

# Jihadist Tendencies in Africa: Al-Shabaab in Somalia

Saron Obia



Islamic Theology of Counter Terrorism

اسلام کے تھیولوجی آف کاؤنٹر ٹیرورزم

## **Abstract-**

Africa is faced with diverse security challenges that are more complex to regional and national security strategy. International cooperation remains the major solution in order to combat these challenges, emanating from the political crises. This paper focuses on the militant group Al-Shabaab and its particularity into modern Islamic radicalization in Somalia. Al-Qaeda-affiliated Islamic group, Al-Shabaab al-Mujahedeen, is a major threat to Africa and the East Africa. However, Al-Shabaab has exposed her capacity to conduct mass casualty spectacular attacks such as; attack on the intelligence and parliament headquarters, attack on police academy in Mogadishu, and a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device attack in Mogadishu, targeting a security checkpoint near the presidential palace. The objective of this paper analyses Shabaab's attacks, provides policing methods and exposing some of the particularities of the group in relation to the challenges of Somalian forces, in order for peace building and state building efforts in Somalia.

## **Introduction**

Al-Shabaab, also known with acronyms such as Harakat Al-Shabaab Al Mujahidin, and Mujahidin Youth Movement, is a religious extremist group which emerged in the mid-2000s due to sociopolitical events in Somalia. The group was established out of a militant wing of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), after Somalia's capital, Mogadishu, was conquered in 2006, despite Ethiopian military support to oust the UIC. Al-Shabaab exploited historical anti-Ethiopian sentiment among Somalis to attract recruits and support from other parts of the world. The group controlled south-central Somalia, including Mogadishu, from the late 2000s until the U.N.-authorized African Union (AU) Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) in counter terrorism strategy against the group as from 2011. The reorganization of Somalia, with a 2012 Federal government in Mogadishu, Al-Shabaab controls and still aspires to attack large areas of the country.

As international security continues to encounter several challenges, terrorist networks or organizations continue to create alliance in order to gain access in to different territories in Africa and Europe. ISIS is increasingly expanding her tentacles in Africa with affiliates organization like Boko-Haram and Al-Shabaab in Somalia. A few years back, ISIS fighters in Libya released a video titled 'A message to our brothers in Somalia' showing two fighters appealing for Al-Shabaab combatants to join ISIS's new franchise in Somalia. For example, in 2016, Abdul Qadir Mu'min, one of Al-Shabaab's religious leaders, along with some followers pledged allegiance to Al-Baghdadi.

Al-Qaeda remains one of the major groups with other emerging jihadist groups pledging allegiance following the mass coverage of the 9/11, which marked new history in Europe and the United States of America in particular. In Somalia, Al-Shabaab al-Mujahedeen has exposed her link to Al-Qaeda and aspires for a caliph (Shay, 2018), through her adjustment in tactics against African Union forces and the Somali government. Somalian military machine continues to be challenged by Al Shabaab coordinated attacks on hard and soft targets like mass-casualty attacks in Mogadishu and the October 14, 2017, suicide attack was the deadliest with internal wrangling in Somalia.

One of the major aspects been compromised during internal wrangling's is education. Following a report from the country's taskforce on monitoring and evaluation of violations against children in armed conflict, it was revealed that between 1 November and 31 December, 407 grave violations affecting 358 children (282 boys and 76 girls) and five attacks on schools. The same year, a total of 143 children were victims of recruitment and use as child soldiers, while others were abducted, assassinated and victims of sexual violence. Most of these human rights violations were attributed to Al-Shabaab (275, or 68 per cent), unknown armed elements (43, or 11 per cent), clan militia (19, or 5 per cent) and state (64, or 16 per cent). Critical enough to point out that, a total of 1,315 children (1,042 boys and 273 girls) were rescued from armed groups, and later placed under the care of the United Nations Children's Fund partners for rehabilitation and eventual reintegration.

### **Profiling Al Shabaab Attacks in Somalia**

The word profiling in this study analyses Al-Shabaab's psychological and behavioural patterns, in order to assess coordinating attacks in the region (North Africa). Following the 9/11 attacks, racial profiling re-emerged as a viable system for detecting potential terrorists and is been implemented by the border security agencies. Nonetheless, contemporary terrorism and extremism is reminiscent to the ideology of religious crusaders in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which the term it 'Holy Jihad' in the bid of establishing a 'caliphate' where 'Sharia law' will be the major agenda. Below are some of the high-profile attacks committed by Al-Shabaab:

#### **1- Assault on the Intelligence and Parliament Headquarters**

A major approach to counter terrorism is intelligence sharing and gathering; when an intelligence agency is under attack, then a nation can be considered a failed state. A nation's military machine is the intelligence headquarter, which must have maximum security coverage, drone surveillance, bomb alert control from distance, hackers and even HD cctv. But the 2018 events expose how negligent the

Somalian administration, when two cars bomb blasts rocked its capital, followed by gunfire. The incident recorded least 18 people casualties and more than 20 injured, despite warning from minister of interior about explosives-laden vehicle somewhere in the capital. The first detonation occurred near Somalia's intelligence headquarters and the second near parliament's headquarters, as security forces were defending presidential palace from sovereignty free actors.

## **2- Attack on Police Academy**

One of the major challenges in Sub-Saharan Africa is that of identification and criminal profiling, which are strategic aspects of the new world order and sociology of crimes. Nonetheless, terrorist attacks on hard targets are usually for humiliation and to show citizens of the country how vulnerable they are. The 2017 attack on the Somalian police academy in the capital, expose inadequate security measures by the academy; identification of personnel, poor access control mechanism (the suicide bomber walked into the academy undetected, with explosives under his sportswear) and available information about the academy on social networking site might also be an addition game. The suicide bomber disguised as a police officer made his way into the academy, with an explosive strapped around his waist, and targeted officers rehearsing for Somalia's Police Day celebrations scheduled for December 20, 2017. He then detonated the bomb which killed at least 18 people and injured 20 officers. A statement was posted on a pro-Shabaab website reading; 'It was a martyrdom operation, in which the mujahedeen targeted the police academy camp' as they claimed responsibility and exposed that 27 perished.

## **3- October Bombings in Somalia**

### **a. The October 28, bombing in Somalia's capital Mogadishu (2017)**

Security protocols in some sub Saharan African countries remain aquake though englobed with the globalization period, mark with radical shift in security software and counter terrorism machines. The October 2017 humiliating attacks perpetrated by jihadists using two cars in Somalia's capital Mogadishu exposed the challenges of securing the nation. First a car dashed into a hotel, Nasahablod Two, about 600 meters from the presidency, and jihadists stormed the building. A few minutes later, a second car bomb (VBIED) exploded near the former parliament house. One of the major narratives of intelligence agencies is to screen all strategic zones in the country, which are potential terrorism spots. Critical to adhere to that fact that any vehicle can be granted access 600 meters from the presidency, is a challenging contemporary approach to security.

Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility through its military operations spokesman Abdiasis Abu Musa, who told Reuters: “We targeted ministers and security officials who were inside the hotel. We are fighting inside”. But the Somalian president, Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, in response, declared three days of national mourning, joined citizens in hospitals to donate blood for the wounded and as well as sacked the chief of police and head of the national intelligence agency. Nonetheless, Al-Shabaab remains a cancer breaking even the African Union Mission force in Somalia.

b. The October 14, massacre in Mogadishu (2018)

Al-Shabaab never claimed responsibility of the October 14, 2018 bombing. One of the brains behind the group, Mukhtar Robow, condemned the pattern and termed it ‘barbaric’ and "a massive tragedy." He added that; "Those who are behind this, whose fingerprints are on this, must refrain from shedding the blood of Muslims. You are not going to go to paradise by killing innocents." The attack took at least 512 people (casualties), 312 people were injured and 62 people remain missing, due to the massive truck bombing on a busy Mogadishu street. Two vehicles were involved in the attack, a Toyota Noah minivan and a truck carrying around 350kg of explosives. The target was the airport compound in Mogadishu, which is close to several embassies and the headquarters of the African Union peacekeeping force. It should be noted that one of the major problems in Africa is centralization of strategic infrastructures in a single location, which if accessed by terrorists, the country goes down on her knees.

This paper isolates the patterns used by jihadists in order not to ignite aspirants to join because of the success recorded and explore some of the challenges and dynamism used by the security forces in this attack. But it’s worth noting that, the suicide bomber was a former soldier in Somalia’s army whose home town was raided by national guards and US special forces earlier in a controversial operation in which 10 civilians were killed. As such the jihadist resorted to revenge for the US-led operation in August 2017.

### **Particularities of Al-Shabaab in Terms of Jihadism**

Terrorism Financing:

Terrorist networks operate in different dimensions, as they recruit from all specialties with IT domain being the most predominant. Al-Shabaab uses the hawala system, money transfer services, and cash couriers, (Fanusie & Entz, 2017, P.4) for Somalia banking system protocols are yet to be updated, and citizens relay on mobile money services (MMS) to transfer money and pay bills. As such, Shabaab sympathizers in other parts of the region can easily support the group via mobile payment. An example

is the UN 2012, sanctioned on al-Shabaab-linked individual for the 2010 creation of an anonymous mobile money network, ZAAD, which the group likely used to transfer and raise funds.

A study titled; Al-Shabaab: The Cancer in East Africa, revealed that by late 2014, Shabaab frequently received support through mobile banking services, and by 2016 she paid most of its salaries with mobile banking (Fanusie & Entz, 2017). This made most U.S. banks to end banking dealings with Somali entities due to inadequate regulation in relation to counter-terror finance. Shabaab's evolved with some of her supporters raising funds through a process known as "trade-based money laundering", where overestimate the value of imported charcoal and underestimate exported value sugar in Somalia. The funds transacted via bank accounts in the Gulf States which has gone a long way to strengthen the group.

The Hiraal Institute, a security think tank based in Mogadishu, revealed that Al-Shabaab collected more than \$27 million in 2018. It also exposed Shabaab's strategy of keeping payroll and naming officials as shadow administrators in areas held by the government - means that the group would continue having sizeable financial commitments even if it loses territory. Even with inadequate funding, the group continue to aspire for new territories. Apart from raising funds for jihadist tendencies, security constraint is a major issue in Somalia.

### **Security Constraint**

Al-Shabaab has been able to dismantle international security organizations involved in counter terrorism in Africa. But the question is what is the role of the African Union in conflict resolution since its creation? Will African states ever be able to stand on their own? Yet the Westphalia treaty of 1648 remains a formidable tool in understanding the new world order. By mid-2016, the European Union, AMISOM's largest donor which had fully funded the mission, announced it would cut its financing by 20 percent to enable it to channel more resources to the Sahel and lake Chad Basin, emerging terrorism spots.

This budget slash led to a deficit in AMISOM's administrative budget and the loss of about 165 US dollars per month to each soldier. This unsettled the troops and affected their morale. The United Nations Security Council the number of all African peacekeepers in Somalia was reduced by 1,000 before the end of 2017. Uganda, the largest contributor of troops (6000 troops), withdrew dozens of its troops from Somalia. The most challenging and humiliating was the plan to withdraw the African Union 22,000 forces from Somalia by 2020, transferring security responsibilities to Somalia's military.

However, Turkish military support in Somalia remains a strategic event to the country. With the creation of military schools to train Somali government troops, equipping them with new, MPT-76, assault rifles, to fight Al-Shabaab. The Turkish government boosted their economy by ordering local defense industry to produce locally designed rifle MPT-76 which had passed 47 NATO tests, and even used by the Turkish Armed Forces.

## **Conclusion**

Terrorism remains a global menace for the world, and Somalia seems to be the most affected in Africa, due to the following reasons; withdrawal of Ethiopian military support, African Union (AU) plan to withdraw the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM), increasing financial resources of Al-Shabaab and quest for alliance between Al-Qaeda and ISIS. The Ethiopian withdrawal from the battlefield was based on the evaluation of the budget engaged in supporting Somalia despite the presence of AMISOM troops. Ethiopia's communications affairs minister Getachew Reda said, "We are pulling out because for a long time our country has shouldered a heavy financial burden having troops in Somalia and it is time the international community took over."

However, in 2017, a U.S. coordinated attacks against Al-Shabaab inside Somalia killing "more than 100" militants, 125 miles northwest of the country's capital of Mogadishu. In January 2018, Somali and US commandos stormed a camp of Al-Shabaab in Jame'o village in Middle Shabelle region. The raid led to the killing of some Shabaab fighters and rescued children under the pathway to jihadism with U.S helicopters. It should be noted that U.S remains a major actor in the field of counter terrorism and logistic support to African countries engaged in the fight against extremism and global jihad. Aspects review in order to overcome the internal wrangling and extremism in 2020 in Somalia are but not limited to; unemployment, education and healthcare which elucidates bad governance in Sub Saharan African countries.

*ITCT does not necessarily endorse any or all views expressed by the author in the article.*

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