ВЗГЛЯД ЗАРУБЕЖНОГО ЭКСПЕРТА FOREIGN EXPERT VIEW

Al-Shabaab terror activities: A threat to regional & international security

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Abstract. This article provides an overview of the contribution made by the United Nations and African Union (AU) in countering Al-Shabaab terror activities in Somalia and neighboring countries. The author argues that the role of IGAD and AMISOM under African Union supervision has been paramount in addressing the Somali insurgency. Insecurity in the Horn of Africa poses a threat to regional and global security. Al-Shabaab's evolution as a transnational terrorist group with deepening ties to Al-Qaeda and its global jihadist movement is analyzed, and the refugee crisis as a consequence is revealed.

The concept of counter-terrorism and how it has been applied is examined. Contributions made by developed countries to boost the African Union efforts through counter-terrorism training aimed at capacity building and funding of peacekeepers are mentioned as factors that have strengthened regional coordination in countering Al-Shabaab terror activities.

Despite African Union efforts in fostering regional and international coordination as a counter-terrorism approach, Al-Shabaab, though weaker, remains a threat to regional and international security. As a result, the author concludes that more players such as Russia, whose commitment to the fight against terrorism can be witnessed in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) region and Syria, would be paramount in boosting regional counter-terrorism efforts.

Keywords: Al-Shabaab, Somalia, African Union, AMISOM, United Nations, counter-terrorism

«Аш-Шабаб»: угроза региональной и международной безопасности

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Резюме. В статье дается обзор вклада Африканского Союза в противодействие террористической деятельности «Аш-Шабаб», представляющей угрозу региональной и глобальной безопасности. Анализируются эволюция «Аш-Шабаб» как транснациональной террористической группировки с углубляющимися связями с «Аль-Каидой» и ее глобальным джихадистским движением. Отмечается, что активное вовлечение большего числа игроков, таких как Россия, приверженность которых борьбе с терроризмом может быть засвидетельствована в Сирии, имеет первостепенное значение для активизации региональных усилий по стабилизации обстановки.

Ключевые слова: «Аш-Шабаб», Сомали, Африканский Союз, АМИСОМ, ООН, борьба с терроризмом

INTRODUCTION

Several academic authors and experts such as I.V.Ponomariov (Russia) [1], Paul D.Williams (USA) [2] have written extensively regarding the horrific activities of Al-Shabaab and the basis of conflict in Somalia. However, the role of the African Union or regional responses in countering Al-Shabaab is understated.

UN AND AU OPERATIONS

United Nations Operations in Somalia (UNSOM) failed in 1992 and was replaced by the Unified Taskforce (UNITAF) from 5th December 1992 until 4th May 1993. The operation was led by the United States and tasked with disarming warring factions as well as peace-building. As a result, UNITAF also discredited, withdrew creating a security vacuum that raised concern within regional actors such as the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) [3].

On February 20, 2007, the United Nations Security Council adopted SCR 1744, which authorized the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) deployment after the failure of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development Peace Support Mission to Somalia (IGASOM)'s anticipated deployment[1]. The UN-supported AMISOM provided military planners to the African Union in Addis-Ababa through an assistance cell. The United Nations Security Council met with the African Union Peace and Security Council on June 16, 2007 to discuss the deeper collaboration and, in particular, the importance of stabilizing Somalia [3].

From the time of deployment in 2007 AMISOM has launched vital operations that have seen Al-Shabaab withdraw from its strongholds. The African Union, through member states, has lobbied the United Nations security council to intervene in the situation, which has seen international Peacekeeping bodies intervene in the Somalia crisis. Funds have also been provided to support the peacekeeping mechanisms. The European Union (EU) started supporting the deployment of AMISOM with 15 mln euros. In June 2005, the UK pledged to finance AMISOM with 1.3 mln pounds [3].

Regional leaders such as the Ugandan President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni have pushed for regional peacekeeping as one of the major components of peace-building in Africa. While explaining this situation, he noted that "Pan African ideals have guided Uganda's involvement and that African problems can best be resolved through African based solutions" [4]. His allusion to Pan African ideals may partly justify why most of the peacekeeping bodies in Somalia are dominated by African countries regardless of the threats received from Al-Shabaab as shall be pointed out.

Most recently, on 29th December, 2020, the Governor of Lower Shabelle region, Abdulkadir M Nur Siidi (Somalia) while paying a courtesy call on the AMISOM base in Arbiska, 30 km northwest of the Somali capital Mogadishu, thanked the Ugandan forces for ensuring security in the Lower Shabelle region of Somalia and Mogadishu in particular, adding that Uganda and Somalia enjoy great historical ties.

The Governor further noted that Uganda had been prompted to intervene in Somalia due to the cordial relations that the two countries enjoy to help find "African solutions to African problems" [5].

TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF AL-SHABAAB

Some analysts like Martha Crenshaw (Nicaragua), an expert in terrorism studies, argue that terrorist groups have made calculated decisions to engage in terrorism from a historical perspective and that terrorism is a "political behavior resulting from the deliberate choice of a rational actor" [6].

Since 2008, Al-Shabaab has transformed itself, this time from a predominantly nationalist organization with the localized agenda of driving the Ethiopians from Somalia to a 'hybrid movement' that has increasingly embraced the Al-Qaeda led the global jihad against the West [7].

On several occasions, the leaders of Al-Shabaab have pledged the group's allegiance to Al-Qaeda. Muktar Robow (Somalia), former deputy leader and spokesman of Al-Shabaab, for example, stated that Al-Qaeda is the mother of the holy war in Somalia: "We are negotiating how we can unite into one, and we will take our orders from Sheikh Osama bin Laden because we are his students" [8].

Similarly, in a statement made in January 2010, Al-Shabaab stated that the "Jihad of Horn of Africa must be combined with the international jihad led by the Al-Qaeda network" [8]. Al-Shabaab's growing friendship with Al-Qaeda had profound effects on its structure, targets, and operational strategy. Until 2008, Al-Shabaab used relatively conventional guerrilla tactics in its attacks against the invading Ethiopian forces [9]. However, the group's increasing ties with Al-Qaeda have led it down the path of suicide attacks as a means of achieving its objectives, and the group has claimed responsibility for several bombings, including suicide attacks in central, northern Somalia and Mogadishu.

Kate Galvin (United Kingdom) engaged in qualitative research in the field of arts and humanities argues that "the internet has enabled terrorist organizations to research and coordinate attacks. Al-Shabaab's need to expand their propaganda to a global audience and communicate with ethnic diaspora and international supporters have embarked on the internet. To foster public awareness and sympathy and convey their messages to international audiences with whom it would otherwise be difficult to communicate", as evidenced during the Westgate attack in Kenya[10].

Al-Shabaab used a Twitter handle to disseminate messages goading Kenyan authorities and claiming responsibility for the deadly attack. Finally, ICT has allowed Al-Shabaab to tap into wealthy Salafi networks keen on supporting Al-Qaeda's global jihadist campaign [10].

In continuation with Al-Shabaab transnational activities, one of the Al-Shabaab fighters Abdullah (Somalia) who was training to be a pilot and had researched terrorism-related areas such as how to breach a commercial plane's

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cockpit, during a hijack which on 16th December 2020 transferred to the US from the Philippines, was to face a long list of terrorism offenses, including aircraft piracy and conspiring to murder US citizens.

As part of Al-Shabaab's transnational activities, Abdullah was allegedly part of an Al-Shabab operation dubbed "Jerusalem will never be Judaized", which was launched in response to the Trump administration's decision to move its embassy in Israel to the city of Jerusalem. Further investigations on Abdullah portrayed that he was being directed by a senior al-Shabab terrorist who was responsible for the 2019 coordinated attack on a luxury hotel and office complex in the Kenyan capital Nairobi[2].

Al-Shabaab's transnational attacks from 2010-2019 are illustrated in *table* 1.

Table 1. **Al-Shabaab's attacks (2010-2019)**

Date of attack	Nature of attack	Victims
July 11, 2010	Simultaneous suicide bombings in Kampala	74+ - killed, 85+ - wounded
September 21, 2013	Attack on Westgate mall in Nairobi, Kenya	68 - killed, 175 - wounded
June 16, 2014	Attack on several targets in the Kenyan town of Mpeketoni	49+ - killed, unknown wounded
Nov 22, 2014	Attack on a bus with 60 passengers who were traveling from Mandera to Nairobi	28 - killed, unknown wounded
January 15, 2019	Militants besieged the five-star Dusit D2 Hotel in Nairobi	21 - killed, unknown wounded

Source: Council on Foreign Relations. https://www.cfr.org/timeline/al-shabab

As indicated in *table* 1, most of the transnational attacks conducted are within the East African region, with Kenya suffering more attacks for several reasons, among which the Militants claim is retaliation to Kenya's decision to join AMISOM in its fight against Al-Shabaab terrorism.

SOMALIA REFUGEE CRISIS AS A RESULT OF AL-SHABAAB ACTIVITIES

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Resettlement Data finder of 2019, it is estimated that East and Horn of Africa host the highest number of refugees estimated at 83.5%, followed by Europe at 13.9%. Efforts in resettling these refugees have been a coordinated initiative by regional actors such as the African Union and East African community in cooperation with the UNHCR under the United Nations.

Nearly 1 mln Somalis have fled the country, an estimate that puts the figure at around 900,000, and another 1.5 mln are internally displaced people (IDPs).

As of 7th January, 2020 according to UNHCR data, the vast majority of Somali refugees are living in neighboring countries like Kenya (256,186), Yemen (250,500), and Ethiopia (192,082). It is worth noting that despite having internal displacement and refugee crises of their own, countries like Yemen and Ethiopia have a long-standing history of welcoming refugees from Somalia[3].

The refugee question is mainly motivated by the existing conflict caused by Al-Shabaab radicalism and extremism. It implies that if the refugee question is to be resolved, the Al-Shabaab terror activities must be addressed. For this question to be addressed, regional and international organizations' coordinated efforts have to be realized in defeating the key players (Al-Shabaab operatives).

REGIONAL RESPONSE IN COMBATING AL-SHABAAB

The role and coordination of regional actors have been paramount in the fight against terrorism in Somalia. The African Union Peace and Security Council, backed IGAD, ignored the Islamic Courts Union's (ICU) repeated objections to the use of foreign troops and endorsed an IGASOM deployment. With international attention focused on Mogadishu, the UN Security Council authorized IGAD and AU member states to establish a military peacekeeping mission in Somalia to protect the Transitional Federal Government.

On one key issue, however, IGAD's authority was upheld, and this proved to be a determining factor in the events that followed [11]. These challenges led to the establishment of AMISOM whose peacekeeping mission has brought about relative peace in former Al-Shabaab strongholds like Mogadishu.

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[2] BBC. FBI accuses man of al-Shabab-led '9/11-style' plot. 16.12.2020. httpsw.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-55340294 (accessed 11.01.2021)

[3] UNHCR. Somalia refugee crisis explained. 07.01.2020. https://www.unrefugees.org/news/somalia-refugee-crisis-explained (accessed 15.01.2021)

IGAD AND COMPETING NATIONAL INTERESTS WITHIN MEMBER COUNTRIES

When looking into IGAD's role in resolving the Al-Shabaab insurgency, an outlay of prospects and challenges need to be mentioned since the challenges received by IGASOM's failed deployment would later guide the activities of AMISOM.

IGAD, in coordination with Somalia Government and other member states, drafted a Provisional Federal Constitution of Somalia to ensure a sense of stability; 825 Somali elders in August 2012 ratified this [12]. The Somali elders could be classified as a section if not the core group of opinion leaders, and therefore their involvement was not merely crucial but strategic. The Somali Government's 2016 Vision for Somalia, which outlines creating a Somali federal system, removing Al-Shabaab, and holding elections in 2016, was initiated or facilitated by IGAD [12].

However, internal conflicts between Ethiopia and Eritreafrom 1998-2000 Eritrean-Ethiopian war would soon paralyze the activities of IGAD. As such, a section of Somalis regarded IGAD not as a neutral mediator, viewing it as one that serves Ethiopia's interests. Djibouti was a neutral party, steered future coordination of IGAD activities in combating increased tensions in Somalia. Negotiations led by IGAD commenced in October 2002 in Kenya, where they came up with the Transitional Federal Charter, which later led to the Somali transitional government formation. IGAD's role cannot be underestimated based on the understanding that they initiated the counter-insurgency programs, which may not have resolved the insecurity challenge but instead initiated a mechanism in which the security dilemma would be resolved, giving birth to AMISOM.

AMISOM AND ITS REGIONAL CONSTRUCTION OF PEACE-BUILDING

The development and mandating of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) must be understood in the context of the continued failure to deploy IGASOM after the March 2006 IGAD meeting [2].

The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) was created on January 19, 2007, to show regional commitment in the fight against terror and restoration of peace and stability in Somalia. Unlike the divisions that limited the deployment of IGASOM, AMISOM has enjoyed cooperation within the troop-contributing countries. AMISOM has since offered professional training to Somalia's national forces, facilitated political transition, provided humanitarian assistance, and launched strong operational attacks against Al-Shabaab's strong bases.

From the time AMISOM intervened, it was considered a neutral party to the conflict, having worked with Somali transitional leaders. When there was a discussion of withdrawing AMISOM troops, the international community engaged the troop-contributing countries and the Somali Government to maintain troops' deployment, given the insecurity that would arise due to their departure.

The Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) continues to partner closely with AMISOM to help enable the transition of security responsibilities from AMISOM to Somali security forces. Between February and March 2019, 1,000 Burundi National Defense Forces left Somalia as part of the first scheduled drawdown for AMISOM forces[4]. AMISOM also conducted and finalized its training on 30th December, 2020. The trainees included the police in Somalia both at the federal and federal member states level as a means to enhance their capacity to secure the upcoming electoral process[5].

Table 2. **AMISOM troop-contributing countries**

No.	Country	Year of 1st deployment	No. of troops
1.	Uganda	March 2007	6223
2.	Burundi	December 2007	5432
3.	Ethiopia	January 1, 2014	4395
4.	Kenya	February 22nd, 2012	3664
5.	Djibouti	December 2011	1850
	Total		**21564**

Source: AMISOM official website. https://amisom-au.org/amisom-mandate

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[4] U.S. Department of State. Country reports on terrorism 2019; Somalia. https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Country-Reports-on-Terrorism-2019-2 (accessed 25.01.2021)

[5] AMISOM. Press Statement, AMISOM trains Somali police officers on securing the upcoming electoral process. 30.12.2020. http://amisom-au.org/2020/12/amisom-trains-somali-police-officers-on-securing-the-upcoming-electoral-process (accessed 21.01.2021)

Table 2 illustrates, as indicated above, AMISOM troop-contributing countries. Uganda comes first as a country that made its first troop deployment in March 2007 and has the highest number of troops serving within the AMISOM ranks. Over deployment of Ugandan troops, in comparison to other troop-contributing countries, is partly explained by its foreign policy, which prioritizes regional and international peace and security.

COORDINATION OF COUNTER-TERRORISM MEASURES

Actors from developed nations, understanding the complexity of Al-Shabaab terror activities, notably the United States of America (USA), United Kingdom (UK), and European Union (EU), have embarked on a series of counter-terrorism approaches. Al-Shabaab is a radical, extremist militant group, as earlier mentioned it believes in suicidal attacks, and instills fear within the population and its adversaries. To combat Al-Shabaab's radical approach, several regional and international actors have resolved on having peacekeepers and enforcers if sustainable peace is to be realized. This approach has led to relative peace in former Al-Shabaab strongholds, such as Baidoa, which Ethiopian forces captured later on.

As one of the developed nations and given its resolve in the fight against terrorism, Russia has contributed to promoting international security by taking on the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Russia is trying to avert Iraq and Libya's scenarios from happening in Syria. Whereas its efforts in Syria are visible to the international community amidst opposition from the US and its allies, Russia's role in the fight against Al-Shabaab is not as equally visible compared to other international actors.

Table 3. **International and regional peacekeeping bodies in Somalia (troop numbers)**

UNSOM	UNSOS	AMISOM	EUTM	TOTAL
61	49	21564	181	21854

Compiled by author from: The Military Balance.2018, Vol. 118, Issue 1.https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/tmib20/118/1

In *table* 3, there is an illustration of regional and International peacekeeping bodies and their troop numbers in Somalia.

AMISOM contributes the most troops. AMISOM is under African Union, and as a result, African Union has coordinated other International organizations such as UNSOM with troop-contributing countries which include UK, Pakistan, Turkey, Sierra Leone, Uganda.

United Nations Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS) is represented by countries such as the UK, Ghana, Nigeria, Pakistan, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Mauritania. European Union Training Mission in Somalia (EUTM Somalia) is among the other international peacekeeping bodies represented. African Union efforts in coordinating international action against Al-Shabaab terror activities have been understated because some African countries such as Uganda are fully represented in the three peacekeeping bodies except EUTM. AMISOM's role in Somalia's peace-building is due to the Regional and Sub-regional mediation and coordination efforts.

The US which had about 700 troops in Somalia indicated that some of the troops would move to neighboring countries, allowing for cross-border operations. The withdrawal order would see troops redeployed just days before the US president Trump leaves office. Some experts have warned that a US withdrawal could embolden militants in the Horn of Africa region[6].

Notably, Al-Shabaab remains an obstacle to peace and security in the horn of Africa regardless of the counter-terrorism responses in terms of peacekeeping and mediation efforts by regional and international actors. Most recently on the 2nd of January, 2021, a suicide bombing near the Somali capital of Mogadishu killed at least five people including two Turks. This attack was confirmed by Abdiasis Abu Musab (Somalia) the military operation spokesman for the al-Qaida linked al-Shabab [13].

The existence of Al-Shabaab came as a result of the collapse of the Stateafter the overthrow of Siad Barre in 1991. The power vacuum which was not adequately filled by the Transitional Government was exploited by the Islamic Courts Unions, which embarked on radicalization. When the rule of law collapses, militia groups and radical movements easily take shape.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, the author makes the following conclusions and recommendations.

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[6] Trump orders most US troops out of Somalia at 4.12.2020. *Aljazeera*. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/4/trump-orders-withdraw-most-us-troops-somalia (accessed 09.01.2021)

First, Peacekeeping operations have proved to be a success whenever there has been good cooperation between the peacekeeping forces and the local authorities; hence, peacekeepers are not perceived as an invasion force.

Second, terrorism being a global threat requires all forces of goodwill to ensure coordinated efforts in counter-terrorism efforts such as intelligence sharing and deradicalization.

Third, increased funding of peacekeeping operations, especially training as a means of capacity building, is necessary to both the peacekeeping forces and the Somali National Army (SNA).

Fourth, Information technology should be effectively used to counter-terrorism propaganda since the terrorists have used it as a useful recruitment tool, especially for young people who are frequent social media users.

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