## Al-Shabaab: An Emerging Terrorist Group in Somalia

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## Abstract

Since the Al-Qaeda terrorist group struck in the United States in September 2011, the upsurge of terrorism has become more frequent and deadly globally. Using sociology of education, with emphasis on indoctrination, the article explored Al-Shabaab as an emerging terrorist group in Somalia. The study found that Al-Shabaab emerged from some Islamic movement with the goal of establishing an Islamic state in Somalia. The group has established networks in some foreign countries and has also created several avenues to raise funds for its operations. The terrorist group has carried out several attacks, killing and wounding several thousands of people. Although

efforts have been made to curb the gruesome activities of the group, the end of the group seems not to be in sight going by its spread. It is therefore recommended among others, the need for counter-media-war especially through the social media platform to dissuade young people from joining the group.

**Keywords:**   Al-Shabaab,   Terrorism,   Somalia,   Islamic Movement

## Introduction

There seems to be a revival in terrorist activities globally since Al-Qaeda struck in the United States in September 2011. Suffice to say till that incident; terrorism had not been a great deal of subject of study, comment, debate and controversy (Laqueur, 2004). Moreover, its frequency and devastating calamities was not as it is today. The way in which terrorism is spreading in contemporary times is worrisome. Howard and Sawyer (2004) categorised terrorist organizations into three: ideological (left and right wing), ethno-nationalist (irredentist, separatist, autonomy), and politico-religious groups. Lately, terrorism linked to Islamic religion seems to be on the increase. Africa is not left out in the surge of terrorist activities.

According to Whittaker (2002), Libya and Algeria are places in Africa associated with terrorist activities on a ground scale; the first as exporter of terrorists and the second as an arena for pitiless fratricide. Recently, Nigeria and Somalia have joined the list. Terrorist groups in the two countries appear to have a link with Islamic religion. While Boko Haram is tormenting the Nigerian populace and is fast spreading to

Cameroon, Al-Shabaab is on the offensive against Somalia and is also spreading to neighbouring countries like Kenya.Indeed, Somalia appears quite different from other sub-Saharan African countries; given its proximity with the Middle East and its people's dedication to Islam. Its affinity with Arabs is far stronger than its African neighbours.

It is therefore not a surprise that many Somalis trace their origin to the prophet Mohammed companions-or to itinerant Sheiks or saints who travelled to Somalia and married local women (JSOU Report, 2014). This study focuses on Al-Shabaab a terrorist group in Somalia, its origin, activities, funding, growth, efforts at curbing its gruesome activities and recommendations to curtail activities of the group or possibly eradicate it.

## Theoretical Framework

The essence of a theory is to shed light on how and why a particular phenomenon occurs the way it does. It provides insight into existing knowledge which can be tested against empirical evidence. This study is anchored on the theory of sociology of education. Dukheim (1961) argued that education in traditional societies encouraged mechanical solidarity as it killed individual consciousness. Dukheim went further to state that humans have two consciousnesses. While one of such consciousnesses is from a group or an entire society, the other is from an individual person. Personality has to do with distinctiveness of an individual from all others. When mechanical solidarity is at its strongest, collective consciousness swallows individual consciousness which blurs distinction between individuals.

Mechanical solidarity in a modern sense according to Karlpatrick (1972) is called indoctrination. In reality, indoctrination simply denotes inculcating attitudes and beliefs into people's minds by passing their free and critical deliberations. The author added that this type of education was rather a norm than an exception in a traditional society. Indoctrination is to make people think, speak, act, believe, etc, alike, and fear the same thing. Al-Shabaab uses propaganda and indoctrination to get attention of the youths to fight the cause of Islam. Young Muslims that fled to America because of civil wars that have ravaged Somalia were made to feel guilty for living comfortably in America while their homeland is in turmoil. They were told that Al-Shabaab is promoting global jihad using Somalia as its enclave and that if youths participate in jihad, they will become heroes. Al-Shabaab also established networks in the West that target young people at mosques with a view to indoctrinating them, telling them it was necessary for them to fight the enemies of Islam. Youths were invited to Cafes and restaurants where they were indoctrinated and latter invited to join jihad in Somalia (Baehr, 2011). Little wonder that Juergensmeyer (2004) contends that religion does not only facilitate terrorists' goals by providing moral legitimacy to their cause, it also defines the rewards that combatants can attain. Suffice to say that it is the so called promised rewards for fighting the cause of Islam (through indoctrination) that make people to engage in killing others especially people of opposite religion with astonishing brutality, getting involved in suicide bombings among others.

## Origin of Al-Shaabab

The exact circumstances of Al-Shabaab's origins are still being debated; however, previous Islamist movements are believed to have contributed to its formation (ICG, 2014).The Joint Special Operations University, (JSOU) Report (2014) traced the formation of Al-Shabaab to some members of Al Ittihad Al Islamiya (AIAI) formed in 1984. Al Ittihad Al Islamiya (AIAI) was a nationalist organization formed with the aim of overthrowing the Barre regime but changed direction by arrogating to itself the responsibility of liberating the Ogaden region from Ethiopia. When Ethiopia retaliated to AIAI attack on Ogaden, the group lost its vigour and its strength was further drained by internal squabbles. For instance, several of its jihadists like Sheik Hassan DahirAweys later became a leader of Hizbul Islam, Aden Hashi Farah Ayro became one of the founders of Al-Shaabab and Hassan al-Turaki later led a faction of the RasKamboniBrigde that allied with Al-Shabaab in 2009. In the same vein, Agbiboa (2014) equally traced the origin of A-Shabaabto Al Itihaad Al Islamiya (AIAI)- a Wahhabi Islamist terrorist organization that emerged in Somalia in the 1980s with the aim of replacing Mohammed Said Barre's regime with an Islamic state.

Thus, in 2000, the remnant of AlAI reformed into Al-Shabaab and was subsequently incorporated into the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) as its radical youth militia. The author added that Ethiopian invasion of Somalia in December 2006 gave impetus to the development and radicalization of Al-Shabaab as it created deep-seated animosity between Somalia and Ethiopia with the opportunity to recruit several thousands of nationals in Somalia as volunteer fighters and also forced the group to adopt an effective Guerrilla-style operational

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strategy in its bid to resist Ethiopian advance into the South. Vilkko (2011) sees Al-Shabaab as an off-shoot of the ICU. Factionalization within ICU led to the disintegration of the group, and hence, the emergence of Al-Shabaab which came to inherit the roles of ICU by mounting resistance against foreign influences. To Harnisch (2010), Al-Shabaab simply mean "the youth" became an independent entity in 2007. Before then it was the military wing of the ICU. In 2006, Ethiopian troops entered Somalia to establish the authority of the United Nations mandated Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and also to destroy a coalition of Sharia Courts called ICU that controlled much of the country then. Upon Ethiopian invasion (which was an anti- terror alliance formed by the US but led by Ethiopian troops), the ICU fled, but Al-Shabaab- its military wing - stayed to fight the invading forces.

Al-Shabaab's primary objectives in the beginning were: to drive Ethiopian troops out of Somalia; and to establish an Islamic State in Somalia. But now the group appears to be spreading its tentacles internationally. In addition to the fact mentioned above as being responsible for the formation of Al-Shabaab, Baehr (2011) alleged that another reason attributed to the formation of Al-Shabaab aside from the above was the 2004 United States (US) bombing of a Union of Islamic Courts safe house. The USA suspected that three of the terrorists responsible for the bombings at the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 were in the safe house. As a result of the US attack, ICU decided to establish a military arm in order to safeguard Islam. It is important to state that, while the ICU held sway, it was able to bring order and security and when Al-Shabaab came to the scene after the disintegration of ICU, many people hoped that, regardless of means and

ideology, Al-Shabaab could do the same. In terms of doctrine, Back (2013) contends that Al-Shabaabideology and doctrine is very much in line with that of Takfir. This movement called Takfir allows its members to declare other Muslims unbelievers (kafirs), reject and resistforeigners from coming to their country, and even engage in suicide mission in order to kill their enemies.

Be it as it may, it can be gleaned from the above that Al-Shabaab emanated from previous Islamic movements with the aim of warding off Ethiopian invading forces and also to turn Somalia into an Islamic State. After splitting from ICU, Al-Shabaab has carried out various attacks against its perceived enemies. For instance, National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (CNCSTR) (2013) argued that since its formation in 2007, Al-Shabaab has carried out about 550 attacks, killing more than 1, 600 and wounding more than 2,100. The table below shows some of the attacks perpetrated by Al-Shabaab from 2008- January, 2015.

**Table 1: Selected Incidents of Al-Shabaab Attacks 2008-January 2015**

| S/N | Dates | Location | Nature of Attack | Estimated Casualties |
|-----|-------|----------|------------------|----------------------|
| 1. | January 24, 2008 | Near African Union Base in Mogadishu | Suicide car bombing | 13 people killed |
| 2. | February 5, 2008 | Port city of Bossaso | Twin bombings | 25 people killed, at least 70injured |
| 3. | September 3, 2008 | Attack on the Somalia Presidential compound. | | 15 killed people , and 25 injured |
| 4. | October 6, 2008 | Mogadishu | Mortar aimed at Presidential palace struck a market place | 17 people killed |
| 5. | October 29, | United Nations | Coordinated | 24 people killed |

| | 2008 | compound, the Ethiopian consulate and the presidential palace in Hagesis. | suicide bombing | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **6.** | February 22, 2009 | African Union Military base in Mogadishu | Bombing against African Union base in Mogadishu. | 11 people killed. |
| **7.** | December 3, 2009 | Mogadishu University | Suicide bombing during a graduation ceremony at the Mogadishu University. | At least 23 people killed |
| **8.** | July 11, 2010 | Kampala, Uganda | Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for twin suicide bombing in Kampala, Uganda. | More than 70 people were killed. |
| **9.** | 2011 | Somalia | It was allege that Al-Shabaab blocked the delivery of aid from some Western relief agencies during the 2011 famine. | The blockage of relief materials in the midst of famine killed tens of thousands of Somalis. |
| **10.** | March 3, 2012 | Puntland region in Somalia | Al-Shabaab attacked soldier from Somalia's semi-autonomous Puntland region | At least 9 people were killed |
| **11** | March 15, 2012 | Mogadishu | Suicide bombing | At least 5 people were killed |
| **12.** | March 19, 2012 | Refugee camp near presidential palace in Mogadishu | Firing of mortars on the refugee camp by suspected members of Al-Shabaab | About six people died in the attack |
| **13.** | March 21, | Mogadishu | A car bomb | 2 people |

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 2012 | | suspected to be the handiwork of Al-Shabaab | werewounded. |
| **14.** | April 4, 2012 | National Theatre in Mogadishu | Suicide bomb attack by Al-Shabaab | At least 6 people were killed. |
| 15 | September 20, 2012 | Mogadishu | Double suicide attack by suspected members of Al-Shababaab | 14 people were killed. |
| **16.** | January 17, 2013 | | Al-Shabaab claimed it killed French intelligence agent Denis Alex when French operation made a failed attempt to free him. | 1 person killed |
| 17 | March 18, 2013 | Mogadishu | Suicide car bomb alleged to be carried out by Al-Shabaab | At least 10 people were killed. |
| 18 | April 15, 2013 | Mogadishu | A nine-man suicide commando blast its way into Mogadishu main court complex, some blowing up their explosive vests, while others sprayed bullets in a rampage. | At least 29 people were killed. |
| 19 | May 3, 2014 | Mogadishu | Bomb explosion credited to Al-Shabaab | At least 6 people were killed. |
| 20 | May 24, 2014 | Mogadishu | Attack by Al-Shabaab on Somalia's Parliament. | At least 10 people were killed |
| 21 | December 25, | AMISOM | | 3 African Union |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 2014 | headquarters (African Union Force) in Somalia. | | Soldiers and a civilian were killed |
| **22** | January 4, 2015 | Mogadishu International Air Port | An explosive – laden vehicle rammed another vehicle setting a huge blast | 4 people were killed. |
| **23** | January 2015 | Mogadishu | Car bombing outside the gate of a hotel were Turkish delegates were preparing to receive their President. | 3 people were killed in the attack. |
| **24** | January 2015 | | Al- Shabaab killed by firing squad four men accused of spying for the CIA and other intelligence agencies. | 4 men were killed. |

*Compiled by the authors from different sources*

The cases listed above are an eloquent testimony to the fact that Al-Shabaab is a deadly terrorist group. Having examined some of the attacks perpetrated by Al-Shabaab, it is pertinent to equally probe into its sources of financing.

## Funding of Al-Shabab

The political economy of civil wars has been a hot topic in academic research for the last ten to fifteen years. In particular, the focus on "self-financing" of insurgencies has gained attention and a lot of effort has been put into understanding the often quite complex and sophisticated ways armed

opposition groups gather funds for their struggle. The funding of armed opposition movements has changed substantially in the last two decades. During the Cold War state support or sponsorship of armed insurgencies was common. The superpowers as well as regional powers often backed proxy-forces in foreign countries to promote their geopolitical interests (Vilkko, 2011).

Today, however, the climate is tougher for an aspiring rebel group. States are neither the only nor necessarily the most prominent sponsors of armed insurgencies. Although the state sponsors are not fully gone, hundreds of millions no longer flow out of Washington's and Moscow's coffers and virtues like respecting human rights and promoting a democratic society play an actual role when a rebel group is looking for support beyond the borders of its homeland (Vilkko, 2011).

Thus, like any significant terrorist or insurgent group, Al-Shabaab must spend a greatdeal of time and energy raising money, both through licit and illicit channels. Assessing Al-Shabaab's linkages with revenue-producing organized crime pose some familiar difficulties and ambiguities. Many, and probably most, insurgencies and other armed opposition groups around the world have become involved in criminal activities of various types and degrees. This is especially the case if the group's existence is a prolonged one like Al-Shabaab(JSOU Report, 2014).

Al-Shabaab has given the impression of being financially competent and less corrupt than the central and local authorities it opposes. But above all, and unlike its armed Somali adversaries, it pays its soldiers and operatives well and regularly and provides for its veterans and the families of its "martyrs", leading many to believe that its operations resemble a "fiscal military state" (ICG Report, 2014:15). Behind the

fiscal responsibility mask lies the group's major avenues for raising funds which includesextortion and the imposition of war taxes, leveraging substantial funds from drug trafficking, robbery, kidnapping, and other revenue-raising criminal enterprises that are typical to the group's operations (Ikelegbe and Okumu, 2010:33; Oloo, 2010).

For instance, the United Nations Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea (UNMGSEM, cited in JSOU Report, 2014:12) estimated that until Al-Shabaab's withdrawal from Mogadishu, they extorted some $60 million a year from the city's Bakara and SuuqBaad markets. The Monitoring Group suggested as well that Al-Shabab generated between $70 million to $100 million per year in revenue from taxation and extortion in areas under its control, to include charcoal exporting and smuggling other contraband into Kenya – the Kismayo and Marka Ports were particularly lucrative for Al-Shabaab in this respect. The Monitoring Group also reported that Al-Shabaab leveraged its religious credentials to raise money through *zakat*, annual donations that Muslims are obliged to give to fulfil their Islamic duties.

In a more elaborate form, the sources of funding for Al-Shabaab could be viewed from external and internal dimensions. According to Vilkko (2011) external sources of funding for the group include Diaspora Somalis (all Somalis with family ties to Somalia living outside Somalia, regardless of whether they live in the East African region or overseas); hawala money transfer companies (a system of money transfer via a network of hawala brokers, located around the world); cash couriers (specifically for larger transactions); Somali business community in Nairobi (usually big businesses of Somali families located in Nairobi who pay for protection out of fear of imminent attack from Al-Shabaab) andalleged

investment by Al-Shabab in the major business hub of Nairobi.

Similarly, the internal sources of income include but are not limited to direct financial control and surveillance of cash-flows; taxations; through import duties from the Port of Kismayo (a strategic port located in Somalia); protection money from businesses; protection fees derived from aid communities and industries; and through the pirate connections (Vilkko, 2011). In fact, the report of an interview conducted and released by the UN Monitoring Group on Somali (2010:99) graphically illustrated how piracy funded the terrorist activities of the Al-Shabaab group, thus:

> They (Al-Shabaab) get some of their money through the piracy. They have a cut... so when you hijack somebody, a ship, or you have people that you've hijacked, and you get paid off, they know. They will call you and tell you, 'we know what has happened: pay up'. And you better pay up.

It is instructive to add that the growth of information and communication technology (ICT) has aided the capacity of Al-Shabaab to raise funds for its engagements. Agbiboa (2014:30) had argued that ICT had allowed Al-Shabaab to tap into wealthy Salafi networks keen on supporting global jihad campaigns. He claimed that in August 2009, Al-Shabaab launched an online fundraising forum that raised 40 000 USD from members of the Somali Diaspora for the transnational jihadist cause.

It is this complex network of inter-terrorist groups, ably aided and abetted by ICT advancement that remains not only the greatest challenge to monitoring the financial transactions of these groups, but more fundamentally assisted their growth across national boundaries. Incidentally, efforts to control and

curb the growth and activities of the terrorist group have drained the energies, resources and time of the international community, leading Bereketeab (2013:61) to assert that "the Horn of Africa (HOA) comprising Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti has been the most conflict-ridden region on the continent for the last 50 years".

## Growth of Al-Shabaab and Efforts at Curbing its Activities

Al-Shabaab has experienced an extraordinary rise by any measure. This is attributable to a number of key differences that the organization evinces. According to the ICG Report (2014), three vital differences in operations have contributed immensely to the sporadic growth in both number and activities of the Al-Shabaab group: first, its core leadership, vitally from a cross-section of Somali clan-based society, remained remarkably constant over nearly a decade, until a July 2013 putsch claimed a few high-profile victims; second, it has had a reasonably consistent declared objective, referenced to Islamic scriptural authority; and third, in its continuing local presence for several years, especially in rural areas, its leaders have become adept at the cut and thrust of grassroots political governance.

Furthermore, the ICG Report (2014) claimed that, in view of the above strategic advantages, the al-Shabaab group will continue to control both money and minds. Elaborating further, the report argued that the group has the advantage of at least three decades of Salafi-Wahhabi proselytization (*daawa*) in Somalia; social conservatism is already strongly entrenched – including in Somaliland and among Somali minorities in neighbouring states –giving it deep reservoirs of fiscal and

ideological support, even without the intimidation it routinely employs. Additionally, the ICG Report asserted that the group's proven ability to adapt militarily and politically offers it flexibility that is assisted by its leadership's freedom from direct accountability to any single constituency.

It is important to point out that even though Al-Shabaab originated in 2002, it is generally agreed that the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia in December 2006 marked a watershed in the growth, development and radicalization of the group. According to Agbiboa, (2014:28), the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia in 2006 provided Al-Shabaab with three unique opportunities for expansion: first, was the opportunity to draw on deep-seated Somali hostility towards Ethiopia to recruit thousands of nationalist volunteers; second, was that the invasion forced Al-Shabaab to adopt an effective guerrilla-style operational strategy as a means of resisting Ethiopian advance into the South; and third, by forcing the Islamic Courts Union leaders who had exerted a level of moderating influence on Al-Shabaab to flee Somalia, the invasion allowed the group to become even more radical, while at the same time severing its ties to other Somali organizations.

In essence, it is safe to say thatthe Ethiopian invasion of Somalia was a primary factor in the ultra-radical turn of Al-Shabaab, "transforming the group from a small, relatively unimportant part of a more moderate Islamic movement into the most powerful and radical armed faction in the country" (Wise, 2011:4 cited in Agbiboa, 2014:28). To be sure, it was during the turn of events following the invasion drama that Al-Shabab developed an effective recruitment strategy which eventually defined and expanded both its growth and scope of operations.

Thus, given the regional and international reach of the organization, it is unsurprising that Al-Shabaab was able to recruit from a wide-range of countries. The organization utilized extremist teachings, literature, videos, and other propaganda materials to spread its message and to bring recruits into its fold (JSOU Report, 2014; CNN Report, 2014). Their targets range from younger Somali population; refugees; internally displaced persons, especially children; unemployed; non-ethnic Somalis, especially of the English, Swahili and Arabic speaking populations; and Minority Muslim population in Europe and America all of whom are motivated by several factors but notably ideological and pragmatic calculations (Botha and Abdile, 2014; JSOU Report, 2014:18). However, all of Al-Shabaab's recruitment efforts in the Horn of Africa have taken place in a context of growing conservatism among Muslims in the region (cited in JSOU Report, 2014).

Interestingly, Al-Shabaab's international recruitment efforts have more than any other enhanced its capacity for growth, and have become a source of concern in recent times (Anti-Defamation League, ADL Report, 2013). For instance, a 2011 Assessment Report, with contributions by a number of specialists having direct experience and/or deep research experience in Somali affairs, specifically addressed the many issues involving the Al-Shabaab foreign fighters, supporters, or leaders. The report concluded that of "the 85 member executive council of Al-Shabaab today, 42 are Somalis and 43 are foreigners, where the hard liners led by the foreign jihadis wield enormous influence and have access to resources and the means to dictate their wishes to the less powerful factions" (cited in JSOU, Report, 2014:24).

These foreigners are central in training new fighters and in the acquisition of new arms, ammunition, and other military

equipments. They have also been key Al-Shabab field commanders, transferring and applying combat and guerrilla tactics, techniques and procedures from firefights to improvised explosive device (IED) employment to kidnappings, assassinations and suicide bombings. As a result of these foreign supports, Al-Shabaab has heightened its operational capacity in several targeted regions, causing unprecedented damages.

According to Agbiboa (2014), since 2008, Al-Shabaab has demonstrated that it has the operational capability to launch deadly attacks against outposts of the West and perceived enemies outside Somalia. He claimed that in October 2008, Al-Shabaab coordinated five suicide bomb attacks that hit the UN Development Programme compound, the Ethiopian Consulate and various government offices, killing several dozen. Again, in September 2009, the group bombed the African Union Peace Keeping Mission in Mogadishu, killing more than 20 people and damaging the offices of a U.S. firm that was purportedly providing support to peacekeepers. Similarly, in July 11, 2010, Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for suicide bombing of two groups of fans watching the World Cup in the Ugandan capital, Kampala, which killed more than 70 people, including one American citizen (Agbiboa, 2014:28).Furthermore, in 2013, Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the terrorist attack at Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya, which killed 72 persons and injured over 200 people (Back, 2013). Details can be found in table 1

Perhaps what many scholars and observers perceive to be the most important and troubling factor that has aided the recent growth of Al-Shabab is their deepening ties with Al-Qaeda since 2009 (Baehr, 2011). According to Agbiboa (2014:29) Al-Shabaab's deepening ties with Al-Qaeda have had

profound effects on its structure and operational strategy in two main ways: first, Al-Shabab's affiliation with Al-Qaeda significantly altered the former's leadership component – after the death of its leader, Aden HashiAyro, in May 2008, Al-Shabab's command structure welcomed a number of Al-Qaeda core members into top leadership roles; second, until 2008, Al-Shabaab made use of relatively conventional guerrilla tactics in its attacks against the invading Ethiopian forces, but following their growing ties with Al-Qaeda, the group has mastered suicide attacks as a means of achieving its ends.

Apart from Al-Shabaab's link with Al-Queda, Barhr (2011) reveals how the group is spreading to the West and other countries. In fact,more of young jihadist sympathisers are travelling to Somalia to take part in the Al-Shabaab Jihad. According to this author, about 2,000 jihadistscome from various countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan and Arabian countries but bulk of Al-Shabaab foreign fighters are from the West. The author added that American intelligence agencies have evidence of a growing number of young Muslims in the USA that are attracted by the ideology of Al-Shabaab and want to go to Somalia to fight alongside with them. Al-Shabaab targets young people at mosques to indoctrinate them that it is a duty to fight against the enemies of Islam. Al-Shabaab has been able to establish its presence in Germany as there is a group called German Shabaab. It is also alleged that some jihadists in Sweden maintain contact with Al-Shabaab in Somalia.It is this dangerous dimension to Al-Shabaab's operational strategy that has warranted an international quest and subsequent coalition against the group.

Thus, countering Al-Shabab's deep presence in south-central Somalia requires the kind of government – financially secure, with a common vision and coercive means – that is

unlikely to materialize in the near future. More military surges will do little to reduce the socio-political dysfunction that has allowed Al-Shabaab to thrive; in certain areas it may even serve to deepen its hold. This challenge is attributable to the unique geographical, political, cultural and historical realities of Somaliland which serve to narrow the coalition's window of opportunity (ICG Report, 2014; JSOU Report, 2014).

However, the greatest challenge to countering Al-Shabaab's operations lie in their "broader military guerrilla tactics" which have been described as "a rational, well-calculated strategic decision" to avoid a devastating confrontation from the well-coordinated international coalition (JSOU, 2014:31). In short, Robert Taber's (2002) arresting metaphor becomes apt in understanding the dynamics of the guerrilla tactics employed by Al-Shabaab as a defensive strategy. He argued thus:

> The guerrilla fights the war of the flea. The flea bites, hops, and bites again, nimbly avoiding the foot that would crush him. He does not seek to kill his enemy at a blow, but to bleed him and feed on him, to plague and bedevil him, to keep him from resting and to destroy his nerve and morale (Taber, 2002:50 cited in JSOU, 2014:32).

Despite these demoralizing tactics and challenging terrain, the international community, under the coalition of the Somali National Army (SNA), Kenyan Defence Forces (KDF), and the latest combined African Union (AU) Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) with the support of the United States, has recorded remarkable successes in countering Al-Shabaab's offensive. The most outstanding success recorded by these combined forces was that they drove Al-Shabab out of at least ten major south-central towns – their strongest bases – in

twenty days leading to the group's dramatic retreat (ICG Report, 2014).

Similarly, one of the clearest manifestations of the coalition's effort is the large number of defectors abandoning Al-Shabaab after its recent territorial losses. Added to this is that, the loss of Al-Shabaab's strongholds has damaged the group's income. No longer able to rely on the level of taxes from Kismayo's Port or Mogadishu's Bakara Market, it has had difficulty providing the same sort of financial benefits to its fighters that induced many of them to join in the first place, and this has led to further defections. Furthermore, Al-Shababhas lost much of the infrastructure it used for transmitting propaganda, such as several of its radio stations, another happy outcome of the coalition's offensive. Again, while there are no solid numbers on just how many insurgents have been killed in the offensive, they are likely significant (JSOU Report, 2014:44).

The United States' efforts have largely determined the targeted killings of high-level Al-Shabaab terrorists and their Al-Qaeda sponsors. While it is difficult to quantify the effects their deaths had on the group, it is nonetheless clear that the immediate effects were poor morale among the fighters and personal security challenges within the rank and file of the group. This perhaps resulted in the surrender of a highly sought after Al-Shabaab leader, Zakariya Ismail Ahmed Hersi to the Somali National Government and African Union forces on December 28, 2014, following a $3million bounty offered by the US for any information leading to his arrest (Aljazeera.com, 2014).

The international community has also heavily sanctioned Al-Shabaab's members, people and countries that support it, as well as the group as an entity. In March 2008, the US

officially designated Al-Shabaab a terrorist organization under Executive Order (EO) 13224, opening the group up to a variety of sanctions, and in April 2010, President Obama in EO 13536 again named Al-Shabaab as an entity to be sanctioned, and included several prominent Al-Shabaab leaders such as Ahmed AbdiGodane, Hassan DahirAweys, and Fuad Mohammed Khalaf, and anyone "engaged in acts that directly or indirectly threaten the peace, security, or stability of Somalia (JSOU Report, 2014:46).

In the final analysis, Al-Shabaab has committed some key blunders on its own that have both weakened its operational dynamics and aided the coalition of international community in their offensive. These mistakes include brutality, Salafism, problem with foreigners and internal schisms or bickering (Sage, 2010). These factors have combined to puncture the structure and leadership of the group leading many to believe that Al-Shabab may not be as appealing and popular among the Somalis as it used to be. This calls for an alternative approach by the international community in crushing the rapidly diminishing networks of the group.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper has strongly advanced the argument that Al-Shabaab is an emerging terrorist group in Somalia, with far reaching influences across Western Europe and the United States. The magnitude of its operations in the Horn of Africa, added to the spate of its spread across the continent are issues of serious concern to the international community. More so, Al-Shabaab's strong ideological sentiment which has aided its recruitment and financing continues to attract the cooperation of other terrorist organizations and even state actors in the

international system. All these supposed advantages have overwhelmed the efforts by the international community to curb the increasing activities of Al-Shabaab.

In view of the above, the paper recommends that "counter- media war", especially through the social media platform, to dissuade young people from joining the organization must be instituted on a global scale. This is necessitated by the fact that the most common strategy by Al-Shabab to recruit young fighters in Europe and the US is through the social media which is populated by young adherents. Again, greater cooperation on the part of governments, especially through the instrumentality of regional organizations (African Union and European Union) should be given serious attention.

Furthermore, the coalition of international community (SNA, KDF and AMISOM) must intensify their offensive against Al-Shabaab and arrest all allegations of corruption, factional politics, demoralization of the fighters and indiscipline on the part of the troops. In our view, high level discipline on the part of the coalition will increase their goodwill from other sections of the international community such as the US. When all these factors are put together, the efforts at curbing the activities of Al-Shabaab will gain momentum and perhaps, yield tremendous political dividends.

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