated by the coalition of warlords in Mogadishu through the collaboration of Ethiopian forces and Western allies.

Despite the defeat of the ICU, the conflict did not end. On the contrary, I was transformed into an insurgency following the declaration of jihad by the Islamic courts and the call for international jihadists to join the struggle, further deteriorating Somalia's security situation and the entire region (Harper, 2007). The insurgency was motivated by Osama bin Laden's 1992 *fatwa,*whichcalled on all Muslims to wage jihad against America and its troops stationed in the Arabian Peninsula and its allies(Roshandel, 2006).

The Al-Shabaab was made up of ruthless, war-hungry young men trained in the arts of asymmetric warfare and insurgency (International Crisis Group, 2006:10). Some international jihadist organisations provided logistical and personnel support to the ICU. In contrast, others voluntarily fought for the ICU. The case of Daniel Maldonado, 28, an American Muslim convert, reported in the New York Times on 20 March 2007, who admitted travelling to Somalia in December 2006 to receive firearms training and explosives to fight on the side of the ICU to bring down the TFG and establish an ISis a good example (New York Times, 2007:16).

On 27 December 2006, the ICU announced its dissolution through the Somali Council of Islamic Courts (International Crisis Group, 2007:1). However, it was firmly believed that the ICU was

only disorganised and not dissolved. This is because all the "basic institutions and networks of revolutionary Islam in Somalia, the mosques, schools, charities and private companies" that spawned Shabaab were still intact (International Crisis Group, 2007:1). Al-Shabaab's threat to engage in guerilla warfare with the TFG and Ethiopian forces in Somalia has indeed been carried out, as evidenced by the growing number of hit-and-run attacks (United Nations Security Council, 2007:17).

6. The Resurgence of Al-Shabaab Attacks

Despite the death of Aden Hashi Ayro in 2008, Al-Shabaab has persisted in its campaign of terror. In February 2008, Al-Shabaab was designated a foreign terrorist organisationby the US government. Until 2009, Al-Shabaab exercised control over certain areas and imposed Sharia law, outlawing behaviours it deemed un-Islamic and imposing barbaric punishments such as beheading, stoning and amputation of offenders. The group has carried out more than 1,700 terrorist attacks and killed more than 4,000 people since it appeared on the terrorist radar (BBC News, 2022). The number of attacks attributed to the group has dramatically increased from less than 10 in 2007 to more than 800 in 2014 (Pate et al., 2015:1). On 3 December 2009, a suicide bomber attacked a doctors' graduation ceremony at the Shamo Hotel, one of Mogadishu's leading hotels, killing 14 medical students, lecturers and doctors from Banadir University and injured others (Hassan, 2019).

In July 2010, Al-Shabaab suicide bombers carried out the group's first attack outside Somalia, killing 75 people gathered in Kampala, Uganda, to watch a football match. According to the group, the attack was in retaliation for the participation of Ugandan troops in the AMISOM in Mogadishu (Rice, 2010). Notwithstanding the attack, AMISOM did not stop its brutal onslaught on Al-Shabaab. By August 2011, the group was exhausted from the fighting and consequently withdrew from Mogadishu even though it still had a stronghold in Kismayo, the port city of Somalia. Meanwhile, on 14 October 2011, Kenyan forces invaded Somalia in response to a series of attacks and kidnappings by Al-Shabaab in the infamous Operation *Linda Nchi* (Council on Foreign Relations, 2022). On 22 February 2012, Kenyan forces formally aligned themselves with AMISOM and thus forced the group to engage in another round of fighting, which, by

October, had succeeded in driving Al-Shabaab out of Kismayo, the last urban stronghold of the group.

The group's campaign of terror nevertheless took a new dimension as it turned its attention to neighbouring countries in the region after losing its strong position in Somalia. Al-Shabaab has been on the list of the most active terrorist groups in the world since 2014 (Pate et al., 2015:1). In February 2012, Al-Shabaab and Al-Qaeda announced a merger when leaders of the two groups jointly released a video publicly declaring Al-Shabaab's allegiance to Al-Qaeda. This new alliance gaveAl-Shabaab the necessary impetus to intensify attacks in and out of Somalia. For example, on 21 September 2013, terrorists armed with automatic weapons and grenades attacked the Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya, killing 65 people and injuring many more. Ahmed Abdi Godane, leader of the group, later claimed responsibility for the attack, saying it was intended to punish Kenya for sending troops into Somalia. In May 2014, the group attacked Djibouti in a double suicide bombing at a restaurant frequented by Westerners, killing three people (Maruf, 2021).

On 2 April 2015, the group attacked Garissa University College in Kenya, killing 147 students, mostly Christians, and injuring 79 others (Pate et al., 2015:1).In October 2015, some Al-Shabaab clerics pledged allegiance to the IS terrorist group. In 2016, the group's pro-ISIS factions managed to take control of the town of Qandala on the coast of the Gulf of Aden in Puntland (International Crisis Group, 2017:3). In the same year, Al-Shabaab killed more than 100 Kenyan soldiers at their base in El Added, near Somalia's southern border (Burke, 2018).

Furthermore, on 14 June 2017, the group attacked the Posh Hotel, a popular nightclub in Mogadishu, killing women and hotel workers and taking 20 others hostage. A group member drove a suicide car heavily laden with explosives and crashed into the hotel entrance before gunmen broke into the restaurant and started shooting sporadically (Sheikh, 2017). In October of the same year, the city of Mogadishu was hit by its worst terrorist attack, when two truck bombs killed more than 500 people and injured more than 300 people (Klobucista et al., 2021).

On 1 April 2018, a series of coordinated attacks were carried out by Al-Shabaab in the Somali city of Bulamaer and at two other places in the Lower Shabelle region. The targets of the attack

were the African Union (AU) and Somali troops. In the Bulamaer attack, two suicide car bombs hit an AU military vehicle and another Somali military vehicle, killing Ugandan peacekeepers and Somali soldiers. The attacks took place near the AMISOM base, followed by violent ground guerrilla attacks throughout the day. The attacks reportedly killed 14 Al-Shabaab fighters and 59 AMISOM soldiers (L'osservatorio, 2018). The attacks were intended to hasten the withdrawal of AMISOM troops, who have been fighting Al-Shabaab for over a decade (Burke, 2018).

In the same month, the group's leader, Ahmed Umar, released an audio calling for lone-wolf attacks on the US and French interests in Djibouti. The leader accused the authorities of turning the country into a military base from which any war against Muslims in East Africa was planned (Maruf, 2021). The group has remained resilient to this day, and its strategies and sophistication have become so powerful that Somalia's weak security architecture can hardly bear it.

It is imperative to note that Al-Shabaab's modus operandi suggests an organisationwith a local focus and that its attacks since 2007 have been directly linked to local warfare, including outside Somalia. The group cannot be understood without understanding the politics of the Somali clan and the local historical context (Hansen, 2013:2). However, it cannot be understood in a local context alone;rather, it is an organisationshaped by global jihadist ideologies, the local must provide some form of rudimentary justice and tactical considerations on behalf of its various members.

7. Counter-terrorism operations in Somalia

The September 11 attacks forced the US to take decisive action against terrorism. The US government defined the attack as an act of war which marked the beginning of a more robust action on terrorists who wage "war against the United States, the peaceful peoples of the world, and the very principles of freedom and human dignity" (Rice, 2003:2). This marked the official commencement of the US Global War on Terror (GWOT) by which many counter-terrorism programmes were initiated and existing ones resuscitated. The GWOT ranged, among other things, from protecting the US citizens and interests at home and abroad to defeating terrorists and their organisations and denying terrorist sponsorship, support, and haven. Consequently, Somalia became a counter-terrorism operation in Africa, with the US and other countries in the

region launching various counter-terrorism programmes in Somalia. This section looks briefly at some of the programmes.

7.1 The US Counter-terrorism and Humanitarian Interventions in Somalia

As part of the UN, the US took part in UNISOM I and II, a humanitarian operation in Somalia, in 1992. The operation was humiliating for the US after 18 US marines lost their lives in a street fight in Mogadishu on 3-4 October 1993, while attempting to capture warlord Farah Aideed. This became known as the "Black Hawk Down"incident for which Osama bin Laden claimed responsibility. After the US withdrew from the programme, the incident's demoralisingeffects caused the UN to leave in 1995 (International Crisis Group, 2002:1). According to the US intelligence authorities, bin Laden sent "training, organizational, and logistical assistance to AIAI fighters in order to resist the American presence in Somalia" (International Crisis Group, 2002:5).

Since the US withdrawal from Somalia in 1995, AIAI's steadily expanding influence and activitieshave raised serious security concerns. The group was alleged to be involved in the 1998 bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania,and an earlier attempt on the life of an Ethiopian minister. The AIAI was immediately designated a terrorist organisationafter the September 11 terrorist attacks on the US (International Crisis Group, 2002:12). The US counter-terrorism programme deployed a lot of intelligence to disentangle the affiliation between AIAI and Al-Qaeda. It was argued that AIAI, acting as an Al-Qaeda cell inside of Somalia, served as the protective cover for terrorists before, during and immediately after the embassy bombings. The US counter-terrorism interest in Somalia continues to be concentrated on capturing wanted Al-Qaeda terrorists thought to be hiding there, including local Somali Jihadists who are thought to not only have ties to Al-Qaeda, but also to be protecting some of these terrorists.

Consequently, the US counter-terrorism efforts in Somalia followed a three-pronged strategy: direct intervention, engagement of regional Somali proxies, and exploitation of ally frontline states. After 11 September 2001, the US contemplated using military force against Somalia but

decided against it after realisingit lacked sufficient information on the topography of the area (Menkhaus, 2004:68). Instead, it chose to confine its military activities to patrolling the Somali coast and performing reconnaissance overflights. Twelve days after the September 11 attacks, the US placed AIAI in "Executive Order 13224", which specified the identities of terrorist groups and ordered the freezing of their assets (Quaranto, 2008:36). Al-Barakaat, the most well-known Somali company, also had its assets frozen by the Department of Treasury on 7 November because it was suspected of helping Al-Qaeda with fund-raising, distribution and management of its finances, the shipment of illegal weapons, and the provision of "secure telephone" and internet facilities to terrorists and their supporters (Quaranto, 2008:37).

The US recognisedthat its operational options were constrained to airstrikes due to the peculiarities of Somalia and that airstrikes alone were not particularly successful in carrying out the sort of operation the Somali environment required. As a result, the US founded and equipped the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counterterrorism (ARPCT), using Ethiopian officials as intermediaries. The partnership was tasked with keeping tabs on potential terrorists and carrying out "snatch and grab operations" on them (Quaranto, 2008:41). However, despite raising the stakes in the Somali conflict by pitting the Alliance against the ICUand other militias opposed to the involvement of the US and Ethiopia in Somalia, the ARPCT's targeting of suspected local Jihadists in Somalia with terrorist ties had very little success. This intense conflict culminated in the Mogadishu war of May–June 2006, which saw the defeat of the Alliance.

In addition, the US military launched a two-day attack on some facilities in Afmadow, a southern Somali town near the Kenyan border, on 7 and 8 January 2007, in pursuit of three Al-Qaeda suspects believed to be hiding inside Somalia and protected by Islamists and some of the leadership core of the retreating ICU. According to the US authorities, the two-day aircraft assault targeted structures and locations thought to be housing foreign militants and local jihadists trying to flee the Ethiopian military firepower in their conflict with the Islamic Courts (Quaranto, 2008:43).

7.2 Ethiopia's Counter-terrorism Operations in Somalia

Of all the nations in the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia's experience with counter-terrorism has been exceptional. Ethiopia has worked hard to externaliseits activities by taking overt action against suspected terrorists outside of its borders when necessary, while most other states focus on pursuing domestic counter-terrorism measures and engagements, and bilateral and regional collaborative involvement. During its counter-terrorism operations, it has frequently sent troops into Somalia in search of alleged Islamist militants. Since the middle of the 1990s, Ethiopia has seen several terrorist strikes. For example, it prevented an assassination attempt on Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa in 1995 by some members of the Islamic Brotherhood of Egypt.

At the peak of its popularity, the Somali radical Islamist group, AIAI, was not only involved in preparing fighters for Ethiopian rebel groups, but had also personally carried out several direct attacks inside Ethiopia. As a result, Ethiopia launched cross-border retaliation attacks on known AIAI training camps near its border inside Somalia (International Crisis Group, 2007:6). Ethiopia,thus, became a crucial US partner in the Horn of Africa during the Global War on Terror, and Somalia's growing radical Islamism received significant attention. Moreover, the Somali Islamists were already suspected of providing safe passage and protection to terrorists, and the country's environment was used as a staging area for the bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998. As a result, Ethiopia stood out in the US counter-terrorism initiatives in Somalia as a regional power and received much assistance to enable it to perform its role effectively. Thus,Ethiopiahas been ruthless to Al-Shabaab due to its robust intelligence and military might.

7.3 Kenya's Counter-terrorism Operation in Somalia

Kenya initiated Operation, *Linda Nchi* (Protect the Country), in 2011, in response to the terrorist threats that the Islamic militant organisationAl-Shabaab presented to its national security and the Horn of Africa. Kenya allegedthat repeated Al-Shabaab's abductions and murders of tourists in its coastal and north-eastern districts endangered its trade and tourism sectors, both of which are essential components of Kenya's economy.

From 2006 to 2009, Al-Shabaab rose to prominence by constantly fighting Ethiopia's occupation of Somalia (Wise, 2011). As a result, Al-Shabaab captured the majority of southern and central

Somalia when Ethiopian soldiers left the country, and they remained in charge of those regions until 2011. Although the size of the operation launched by Kenya suggests that preparations for such an attack had started long before the actual invasion, it is, however, unclear how well prepared Kenya was for this onslaught, given the counterattacks that Al-Shabaab launched against Kenyan civilians, which amply illustrated the country's significant domestic security flaws.

Kenya asserted its right to self-defence at the outset of its entry into Somalia, citing Article 51 of the UN Charter, which expressly recognises the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence in the event of an armed attack against a UN member. A day before the intervention began in 2011, Kenya's late minister for internal security stated that the country was intervening "to protect its territorial integrity from foreign aggression" (Akolo, 2012). He implied that in order to catch up with Al-Shabaab militia, the Kenya Defence Force would invade Somalia and advance as far as possible (Throup, 2012).

8. Assessment of the US, Ethiopia and Kenyan Counter-terrorism operations in Somalia

Since the Islamic Courts were expelled from Mogadishu in late December 2006, counter-terrorism operations by the US, Ethiopia, and Kenya have increased the Courts' activities and, more recently, Al-Shabaab, and gradually ushered in the deadly insurgency. This has greatly favouredAl-Qaeda's strategy to keep infiltrating, gathering supporters, organising, and building a strong Islamist resistance to the US-led counter-terrorism operations.

The US airstrikes were unsuccessful as there was no proof that the airstrikes struck the targets, despite the assumption that they were primarily targeting three Al-Qaeda members linked to the bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, a hotel and airport in Mombasa, Kenya, in 2002.Reports of civilian deaths during those airstrikes fueled anti-American sentiment and benefited the Islamists, who utilisedthe attacks to galvanisesupport for their cause by opposing the presence and acts of Ethiopian forces while criticisingtheir American sponsors (Prendergast &Thomas-Jensen, 2007:69). Al-Qaeda swiftly capitalisedon this by presenting Somalia as yet another battleground in the American-led campaign to conquer Islam and the Muslim world, which must be opposed by waging a worldwide jihad.

The role of the US in financing the ARPCT is still one of the biggest mistakes of the US in Somalia. The task of the Alliance was to mount surveillance, round up suspected terrorists in "snatch and grab" operations, and act as a wedge against the spread of radical Islamism. However, the ARPCT ended up exacerbating the security situation in Somalia (Quaranto, 2008:41). The difficulties of the US to enter Somalia for the operation may have informed the formation of the ARPCT because operations of that nature by outside agents carry a significant security risk. However, since its formation, the most significant achievement of the ARPCT was the capture of Suleiman Ahmed Hemed (Issa Tanzania) in Mogadishu in April 2003 (International Crisis Group, 2005:10). Also worth mentioning are instances where members of the ARPCT and the US shared intelligence, which often thwarted some planned attacks (International Crisis Group, 2005:10).

Furthermore, the overt Ethiopian military presence in Somalia since December 2006 (at the behest of the troubled TFG) increased tension in the region as a whole and Somalia in particular. It also allowed Eritrea to intervene in Somalia by increasing its military, resource, and logistical support for the Islamic Courts to spite Ethiopia (Ray, 2007). This setback for counter-terrorism efforts was intended to stop the spread of radical Islamist groups and those who support terrorism in Somalia. However, ordinary Somalis still nurtured resentment towards Ethiopia for its involvement and continuous presence due to the enemy image that had solidified in their minds over the years (Osondu, 2008).

In the same vein, Kenya's intervention in Somalia was not perfect. There were reported cases of civilian casualties, both in Somalia and Kenya, during the operation. Women and children were said to have been killed and seriously injured as the Kenya Defence Force launched its attacks on the Somali areas controlled by Al-Shabaab (Shabelle Media Network, 2012). Grenade attacks in Kenya not only resulted in casualties but also fired up resentment among the ordinary Kenyans over the government's alleged neglect of the nation's internal security in favour of the invasion of Somalia.

By getting involved in Somalia, Kenya gave Al-Shabaab plenty of justification to carry out its threats to attack the country. Consequently, the group declared it would launch retaliatory attacks

on Kenyan soil (Pflanz, 2011). The group made it abundantly clear that they oppose any foreign intervention in Somalia, including that of Kenya. Since the beginning of the intervention, small-scale attacks and violence, mainly through grenade attacks in Kenya's capital, the coastal region and the North Eastern border regions, escalated, indicating that threats of Al-Shabaab's counterattacks were real.

Generally, the counter-terrorism initiatives in Somalia have not been a success. Rather, they have tended to escalate the security threats and increase the rate of attacks in and out of Somalia. As a result, the insurgency has become a protracted security problem with no end in sight. However, there are expectations since the election of a new president in Somalia. As demonstrated in the next section of this paper, he is expected to focus more on dealing with the threat of Al-Shabaabusing a mixture of hard and soft approaches.

9.   The New Leadershipof Somalia and the Task of Combating Al-Shabaab

In May 2022, Somali lawmakers elected a new president, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, marking the end of a two-year bitter election period characterised by corruption, heavy fighting in the streets and terrorist attacks from the Al-Shabaab militant group, which had greatly undermined the government's ability to deliver key services to the people of Somalia. On the same day of the election, loud explosions were heard near the fortified compound supposedly orchestrated by Al-Shabaab suicide bombers where the voting was held. Although it did not disrupt the process, 48 people were killed and 100 others wounded (Hasan, 2022).This was a signal for the new government that the strength of Al-Shabaab was going to be a formidable challenge to confront.

For more than a decade, Al-Shabaab has been fighting the UN-backed Somali government using different strategies, including intimidation, violence and, recently, individual suicide bombers. In the weeks following the election, the group was reported to have murdered six civilians at a beachside restaurant in Mogadishu's Lido beach area. Further, it mounted a major offensive sign on an AU base where they killed at least 10 peacekeepers from Burundi (BBC News, 2022). They also sent suicide bombers to jump onto the cars of government officials (Stigant, 2022). The group used this strategy in November 2021, when a prominent Somali journalist Abdulaziz Mohamud Guled was

killed by a suicide bomber who had jumped onto his car window and exploded just as Abdulazizhad gotten into the car and was about to drive off (Africanews, 2021).

On 21 August 2022, the group stormed the Hayat Hotel in Mogadishu, frequented by government officials, after causing an explosion and shooting. The explosions sent plumes of smoke over Mogadishu, the gunfire reverberated through the city, and much of the hotel was destroyed in the fighting. The attack, for which the group claimed responsibility, killed 10 people and injured another 40. The siege lasted about 30 hours before authorities took over the hotel (Aljazeera, 2022). On 3 September 2022, another Al-Shabaab attack killed at least 19 people in central Somalia. Again, the group intercepted at least eight vehicles driving between the towns of Beledweyne and Maxaa overnight, and set the vehicles on fire, killing innocent occupants. In a statement released by Al-Shabaab, the group said it had targeted militants who had recently aided government forces in killing 20 militia officers and those transporting equipment for them (Agence France-Presse, 2022).

Al-Shabaab is now becoming particularly brazen in its suicide terrorism, with suicide bombers now carrying homemade explosives. Hassan (2022) quotes the former head of the Somali National Intelligence and Security Agency, Abdullah Mohamed, as saying:

> Before, the militants used mainly gunmen storming on military bases, government offices, hotels, and restaurants, roadside IEDs, drive-by shootings, guerrilla style ambushes and among others. But now as security at government key installations and military bases beefed up, they use more bombers wearing suicide vests with huge magnitude and impact.

Al-Qaeda-affiliated militant Islamist group had taken advantage of the political unrest to expand and consolidate its presence in Somalia. After more than 16 years, the group has become powerful enough to collect taxes, resolve disputes in their mobile sharia courts, and have become notorious for suicide bombings against the UN-backed government, western interests and any person or entity deemed to be opposed to the ideology of the group. Traders are also compelled to pay taxes to the group for fear of threats to their businesses. The group behaves like a mafia; either the traders obey and pay them or they close their businesses (Dahir, 2022).

Therefore, Hassan Sheikh's election marks an opportunity for Somalia to partner with neighbouring states to improve the region's security. The new administration must re-focus its attention on addressing the threat Al-Shabaab poses. While maintaining pressure onthe group, the new government should engage with its leaders to test whether home-grown political engagement might be feasible and explore initial confidence-building steps that could reduce the violence and help bring peace to Somalia and the Horn of Africa.

Furthermore, countering Al-Shabaab's threats would require a security architecture that is both effective and sustainable. This can be achieved by a continuing partnership with the US special forces, whose presence is already significant in the region, and by expanding the strategic partnership with key players in the international community. This partnership would help build Somalia's official armed and law enforcement agencies and civil administration institutions,anda functional police force to meet Somalia's wider security needs (Felbab-Brown, 2020).

The security sector should be nested within consistent political leadership by Hassan Sheikh's government. Political dialogue at local levels is alsorequired to expand the number of Somalis living under effective inclusive administrationsof recognised political units and sub-units rather than Al-Shabaab. Hassan Sheikh must demonstrate that the federal government can deliver services, govern and respond to citizens' priorities.

It is also critically important for international partners to double-up support for Somalia's federal government to enable it to stand on its feet and assume full responsibility for Somalia's security and general administration. This will require timely financial support from international partners and engagement with Somalia's entrepreneurial private sector.

10. Conclusion

Somalia has been rightly described as a collapsed state where terrorists can operate beyond the law. Over the past decade, Somalia developed a growing reputation as providing a congenial environment for terrorism. The Somali-Al-Qaeda-linked terrorist group,Al-Shabaab,launched an insurgency which has prompteda series of counter-terrorism operations by the US, Ethiopia and Kenya, all of which have failed to end the insurgency.

However, Somalia's involvement in terrorism may be more, but not entirely, limited to serving as a place of recruitment, training and safe haven for terrorists. Therefore, as recommended above, the new leadership of Somalia should seek to engage Al-Shabaab using a mixture of hard and soft approaches. The government should intensify its military operations, against the group and at the same time, attempt political engagement with its leaders to ascertain if such engagements can bring peace to Somalia.

Consequently, future research on this subject should examine the workability of this mixed approach to countering the threats of Al-Shabaab in Somalia. If it is found to be successful, other states may also consider adopting it to combat similar threats in their territories.

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