

Al-Shabaab from Local to Regional and Global Terror Threat¹

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Abstract:

The Al-Shabaab group, is an off-shoot of the former Islamic Courts Union (ICU) of Somalia and the branch of Al-Qaeda in the Horn of Africa. Al-Shabaab seeks to overthrow the government in Somalia and to establish an Islamic emirate ruled by a strict version of Shariah law.

In recent months, Al-Shabaab has stepped up its attacks as Somalia has been rocked by political crisis, the withdrawal of most of the US's troops from Somalia and a pause in American drone strikes that had targeted the Al-Shabaab group and its leaders.

Al-Shabaab poses a serious threat not only to Somalia's security but also to that of the African continent and the globe at large. It adheres to the same global Islamist ideology as Al-Qaeda and has made several public statements pledging allegiance to the group and praising its leaders.

Keywords:

Al-Shabaab; Al-Qaeda; AMISOM; Kenya; Uganda; Djibouti; suicide bombings; cross border attacks.

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Introduction

Nearly 20 years after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Al-Qaeda's East African branch, the Al-Shabaab (Movement of Warrior Youth), is still considered as a regional and global terror threat.

In recent months, Al-Shabaab has stepped up its attacks as Somalia has been rocked by political crisis, the withdrawal of most of the US's troops from Somalia and a pause in American drone strikes that had targeted the Al-Shabaab group and its leaders (The New York Times, 2021).

Al-Shabaab poses a serious threat not only to Somalia's security but also to that of the African continent and the globe at large. It adheres to the same global Islamist ideology as Al-Qaeda and has made several public statements pledging allegiance to the group and praising its leaders. Al-Shabaab has links with Boko Haram, Al-Qaeda of the Maghreb and Al-Qaeda of the Arab Peninsula.

The group has issued several threats to strike outside Africa, including American and European targets. On January 5, 2021, Al-Shabaab's leader, Abu Ubaydah urged his followers to step up attacks against American and Israeli targets and also called for attacks on France for its "crimes" against the honour of the prophet Muhammad.

Abu Ubaydah marked the anniversary of the terrorist group's attack on Camp Simba in Kenya, claiming it was revenge for alleged U.S. crimes against the Muslims of Somalia. He added that it was also part of a series of attacks under the slogan, "Jerusalem will never be Judaized", launched by Al-Qaeda in response to the Trump administration's decision to move the U.S. embassy in Israel to the city of Jerusalem (JNS, 2021).

Al-Shabaab – Background

Al-Shabaab, is an off-shoot of the former Islamic Courts Union (ICU) of Somalia and the branch of Al-Qaeda in the Horn of Africa. Al-Shabaab seeks to overthrow the government in Somalia and to establish an Islamic emirate ruled by a strict version of Shariah law (Al-Jazeera, 2020). The US military estimates that Al-Shabaab commands somewhere between 5,000 to 10,000 fighters.

By 2006, the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) was in control of much of Southern Somalia, including the capital Mogadishu. At that time, Al-Shabaab was the youth wing of the ICU and was "integrated quite tightly with the ICU armed forces, acting as a sort of 'special forces' for the ICU" (Shay, 2014, p. 97).

When the Islamic Courts Union (from which Al-Shabaab was born) was first instituted and sought to implement Sharia law, there was broad community support. Many people in Somalia admired and supported Islamic rule in the country after the era of warlords, since

Muslims believe Islamic Shariah to be the best and supreme law on earth. Some Somalis even returned from western countries to take part in what they saw as the new dawn in the country.

In December 2006, the ICU was defeated by a coalition of the transitional government (TFG) and the Ethiopian forces. Backed by the Ethiopian armed forces, the transitional federal government asserted rule in 2007.

Since 2007 the ICU group launched a guerrilla war against the TFG and the Ethiopian forces who invaded the country. Al-Shabaab emerged as a distinct force during the course of the insurgency (Shay, 2014, p. 98).

The break between Al-Shabaab and ICU came in late 2007. That September, the ICU attended a conference of opposition factions in the Eritrean capital, Asmara, and re-emerged as the Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS). Al-Shabaab boycotted the conference, and its leaders criticized the ARS for failing to adopt a global jihadist ideology (Middle East Quarterly, 2009).

In the years 2008-2009 a national reconciliation program took place and ICU came to the negotiation table with the transitional government. On January 2009 UN-sponsored peace talks concluded in Djibouti with Ethiopians agreeing to withdraw from Somalia and ICU leader Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmad "agreed to stop fighting." On January 31, 2009 - Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmad was elected as the president of the Transitional Federal Government.

Divisions about reconciliation led to the formation of Al-Shabaab as an opposition to the "moderate" ICU.

As Ethiopian forces left Somalia in early 2009, fighters affiliated with Al-Shabaab took over the areas that were occupied by the Ethiopian forces and implemented a strict version of Shariah in areas they came to control. The western-backed Somali government (TFG) has relied on the support of the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) to battle the Al-Shabaab.

Al-Shabaab described itself as waging Jihad (holy war) against "enemies of Islam" and was engaged in combat against the Somali TFG and African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM). It has declared war also on the U.N and on Western non-governmental organizations that distribute food aid in Somalia.

Al-Shabaab has been designated a global terrorist organization by the U.S. and several western governments and described as having ties to Al-Qaeda. Prominent members of Al-Shabaab responded in a celebratory tone. Sheikh Mukhtar Robow, told the BBC that he welcomed the designation as an "honour" because "[w]e are good Muslims and the Americans are infidels. We are on the right path."



He said that Al-Shabaab was "negotiating how we can unite into one" with Al-Qaeda. He continued, "We will take our orders from Sheikh Osama bin Laden because we are his students."

In 2010, Al-Shabaab controlled much of southern Somalia (at least a third of Somalia), including most of Mogadishu, the capital, where they enforced strict Islamic sharia law.

The Fall and the "Come Back" of Al-Shabaab

Since August 2011, the African Union Mission (AMISOM) of 21,000 soldiers from Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Burundi and Djibouti and the relatively weak Somali army, with 35,000 troops, have liberated the major towns from Al-Shabaab.

Al-Shabaab has shown little resistance, first losing control of the capital, Mogadishu, in 2011 and then being pushed out of all of Somalia's other major cities and towns.

After being pushed out of their main bastions by AMISOM in 2011, Al-Shabaab still controls swaths of territory outside the cities. The group is essentially a governing force that provides effective – if brutal – judicial services and imposes fines and taxes, even in government-controlled areas. (Shay, 2021)

Al-Shabaab's leadership also suffered several blows during last decade. Al-Shabaab was headed by Aden Hashi Ayro until he was killed by a US airstrike in early May 2008. After the death of Ayro, Ahmed Abdi Godane (also known as Abu Zubair) a devout ruthless hardliner became leader of the group. Godane himself was killed in a US airstrike as well. He was succeeded by Ahmed Umar (also known as Abu Ubaydah).

Al-Shabaab has continued to wage war against the government, with regular attacks in Mogadishu and against neighbouring countries (mainly Kenya) which have contributed to the AMISOM force (Al Jazeera, 2020).

Al-Shabaab opposes the presence of foreign troops and regularly attacks foreign interests and peacekeepers in the region including American, EU and Turkish targets.

Al-Shabaab is far from a spent force and has the ability to out manoeuvre the Somali government and its international partners. The Al-Shabaab group has been on the offensive since 2019 and the group has increased its attacks on African Union (AMISOM) bases, Somali government facilities and officials and security forces, hotels and targets in neighbouring Kenya (Shay, 2019, p. 93.).

Al-Shabaab links to Al-Qaeda

Bin Laden's organization has long had a presence in Somalia. It dispatched trainers to liaise with the Islamic Union group (IU) prior to the 1993 battle of Mogadishu when eighteen U.S.

soldiers were killed. Despite that connection, some scholars have questioned how deep the ties between Al-Qaeda and the IU really were. (Menkhaus, 2004).

In contrast, after Al-Shabaab emerged as a distinct entity, its leaders reached out to Al-Qaeda's senior leadership, and its chief military strategist openly declared his allegiance to bin Laden.

As early as 2006, Bin Laden accused the West of interfering in Somalia's politics as part of its "crusade" against Islam. Top Al-Qaeda leaders, including Osama bin Laden, Ayman al Zawahiri, Abu Yahya al Libi, praised Al-Shabaab in propaganda tapes and encouraged the group to carry out attacks against the Somali government, neighbouring countries, and the West (The Sunday Times, 2008).

Before 2009, Al-Shabaab and its main ally, the Islamic party (Hizb al Islam), had always denied links to Al-Qaeda. In September 2009, Al-Shabaab pledged allegiance to Al-Qaeda. The Emir of Somalia's Al-Shabaab, Abu Zubair, lent his support to Bin Laden in a video distributed on Jihadi blogs. The tape was Al-Shabaab's response to a message from Bin Laden to Somalis in March 2009, asking them to rebel against their newly elected president, Islamic militant-turned-politician Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmad (Shay, 2019, p. 91-92).

The motivation behind the change in the group's public position might have been prompted by a desire to give the group a more global dimension, which the leader Abu Zubair mentioned in his statement.

In late 2009, Osama bin Laden appointed Fazul Abdullah Mohammed to serve as Al-Qaeda's operations chief in East Africa and Al-Qaeda's link to the Al-Shabaab. The announcement was made at a ceremony in Mogadishu.

Fazul had been indicted by the US for his involvement in the 1998 attacks on American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. In addition to his role in the embassy attacks, Fazul was the suspected mastermind of the 2002 bombing of an Israeli-owned hotel in the Kenyan city of Mombasa that killed 15, and a failed attempt to shoot down an Israeli airliner at the same time (Shay 2019, p. 93).

Fazul was killed just four weeks after Bin Laden, by Somali troops at a checkpoint outside of Mogadishu, on June 3, 2011.

Al-Shabaab is said to have non-Somali foreigners in its ranks, particularly at its leadership. Sheikh Muhammad Abu Fa'id, a Saudi citizen, served as a top financier and a "manager" for Al-Shabaab. Abu Musa Mombasa, a Pakistani citizen, served as Al-Shabaab's chief of security and training. Mahmud Mujajir, a Sudanese citizen, was Al-Shabaab's chief of recruitment for suicide bombers. Abu Mansour al Amriki, a US citizen, served as a military commander, recruiter, financier, and propagandist. (International Business Publications, 2011, p. 116)

Fighters from the Persian Gulf and international jihadists were called to join the holy war against the Somali government and its Ethiopian allies. According to UN Security Council



documents, there were several hundreds of non-Somali fighters being used by Somali rebel groups, mostly Al-Shabaab.

Though Somali Islamists did not originally use suicide bombing tactics, the foreign elements of Al-Shabaab were blamed for several suicide attacks. Later local Somalis joined the suicide campaign of Al-Shabaab.

In December 2010, Al-Shabaab's spokesperson has openly called for Al-Qaeda to send fighters to Somalia to fight the Transitional Federal Government and African Union forces from Uganda and Burundi. "We call on our brothers [Al-Qaeda] to come to Somalia and to help us expand the East Africa jihad."

After the death of Osama bin Laden, Al-Qaeda's central command appointed on June 16, 2011, his deputy Ayman al Zawahiri as the new emir of the group.

In June 2011, Al-Shabaab's spokesman said that the group had sworn allegiance to al Zawahiri and would follow his orders (SITE, 2011). In January 2012, Al-Qaeda's new head welcomed a merger with the Al-Shabaab (SITE, 2011).

The "globalization" of Al-Shabaab

Al-Shabaab's main terrorist activity is concentrated in the fighting in Somalia and terrorist acts in neighbouring countries, but the organization also poses a threat of global terrorism:

- Terrorist attacks against military and non-military personnel and interests of the US, EU countries and Turkey on Somali soil and in Kenya.
- Attempts to carry out terror attacks outside the African continent against the targets of the United States, Israel and other countries.

The 9/11 style terror plot against the United States

Al-Shabaab has trained two terrorists of Kenyan descent as pilots for the purpose of carrying out terrorist acts using airplanes. The Philippine security forces have arrested Cholo Abdi Abdullah, a Kenyan member of Al-Shabaab, in Iba, Zambales in Philippines, on July 1, 2019 on local charges (Shay, 2021). Abdullah received training and completed the tests necessary to obtain his pilot's license from an aviation academy in the Philippines (BBC, 2020).

Before his arrest, Abdullah researched methods of hijacking a commercial airliner, such as how to breach a cockpit door from the outside. In addition, Abdullah did research about the tallest building in a major U.S. city and sought information about how to obtain an American visa (Rappler.com, 2019).

Abdullah was acting in Philippines under the direction of a senior Al-Shabaab commander, Salim Gichunge Osman, the leader of the Dusit D2 attack that took place in January 2019 at Riverside, Nairobi. He also had a cordial relationship with Osman Gedi, another Dusit attacker.

Abdullah was transferred on December 15, 2020, to U.S. custody on charges that he conspired to hijack an aircraft and crash it into a tall building in the U.S. (Rappler.com, 2019). Cholo Abdi Abdullah's plot was allegedly part of the operation "Jerusalem will never be Judaized," which was launched in 2019.

Al-Shabaab - the second pilot

Kenyan police have issued in March 2021, a terror attack warning and asked Kenyans to help the police with any information regarding Mr Rashid Mwalimu, whom they suspect will use his expertise as a pilot to carry out an aviation-linked attack on Kenya or from Kenya (All Africa, 2021). The Kenyan security forces believe that Mwalimu currently resides in Somalia and could sneak back into the country.

Rashid Mwalimu, joined Al-Shabaab in 2015, along with his friend Cholo Abdi Abdullah they have conducted numerous attacks in Somalia shortly after training in Boni along the Kenyan coast. Later they were trained as pilots in the Philip-pines (All Africa, 2021).

Al-Shabaab - terror plot in Australia

In August 2009, Australian security agencies foiled an Al-Shabaab associated plot to attack Holsworthy Army Barracks in Sydney. Codenamed Operation Neath, the counterterrorism operation disrupted the plot in its early stages. The terrorist men had sought weapons, dispatched others for training and conducted recon-naissance of Holsworthy Barracks. Two of the terrorists had travelled to Somalia to be trainee in Al-Shabaab camps and other members of the Australian cell had made calls to Somalia requesting the approval of Al-Shabaab's Muslim cleric to attack Australian targets. The trial concluded in December 2011 and five men were charged, and three were convicted of planning to attack the barracks. Al-Shabaab has denied operational links with the Australians. (Zamit, 2011).

Al-Shabaab – terror plots in Denmark

Two Danish brothers of Somali origin have been arrested in Denmark in May 2012, on suspicion of plotting a terror attack. The country's police intelligence issued a statement saying that the arrests had foiled "a concrete act of terror". The two brothers, aged 18 and 23, held Danish citizenship and had been living in the Aarhus area. They were arrested, one at his home in the city of Aarhus and the other as he arrived by plane at Copenhagen airport.



The statement said "The arrested are suspected of having been in the process of preparing an act of terror, among other things through conversations about methods, targets and the use of weapon types." One of the arrested is also suspected of having undergone training, instruction and teaching at an Al-Shabaab training camp in Somalia with the aim of carrying out an act of terror. (Al Jazeera, 2012).

The assassination attempt against Danish cartoonist

In January 2009, Somali national Mohammed Muhideen Gelle attempted to kill a Danish cartoonist who printed controversial cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad in 2005. While Al-Shabaab did not claim responsibility for Gelle's actions, Danish intelligence officials have alleged that Gelle had links to Al-Shabaab. In 2011, a Danish court has found Mohammed Muhideen Gelle guilty of attempted terrorism and attempted murder of the Danish cartoonist (DW, 2011).

The terror plans of Al-Shabaab and Al-Qaeda – the "Fazul documents"

Fazul Abdullah Mohammed, the Al-Qaeda commander of East Africa, was shot dead by Somali forces in June 2011. A cache of intelligence has been found on the body and inside the bullet-ridden Toyota truck he tried to ram through a Somali government checkpoint. The documents provided a chilling look at the global aspirations of Somalia's Al-Shabaab.

The documents detailed plots for a kidnapping and attacks on the prestigious Eton College, Jewish neighbourhoods and the Ritz and Dorchester hotels in London. (Shay, 2014).

The Fazul documents show, the group's ambitions go beyond the Horn of Africa. When found in 2011, they gave intelligence officials the clearest picture yet of some of these foreign goals, prompting the U.S. and the U.K. to increase security around sites that were named as targets. Intelligence officials fear that such plans did not die with the Al-Qaeda leader.

The documents are chilling, both in the level of terror they describe and in their tone. They were written with a business-case formality that analyses the pros and cons of proposed attacks. It is not clear who authored the reports.

"Our objectives are to strike London with low-cost operations that would cause a heavy blow amongst the hierarchy and Jewish communities," begins the document labelled "International Operations." (Shay, 2014.)

"These attacks must be backed with a carefully planned media campaign to show why we chose our targets to refute hypocrites, clear doubts amongst Muslims and also inspire Muslim youth to copy."

The next two pages show specific plans for the hotels, for Eton school on opening day and for London's Stamford Hill and Golders Green neighbourhoods, which are populated with "tens of thousands of Jews crammed in a small area."

"The plan is to hit the hotel when it's fully booked to ensure maximum casualties . . . key players from all around the world stay in these hotels.

"We plan to book in advance," the document continues, "and take plenty of petrol with the brother and then set the 1st, 2nd, 3rd floor on fire . . . while we block the stairs so no one can run down.

"The martyrdom seeker would then make his way to the exits and start killing anyone fleeing the area."

Other scenarios are laid out, including one where a fire alarm is pulled and as guests emerge, attackers would "shower them with petrol bombs and gunfire."

Under "general summary of mission," the report states that the attackers should be trained in Somalia for two months and that the operatives alone would know their mission (Shay, 2014).

"The brothers will be pushed through many battles to see how they react under pressure, and they will be analysed to see if they can keep their composure."

Although time periods are specified, such as striking the Jewish community during Hanukkah, there is no mention of London's Olympics – which starts this month and has security agencies worldwide on high alert.

There is also no indication in the documents obtained by the Star that these plans were anything but aspirational.

In addition to the London plots, the Burundian, Ethiopian and Ugandan embassies in Nairobi were also on the hit list - presumably in retaliation for their joining the joint operations to battle the Al-Shabaab in Somalia (Shay, 2014).

A separate document outlined another plot to kidnap Sudan's deputy ambassador to Kenya in Nairobi and lists his phone number, license plate, a route he travelled frequently and his preferred mosque, among other details. The plot is an attempt to press Sudan to release one of the group's fighters, identified only as Abu Abdullah.

The "Plan B" kidnapping scenario involved taking the diplomat to a safe house in Garissa the Kenyan town near Somalia's border. (Shepard, 2012).

Al-Shabaab and the U.K

Up to 50 British "volunteers", including white Christian converts and British-Somali men, have been recruited to fight for Al-Shabaab. Al-Shabaab has managed to generate tens of



thousands of pounds in funding through the UK-based Somali population which is estimated at 250,000. While some British Somalis willingly donate to the terrorist organization, a proportion of the cash legitimately sent back to extended families in the country is siphoned off by the Islamists. It is understood that the group is using the same connections to recruit young men from the Somali diaspora in the UK as well as British Muslims. The Security Service fears that British volunteers who survive the bloody civil war may return home as hardened terrorists eager to launch attacks against the UK (Shay, 2014.).

In 2007, Ahmed Hussein Ahmed, a 21-year-old student from Ealing, west London, dropped out of a business studies course at Oxford Brookes University to serve as a volunteer with Al-Shabaab, flying first to Kenya and then crossing into Somalia by foot on bush tracks. He then detonated a suicide bomb at a checkpoint manned by Ethiopian Army troops, killing 20 soldiers. In a "martyrdom" video shot before his death, he issued a call to fellow British Somalis to follow his example, delivered in a soft, earnest, English accent. "I advise you to migrate to Somalia and wage war against your enemies," he said, speaking against a backdrop of a black and white Al-Shabaab banner. "Death in honour is better than life in humiliation." (Sean Rayment, 2012)

On September 17, 2010, the head of MI5, announced that it was "only a matter of time" before a terror attack was carried out in Britain by UK subjects. He suggested that people who had gone from Britain to Somalia to attend Al-Shabaab training camps would be the assailants. Shortly after Evans' warning, a British terror suspect, with apparent ties to Al-Shabaab, was arrested at Amsterdam's Schipol airport by the Netherlands' military police (Shay, 2014). The man, of Somali origin, had intended to board a plane bound for Entebbe in Uganda. He had taken a linking flight from Liverpool's John Lennon Airport in Britain. His arrest had followed a tip-off from U.K. counter-terrorism officials.

In January 2012, one of those British volunteers Bilal al-Berjawi from West London, was killed when missiles fired from an American drone hit his vehicle outside Mogadishu. Berjawi was already an Afghanistan veteran and an Al-Shabaab commander.

In October 2012, Al-Shabaab has threatened to inflict on the UK a terrorist at-tack worse than the London bombings of 7 July 2005 for extraditing the Islamist cleric Abu Hamza to the United States. Britain extradited Abu Hamza and four other terrorism suspects to the US in October 2012 after a lengthy legal battle that went all the way to the European Court of Human Rights.

Al-Shabaab made the threats in a series of messages on Twitter. One tweet threatened the biggest Islamist terrorist attack yet on Britain: "The nightmare that surreptitiously looms on British shores is bound to eclipse the horrors of 7/7 and 21/7 combined." Another read: "Britain will pay the heftiest price for its bra-zen role in the war against Islam and endless brutality against innocent Muslims." Al-Shabaab also said it would "go to every possible length to attain the freedom of imprisoned Muslim scholars".

Al-Shabaab and the US terror blacklist

On August 5, 2021, the US State Department added five alleged senior members of Islamic militant groups in Africa to its terror blacklist, blocking access to any property or interests they may have in the United States (Asharq Al Awsat, 2021).

Two of them were Al-Shabaab members: Ali Mohamed Rage, a spokesman for Al-Shabaab, and Abdikadir Mohamed Abdikadir, an operations planner, both had planned attacks for Al-Shabaab (Asharq Al Awsat, 2021).

Al-Shabaab and Turkey

Turkey is a key ally and a major donor of the Somali government in efforts to rebuild the country after more than two decades of conflict and famine. Erdogan became the first non-African leader to visit Somalia in nearly 20 years when he travelled there in 2011, as Turkey's prime minister. (Daily Sabah, 2018).

Turkey's military base in Somalia

In September 2017, Turkey opened its largest military base abroad in the Somali capital, massively strengthening its presence in East Africa. More than 10,000 Somali soldiers will be trained by Turkish officers at the base of Mogadishu.

The construction of the training camp began in March 2015, at the cost of \$50 million. The training camp occupies 400 hectares in Mogadishu. It houses three military schools, dormitories, and depots. It has the capacity to train more than 1,500 troops at any one time, by Turkish military officers. Turkey has deployed 200 officers and soldiers as trainers and to provide the compound with security. The first batch of Turkish military personnel arrived in Mogadishu in August 2017 to commence the training program for the Somali national army.

Al-Shabaab and Turkey

For al-Shabaab, Turkey is an unwelcome actor, helping the Somali government fight the group. It seems unsurprising, then, that Turkey has become a major enemy.

Al-Shabaab has built authority by claiming to be the only "legitimate" Islamic movement in Somalia. Turkey's work there undermines that claim. Turkey's Di-rectorate of Religious Affairs, the Diyanet, has been funding mosque-building projects in a number of countries, including Somalia. Building mosques gives Turkey a platform to promote itself as a legitimate and authentic religious au-thority. It also gives it an opening to promote Turkey's vision of Islam.

There have been several attacks on Turkish targets and interests in Somalia:



The attack on Turkish convoy

On December 28, 2019, at least 79 people were dead and 149 more injured after a massive car bomb exploded at a busy intersection on the outskirts of Somalia's capital, Mogadishu, on December 28, 2019. Two Turkish citizens were killed in the blast and another two were wounded.

It was the deadliest attack since truck exploded in 2017 near a fuel tanker, creating a fireball that killed over 500 people.

The attacker drove his vehicle into the Ex-Control checkpoint, a tax collection centre in Mogadishu. The attack happened during rush hour in the Somali capital and civilians including university students from the Banadir University in Mogadishu and soldiers were among the dead. (CNN, 2019).

Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the bomb in Mogadishu. The group's spokesman Sheikh Ali Mohamud Rage in an audio post on pro-al-Shabaab websites said the bombing targeted a "hostile Turkish convoy" near a busy checkpoint at an entrance to the city. Two Turkish brothers were among the dead. (Arab news, 2019).

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan condemned the attack and on December 29, 2019, 16 people in critical condition were airlifted to Turkey by a Turkish military cargo aircraft to receive further medical treatment. The aircraft also brought 24 doctors specializing in trauma to help treat some 125 people injured in the blast.

The hotel bombing

On January 22, 2015, three Somali nationals were killed when a suicide car bomber blew himself up at the gate of a hotel housing the advance party of the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan who visited the country days later. The Turkish delegation of around 70 members was staying at the hotel at the time of the attack but was unharmed. Following the January bombing, the spokesperson for al-Shabaab, Sheikh Ali Mohamed Rage, named Turkey as one of its targets. "NATO is the biggest enemy of Muslims and Turkey is a part of it. NATO is a union of Christians. NATO uses Turkey as a hammer to smash Muslims," said Rage.

The Daallo Airliner bombing

On February 8, 2016, a suicide bomber detonated his explosive device on board of a Daallo Airlines plane and forced it to make an emergency landing in Mogadishu. The bomber was sucked out of the plane through the one-meter-wide hole when the blast ripped open the pressurized cabin in mid-air. Somali officials re-leased a video of airport workers handling a laptop believed to have concealed an explosive device that was detonated on a passenger plane traveling from Mogadishu to Djibouti. The footage showed two airport workers handing a laptop to the suspected bomber.

The 74 passengers aboard the flight, including the suicide bomber, have originally checked in with Turkish Airlines. Turkish Airlines cancelled its flight from Mogadishu that morning because their incoming flight from Djibouti could not come to Mogadishu due to strong winds. The Turkish Airlines requested Daallo Airlines to carry the passengers on their behalf to Djibouti where they would continue their journey on a Turkish Airlines flight.

The Al-Shabaab group claimed an attack on a Daallo Airlines flight from Mogadishu to Djibouti the initial target was a Turkish Airlines jet, but it attacked Daallo Airlines after Turkey's national carrier cancelled its flight.

In a statement the armed group said the attack on the Daallo Airlines flight was part of an operation targeting dozens of Western intelligence officials and Turkish NATO forces. It added that while the operation did not bring down the plane, "it struck terror in the hearts of the crusaders, demonstrating to the disbelievers that despite all their security measures and the strenuous efforts they make to conceal their presence, the Mujahideen can and will get to them" (Al Jazeera, 2016).

Al-Shabaab and Israel

As further indication of Al-Shabaab's intent to operate outside of African continent, the group has declared an "open war " against Israel and Israeli and Jewish interests in Africa.

On October 30, 2009, Al-Shabaab held a rally in Mogadishu, where crowds of people chanted anti-Israel slogans. "It is time to go for open war against Israel in order to drive them from the holy cities," Sheikh Fuad Mohamed Shangole, a top Al-Shabaab official said.

On November 1, 2009, in response to standoffs between Israeli police and Palestinians at Al - Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, Al-Shabaab has threatened to attack Israel. Media reports indicated that in a sermon delivered after Friday prayers in Baidoa, Somalia, Al-Shabaab, commander Mukhtar Robow Abu Mansur urged his followers to attack Israel. "The Jews started to destroy parts of the holy mosque of Al - Aqsa and they routinely kill our Palestinian brothers, so we are committed to defend our Palestinian brothers," he said.

Al-Shabaab announced the establishment of Al - Quds Brigade, a military unit specifically tasked with attacking Israel and Jewish interests in Africa. In a rally held the previous week in Mogadishu, a top Al-Shabaab official said, "It is time to go for open war against Israel in order to drive them from the holy cities."

In addition to threatening Israel, Al-Shabaab warned of attacks on Jewish interests in Africa, declaring an "open battle with the oppressing Zionist entity as well as targeting its interests, especially in Africa."

Israeli Arabs and Al-Shabaab



Seven Israeli Arabs from the city of Nazareth have been arrested for allegedly murdering a taxi driver in November 2009, and carrying out a series of terrorist attacks. (Globes, 2010).

According to police, the group became more radical over the past few years after being exposed to online video clips posted by Osama Bin Laden and his followers, which also helped them obtain knowledge on the use of weapons and explosives. The group regularly watched Al – Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden's lectures online and wanted to join the fight against Jewish and Christian "infidels."

In joint police- ISA (Israel Security Agency – ISA) operation, the seven, aged 19-26, were arrested in May 2010 for a series of attacks that were carried out with nationalistic motivations. The suspects used to pray and got acquainted to each other in Mosque in Nazareth, led by a radical imam.

Some of those arrested were allegedly involved in the murder of taxi driver Yafim Weinstein, who was killed, on November 30, 2009 night, in Kfar Hahoreh near Nazareth, as well as other attacks.

The ISA also found that two of the men flew to Ethiopia in April 2010 in order to join Al-Shabaab in Somalia and fight "infidels". They failed to cross into Somalia from Ethiopia and moved to Kenya. In Kenya were caught by the Ken-yan authorities on the border with Somalia and handed over back to Israel.

Despite the Al-Shabaab's militant statements, no volunteers from the organization arrived in Lebanon or the Gaza Strip to take part in the struggle against Israel.

The only example of the organization's attempt to carry out terrorist activity against Israel occurred in 2011. A Somali was arrested at the Cairo airport in May 2011 and confessed to being part of a cell with plans to attack Western interest in Egypt and Israel.

Operation "Jerusalem Will Never be Judaized"

In January 2019 Al-Qaeda launched a campaign called "Jerusalem will never be Judaized" in response to the Trump administration's decision to move the U.S. embassy in Israel to the city of Jerusalem (BBC News, 2020). Under campaign "Jerusalem will never be Judaized" the group's affiliates in East and West Africa have carried out high profile terror attacks in respective regions and beyond (BBC News, 2020).

On January 5, 2020, U.S. Africa Command and Kenya Defence forces (KDF) repelled an attack on Manda Airstrip near the Camp Simba U.S. base in Lamu county, near Kenya's border with Somalia. A U.S. service member and two civilian contractors working for the Department of defence were killed, two other U.S. Department of defence personnel were wounded and six aircrafts were destroyed in the attack.

Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack and Kenya's military said it killed at least four terrorists in repelling the attack. Al-Shabaab said that the attack was "part of Harakat Al-Shabaab Al Mujahideen's - Jerusalem will never be Judaized' military operation".

On September 30, 2019, Al-Shabaab launched two attacks on U.S and Europe-an military targets in Somalia. The first attack was on the Belidogle military air-strip which is a base for U.S. and Somalia forces in the Lower Shabelle region in southern Somalia. A suicide car bomber detonated a vehicle packed with explosives at the gate of the Belidogle airstrip. AFRICOM officials clarified that one U.S. service member suffered a concussion injury. The U.S. military used the Belidogle airstrip base to launch drones that attacked Al-Shabaab targets and to trained Somali troops.

The second attack was by a suicide car bomber targeting Italian peacekeepers in Mogadishu. The explosion missed a convoy of the European Union peacekeepers but injured Somali civilians who were nearby.

On January 16, 2019, Al-Shabaab attacked the Dusit D2 hotel in Nairobi killing 14 civilians, including one American. In its statement claiming responsibility for the attack, Al-Shabaab said it was in response to U.S. President Donald Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. "Even if the Zionists and crusaders were to move all the embassies in the world to Jerusalem, the sacred land shall forever remain a noble Muslim sanctuary, without concession or compromise. Jerusalem will never be Judaized," the statement said (VOA, 2019).

Al-Shabaab as a regional terror threat

The Al-Shabaab has managed to expand its operations in the region, especially in Kenya since invading Somalia in 2011 to attack Al-Shabaab, who it accused of threatening its tourism industry. Kenyan forces have since joined the African Union force (AMISOM), battling the Islamists.

Al-Shabaab fighters have made a series of deadly incursions into neighbouring Kenya, including the 2013 killing of at least 67 people at the Westgate Mall in the capital, Nairobi, and the massacre of 148 people at a university in the town of Garissa in April 2015.

Al-Shabaab operations in Kenya are designed both to shift Kenyan political opinion toward withdrawing forces from Somalia and to recruit Kenyan Muslims to its ranks. Al-Shabaab has actively shifted focus onto Kenya using two main tactics (Arab news, 2019):

- Large scale terror attacks in Kenya - the attacks on the Westgate Mall (2013) and Garissa University (2015).
- Cross border attacks - Al-Shabaab frequently ambushes buses, tourists and police and security forces along the Somali-Kenyan border.



On December 8, 2021, Kenyan authorities said a suicide bomber killed himself and two others in Kisumu County, on the border with Uganda. Police said the suspect was a member of Al-Shabaab terrorist group. (Yusuf, 2021).

On June 20, 2021, three people were killed, in an attack by Al-Shabaab militants in Mandera county which borders Somalia. According to local police, the attack occurred in the Jabibar area of Mandera county, where a road construction project is underway (a.a.com, 2021).

On May 19, 2021, a Kenyan police official said that seven soldiers have been killed and one was missing in Lamu county after a bomb and ambush by Al-Shabaab rebels from neighbouring Somalia. The attack happened just days before President Uhuru Kenyatta launched a multi-million-dollar port in Lamu county (AP, 2021).

On May 12, 2021, three police reservists were killed after Al-Shabaab extremists attacked cell phone towers near the border with Somalia in an effort to cripple communication. (AP, 2021).

On May 4, 2021, at least two people were killed near Kenya's eastern border with Somalia when the vehicle they were travelling in ran over an explosive device suspected to have been planted by the Al-Shabaab rebels (AP, 2021).

It was the second attack in two months targeting vehicles delivering supplies to a construction site where Kenya is building a fence and trenches along the Somali border to prevent extremists, bandits and illegal immigrants from entering the country.

Al-Shabaab's terror plot in Uganda

The Ugandan army spokeswoman said in August 2021 it had foiled a suicide bomb attack against the state funeral of Major General Paul Lokech, nicknamed the "Lion of Mogadishu". The late General Lokech, served as a commander in Somalia with AMISOM and he led the units that routed Al-Shabaab fighters from the capital Mogadishu in 2011.

Security forces said they had arrested a man in the northern town of Pader. The suspect was found with a home-made bomb, suicide vests, detonators, ammonium sulphate, switches and mobile phones used to detonate the device (Ahram, 2021).

In July 2010, twin bombings in Uganda marked the first time the Al-Shabaab launched an international terrorist attack. The bombings, which tore through two venues where crowds gathered to watch the broadcast of the World Cup finals, killed more than 70 people, including an American aid worker (ADL, 2015).

Al-Shabaab spokesman who claimed responsibility for the bombings, threatened additional attacks against Uganda and other African countries if they do not withdraw their

soldiers from the African Union's peacekeeping mission stationed in Somalia to protect the country's transitional government (ADL, 2015).

Ethiopia arrested militants (September 2019)

In September 2019, Ethiopian security officials announced the arrest of a number of alleged Al-Shabaab suspects. The suspects aimed to attack "hotels, religious festivities, gathering places and public areas" in the capital Addis Ababa, Oromia and Ethiopia's Somali region, according to a statement by the country's National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) read out on state television (ADL, 2015).

NISS did not specify how many people it detained, but the state broadcaster re-ported that it was 12. The suspects were said to have entered Ethiopia through Djibouti and Somalia, as well as the breakaway state of Somaliland.

Berhanu Jula, deputy chief of Ethiopia's military, told the state-owned Ethiopian News Agency that there is evidence Al-Shabaab "has recruited, trained and armed some Ethiopians."

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed had also warned about attempts by the Somalia-based Al-Shabaab extremists to make inroads into Ethiopia, according to the Associated Press news agency.

Al-Shabaab's terror threat to Djibouti

In a video released on March 26, 2021, the leader of Al-Shabaab, Abu Ubaydah lashed out at Djibouti's President Ismail Omar Guelleh, who has been in power since 1999.

Abu Ubaydah accused Guelleh of turning the Horn of Africa country "into a military base from where every war against the Muslims in East Africa is planned and executed. Make American and French interests in Djibouti the highest priority of your targets," he said in the video.

Summary

Al-Shabaab has been on the offensive since 2019 and increased its attacks on African Union (AMISOM) bases, Somali government facilities and officials and security forces, US and EU forces and targets in neighbouring Kenya and Ethiopia.

The Biden administration has recently reduced its support to the Somali army fighting Al-Shabaab and it has already translated into an increase in militant activity and some territorial gains by the group.



Al-Shabaab group poses a serious threat not only to Somalia's security but also to that of the African continent and the globe at large.

It adheres to the same global Islamist ideology as Al-Qaeda and has made several public statements pledging allegiance to the group and praising its leaders.

The group has issued several threats to strike outside Africa, including American and European targets. The indictment of Cholo Abdi Abdullah was the latest re-minder that Al-Qaeda and its affiliates remain a threat to America nearly two decades after terrorists brought down the World trade centre in Manhattan and hit the Pentagon with commercial aircrafts.

It also highlights the importance of maintaining robust intelligence collection and counterterrorism operations in the region despite the U.S. withdrawal from Somalia.

Conflict of interest

The author hereby declares that no competing financial interest exist for this manuscript.

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