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EVOLUTION? WHICH DRIVER(S) HAVE HAD
THE MOST IMPACT ON THE GROUP'S EVOLUTION?**

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**NAVAL
POSTGRADUATE
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MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**WHAT ARE THE DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL
DRIVERS OF AL-SHABAAB'S EVOLUTION? WHICH
DRIVER(S) HAVE HAD THE MOST IMPACT ON THE
GROUP'S EVOLUTION?**

by

Neha U. Athavale

September 2022

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MOST IMPACT ON THE GROUP'S EVOLUTION?**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

Al-Shabaab, a Somali-based militant group, has been destabilizing the Horn of Africa region since its formal emergence in 2006. While its initial attacks focused on Somalia and weakening the transitional government, the group has evolved into a transnational threat through cross-border attacks into Kenya and Uganda. Previous scholars have analyzed both domestic and transnational factors contributing to al-Shabaab's evolution and endurance. To further contribute to understanding how the group has remained resilient, this thesis takes a unique approach in analyzing domestic and transnational drivers separately. To understand domestic drivers, I looked at country case studies to demonstrate how al-Shabaab leverages domestic challenges. To understand transnational drivers, I evaluated al-Shabaab's activities crossing and transcending borders and how these have contributed to its expansion. Findings included that corruption has been the foundational challenge, both domestically and transnationally, exacerbating the effects of other drivers like ineffective counterterrorism policies and porous borders. Furthermore, the analysis revealed al-Shabaab's inconsistent opportunistic use of ideology depending on the context. Finally, from a transnational perspective, al-Shabaab's activities outside of Somalia can be divided into global and regional spheres of effort.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AIAI	al-Ithiaad al-Islaamiyya
ATMIS	African Union Transition Mission in Somalia
ATPU	Anti-terrorism Policing Unit
AU	African Union
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CSO	Civil Society Organization
EU	European Union
ICG	International Crisis Group
ICU	Islamic Courts Union
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority for Development
IPOA	Independent Policing Oversight Authority
IS	Islamic State
JATT	Joint Anti-terrorism Task Force
JTF	Joint Task Force
KDF	Kenyan Defense Forces
KNCHR	Kenyan National Commission on Human Rights
NISA	National Intelligence and Security Agency
ONLF	Ogaden National Liberation Front
SNA	Somali National Army
SRRC	Somali Reconciliation and Rehabilitation Council
TCC	Troop Contributing Country
TFG	Transitional Federal Government
TNG	Transitional National Government
UMSC	Uganda Muslim Supreme Council
UN	United Nations
UNSOS	United Nations Support Office for Somalia

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I. INTRODUCTION

Al-Shabaab, an Islamist terrorist organization, has been operating in the Horn of Africa for the past twenty years and shows no signs of retreat. In fact, al-Shabaab has grown and evolved from a local Somali insurgent group to one with regional influence. The group is capable of carrying out attacks in Somalia and bordering countries, despite efforts of the African Union (AU) and western partners such as the United States to defeat it militarily. Despite being driven out of Mogadishu and other populated cities, and the decrease of piracy operations, al-Shabaab continues to receive massive funding through extensive racketeering operations as well as from smuggling contraband sugar across the Kenyan border.¹ The United Nations (UN) noted that in 2019, the militant group “spent upward of \$21 million on fighters, weapons, and intelligence gathering.”² Given the resilience of al-Shabaab, this thesis seeks to answer the following questions: What are the international and domestic factors that have allowed al-Shabaab to operate and evolve as an effective transnational militant organization? What driver(s) have had the most impact in its influence and resiliency?

In the short term, al-Shabaab will continue to pose a threat to Somali civilians as well as to the provisional government, providing this militant group the means to capture swaths of Somali territory while launching mass casualty attacks in the country and across the region.³ State weakness within Somalia has allowed al-Shabaab to take advantage of the power vacuum and state instability and assert its own strict rule of law through sharia. Additionally, al-Shabaab’s attacks in Uganda and Kenya illustrate its capability to expand, hampering efforts to maintain security and stability in the region. The United States relies on strong stable African nations such as Kenya to deter and suppress militant organizations that pose a threat to U.S. military and government personnel, as well as to AU and UN-

¹ Claire Felter, Jonathan Masters, and Mohammed Aly Sergie, “Al-Shabab,” Council on Foreign Relations, May 19, 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/al-shabab>.

² Felter, Masters, and Sergie.

³ Jake Harrington and Jared Thompson, “Examining Extremism: Harakat al Shabaab al Mujahideen (al Shabaab),” Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 23, 2021, <https://www.csis.org/blogs/examining-extremism/examining-extremism-harakat-al-shabaab-al-mujahideen-al-shabaab>.

backed peacekeeping missions. Al-Shabaab's techniques, from recruiting and advocating for its causes that include appealing to diaspora communities in Europe and the U.S., are of concern to the U.S. military. Therefore, it is crucial to understand its rise, ways of operating, and sources of its resilience in order to contain its future expansion and ultimately defeat it.

To determine al-Shabaab's resilience and advancement, I divided those influences into domestic and transnational drivers. The domestic chapter analyzed three case studies where al-Shabaab has executed attacks, Somalia, Kenya, and Uganda. Within each case study, I examined the domestic drivers which were consistent within the case studies, corruption of government and security forces, counterterrorism, and socio-economic marginalization in relation to recruitment. Given that each of these nations possesses its own unique domestic situation, it was important to exemplify any similarities and differences which have enabled al-Shabaab's operations. In contrast, the case study approach was not utilized for the transnational chapter. Primary reason being that transnational drivers do not necessarily originate from one country but are rather more complex. As a result, the transnational drivers analyzed included the role of internet and social media, influence of larger movements such as al-Qaeda, the role of porous borders, and external intervention.

Examination of domestic and transnational drivers exemplified the emergence of several patterns. While the initial question was to determine if several drivers have influenced al-Shabaab's evolution in the region, the finding is that the driver of corrupt government and security forces is the multiplicative variable that has influenced other dynamics in the region. An unexpected finding which emerged was the need to further divide transnational dynamics into global and regional. By doing so, this illustrated that global and regional drivers were acting somewhat independently on two planes. This analysis also brought into perspective the inconsistent ideologies within al-Shabaab, which raises the question of vulnerability within the organization.

A. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many drivers have contributed to al-Shabaab's ability to influence as well as remain resilient in the Horn of Africa. I divide these drivers into domestic and international variables. However, before diving into the domestic and international drivers, it is crucial to understand that al-Shabaab's beginnings and its resiliency have been achievable due to two structural factors—state weakness and ungoverned territory. The presence of both factors has not only allowed the militant group to remain robust within Somalia but has paved the path for the group to expand transnationally and remain domestically influential within Kenya and Uganda. As a result, analysis of domestic and international drivers presents the opportunity to examine which driver(s) have had the most impact on the group's formidable presence.

1. Structural Factors

Domestically, a fragile Somali state and vast ungoverned territories appear to have contributed to al-Shabaab's rise and success.⁴ Weak or fragile states undermine the credibility of state institutions to govern, provide basic services, and protect their populations.⁵ Consequently, militant groups take advantage of the governance vacuum to offer their own rule of law. Ungoverned territory within a state provides militants the space to form and establish their organizations, as well as train for and plan operations against local and transnational targets.⁶

a. *Fragile States*

For the purposes of this paper, a weak or fragile state is “one that struggles to fulfill the fundamental security, political, economic, and social functions that are associated with

⁴ James A. Piazza, “Transnational Ethnic Diasporas and the Survival of Terrorist Organizations,” *Security Studies* 27, no. 4 (October 2, 2018): 80, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2018.1483615>; Henry Isoke, “The Dilemma of Porous Borders: Uganda's Experience in Combating Terrorism” (Thesis, Monterey, California, Naval Postgraduate School, 2015), 20.

⁵ Aleksandar Pašagić, “Failed States and Terrorism,” *Terrorism Research Initiative* 14, no. 3 (2022): 20, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26918297>.

⁶ John Sunday Ojo, “Governing ‘Ungoverned Spaces’ in the Foliage of Conspiracy: Toward (Re)Ordering Terrorism, from Boko Haram Insurgency, Fulani Militancy to Banditry in Northern Nigeria,” *African Security* 13, no. 1 (January 2, 2020): 83, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392206.2020.1731109>.

sovereign statehood.”⁷ Pašagić offers the perspective that weak states inherently increase the probability of transnational terrorist organizations to operate in these regions.⁸ Such states provide a form of sanctuary—“a territory outside of the influence of a weak legitimate government for terrorist groups to function with impunity.”⁹ Consequently, weak states make it more feasible for militant groups to set up bases to plan and rehearse attacks, while also build training camps.¹⁰ From a transnational perspective, weak states offer the opportunity for militant groups to take advantage of porous borders due to the absence of effective security forces. Over time, militant groups are essentially unaccountable due to little or no oversight from weak and incapable state institutions.

b. Ungoverned Territory

In addition to weak state institutions, ungoverned territory provide space for terrorist groups to operate without any consequences.¹¹ However, it must be noted that areas with weak governance are where it is possible for such spaces to exist. For the purposes of this thesis, an ungoverned territory is defined as the following, “A place where the state or central government is unable or unwilling to extend control, effectively govern, or influence the local population.”¹² Ojo stipulates that “ungoverned territory is a place where the state or central government is unable or unwilling to extend control, effectively govern, or influence the local population due to inadequate governance capacity and gaps

⁷ Council on Foreign Relations, “Excerpt: Weak Links,” accessed March 17, 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/excerpt-weak-links>.

⁸ Pašagić, “Failed States and Terrorism,” 20.

⁹ Pašagić, 20.

¹⁰ Pašagić, 20 . Morten Bøås and Kathleen M Jennings, “Insecurity and Development: The Rhetoric of the ‘Failed State,’” *The European Journal of Development Research* 17, no. 3 (September 2005): 387, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09578810500209148>.

¹¹ Ojo, “Governing ‘Ungoverned Spaces’ in the Foliage of Conspiracy.” Angel Rabasa et al., *Ungoverned Territories: A Unique Front in the War on Terrorism* (RAND Corporation, 2007), 1, <https://doi.org/10.7249/RB233>.

¹² Andrew J. Taylor, “Thoughts on the Nature and Consequences of Ungoverned Spaces,” *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 36, no. 1 (2016): 6, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sais.2016.0002>; Ojo, “Governing ‘Ungoverned Spaces’ in the Foliage of Conspiracy,” 82; Robert D Lamb, “Ungoverned Areas and Threats from Safe Havens” (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 2007), 1.

in legitimacy.”¹³ For example, in areas such as northern Nigeria, ungoverned territories have facilitated relentless conflict, making such regions more prone for terrorist operations and recruitment.¹⁴ Militant groups such as Boko Haram have continued to exploit the fact that forests in certain regions are not governed, allowing the group to carry out operations. For example, the ungoverned forests in northern Nigeria have allowed bandits to operate without repercussions.¹⁵ A related situation was found in Iraq linking ungoverned spaces and insecurity. The Islamic State (IS) captured areas within the Hamrin Mountain range, an area that has been ungoverned, using it as a base to plan and stage attacks and carry out daily operations at night.¹⁶ The other negative side to ungoverned spaces is the ability for terrorist organizations to take advantage of the inability of state institutions to provide to local security and services. As a result, the absence of formal institutions reassures local citizens to either join or rely on terrorist organizations.¹⁷

2. Domestic Drivers

There are numerous domestic drivers that have the capacity to enable militant groups to increase their influence as well as remain strong within a state. Duke, Agbaji, and Bassey state that “Corruption of government and security forces towards the general population, to include practices such as extortion and bribery, enable militant groups to access populations that have experienced malpractice by institutions.”¹⁸ As a result, this

¹³ Ojo, “Governing ‘Ungoverned Spaces’ in the Foliage of Conspiracy,” 82.

¹⁴ Ojo, 82.

¹⁵ Ojo, 86. Oluwale Ojewale, “Rising Insecurity in Northwest Nigeria: Terrorism Thinly Disguised as Banditry,” *Brookings* (blog), February 18, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2021/02/18/rising-insecurity-in-northwest-nigeria-terrorism-thinly-disguised-as-banditry/>.

¹⁶ Ojo, “Governing ‘Ungoverned Spaces’ in the Foliage of Conspiracy,” 87; Derek Flood, “From Caliphate to Caves: The Islamic State’s Asymmetric War in Northern Iraq,” Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, September 10, 2018, <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/caliphate-caves-islamic-states-asymmetric-war-northern-iraq/>.

¹⁷ Ojo, “Governing ‘Ungoverned Spaces’ in the Foliage of Conspiracy,” 82.

¹⁸ Salem Solomon, “Report: Corruption in Nigerian Military Benefits Boko Haram,” VOA, May 19, 2017, <https://www.voanews.com/a/corruption-nigeria-military-boko-haram-report/3862196.html>; Eguiar Lizundia and Luke Waggoner, “IRI Experts in The Hill: To Combat Terrorism, Tackle Corruption,” International Republican Institute, March 28, 2018, <https://www.iri.org/news/iri-experts-in-the-hill-to-combat-terrorism-tackle-corruption/>; Otu Offiong Duke, Dickson David Agbaji, and Okon Bassey, “Corruption and the Challenge of Boko Haram Terrorism in Nigeria: A Case of the Nigerian Armed Forces,” *Asian Research Journal of Arts and Social Sciences* 1, no. 20 (January 2017): 21.

inevitably makes it easier for armed groups to recruit from those who have been targeted. Counterterrorism policies executed by states and security forces also have the potential to backfire. Counterterrorism policies that target marginalized populations, such as certain ethnic or religious communities, have the capacity to incite citizens in pursuing revenge by joining armed groups.¹⁹ Additionally, Silke underlines that states may use counterterrorism policies to pursue its own political interests against opposition groups.²⁰ From a socio-economic perspective, militant groups may capitalize on the opportunity to influence and recruit from marginalized communities that are disregarded by the government.²¹

a. *Corrupt Government and Security Forces*

Corrupt practices by the government and its security forces enable militant groups to take advantage of the misconduct perpetrated by such institutions. If these institutions are unable to provide adequate governance and security, it essentially becomes easier for disenfranchised populations to seek security elsewhere.²² As a result, many turn to other unofficial institutions, such as militant groups, to seek protection as well as revenge. Additionally, corrupt practices within state institutions further obstruct their capability to eradicate militant groups.

¹⁹ Daniel Cebul, “Corruption in Counterterrorism Aid Programs Fuels Extremist Groups, Says New Report,” *Defense News*, September 13, 2018, <https://www.defensenews.com/congress/budget/2018/09/13/corruption-in-counterterrorism-aid-programs-fuels-extremist-groups-says-new-report/>; Hussein Solomon, “Counter-Terrorism in Nigeria: Responding to Boko Haram,” *The RUSI Journal* 157, no. 4 (August 2012): 6–11, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2012.714183>.

²⁰ Andrew Silke, ed., *Routledge Handbook of Terrorism and Counterterrorism*, Routledge Handbooks (London New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2019); Solomon, “Counter-Terrorism in Nigeria.”

²¹ Jessica Trisko Darden, “Tackling Terrorists’ Exploitation of Youth” (American Enterprise Institute, May 2019), <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/report/tackling-terrorists-exploitation-of-youth/Tackling-Terrorists-Exploitation-of-Youth.pdf>; Freedom Onuoha, “Why Do Youth Join Boko Haram?” (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, June 2014), https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR348-Why_do_Youth_Join_Boko_Haram.pdf. Mercy Corps, “Motivations and Empty Promises- Voices of Former Boko Haram Combatants and Nigerian Youth.”

²² Transparency, “Tackle Instability and Terrorism by Fighting Corruption - News,” Transparency, February 4, 2015, <https://www.transparency.org/en/news/tackle-instability-and-terrorism-by-fighting-corruption>.

One prime example that showcases how corruption further empowers militant groups is the prevalent corruption within the Nigerian army, which has hampered its ability to successfully fight the militant group Boko Haram.²³ There have been several ways in which corruption has the capacity to hinder a government from fighting militant groups. In the case of Nigeria, there was a clear case where the funds appropriated to the defense sector to combat terrorism were diverted to other use. In an effort to address the elevated levels of terrorism, “the defense budget increased from \$625 million in 2010 to \$6.25 billion in 2012, 2013, and 2014.”²⁴ Duke, Agbaji, and Bassey state that despite the increase in allocated funds to the defense sector, “there is no corresponding outcome due to the inability of the military to justifiably expend the appropriations in tackling security problems in the country.”²⁵ An in-depth investigation revealed that large sums of this funding “had been misappropriated by top government, military, and security agency officials, in collaboration with politicians and contractors supplying military supplies.”²⁶

Rampant corruption within a state provides an avenue for militant groups to recruit and radicalize. The issue of widespread corruption denies communities of the required services and infrastructure, while also creating an environment where communities start to become outraged. Onuoha emphasizes that “Pervasive malfeasance, especially in the public sector, provides a key referent around which extremists can frame anti-secular ideology and radicalization.”²⁷ Countries such as Tunisia and Kosovo, where the corruption rates are high, have illustrated the direct connections between corruption and

²³ Transparency; Solomon, “Report.”

²⁴ Duke, Agbaji, and Bassey, “Corruption and the Challenge of Boko Haram Terrorism in Nigeria: A Case of the Nigerian Armed Forces,” 15.

²⁵ Duke, Agbaji, and Bassey, 15.

²⁶ Albert. T Akume and James Godswill, “The Challenge of Managing Insurgency in Nigeria (2009-2015),” *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 7 (January 5, 2016): 145–50, <https://doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2016.v7n1s1p145>; Duke, Agbaji, and Bassey, “Corruption and the Challenge of Boko Haram Terrorism in Nigeria: A Case of the Nigerian Armed Forces,” 15.

²⁷ Onuoha, “Why Do Youth Join Boko Haram?,” 7.

vulnerabilities to violent extremism.²⁸ As a result, numerous citizens have joined such groups, stating “corruption as a common grievance.”²⁹

b. Counterterrorism

The implementation of counterterrorism policies and the execution of collecting counterintelligence have the capacity to alter the main objective of the state—to eradicate terrorism. Governments and security institutions use these strategies as ways to implement methods of oppression against the marginalized. These methods may include indiscriminate killings and utilizing counterterrorism tactics against opposition groups. Additionally, counterterrorism may be ineffective due to lack of training, supplies, as well as minimal support from the government.

In the case of Nigeria, the lack of resources in collecting intelligence have hindered the police force in its capacity to carry out investigations.³⁰ According to a report published by Amnesty International, Nigeria’s police stations do not maintain a thorough database for fingerprints, nor do they have a methodology to execute forensic investigations.³¹ Additionally, due to insufficient budgets there are only two forensic laboratory facilities with only a few trained police officers to conduct the analysis.³² Consequently, due to lack of budget and infrastructure, the police force often resort to extracting confessions through torture and violent means.³³ As a result of ineffective and insufficient resources, security forces struggle to keep up with tracking militant groups and often resort to violent tactics on

²⁸ Lizundia and Waggoner, “IRI Experts in The Hill.”

²⁹ Lizundia and Waggoner.

³⁰ Solomon, “Counter-Terrorism in Nigeria,” 9; Adaku Onyenucheya, “Lack of Resources, Operational Tools Limiting Police Performance, Says IGP,” *The Guardian Nigeria News - Nigeria and World News* (blog), January 27, 2021, <https://guardian.ng/news/lack-of-resources-operational-tools-limiting-police-performance-says-igp/>.

³¹ Solomon, “Counter-Terrorism in Nigeria,” 8; Amnesty International, “Nigeria: Human Rights Agenda 2011–2015,” 2011, 5, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/014/2011/en/>.

³² Amnesty International, “Nigeria: Human Rights Agenda 2011–2015,” 5.

³³ Solomon, “Counter-Terrorism in Nigeria,” 9; Open Society Justice Initiative, “Criminal Force: Torture, Abuse, and Extrajudicial Killings by the Nigeria Police Force,” May 2010, <https://www.justiceinitiative.org/publications/criminal-force-torture-abuse-and-extrajudicial-killings-nigeria-police-force>.

locals. Additionally, minimal resources may push security forces towards corrupt practices, further undermining counterterrorism operations.³⁴

In addition to understaffed and under-resourced security forces, counterterrorism methods have also included indiscriminate violence and killings perpetrated by security forces. In the case of Borno State, the Joint Task Force (JTF) has resorted to “unlawful killings, dragnet arrests and extortion and intimidation of hapless residents of Borno.”³⁵ Without reliable intelligence, counterterrorism operations within this context have included the JTF raiding homes, closing off areas to carry out searches, and shooting young men.³⁶ Excessive violence and repression by security forces can only widen the trust gap between state institutions and citizens. Further alienation has the capacity for the oppressed to seek revenge and take arms with militant groups.

c. Socio-Economic Marginalization

Marginalization due to social and economic inequalities are in part due to the state’s inability to provide for the basic needs to all communities, equally. As a result, when communities remain marginalized, discontent increases, creating a breeding ground for militant groups. It is not only if the state cannot provide those needs, but also if the state does not advocate for them which adds more fuel to the discontent.

If the state is unwilling or unable to provide the basic needs or advocate for the marginalized, communities will lean on groups that have the capacity to provide for those needs.³⁷ From an economic perspective, if conditions within the country are grim, it may force people to seek additional methods of income, such as from militant groups.³⁸ In states where well-educated youth have a challenging time in finding employment, this may also

³⁴ Solomon, “Counter-Terrorism in Nigeria,” 9. Amnesty International, “Nigeria: Human Rights Agenda 2011–2015,” 9; Cebul, “Corruption in Counterterrorism Aid Programs Fuels Extremist Groups, Says New Report.”

³⁵ Solomon, “Counter-Terrorism in Nigeria,” 9.

³⁶ Solomon, “Counter-Terrorism in Nigeria,” 9; The New Humanitarian, “Civilian Vigilante Groups Increase Dangers in Northeastern Nigeria.”

³⁷ Darden, “Tackling Terrorists’ Exploitation of Youth,” 9.

³⁸ Darden, 9; Mercy Corps, “Motivations and Empty Promises- Voices of Former Boko Haram Combatants and Nigerian Youth,” 13.

become a factor in radicalization and recruitment.³⁹ For example Darden states, “Tunisian ISIS recruits were more likely to come from areas with relatively high levels of internal migrants and high unemployment among university graduates.”⁴⁰

Marginalized communities who are exposed to the obvious discrimination, socially and economically, may lead to people pursuing violence. According to Krieger and Meierrieks, economic deprivation or marginalization has also been tied in the increase of terrorism through the Relative Deprivation Theory.⁴¹ This theory delineates three main ideas: “1) members of a society evaluate their economic position relative to reference groups in society, 2) members in society develop feelings of discontent and frustration when their economic position compares unfavorable to a reference group, and 3) discontent feelings matter strongly to participation in collective action, which can include violence to counter inequality.”⁴² Along this vein, the frustration experienced may also lead to violence where voices of discontent are eager to change the economic status quo. Krieger and Meierrieks state, “Terrorism is used by the frustrated ‘have-nots’ to violently voice discontent, punish the ‘haves’ and challenge (and, possible, change in their favor) the distribution of economic resources.”⁴³ As a result, terrorist groups have the ability to portray themselves as fighting for the marginalized.

³⁹ Ömer Taşpınar, “Fighting Radicalism, Not ‘Terrorism’: Root Causes of an International Actor Redefined,” *Brookings* (blog), November 30, 1AD, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/fighting-radicalism-not-terrorism-root-causes-of-an-international-actor-redefined/>; Darden, “Tackling Terrorists’ Exploitation of Youth,” 9.

⁴⁰ Darden, “Tackling Terrorists’ Exploitation of Youth,” 9; Daniel Brennan Corral Miguel de, “The Fight Against Terror Needs Better Data,” *Foreign Policy* (blog), October 2, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/10/02/war-on-terror-needs-data-tunisia-poverty-terrorism-relative-deprivation/>.

⁴¹ Tim Krieger and Daniel Meierrieks, “Does Income Inequality Lead to Terrorism?,” *Center for Economic Studies & Ifo Institute*, March 2016, 3.

⁴² Krieger and Meierrieks, 4; Heather J. Smith et al., “Relative Deprivation: A Theoretical and Meta-Analytic Review,” *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 16, no. 3 (August 1, 2012): 206, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868311430825>.

⁴³ Krieger and Meierrieks, “Does Income Inequality Lead to Terrorism?,” 5.

3. International Drivers

From a transnational perspective, various dynamics have enabled militant groups to foster and grow. Technological innovations have facilitated militant groups to utilize communication applications and social media to not only recruit but to spread their messages faster.⁴⁴ Moreover, terrorist groups have also been able to exploit online banking and money transfers to raise funds for their cause. The transparency the internet and other modalities have provided technologically, has also enabled well-known militant groups to spread their word to smaller movements.⁴⁵ One prime example being ISIS and al-Qaeda and their influences on growing movements within Africa, Southeast Asia, and Western nations. Aside from technology, porous borders have also increased the spread of terrorist operations due to elements such as poor border security.⁴⁶

a. Technological Innovations

The technological evolution that has occurred within the past twenty years has enabled transnational militant organizations to adapt the way they radicalize and plan attacks. Harrison indicates that online platforms have “offered more opportunities to become radicalized and accelerate the speed with which radicalized individuals mobilize.”⁴⁷ Harrison additionally states that “Applications such as WhatsApp and Telegram, through the use of end-to-end encrypted messaging, afford terrorists unprecedented operational security, limiting law enforcement’s ability to view or even disrupt these communique.”⁴⁸ Similarly, “VPNs allow radicalized individuals to play defense,” enabling users to access private connections.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, “The Use of the Internet for Terrorist Purposes,” 2012, 158; United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, act 158; Seth Harrison, “Evolving Tech, Evolving Terror,” Spring 2018, <https://www.csis.org/npfp/evolving-tech-evolving-terror>.

⁴⁵ Aisha Ahmad, “Going Global: Islamist Competition in Contemporary Civil Wars,” *Security Studies* 25, no. 2 (April 2, 2016): 353–84, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2016.1171971>; Ali Soufan, “Evolution of Jihadism 20 Years After 9/11 Wilson Center,” September 8, 2021, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/evolution-jihadism-20-years-after-911>.

⁴⁶ Ojo, “Governing ‘Ungoverned Spaces’ in the Foliage of Conspiracy”; Isoke, “The Dilemma of Porous Borders: Uganda’s Experience in Combating Terrorism.”

⁴⁷ Harrison, “Evolving Tech, Evolving Terror.”

⁴⁸ Harrison.

⁴⁹ Harrison.

Harrison further states, “In doing so, the technology effectively anonymizes the internet activity of the user,” which “prevents law enforcement from tracking their movement and intentions.”⁵⁰

Technological advances have also enabled terrorist organizations to utilize the internet as a platform for recruitment globally. In a document published by the UN it was noted that “the process of recruitment and radicalization commonly capitalizes on an individual’s sentiments of injustice, exclusion, or humiliation.”⁵¹ The internet provides a powerful tool for the recruitment of minors, who are easily coerced into joining movements through cartoons mixed with children’s stories which promote and glorify acts of terrorism.⁵² However, to appeal to all age groups, terrorist organizations have created online video games as another way to recruit and provide training.⁵³ Technologically advanced recruitment strategies have essentially enabled militant groups to cater to a wide range of the population to join the cause.

The ability to use online financing has allowed terrorist groups to raise and collect funds through “four general categories: direct solicitation, e-commerce, the exploitation of online payment tools, and through charitable organizations.”⁵⁴ The unique ability to use “electronic wire transfer, credit cards, or alternate payment facilities via services such as PayPal or Skype” makes it easier for terrorist groups to not only collect payment, but to expand their global reach.⁵⁵ In addition to these methods, the UN notes, “Online payment facilities may also be exploited through fraudulent means such as identity theft, credit card theft, wire fraud, stock fraud, intellectual property crimes and auction fraud.”⁵⁶ Terrorist

⁵⁰ Harrison.

⁵¹ United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, “The Use of the Internet for Terrorist Purposes,” 5.

⁵² Examiner Staff, “Al-Qaida of Yemen Using Cartoons to Recruit Children,” San Francisco Examiner, June 16, 2022, https://www.sfoxaminer.com/our_sections/forum/al-qaida-of-yemen-using-cartoons-to-recruit-children/article_e1d6c305-9d5a-5313-9c18-efeb22b78549.html.

⁵³ United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, “The Use of the Internet for Terrorist Purposes,” 5.

⁵⁴ United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, 7.

⁵⁵ United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, 7.

⁵⁶ United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, 7.

organizations may also disguise themselves as philanthropic organizations as a way to raise funds online.

Technology has allowed terrorist organizations to turn to the Internet as an alternative training ground for terrorists. The UN states that that “there is a growing range of media that provides platforms for the dissemination of practical guides in the form of online manuals, audio and visual clips, information, and advice.”⁵⁷ Online manuals and media have also enabled the ability for individual jihadis to take part in transnational movements. Similarly, Burke states, “The cumulative effect of all these various technological innovations is to make smaller attacks by individuals or very small groups more attractive to terrorist organizations than ever before.”⁵⁸ It can be argued that based on these technological changes, those with the aspiration to join are no longer required to attend training camps but have the option to execute smaller yet effective attacks in their hometowns.⁵⁹ The steady rise in the number of lone-actor operations indicates “a trend which has coincided with the deepening and broadening of the digital revolution as well as the encouragement of such operations by terrorist groups.”⁶⁰ As counterterrorism operations intensify, this disrupts the ability of terrorist groups to launch larger plots.⁶¹ Burke contributes that “this evolution has made it easier for ‘individual’ terrorists globally to claim carrying out their attack on behalf of a larger militant organization, effectively expanding a group’s cause.”⁶²

b. International Ideologies and Networks

Smaller militant movements have the capacity to recruit higher numbers while appealing across ethnic and tribal divisions when they merge with global Islamist groups.⁶³

⁵⁷ United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, 8.

⁵⁸ Jason Burke, “The Age of Selfie Jihad: How Evolving Media Technology Is Changing Terrorism,” Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, November 30, 2016, <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-age-of-selfie-jihad-how-evolving-media-technology-is-changing-terrorism/>.

⁵⁹ Burke.

⁶⁰ Burke.

⁶¹ Burke.

⁶² Burke.

⁶³ Ahmad, “Going Global,” 353.

Al-Qaeda and ISIS are examples of two global movements that have been successful in expansion and recruitment. Soufan indicates that “since 9/11 both ISIS and al-Qaeda, have increasingly acted through regional affiliates embedded in local societies, rather than with their centralized operational ‘core.’”⁶⁴ Ahmad stipulates that when organizations adhere to a well-known global Islamist identity, this allows groups to gather political support, regardless of ethnic or tribal affiliation.⁶⁵ Global movements also have the ability to spur movements through insurgencies in areas where there are already geopolitical conflicts or sectarian conflict.⁶⁶ Ahmad emphasizes that “global Islamists are better positioned to generate domestic political support across ethnic and tribal divisions.”⁶⁷ Robin et. al further strengthen this argument specifying that “there is a synergy between large movements such as jihadism and violence, whether perpetrated by repressive regimes, militia rivalries, terrorist groups, sectarian differences, tribal tensions, criminal organizations, or foreign intervention.”⁶⁸ Jihadism exploits local tensions which can promote the rise of extremist groups by larger radicalized organizations.⁶⁹

Deep ideological turmoil may also enable larger movements such as jihadism to infiltrate and form smaller movements. Robin et.al state that in the case of jihadi Salafism, this movement “is likely to increasingly draw Sunnis who feel victimized, marginalized, underrepresented, or excluded.”⁷⁰ Promises made by larger ideological movements indicate a utopian society, where it includes a “supranational vision that circumvents both formal structures like central governments and traditional identities such as tribes or clans.”⁷¹ In essence, larger movements foster the illusion of an “imagined community” that creates a space

⁶⁴ Soufan, “Evolution of Jihadism 20 Years After 9/11 | Wilson Center.”

⁶⁵ Ahmad, “Going Global,” 355.

⁶⁶ Soufan, “Evolution of Jihadism 20 Years After 9/11 | Wilson Center.”

⁶⁷ Ahmad, “Going Global,” 361.

⁶⁸ Robin Wright et al., “The Jihadi Threat- ISIS, al-Qaeda, and Beyond” (Wilson Center: United States Institute of Peace, December 2016), 28.

⁶⁹ Robin Wright et al., 28.

⁷⁰ Robin Wright et al., 28.

⁷¹ Robin Wright et al., 28.

for those who have experienced displacement and discrimination.⁷² Ahmad strengthens this argument: “Unlike nationalism or tribalism, global Islamism can ‘nurture feelings of loyalty and identity towards a large reference group that exceeds ethnic boundaries.’”⁷³ Such promises instigate smaller ideological movements to act on behalf of a larger ideological movement.

c. Porous Borders/Security Weakness

Terrorist organizations have the advantage to expand and evolve operations through the exploitation of borders that are under diminished control. Kittner suggests that “the lack of resources provided by the state to adequately control borders, to include failure to keep up with the flow of people and commodities, increases the likelihood that militant organizations may use this to their advantage.”⁷⁴ Additionally, borders that are surrounded by rough geographical features are often ignored and/or not a high priority for state authorities and border patrols. As a result, terrorists can exploit these features to ensure access to organizations and operations.⁷⁵ Rugged territory by the borders is not only exploited as a transit passage, but “also offers sufficient cover to establish training facilities, preparations for attacks, and to conduct illegal activities such as fundraising.”⁷⁶

Weak or failed states have the capacity to create porous and poorly secured boundaries, which serves as an attraction for those drawn to the jihadist ideology, thus allowing terrorist organizations to flourish and expand operations.⁷⁷ Antwi-Boateng underscores, “The weak and porous borders in sub-Saharan Africa provide safe-haven opportunities for under-siege terrorist groups from the Middle East to relocate where they are

⁷² Robin Wright et al., 28.

⁷³ Ahmad, “Going Global,” 361.

⁷⁴ Cristiana C. Brafman Kittner, “The Role of Safe Havens in Islamist Terrorism,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 19, no. 3 (July 4, 2007): 309, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546550701246791>.

⁷⁵ Kittner, 309.

⁷⁶ Kittner, 309.

⁷⁷ Osman Antwi-Boateng, “The Rise of Pan-Islamic Terrorism in Africa: A Global Security Challenge: Terrorism And Global Security,” *Politics & Policy* 45, no. 2 (April 2017): 270, <https://doi.org/10.1111/polp.12195>.

able to attract local actors to join them.”⁷⁸ In regions such as North Africa where countries share long borders along the desert, the landscape makes it almost impossible to govern, especially when there is a lack of state legitimacy in these areas.⁷⁹ For example in Mauritania, the desert region is controlled by three military posts, making it easier for militant groups to grow and cross borders without any ramifications.⁸⁰

The negligence of border security and lack of management not only provides a safe haven for terrorist groups, but it also brings to light the lack of cooperation, lack of strong institutions, and lack of demarcation which inherently makes it easier for militant groups to survive and evolve. Okumu illustrates that “the lack of integration at different levels—local, governmental, and regional—is detrimental to border security.”⁸¹ At the governmental level, there is “little or no integration between departments such as immigration, customs, police, and intelligence.”⁸² It is a major security failure when personnel, such as those in the police force or intelligence services, do not coordinate to address border concerns. As a result, the lack of coordination amongst various vital departments are further exploited by terrorist groups. The issue of demarcation is often exacerbated by governments that are unaware of the geographical characteristics of its borders; as a result, borders are not monitored, patrolled, or controlled.⁸³ Consequently, “borders are left to the devices of terrorist groups, with the potential to have most, if not all, African borders left to transnational crime zones.”⁸⁴

B. THESIS OVERVIEW AND OUTLINE

Prior to providing an analysis on the domestic and transnational drivers that have contributed to al-Shabaab’s influence in the Horn of Africa region, it was crucial to provide a history of the group’s emergence. Chapter II provides the history and emergence of al-

⁷⁸ Antwi-Boateng, 270.

⁷⁹ Antwi-Boateng, 270.

⁸⁰ Antwi-Boateng, 270.

⁸¹ Wafula Okumu, “Border Management and Security in Africa” (The Borders Institute, June 2011), 7.

⁸² Okumu, 7.

⁸³ Okumu, 8.

⁸⁴ Okumu, 8.

Shabaab, depicting the intricacy of the group's beginnings, as well as the complex domestic and international influences at play. Chapter III discusses the domestic drivers which have enabled al-Shabaab's influence within the region. This analysis focused on the three countries where al-Shabaab has executed attacks—Somalia, Kenya, and Uganda. Chapter IV analyzes the transnational drivers that have enabled al-Shabaab to remain successful in the region. The conclusion summarizes the significant findings and their implications, recommendations, and potential questions to consider for follow on research.

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II. THE HISTORY OF AL-SHABAAB

A. INTRODUCTION

Throughout al-Shabaab's existence, they have undergone several evolutions which have enabled the group to grow within Somalia while also undertaking the capability to execute attacks in neighboring countries such as Kenya and Uganda. Due to the complexity of al-Shabaab's origins and emergence, previous scholars have presented their research through influencers and drivers of the group's formation versus a strict chronological portrayal. This chapter will follow suit by showcasing al-Shabaab's history through influential drivers. Elements that will be addressed that have contributed to the group's rise include the first Ogaden war, Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, state failure post-Barre's regime, formation of AIAI and the ICU, and the influence of al-Qaeda.

B. THE ORIGINS OF AL-SHABAAB

Scholars such as Hansen who have studied al-Shabaab indicate there are many claims about how al-Shabaab began.⁸⁵ Roland Marchal stipulates that the formation of the Mu'askar Mahkamat (Camps of the Islamic Courts) was later renamed to Jamaa'a Al-Shabaab (Youth Group).⁸⁶ Hansen further states that al-Shabaab initiated in "the form of a rapid reaction corps of various Sharia Courts in Mogadishu, created to transcend clan and power of the business community and to give independence to various courts from the support of the Mogadishu business community."⁸⁷ However journalist Abdirahman "Ayante" Ali has made the claim that al-Shabaab originated in 2003 during a meeting in Hargeisa, the current capital of Somaliland.⁸⁸ The outdated al-Shabaab-affiliated webpage Kataaib has made the claim that the group was established in the Al Huda camp in May of

⁸⁵ Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Group, 2005–2012* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 19.

⁸⁶ Roland Marchal, "A Tentative Assessment of the Somali *Harakat Al-Shabaab*," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 3, no. 3 (November 2009): 388, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17531050903273701>.

⁸⁷ Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Group, 2005–2012*, 2012, 19.

⁸⁸ Stig Jarle Hansen, 19.

1996, which currently serves as the administrative region in southern Somalia.⁸⁹ Hansen further states, “A later version, aired in Somali broadcasts, can be interpreted as claiming that it emerged as an organization after the Sharia Courts’ attack on Kismayo in September 2006, having existed for several years as a loose network.”⁹⁰ The complicated and somewhat intricate origins of al-Shabaab is a result of “the existence of a loose network of like-minded individuals, prior to the formation of al-Shabaab, which often has been mistaken for a fully-fledged organization.”⁹¹ Nevertheless, regardless of the arguments surrounding its formal formation, the group’s history may be traced back to the first Ethiopian-Somali war.

1. The First Ogaden War

One of the potential motivations for why many Somalis went to fight against the Soviets may be traced back to the 1978 war between Ethiopia and Somalia.⁹² Following the assassination of Somali Prime Minister Sharmarke, the parliament was unable to choose a successor. In a matter of months, Somalia became a military dictatorship under the rule of Major General Siad Barre, who had ties to the Soviet Union.⁹³ As a result, the army was in a position to grow stronger, courtesy of Soviet tanks and advisors; however, Barre’s mix of nationalism and communism had also reached its peak in July 1977 with his desire to execute his plan to achieve a “Greater Somalia.”⁹⁴ Barre sent more than thirty-five thousand Somali troops into Ethiopia to take over the Ogaden region, where the majority are ethnic Somalis.⁹⁵ However, Barre’s dream collapsed when the Soviets, who had

⁸⁹ Stig Jarle Hansen, 19.

⁹⁰ Stig Jarle Hansen, 19.

⁹¹ Stig Jarle Hansen, 19.

⁹² Harun Maruf and Dan Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab: The Secret History of al-Qaeda’s Most Powerful Ally* (Indiana University Press, 2018), 10.

⁹³ Maruf and Joseph, 9; Faisal Ali, “Socialist Somalia: The Legacy of Barre’s Military Regime,” October 21, 2019, <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/socialist-somalia-the-legacy-of-barre-s-military-regime-30735>.

⁹⁴ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab: The Secret History of al-Qaeda’s Most Powerful Ally*, 9.

⁹⁵ Ephrem Yared, “Ethiopian-Somali War Over the Ogaden Region (1977–1978),” March 21, 2016, <https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/ethiopian-somali-war-over-ogaden-region-1977-1978/>.

developed positive relations with both Somalia and Ethiopia, threw their full support to Ethiopia.⁹⁶ As a result, Ethiopian forces, with the help of Soviet weaponry and Cuban troops, were successful in driving out Somali forces by 1978.⁹⁷ This betrayal act by the Soviets would later fuel Somali fighters to seek revenge after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. This later movement to support Afghanistan would later into its own jihad movement in efforts to combat the West to eventually form al-Shabaab.

2. The Influence of the Mujahedeen on Somalia

In the wake of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Somali jihadists were drawn to Afghanistan through the shared belief of defensive jihad, to help their Muslim brothers in another country attacked by “infidels.”⁹⁸ Somali fighters in Afghanistan were greatly influenced by the ideology to remove borders that separate countries with similar political beliefs. Hansen emphasizes “that several of the first-generation Somali Afghanistan veterans, such as future al-Shabaab leader Ibrahim Haji Jama Mee’aad ‘Al-Afghani,’ emphasized that borders separating Muslims from each other must be removed, and a common Muslim state, the Caliphate, must be established.”⁹⁹ Al-Afghani and several others were successful in circulating propaganda videos from Afghanistan in closed circles within Somalia.¹⁰⁰ However, Hansen notes that the influence of this group should not be misjudged; “it was a loose connection of veterans keeping contact and shaping ideas about the international sphere and religion, and a notion of loyalty towards a wider entity than simply the Somali nation, towards the wider *ummah*.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab: The Secret History of al-Qaeda’s Most Powerful Ally*, 10; Brenda Mugeci Githing’u, “Al-Shabaab and Al-Qaeda: Exploring the Tactical Utility of Terrorist Affiliations in Africa” (Mini Dissertation, South Africa, University of Pretoria, 2018), 44.

⁹⁷ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab: The Secret History of al-Qaeda’s Most Powerful Ally*, 10; Githing’u, “Al-Shabaab and Al-Qaeda: Exploring the Tactical Utility of Terrorist Affiliations in Africa,” 45.

⁹⁸ Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Group, 2005–2012*, 2012, 20; Githing’u, “Al-Shabaab and Al-Qaeda: Exploring the Tactical Utility of Terrorist Affiliations in Africa,” 46.

⁹⁹ Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Group, 2005–2012*, 2012, 20.

¹⁰⁰ Stig Jarle Hansen, 20.

¹⁰¹ Stig Jarle Hansen, 20.

3. AIAI's Beginnings and Expansion

Simultaneously and unrelated to the events in Afghanistan, the largest Islamist armed organization, *al-Itihaad al-Islamiyya* (AIAI) was formed in 1984 from the fusion of two Salafi organizations, *al-Jama'a al-Islamiya* and *Wahdat al-Shabaab al-Islam*.¹⁰² AIAI's origins were with Islamic leadership seeking to counteract influence from the west and "support the creation and unification of an Islamic state in the Horn of Africa."¹⁰³ Even though their initial goal was to promote ideology through nonviolent means, the late 1980s was when the group shifted its focus towards Somalia's dictator, Siad Barre, with an armed resistance.¹⁰⁴ AIAI was able to drum up support by Somalis due to the group's nationalist messaging and opposition to Barre; after Barre lost power in 1991, "the group officially announced its formation and explicitly stated its primary goal as the establishment of a new state ruled by sharia law in the region."¹⁰⁵ From this point, Ethiopia became AIAI's main focus and "allied with the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), an Ogadeeni separatist group comprised of ethnic Somalis living in Ethiopia's Ogaden region."¹⁰⁶ Since the 1800s the Ogaden pastoral region has been and since a contested area between the Somalia and Ethiopians.¹⁰⁷ While the land was declared by Somalis, the region was settled to Ethiopian Emperor Menelik II in 1897 by the British, but the region was later annexed in 1936 to Italian Somaliland, and returned in 1948 by the British to Ethiopia.¹⁰⁸ Tensions between the two nations fueled al-Shabaab's emergence in the early 2000s and will be discussed in a later section.

¹⁰² Stanford University, "MMP: Al Ittihad Al Islamiya," February 2019, <https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/al-ittihad-al-islamiya>.

¹⁰³ Stanford University.

¹⁰⁴ Stanford University; Angel Rabasa, "Radical Islam in East Africa," *RAND Corporation*, 2009, 33.

¹⁰⁵ Stanford University, "MMP," February 2019; Rabasa, "Radical Islam in East Africa.," Mohamed Haji Ingiriis, "From Al-Itihaad to Al-Shabaab: How the Ethiopian Intervention and the 'War on Terror' Exacerbated the Conflict in Somalia," *Third World Quarterly* 39, no. 11 (November 2, 2018): 2041, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2018.1479186>.

¹⁰⁶ Stanford University, "MMP," February 2019.

¹⁰⁷ History World, "History of Somalia," accessed August 9, 2022, <http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=ad20>.

¹⁰⁸ Harvard Divinity School, "Ogaden, The," accessed March 14, 2022, <https://rpl.hds.harvard.edu/faq/ogaden>.

Following Siad Barre's fall, AIAI's initial determination to remain peaceful was prevented by the veterans who returned from Afghanistan who promoted a more violent jihad in Somalia. Barre's overthrow led to a power vacuum that stimulated a civil war in Mogadishu between warlords, one being Mohamed Farah Aidid.¹⁰⁹ This clash pushed the country into famine, prompting the UN to send forces to safeguard food aid deliveries from militia groups.¹¹⁰ During 1993 to 1995 UN military intervention under UNISOM II, several Afghanistan veterans fought the UN on the streets of Mogadishu.¹¹¹ Their claim was to fight "a defensive jihad, in the name of protecting the Muslim *ummah* against the Western intrusion."¹¹² This resulted in UNISOM convoys being attacked with mines w laid on UNISOM-patrolled roads. This tactic of defensive jihad attracted youngsters to join the local radical movement in an effort to drive out the West. In this initial group several would become members of AIAI and eventually al-Shabaab such as Muktar Robow and Aden Hashi Ayro.¹¹³ On June 5, 1993, militants from Somalia, supported by Sudan and Iran, ambushed, and killed twenty-six of Pakistan's soldiers.¹¹⁴ As a result, the following day UN Resolution 837 was passed, which strongly condemned the attack.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁹ Conor Gafey, "Somalia Has Its First U.S. Ambassador in 25 Years. Read a History of Somali-U.S. Relations," *Newsweek*, August 10, 2016, <https://www.newsweek.com/short-history-somali-us-relations-489125>; Emily K. Elmore, "The Horn of Africa: Critical Analysis of Conflict Management and Strategies for Success in the Horn's Future," *Inquiries Journal* 2, no. 06 (2010), <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/256/the-horn-of-africa-critical-analysis-of-conflict-management-and-strategies-for-success-in-the-horns-future>.

¹¹⁰ United Nations, "United Nations Operation In Somalia II (UNOSOM II) - Background (Full Text)," accessed June 28, 2022, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/past/unosom2backgr2.html>.

¹¹¹ Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Group, 2005–2012*, 2012, 21.

¹¹² Stig Jarle Hansen, 21.

¹¹³ Stig Jarle Hansen, 21; Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, "The Strategic Challenge of Somalia's Al-Shabaab," *Middle East Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (Fall 2009): 25–36, <https://www.meforum.org/2486/somalia-al-shabaab-strategic-challenge>.

¹¹⁴ David Shinn, "Al Shabaab's Foreign Threat to Somalia," *Orbis* 55, no. 2 (January 2011): 203–15, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2011.01.003>; The Associated Press, "26 U.N. Troops Reported Dead in Somalia Combat," *The New York Times*, June 6, 1993, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/06/06/world/26-un-troops-reported-dead-in-somalia-combat.html>; "U.N. Soldiers Killed, Wounded in Somalia," UPI, June 5, 1993, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1993/06/05/UN-soldiers-killed-wounded-in-Somalia/6541739252800/>.

¹¹⁵ UN Security Council, "UN Resolution 837 (1993)" (New York, June 6, 1993).

Additionally, the United States offered \$25,000 for Aidid's capture.¹¹⁶ However, the offer for the reward failed to inspire Aidid's capture, however, reward made him a bigger hero in the eyes of his followers in Somalia. This enabled Aidid to use the reward as a propaganda tool to recruit more soldiers to fight against foreign forces.¹¹⁷ In addition to Somali forces, Daniels states that "the combination of backing from Iran, Sudan, and al-Qaeda resulted in the establishment of a force that the international community was unwilling to continue to fight."¹¹⁸ Following the infamous "Black Hawk Down" incident, American forces withdrew from Somalia, which prompted the UN to cancel its mission.¹¹⁹ Terrorist organizations would use the withdrawal of UN and U.S. troops to their advantage, by creating inspirational propaganda tools through violent means.¹²⁰

Following the withdrawal of UNISOM II, AIAI tried to establish a base in the Gedo region of southern Somalia.¹²¹ This region borders on the Kenya and the Ogaden region of Ethiopia where AIAI continued its attacks on Ethiopian forces as well as various Somali factions.¹²² Hansen notes that according to the Kaataib website (once affiliated with al-Shabaab) Robow was sent to command the Bar Huda camp.¹²³ The training camp created new networks versus a new cohesive organization. This new organization did not in fact emerge from the Bar Huda training camp; instead, new networks emerged that offered Robow the opportunity to increase his contacts throughout Somalia.¹²⁴

¹¹⁶ Christopher Daniels, *Somali Piracy and Terrorism in the Horn of Africa* (Scarecrow Press, 2013); Shinn, "Al Shabaab's Foreign Threat to Somalia."

¹¹⁷ Daniels, *Somali Piracy and Terrorism in the Horn of Africa*

¹¹⁸ Daniels, *Somali Piracy and Terrorism in the Horn of Africa*, 54.

¹¹⁹ Daniels, 54; PBS Frontline, "Ambush in Mogadishu Chronology: The US/UN in Somalia," accessed July 1, 2022, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/ambush/etc/cron.html>.

¹²⁰ Daniels, *Somali Piracy and Terrorism in the Horn of Africa*, 54.

¹²¹ Pamela G Faber, "Al-Shebab: An Al-Qaeda Affiliate Case Study" (Center for Strategic Studies, October 2017), 7.

¹²² Rabasa, "Radical Islam in East Africa," 55.

¹²³ Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Group, 2005–2012*, 2012, 21.

¹²⁴ Stig Jarle Hansen, 21.

By 1996, AIAI had executed numerous attacks in Ethiopia, which prompted Ethiopia's intervention in Somalia.¹²⁵ Some of the attacks included AIAI's assassination attempt on an Ethiopian minister, as well as several bomb blasts at Ethiopian hotels.¹²⁶ Tension between Ethiopian and Somali fighters resulted in the Battle of *Hilac wayne* (the big lightning), also known as the Battle of Dolow city in 1996.¹²⁷ The Ethiopians asserted to have captured more than eighty foreign fighters, while al-Qaeda disputes that only twelve had been either killed or captured.¹²⁸ Regardless of the exact number, Hansen states this claim indicated "that sub-commanders such as Robow and Ayro may have established contacts with the radical AIAI leader at the time, Hassan Turki, who had known al-Qaeda contacts."¹²⁹

The defeats AIAI faced to include the ideological differences over how Wahhabism should be promoted, along with clan differences, led to deep fragmentation within the group. One section of AIAI was renamed the *Jama'at al-I'tissam Bil-Kitaab Wa Sunna*.¹³⁰ By 1998, AIAI was a shattered force; however, the old personal networks within the organization continued to exist. Hansen underlines that "Amongst the former young radical AIAI members who had been fascinated by the Afghanistan veterans, the idea of a pan-Islamist form of solidarity, as well as respect for the training that could be received in the camps in Afghanistan, prompted a new generation of Somalis to go to Afghanistan."¹³¹ A

¹²⁵ David H Shinn, "Al-Qaeda in East Africa and the Horn," *The Journal of Conflict Studies*, 2007, 53; John Pike, "Al-Itihad al-Islami (AIAI)," FAS Intelligence Resource Program, May 21, 2004, <https://irp.fas.org/world/para/ogadin.htm>; Gartenstein-Ross, "The Strategic Challenge of Somalia's Al-Shabaab."

¹²⁶ Shinn, "Al-Qaeda in East Africa and the Horn," 53.

¹²⁷ Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Group, 2005–2012*, 2012, 21.

¹²⁸ Stig Jarle Hansen, 21; Harun Amin, "Report from Somalia (Al-Qaeda Document Found in Afghanistan)" (Combating Terrorism Center- West Point, 1996).

¹²⁹ Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Group, 2005–2012*, 2012, 21.

¹³⁰ Stig Jarle Hansen, 22.

¹³¹ Stig Jarle Hansen, 22.

critical point to underscore is that in 1998 Ayro visited Afghanistan and may have met and established connections with Osama Bin Laden.¹³²

4. Beginnings of the Islamic Courts Union

Scholars such as Rabasa underline that the formation of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) is somewhat vague. Rabasa indicates that “the first Islamic court was established in 1993 in the Medina district of Mogadishu by Sheikh Ali Dheere” as a reaction to the anarchy following the removal of Barre.¹³³ Due to the successes of the Medina court in managing crime, several more courts emerged. There was no official link between the assorted Islamic courts, but the courts were part of an informal movement.¹³⁴ While the informal movement was under a shared Islamic identity, the ways in which jurisdiction applied to specific regions meant the courts were not interchangeable.¹³⁵ By 1996, other subclans followed in the same footsteps by establishing an Islamic court in central Somalia, and by 1998 two more Islamic courts were added in Mogadishu and in the town of Merka in southern Somalia.¹³⁶ Financially, the ICU received support from some businessmen and were able to maintain a militia, “which were regarded as a disciplinary force that also contributed to maintaining stability in the areas that the courts controlled.”¹³⁷

5. The Influence of the Sharia Courts

Future al-Shabaab leaders and the Sharia Courts were able to ride on a wave of popularity that would prove essential in bringing about the Harakat al-Shabaab in three ways. But it must be noted that this popularity was not steeped in radical ideology. As

¹³² Stig Jarle Hansen, 22. Faber, “Al-Shebab: An Al-Qaeda Affiliate Case Study,” 7.

¹³³ Rabasa, “Radical Islam in East Africa,” 55; Stanford University, “MMP: Islamic Courts Union,” accessed March 14, 2022, <https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/islamic-courts-union>.

¹³⁴ Stanford University, “MMP.”

¹³⁵ Rabasa, “Radical Islam in East Africa,” 55; International Crisis Group, “Somalia: Countering Terrorism in a Failed State,” ICG Africa Report (Nairobi/Brussels, May 23, 2002).

¹³⁶ Rabasa, “Radical Islam in East Africa,” 56; International Crisis Group, “Somalia: Countering Terrorism in a Failed State.”

¹³⁷ Rabasa, “Radical Islam in East Africa,” 56; Aisha Ahmad, “The Security Bazaar: Business Interests and Islamist Power in Civil War Somalia,” *International Security* 39, no. 3 (January 2015): 98, https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00187.

mentioned earlier, the premise for the formation of the ICU was to establish some resemblance of law and order, which proved to be of more prominence post 1998 when factions of the warlords had fragmented.¹³⁸ A major reason that businesses decided to support the Courts was due to the inability of warlords to provide protection against “crime for the clans they drew support from.”¹³⁹ In addition to receiving support from local businesses, many Somali investors from Dubai returned and re-established themselves in a period when Mogadishu had become more stable, enabling businesses to operate without complications.¹⁴⁰ The movement away from relying on warlords for protection empowered business owners to accumulate a significant amount of arms and soldiers.¹⁴¹ For example, by 2005 telecommunication companies such as Hortel had 1,000 men-at-arms.¹⁴² As a result, companies in Mogadishu become more than just ordinary business firms; they took on the role of military actors, assisting in developing alliances with Islamists and with the Islamic Courts.¹⁴³

The second means through which the Sharia Courts held influence took place during 2002–2004 when the so-called Transitional Federal Government (TFG) of Somalia was created in Kenya.¹⁴⁴ This created a counter-mobilization in Mogadishu to prevent the TFG from entering the city.¹⁴⁵ Before understanding the significance and downfall of the TFG it is crucial to provide background on the initial efforts to form a government. In late

¹³⁸ Ingiriis, “From Al-Itihaad to Al-Shabaab,” 2040; Jessica Piombo and Pierre Englebert, “The War on Terror in Context: Domestic Dimensions of Ethiopia and Kenya’s Policies towards Somalia,” *Third World Quarterly* 43, no. 5 (May 4, 2022): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2022.2057292>.

¹³⁹ Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Group, 2005–2012*, 2012, 23; Ahmad, “The Security Bazaar,” 99.

¹⁴⁰ Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Group, 2005–2012*, 2012, 33.

¹⁴¹ Stig Jarle Hansen, 33; Ahmad, “The Security Bazaar,” 99.

¹⁴² Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Group, 2005–2012*, 2012, 33.

¹⁴³ Stig Jarle Hansen, 33; Ahmad, “The Security Bazaar,” 99.

¹⁴⁴ Luckystar Miyandazi, “Kenya’s Military Intervention in Somalia,” *ACCORD* (blog), November 2012, <https://www.accord.org.za/publication/kenya-s-military-intervention-in-somalia/>.

¹⁴⁵ Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Group, 2005–2012*, 2012, 23.

2000, the first attempt to create a functioning government was the Transitional National Government (TNG), formed in Arta, Djibouti, with the goal of bringing order within Somalia following Barre's regime.¹⁴⁶ For a short time period, the TNG appeared to be favorable, but was dominated by clans based in Mogadishu, (to include the Hawiye/Haber Gedir/Ayr sub-clan), which fell short in their goals of unifying the government.¹⁴⁷ Menkhaus states that "An informal coalition of clans opposed this alliance called the Somali Reconciliation and Rehabilitation Council (SRRC), who were backed by Ethiopia and led by Abdullahi Yusuf, Somalia's first interim prime minister."¹⁴⁸ However, due to ideological differences and clan lines, a fragment group within the SRRC, known as the "Mogadishu Group," formed. The original SRRC coalition was supported by Ethiopia, fiercely anti-Islamist, mainly based in regions outside Mogadishu, and federalists.¹⁴⁹ Hansen points out that "While the Mogadishu-based coalition received support from the Arab world, it was staunchly anti-Ethiopian, included Islamists in its alliance, and embraced a vision of a strong central government."¹⁵⁰ Despite efforts of the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD), the government represented an institution which neither governed nor imitated unification.¹⁵¹

In another effort to create a functioning government within Somalia, with the assistance and sustained pressure from key IGAD member-states, especially Ethiopia, Menkhaus underlines that "the delegates were successful in naming a 275-person parliament in mid-2004 in Nairobi."¹⁵² By October 2004, the transitional parliament elected Abdullahi Yusuf as President of Somalia, a member of the Mijerteen/Darood clan,

¹⁴⁶ One World Nations Online, "Somalia - Country Profile - Somaliland - Puntland - Horn of Africa," accessed August 9, 2022, https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/somalia.htm?source=post_page-----

¹⁴⁷ Ken Menkhaus, "The Crisis in Somalia: Tragedy in Five Acts," *African Affairs* 106, no. 424 (July 1, 2007): 359, <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adm040>; Ahmad, "The Security Bazaar," 99.

¹⁴⁸ Menkhaus, "The Crisis in Somalia," 359.

¹⁴⁹ The New Humanitarian, "SRRC to Organise Reconciliation Conference," April 9, 2001, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/report/19979/somalia-srrc-organise-reconciliation-conference>.

¹⁵⁰ Menkhaus, "The Crisis in Somalia," 359.

¹⁵¹ Menkhaus, 360.

¹⁵² Menkhaus, 360.

who more importantly, was a supporter and close ally of Ethiopia.¹⁵³ Yusuf selected Mohamed Ghedi to be Prime Minister of Somalia, who also had close ties to Ethiopia and took advantage in creating a cabinet where power was concentrated within the president's clan, and more generally in the hands of the Ethiopian-backed SRRC alliance.¹⁵⁴ Menkhaus notes that "Yusuf's first decision to select a prime minister who did not represent the interests of the Mogadishu Group reinforced the perception that the new regime was not necessarily interested in achieving national unity nor in earning the confidence of the Mogadishu community."¹⁵⁵ The new process for forming a governing body left the dominating clan in Mogadishu, the Hawiye, to feel estranged. Given that the new president of the TFG, Yusuf, was seen as from an unfamiliar clan, and as an ally of Ethiopia, there was a sentiment that the government had lost its identity. Somalis, mainly based in Mogadishu, were also suspicious of the newly formed TFG given Ethiopia's role in the negotiation process.¹⁵⁶ To further exacerbate tensions, allegations immediately surfaced that "the votes of parliamentarians had been purchased with Ethiopian government money, where the going rate for a MP's vote ranged from \$3,000 to \$5,000."¹⁵⁷ Throughout this process, the reliance on and presence of warlords weakened. As a result, Somalis viewed the Islamists in the Courts as the stable group in standing their ground against the Ethiopian-backed government, the TFG.

The third way in which the Sharia Courts and future al-Shabaab members initially gained popularity was viewed as the most important. Hansen indicates that "the citizens of

¹⁵³ Menkhaus, 361; Reuters, "Chaotic Somalia Picks a President; 14th Effort to End Lawlessness," *The New York Times*, October 11, 2004, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/11/world/africa/chaotic-somalia-picks-a-president-14th-effort-to-end.html>.

¹⁵⁴ Menkhaus, "The Crisis in Somalia," 361; The New Humanitarian, "President Reappoints Interim Prime Minister," December 14, 2004, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/report/52407/somalia-president-reappoints-interim-prime-minister>; The Nation, "Somalia: Starting Over in Somalia: How to Break the Cycle of Failure," *The Nation*, February 23, 2006, sec. News, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200602230804.html>.

¹⁵⁵ Menkhaus, "The Crisis in Somalia," 360; International Crisis Group, "Somalia: Continuation of War by Other Means?," December 21, 2004, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/somalia/somalia-continuation-war-other-means>.

¹⁵⁶ Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Group, 2005–2012*, 2012, 23.

¹⁵⁷ Menkhaus, "The Crisis in Somalia," 361.

Mogadishu were essentially tired of the lawlessness that existed,” regardless of how many makeshift governments were created.¹⁵⁸ Hansen further explains that “Citizens were exhausted and in many ways felt helpless from the anarchy, rape, robbery, theft, murder—and the various ideologies that had influenced Somali history, nationalism, fascism, Marxism, and clannism—were all discredited.”¹⁵⁹ By the late 2000s in Somalia, the only ideology that was not questioned was Islam; as a result, citizens were more at ease and comfortable going to religious leaders to ask for protection.¹⁶⁰ Compared to the other unstable systems and institutions, seeking advice from religious leaders were seen as the best option. As a result, the pre-al-Shabaab networks were perceived as upholders of justice and fairness since they were dedicated to Islam.¹⁶¹

6. Al-Qaeda’s Influence in East Africa

Al-Qaeda has maintained an established interest in Somalia since the early 1990s when bin Laden resided in the Sudanese capital Khartoum.¹⁶² Between 1991–1996, al-Qaeda’s influence in Somalia included sending instructors to Sudan as well as training forces in Somalia.¹⁶³ Bryden dictates that “In December 1992, al-Qaeda’s ‘fatwa committee’ had urged followers to cut off ‘the head of the snake’ by attacking U.S. troops in Somalia, and by early 1993, the militant group itself was providing training to Somali factional militia opposed to the U.S.-led international intervention force.”¹⁶⁴ During 1992–1993, bin Laden’s deputy, Mohamed Atef, visited Somalia on numerous occasions to train local fighters. By 1993, given that al-Qaeda and AIAI already had an established working

¹⁵⁸ Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Group, 2005–2012*, 2012, 23.

¹⁵⁹ Stig Jarle Hansen, 23.

¹⁶⁰ Stig Jarle Hansen, 23; Ahmad, “The Security Bazaar,” 98.

¹⁶¹ Ahmad, “The Security Bazaar,” 98.

¹⁶² Matt Bryden, “No Quick Fixes: Coming to Terms with Terrorism, Islam, and Statelessness in Somalia,” *Journal of Conflict Studies* 23, no. 2 (Winter 2003): 5, https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/jcs23_2art03.

¹⁶³ Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Group, 2005–2012*, 2012, 24; Shinn, “Al-Qaeda in East Africa and the Horn,” 50.

¹⁶⁴ Bryden, “No Quick Fixes: Coming to Terms with Terrorism, Islam, and Statelessness in Somalia,” 27.

relationship, al-Qaeda's expertise was obtainable to anyone who was prepared to fight U.S. troops, but more specifically against the clan militia of Somali warlord Aidid.¹⁶⁵ It is important to note that Aidid was by no means seen as an Islamist leader. Upon bin Laden's departure from Sudan to Afghanistan, tensions amplified between al-Qaeda and Sudan, which led to the abandonment of training local allies in East Africa. By the late 1990s, the focus shifted to conducting attacks against "the far enemy," the United States and later Israel.¹⁶⁶ The 1998 embassy bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam did include Somalis, but they were only used for logistical tasks. Primarily, al-Qaeda's East African branch was able to draw upon assets in Pakistan, the UK, and Afghanistan.¹⁶⁷ Both Lahoud and Hanesen note that "Local Somali operatives had minor tasks such as buying the cars used for the attacks, renting safe houses, creating charitable organizations that gave international operatives access to visas, intelligence gathering, and dealing with the aftermath of the attacks."¹⁶⁸ For this particular operation, Somalia was not needed as a homebase nor for resources; al-Qaeda was capable of evacuating to other places while also drawing on resources in other countries.¹⁶⁹

However, post 9/11 surveillance forced East African operations to decrease, making it more challenging for al-Qaeda to operate on a global scale. Additionally, new police measures made it harder to transport resources and manpower.¹⁷⁰ As a result, al-Qaeda in the region "went native" and became reliant and dependent on local sympathizers.¹⁷¹ During the next set of attacks on 28 November 2002, al-Qaeda suicide

¹⁶⁵ Bryden, 27.

¹⁶⁶ Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Group, 2005–2012*, 2012, 24.

¹⁶⁷ Stig Jarle Hansen, 25.

¹⁶⁸ Nelly Lahoud, "Beware of Imitators: Al-Qa'ida through the Lens of Its Confidential Secretary:" (Fort Belvoir, VA: Defense Technical Information Center, June 4, 2012), 23, <https://doi.org/10.21236/ADA562328>; Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Group, 2005–2012*, 2012, 25.

¹⁶⁹ Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Group, 2005–2012*, 2012, 25.

¹⁷⁰ Stig Jarle Hansen, 25.

¹⁷¹ Stig Jarle Hansen, 24.

bombers targeted the Paradise Hotel in Mombasa while concurrently carrying out an attack on the Israeli airliner Arakia.¹⁷² This series of attacks was different in that it incorporated the use of safe houses in the Somali cities of Mogadishu and Kismayo, as well as the Kenyan city Lamu. While the 1998 attackers had been flown in from around the world, the 2002 attackers and arms to include hand-held air missiles were imported from Somalia by a small boat.¹⁷³ According to reports on Somalia by the International Crisis Group (ICG) and the Kenyan authorities, the majority of the planning was executed in Somalia and Kenya by local al-Qaeda members. These members included those who participated in the 1998 attacks who had elected to stay in the region.¹⁷⁴ As a result, Somalia had become increasingly vital as al-Qaeda decentralized its East African efforts.

Those leaders who remained in Somalia after the 1998 bombings, became essential in the formal organization of al-Shabaab, as opposed to the leadership around bin Laden in Afghanistan or Pakistan. As a result, participants such as Fazul Abdullah Mohammed and Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan were critical in maintaining operations in Mogadishu. The involvement of this small group in Mogadishu drew the attention of the United States and its allies. Consequently, the United States became involved in covert operations to dismantle the rise of this militant organization. This war came to be known as the “Shadow War of Mogadishu” which lasted from 2002 to 2006 but in reality, it was several parallel conflicts.¹⁷⁵

At this point, U.S. officials realized that certain parties could be bought to assist in fighting militants or gathering intelligence. Thus, starting in 2002, the Central Intelligence

¹⁷² James Bennet, “In Kenya, 3 Suicide Bombers Attack Hotel Owned by Israelis; Missiles Fired at Passenger Jet,” *The New York Times*, November 28, 2002, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/11/28/international/middleeast/in-kenya-3-suicide-bombers-attack-hotel-owned-by.html>; Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Group, 2005–2012*, 2012, 25.

¹⁷³ Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Group, 2005–2012*, 2012, 25.

¹⁷⁴ Stig Jarle Hansen, 25; International Crisis Group, “Counter-Terrorism in Somalia: Losing Hearts and Minds?,” July 11, 2005, 1.

¹⁷⁵ Brett M. Butler, “Precipitating the Decline of Al-Shabaab: A Case Study in Leadership Decapitation,” (Fort Belvoir, VA: Defense Technical Information Center, December 1, 2015), 26, <https://doi.org/10.21236/AD1009099>; Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Group, 2005–2012*, 2012, 26. Faber, “Al-Shebab: An Al-Qaeda Affiliate Case Study,” 8.

Agency (CIA) made efforts to contact the warlords whose fighters effectively controlled the streets of Mogadishu and other key cities.¹⁷⁶ The goal was to recruit forces that could help the United States capture suspected terrorists traveling through or hiding within Somalia. The operation was run out of the embassy in Kenya and within months the CIA had sealed deals with eleven warlords and militias.¹⁷⁷ However, the significant piece of intelligence which the West did not consider was the reputation of the warlords within the local community. Warlords had an ongoing conflict with civil society and the business community, making the West's support for them more controversial.¹⁷⁸ Inevitably, the warlords who were recruited by the Americans used this momentum to their advantage and sought to extract financial support. For example, while the warlords portrayed themselves as the first line of defense against al-Qaeda, in exchange for money Somali militants would turn in innocent locals to Western intelligence services.¹⁷⁹ As a result, the relationship that had developed between the Americans and the warlords fueled al-Shabaab's cause in establishing an official organization.¹⁸⁰

Consequently, in 2005, the early members of al-Shabaab initially included a variety of Afghanistan veterans and those who retaliated against the warlords.¹⁸¹ The exact boundaries of the group were not well-defined; there were sympathizers who never became members, clan fighters, as well as clannists and nationalists. However, the ideology portrayed during this time was a mixture of "international offensive and defensive jihad

¹⁷⁶ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab: The Secret History of al-Qaeda's Most Powerful Ally*, 29; Mark Mazzetti, "Efforts by C.I.A. Fail in Somalia, Officials Charge," *The New York Times*, June 8, 2006, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/08/world/africa/08intel.html>.

¹⁷⁷ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab: The Secret History of al-Qaeda's Most Powerful Ally*, 30.

¹⁷⁸ Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Group, 2005–2012*, 2012, 26.

¹⁷⁹ Jeffrey Gettleman, "Demonstrations Become Clashes After Islamists Take Somali City," *The New York Times*, September 26, 2006, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/26/world/africa/demonstrations-become-clashes-after-islamists-take-somali-city.html>; Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Group, 2005–2012*, 2012, 26.

¹⁸⁰ Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Group, 2005–2012*, 2012, 26.

¹⁸¹ Stig Jarle Hansen, 27.

and a campaign for reform of Somali society.”¹⁸² By February of 2005 an old Italian cemetery was seized by the ad-hoc group where a new mosque and training center, the Abu Ayab, were constructed.¹⁸³ This was the first step which transformed al-Shabaab from a network to an organization. Extensive training took place, which allowed the group to start recruiting independently. The recruitment mainly targeted youngsters who were orphans or who lived away from their families. The group’s first territorial gain was the village of Cel Garas in central Somalia.¹⁸⁴ By the beginning of 2005, al-Shabaab, now more organized but not yet an official organization, was a small but prosperous network of only thirty-one members.¹⁸⁵

7. Rise to Power

Al-Shabaab’s rise to power was aided by several more profound structural changes within Somalia. First, the decline of the warlord system enabled alternative sources of power to emerge such as the Somali business community, who developed alliances with the Islamic Courts. Second, the rise in power of the Sharia Courts facilitated al-Shabaab’s movement because several of its members were highly active in the courts system. As a result, al-Shabaab became an ideal partner in the push for Sharia Courts unification; it was the political group in Mogadishu that had the most success in surpassing clan cleavages.¹⁸⁶ As the Sharia Courts alliance became more structured, al-Shabaab was able to command a greater force, but its unification is what enabled the group to get access to funding and the

¹⁸² Stig Jarle Hansen, 28.

¹⁸³ Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Group, 2005–2012*, 28; Marchal, “A Tentative Assessment of the Somali *Harakat Al-Shabaab*,” 389; Faber, “Al-Shebab: An Al-Qaeda Affiliate Case Study,” 9; Matt Bryden, Arnaud Laloum, and Jörg Roofthoof, “Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia Pursuant To Security Council Resolution 1853 (2008)” (United Nations, 2008), 14.

¹⁸⁴ Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Group, 2005–2012*, 2012, 29.

¹⁸⁵ Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Group, 2005–2012*, 29; International Crisis Group, “Counter-Terrorism in Somalia: Losing Hearts and Minds?,” 7.

¹⁸⁶ Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Group, 2005–2012*, 2012, 34.

support of the business community.¹⁸⁷ In one sense, al-Shabaab was a parasite on the Sharia Courts' back.

The Ethiopian invasion of Somalia in 2006 drove the ICU out of Mogadishu, leaving the ICU completely dismantled which led it to disband in December 2006.¹⁸⁸ However, al-Shabaab remained active. The Ethiopian invasion was a crucial event for the militant group that was able to fuel resentment against a foreign occupying power.¹⁸⁹ This allowed al-Shabaab to become the major force for resistance in Somalia.¹⁹⁰ However, the group suffered severe losses following the Ethiopian invasion. But within the next several years, al-Shabaab would rebuild and become highly active on the internet, delivering sophisticated propaganda while regaining control over large parts of southern Somalia.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ Stig Jarle Hansen, 36.

¹⁸⁸ Stanford, "MMP: Al Shabaab," Stanford Center for International Security and Cooperation, January 2019, <https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/al-shabaab>; "Al-Shabab," Council on Foreign Relations, accessed July 1, 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/al-shabab>.

¹⁸⁹ Stanford, "MMP."

¹⁹⁰ Stanford; Piombo and Englebert, "The War on Terror in Context," 3.

¹⁹¹ Felter, Masters, and Sergie, "Al-Shabab"; Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Group, 2005–2012*, 2012, 47.

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III. DOMESTIC DRIVERS OF AL-SHABAAB'S EVOLUTION

Al-Shabaab's ability to progress as a militant group has been empowered through various domestic influences within Somalia, Kenya, and Uganda. The local corruption of government and security forces presents challenges such as inhuman treatment of citizens, extortion, and bribes, all which undermine the relationship between citizens and their government institutions. As a result, many lose trust and see militant groups, such as al-Shabaab, as an opportunity to pursue revenge. Corruption of the government and within its security forces have led to challenges in the implementation of effective counterterrorism policies and operations. Ineffective counterterrorism policies have fostered an environment for marginalization to take place, acting as a catalyst for the marginalized to join militant groups as a form of revenge.

While the countries mentioned exemplify shared patterns of domestic challenges, each state also demonstrates distinct trials in combatting and eradicating al-Shabaab. The purpose of this analysis was to determine which domestic driver(s) is most influential in comparison to the others. While al-Shabaab's presence has been greater and more consistent in Somalia and Kenya, it is evident that corruption within the government and its security forces has been the connective tissue which has exacerbated counterterrorism policies. As a result, ineffective and discriminatory counterterrorism policies have led to increased socio-economic marginalization. While al-Shabaab has perpetrated fewer attacks in Uganda, it is evident that corruption within the government has also disabled the formation of effective counterterrorism policies.

A. SOMALIA

Somalia's domestic response in combatting al-Shabaab presents a complex problem set given the militant group's origins in Somalia. There has been a strong connection between the corruption within Somalia's government and security forces and their lackluster ability to execute counterterrorism and counterintelligence operations. The National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) has been attributed to collecting bribes

and violence.¹⁹² From a counterterrorism perspective, members within NISA and the Somali National Army (SNA) have assisted al-Shabaab through the placement of moles, while also being used to thwart political opposition groups.¹⁹³ The socio-economic landscape within Somalia is diverse and complex given the vast number of clans and the divisiveness within clan politics. As a result, al-Shabaab has taken an interesting stance on clan politics with relation to its recruitment strategy. The group advocates against clan discrimination to attract marginalized clans.¹⁹⁴ However, the militant group also uses clan divides to further its influence when necessary.

1. Corruption of Government and Security Forces

Somalia's perpetual cycle of failed attempts to consolidate power and eradicate corruption has destabilized security institutions, to include NISA. As a result, the primary focus on such institutions to exploit al-Shabaab becomes sidelined. Ingiriis underscores that "the politicization of NISA affects and impacts ordinary people and undermines the government's attempts to reintroduce an 'architecture of stable security'."¹⁹⁵ NISA's inability to execute humane operations has decreased its trust with the population. Ingiriis states that NISA's "use of extrajudicial operations reflects the dictatorial rule of the regime," which has ultimately created anxiety within the population in the government's ability to protect its citizens.¹⁹⁶ The group's extrajudicial operations have included rounding up young people who are suspected of harboring and aiding al-Shabaab during

¹⁹² Mohamed Haji Ingiriis, "Predatory Politics and Personalization of Power: The Abuses and Misuses of the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) in Somalia," *African Affairs* 119, no. 475 (April 23, 2020): 251–74, <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adz027>.

¹⁹³ Shumel Agnon, "Somalia Facing Challenges of Al-Shabaab Moles inside Government – Strategic Intelligence Service," accessed July 7, 2022, <https://intelligencebriefs.com/somalia-facing-challenges-of-al-shabaab-moles-inside-government/>; Kaunin Ronan and Matthew Jenkins, "Somalia: Overview of Corruption and Anti- Corruption," *U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Center*, 2017, 38.

¹⁹⁴ Haji Ingiriis Mohamed, "State and Clan Violence in Somalia," *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review* 8, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 73–96, <https://doi.org/10.2979/africonfpeacrevi.8.1.04>.

¹⁹⁵ Ingiriis, "Predatory Politics and Personalization of Power," 253; London-Somalia Conference, "2017 London-Somalia Conference" (London-Somalia Conference, England, 2017), 9.

¹⁹⁶ Ingiriis, "Predatory Politics and Personalization of Power," 264.

random nightly manhunt operations.¹⁹⁷ However, the majority of those detained were never involved in such militant movements. Based on focus group discussions conducted by Ingiriis, “NISA authorities make money from detaining civilian people accused of being members of Al-Shabaab.”¹⁹⁸ Conversely, if those accused are real al-Shabaab members, they have the ability to pay bribes to get released out of NISA’s detention centers.¹⁹⁹ Regardless, those who become imprisoned face harsh conditions and are rarely provided with medical treatment.²⁰⁰

Bribes are also paid to NISA by those who have the capacity to avoid being attacked. For example, the famous restaurateur Ahmed Jama has paid “protection money” to “the government security and intelligence services.”²⁰¹ This demonstrates the palpable differences in how people of certain socio-economic classes are able to buy protection versus those living within meager means who are more often subject to torture and extortion. In Ingiriis’s discussion of his interviews with NISA agents he underscores, “When detained, Al-Shabaab suspects are immediately interrogated to distinguish those who cannot pay from those who can buy ‘their head.’”²⁰² NISA agents also partake in the practice of falsely accusing people to extort money, to include brutally attacking government employees.²⁰³

There have been considerable consequences to NISA’s actions in attacking citizens. Brutal treatment imposed by NISA agents or whose family members had been unlawfully

¹⁹⁷ Ingiriis, 264; Shmuel Yosef Agnon, “Somali Forces Carry Out Massive Security Operation in Mogadishu, 20 Arrested – Strategic Intelligence Service,” accessed July 5, 2022, <https://intelligencebriefs.com/somali-forces-carry-out-massive-security-operation-in-mogadishu-20-arrested/>; Shabelle Media Network, “Somalia: NISA Conducts Security Sweep in Mogadishu,” *Shabelle Media Network*, December 2, 2016, sec. News, <https://allafrica.com/stories/201612020157.html>.

¹⁹⁸ Ingiriis, “Predatory Politics and Personalization of Power,” 265.

¹⁹⁹ Ingiriis, 265.

²⁰⁰ Ingiriis, 265; Ronan and Jenkins, “Somalia: Overview of Corruption and Anti- Corruption,” 3. Calamada, “Maxbuus Ku Geeriyooday Xabsiga Dhexe Ee Xamar.”

²⁰¹ Ingiriis, “Predatory Politics and Personalization of Power,” 265; Andrew Harding, *The Mayor of Mogadishu: A Story of Chaos and Redemotion* (St. Martin’s Press, 2016), 222, 271.

²⁰² Ingiriis, “Predatory Politics and Personalization of Power,” 267.

²⁰³ *Video Somali Secret Service NISA Tortures a Government Worker*, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILqTvwBEIVw>; Ingiriis, “Predatory Politics and Personalization of Power,” 267; Ronan and Jenkins, “Somalia: Overview of Corruption and Anti- Corruption,” 24.

detained, many choose to engage in revenge; as a result, al-Shabaab has taken full advantage of their grievances.²⁰⁴ Based on interviews conducted by Ingiriis, once detainees are released by NISA, some had been involved in assisting al-Shabaab “to carry out suicide attacks in the government-held so-called Green Zone.”²⁰⁵

2. Counterterrorism Efforts

NISA’s inability to execute counterterrorism operations translates not only through its corruption and inhuman treatment of civilians, but through a lack of training and resources.²⁰⁶ In addition to the brutalities committed by NISA, the Somali National Army (SNA) has also been reported as incapable of executing counterterrorism missions due to lack of training and resources.²⁰⁷ It has been reported that the SNA “remains undermanned, poorly equipped, and ineffective,” and have also received training without the use of firearms.²⁰⁸ Due to inadequate training and equipment, troops are often forced to abandon posts, to include key areas, such as towns in the Lower Shabelle region.²⁰⁹

NISA has been utilized inappropriately by the Somali government in executing counterterrorist operations. Between 2019 and 2021, it was reported by the U.S. State Department that NISA “has morphed to a Mephistophelian outfit rather than a professional and objective intelligence agency with a clear National Security mandate.”²¹⁰ Prior to the

²⁰⁴ Ingiriis, “Predatory Politics and Personalization of Power,” 267.

²⁰⁵ Ingiriis, 267.

²⁰⁶ Ingiriis, “Predatory Politics and Personalization of Power”; Katherine Zimmerman et al., “US Counterterrorism Objectives in Somalia: Is Mission Failure Likely?,” *Critical Threats*, March 1, 2017, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/us-counterterrorism-objectives-in-somalia-is-mission-failure-likely>.

²⁰⁷ Katherine Zimmerman et al., “US Counterterrorism Objectives in Somalia.”

²⁰⁸ Katherine Zimmerman et al; Jessica Hatcher and Jessica Hatcher-Moore, “Somalia’s Young Army Recruits Face Uphill Battle for Credibility,” *The Guardian*, April 19, 2013, sec. Global development, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2013/apr/19/somalia-army-uphill-battle-credibility>.

²⁰⁹ Katherine Zimmerman et al., “US Counterterrorism Objectives in Somalia;” Abdirahman A, “Somalia and AU Troops Abandon Key Towns,” *Horseed Media* (blog), July 2, 2015, <https://horseedmedia.net/2015/07/02/somalia-and-au-troops-abandon-key-towns/>.

²¹⁰ David Goldman, “US State Department Indicts Somalia’s Fascist President & His Quasi-Intelligence Service (NISA) of War Crimes, Corruption, and Clinging to Power. – Strategic Intelligence Service,” accessed July 7, 2022, <https://intelligencebriefs.com/us-state-department-indicts-somalias-fascist-president-his-quasi-intelligence-service-nisa-of-war-crimes-corruption-and-clinging-to-power/>.

previous leader of the Federal Government of Somalia, Mohammed Abdullahi Farmaajo, lost in the recent election, one of the main objectives of the agency was to undermine and sabotage the Federal Member States and their leadership.²¹¹ Farmaajo's cabinet has also created disdain within liberation movements such as the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) by proclaiming one of its leaders of being an al-Shabaab member.²¹² Nonetheless, falsely accusing opposition members as being part of a terrorist organization creates more instability and chaos. This has had major geopolitical impacts which has facilitated terrorism throughout Somalia by providing payments to al-Shabaab to either directly or indirectly "orchestrate insecurity, terrorism, and human rights violations."²¹³

Additionally, because NISA agents are not paid consistently, there have been instances where agents side with al-Shabaab in exchange for anywhere between \$30,000 and \$300.²¹⁴ As a result, soldiers have marched on the streets of Mogadishu criticizing the Federal Government of Somalia. According to *Garowe Online*, many soldiers have gone months without pay.²¹⁵ Therefore, many are lured into finding other ways of earning a living, even if it means working for al-Shabaab. For instance, a top official within NISA was found guilty in 2014 for "providing photos of agents and other identifying data to al-Shabab."²¹⁶ The use of NISA agents by al-Shabaab militants makes it easier to dilute the agency with undercover al-Shabaab members to undermine counterterrorism operations.

²¹¹ Goldman.

²¹² Abukar Arman, "Farmaajo's Betrayal of the Somali People," September 25, 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2017/9/25/farmajos-betrayal-of-the-somali-people>.

²¹³ Michael Rubin, "Somalia: Mohamed Farmaajo's Treasury Has Become a Black Hole," *American Enterprise Institute - AEI* (blog), accessed July 7, 2022, <https://www.aei.org/op-eds/somalia-mohamed-farmajos-treasury-has-become-a-black-hole/>; Goldman, "US State Department Indicts Somalia's Fascist President & His Quasi-Intelligence Service (NISA) of War Crimes, Corruption, and Clinging to Power. – Strategic Intelligence Service."

²¹⁴ Harun Maruf, "Somalia Assesses Al-Shabab Moles' Infiltration of Government," VOA, accessed July 7, 2022, https://www.voanews.com/a/africa_somalia-assesses-al-shabab-moles-infiltration-government/6173903.html; Garowe Online, "Intelligence Officers Stage Mutiny in Somalia over Unpaid Salaries," Garowe Online, September 17, 2020, <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/intelligence-officers-stage-mutiny-in-somalia-over-unpaid-salaries>.

²¹⁵ Garowe Online.

²¹⁶ Maruf, "Somalia Assesses Al-Shabab Moles' Infiltration of Government." Agnon, "Somalia Facing Challenges of Al-Shabaab Moles inside Government – Strategic Intelligence Service."

3. Socio-Economic Marginalization

The challenges of fighting al-Shabaab not only reside in the politics of ineffective counterinsurgencies and corrupt government security forces, but also in the ethnic and economic marginalization faced by millions in Somalia. To understand how al-Shabaab has profited from clan politics, it is pertinent to understand that Somalia's clan system is complex and extremely diverse. The nation comprises of approximately 500 clans and sub-clans, which has and continues to result in internal fighting for power, prosperity, and security. The four major clans that are subdivided into numerous sub-clans are Darod, Hawiye, Dir, and Issaq.²¹⁷ Al-Shabaab has and continues to capitalize off clan tensions to further exploit clan grievances, as well as to expand its influence.

The intricacy of today's clan-based tensions may be traced back to warring clans during Barre's time in power. State violence which took place during Barre's reign was rooted in the clan policies pursued by the military regime that normalized violence. As a result, Somalia had become a "clan-controlled state."²¹⁸ Following Barre, "the predictable consequences of enduring state violence culminated in an unprecedented clan violence, where each clan had to fight the other for its survival."²¹⁹ In a state that has continued to live under lawlessness, security challenges, the growing presence of al-Shabaab, and the discrimination between clans, has exacerbated the violence while also showcasing an increase in economic marginalization.

One of the luring factors of joining al-Shabaab is based on the premise that the militant group detests the practice of clan representation, which also translates to its institutional structure "where no clan group is side-lined in favor of another."²²⁰ Ingiriis

²¹⁷ Alex de Waal, "The UN and Somalia's Invisible Minorities," March 1994, <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/un-and-somalias-invisible-minorities>; Nations Encyclopedia, "Ethnic Groups-Somalia," accessed July 14, 2022, <https://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/Africa/Somalia-ETHNIC-GROUPS.html>.

²¹⁸ Mohamed, "State and Clan Violence in Somalia."

²¹⁹ Mohamed.

²²⁰ Mohamed Haji Ingiriis, "The Anthropology of Al-Shabaab: The Salient Factors for the Insurgency Movement's Recruitment Project," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 31, no. 2 (February 17, 2020): 368, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2020.1713548>; U.S. State Department, "Integrated Country Study: Somalia," March 20, 2022, 8.

depicts, “Al-Shabaab exploits the grievances expressed by clans and communities who feel marginalized by the federal government (and by regional clan-based states).”²²¹ As a result, the majority of local al-Shabaab members tend to belong to those clans and communities that have been marginalized. The story of a young man who deserted the government to work for al-Shabaab was publicly noted by Mohamoud “Tarzan” Ahmed Nuur, former mayor of Mogadishu.²²² The mayor notes that the young man defected because he faced injustice in addition to discrimination based on his clan.²²³ The marginalization from power and resources by government institutions inevitably makes it easier for many young individuals, mostly men, to connect with al-Shabaab’s perspective on clannism. Ingiriis and Marchal further explain that since the Somali Youth League (Somalia’s first political party), al-Shabaab is the first organization that has “effectively suppressed the divisive nature of the clan system.”²²⁴ Al-Shabaab adheres to its strict position on clannism, which facilitates its ability to employ strategic exploitation as a way of survival.

Nevertheless, one of al-Shabaab’s tactics, is to exploit those who do not have power within Somalia. Therefore, the group provides the powerless with more political emancipation than expected as well as by encouraging marriage arrangements between clans.²²⁵ Marriage arrangements by al-Shabaab also demonstrate the movement’s ability to discard the cultural notion that the same clans must intermarry.²²⁶ Ingiriis states that the militant group disregards the notion of “Somali pastoralist notion of ‘isma guursanno’ (we do not inter-marry)” which helps to close the socio-economic gap between the idea the

²²¹ Ingiriis, “The Anthropology of Al-Shabaab,” 369.

²²² Harding, *The Mayor of Mogadishu: A Story of Chaos and Redemotion*, 194.

²²³ Ingiriis, “The Anthropology of Al-Shabaab,” 369; Harding, *The Mayor of Mogadishu: A Story of Chaos and Redemotion*, 194.

²²⁴ Ingiriis, “The Anthropology of Al-Shabaab,” 369; Roland Marchal, “The Rise Of A Jihadi Movement In A Country At War,” March 2011, 5, https://www.sciencespo.fr/ceri/sites/sciencespo.fr/ceri/files/art_RM2.pdf.

²²⁵ Ingiriis, “The Anthropology of Al-Shabaab,” 370; Martin Hill, “No Redress: Somalia’s Forgotten Minorities” (Minority Rights Group International, October 2010), 3.

²²⁶ Ingiriis, “The Anthropology of Al-Shabaab,” 370.

higher and lower clans within Somalia.²²⁷ Nevertheless, al-Shabaab has been able to instrumentalize the Somali clan culture to a better capacity than the government. Ingiriis notes, based on an account from a female officer in the government army, that “people do not have confidence in the government because it is lineage based and clan based.”²²⁸

However, al-Shabaab has been known to use clannism when it is advantageous, such as praising clans who have provided support to the insurgency or to blackmail clans that have resisted the group’s movement.²²⁹ From a recruitment standpoint, according to the *International Crisis Group*, al-Shabaab “promises male recruits enhanced access to wives and greater social mobility” through the prohibition of marrying women from minor clans.²³⁰ Instead, Al-Shabaab has advocated for its men to marry into families from a large prominent clans as a way to advance relations and “procure loyalties across a wide patchwork of clans.”²³¹

From an economic perspective, due to the lack of job opportunities within the country, joining al-Shabaab has been viewed as the most profitable option. Given that 70 percent of the population under 30 is unemployed, those who joined the ranks of the militant group have very few alternatives.²³² While there have been upgrades in the systems the government uses for payments, army wages are still irregularly paid. However, al-Shabaab’s taxation system has provided its members with significant budgetary surpluses, with the ability to pay its troops a consistent salary.²³³

²²⁷ Ingiriis, 370.

²²⁸ Ingiriis, 371.

²²⁹ Ingiriis, 370; Dr Orly Maya Stern and Adam Smith International, “Married in the Shadows: The Wives of al-Shabaab,” 2020, 12.

²³⁰ Stern and International, “Married in the Shadows: The Wives of al-Shabaab,” 13; International Crisis Group, “Women and Al-Shabaab’s Insurgency,” June 27, 2019, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/somalia/b145-women-and-al-shabaabs-insurgency>.

²³¹ International Crisis Group, “Women and Al-Shabaab’s Insurgency.”

²³² Tricia Bacon, “Inside the Minds of Somalia’s Ascendent Insurgents: An Identity, Mind, Emotions and Perceptions Analysis of Al-Shabaab,” Program on Extremism (George Washington University, March 2022), 90.

²³³ “Al-Shabaab Marchal, “The Rise Of A Jihadi Movement In A Country At War,” 18; Bacon, “Inside the Minds of Somalia’s Ascendent Insurgents: An Identity, Mind, Emotions and Perceptions Analysis of Al-Shabaab,” 90.

B. KENYA

Kenya's domestic challenges in combatting al-Shabaab have stemmed from the endemic corruption the country continues to face. The corruption within the government and the security forces have created vast challenges through the diversion of funds, taking advantage of the charcoal and sugar trade involving al-Shabaab, as well as aiding al-Shabaab militants through their travel within the country.²³⁴ Kenya's efforts through counterterrorism have exacerbated tensions between marginalized communities, such as Kenyan-Somalis and Muslims, through indiscriminate repression.²³⁵ Additionally, the installation of several counterterrorism programs such as Usalama Watch have brought to light Kenya's failure to build trust with its citizens, particularly those who are marginalized and ex fighters within al-Shabaab.²³⁶ Finally, the cumulative challenges of corruption and inhumane counterterrorist operations have further divided marginalized communities in trusting their state institutions.²³⁷ As a result, increased oppression has created a window of opportunity for al-Shabaab to increase its influence and recruit from the marginalized.

²³⁴ Anneli Botha, "East Africa: The Roots of Radicalism Should Inform Government's Response to Terror," *Daily Maverick*, October 15, 2014, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2014-10-15-east-africa-the-roots-of-radicalism-should-inform-governments-response-to-terror/>; Chris Oxtoby, "Terrorism and Governance in South Africa and Eastern Africa," *Cambridge University*, June 12, 2017, 24; Simon Allison, "Think Again: Who Profits from Kenya's War in Somalia?," *ISS Africa*, December 7, 2015, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/think-again-who-profits-from-kenyas-war-in-somalia>.

²³⁵ Simone Papale, "Fuelling the Fire: Al-Shabaab, Counter-Terrorism and Radicalisation in Kenya," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 0, no. 0 (December 16, 2021): 1–25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2021.2016091>; U.S. State Department, "Integrated Country Study: Somalia"; William Patterson, "Islamic Radicalization in Kenya," National Defense University Press, July 1, 2015, <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/607564/islamic-radicalization-in-kenya/>.

²³⁶ Jeremy Lind, Patrick Mutahi, and Marjoke Oosterom, "'Killing a Mosquito with a Hammer': Al-Shabaab Violence and State Security Responses in Kenya," *Peacebuilding* 5, no. 2 (May 4, 2017): 118–35, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2016.1277010>; Amnesty International, "Kenya: Somalis Scapegoated in Counter-Terror Crackdown," Amnesty International, May 23, 2014, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2014/05/kenya-somalis-scapegoated-counter-terror-crackdown/>.

²³⁷ Ryan Cummings, "Al-Shabaab and the Exploitation of Kenya's Religious Divide," *IPI Global Observatory* (blog), December 3, 2014, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2014/12/al-shabaab-exploitation-kenya-religious-divide/>; Catherine Wyatt, "The Cry of Kenyan-Somalis: Is Anyone Listening?," accessed July 10, 2022, http://www.hiiraan.com/op4/2015/aug/100947/the_cry_of_kenyan_somalis_is_anyone_listening.aspx; International Crisis Group, "Kenyan Somali Islamist Radicalisation."

1. Corruption of Government and Security Forces

Corruption within the Kenyan government has posed a major threat in combating al-Shabaab. Kenya's invasion of Somalia in 2011 sparked a terror surge within the country.²³⁸ In the midst of increased domestic terrorism, it has been reported that "millions of dollars were diverted from the security budget to a slush fund controlled by officials of the Internal Security Ministry."²³⁹ In April 2015, al-Shabaab was responsible for one of the deadliest attacks within Kenya in Garissa University College which killed 147 people.²⁴⁰ Kenya in general is known for its endemic corruption; however, the attack in 2015 exploited the fact that corruption had seeped into its security services, further alienating trust between the people and its institutions in the fight against domestic terrorism and extremism. Meservey states that the death toll at Garissa University should have been lower, based on the fact that "elite Nairobi-based counterterror commandos" took close to eleven hours to arrive.²⁴¹ Meservey notes that according to the *Daily Nation*, one of Kenya's prominent newspapers, the delayed arrival "was due in part to the delay of a police plane that was supposed to fly the commandos, and was instead transporting relatives of a high-ranking police official on an unauthorized flight."²⁴²

However, Kenya's security services have not only been negatively impacted by the corrupt system but have also greatly contributed to the endemic corrupt system. Meservey states that in al-Shabaab's 2013 attack on Nairobi's Westgate Mall, "Kenyan soldiers

²³⁸ Daniel Branch, "Why Kenya Invaded Somalia," November 8, 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/africa/2011-11-15/why-kenya-invaded-somalia>; David Throup, "Kenya's Intervention in Somalia," February 16, 2012, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/kenya%E2%80%99s-intervention-somalia>.

²³⁹ Joshua Meservey, "The Cost of Kenyan Corruption," *Atlantic Council* (blog), May 29, 2015, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/the-cost-of-kenyan-corruption/>.

²⁴⁰ Meservey; BBC News, "Kenya Attack: 147 Dead in Garissa University Assault," April 3, 2015, sec. Africa, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-32169080>.

²⁴¹ Meservey, "The Cost of Kenyan Corruption."

²⁴² Meservey; Nation Team, "Private Mission Delayed Police Plane on Day of Garissa University Attack," July 2, 2020, <https://nation.africa/kenya/news/private-mission-delayed-police-plane-on-day-of-garissa-university-attack-1084594>.

laying siege to the attackers looted the mall of cash, electronics, and alcohol.”²⁴³ Kenyan security forces have not only showcased their inability to act in thwarting al-Shabaab’s influence, but they have also facilitated al-Shabaab in growing economically.

From an economic standpoint, al-Shabaab has been successful in exploiting the legal trade of charcoal and sugar. In early 2013, the Kenyan military liberated the southern Somali port of Kismayo, which is known for its robust charcoal exports to Somalia.²⁴⁴ The charcoal trade has played a fundamental role in financing al-Shabaab; as a result, the UN banned the trade of this commodity.²⁴⁵ In addition to benefitting from coal, sugar (which is heavily taxed in Kenya) has added to al-Shabaab’s funding opportunity through illegal means.²⁴⁶ However, the UN has stated “that the Kenyan military—in exchange for a cut of the port revenues—has allowed the business to continue and grow.”²⁴⁷ In addition to charcoal, reports have stated that senior Kenyan Defense Forces (KDF) were also involved in the illegal trade of sugar in collaboration with al-Shabaab.²⁴⁸ Allison provides the following insight on exactly how the KDF benefits from the illegal trade- “ships laden with sugar enter the port of Kismayo, and leave it with a cargo of coal. The KDF levies a US\$2 tax on every bag of sugar, while al-Shabaab collects US\$1050 per truck that departs the port. Each truck is taxed again on its way to through Somalia by the Jubaland

²⁴³ Meservey, “The Cost of Kenyan Corruption;” New York Daily News, “Kenya Mall Attack Video Shows Soldiers Looting Shops during Terror Attacks,” October 20, 2013, <https://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/security-footage-captures-kenya-soldiers-looting-mall-attack-article-1.1491163>.

²⁴⁴ Meservey, “The Cost of Kenyan Corruption;” Lutfi Mohammed and Robyn Dixon, “Kenya Attacks Islamist Militia in Kismayo, Somalia,” Los Angeles Times, September 28, 2012, <https://www.latimes.com/world/la-xpm-2012-sep-28-la-fg-kenya-somalia-fighting-20120929-story.html>.

²⁴⁵ Andrew Wasike, “Somalia’s Illicit Charcoal Trade Threatens Security, the Environment and Livelihoods DW 11.05.2018,” DW.COM, November 5, 2018, <https://www.dw.com/en/somalias-illicit-charcoal-trade-threatens-security-the-environment-and-livelihoods/a-43745333>.

²⁴⁶ Allison, “Think Again: Who Profits from Kenya’s War in Somalia?”

²⁴⁷ Meservey, “The Cost of Kenyan Corruption;” United Nations Security Council, “Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2111 (2013): Somalia,” October 13, 2014, https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2014/726.

²⁴⁸ Allison, “Think Again: Who Profits from Kenya’s War in Somalia?” ; The Economist, “The Kenyan Army Is Accused of Running a Sugar-Smuggling Racket with Somali Terrorists,” *The Economist*, November 23, 2015, <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2015/11/23/the-kenyan-army-is-accused-of-running-a-sugar-smuggling-racket-with-somali-terrorists>.

administration, and then again by other KDF elements as it crosses the Kenyan border.”²⁴⁹ The same procedure is done with charcoal but in reverse. Nevertheless, this illegal trade brings in at least \$50 million annually for Kenyan military officers, while al-Shabaab profits immensely through the charcoal trade, where profits are more than US\$100 million.²⁵⁰

In addition to economic gains, Meservey notes that al-Shabaab has received direct assistance from Kenyan security personnel. For example, it was noted that in 2013 that “two militants (al-Shabaab) bribed Kenyan border guards to escort them to the port city of Mombasa.”²⁵¹ The report further stated that “The two (militants) were later captures in the city driving a vehicle stuffed with automatic weapons, ammunition, and over 130 pounds of explosives.”²⁵²

2. Counterterrorism Efforts

Al-Shabaab’s increased activity within Kenya has in many ways forced Kenya to tighten its counterterrorism policies, which has led to intensified security operations in vulnerable areas. In doing so, Kenya’s counterterrorism measures have been criticized for disregarding legal boundaries, which have included indiscriminate repression against suspicious people and communities.²⁵³ In many cases the conduct of Kenyan counterterrorist groups have exacerbated frictions and widened socio-political divisions, which has led to locals joining militant groups in hopes of taking revenge against widespread repression, human rights violations, and targeted killings. As a result, widespread government initiatives to counter al-Shabaab such as Operation Linda Nchi, have had a detrimental effect on counterterrorism.

²⁴⁹ Allison, “Think Again: Who Profits from Kenya’s War in Somalia?”

²⁵⁰ Allison; Hiiraan Online, “Author of Book on Dadaab Says Shabaab Has No Base in Refugee Camps,” January 9, 2016, http://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2016/jan/103496/author_of_book_on_dadaab_says_shabaab_has_no_base_in_refugee_camps.aspx.

²⁵¹ Meservey, “The Cost of Kenyan Corruption.”

²⁵² Meservey.

²⁵³ Papale, “Fuelling the Fire,” 1.

Indiscriminate repression in Kenya over time has fueled the local targeted population to mobilize towards terrorism. Papale underscores, “Generating a sense of collective insecurity, resentment, and alienation, encounters with repressive security authorities have fueled the propensity of aggrieved communities in Kenya to rebel against the state, increasing al-Shabaab’s appeal on the ground.”²⁵⁴ Kenya’s counterterrorism policies, in the past decade, have led to amplified violent interaction between state institutions and Muslim communities, to include people of Somali ethnicity. Papale states that disputes between Kenyan authorities and minority communities can be traced back to the “1963-67 ‘Shifita War,’ which saw Kenyan forces intervening against local ethnic Somali communities opposing the configuration of national borders and claiming annexation to Somalia.”²⁵⁵ However, collective punishment and violence remained prevalent in the 1980s. This behavior cemented fractures and ultimately portrayed ethnic Somalis as hostile. Following the 2011 launch of Operation Linda Nchi by the Kenyan military in Somalia, which proceeded after the intensification of al-Shabaab’s attacks, had accelerated the impact of historical frictions and ultimately fueling even more mistrust towards ethnic Somalis.²⁵⁶

Kenya’s strategy to thwart attacks perpetrated by al-Shabaab has involved counterterrorism measures such as Usalama Watch, which has backfired. Kenya’s Muslim and Somali leadership strongly criticized the objectives and execution of the Usalama Watch based on reports that police officers were using extortion. Lind, Mutahi, and Oosterom state that “a fact-finding mission by the Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA) found that police personnel failed to observe human rights protections

²⁵⁴ Papale, 3.

²⁵⁵ Papale, 3; Müturi Njeri, “Kenya That Was Never Kenyan: The Shifita War & The North Eastern Kenya,” *Medium* (blog), April 13, 2015, <https://medium.com/@muturi/kenya-that-was-never-kenyan-the-shifita-war-the-north-eastern-kenya-e7fc3dd31865>; Piombo and Englebert, “The War on Terror in Context,” 13.

²⁵⁶ Papale, “Fuelling the Fire,” 3. Daniel Bekele, “Kenya: Human Rights Concerns of Operation ‘Linda Nchi,’” *Human Rights Watch* (blog), November 18, 2011, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2011/11/18/kenya-human-rights-concerns-operation-linda-nchi>; Piombo and Englebert, “The War on Terror in Context,” 8.

and demanded bribes from detainees.”²⁵⁷ Additionally, extensive, and undefined curfews were also forced, which resulted in residents getting harassed if they traveled or even did not carry identity cards issued by the government. A comment made by one resident, “Many of the people who are arrested and cannot pay are taken into custody are accused of having ties with the Al-Shabaab.”²⁵⁸

Kenya’s government has not been successful in implementing the necessary protection required for vulnerable communities. State security programs such as Usalama Watch, which included the deployment of armed forces as well as the implementation of extended curfews were formed on the belief that Somalis were a threat to Kenya’s security. In addition to extortion and bribery, “Kenya’s security forces have been accused of being behind a number of assassinations and disappearances of ordinary Muslims (Kenyan and Somali), businessmen, traders, clerics, and activists.”²⁵⁹ Lind, Mutahi, and Oosterom underline, “The state funded Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) has accused security agencies of being behind the extrajudicial killings of 25 people and enforced disappearances of 81 during counterterrorism operations.”²⁶⁰ Additionally, it has been documented by Human Rights Watch that there were “at least 34 cases of disappearances between 2014–2016 in Nairobi and north-east Kenya, alleging the involvement of the Anti-Terrorism Policing Unit (ATPU) and KDF.”²⁶¹ The inconclusive investigations and the deniability of the government has led to intensified mistrust and has driven tensions between security institutions and marginalized communities. Furthermore, little to no accountability has led to the conclusion, “security personnel resort to extrajudicial killings of suspects due to failure on their part to gather evidence and secure witnesses to testify in court.”²⁶²

²⁵⁷ Lind, Mutahi, and Oosterom, “Killing a Mosquito with a Hammer,” 130.

²⁵⁸ Lind, Mutahi, and Oosterom, 130.

²⁵⁹ Lind, Mutahi, and Oosterom, 130; Frank Nyakairu, “U.N. Investigator Probes Kenyan Arbitrary Killings,” *Reuters*, February 16, 2009, sec. World News, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-kenya-killings-idUKTRE51F1R020090216>.

²⁶⁰ Lind, Mutahi, and Oosterom, “Killing a Mosquito with a Hammer,” 130.

²⁶¹ Lind, Mutahi, and Oosterom, 131.

²⁶² Lind, Mutahi, and Oosterom, 131; Piombo and Englebert, “The War on Terror in Context,” 8.

In an effort to assist ex al-Shabaab members, Kenya's short-sighted and poorly constructed policies failed. In addition to creating policies to directly combat terrorism, the Kenyan government in April 2015 made a statement which offered amnesty to Kenyan youth who had either been recruited or joined al-Shabaab willingly.²⁶³ Kamau states, "The youth were expected to report within ten days to county commissioners in Nairobi, Mombasa, and Garissa to receive appropriate reintegration support."²⁶⁴ However, there were consequences to those who chose to not take the amnesty offer, this offer also included parents and guardians who failed to report youth who joined terrorist groups.²⁶⁵ However, the program encountered several challenges that weakened its viability. First, there was a lack of legislation and policy which would enable support to the government's amnesty declaration.²⁶⁶ As a result, the various stakeholders, to include several government departments in charge of implementing the plan, did not take the policy nor the execution seriously. Additionally, because there were no policies in place, sufficient resources were nonexistent in assisting those who came forward in hopes of securing a safe transition to a normal life.²⁶⁷

The next challenge was that the returnees feared retaliation from security institutions as well as from al-Shabaab.²⁶⁸ Kamau stipulates, "Some high-ranking government officials were against the amnesty programme [sic] since they associated the

²⁶³ Juliet Wambui Kamau, "Is Counter-Terrorism Counterproductive? A Case Study of Kenya's Response to Terrorism, 1998–2020," *South African Journal of International Affairs* 28, no. 2 (April 3, 2021): 218, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461.2021.1924252>; Richard Downie, "Kenya's Struggling Amnesty Experiment: The Policy Challenge of Rehabilitating Former Terrorists," Center for Strategic and International Studies, October 26, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/kenyas-struggling-amnesty-experiment-policy-challenge-rehabilitating-former-terrorists>; Crisis Group, "Al-Shabaab's Kenyan Ambitions," Crisis Group, April 15, 2015, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/kenya/al-shabaab-s-kenyan-ambitions>.

²⁶⁴ Kamau, "Is Counter-Terrorism Counterproductive?," 218.

²⁶⁵ Kamau, 218; Cyrus Ombati, "Government Extends Amnesty for Radicalised Youth," *The Standard*, 2014, <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/counties/article/2000159622/government-extends-amnesty-for-radicalised-youth>.

²⁶⁶ Kamau, "Is Counter-Terrorism Counterproductive?," 219; Downie, "Kenya's Struggling Amnesty Experiment."

²⁶⁷ Kamau, "Is Counter-Terrorism Counterproductive?," 219.

²⁶⁸ Kamau, 219; Mohammed Yusuf, "How Kenya's al-Shabab Amnesty Is a Loaded Gun," *The New Humanitarian*, August 31, 2016, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/2016/08/31/how-kenya-s-al-shabab-amnesty-loaded-gun>.

‘returnees’ with terror attacks that had caused loss of life and damage to Kenya’s national pride, with negative implications for the economy.”²⁶⁹ Lastly, al-Shabaab has had a reputation of sending assassins to dispose of defectors who undermined the group’s activities as well as those who were likely to divulge secrets that would destabilize operations.²⁷⁰ As a result, Kamau states that “many ‘returnees’ preferred to not register themselves with government agencies and instead decided to stay underground.”²⁷¹

Another dynamic which undermined the credibility of the amnesty program was the mutual distrust that had become exacerbated between the Kenyan government and civil society organizations (CSO) that had been working with the returnees.²⁷² For example, “CSOs such as Haki Africa had opted to help individuals return, de-radicalize and reintegrate back into society without the knowledge of the government.”²⁷³ Consequently, the government labeled such CSOs as “facilitators of terrorism and suspended their operating licenses as well as froze their bank accounts.”²⁷⁴ Due to the challenging and ineffective collaboration between the state and CSOs, ex al-Shabaab members who turn themselves in were targeted for security operations, to include posting their pictures on “Wanted” signs. In addition to a lack of collaboration, CSOs did not maintain strong monitoring mechanisms, which exacerbated the ability to distinguish between returnees and from those returning to execute terrorist operations.²⁷⁵ The last and arguably most important, is that the amnesty program was not successful in providing youth with adequate financial support, which left returnees vulnerable to engage in criminal activities or even to re-join the militant group.²⁷⁶

²⁶⁹ Kamau, “Is Counter-Terrorism Counterproductive?,” 219.

²⁷⁰ Kamau, 219.

²⁷¹ Kamau, 219; Stephen Oduor, “The Dilemma Facing Terror Returnees,” *Nation*, August 24, 2020, <https://nation.africa/kenya/nation-prime/terrorism-festus-kisinga-returnees-kenya-1924148>.

²⁷² Downie, “Kenya’s Struggling Amnesty Experiment.”

²⁷³ Kamau, “Is Counter-Terrorism Counterproductive?,” 219; Tianna Hutchins, “Kenya,” *2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Kenya* (blog), March 30, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/kenya/>.

²⁷⁴ Kamau, “Is Counter-Terrorism Counterproductive?,” 219.

²⁷⁵ Kamau, 219.

²⁷⁶ Kamau, 219.

3. Socio-Economic Marginalization

Al-Shabaab's shift to successfully recruit in Kenya may be understood through a socio-economic lens. In an effort to keep its movement alive and robust, al-Shabaab has shifted its recruitment tactics to focusing on "aggrieved sub-clans and minority groups."²⁷⁷ As a result, the militant group's recruitment strategy in Kenya has concentrated its efforts on the "victimization narrative," where the goal is to appeal to communities where Islam and Muslims are often portrayed as victims.²⁷⁸ In addition to appealing to Muslims, al-Shabaab has also engaged with Somali Kenyans, many who have the sentiment of being treated as second-class citizens, this also includes "Swahili coastal Muslims who feel subjugated by 'up-country' Kenyan Christians."²⁷⁹

The scrutiny faced by Muslims in Kenya has created an opening for al-Shabaab to exploit these grievances. Consequently, "Salafi-Wahhabi-based Islamism" has made its way into the Kenyan region, which has created an opening for al-Shabaab's potential recruitment pool.²⁸⁰ Kfir notes, "The importance of this brand of Islamism, especially when it is infused with the Al Qaeda ideology is that it uses grievance as a recruitment tool."²⁸¹ As a result, militant leaders have the ability to highlight how "un-Islamic" local and state leaders behave; this rhetoric then contributes to the message claiming that the

²⁷⁷ Ken Menkhaus, "Al-Shabab's Capabilities Post-Westgate," *Combating Terrorism Center at Westpoint* 7, no. 2 (February 2014): 6; Isaac Kfir, "Al-Shabaab , Social Identity Group, Human (In)Security, and Counterterrorism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 40, no. 9 (September 2, 2017): 779, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2016.1236569>.

²⁷⁸ Kfir, "Al-Shabaab , Social Identity Group, Human (In)Security, and Counterterrorism," 778; David M. Anderson and Jacob McKnight, "Understanding Al-Shabaab: Clan, Islam and Insurgency in Kenya," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 9, no. 3 (July 3, 2015): 536–57, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2015.1082254>.

²⁷⁹ Kfir, "Al-Shabaab , Social Identity Group, Human (In)Security, and Counterterrorism," 778. Menkhaus, "Al-Shabab's Capabilities Post-Westgate," 6; Piombo and Englebert, "The War on Terror in Context," 13.

²⁸⁰ Kfir, "Al-Shabaab , Social Identity Group, Human (In)Security, and Counterterrorism," 778; International Crisis Group, "Exploiting Disorder: Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State," March 14, 2016, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/exploiting-disorder-al-qaeda-and-islamic-state>.

²⁸¹ Prebble Ramswell, "The Utilization and Leveraging of Grievance as a Recruitment Tool and Justification for Terroristic Acts Committed by Islamic Extremists | Small Wars Journal," April 30, 2019, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/the-utilization-and-leveraging-of-grievance-as-a-recruitment-tool-and-justification-for-ter>; Kfir, "Al-Shabaab , Social Identity Group, Human (In)Security, and Counterterrorism," 778.

hardships faced by Muslims in Kenya have stemmed from Western values, as well as the corruption of the *umma*.²⁸²

However, the discrimination faced by Kenya's Muslims and the Kenyan Somali community has been present since country's independence, predominantly in the North Eastern Province.²⁸³ According to the *International Crisis Group*, the North Eastern region is "the worst victim of unequal development," which has been attributed to various factors to include: repression, chronic poverty, poor infrastructure, and lack of basic services.²⁸⁴ In addition, the Kenyan government has maintained a monopoly on citizenship, which means that 60% of Somali residents who live in the North Eastern Province do not have identification cards.²⁸⁵ As a result, Somali Kenyans without these identification cards makes the majority of the ethnic population vulnerable to harassment and punishment by local security forces, especially when questioned on their alliance to al-Shabaab.

While it is challenging, through a qualitative and quantitative analysis, to assess precisely how much support al-Shabaab has within the marginalized communities in Kenya, there is evidence that the discriminatory practices used by the Kenyan government may have facilitated the group's recruitment.²⁸⁶ Predominantly, disparities in educational opportunities and unemployment have opened a window of opportunity for al-Shabaab to prey on the marginalized, particularly the youth. Additionally, the highest levels of unemployment from 2005 to 2006 were in three predominantly Muslim concentrated regions, North East Province, Nairobi, and Coast Province.²⁸⁷ Patterson further states, "economic development in the tourism industry, particularly in Coast Province, has

²⁸² Kfir, "*Al-Shabaab* , Social Identity Group, Human (In)Security, and Counterterrorism," 778.

²⁸³ International Crisis Group, "Kenyan Somali Islamist Radicalisation;" Kfir, "*Al-Shabaab* , Social Identity Group, Human (In)Security, and Counterterrorism," 778.

²⁸⁴ Wyatt, "The Cry of Kenyan-Somalis;" International Crisis Group, "Kenyan Somali Islamist Radicalisation."

²⁸⁵ Wyatt, "The Cry of Kenyan-Somalis."

²⁸⁶ Cummings, "Al-Shabaab and the Exploitation of Kenya's Religious Divide;" Anneli Botha, "Recruitment to Al-Shabaab and the Mombasa Republican Council," *Institute for Security Studies*, no. ISS Paper 265 (September 2014): 1.

²⁸⁷ Patterson, "Islamic Radicalization in Kenya."

generally advanced without input from the local Muslims population, and has largely excluded them from its benefits.”²⁸⁸ A lack of educational opportunities, to include little to no access to government-run schools, have forced many Muslim families to turn to madrassas for support.²⁸⁹ In conjunction, from a political standpoint, Botha’s finding emphasizes “that many Muslim youths joined extremist groups as a reaction to the Kenyan government’s collective punishment or assassination of their religious leaders.”²⁹⁰

C. UGANDA

Compared to Kenya and Somalia, Uganda has not experienced the same levels of atrocities committed by al-Shabaab. As a result, less data and analysis has been written to exemplify al-Shabaab’s strength and influence within the nation. However, in efforts to stall al-Shabaab, there has been considerable overlap between Uganda’s corruption of its government and security forces and its counterterrorism policies. Units such as the Joint Anti-Terrorism Task Force (JATT) have committed inhumane practices against citizens in pursuit of counterintelligence.²⁹¹ In addition to corrupt practices, the government has published vague counterterrorism policies while also using counterterrorism units to oppress political oppositions. Both practices have inherently detracted from the main purpose of counterterrorism.²⁹² From a socio-economic perspective, the incongruence between the Muslim and Christian communities has created tension between the dominant Christian government and the Muslim community.²⁹³

²⁸⁸ Patterson.

²⁸⁹ Patterson; Halima Athumani, “Are Madrassas in Africa Educating or Indoctrinating?,” *The World from PRX*, November 5, 2014, <https://theworld.org/stories/2014-11-05/madrassas-africa-educating-or-indoctrinating>.

²⁹⁰ Botha, “East Africa.”

²⁹¹ Oxtoby, “Terrorism and Governance in South Africa and Eastern Africa.”

²⁹² Wanda Ramsey, “Uganda,” *United States Department of State* (blog), accessed July 6, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2020/uganda/>; Thomas Dyrenforth, “Countering Violent Extremism in Nigeria and Uganda,” 2018, 26; Florence Selnes, “Anti-terrorism regulation and the media in Uganda,” *Verfassungsblog* (blog), accessed July 6, 2022, <https://verfassungsblog.de/os4-uganda/>.

²⁹³ Tianna Hutchins, “Uganda,” *United States Department of State* (blog), accessed July 11, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/uganda/>.

1. Corruption of Government and Security Forces

Ugandan citizens are also no stranger to a government and its security forces for exhibiting violence, corruption, and restrictions on civil liberties, which have created an environment suitable for instability and extremism.²⁹⁴ One such entity which has committed serious human rights abuses is the Joint Anti-Terrorism Task Force (JATT).²⁹⁵ According to a report by *Human Rights Watch*, abuses by the JATT include “routine use of torture, prolonged incommunicado and illegal detention, and in some instances, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings.”²⁹⁶ The group’s operations have a primary focus on arrests and finding individuals alleged to have an affiliation with al-Shabaab. As a result, the JATT led the investigations of the Kampala bombings in July 2010, which included the detainee of individuals who were never charged with involvement in the bombing.²⁹⁷

2. Counterterrorism Efforts

The 2010 Kampala bombings executed by al-Shabaab elucidated the shortcomings of local intelligence units to detect and follow through on government warnings. A few months prior to the July 2010 attacks, the Ugandan government had disseminated flyers in Kampala to warn citizens of an imminent terrorist attack.²⁹⁸ However, James states “it appeared that the security and the public in general somehow relaxed their vigilance leading to the terrorist’s exploitation of the security gaps to accomplish their mission.”²⁹⁹ Additionally, al-Shabaab’s top leader at the time had warned via audio message that

²⁹⁴ Thomas Dyrenforth, “Countering Violent Extremism in Nigeria and Uganda: A Comparative Case Study,” *THE INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS REVIEW*, February 2015, <https://www.iar-gwu.org/print-archive/i91vst8e500yuleqf29n5jl6jhbez>.

²⁹⁵ Oxtoby, “Terrorism and Governance in South Africa and Eastern Africa,” 589.

²⁹⁶ Oxtoby, “Terrorism and Governance in South Africa and Eastern Africa,” 589; Human Rights Watch, “UPR Submission Uganda,” 1.

²⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch, “UPR Submission Uganda,” 2.

²⁹⁸ Kateete James, “STATE CAPACITY AND COUNTER-TERRORISM MEASURES IN UGANDA,” March 2022, 20. Xan Rice, “Uganda Bomb Blasts Kill at Least 74,” *The Guardian*, July 12, 2010, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jul/12/uganda-kampala-bombs-explosions-attacks>.

²⁹⁹ James, “STATE CAPACITY AND COUNTER-TERRORISM MEASURES IN UGANDA,” 20; Rice, “Uganda Bomb Blasts Kill at Least 74.”

Uganda would face retaliation in Uganda's role in providing troops to Somalia in 2007 as part of AMISOM.³⁰⁰ Given the warning via audio message, this should have heightened security measures, especially during a highly anticipated event such as the world cup.

3. Socio-Economic Marginalization

While the marginalization of the Muslim community is prevalent, there is no evidence to showcase al-Shabaab's efforts to capitalize off this situation. However, based on case studies within Somalia and Kenya, marginalization of specific communities has often led to citizens joining militant groups to seek revenge against the government and security forces. Areas where this may develop are through under-representation of Muslims in Uganda's government and through unequal educational opportunities. As of 2020, Muslims constitute fourteen percent of the population, while the largest Christian group, Roman Catholic is thirty-nine percent, with the majority of government personnel practicing the Christian faith.³⁰¹ Consequently, the government has not been proactive in addressing and eradicating the unequal educational system. As a result, it has been noted by several CSOs and the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council (UMSC) that there is an unquestionable link between educational marginalization and access to jobs for the Muslim community.³⁰² Based on previous case studies within Somalia and Kenya, this palpable disparity may enable al-Shabaab to easily exploit the marginalized.³⁰³

D. CONCLUSION

Al-Shabaab's notable presence, specifically within Somalia and Kenya, has demonstrated its ability to be relentless in its pursuit to expand its influence. The three factors analyzed throughout this chapter, corruption, counterterrorism, and socio-economic

³⁰⁰ James, "STATE CAPACITY AND COUNTER-TERRORISM MEASURES IN UGANDA," 21; France 24, "Somalia's Al Shabaab Claim Responsibility for Kampala Bombings."

³⁰¹ Hutchins, "Uganda." Life and Peace Institute, "The Question of Marginalisation and Vulnerability to Violent Extremism in Uganda" 1, no. 2 (September 2020): 6.

³⁰² Life and Peace Institute, "The Question of Marginalisation and Vulnerability to Violent Extremism in Uganda," 6; Nabukenya Aminah, "Be Fair to Muslims – UMSC Tells Government," October 25, 2018, <https://nilepost.co.ug/2018/10/25/be-fair-to-muslims-umsc-tells-government/>.

³⁰³ Life and Peace Institute, "The Question of Marginalisation and Vulnerability to Violent Extremism in Uganda," 7.

marginalization, are in many ways intertwined. However, corruption stands out as the connective tissue.

Somalia, the epicenter of al-Shabaab, has exemplified challenges to eradicate the militant group due to unstable and corrupt government and security institutions. In comparison to Kenya, Somalia presents an arguably more complex problem set due to decades of unstable and weak governance. Unlike Kenya, Somali forces are not paid consistently and generally do not have other means to earn a living. As a result, al-Shabaab has capitalized off this by offering money in exchange for information. Corruption within Kenyan security forces has mainly stemmed from their ability to exploit the country's rich economic resources in charcoal and sugar in return for payments from al-Shabaab. While my research did not indicate Kenyan forces are underpaid, the ability for soldiers to partake in additional income presents al-Shabaab with a way "in." However, all three nations have demonstrated that corruption has entailed human rights abuses of security forces on citizens. As a result, distrust of government and security forces is relatively high.

Corruption of government institutions has seeped into the inability for countries to successfully execute counterterrorist and counterintelligence operations. In comparison to Uganda and Somalia, Kenya has implemented various counterterrorist programs, to include the re-integration of ex al-Shabaab members. Its ability to implement more programs may be due to larger pots of money. Additionally, Kenya arguably plays a more vital role on the political-economic stage, which may initiate its desire to exemplify its serious and sustained role in eradicating al-Shabaab. However, these programs have backfired due to inconsistent policies, while also conducting indiscriminate killings and torture of marginalized communities. Somalia's and Uganda's counterterrorism units has mainly been misused by their governments in maintaining political power. Somalia's weak governance and Uganda's "strong man" politics has essentially created a diversion in which the focus has been detracted from eradicating al-Shabaab. This mismanagement has and may continue to present as an opportunity for al-Shabaab to grow exponentially.

Marginalization within these three countries is very distinct given the social and economic differences. However, al-Shabaab has used the inhumane treatment of the marginalized to recruit. Somalia's intricate clan dynamics have enabled al-Shabaab to

utilize clan disputes to its advantage, whether it is through forced inter-clan marriages or recruitment from less powerful clans. The narrative changes in Kenya and Uganda. In Kenya, discrimination by the government has historically been against Somali Kenyans and the Muslim communities. Uganda presents the same religious challenges but between the Muslim and Christian communities. However, regardless of the group being marginalized, security forces have taken advantage of the situation, further driving a wedge between government and its people.

While the three domestic factors mentioned have contributed irrefutably to al-Shabaab's growing presence and evolution, the group's influence as a transnational threat has enabled its domestic presence. Proximity to the epicenter, Somalia, has played a significant role in the strength of al-Shabaab's presence, as depicted within Kenya and Uganda. Consequently, to further understand how al-Shabaab has grown within these states, it is necessary to analyze the transnational dynamics that have played a vital role in the group's evolution.

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IV. TRANSNATIONAL DRIVERS OF AL-SHABAAB'S EVOLUTION

While al-Shabaab has evolved significantly from a domestic perspective, the group has also been able to leverage transnational factors to further impact the security situation in the Horn of Africa. The group's evolution in using social media and the web to collect donations has enabled its militants to cater to Western audiences.³⁰⁴ To gain prominence on the global stage, al-Shabaab's merger with al-Qaeda has provided the group with several fortuitous gains, to include affiliation and funding.³⁰⁵ However, the merger has had negative implications with local Somalis, further driving a wedge between citizens and the militant group.³⁰⁶ Porous borders between Somalia and Kenya have facilitated the transport of arms, weapons, people, while also exploiting marginalized communities.³⁰⁷ Lastly, al-Shabaab has taken advantage of the challenges faced by Western backed organizations, enabling the militant group to execute deadly attacks.³⁰⁸

Al-Shabaab's aptitude to operate at the transnational level is evidence of its ability to adapt to best position themselves as a durable disruptor to regional and global security.

³⁰⁴ Christopher Anzalone, "Addressing the Enemy: Al-Shabaab's PYSOPS Media Warfare," *Combating Terrorism Center at Westpoint* 13, no. 3 (March 2020): 41; Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, Shiraz Maher, and James Sheehan, "Lights, Camera, Jihad: Al-Shabaab's Western Media Strategy," *International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence*, 2012, 52; Gabriel Weimann and Asia Vellante, "The Dead Drops of Online Terrorism," *Terrorism Research Initiative* 15, no. 4 (2022): 16.

³⁰⁵ Matthew J. Thomas, "Exposing and Exploiting Weaknesses in the Merger of Al-Qaeda and Al-Shabaab," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 24, no. 3 (July 2013): 413–35, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2013.802611>; Thomas Joscelyn, "Al Qaeda's Unsurprising Merger," *Washington Examiner*, February 10, 2012, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/weekly-standard/al-qaedas-unsurprising-merger>.

³⁰⁶ Matt Bryden, "The Reinvention of Al-Shabaab: A Strategy of Choice or Necessity?," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, A Report for the CSIS Africa Program, February 2014, 20; Thomas, "Exposing and Exploiting Weaknesses in the Merger of Al-Qaeda and Al-Shabaab."

³⁰⁷ Godfrey Buluma, "Al-Shabaab: The Threat to Kenya and the Horn of Africa:" (Fort Belvoir, VA: Defense Technical Information Center, March 1, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.21236/ADA589056>; Nima Elbagir, "The 'back Door' to Kenya: Security Threat from Porous Somali Border," *CNN*, July 24, 2015, <https://www.cnn.com/2015/07/24/africa/kenya-back-door-porous-border-security-threat/index.html>.

³⁰⁸ Paul D Williams, "AMISOM under Review," *The RUSI Journal* 161, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 40–49, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2016.1152120>; Dawit Yohannes Wondemagegnehu and Daniel Gebreegziabher Kebede, "AMISOM: Charting a New Course for African Union Peace Missions," *African Security Review* 26, no. 2 (April 3, 2017): 199–219, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2017.1297583>.

This analysis revealed three main take aways. First, within the transnational space, al-Shabaab has been able to operate on two separate planes, globally and regionally. While there are some overlaps amongst these planes, they are operating somewhat independently. Second, corruption within the government and security forces have added to the instability along the Kenya-Somalia border, enabling al-Shabaab to operate somewhat seamlessly. Corruption within certain elements of AMISOM have facilitated al-Shabaab to execute attacks. Lastly, this chapter uncovered the inconsistent ideologies that exist within the militant group, which may potentially leave al-Shabaab vulnerable.

A. GLOBAL DYNAMICS

Al-Shabaab has been successful in growing on the global stage through the use of social media and various online platforms to collect money through false fundraising. The group has understood that in order to attract the Western audience, it had to adapt to utilizing English as well as other forms of propaganda to recruit sympathizers. The second prominent way in which the militant group has gained influence was its merger with al-Qaeda. This was crucial in that it allowed al-Shabaab to build a wider following while also receiving external financial and material support. However, the merger was not supported by local Somalis and has created deeper tensions and mistrust with al-Shabaab. Nevertheless, this dynamic has pushed al-Shabaab towards a more extreme practice of jihad.

1. Leveraging Web and Social Media

Al-Shabaab's ability to adapt to using telecommunications technology has provided the group with the skill set to become more versatile, while also increasing its outreach transnationally. From applications such as Twitter to posting YouTube recruitment videos, its keenness to spread its message has built a strong following. Meleagrou-Hitchens, Maher, and Sheehan note that "At its core, al-Shabaab has a sophisticated and diverse communications strategy aimed at influencing Muslims living in the West."³⁰⁹ The

³⁰⁹ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Maher, and Sheehan, "Lights, Camera, Jihad: Al-Shabaab's Western Media Strategy," 2.

Combating Terrorism Center at West Point has documented al-Shabaab's ability to target both enemy soldiers within the region as well as those in the West as part of their psychological operations (PSYOPS).³¹⁰ As a result, the group's message has been able to resonate with not only those living in the Horn of Africa but with members of the Somali diaspora through culturally relevant material. Their message has revolved around positioning Somalia as "a key battleground in the struggle between Islam and the West."³¹¹ From a financial perspective, the militant group has been successful at navigating online transactions with the help of the diaspora community, whether it is through the creation of bogus aid organizations or relying on al-Qaeda's online support and members.³¹²

a. Online Recruitment and Social Media

To expand al-Shabaab's message and appeal to the masses, the group has pursued the alternative media strategy of producing videos in English as well as posting transcriptions in English.³¹³ The group's media group, al-Kata'ib, employs the use of modern and professional production in its jihadist videos. The purpose of these videos is "to present the group's version of events, motivate recruits and establish an alternative narrative."³¹⁴ For example, a video that focused on a battle between al-Shabaab and Burundian AMISOM soldiers was released in November 2011 titled "The Burundian Bloodbath: Battle of Daynile," which took place in the Daynile district of Somalia.³¹⁵ While mainstream media portrayed al-Shabaab's struggle to control the area, al-Kataid

³¹⁰ Anzalone, "Addressing the Enemy: Al-Shabaab's PSYOPS Media Warfare," 30.

³¹¹ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Maher, and Sheehan, "Lights, Camera, Jihad: Al-Shabaab's Western Media Strategy," 2.

³¹² Adlini Ilma Ghaisany Sjah, "Tracing Al Shabaab's Decision to Cooperate with Al Qaeda in Somalia (2008)," *Contemporary Voices: St Andrews Journal of International Relations* 5, no. 1 (February 10, 2014): 48, <https://doi.org/10.15664/jtr.827>; U.S. News & World Report, "Dutch Woman Convicted in U.S. of Al-Shabab Fundraising."

³¹³ Weimann and Vellante, "The Dead Drops of Online Terrorism," 45; Meleagrou-Hitchens, Maher, and Sheehan, "Lights, Camera, Jihad: Al-Shabaab's Western Media Strategy," 29.

³¹⁴ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Maher, and Sheehan, "Lights, Camera, Jihad: Al-Shabaab's Western Media Strategy," 29.

³¹⁵ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Maher, and Sheehan, 29.

depicted it as “a massacre of the ‘African Crusaders and their Western masters.’”³¹⁶ The documentary also placed an emphasis on Western intervention by showing clothing tags with “Made in France” which were found on armored vests of Burundian soldiers.³¹⁷

In addition to the portrayal of negative Western intervention, al-Shabaab has created media content to directly appeal to the foreign audience. Wise notes that, “Between 2006 and 2008, al-Shabaab recruited almost entirely from local Somali populations who volunteered to fight the Ethiopians.”³¹⁸ However by 2008, the group’s al Kata’ib Foundation started to create a series of videos to include, “Ambush at Barsdale,” “At Your Service, Oh Osama,” and “No Peace Without Islam” to expand its appeal to a foreign audience.³¹⁹ In an attempt to appeal to Western youth, the video, “Ambush at Barsdale,” uses an English speaker with an American accent to rap on liberating Somalia instead of using Islamic chants to entice recruits.³²⁰ In “At Your Service, Oh Osama,” the 2009 video portrays a young Caucasian man wearing a bullet-proof vest leading an al-Shabaab unit.³²¹ The premise of this video may have been to advance the organization, increase its recruitment and funding.³²²

While al-Shabaab has gained foreign appeal and supporters from using anonymous English speakers in its campaign videos, the group has also greatly benefited from the

³¹⁶ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Maher, and Sheehan, 29; France 24, “Al Shabaab Militants Mount Deadly Attack on African Union Base in Somalia,” May 3, 2012, <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20120503-al-shabaab-militants-storm-african-union-base-in-somalia-killing-several>; “*The Brundian Bloodbath - Battle of Dayniile*”, 2011, http://archive.org/details/Dayniilebattle_somalia.

³¹⁷ “*The Brundian Bloodbath - Battle of Dayniile*”; Meleagrou-Hitchens, Maher, and Sheehan, “Lights, Camera, Jihad: Al-Shabaab’s Western Media Strategy,” act 29.

³¹⁸ Rob Wise, “Al-Shabaab,” AQAM Future Project Case Study Series (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, July 2011), 8.

³¹⁹ Wise, 8; Chris Harnisch, “Al Shabaab’s First ‘News’ Video: An Effort to Recruit Westerners and Expel Peacekeepers,” *Critical Threats*, August 5, 2010, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/al-shabaabs-first-news-video-an-effort-to-recruit-westerners-and-expel-peacekeepers>; Christopher Harnisch, “The Terror Threat From Somalia- The Internationalization of Al-Shabaab,” *Critical Threats Project* (American Enterprise Institute, February 12, 2010), 30.

³²⁰ Christopher Harnisch, “The Terror Threat From Somalia- The Internationalization of Al-Shabaab,” *Critical Threats Project* (American Enterprise Institute, February 12, 2010), 30.

³²¹ Harnisch, 30.

³²² Charlie Szrom, “Does Al Qaeda Threaten the World Cup? | AEI,” *American Enterprise Institute - AEI* (blog), June 7, 2010, <https://www.aei.org/articles/does-al-qaeda-threaten-the-world-cup/>.

presence of its English-language spokesperson Omar Hammami, also referred to as “Abu Mansour al-Amriki.”³²³ Hammami, a native of Alabama, emerged as an al-Shabaab militant in 2007 and was recognized for his fluency in Arabic and English as well as being tech savvy, enabling the group to utilize his skills to appeal to potential Western recruits.³²⁴ Al-Shabaab drew attention to Hammami by publishing footage of him giving instructions to Somali jihadists before an ambush as a way to showcase that foreign fighters are also capable of holding leadership positions within the group.³²⁵ Additionally, in a further effort to appeal to the young crowd, his videos were often of him calling on his fellow Muslims to join by singing jihadi rap songs.³²⁶ This shift in recruitment tactics alarmed counterterrorism experts who worried that his rap videos would in fact attract more recruits to Somalia.³²⁷

In an effort to appeal to the American public, in November 2019 al-Shabaab’s approach changed with an audiovisual message.³²⁸ Noting an extreme rise of American mass shooting and several years of horrific wildfires in California, al-Shabaab’s emir, Ahmad “Abu Ubayada” Umar, “released an audiovisual message that included a direct message to the American people that played off of domestic economic, political, and

³²³ Wise, “Al-Shabaab,” 9.

³²⁴ Andrea Elliott, “The Jihadist Next Door,” *The New York Times*, January 27, 2010, sec. Magazine, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/31/magazine/31Jihadist-t.html>; Christopher Harnisch, “The Terror Threat From Somalia- The Internationalization of Al-Shabaab,” Critical Threats Project (American Enterprise Institute, February 12, 2010), 30.

³²⁵ Ken Menkhaus, “Al-Shabaab and Social Media: A Double-Edged Sword,” *Brown Journal of World Affairs* XX, no. II (Spring/Summer 2014): 314; Harnisch, 31.

³²⁶ J. Dana Stuster, “9 Disturbingly Good Jihadi Raps,” *Foreign Policy* (blog), April 29, 2013, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/04/29/9-disturbingly-good-jihadi-raps/>.

³²⁷ Menkhaus, “Al-Shabaab and Social Media: A Double-Edged Sword,” 314; Stuster, “9 Disturbingly Good Jihadi Raps.”

³²⁸ Anzalone, “Addressing the Enemy: Al-Shabaab’s PYSOPS Media Warfare,” 36.

security issues.”³²⁹ In September 2019, al-Shabaab attacked the Baledogle Air Base in Somalia.³³⁰ While this was a failed attack, it was also significant in that Umar utilized this event to send a message to the American people.³³¹ To justify the attacks, Umar argued that retaliation against American interests were necessary given U.S. intervention in Somalia and other Muslim-majority countries.³³² Umar’s message discussed the ramifications of American taxpayer money being used to engage in “military adventures against Muslims abroad” rather than being used to provide security against mass shootings or address unemployment and natural disasters.³³³

In further attempts to attract and recruit Westerners, al-Shabaab has also entered the world of Twitter to convey its narrative and ideology. This strategy is not new but follows that of al-Qaeda and its affiliates in their attempts “to control and manipulate the flow of information” regarding the group’s fortunes and successes, while also enticing a wider audience.³³⁴ Al-Shabaab posted its first tweet on 7 December 2011 under the handle “@HSMPress” with the following description: “Harakat Al-Shabaab Al Mujahideen is an Islamic movement that governs South & Cen. Somalia & part of the global struggle towards

³²⁹ Anzalone, 36; Brian Lada, AccuWeather meteorologist, and Staff Writer, “Devastating California Wildfires Predicted to Cost U.S. Economy \$85 Billion; Containment May Take Weeks,” accessed July 27, 2022, <https://www.accuweather.com/en/weather-news/devastating-california-wildfires-predicted-to-cost-us-economy-85-billion-containment-may-take-weeks/328717>. BBC News, “US Saw Highest Number of Mass Killings on Record in 2019, Database Reveals,” December 29, 2019, sec. U.S. & Canada, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-50936575>; IFI Monitoring, “Harakat al Shabaab al Mujahidin: We Bow to None Other Than Allah,” November 5, 2019, <https://monitoring.ifiadvisory.com/en/harakat-al-shabaab-al-mujahidin-we-bow-to-none-other-than-allah/>.

³³⁰ Harun Maruf, “Al-Shabab Attacks Airbase Used by U.S. Military,” VOA, accessed July 27, 2022, https://www.voanews.com/a/africa_al-shabab-attacks-airbase-used-us-military/6176706.html; BBC News, “Somalia: Jihadists Attack U.S. Training Base at Baledogle,” September 30, 2019, sec. Africa, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-49879607>.

³³¹ Anzalone, “Addressing the Enemy: Al-Shabaab’s PYSOPS Media Warfare,” 36; Maruf, “Al-Shabab Attacks Airbase Used by U.S. Military.”

³³² Anzalone, “Addressing the Enemy: Al-Shabaab’s PYSOPS Media Warfare,” 36; “Harakat al Shabaab al Mujahidin.”

³³³ Anzalone, “Addressing the Enemy: Al-Shabaab’s PYSOPS Media Warfare,” 36; “Harakat al Shabaab al Mujahidin.”

³³⁴ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Maher, and Sheehan, “Lights, Camera, Jihad: Al-Shabaab’s Western Media Strategy,” 31.

the revival of Islamic Khilaafa.”³³⁵ Twitter has enabled the group to depict itself as a just and honorable organization, while also promoting the interests of all Muslims.³³⁶ As noted in the previous chapter regarding clan politics, al-Shabaab promotes unity and solidarity by tweeting messages which highlight inter-clan allegiances.³³⁷

b. Finance

In addition to online recruitment through social media, al-Shabaab has also successfully leveraged the online space to fundraise, realizing its utility over “on the ground” operations.³³⁸ In May and March of 2009, the militant group conducted a live three-day fundraiser, attended by high ranking members of both al-Shabaab and Hizbul Islam.³³⁹ This was followed up by a two-week event in August the same year, which not only included senior members but the diaspora community as well.³⁴⁰ From this event alone, participants made pledges up to \$40,000, feeding into the militants’ narrative that “leaders told of the hardships facing fighters and their families.”³⁴¹

Funneling money through the web is challenging for groups such as al-Shabaab given the ease of traceability. Therefore, the militant group has found other indirect ways to gather funds. Earlier this year, Farhia Hassan from Virginia, was convicted for fundraising and providing financial support to al-Shabaab.³⁴² Hassan, along with a group

³³⁵ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Maher, and Sheehan, 31; David Smith, “Al-Shabaab in War of Words with Kenyan Army on Twitter,” *The Guardian*, December 13, 2011, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/dec/13/al-shabaab-war-words-twitter>.

³³⁶ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Maher, and Sheehan, “Lights, Camera, Jihad: Al-Shabaab’s Western Media Strategy,” 33; James Forest, “Perception Challenges Faced by Al-Qaeda on the Battlefield of Influence Warfare” 6, no. 1 (2012): 16.

³³⁷ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Maher, and Sheehan, “Lights, Camera, Jihad: Al-Shabaab’s Western Media Strategy,” act 33; Sikorski, “Airwaves and Microblogs: A Statistical Analysis of Al-Shabaab’s Propaganda Effectiveness,” 18.

³³⁸ Frank Nyakairu, “Somali Rebels Join Forces in Cyberspace: U.N. Report,” *Reuters*, March 19, 2010, sec. Technology News, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-internet-idUSTRE62I2S920100319>.

³³⁹ Nyakairu.

³⁴⁰ Nyakairu.

³⁴¹ Nyakairu; Wise, “Al-Shabaab,” act 9.

³⁴² U.S. News & World Report, “Dutch Woman Convicted in U.S. of Al-Shabab Fundraising.”

of women, had been collecting funds for over three years; however, their method of collection was not through direct online transfers. Instead, “the women funneled cash payments directly to members of the terrorist group, coordinating the payments using online chatrooms.”³⁴³ While the donations only amounted to about \$300 over a three-year period, the women in the chatroom were committed on a regular basis to sending small amounts of money.³⁴⁴

2. Al-Shabaab’s Merger with Al-Qaeda

On 9 February 2012, al-Shabaab officially became affiliated with al-Qaeda; by some scholars this has been noted as an inevitable merger.³⁴⁵ There are several reasons why this merger was deemed as inevitable. As noted in Chapter II, the Somali members who initially joined and help establish al-Shabaab have had ties with al-Qaeda following the return of veteran fighters from Afghanistan in 1989. Additionally, both militant groups believe in similar ideologies of jihad.³⁴⁶ Lastly, the affiliation would assist in the growth of both militant groups. Hence, this formal alliance only strengthens the argument that al-Shabaab has continued to maintain ties with al-Qaeda and is aligned with implementing a global jihad.³⁴⁷ However, given that it was predictable that al-Shabaab would in fact merge with al-Qaeda, questions have been raised as to whether this alliance would in fact prove to be advantageous for al-Shabaab. From a financial and recruitment perspective, al-Shabaab has been able to benefit. However, the merger has further deepened mistrust between Somali citizens and the militant group.

³⁴³ U.S. News & World Report; Matthew Barakat, “Dutch Mom Gets 3 Years in U.S. for Supporting Somali Militants,” AP NEWS, August 1, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/africa-netherlands-somalia-al-shabab-28726c5a5a84f93ac9482f8f5c34e300>.

³⁴⁴ Barakat, “Dutch Mom Gets 3 Years in U.S. for Supporting Somali Militants.”

³⁴⁵ Thomas, “Exposing and Exploiting Weaknesses in the Merger of Al-Qaeda and Al-Shabaab,” 413. the CNN Wire Staff, “Al-Shabaab Joining al Qaeda, Monitor Group Says,” CNN, February 9, 2012, <https://www.cnn.com/2012/02/09/world/africa/somalia-shabaab-qaeda/index.html>.

³⁴⁶ Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Group, 2005–2012* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 6.

³⁴⁷ Thomas, “Exposing and Exploiting Weaknesses in the Merger of Al-Qaeda and Al-Shabaab,” 416; Joscelyn, “Al Qaeda’s Unsurprising Merger.” Hiiraan Online, “‘al-Shabaab’ Merger with ‘al Qaida’ Will Not Aid Insurgency.”

Before understanding whether this merger was advantageous it is crucial to summarize the challenges that both al-Shabaab and al-Qaeda were facing prior to the official announcement.

In 2011 al-Shabaab was at one of its weakest points, given that the group had lost territory to Kenyan and Ethiopian militaries as well as to African Union peacekeepers.³⁴⁸ In addition to losing key territorial areas, al-Shabaab also faced internal division, mainly within its core leadership about what the vision should be. In 2012 Zimmerman stated how “one camp sees the group’s path as following that of other al Qaeda affiliates towards global *jihad*, while the other holds a more localized Islamist agenda in the establishment of an Islamic state in Somalia.”³⁴⁹ Al-Qaeda was also facing similar weak points where Thomas underlines, “this merger may symbolize al-Qaeda’s impending defeat.”³⁵⁰ The merger may have also brought to light the need for al-Qaeda to remain relevant in the midst of its downfall, given that the group faced serious setbacks in the Afghanistan and Pakistan region.³⁵¹ During the same time frame, al-Qaeda had also lost bin Laden, as well as its previous number two, Abu Yahya al-Libi (also known as Mohamed Hassan Qaid).³⁵²

While the merger may have been necessary for the survival of both militant groups, it must not be discounted that the announcement did not have a positive response in Somalia as well as within al-Shabaab. Thomas points out that “Al-Qaeda’s global jihadist ideology based on militant Islamism, which includes elements of Wahhabism and Salafism, is foreign to Somalia and does not resonate strongly with the traditionally Sufi and

³⁴⁸ Katherine Zimmerman, “Al Shabaab in Decline?,” *Critical Threats*, May 8, 2012, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/al-shabaab-in-decline>; Seth Jones, Andrew Liepman, and Nathan Chandler, *Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency in Somalia: Assessing the Campaign Against Al Shabaab* (RAND Corporation, 2016), 21, <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR1539>.

³⁴⁹ Zimmerman, “Al Shabaab in Decline?”

³⁵⁰ Thomas, “Exposing and Exploiting Weaknesses in the Merger of Al-Qaeda and Al-Shabaab,” 417.

³⁵¹ Thomas, 417.

³⁵² Thomas, 417. Christopher Anazalone, “The Formalizing of an Affiliation: Somalia’s Harakat al-Shabab al-Mujahideen & Al-Qa’ida Central,” February 10, 2012, <https://thewasat.wordpress.com/2012/02/10/the-formalizing-of-an-affiliation-somalias-harakat-al-shabab-al-mujahideen-al-qaida-central/>.

xenophobic population.”³⁵³ As result, the disdain that had already been felt by Somalis with regard to al-Shabaab, had deepened as the group diverted towards a more draconian style of governing and killing residents of the territories it seeks to control.³⁵⁴ Ultimately, this merger has further pushed al-Shabaab towards the extremist fringe, while simultaneously deepening the mistrust with local Somalis.

Even though al-Shabaab had been largely independent prior to this merger, this alliance further placed the group on the map while also providing strength to al-Qaeda. Leading up to the merger, al-Shabaab had created an extensive network within the region, and had become “better positioned to carry out strikes on the U.S. homeland.”³⁵⁵ Additionally, compared to other small organizations, al-Shabaab has been able to recruit a substantial number of Western recruits. The majority of Western recruits come from first- and second-generation immigrants from Somalia, in addition to “support from radicalized converts from diverse backgrounds” who are essentially attracted to the harsh rule of law al-Shabaab implements.³⁵⁶

The merger with al-Qaeda enabled al-Shabaab to learn and implement tactics in terms of achieving transnational goals through three facets: tactics, funding, and branding and recruitment. The militant group had undergone significant changes which became apparent prior and after the 2006 Ethiopia invasion of Somalia.”³⁵⁷ Previous al-Shabaab attacks relied on assassination tactics; however, following the merger and foreign influence al-Shabaab added suicide bombings as well as the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and roadside bombs.³⁵⁸ From a financial perspective, the merger enabled al-Shabaab to receive more access to funding. In comparison to other Jihadist organizations,

³⁵³ Thomas, “Exposing and Exploiting Weaknesses in the Merger of Al-Qaeda and Al-Shabaab,” 418; Bryden, “The Reinvention of Al-Shabaab: A Strategy of Choice or Necessity?,” 1.

³⁵⁴ Bryden, “The Reinvention of Al-Shabaab: A Strategy of Choice or Necessity?,” 2.

³⁵⁵ J. M. Berger, “Al Qaeda’s Merger,” *Foreign Policy* (blog), February 15, 2012, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/02/15/al-qaedas-merger/>.

³⁵⁶ Berger.

³⁵⁷ Thomas, “Exposing and Exploiting Weaknesses in the Merger of Al-Qaeda and Al-Shabaab,” 416; Wise, “Al-Shabaab,” 4.

³⁵⁸ Sjah, “Tracing Al Shabaab’s Decision to Cooperate with Al Qaeda in Somalia (2008).”

al-Qaeda is considered to be a “well-financed” organization.³⁵⁹ In terms of funding, al-Qaeda has had access to networks in the Arab world.³⁶⁰ Therefore, this partnership meant that al-Shabaab would potentially have access to a new funding pool.³⁶¹ Lastly, the last perceived benefit of this merger would mean that al-Shabaab would be able to attract more foreign fighters in support of the Global Jihad.³⁶² Byman notes that because al-Qaeda has a wider network “with the ability to reach out to various cultures and languages,” merging with it increases al-Shabaab’s publicity and image.³⁶³

B. REGIONAL DYNAMICS

Al-Shabaab has been successful in taking advantage of the porous borders between Kenya and Somalia, enabling the group to operate regionally in the Horn of Africa and carry out attacks against Western backed organizations. While the group has disrupted security along the borders, al-Shabaab has also used this weakness in infiltrating Nairobi to collect intelligence from marginalized communities such as sex workers. The intervention of western backed forces, such as AMISOM, has further instigated al-Shabaab in executing attacks in the region. Al-Shabaab has been able to benefit from the challenges that face AMISOM forces such as internal divisions and ill-equipped forces.

1. Porous Borders

Al-Shabaab’s ability to conduct transnational attacks is also a consequence of the weak and porous borders between Somalia and Kenya.³⁶⁴ Porous borders between these two nations have not only enabled transnational attacks but has facilitated the movement of arms, migrants, refugees, and al-Shabaab’s capability to use sex workers in Kenya to gather intelligence.

³⁵⁹ Sjah.

³⁶⁰ Daniel L Byman, “Breaking the Bonds between Al-Qa’ida and Its Affiliate Organizations” (Brookings Institution, August 2012), 27.

³⁶¹ Sjah, “Tracing Al Shabaab’s Decision to Cooperate with Al Qaeda in Somalia (2008).”

³⁶² Sjah.

³⁶³ Byman, “Breaking the Bonds between Al-Qa’ida and Its Affiliate Organizations,” 27.

³⁶⁴ Elbagir, “The ‘back Door’ to Kenya.” *KDF Intensifies Patrols along Porous Kenya-Somalia Border* (Kenya, 2020), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4sd-S3U3hho>.

a. Arms and Weapons Movement

A wide variety of arms and weapons have been transported across the Kenya-Somalia borders, to include small arms, light weapons, and IEDS.³⁶⁵ The transport of weapons and other contraband is feasible due to the southern and central parts of Somalia being under al-Shabaab's control. As a result, control over these regions has allowed such items to enter Kenya via Kismayo port, then through the border towns of Mandera, Liboi, and Hulugho prior to transport to Garissa followed by the Eastleigh neighborhood in Nairobi.³⁶⁶ Buluma notes that an alternative route for the transport of weapons and small arms from Garissa would be "via Modogashe, Garbatula, Isiolo or Meru then to Nairobi."³⁶⁷ It is important to note these routes close to the border are utilized due to lack of security infrastructure, as discussed in Chapter III. The pursuit of using such routes strengthens the argument that al-Shabaab is aware and knowledgeable of Kenya's "clan politics, poor services, growing corruption and disarray in the security forces," specifically in the North-Eastern counties.³⁶⁸ As a result, weakness within the security infrastructure and domestic issues has paved the path for al-Shabaab to permeate the border from Somalia into Kenya.

b. Clan Disputes

An unanticipated side effect of weak borders between Somalia and Kenya, is that clan and border disputes with and within Kenya have resulted in certain clans creating alliances with al-Shabaab, as well as routes for the militant group to cross into Kenya. While Somalia and Kenya share an extensive border, the majority of disputes take place in

³⁶⁵ Buluma, "Al-Shabaab," 15.

³⁶⁶ Buluma, 16.

³⁶⁷ Buluma, 16.

³⁶⁸ David Karienyé and Ahmed Osman Warfa, "Role Of Al-Shabaab In Violent Extremisms And Perennial Clan Conflicts: A Case Of Wajir County Kenya," 2020, 28.

Mandera County located in northeastern Kenya.³⁶⁹ One example is the dispute between the Ajuran and the Degodia due to “unequal allocation of resources.”³⁷⁰ As a result, both clans order guns and ammunition from Somalia to Kenya to support their conflicts and feuds. In addition to getting supplies from Somalia through insecure borders, al-Shabaab is paid by militiamen to aid them during conflicts, accelerating clan disputes.”³⁷¹ Additional clan disputes in the same region have also included clashes between the Garre and Degodia clans where al-Shabaab has conducted cross-border attacks. In July 2012, “attacks on the Degodia had left 40 civilians dead and 60,000 displaced on both sides by August 2012.”³⁷² Based on previous al-Shabaab recruit tactics in relation to clan politics, it would be unsurprising if al-Shabaab has taken advantage of clan politics within the border towns of Kenya to forcefully recruit and grow.

c. Cross Border Recruitment

Porous borders between Somalia and Kenya have not only enabled Somalis to easily cross the border and seek refuge in refugee camps along the border, but have facilitated government entities, as well as al-Shabaab, to recruit young men for various causes. The overthrow of Somalia’s dictator, Siad Barre, in the early 1990s as well as various internal conflicts have caused many to migrate and seek refuge in Kenya.³⁷³ The country continues to host refugees in some of the largest camps in the world, to include Dadaab and Kakuma.³⁷⁴ While Kenya has opened its arms in continuing to host refugees,

³⁶⁹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “Refworld | Somalia: Information on the Degodia Clan, Including Distinguishing Features, Locations, Occupations and Position in the Clan Hierarchy; Treatment (2014-August 2016),” Refworld, September 2, 2016, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/592d77b44.html>; Human Rights Watch, “High Stakes- Political Violence and the 2013 Elections in Kenya,” February 2013, 36.

³⁷⁰ Karienyé and Warfa, “Role Of Al-Shabaab In Violent Extremisms And Perennial Clan Conflicts: A Case Of Wajir County Kenya,” 30.

³⁷¹ Karienyé and Warfa, 31.

³⁷² Refugees, “Refworld | Somalia.” Human Rights Watch, “High Stakes- Political Violence and the 2013 Elections in Kenya,” 41.

³⁷³ Avery Burns, “Feeling the Pinch: Kenya, Al-Shabaab, and East Africa’s Refugee Crisis,” *Refuge: Canada’s Journal on Refugees* 27, no. 1 (December 31, 1969): 5, <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.34356>.

³⁷⁴ Burns, 5; Enrique Hale, “The 7 Largest Refugee Camps in the World – Refugee Council USA,” September 3, 2020, <http://refugeecouncilusa.org/largest-refugee-camps/>.

the Kenyan government as well as al-Shabaab have taken advantage of the vulnerable population, ultimately using refugees as proxies.³⁷⁵

Al-Shabaab's ability to permeate Kenya has allowed the militant group to persevere in growing through the recruitment of Kenyan Muslims and refugees. The high numbers of refugees living at the border in camps provides al-Shabaab the opportunity to infiltrate such camps, recruit young men, and return them back to Somalia.³⁷⁶ The conditions within the refugee camps are dire and intolerable. As a result, it becomes rather easy for militant groups such as al-Shabaab to capitalize on such grievances for recruitment with the promises of being paid.³⁷⁷ Chester notes, "they (al-Shabaab) can apparently offer \$300 per month and a \$50 signing bonus."³⁷⁸ Burns further provides evidence that most recruits understand the dangers of joining al-Shabaab and going back to Somalia to fight and that "despite this known fact, most of these recruits are enticed to join in order to earn some income."³⁷⁹

In addition to al-Shabaab taking advantage of refugees and migrants along the border, there have been speculative reports of the Kenyan government also recruiting within the camps to fight against al-Shabaab in Somalia. While the Kenyan government has denied such operations, it is a vital piece of information to include given that it adds to the challenge of porous borders and the ease of transporting people across the border.³⁸⁰ NBC News underlines this notion, "A U.N. official says there have been rumors but no hard evidence of recruitment in refugee camps, which would violate the rights of the

³⁷⁵ Burns, "Feeling the Pinch," 6.

³⁷⁶ Burns, 11; Penelope Chester, "Amid Ongoing Conflict, Somali Refugees Recruited to Fight Al-Shabaab," UN Dispatch, April 6, 2010, <https://www.undispatch.com/amid-ongoing-conflict-somali-refugees-recruited-to-fight-al-shabaab/>.

³⁷⁷ Cristiano d'Orsi, "The World's Largest Refugee Camp: What the Future Holds for Dadaab," The Conversation, December 12, 2017, <http://theconversation.com/the-worlds-largest-refugee-camp-what-the-future-holds-for-dadaab-88102>.

³⁷⁸ Chester, "Amid Ongoing Conflict, Somali Refugees Recruited to Fight Al-Shabaab."

³⁷⁹ Burns, "Feeling the Pinch," 11.

³⁸⁰ Moni Basu, "Rights Group Urges Kenya to Stop Military Recruitment of Refugees - CNN.Com," November 6, 2009, <https://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/africa/10/25/intl.kenya.refugee.recruitment/index.html>; NBC News, "Kenyans Recruited to Fight in Somalia," November 16, 2009, <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna33971243>.

refugees.”³⁸¹ In a Human Rights Watch article, Albin-Lackey tells the story of Ahmed who fled with his mother across Somalia’s southern border to the town of Hagadera in northeast Kenya.³⁸² Like most refugees in the camps, Ahmed was not able to find a job and had gone missing. In an interview, friends of Ahmed said, “a recruiter had lured him into a covert force of Somali refugees that the Kenyan government is training to help Somalia’s internationally backed transitional government to fight the extremist Islamist group Al-Shabab.”³⁸³ Children as young as eleven are being lured into the militia with the promise of \$600 a month, and many are successfully recruited to escape the overcrowded camps.³⁸⁴

d. Unconventional Ways of Infiltration and Recruitment

Al-Shabaab not only operates at the border regions but has found an unconventional method of infiltration into Kenya using sex workers for information.³⁸⁵ The militant group understands that in order to remain influential and agile, access to Nairobi is necessary and has been possible due to porous borders. This is another case where al-Shabaab has been able to tap into a socio-economic marginalized community to take advantage of grievances, while also promising pay.

Al-Shabaab’s capacity to recruit and pay sex workers for information truly underlines the group’s tenacity in expanding its reach due to the nature of porous borders. Petrich emphasizes that the al-Shabaab network with sex workers is “a highly structured, hierarchical network in which sex workers sell information gleaned from their customers—

³⁸¹ NBC News, “Kenyans Recruited to Fight in Somalia.”

³⁸² Chris Albin-Lackey, “Kenya Recruits Somali Refugees to Fight Islamists Back Home in Somalia,” *Human Rights Watch* (blog), November 10, 2009, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2009/11/10/kenya-recruits-somali-refugees-fight-islamists-back-home-somalia>.

³⁸³ Albin-Lackey.

³⁸⁴ NBC News, “Kenyans Recruited to Fight in Somalia.”

³⁸⁵ Katharine Petrich, “Al-Shabaab’s Mata Hari Network,” *War on the Rocks*, August 14, 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/08/al-shabaabs-mata-hari-network/>; Katharine Petrich and Phoebe Donnelly, “Worth Many Sins: Al-Shabaab’s Shifting Relationship with Kenyan Women,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 30, no. 6–7 (November 10, 2019): 1169–92, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2019.1649814>.

specifically, corrupt police officers—to al-Shabaab.”³⁸⁶ However it is important to note that a decent number of women who cooperate in selling information to al-Shabaab are those from Tanzania, living in the slums of Nairobi, who work for local Kenyan women.³⁸⁷ This further proves the transnational nature of al-Shabaab’s ability to expand and collect information. In addition to using sex workers to gather intelligence, “Kenyan women have been victims and participants in al-Shabaab’s human trafficking scheme to bring women to al-Shabaab camps on the border of Kenya and Somalia.”³⁸⁸ While it may seem plausible that al-Shabaab would use sex workers to gather intelligence, Petrich notes in her interviews with Kenyan law enforcement officers expressed “surprise at the idea that sex workers could be intelligence conduits for an ideologically conservative Islamist group.”³⁸⁹

2. External Intervention

Since the ousting of Barre in 1991, Somalia’s perpetual state of turmoil has resulted in the intervention of numerous countries and organizations such as the UN AMISOM mission, which was reconfigured and replaced with African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) in April 2022.³⁹⁰ However, the growth of al-Shabaab in the early 2000s has resulted in external efforts to assist nations that have been terrorized by the militant group. While the external entities have intervened in the best interest of marginalized citizens, external efforts have more than often backfired due to poor strategy, lack of knowledge of the enemy, and inconsistency. As result, al-Shabaab has been able to capitalize on these shortfalls, enabling the militant group to recruit and grow.

Before discussing how al-Shabaab has continued to operate successfully despite AMISOM’s presence in the region, it is crucial to understand the dynamics of the mission

³⁸⁶ Petrich, “Al-Shabaab’s Mata Hari Network.”

³⁸⁷ Petrich and Donnelly, “Worth Many Sins,” 1181; Petrich, “Al-Shabaab’s Mata Hari Network.”

³⁸⁸ Petrich and Donnelly, “Worth Many Sins,” 1183; Charlotte Attwood, “The Sex Slaves of Al-Shabab,” *BBC News*, May 24, 2017, sec. Magazine, <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-40022953>.

³⁸⁹ Petrich, “Al-Shabaab’s Mata Hari Network.”

³⁹⁰ AMISOM, “AMISOM,” accessed August 18, 2022, <https://amisom-au.org/>.

as well as the regional partners involved. Through the approval of the UN, AMISOM, a regional peacekeeping mission activated by the AU, was created on 19 January 2007.³⁹¹ While AMISOM comprises of four components to include AMISOM Police, Humanitarian Work, Military and Civilian, the military component comprises of the largest unit with the mandate “to conduct peace support operations in Somalia.”³⁹² The military component is comprised of the following regional partners deployed to six sectors in central and southern Somalia: Uganda, Burundi, Djibouti, Kenya and Ethiopia.³⁹³ AMISOM adheres to numerous strategic objectives per the UN Security Council Resolution 2372 (2017) with the focus of diminishing security threats posed by violent groups such as al-Shabaab.³⁹⁴

However, even though African nations have provided the manpower to deploy troops within the six sectors, logistical and financial assistance has been provided by external entities. Williams notes, “In AMISOM’s case, the model required the African Union (AU) to supply troops; the European Union (EU) to pay their allowances (and other forms of support); the United Nations (UN) to provide logistics support and equipment reimbursement; and key bilateral partners, notably the United States and United Kingdom to provide equipment, training and other forms of security assistance to the troop-contributing countries.”³⁹⁵ Western intervention in supporting regional African troops to eradicate al-Shabaab has only added more fuel to the fire to the militant group’s objective in creating more instability in the region.

³⁹¹ Oscar Gakuo Mwangi, “State Collapse, Peace Enforcement and the Responsibility to Protect in Somalia,” *The International Journal of Human Rights* 19, no. 8 (November 17, 2015): 1229, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2015.1082837>.

³⁹² AMISOM, “AMISOM Military Component,” AMISOM, accessed August 18, 2022, <https://amisom-au.org/mission-profile/military-component/>; Mwangi, “State Collapse, Peace Enforcement and the Responsibility to Protect in Somalia,” 1229.

³⁹³ AMISOM, “AMISOM Military Component;” Colin Robinson, “The African Union Intervention Force Will Stay in Somalia, but with Whose Troops?,” August 10, 2021, <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/african-union-intervention-force-will-stay-somalia-whose-troops>.

³⁹⁴ “AMISOM Mandate,” AMISOM, accessed August 18, 2022, <https://amisom-au.org/amisom-mandate/>; UN Security Council, “United Nations Security Council Resolution 2372 (2017)” (United Nations, August 30, 2017).

³⁹⁵ Paul D. Williams, “Subduing Al-Shabaab: The Somalia Model of Counterterrorism and Its Limits,” *The Washington Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (April 3, 2018): 96, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2018.1484227>.

In addition to Western intervention, AMISOM, since its conception, has been ineffective in eradicating al-Shabaab which has further enabled the militant group to operate in the region. Challenges faced within the mission have included internal organization issues, and lack of logistics and equipment.

While AMISOM has been operating on the ground for the past fifteen years, internal organizational issues have still hindered its ability to implement the mandated tasks. Interrelated challenges within AMISOM's command and control configurations have brought to light that "AMISOM's force headquarters had command but no control over its national contingents in the regional sectors."³⁹⁶ In addition to lack of coordination on a higher level, was the challenge of cooperation amongst the troop-contributing countries as well as between forces and headquarters.³⁹⁷ Due to processes within AMISOM that have not been streamlined, troop contributing countries (TCCs) are often left waiting for orders from their respective countries "to engage in offensive military operations instead of heeding to AMISOM headquarters' orders."³⁹⁸ The problem has been compounded due to individual TCCs not supporting one another when troops are attacked by al-Shabaab.³⁹⁹ Thus, lack of coordination and cohesion have continued to leave AMISOM forces fragmented and unable to address the challenges posed by al-Shabaab. This has provided the militant group with opportunities to strategize based on leadership faults and time delays within AMISOM. Williams emphasizes, "al-Shabaab fighters had been able to hide in the areas between AMISOM's sector boundaries because operational co-ordination was so poor between the mission's different contingents."⁴⁰⁰ This example truly accentuates al-Shabaab's capacity to not only attack AMISOM forces at opportune times, but to understand the challenges AMISOM forces face and successfully implement tactics.

³⁹⁶ Williams, "AMISOM under Review," 45.

³⁹⁷ Williams, 45.

³⁹⁸ Wondemagegnehu and Kebede, "AMISOM," 214.

³⁹⁹ Wondemagegnehu and Kebede, 214.

⁴⁰⁰ Williams, "AMISOM under Review," 45.

The other major challenge AMISOM has faced in eliminating al-Shabaab is in the arena of equipment and logistics. One of the trials AMISOM forces have faced with regards to receiving resources is that the United Nations Support Office for Somalia (UNSOS) is authorized “to transport non-lethal assistance and troops to designated points known as battalion hubs.”⁴⁰¹ The challenge being, it becomes the responsibility of the TCC to transport war supplies troops.⁴⁰² While various African nations and external organizations have made donations to support the AMISOM mission, they have not been successful in delivering the required resources.⁴⁰³ Without the required resources, troops have had to conduct offensive operations without “sufficient number of helicopters, armoured [sic] vehicles, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities.”⁴⁰⁴ Lack of helicopter support have placed AMISOM forces behind the curve in having the strike capability, enabling al-Shabaab to retreat while also “retaining the luxury of freedom.”⁴⁰⁵

While the primary goal of AMISOM is to eliminate al-Shabaab, internal challenges within the organization have created setbacks. As a result, without the adequate training and resources AMISOM has not been effective in conducting its mission. Incompetence within the UN-based organization has created an opening for al-Shabaab to resourcefully navigate through the shortfalls, enabling the group to improvise and adapt within the region.

C. CONCLUSION

To some extent, global and regional dynamics within the transnational sphere are occurring separately. However, it is reasonable to assume that there is in fact overlap to some scope. But it is more challenging to accurately track the mechanisms within these dynamics that have enabled al-Shabaab to use factors such as online financing and its

⁴⁰¹ Africa Center for Strategic Studies, “AMISOM’s Hard-Earned Lessons in Somalia,” *Africa Center for Strategic Studies* (blog), accessed August 18, 2022, <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/amisom-hard-earned-lessons-somalia/>.

⁴⁰² Africa Center for Strategic Studies.

⁴⁰³ Williams, “AMISOM under Review,” 45.

⁴⁰⁴ Williams, 45.

⁴⁰⁵ Williams, 45.

merger with al-Qaeda as a force multiplier in executing attacks against AMISOM or even enabling al-Shabaab to recruit sex workers. Nevertheless, there is still some reliance on global dynamics in further enabling insecurity in the region.

There are several ways in which the global and regional dynamics discussed are not interdependent. Al-Shabaab is not reliant on utilizing internet resources to pursue attacks on western-backed forces such as AMISOM. The same concept may be applied to porous borders. Al-Shabaab is not dependent on the internet to cross porous borders between Kenya and Somalia, whether it is to partake in clan conflicts or to collect intelligence from sex workers in Nairobi. Additionally, al-Shabaab's ability to take advantage of the porous borders was not contingent on the merger with al-Qaeda.

While there is scant evidence to prove that global factors assisted regional factors, the drivers within each dynamic (global and regional) showcase strong interdependence. While al-Shabaab had a strong online presence prior to the merger with al-Qaeda, the affiliation post 2012 enabled the group to reach a wider audience globally through recruitment, financing, and transport of equipment and weapons. Porous borders not only facilitated al-Shabaab to infiltrate Kenya and destabilize communities at the border but has enabled al-Shabaab to permeate into Kenyan cities such as Nairobi. Additionally, porous borders have allowed al-Shabaab troops to maneuver and conduct attacks against AMISOM forces, while also potentially providing al-Shabaab with the advantage to retreat and regroup if necessary.

Al-Shabaab's growth and expansion through global and regional elements provides insight into the group's opportunistic approach. This has allowed al-Shabaab to expand and adapt without strict adherence to ideology, which to some extent may be seen as advantageous. On the other hand, an inconsistent approach to ideology such as collecting intelligence from sex workers or even using English to recruit, may be a weak point for al-Shabaab, potentially making the group vulnerable to a certain level.

V. CONCLUSION

A. SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH QUESTION AND FINDINGS

Al-Shabaab's presence in the Horn of Africa has undeniably exacerbated the insecurity within the region. Since the militant group's early beginnings in 2006, it has been able to evolve and become even more resilient to adapt to the ever-changing environment. Therefore, understanding how al-Shabaab has been able to multiply and alter its tactics will support the U.S. and its partners in combating the spread of this transnational threat. To enhance our understanding on how al-Shabaab has been able to evolve, this thesis examined the international and domestic drivers which have enabled the militant group to evolve and expand, with the goal of determining which driver(s) have had the most impact to al-Shabaab's advancement. The domestic drivers analyzed included corruption of government and security forces, counterterrorism tactics, and socio-economic marginalization in relation to recruitment. Transnational drivers analyzed included online presence and social media, al-Shabaab's merger with al-Qaeda, porous borders, and impact of external intervention.

However, it is crucial to underline that al-Shabaab's presence and growth in the region is largely a consequence of Somalia's weak governance structures, which have created space for the group to grow in ungoverned territories. Keeping these crucial factors in mind, this research initially postulated that several drivers would be the most influential to al-Shabaab's evolution. Instead, the analysis showcases that one driver, corruption, is the connective tissue affording al-Shabaab the opportunistic means to evolve. Additionally, an unexpected finding from the transnational analysis (Chapter IV) was the necessity to divide this chapter into global and regional dynamics. This facilitated the finding that global and regional factors were somewhat independent. Lastly, this thesis brought to light the potential ideological inconsistencies within al-Shabaab, creating certain vulnerabilities in its evolution.

Domestically, al-Shabaab has had a deadly influence within Somalia, Kenya, and Uganda. Corrupt government and security forces not only affect institutions to effectively govern but have deepened tensions between the government and its citizens through inhumane treatment, extortion, and bribes. The wedge that has been created between the government

and its citizens provides al-Shabaab with the opportunity to recruit those seeking revenge. In addition to corrupt behavior towards citizens, those working within such institutions are not always paid adequately. As a result, a certain level of grievance occurs which further promulgates government institutions to engage in corrupt behavior towards citizens. Corrupt officials within such institutions have also obstructed counterterrorism operations.

Instead of effectively fulfilling counterterrorism missions against al-Shabaab, politicians have used counterterrorism units to pursue their own agenda. Additionally, counterterrorism policies had been used to target specific populations through inhumane violence and interrogation. Corruption within counterterrorism policies have further enabled al-Shabaab to recruit from those wronged by government institutions. As a result, socio-economic marginalized groups such as Somali-Kenyans or Islamic communities are on the receiving end of harsh and corrupt counterterrorism policies, fueling many to join al-Shabaab due to mistrust in the government.

On a transnational level, al-Shabaab has been unwavering in its evolution and growth in the region. Globally, al-Shabaab's use of the internet and social media have empowered the group to reach a wider audience, to include the diaspora community as well as Western audiences. In addition to using social media for recruitment, al-Shabaab has also been able to leverage the internet to finance its operations. The merger with al-Qaeda provided al-Shabaab the opportunity to expand its messaging through social media while also giving the group access to increased finances and equipment.

At the regional level, porous borders between Somalia and Kenya have further aggravated the security situation allowing al-Shabaab to cross borders rather seamlessly to transport people, weapons, and arms. It is evident that lack of security at the border in addition to corruption within security entities has made it permissible for al-Shabaab to not only aggravate the situation at the border areas, but to infiltrate further into the Kenyan capital. However, due to the endemic corruption within Kenya, al-Shabaab has been able to take advantage of marginalized communities such as sex workers. Al-Shabaab has recognized that police forces, politicians and other prominent workers within the government visit sex workers. As a result, al-Shabaab has relied on this community to collect intelligence to

infiltrate the Kenyan government. Lastly, internal challenges within external missions, such as AMISOM, have allowed al-Shabaab to capitalize off its corruption and lack of resources.

B. IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The eradication of al-Shabaab will not only require support from the AU to engage militarily, but from Western nations and organizations to continue their assistance, whether it be through military training or financial means. Arguably, al-Shabaab has evolved relatively quickly since its inception in 2006. The group's ability to quickly progress may suggest that al-Shabaab will continue to evolve and expand in accordance with the environment. Therefore, there are several imperative implications of the group's ability to evolve and grow based on both domestic and transnational drivers.

While al-Shabaab continues to seek opportunities to execute deadly attacks within the region, it must be acknowledged that to eradicate the threat domestically requires the assistance of regional and transnational organizations. Somalia is a prime example where internal conditions have been dire since the early 1990s, resulting in the steady stream of consistent humanitarian and financial assistance. As mentioned in Chapter III, Somalia's weak internal structures have paved the path for ungoverned territories to exist, creating a vacuum for al-Shabaab to operate lawlessly and recruit through violent means. Consequently, and arguably the most challenging, the first tactic in addressing the domestic situation may be for the AU to play a more active role in the formation and strengthening of Somalia's government and CSOs. In conjunction with assisting formal institutions, from an economic perspective, the AU must assist in developing economic structures within Somalia to enable locals to earn a living versus joining militant groups. However, development of Somalia's economy may also be reinforced by the Somali diaspora. Regardless, building a financial system that is consistent will enable Somalis to remain in the country versus being forced to become refugees or internally displaced, which would assist in reducing the insecurities along the border with Kenya.

While Kenya is viewed as one the stronger nations in Africa, the nation has been subject to endemic corruption, which has hampered its efforts in combating al-Shabaab through its security forces and counterterrorism policies. If Kenya's government and

institutions are not active in addressing its corruption challenges and inhumane counterterrorism policies, it will continue to present al-Shabaab with the opportunity to recruit from the marginalized. If the AU does not address this grave challenge or does not implement consequences, Kenya's government will continue to run the risk of al-Shabaab growing within the country. Therefore, it is imperative that the AU in addition to other external organizations provide guidance and recommendations on combating corruption at the highest levels. In addition to engaging corruption challenges, the Kenyan government will also need to address its counterterrorism policies, predominantly its discourses in repatriating ex al-Shabaab members as well as the Kenyan-Somali and Muslim communities. In parallel, it is essential that Kenyan institutions continue to fight for marginalized communities where access to education is unavailable. This may help prevent militant groups from easily reaching and potentially recruiting from such communities. Along the same vein, inclusion of marginalized communities may prevent those seeking inclusion and acceptance from militant groups.

Transnationally, eradicating al-Shabaab presents a more complex problem set. Globally, factors such as monitoring financial and recruitment activity is more challenging to prevent and track. As a result, this arduous and intricate task requires the strict monitoring of online transactions as well as social media networks. While the U.S. and other nations have been proactive in shutting down social media accounts and web pages, it is still crucial that we continue to monitor online activity within the diaspora community. Given that a large number of remittances are sent to Somalia, it is vital to track exactly where and to whom funds are sent. The other intricate global dynamic that requires constant monitoring is al-Shabaab's activity with al-Qaeda. As al-Shabaab continues to adapt its strategic tactics, with the support of al-Qaeda, al-Shabaab has the potential and the leverage to expand its operations down the coast as well as conduct more attacks in landlocked countries such as Uganda. This will allow al-Shabaab to establish more network cells through increased financing and equipment via al-Qaeda.

Regionally, porous borders between Kenya and Somalia must be addressed in conjunction with domestic insecurity through security institutions. However, the challenge of porous and insecure borders can only be addressed once corruption and counterterrorism

policies in both nations are revamped. This is a prime example of domestic policies affecting regional insecurities. As a result, these issues must be addressed simultaneously for change to take place. Cooperation from the international community as well as regional actors are pertinent. Given that border insecurity also includes arms and people smuggling, both nations play a pertinent role in ceasing such operations through the strengthening of government institutions. Once again, corruption has played a significant role because officials, whether at the border or within the government, reap the benefits of porous borders. Insecurity at the border has enabled al-Shabaab to operate rather seamlessly into Kenya, which has been detrimental to external missions such as AMISOM in eradicating the militant group. However, there have been serious challenges within AMISOM, enabling al-Shabaab to exploit the organization's weaknesses.

As a result, it is urgent that external missions, that incorporate multiple nations, structure a command and control that does not detract from the mission. While this thesis did not conduct a heavy analysis on U.S. and Western intervention, ultimately transnational and domestic influences require the support of multiple organizations and countries. However, alleviating corruption and ameliorating counterterrorism policies should remain primarily with African institutions such as the AU or the East African Community (EAC). Western organizations may facilitate the process through providing military training, humanitarian support and equipment. But these provisions are deemed unconstructive if state institutions misuse them. Therefore, working closely with our African partners, versus dictating the terms, has the potential to foster a more cooperative effort in eradicating al-Shabaab.

C. FUTURE WORK

This thesis analyzed the drivers which have led to al-Shabaab's evolution through the exploitation of various domestic and transnational dynamics, however, this leaves new questions to include, al-Qaeda's role, institutions that benefit from insecurity, and the implications of al-Shabaab's inconsistent ideology, to be considered. While there is some evidence that al-Shabaab's merger with al-Qaeda has been advantageous, in actuality it may be more challenging to really prove if in fact the merger has truly assisted al-Shabaab. Given the fracture that occurred with Boko Haram, which splintered into Islamic State's West

African Province (ISWAP), this raises the question of whether this merger may create future schism within al-Shabaab. Any schism which may occur are important to consider, especially if splinter groups seek to gain political significance within the region, but particularly in Somalia.

An area of further research, which was outside the scope of this thesis, would be to address the role of al-Shabaab in Somalia's and Kenya's governments. In other words, who benefits politically from al-Shabaab's persistence as a terrorist group? It is also crucial to consider in what ways NGOs, IGOs, and various institutions within the region have ultimately benefited from the persistent, "stable" threat. Further, if al-Shabaab's goal in the future is to gain political prominence, who benefits from this transition. These questions potentially assist in determining how much influence does al-Shabaab actually have in the region.

Further areas of research would also include determining if missions such as AMISOM are truly the right way forward in operating in an environment as complex as the Horn of Africa with multiple nations invested. Given that there has been corruption within AMISOM, it would be crucial to determine how many AMISOM members have defected to al-Shabaab because of the corruption, lack of training and equipment, and pay. Given the robust challenges, are missions such as AMISOM a sustainable approach?

Lastly, al-Shabaab has exemplified inconsistent ideologies and contradictory messaging; therefore, the next logical step would be to determine what are the core concepts of the group. Based on the group's messaging and choice of targets, al-Shabaab's ideologies have encompassed anti-Western sentiments, rather than a strict religious or nationalist ideology. Research on this subject would not only assist in extrapolating the group's evolution, but to better comprehend, outside of attacking Western backed organizations and way of life, what direction al-Shabaab may take. Ultimately, it may provide insight as to whether al-Shabaab wants political influence, or if they have goals to expand its influence and execute attacks within other regions of Africa.

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