



FORUM: SPECIAL POLITICAL AND DECOLONIZATION COMMITTEE

QUESTION OF: ADDRESSING THE DISPUTE CAUSED BY THE TERROR GROUP AL-SHABAAB IN SOMALI



INTRODUCTION

Al-Shabaab, also known as 'the Youth,' is an Islamist insurgent group originating from Somalia. While it previously held control over Mogadishu in the late 2000s, a military effort led by the African Union (AU) with support from the United States and Western allies successfully pushed the group away from major population centers. Despite these efforts, the insurgency has proven resilient, remaining a significant security threat in Somalia. Al-Shabaab currently dominates large portions of the country's south and continues to carry out deadly attacks against both international forces and civilians in the region. The ongoing threat posed by al-Shabaab has prompted the AU to reassess its withdrawal plans, and it has also complicated U.S. counterterrorism operations, which have experienced fluctuations in recent years.



In the midst of prolonged political turmoil, Somalia, known as one of the world's most impoverished nations, has witnessed the emergence and dissolution of various militant groups. Al-Shabaab, currently a major security concern, traces its roots back to al-Ittihad al-Islami (AIAI), a militant Salafi group that gained prominence in the 1990s following the fall of Siad Barre's regime and the onset of civil war. AIAI, initially supported by Osama bin Laden, comprised Middle East-educated Somali extremists.

During the early 2000s, internal divisions arose within AIAI between those advocating for a political front and younger members aspiring to establish a "Greater Somalia" under strict Islamic governance. The hard-liners aligned with an alliance of sharia courts called the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) and became its youth militia. In June 2006, Al-Shabaab and the



ICU seized control of the capital, causing concerns in neighboring Ethiopia about the potential spread of jihadi violence.

In December 2006, Ethiopia, a predominantly Christian nation, invaded Somalia and easily ousted the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) from Mogadishu at the request of Somalia's transitional government. This intervention had the unintended consequence of radicalizing al-Shabaab. Following the expulsion of much of the ICU to neighboring countries, al-Shabaab retreated to southern Somalia, where it initiated guerrilla attacks, including bombings and assassinations, targeting Ethiopian forces. This period marked al-Shabaab's transformation into a formidable insurgency, gaining control over significant territories in central and southern Somalia. Ethiopia justified its intervention as a "reluctant response" to the ICU's calls for jihad against Ethiopia and its territorial claims against Ethiopia and Kenya. Ethiopia asserted that the intervention had support from the United States, the African Union (AU), and other partners. Between 2006 and 2008, new Islamist-nationalist recruits significantly increased al-Shabaab's membership from about four hundred to several thousand. During this time, the group's ties to al-Qaeda became apparent, with al-Shabaab leaders expressing admiration for the terrorist network and condemning perceived U.S. crimes against Muslims globally. The U.S. State Department designated al-Shabaab as a foreign terrorist organization in 2008, and in 2012, al-Shabaab's leadership formally pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda. Current estimates suggest that al-Shabaab's membership ranges between seven thousand

and twelve thousand individuals. The group enlists civilians, particularly children, forcefully into its ranks, while others join voluntarily, often driven by financial motivations.





DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Territorial claims refer to assertions or demands made by a country or political entity regarding its right to control or govern a specific geographic area. These claims often involve disputes over boundaries, ownership, or sovereignty of a particular territory. Territorial claims can lead to conflicts between nations and are typically rooted in historical, cultural, political, or economic factors. Resolving such disputes may involve diplomatic negotiations, legal processes, or, in some cases, international mediation or arbitration. The recognition or rejection of territorial claims can significantly impact geopolitical relationships and regional stability.

A **terrorist network** is a clandestine and organized group or association that utilizes violence, intimidation, and fear to achieve political, ideological, religious, or social objectives. Members of a terrorist network often engage in acts of terrorism, such as bombings, assassinations, or kidnappings, with the intention of instilling fear, coercing governments or societies, and advancing their agenda. These networks may operate domestically or internationally and can have a hierarchical or decentralized structure. Communication within terrorist networks often involves secrecy and encrypted channels to avoid detection by law enforcement and intelligence agencies. Counterterrorism efforts aim to disrupt and dismantle these networks to prevent acts of terror and protect public safety.

Radicalization is the process by which an individual or group undergoes a transformation in beliefs, values, and opinions, adopting extreme ideologies or perspectives, often involving a departure from mainstream or moderate views. This shift may manifest in political, religious, social, or cultural contexts and can lead individuals or groups to support or engage in radical actions, including violence or terrorism. Factors contributing to radicalization can include socio-economic grievances, political instability, religious influences, online propaganda, and exposure to extremist ideologies. Understanding the process of radicalization is crucial for developing effective strategies to prevent or counteract the development of violent extremism.



Allegiance refers to loyalty, fidelity, or devotion shown by an individual or group toward a person, organization, cause, or government. Pledging allegiance often involves a formal or symbolic commitment to support, defend, and uphold the values or goals associated with the entity to which loyalty is sworn. This concept is particularly relevant in the context of political or national allegiance, where individuals may express their loyalty and commitment to a country, its flag, or its governing principles. Allegiance can also extend to affiliations with groups, ideologies, or leaders, indicating a steadfast dedication to their objectives or beliefs.

Insurgency refers to an organized and often prolonged rebellion or uprising against established authorities, typically by a group seeking political, social, economic, or territorial change. Insurgencies involve irregular warfare tactics, including guerrilla warfare, ambushes, and other asymmetrical strategies, rather than conventional military methods. Insurgent groups may operate within a specific region or across borders, and they often challenge the existing government or ruling authority. Key characteristics of insurgency include the use of subversion, propaganda, and popular support to undermine the legitimacy and stability of the established order. Insurgencies can arise in response to perceived injustices, political grievances, ethnic or religious tensions, or other socio-economic factors. The goal of insurgents is often to weaken the government's control and influence, ultimately seeking to replace or transform the existing system. Counterinsurgency efforts involve political, military, and socio-economic strategies aimed at quelling the insurgency and addressing its root causes.

Counterterrorism refers to the efforts and strategies employed by governments and security forces to prevent, respond to, and mitigate acts of terrorism. This involves a range of measures, including intelligence gathering, law enforcement activities, international cooperation, and military interventions, aimed at disrupting terrorist plots, dismantling terrorist networks, and safeguarding public safety. The goal of counterterrorism is to minimize the impact of terrorism, protect civilians, and maintain national and international security.



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Harakat Shabaab al-Mujahidin, commonly known as al-Shabaab, initially emerged as the militant wing of the Somali Council of Islamic Courts in the latter part of 2006. Despite facing defeat by Somali and Ethiopian forces in 2007, al-Shabaab, operating as a clan-based insurgent and terrorist group, has persistently conducted violent insurgency in southern and central Somalia. The group has gained control over strategic locations by recruiting regional sub-clans and their militias, often through coercive means, employing guerrilla warfare and terrorist tactics against the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS), African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) peacekeepers, and non-governmental aid organizations. Since 2011, concerted efforts from AMISOM and Ethiopian forces have significantly diminished al-Shabaab's control, particularly in Mogadishu and other crucial regions. Internal conflicts among senior leaders have further weakened the group, with a notable purge of opponents occurring in 2013 under the leadership of the now-deceased Ahmed Abdi Aw-Mohamed.



Al-Shabaab exhibits consistent internal strife among its leadership, indicating a lack of centralization and a diverse range of agendas and goals. The group's members hail from different clans, making it susceptible to clan politics, internal divisions, and changing alliances. The majority of its fighters primarily focus on a nationalistic struggle against the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) rather than aligning with global jihadist objectives. While al-Shabaab's senior leaders maintain ties with al-Qaeda, the official merger of the two groups was publicly declared in February 2012 by the leader of al-Shabaab and Ayman al-Zawahiri, al-Qaeda's leader. However, the loss of four senior figures, including Abdi, since September 2014 may have hindered communication between al-Shabaab and al-Qaeda leadership.



Al-Shabaab has claimed responsibility for numerous bombings, including suicide attacks, targeting Mogadishu and different regions in Somalia. Their usual targets include Somali government officials, AMISOM, and perceived allies of the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS). Since 2013, the group has expanded its operations to neighboring countries, carrying out notable attacks such as the Westgate mall attack in Nairobi (September 2013), the restaurant attack in Djibouti (May 2014), and the university massacre in Garissa, Kenya (April 2015). The Westgate attack resulted in the death of 67 individuals, while the Garissa attack claimed the lives of approximately 150 mainly Christian students.

Al-Shabaab is also accountable for assassinating Somali peace activists, international aid workers, civil society figures, and journalists. The group obstructed aid delivery from certain Western relief agencies during the 2011 famine, leading to a significant loss of life. Designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the US Government in 2008 under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act and as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist entity under Executive Order 13224, the Rewards for Justice program added several al-Shabaab leaders to its site in 2012, offering substantial rewards for information leading to their capture.

CURRENT SITUATION

The Somali government has achieved significant progress in areas such as state-building and security restoration through military actions against Al-Shabaab, according to senior officials addressing the Security Council today. Members of the Council emphasized the importance of coordination and support for the government as it prepares to take on the responsibility for its own security, especially with the upcoming reduction of international presence on the ground. Catriona Laing, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), emphasized political advancements, including the 27 May National Consultative Council communiqué outlining suggestions for a forthcoming electoral





system. She pointed out that two of these proposals—the presidential system and aligning the election schedules of federal member states with the extension of incumbent mandates—were generating disagreements. Laing underscored the importance of ensuring that any constitutional amendments are grounded in inclusive dialogue, consensus-building, and legislative processes. Regarding security matters, she highlighted the ongoing threat from Al-Shabaab. Despite the initial success of the Somali National Army's offensive in gaining significant territory, they have encountered setbacks and operational challenges. As the government forces concentrate on regrouping, reinforcing, and reorganizing, Al-Shabaab has escalated the use of 107-millimeter rockets in Mogadishu and carried out targeted attacks on prominent Somali politicians. The conflicts have resulted in an increasing toll on civilians, with 1,289 civilian casualties recorded in 2023 thus far. Mohamed El-Amine Souef, Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission for Somalia and Head of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), stated that commendable progress has been achieved on various outstanding issues in Somalia since his last briefing to the Council in June. This includes consensus building and dialogue among the country's leaders and the ongoing offensive against Al-Shabaab. President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud has been leading the government's commitment to combat Al-Shabaab, which is identified as the primary threat to the country and the region. Souef detailed the support provided by ATMIS in the government-led offensive against the terrorist group.

SOLUTION ALTERNATIVES

For the situation in Somalia, there is no silver bullet. But there are some solutions that can be useful for the situation. United Nations (UN) and multilateral involvement in addressing the al-Shabaab dispute in Somalia is crucial for fostering international cooperation and collective action. The UN plays a central role in coordinating efforts, providing humanitarian aid, and facilitating diplomatic initiatives to bring about stability and security. Through peacekeeping missions and resolutions, the UN seeks to address the root causes of the conflict, promote political dialogue, and support the capacity-building of the Somali government. Multilateral involvement involves collaboration with regional organizations, neighboring countries, and international partners to pool resources and expertise. This collective approach enhances the effectiveness of counterterrorism measures, facilitates diplomatic initiatives, and contributes



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to building a sustainable and peaceful future for Somalia. The UN and multilateral efforts aim to address the complex challenges posed by al-Shabaab comprehensively, recognizing the need for a coordinated, multidimensional approach to promote lasting stability in the region.

Community engagement and counter-radicalization efforts are essential components of addressing the al-Shabaab dispute in Somalia. These initiatives involve actively involving local communities in the prevention of radicalization and recruitment. By implementing programs that focus on education, vocational training, and economic opportunities, vulnerable populations are provided with alternatives to extremism. Collaboration with community leaders, religious figures, and civil society helps build trust and facilitates the dissemination of counter-narratives against radical ideologies. Community engagement also empowers communities to identify and report potential radicalization, contributing to early intervention. By addressing root causes and fostering resilience within communities, these efforts play a vital role in reducing the appeal of extremist ideologies and promoting long-term stability in the region.

Diplomacy and regional cooperation are key elements in addressing the al-Shabaab dispute in Somalia. Diplomatic initiatives involve engaging in dialogue and negotiations with relevant stakeholders, both within Somalia and in the broader East African region. Building consensus among neighboring countries and international partners is essential to develop a unified approach to counter-terrorism and address the root causes of instability. Strengthening regional cooperation fosters intelligence-sharing, coordinated military efforts, and joint strategies to curb the cross-border movements of al-Shabaab. By promoting diplomatic solutions and collaboration, the international community can enhance the effectiveness of counterterrorism measures and contribute to the overall stability and security of the region. Regional cooperation also plays a crucial role in preventing the spillover effects of the conflict and creating a conducive environment for sustainable peace and development in Somalia.



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USEFUL LINKS

Council on Foreign Relations:

<https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/al-shabaab>

Office of the Director of National Intelligence Terrorism Guide:

<https://www.dni.gov/nctc/index.html>

Human Rights Watch:

<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/somalia>

EUAA:

<https://euaa.europa.eu/country-guidance-somalia-2023/521-al-shabaab>

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