

Al Shabaab: The Cancer in East Africa

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Abstract~ This paper explores the genesis of al Shabaab, the modus operandi, fundraising and strategies used to receive funding from abroad. It provides insight on human security threats in East Africa and the challenges faced by Somalia in particular. Highlighting the responses by the African Union (A.U) and countries in the region, the paper equally discusses the role of external actors such as the United Nations, the United States support to counter terrorism in Somalia. The paper argues that although significant progress is being made to develop coherent counterterrorism approaches in East Africa, there are still some challenges. They include internal wrangling's, increasing Islamic radicalization, competing national interest, and the dynamics of counter-terrorism in Africa.

Keywords~ Al Shabaab, Wahhabism, Sufism, Shura Council

Introduction

On the 1st July 1960, Somalia gained her independence. Since 1991, Somalia has been in protracted conflict because of bad governance and a political agenda for the state. According to Buluma, internal wrangling in Somalia has enabled the Islamist militia, al Shabaab, whose primary objective is to establish a Somali caliphate. The magnitude of the security threats posed by al shabaab has led to the deployment of African Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) peace keepers and the entry of Kenya Defense Forces (KDF) into the territory to dislodge fop from her strongholds. Al-Shabaab geostrategy is a serious security threat to Somalia and other countries of the region. Her attacks on military targets in 2007 was rated at 48.8% (in Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Turkey, and Uganda, as well as multinational AMISOM forces). The paradigm of al-Shabaab have gone beyond military targets, as attacks keep multiplying on citizens and property (26%), general government (12.9%), police (8%), businesses (6.1%), diplomatic entities (2.0%), and journalists and media (2.0%), (START Background Report, 2015)¹. In terms of the challenges posed by al Shabaab regional responds seems to be inadequate, as the group continue to coordinate attacks and thrive for a Somali caliphate.

Al Shabaab landscape

Al Shabaab, which signifies “the youth” or “the boys” in Arabic is a militant Islamist group founded and based in Somalia². East African nations are prone to terrorism, because of continuous internal wrangling's, bad governance, porous borders and the importation of

¹ Al-Shabaab Attack on Garissa University in Kenya by START Background Report , April 2015

² Al-Shabaab: The Threat To Kenya And The Horn Of Africa by Colonel Godfrey Buluma, Kenya Army

illegal weapons, which contributes to extremist religious ideology and radicalization³. These factors generally coincide with poor socio-economic conditions, which pave the way for the existence of terrorism. Al Shabaab came in to the spotlight as part of the armed wing of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU)⁴. When the Courts Union gained power in the Somali capital of Mogadishu in 2006, Ethiopian Forces intervention contributed to leadership exile. Though some fighters remained and battled with Ethiopians till 2009. Since then, the militia force capability to conduct terror attacks in neighboring Kenya and across into Uganda, is an indication of its regional threat.

Al Shabaab believes in the concept of Salafi-Jihadi ideology, and consider America as the cause of most of the misfortunes of Muslims. The merger with al Qaeda in early 2012 shows an increasingly global militant group which has earned international terror recognition with recruits from across the world from countries such as the Comoros, Kenya, Pakistan, Sudan, Sweden, Uganda, the US, the United Kingdom and Yemen just to name a few⁵. Al Shabaab, just like other terrorist groups, continue to stage attacks in the Horn of Africa. Somalia is located in the Horn of Africa, and she has close historical and religious links with a majority Islamic countries in Africa and Arab states. It's a member of both the United Nations (UN) and African Union (AU). Geographically it is predisposed to foreign Islamic jihadists and fighters from terror prone nations in the Middle East, especially Yemen and Afghanistan, by virtue of being a failed and predominantly Muslim state⁶. The crisis in Somalia is of a strategic nature as all the nations in the region are involved in fight against al Shabaab. Serious crimes against humanity have been committed by this dangerous group, violent clashes continue to occur. Women and children are major victims of the ongoing lawless situation through death, rape, refugees and hostages are often victims of al Shabaab's heinous attacks⁷. Al Shabaab has extended its tentacles into the region to recruit and radicalize jobless youth to fill its rank and agenda. The complex situation has threatened spillover peace and stability in the region through the proliferation of small arms and light weapon particular in Somalia.

The historical evolution of al Shabaab

According to Jones et al (2016) al Shabaab has five phases; ideological and historical origins (1960s–2005), proto-insurgent phase (2005–2007), rebirth and rise to organizational maturity (2007–2009), the peak of its territorial control and institutional owe (2009–2011), and weakening and devolution to a terrorist group (2011–2016). Each phase will be examined accordingly;

³ See Patrick Kimunguyi. Terrorism and Counter terrorism in East Africa. Global Terrorism Research Centre and Monash European and EU Centre Monash University

⁴ See Sauti za Wananchi, The roots of radicalization Citizens' views on the causes and solutions for insecurity in Kenya

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

Phase One: Ideological and Historical Origins, 1960s–2005

Al Shabaab's ideology dates far back to the 60s, with Saudi Arabia and Egyptian networks (Salafi and Wahhabi)⁸ introduced in Somalia, challenging the Sufi⁹ Koranic supporters. The first generation of Somalian jihadists went to Afghanistan in the early 1980s to join the *mujahideen* against Soviet forces (Jones et al, 2016). The return of the fighters created al Shabaab in Somalia with attempt to spread pan-Islamist ideology inspired by Abdullah Azzam¹⁰. Al-Itihaad al-Islamiya (AIAI), was founded in 1983, in a crusade the eventually creation of al Shabaab to overthrow Siad Barre's¹¹ regime. Al Shabaab's existence gain media and Internet coverage in the early 2000, with her link to foreign terrorist organization.

Phase Two: Proto-Insurgency, 2005–2007

In 2005, al Shabaab gain global prominence with 30 core members that included Afghan veterans, former AIAI members, and remnants of al Qa'ida in East Africa (Jones et al, 2016). According to Mukhtar Robow, al Shabaab's creation in 2005 was for unification of extremists groups¹². In June 2006, the ICU was controlling Somalia, after a hit on U.S.-backed group of mostly secular warlords, the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism¹³. In August 2006, al Shabaab formally became a splinter group of the ICU¹⁴. The dynamics of al Shabaab changed when it held nine of 97 seats in the Shura Council¹⁵, and received sizable funding from the courts. In September 2006, al Shabaab and ICU forces took over the port city of Kismayo, a strategic location which served as the commercial capital of Jubaland and became one of their principal sources of funding. Somalia was hit by 151 attacks in 2007, only 21 were coordinated by al Shabaab and 86% of attacks were attributed to "unknown" perpetrators, though al Shabaab is the main sovereignty-free-actor in the region (START Background Report, 2015).

Phase Three: Rebirth and the Rise of the Islamists, 2007–2009

Al Shabaab's future was uncertain in 2007 as most of the leaders were killed (Jones et al, 2016). Ethiopian forces numbered about 5,000 soldiers, controlled most of southern Somalia¹⁶. While AMISOM, consisting of several thousand Ugandan and Burundian troops,

⁸ Wahhabism is an extremely conservative interpretation of the Koran which restrict most aspects of modern education, culture, as well as basic human rights of women.

⁹Sufism is a "mystical" perception of Islam which includes the veneration of saints. Some Muslims have adhere to certain rituals inherited from their forefathers such as, attributing spiritual significance to sacred objects.

¹⁰ For more information read, Thomas Hegghammer, "The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters: Islam and the Globalization of Jihad," *International Security*, Vol. 35, No. 3, Winter 2010/2011, pp. 53–94.

¹¹Major General Mohamed Said Barre's tenure in Somalia was characterized with serious human rights violation (for example, torture of political opponents). Meanwhile his departure from office pave the way for sovereignty free actors "al Shabaab", with serious internal wrangling till date in the country and the region.

¹² Ibid

¹³ See 3. Jones, G. et al (2016) *Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency in Somalia. Assessing the Campaign Against Al Shabaab*. Published by the RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, Calif p.29

¹⁴ Somaliland Times, "Extremist Splinter Group of Somali Islamic Courts Formed," August 12, 2006.

¹⁵ Al Shabaab leadership is known as the Shura Council. For more information, see Nathaniel Horadam, "Al Shabaab leadership profiles", *Critical Threats*, August 3, 2012

¹⁶ Ibid

deployed to Mogadishu in February 2007 to support the Transitional Federal Government (TFG)¹⁷ led by veterans Godane, Afghani, and Shongole, al Shabaab focused on strengthening its organizational structure and rearming its ranks in southern Somalia¹⁸. The organization operated online, directing its messaging toward a domestic audience. Her online propaganda and recruiting in foreign territories, as well as affiliation with al Qa'ida raised funds from wealthy Arab patrons¹⁹. Shabaab's impact was felt in northward from Kismayo to Mogadishu, as she conquered areas such as Merka, Qoreole, and Baraawe (Jones et al, 2016, p.32). Northwest of Mogadishu, al Shabaab challenged Somali government and Ethiopian offensives in towns such as Bardale, Ufurow, Buurhakaba, Qansah-Dheere, Wajid, and Huddur in the districts of Bay and Bakool (Hansen, 2013). Guerrilla strategy were adopted by Shabaab, using military and political resources to mobilize the Somali people, conduct hit-and-run attacks, and undermine the government's will to fight.

Phase Four: The Heyday of al Shabaab, 2009–2011

Al Shabaab's territorial dominance was felt after Ethiopian withdrawal in 2009. She took over Baidoa, the interim capital of the TFG, including north and west of Mogadishu²⁰. In 2010, the group expanded her grip, by capturing territory from Ahlu Sunna Wah Jamaa (ASWJ), a paramilitary group made of moderate Sufis and fighters from the Hawadle, Ayr, Abgal-Waisle, and other coteries (Hansen, 2013). Al Shabaab also took control of the pirate port city of Haradere an important source of revenue (generate about \$1 million per day from tax at the ports) after defeating and incorporating Hizbul Islam²¹. In July 2010, Shabaab coordinated the first major attack outside of Somalia, suicide bombers killed 76 civilians watching a World Cup match at a cafe in Kampala, Uganda. In response, the African Union expanded AMISOM's mandate in July 2010, from a peacekeeping mission to engage al Shabaab directly (Wise, 2011). In 2010, al Shabaab launched its Ramadan offensive, termed *Nahayatu Muxtadiin* ("end of the apostates"), with spectacular, coordinated suicide attacks on the Presidential Palace and Muna Hotel in Mogadishu, which killed more than 100 TFG politicians and civil servants, including six parliamentarians (Jones et al, 2016). The Ramadan offensive raised serious criticism from al Shabaab commanders for the paradigm shifting from guerrilla attacks to more-conventional operations, which also led to the fracture of the Shura council²². Osama bin Laden²³ and al Qa'ida operative Fazul Abdullah Mohammed criticized al Shabaab and Godane for causing civilian casualties and unnecessarily killing Muslims²⁴.

¹⁷ The TFG was created in 2004, with representatives from the largest clans in Somalia, following the major changes in Mogadishu that altered the landscape of Somalia.

¹⁸ Jones, G. et al (2016) Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency in Somalia. Assessing the Campaign Against Al Shabaab. Published by the RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, Calif. P.30

¹⁹ Wise, 2011

²⁰ Jones et al, 2016

²¹ Ibid

²² Mohamed Shil, "Al-Shabab: What Will Happen Next?" Somalia Report, September 3, 2011.

²³ Osama bin Laden is the founder of al Qaeda and was at the origin of the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center in U.S.

²⁴ Ibid, 20

Phase Five: Retreat and Adaptation, 2011–2016

In 2011, al Shabaab encountered serious offensives against AMISOM in Mogadishu. AMISOM recaptured 13 of the capital's 16 districts, including key revenue sources such as the Bakara market. The same year, al Shabaab launched suicide attacks, roadside improvised explosive devices, and small hit-and-run ambushes. On October 14, 2011, Kenya launched a combined air and ground offensive (Operation Linda Nchi) in the Jubbada Hoose region south of Mogadishu, uprooting al Shabaab (Jones et al, 2016). The group then expanded its operations in Kenya on soft targets (churches, bus stops, bars, and refugee camps) in 2012. Al Shabaab coordinated attacks in Somalia, targeting the Somali president in September 2013, the chief of security in March 2013, the presidential compound in February 2014, the Supreme Court in April 2013, the UN Development Programme headquarters in June 2013, the international airport in February 2014, and numerous hotels and restaurants frequented by Somali and foreign officials which claimed the lives of more than 100 security officials, politicians, and civil servants²⁵. The decline in al Shabaab attacks in 2015 is as a result of AMISOM Operation Jubba Corridor, which the group lost control of Baardheere and Diinsoor²⁶. Al Shabaab remains a formidable threat, capable of conducting attacks and killing combatants and noncombatants in East Africa.

Mobile money a strategic threat to national security: The case of al Shabaab

Al-Shabaab has little access to conventional banking outlets, and thus extensively uses the hawala system, money transfer services, and cash couriers (Fanusie & Entz, 2017, P.4). The banking system in Somalia is mark with serious security lapses, which foreign countries are bound to transact with the government in cash²⁷ and citizens depend on mobile money services (MMS) to transfer money and pay bills. As such, al-Shabaab sympathizers in Kenya effectuate transfers to the group through mobile payment, and as well network with the banking sector by depositing customers' funds in commercial banks. The impact of the UN was felt in 2012, when she sanctioned an al-Shabaab-linked individual for the 2010 creation of an anonymous mobile money network, ZAAD, that the group likely used to transfer and pay funds²⁸.

By late 2014, the group frequently received extortion payments through mobile banking services²⁹, and by 2016, the group “abandoned its previous reticence to using mobile money” and paid most of its salaries with mobile banking (Fanusie & Entz, 2017). The security lapses and inadequate regulation in Somalia in relation to counter-terror finance protections led most U.S. banks to end banking dealings with Somali entities in 2015³⁰. But Shabaab's links

²⁵ See Jones et al, 2016. P,43

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ For more information read United Nations Security Council, Press Release, “Security Council Committee on Somalia and Eritrea Adds One Individual to List of Individuals and Entities,” February 17, 2012

²⁹ See United Nations Security Council, “Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea pursuant to Security Council resolution 2182 (2014): Somalia,” October 19, 2015, pages 29 and 218.

³⁰ Ibid

with some Somali businessmen permit them raise funds through a process known as “trade-based money laundering”, where overestimate the value of imported charcoal and underestimate exported value sugar in Somalia³¹. This money laundering goes through bank accounts in the Gulf States³². As such, Shabaab’s sympathizers and financials have increased the strength of the group.

Road tolls and port fees

The transportation is a strategic area where Shabaab arise funds, particularly in southern Somalia. From 2008 to 2012, Shabaab generated about \$35 to \$50 million (through low tax, encouraging importers and exporters transit through the port) from the Kismayo port which she controlled (Fanusie & Entz, 2017). A UN report of 2010, found out that Shabaab’s income and supplies came through its control of port. The group operated checkpoints which charge \$30 for a civilian car and up to \$1,500 for a truck of goods³³. The Somali diaspora sends \$1 billion a year in remittances to Somalia, of which an uncertain portion makes its way to al-Shabaab³⁴. This is due to the complex system, which makes it difficult to track the flow of remittances and identify recipients, as well as poor infrastructure or banking system. In regard to international think, the group’s dynamics has change from an anti-government nationalist campaign to extreme violence and the quest for civilian casualties, as well as dampening its external fundraising.

Conclusion

The provision of security over a defined territory is one of the foundations of a nation-state, as security issues in any one country are a complex and convoluted tangle of in-country criminality and violence as well as international threats (Sauti za Wananchi, 2016). Al Shabaab’s international affiliates have change the pattern of operations (the nature of her funding and attacks). Stopping al-Shabaab’s financing will necessitate the actions; the fight against corruption, development or empowerment of Somalia’s institutional capacity, formalize the banking system with anti-money laundering and counter-terror finance regulations (Fanusie & Entz, 2017). Outside of Somalia, the international community (mostly security agencies and financial institutions) should monitor all transaction been effectuated to Somalia and countries within the region. The regional states should not only focus on developing institutions on economic development and governance, but that construct social and national identities to prevent radicalized narratives (Fanusie & Entz, 2017).

³¹ Ibid

³² Ibid

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Al Shabaab funds were usually through UAE-based money clearing houses, which gave loans to Somali traders for importing goods. In Somalia, the traders would reimburse the local remittance agent, which then get to Shabaab’s (Fanusie & Entz, 2017).

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