



ISSUE BRIEF

INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC STUDIES ISLAMABAD

Web: www.issi.org.pk

Phone: +92-920-4423, 24

Fax: +92-920-4658

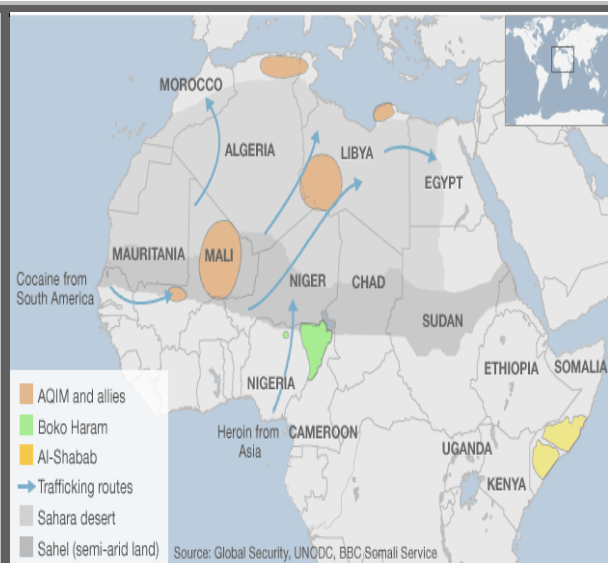
GROWING THREAT OF TRANSNATIONAL TERRORISM IN AFRICA: THE CASE OF AL-SHABAB IN SOMALIA

By
Ahmad Saffee
Research Fellow

Edited by
Najam Rafique

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*(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do
not represent those of ISSI)*



Despite a decade long international "war on terror", the threat and ability of conducting complex attacks by transnational terrorist organizations has evolved and somewhat shown resilience. The recent bomb attack killing over 300 people in Mogadishu is a horrific reminder to the international community of the very existence of the global terrorism franchise, pioneered by Al-Qaeda and now Daesh or Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Al-Shabab.

In order to counter this threat, there is a need for an effective synchronization of counter-terrorism efforts at a multi-sectoral level under an integrated policy approach. There is also a need for a localized approach. The African Union along with international partners (including the United Nations) need to confront indigenous reasons, cause and means which are being exploited by terrorist organizations like Al-Shabab, and also to stop them from collaborating with this fluid network of transnational terrorism.

Al-Shabab was formed as a radical offshoot of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), which, in 2006, controlled Mogadishu.¹ The Islamist group, which controls about half of south-central Somalia, is estimated to have between 7,000 to 9,000 fighters, mainly recruited within Somalia but also from Western countries.² The Ethiopian invasion of Somalia in December 2006 marked a watershed in the

¹ Fergusson, J. (2013). *The World's Most Dangerous Place: Inside the Outlaw State of Somalia*. De Capo Press; Bantam.

² BBC News. (2013). "Q&A: Who Are Somalia's Al-Shabab?" September 23. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-15336689>.

development and radicalization of Al-Shabab. The conflict created a breeding ground for these extremist elements whose leadership now resided with a more radical youth that rallied people for their own ideological interests. Since 2008, Al-Shabab has demonstrated that it has the operational capability to launch deadly attacks against outposts of the West and perceived enemies outside Somalia, mainly Kenya and Uganda as they are contributing troops to African Union Peacekeeping Mission in Somalia.³

Therefore, any counter-terrorism effort must take into account the historical grievances and the ideological appeal that is being exploited by transnational terrorist organization to further their personal agenda. Moreover, there is a also need for restricting online social media recruitment and propaganda carried by transnational terrorist organizations and their ability to communicate and coordinate such complex attacks.

What is also interesting is the strategic presence of key military installations of the West, and now other foreign countries like China and Turkey on the African continent. Where it is in the best interest of these external partners of Africa to counter terrorism, there will also be others who would want to use organizations like Al-Shabab as proxies for destabilizing the prospective economic growth of some African countries.

A number of key members of the Al Itihaad al Islamiya (AIAI) leadership (former Al-Shabab) have been reported to have travelled with Al-Qaeda to Afghanistan to receive training in Al-Qaeda's combat strategy, including suicide attacks and simultaneous bombings of different targets.⁴ Such dangers even exist today, especially with Daesh's military drawdown, its leadership and strategic apparatus would need new places to settle and disseminate their virus. These fluid networks of transnational terror organizations pose a threat to international peace and stability, and signifies the urgent need for the international community to form strategies and synergies in building a firewall against the menace of transnational terrorism.

In order to counter this fluid network on transnational terrorism, United Nations (UN) must reform its peace keeping missions in a way to match the changing security situation. The violent extremism component must be incorporated to the strategy. Also, the peace keeping missions should review and reform their mandate and build on issues of sustainability and capacity building. Moreover, the African Union should pro-actively pursue bilateral and multilateral forums for an effective international engagement.

³ Council for Foreign Relations, "Al-Shabab in Somalia", <https://www.cfr.org/interactives/global-conflict-tracker#!/conflict/al-shabab-in-somalia>

⁴ <https://jtr.st-andrews.ac.uk/articles/10.15664/jtr.826/>

The Heads of Intelligence and Security Services (HISS) of the member countries of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the East African Community (EAC) met twice in 2015 to deepen security cooperation and harmonize efforts to fight terrorism and violent extremism.⁵ The recommendations which came out of these consultations emphasized increased cooperation and understanding of conflicts. Confronting extremism at a socio-psychological level involves a multi-dimensional approach in a systematic manner with the support from all major stakeholders.

Pakistan has a unique role to play considering the number of its troops deployment for seven peace keepings missions on the African continent under the UN mandate. More so, Pakistan's own experience in fighting home grown extremism and transnational terror networks is of much significance for Africa and the United Nations.

There is also a need for better border management to deter the inflows of foreign terrorist fighters from Middle East and elsewhere. More intelligence cooperation and joint operations will be effective in rooting out transnational terrorism in its early phase. However, ultimately the solution to these problems will have to come from Africa and others can only facilitate.

⁵ <http://www.peaceau.org/en/article/the-heads-of-intelligence-and-security-services-of-the-east-africa-region-conclude-their-second-meeting-in-kampala>