



NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**THE RESILIENCY OF THE AL-SHABAAB MOVEMENT
IN SOMALIA**

by

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September 2020

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			<i>Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188</i>	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington, DC 20503.				
1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)		2. REPORT DATE September 2020	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED Master's thesis	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE THE RESILIENCY OF THE AL-SHABAAB MOVEMENT IN SOMALIA			5. FUNDING NUMBERS	
6. AUTHOR(S) Tess O'Neill				
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A			10. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER	
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government.				
12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release. Distribution is unlimited.			12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE A	
13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words) Throughout Al-Shabaab's history, the militant group has demonstrated enduring organizational resiliency in the face of concerted international counterterrorism efforts and turbulent internal dynamics. This thesis explores the factors that enabled the terrorist group's success and resilience in East Africa by considering two severe low points in the group's history, notably the failure of the Ramadan Offensive in 2010 and the death of Al-Shabaab emir Ahmed Godane in 2014. Both cases apply alternative hypotheses related to political context, organizational attributes, and counterterrorism failures and assess the hypotheses' relevance to the case of Al-Shabaab in Somalia. Al-Shabaab's critical factors for resiliency provide insight into potential policy implications for Somalia and similarly situated conflict zones.				
14. SUBJECT TERMS Al-Shabaab, resiliency, militant group, terrorist, terrorism, Somalia, Kenya, East Africa, Horn of Africa			15. NUMBER OF PAGES 121	
			16. PRICE CODE	
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT Unclassified	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE Unclassified	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT Unclassified	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UU	

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THE RESILIENCY OF THE AL-SHABAAB MOVEMENT IN SOMALIA

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
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**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES
(MIDDLE EAST, SOUTH ASIA, SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA)**

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ABSTRACT

Throughout Al-Shabaab's history, the militant group has demonstrated enduring organizational resiliency in the face of concerted international counterterrorism efforts and turbulent internal dynamics. This thesis explores the factors that enabled the terrorist group's success and resilience in East Africa by considering two severe low points in the group's history, notably the failure of the Ramadan Offensive in 2010 and the death of Al-Shabaab emir Ahmed Godane in 2014. Both cases apply alternative hypotheses related to political context, organizational attributes, and counterterrorism failures and assess the hypotheses' relevance to the case of Al-Shabaab in Somalia. Al-Shabaab's critical factors for resiliency provide insight into potential policy implications for Somalia and similarly situated conflict zones.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AFRICOM	United States Africa Command
AIAI	al-Ittihad al-Islami
AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
AQ	Al-Qaeda
AQAP	Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
AU	African Union
FGS	Federal Government of Somalia
FY	Fiscal Year
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICU	Islamic Courts Union
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham
RPG	Rocket Propelled Grenade
SNA	Somali National Alliance
TFG	Transitional Federal Government of Somalia
UN	United Nations

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am incredibly grateful for all who have supported me throughout this thesis journey. I would like to express a special thanks to my advisors, Dr. Mohammed Hafez and Dr. Rachel Sigman, and all NPS professors and faculty who helped me to grow as a scholar. Dr. Mohammed Hafez generously offered his time, expertise, and guidance in shaping and refining my thesis. Dr. Rachel Sigman meticulously reviewed my work for content and clarity, and her feedback proved invaluable. Any remaining errors are my own.

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I. INTRODUCTION

See Figure 1 for a 2011 map of Somalia.



Figure 1. Map of Somalia¹

¹ "Somalia Map," United Nations Department of Field Support Cartographic Section, December 2011, <https://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/somalia.pdf>.

A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

Since its inception, Al-Shabaab has shown its ability to adapt and respond as a strategic, pragmatic actor in the face of significant international efforts to eradicate the terrorist organization. Despite its claim of Salafi-jihadist principles and enforcement of sharia law in areas of territorial control, the group has resorted to extortion, smuggling, illicit trafficking, and ties with criminal elements that run counter to its religious principles. Why has Al-Shabaab endured in East Africa despite significant external pressure and major inconsistencies between its ideological claims and practices? This thesis explores theories of militant group resiliency and assesses their relevance to the case of Al-Shabaab in Somalia. After investigating alternative hypotheses, this thesis finds that Al-Shabaab survives and thrives through a multifaceted approach incorporating factors including internal organizational attributes, political context, and strategic failures in the war on terrorism. Al-Shabaab's organizational cohesion, financial mechanisms, and intelligence function allow the group to fill the void of the Somali state and rebound from near destruction. With Al-Shabaab's critical resiliency factors highlighted, the thesis concludes with policy implications for countering enduring threats in Somalia and similarly situated conflict zones.

B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

For the United States, Al-Shabaab has remained a persistent challenge since 2007 and the United States has sought to combat the terrorist organization through both bilateral and multilateral means.² On the bilateral side, the United States supports the government of Somalia's security forces in their counterterrorism efforts, while multilaterally, the United States supports the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) through finances, training, and equipment.³ In April of 2017, President Trump authorized the deployment of 500 United States military service members to Somalia and ramped up kinetic operations against Al-Shabaab from 14 airstrikes conducted in 2016 to 35

² Claire Felter, Jonathan Masters, and Mohammed Sergie, "Al-Shabab Backgrounder," Council on Foreign Relations, January 31, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/al-shabab>.

³ Felter, Masters, and Sergie.

conducted in 2017.⁴ In addition to military operations, the United States has placed significant pressure on Al-Shabaab's operational, financial, and political efforts. Yet, Al-Shabaab's organizational strengths remain and continue to allow the movement to destabilize East Africa.⁵ Understanding Al-Shabaab's Islamist ideological origins, evolution, and appeal in East Africa as well as its organizational strategies and conduct can help explain why the group remains successful and provide policy implications for countering enduring threats in the region.

C. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

A review of the literature regarding terrorist group resilience reveals a number of potential explanations for how groups operate and therefore why groups are able to endure. These explanations can be categorized into the terrorist group's organizational attributes, the political context in which the group operates, and the strategic failures of external actors who seek the group's demise. The organizational attribute explanation investigates the characteristics that allow militant groups to overcome adversity and is comprised of two sub-approaches: an internal organizational and organizational resilience approach.⁶ Another approach explores how the political context allows militant groups to revitalize their organizations after major setbacks. A third approach looks at the failings of counterterrorism strategies. Each of these approaches generates testable hypotheses for the study of Al-Shabaab resilience in Somalia.

1. Organizational Attribute Approach: Internal Organization and Organizational Resilience

In this approach, Oots classifies terrorist groups as political entities and thus organizational considerations such as overall internal cohesion, group size, leadership

⁴ Felter, Masters, and Sergie.

⁵ Thomas Waldhauser, "United States Africa Command Posture Statement," § Senate Armed Services Committee (2019), 4.

⁶ Martha Crenshaw, "Theories of Terrorism: Instrumental and Organizational Approaches," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 10, no. 4 (December 1, 1987): 13–31, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402398708437313>; René M. Bakker, Jörg Raab, and H. Brinton Milward, "A Preliminary Theory of Dark Network Resilience," *Journal of Policy Analysis & Management* 31, no. 1 (Winter 2012): 34, <https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.20619>.

structure, and the nature of external support and linkages all play a role in group resilience.⁷ Crenshaw elaborates on this notion of organizational attributes as she claims a terrorist group's struggle for survival shapes the internal actions within a group.⁸ Winning member's unquestioning loyalty and preventing dissent and defection within the organization is essential for the group's continued existence. How successfully terrorist leaders provide incentives to their members to maintain loyalty and group cohesion determines the likelihood of group survivability in the face of external pressure.⁹ Finally, Cronin identifies the internal structure of the terrorist organization, from hierarchical to decentralized, and the viability of a successor determines whether a group will survive.¹⁰ Delineating terrorist groups' internal organizational attributes can help explain why certain groups survive, such as Al-Shabaab, and others fracture under pressure.

A final explanation of terrorism using the Organizational Attributes Approach is the organizational resilience model. In this approach, Bakker, Raab, and Milward focus on the internal decision making process of dark networks, such as terrorist organizations, when faced with a "shock" such as an attack or any other unforeseen negative event.¹¹ The authors determine the likelihood of dark network resilience (listed in Figure 2) using the following variables: group centralization, member motivation, network characteristics including "legitimacy and resources," and network capability meaning "the ability to replace nodes and linkages" of key members within the network.¹² In Bakker, Raab, and Milward's model, networks that are able to remain stable, i.e., "robust" or to reestablish stability, i.e., "rebound" are deemed resilient networks while those that fail to overcome the impact of "shock" are deemed non-resilient networks.¹³ In this way, terrorist

⁷ Kent L. Oots, "Bargaining with Terrorists: Organizational Considerations," *Terrorism* 13, no. 2 (January 1, 1990): 156, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10576109008435821>.

⁸ Crenshaw, "Theories of Terrorism," 13, 27.

⁹ Crenshaw, 13, 27.

¹⁰ Audrey Kurth Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns* (Princeton University Press, 2009), 14.

¹¹ Bakker, Raab, and Milward, "A Preliminary Theory of Dark Network Resilience," 35.

¹² Bakker, Raab, and Milward, 58–59.

¹³ Bakker, Raab, and Milward, 35.

organizations can be seen to exhibit a degree of organizational learning in that they rebound from crises equal to or stronger than they were before facing the shock.

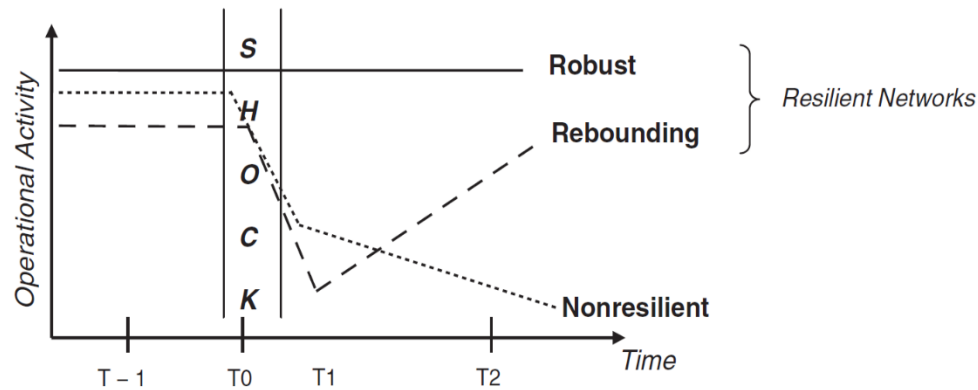


Figure 2. Operationalization of dark network resilience¹⁴

When applied to the context of Somalia, the organizational attribute approach incorporates both Al-Shabaab’s internal organizational factors which allow the group to function, and the organizational resilience factors which allow Al-Shabaab to respond to “shock” or external pressure. **Hypothesis 1** therefore considers that specific organizational attributes allow Al-Shabaab to remain resilient in the face of a dynamic political environment and significant international pressure. By analyzing specific challenges that Al-Shabaab has faced in its past, it will be possible to identify internal organizational or resiliency factors that allow the group to remain successful.

2. Political Context Approach

Blomberg, Engel, and Sawyer define terror organizations that have conducted multiple attacks, or “recidivists,” and determine that “regional, socioeconomic, and political factors” impact the organization’s survival and lethality.¹⁵ They conclude that for

¹⁴ Bakker, Raab, and Milward, 36.

¹⁵ S. Brock Blomberg, Rozlyn C. Engel, and Reid Sawyer, “On the Duration and Sustainability of Transnational Terrorist Organizations,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 54, no. 2 (April 2010): 327, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002709355431>.

these types of terrorist organizations, improvements in the target country's socioeconomic status such as GDP per capita and higher income dispersion in populated areas means the group will be less likely to survive.¹⁶ Young and Dugan further explain how the nature of the government system in which the terrorist group operates alters the group's likelihood of survival.¹⁷ Within their study, the authors found that increases in state capability, including GDP, population, and Composite Index of National Capability, significantly increase terrorist organizations' risk of failure as the state has greater capacity both financially and militarily to combat the threat.¹⁸ Thus, for these authors the political context in which terrorist groups operate shapes the strategy the group employs and the overall resilience of the group.

Applying the Political Context approach to Al-Shabaab, the failed state dynamic provides an opportunity to test **Hypothesis 2**, Somalia's political context provides Al-Shabaab the needed space and leverage to allow the group to remain resilient when challenged with both domestic and international opposition. As Al-Shabaab faces limited viable rivals and a political vacuum in areas outside Somalia's central government control, the group is able to successfully exploit the political environment to establish quasi-state functions through nominal buy-in and coercion.

3. Failed Counterterrorism Approach

The final perspective on terrorist group resilience takes into account the strategic failures of external actors to eliminate the group. Cronin argues that terrorist movements end by following distinct paths namely, negotiations, decapitation, internal failures, diminished public support, external repression, or transition to alternative violent action.¹⁹ Similarly, Jones and Libicki offer an assessment that terrorist groups end by achieving their goals in full or in part, by losing popular support, transitioning to another goal, burning

¹⁶ Brock Blomberg, Engel, and Sawyer, 318.

¹⁷ Joseph K. Young and Laura Dugan, "Survival of the Fittest: Why Terrorist Groups Endure," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 8, no. 2 (April 24, 2014): 16, <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/334>.

¹⁸ Young and Dugan, 15.

¹⁹ Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends*.

out, or by the state destroying the group through repression or elimination of the leader.²⁰ In both Cronin and Jones and Libicki's arguments, the failure of external actors to understand the factors that weaken and kill terrorist movements and to misapply the appropriate strategy for the terrorist group type allows groups and movements to endure.²¹ Specifically for the decapitation strategy, Mannes emphasizes that eliminating a terrorist group's leader fails to achieve the intended effect of reducing terrorist activity and group strength especially for religious-based terrorist organizations.²² Cronin, Jones and Libicki, and Mannes all emphasize the need to understand terrorist group type, strength, size, and goals in order to apply an effective counterterrorism strategy or risk fostering terrorist group's persistence.²³

For Al-Shabaab, the Failed Counterterrorism Approach may explain the group's resilience despite coalition efforts to eliminate the group. **Hypothesis 3** states that Al-Shabaab has remained successful and resilient as a terrorist organization due to failures in United States' and international counterterrorist strategies. By reviewing current and historical counterterrorism tactics and strategy employed against Al-Shabaab as well as Al-Shabaab's response, it is possible to identify instances of misapplied efforts as external forces conduct successful kinetic operations while failing to address root causes thereby allowing the terrorist organization to remain resilient.

D. RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to determine why Al-Shabaab is able to persist and succeed in East Africa, this thesis opens with a review of the terrorist organization's history and ideological roots, then proceeds to discuss specific periods when the organization faced crisis, risked failing,

²⁰ Seth G. Jones and Martin C. Libicki, *How Terrorist Groups End: Lessons for Countering Al Qa'ida* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2008).

²¹ Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends.*; Jones and Libicki, *How Terrorist Groups End.*

²² Aaron Mannes, "Testing the Snake Head Strategy: Does Killing or Capturing Its Leaders Reduce a Terrorist Group's Activity?," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2008, 40, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2988670>.

²³ Mannes, "Testing the Snake Head Strategy."; Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends.*; Jones and Libicki, *How Terrorist Groups End.*

yet was able to persevere.²⁴ A number of sources will be referenced in order to accomplish this analysis including numerous news reports and the works by Keating and Waldman *War and Peace in Somalia: National Grievances, Local Conflict and Al-Shabaab*, Hansen *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group, 2005–2012*, and Maruf and Joseph *Inside Al-Shabaab: The Secret History of Al-Qaeda’s Most Powerful Ally* to provide historical context and insight into the two case studies. In addition, this thesis incorporates a number of reports from The International Crisis Group, UN, World Bank, RAND, as well as academic articles analyzing Al-Shabaab’s mode of operation and impact on East Africa.²⁵ Two specific periods in Al-Shabaab’s history highlight instances when the organization came under pressure: Al-Shabaab’s withdrawal post-Ramadan offensive in 2010 and Al-Shabaab leader Ahmed Abdi Godane’s death in 2014.²⁶ During both of these setbacks, Al-Shabaab suffered significant leadership challenges, faced internal discord, and lost control of territory, but proved its ability to adapt militarily and politically.²⁷ By evaluating these two case studies, it will be possible to isolate critical variables in Al-Shabaab’s resiliency to determine what allows the groups to remain successful.

Next, the competing hypotheses of **Hypothesis 1: The Organizational Attributes Approach**, **Hypothesis 2: The Political Context Approach**, and **Hypothesis 3: The Failed Counterterrorism Approach** will each be applied to the case studies to determine the accuracy in explaining Al-Shabaab’s resiliency. For each hypothesis, a review of the

²⁴ Michael Keating and Matt Waldman, eds., *War and Peace in Somalia: National Grievances, Local Conflict and Al-Shabaab* (Oxford University Press, 2019).

²⁵ Utz Pape and Wendy Karamba, “Somalia Poverty and Vulnerability Assessment: Findings from Wave 2 of the Somali High Frequency Survey” (Washington, DC: World Bank Group, April 2019), <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/32323>; Stephen Watts et al., *Reforming Security Sector Assistance for Africa*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB10028.html; Katharine Petrich, “Cows, Charcoal, and Cocaine: Al-Shabaab’s Criminal Activities in the Horn of Africa,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (October 17, 2019): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2019.1678873>.

²⁶ Harun Maruf and Dan Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab: The Secret History of Al-Qaeda’s Most Powerful Ally* (Indiana University Press, 2018), 162–76, 236, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv6mtfn2>.

²⁷ International Crisis Group, “Somalia: Al-Shabaab – It Will Be a Long War,” Policy Briefing, no. 99 (June 26, 2014): 1, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/somalia/somalia-al-shabaab-it-will-be-long-war>.

major themes and causal arguments will provide a framework of analysis for the specific case studies within the Somali context and reveal a potential explanation for Al-Shabaab's organizational resilience. To determine whether each hypothesis is supported or not, this thesis evaluates specific criteria in two case studies.

For **Hypothesis 1: The Organizational Attributes** approach to be valid, evidence should include Al-Shabaab's successful organizational cohesion namely unity among the group's leadership and an effective succession process. Additional organizational attributes include Al-Shabaab's power mechanisms such as an efficient organizational financial system and a loyal and effective intelligence apparatus, both of which allow the group to exert control and rebound from shock. Successful financial functions mean that Al-Shabaab's operations match the income obtained, the sustainability of Al-Shabaab's income sources, and the adaptability of the group to diversify or adjust financial mechanisms as needed. Evidence of an effective intelligence apparatus includes Al-Shabaab's intelligence operatives successfully identifying individuals or nodes to target for coercion or recruitment, the intelligence force providing timely and accurate information for Al-Shabaab's leadership decisions, and the intelligence personnel reliably enforcing Al-Shabaab's leadership decrees. Evidence of Al-Shabaab's effective organizational cohesion and power mechanisms of finance and intelligence within each case study suggests that **Hypothesis 1: The Organizational Attribute** approach is at work.

Support for **Hypothesis 2: The Political Context** approach should include evidence of Somalia's failed state environment as well as Kenya's proximity and viability as an attractive target for attack. The absence of effective state institutions in Somalia mean the government fails to provide Somalia's citizens with basic needs and services such as rule of law, security, healthcare, and education. Evidence supporting **Hypothesis 2: The Political Context** should include indications of Al-Shabaab filling the void in the Somalian state's failure thereby increasing the group's reach and power. This would include Al-Shabaab exploiting environmental factors such as drought and inter-clan rivalries in order to exacerbate the crisis and expand the group's influence. In addition, neighboring Kenya offers Al-Shabaab the opportunity for high profile attacks and potential recruitment base among Somali diaspora. Both case studies will be examined for further evidence of Al-

Shabaab exploiting the regional political context of Somalia's failed state and Kenya's proximity in order to remain successful and resilient as an organization.

Hypothesis 3: The Failed Counterterrorism approach will take an alternative angle on Al-Shabaab's resiliency namely, considering the failure of legitimate states and alliances to effectively confront the organization. For both case studies, counterterrorism policies will be analyzed at three levels: the Somali government, both the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and Federal Government of Somalia (FGS), AMISOM, and the United States. For this hypothesis to be supported, counterterrorism policies will be evaluated for evidence of policies backfiring, creating additional grievances among local Somali populous, and bolstering Al-Shabaab's operations. With this knowledge, it will be possible to note the accuracy of this hypothesis and discuss policy implications for the United States and coalition partners and construct tailored counterterrorism solutions.

E. THESIS OVERVIEW

This thesis focuses on Al-Shabaab's evolution since 2006, punctuated by two specific low points in the group's history—the regression in 2010 and the loss of their emir in 2014—to determine how the group responded in each circumstance. The subsequent chapters will describe the factors that have enabled the group to remain resilient including ideological exploitation, local cultural understanding, and the group's ability to be adaptable to austere conditions to maintain both their financial resilience and intelligence apparatus. It will examine how Al-Shabaab's understanding of the regional political, historical, and cultural environment within their sphere of influence, from the local environment within Somalia and beyond to regionally across East Africa, enable the organization to exploit conditions to their favor.

II. EVOLUTION OF AL-SHABAAB

Al-Shabaab's Islamist ideological origins, evolution, and appeal underpins the group's success throughout East Africa. This section will first discuss the historical origins of Al-Shabaab including the group's link to al-Ittihad al-Islami (AIAI, or "Unity of Islam"), the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), and Al-Qaeda. It will then characterize Al-Shabaab's ideological narrative and identify how Al-Shabaab uses this narrative to exploit the religious and cultural context within Somalia and among its diaspora throughout the region, namely Kenya. Finally, this section will summarize Al-Shabaab's major power mechanisms including both its financial and intelligence apparatuses that enable the organization's internal functions, leverage external support for the group, and coerce local populations to follow Al-Shabaab's bidding.

A. HISTORY

Al-Shabaab's historical origins took root in anarchic and impoverished Somalia, starting first with the formation of AIAI, the ICU, and eventually formalizing as Al-Shabaab. Somalia's descent into anarchy followed the 1991 collapse of the Siad Barre regime and resulted in persistent inter-clan and warlord conflict.²⁸ The lack of decisive victory by any single faction meant widespread instability and enduring insecurity throughout the country.²⁹ By the late 1990s, local Islamic clerics attempted to exert a degree of order and stability through the establishment of neighborhood sharia courts.³⁰

The ICU became the most influential of such sharia court networks, as the loose coalition of Islamic clerics and militia members promised to end to the chaotic warlord rule.³¹ Vidino, Pantucci, and Kohlmann describe the ICU's exploitation of the instability

²⁸ Ted Dagne, *Somalia: Current Conditions and Prospects for a Lasting Peace*, CRS Report No. RL33911 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2011), 5.

²⁹ Rob Wise, "Al Shabaab," *Center For Strategic and International Studies*, AQAM Futures Project, 2, no. Homeland Security and Counterterrorism Program (July 2011): 2.

³⁰ Dagne, *Somalia: Current Conditions and Prospects for a Lasting Peace*.

³¹ Lorenzo Vidino, Raffaello Pantucci, and Evan Kohlmann, "Bringing Global Jihad to the Horn of Africa: Al Shabaab, Western Fighters, and the Sacralization of the Somali Conflict," *African Security* 3, no. 4 (November 29, 2010): 220, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392206.2010.533071>.

to forward their jihadist vision among a primarily moderate population: “While the group’s aim to bring banditry under control was popular with the local populations, it is arguable that its desire to impose sharia law was not. Their strict interpretation of Islam had little in common with the local traditional Sufi practices of most Somalis, yet the population was willing to tolerate ICU’s zeal in exchange for some long-desired security.”³² With the necessary backing of popular support, the ICU managed to gain control of a large portion of Somalia and paved the way for more extremist factions to move in and eventually take over.

The Islamic militant group AIAI proved to be just such an extremist faction. Between 1982 and 1984, Middle Eastern-educated Somali Wahhabis founded AIAI as a Salafist organization with the goal of overthrowing Mohammed Said Barre’s regime.³³ Through AIAI’s Middle Eastern connection, its core membership received funding and arms from Osama bin Laden.³⁴ Over the decades, however, the group failed to achieve its objective of establishing a Salafist state as it lacked cohesive structure and leadership and suffered internal infighting.³⁵ By 2000, the remaining membership consisted primarily of young, militant radicals.³⁶ This group of young fundamentalists known as Al-Shabaab, or “the youth,” decided to form an alliance with the ICU as the organization’s youth militia.³⁷

Together, Al-Shabaab and the ICU took control of Somalia’s capital, Mogadishu, in June 2006, a provocation that incited neighboring Ethiopia to stage an intervention for fear of spillover violence.³⁸ This invasion by Ethiopia, a historical enemy of Somalia, significantly aided Al-Shabaab’s plight as it proved to be a call to action from both an

³² Vidino, Pantucci, and Kohlmann, 220.

³³ Wise, “Al Shabaab,” July 2011, 3; United Nations Security Council, “Al-Itihaad Al-Islamiya / AIAI,” July 19, 2019, https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1267/aq_sanctions_list/summaries/entity/al-itihaad-al-islamiya/aiai.

³⁴ Felter, Masters, and Sergie, “Al-Shabab Backgrounder.”

³⁵ Dagne, *Somalia: Current Conditions and Prospects for a Lasting Peace*, 5.

³⁶ Wise, “Al-Shabaab,” 3.

³⁷ Felter, Masters, and Sergie, “Al-Shabab Backgrounder.”

³⁸ Felter, Masters, and Sergie.

Islamist and Somali nationalist perspective.³⁹ Vidino, Pantucci, and Kohlmann describe the resulting environment for the expansion of Al-Shabaab: “The more moderate sections of the ICU, composed mostly of Sufis, were eclipsed in influence by the more radical wings in the wake of the Ethiopian invasion. Conflating their global Islamist outlook with nationalist emotions brewing after the invasion, former AIAI leaders such as Aweys and Ayrow led a well-trained and deeply ideological militia of young volunteers that began engaging in daring actions against Ethiopian troops.”⁴⁰ The Ethiopian invasion allowed Al-Shabaab to win additional fighters, consolidate disparate militant group factions, and gain sympathizers among local populations.⁴¹

As the fight devolved into a full-fledged insurgency, Al-Shabaab adjusted tactics. In April 2007, Al-Shabaab’s insurgency strategy included recruitment for suicide bombing operations, which they euphemistically called “martyrdom operations,” a tactic not previously seen within Somalia’s conflict.⁴² Mwagi describes the evolution of the tactics and goals Al-Shabaab displayed: “Al-Shabaab has significantly transformed the nature of the conflict in Somalia by introducing, into this conflict, extremism. The conflict has now acquired a more global jihadist dimension. Attacks carried out by the movement have demonstrated its ability to strike outside its usual territory, adding fears that the group is becoming more transnational.”⁴³ Even as Ethiopian troops pulled out of Somalia in early 2009, Al-Shabaab’s tactical flexibility proved vital for the organizational survival and further linked Al-Shabaab with Al-Qaeda’s jihadist approach.⁴⁴

Al-Shabaab’s link with Al-Qaeda formalized over the next few years. Although AIAI had retained several Al-Qaeda linked individuals as early as the late-1990s, Al-Qaeda remained focused on global issues while AIAI primarily remained committed to

³⁹ Vidino, Pantucci, and Kohlmann, “Bringing Global Jihad to the Horn of Africa,” 220.

⁴⁰ Vidino, Pantucci, and Kohlmann, 220–21.

⁴¹ Vidino, Pantucci, and Kohlmann, 220.

⁴² Vidino, Pantucci, and Kohlmann, 223.

⁴³ Oscar Gakuo Mwangi, “State Collapse, Al-Shabaab, Islamism, and Legitimacy in Somalia,” *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 13, no. 4 (December 1, 2012): 519, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2012.725659>.

⁴⁴ Vidino, Pantucci, and Kohlmann, “Bringing Global Jihad to the Horn of Africa,” 222.

establishing an Islamic state within Greater Somalia.⁴⁵ However with Al-Shabaab's rising prominence, the two organizations became more closely aligned. Just as Ethiopia's invasion of Somalia had mobilized the Somali population to support Al-Shabaab, Al-Qaeda supporters again saw an opportunity to confront the "foreign crusaders" within Somalia.⁴⁶ According to Vidino, Pantucci, and Kohlmann, "In March 2009, Osama bin Laden issued a video titled 'Fight On, Champions of Somalia' in which he specifically endorsed Al-Shabaab. In an As-Sahab video recording titled 'No Peace Without Islam,' Al-Qaeda commander Abu Yahya al-Libi similarly called on Muslims around the world to stand with Al-Shabaab."⁴⁷ Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda endorsement video served as the vital publicity and recognition Al-Shabaab needed to fuel its insurgency.

Throughout 2010, Al-Qaeda provided additional support to Al-Shabaab when it sent hundreds of Afghanistan-trained foreign fighters to southern Somalia to facilitate Al-Shabaab training camps.⁴⁸ With the continued flow of foreign fighters joining Al-Shabaab, Vidino, Pantucci, and Kohlmann note Al-Shabaab's growing ambitions: "Considering this change in political landscape and increased use of religious, global, and Al-Qaeda-inspired imagery over nationalistic themes in Al-Shabaab's rhetoric since the Ethiopians' pullout, it is fair to state that it is likely that some of the volunteers that joined the group since 2008 are more attracted by its global jihadist ideology than by patriotic fervor."⁴⁹ Al-Shabaab found that its association with Al-Qaeda fed the notion that local struggles served a greater purpose: the global jihad of Islam versus infidelity.⁵⁰

In 2012, Al-Shabaab and Al-Qaeda leadership agreed to a formal merger of the two organizations with Al-Shabaab deemed an official affiliate and Al-Shabaab's leader

⁴⁵ Vidino, Pantucci, and Kohlmann, 220.

⁴⁶ Vidino, Pantucci, and Kohlmann, 222.

⁴⁷ Vidino, Pantucci, and Kohlmann, 222.

⁴⁸ John F Kerry et al., "Al Qaeda in Yemen and Somalia: A Ticking Time Bomb," Committee Print, A Report to the Committee on Foreign Relations (Washington, DC: United States Senate, January 21, 2010).

⁴⁹ Vidino, Pantucci, and Kohlmann, "Bringing Global Jihad to the Horn of Africa," 228.

⁵⁰ Vidino, Pantucci, and Kohlmann, 221.

Godane named as Al-Qaeda's emir for Somalia.⁵¹ In addition, Al-Shabaab remained closely linked with another Al-Qaeda affiliate, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), by continuing to exchange intelligence, equipment, and expertise among their fighters.⁵² These alliances provided Al-Shabaab necessary practical support but also allowed Al-Shabaab to continue framing Somalia's conflict in terms of a global struggle against apostate governments, notably the group's "near enemies" of Ethiopia and the Somalia's government.⁵³ In contrast, Al-Shabaab's link with Al-Qaeda allowed them to also consider the United States and Europe as "far enemies" of Islam.⁵⁴

Later, as Al-Qaeda's rival ISIS gained prominence, Al-Shabaab briefly considered allying with the organization, but due to Al-Shabaab's connections with Al-Qaeda's leadership, Al-Shabaab rejected ISIS's advances.⁵⁵ According to Maruf and Joseph, "Essentially, Al-Shabaab wanted to remain important in the global jihad arena, and Al-Qaeda gave them brand approval, despite Al-Shabaab having no real ties to Al-Qaeda core aside from general guidance and advice."⁵⁶ The mutually beneficial alliance between Al-Qaeda and Al-Shabaab has enabled the group to conduct complex attacks throughout the region, significantly subvert efforts to establish stable governance in Somalia, and present an ongoing threat to the Horn of Africa.⁵⁷

B. IDEOLOGY

Much like the historical origins of Al-Shabaab, the ideology of the group evolved in response to challenges and shifting goals. As previously noted, Al-Shabaab's history advanced from specific, nationalistic interests to global jihad, a concept known as sacralization. According to Vidino, Pantucci, and Kohlmann, "Sacralization of conflict is

⁵¹ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 197.

⁵² Maruf and Joseph, 255.

⁵³ Vidino, Pantucci, and Kohlmann, "Bringing Global Jihad to the Horn of Africa," 222.

⁵⁴ Vidino, Pantucci, and Kohlmann, 222.

⁵⁵ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 260.

⁵⁶ Maruf and Joseph, 260.

⁵⁷ Felter, Masters, and Sergie, "Al-Shabab Backgrounder."

the process through which religion, or, in most cases, a militant interpretation of it, evolves from being an irrelevant or secondary factor at the onset of a conflict to shaping the views, actions, and aims of one or more of the conflict's key actors."⁵⁸ In Al-Shabaab's case, the ideological shift from removing an Ethiopian occupation to eradicating the Somali government and establishing a global Islamic caliphate makes a peaceful solution nearly impossible as Al-Shabaab's religious imperatives allow no space for negotiation or compromise.⁵⁹

Al-Shabaab's extremist views of Islam follows a Salafi-Jihadist ideology. According to Maher, Salafi-Jihadism remains a broad and complex belief system: "This millenarian project believes in progress through regression, where the perfect life is realized by reviving the Islam of its first three generations. Taken as markers for both authenticity and purity, the legacy of these so-called 'pious predecessors' ... provides the praxis for action in contemporary Salafism."⁶⁰ As Al-Shabaab seeks to establish a purist Islamic society emulating these "pious predecessors," the movement imposes a strict code of conduct that prohibits movies, sports, khat, and immodest dress.⁶¹ Al-Shabaab portrays itself as the protector of true Islam and believes its version of Islam will lead to stability and good governance in the region.⁶²

While Al-Shabaab strives for legitimacy as an empowered Islamist organization capable of governing Somali society, their identity as a Salafi-Jihadist organization remains ambiguous. The concept of Salafi-Jihadism is diverse in practice as many Salafi-Jihadist groups hold divergent opinions and follow various interpretations of Islam.⁶³ As Maher defines it, "Movements within Salafism differ sharply over their views on the modern nation-state, its role, and legitimacy. They consequently prescribe different methods... for

⁵⁸ Vidino, Pantucci, and Kohlmann, "Bringing Global Jihad to the Horn of Africa," 217.

⁵⁹ Vidino, Pantucci, and Kohlmann, 233.

⁶⁰ Shiraz Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism: The History of an Idea*, 1 edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 207.

⁶¹ Mwangi, "State Collapse, Al-Shabaab, Islamism, and Legitimacy in Somalia," 524.

⁶² Mwangi, 524.

⁶³ Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, 207.

change, from inert quietism to revolutionary upheaval.”⁶⁴ For Al-Shabaab, this interpretive pluralism allows the organization to justify its violent jihad and combat any opposition in terms of religious blasphemy.⁶⁵

Within the context of Somalia, Al-Shabaab faces the ideological challenge of reforming or eliminating the dominant role of Sufism throughout society.⁶⁶ Classified as a deviant Islamic sect by Al-Shabaab, Sufism “is particularly disliked because of ‘saint worship’ and other ‘idolatrous’ (shirk) acts,” according to Mwangi.⁶⁷ The author continues: “Al-Shabaab controls religious institutions and associated religious symbols that run contrary to its variant of Islamism through practices such as destroying or desecrating shrines and graves.”⁶⁸ Since 2008, Al-Shabaab has executed numerous Sufi Muslim clerics and any known supporters.⁶⁹ Al-Shabaab views Sufism as incompatible with authentic Islamic society and strives for its eradication from local politics and Somalia’s tribal environment.⁷⁰

Al-Shabaab pursues its ultraconservative interpretation of sharia through a strategy of religious socialization, rehabilitation of Somali society, and pacification of inter-clan violence.⁷¹ Al-Shabaab begins with the premise that its extreme version of Islam is correct and incontestable while all other interpretations are false, obliterating the possibility of any further debate about Islamic jurisprudence or sharia.⁷² As such, the group liberally proclaims takfir, or excommunication, upon individuals alleged to have committed serious sins against Islam, even in cases of faithful Muslim adherents committing minor

⁶⁴ Maher, 207.

⁶⁵ Mwangi, “State Collapse, Al-Shabaab, Islamism, and Legitimacy in Somalia,” 524.

⁶⁶ Mwangi, 524.

⁶⁷ Mwangi, 524.

⁶⁸ Mwangi, 524.

⁶⁹ Solomon Dersso, “Somalia Dilemmas: Changing Security Dynamics, but Limited Policy Choices,” *ISS Africa*, no. 218 (October 12, 2010): 8, <https://issafrica.org/research/papers/somalia-dilemmas-changing-security-dynamics-but-limited-policy-choices>.

⁷⁰ Vidino, Pantucci, and Kohlmann, “Bringing Global Jihad to the Horn of Africa,” 233.

⁷¹ Mwangi, “State Collapse, Al-Shabaab, Islamism, and Legitimacy in Somalia,” 524.

⁷² Mwangi, 524.

offenses.⁷³ This notion allows the group to confront elders and religious leaders and attract younger followers, as Mwangi describes it: “The Islamism professed by the movement also offers the youth a route to globalization and a means to practice their faith in any situation. It allows its faithful to detach themselves from their local situations and seek out a less parochial environment. Al-Shabaab has gained some social control and legitimacy through its religious rhetoric and practices.”⁷⁴

Al-Shabaab’s link with Al-Qaeda offers further ideological appeal through the endorsement of the Al-Qaeda “brand.”⁷⁵ Al-Qaeda offers Al-Shabaab a broadened ideological mindset of a shared critique of the current world order and the nation-state system, a legendary status symbol, and a basic framework for which other extremist organizations can be franchised.⁷⁶ For Al-Shabaab, Al-Qaeda’s global jihadist movement enables their primarily nationalistic agenda to be transformed rhetorically and operationally into a global struggle for Islam.⁷⁷ According to Vidino, Pantucci, and Kohlmann, this transformation serves both organizations as “local actors might maintain some of their parochial agendas, but by putting themselves under the banner of the global jihadist movement they benefit from outside support in terms of funding, recruits, propaganda, and military expertise. The global jihadist movement also benefits, as it can expand its influence and add credibility to its narrative that Islam is under attack from non-Muslims.”⁷⁸

⁷³ Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, 98.

⁷⁴ Mwangi, “State Collapse, Al-Shabaab, Islamism, and Legitimacy in Somalia,” 524.

⁷⁵ Peter Mandaville, *Islam and Politics*, 2 edition (New York: Routledge, 2014), 365.

⁷⁶ Mandaville, 365.

⁷⁷ Vidino, Pantucci, and Kohlmann, “Bringing Global Jihad to the Horn of Africa,” 224.

⁷⁸ Vidino, Pantucci, and Kohlmann, 224.

C. AL-SHABAAB'S EXPLOITATION OF THE REGIONAL CULTURAL CONTEXT

1. Somalia's Clan Dynamic and Cultural Context

In addition to Al-Shabaab's ideological appeal and religious narrative, Al-Shabaab also seeks to exploit the cultural context within Somalia, including pervasive clannism and failed state environment. As previously discussed, Somalia's clan environment provides the basis for the way of life in Somalia, yet the clan system remains fluid and complex.⁷⁹ Organized by lineage, Somali society remains closely tied to ancestry, and alliances often follow the proximity of one's lineage with another.⁸⁰ Shapiro describes the nature of clannism in Somalia, "Clannism forms the foundation for most of traditional Somali core social institutions and norms such as personal identity, local resource rights, customary law (xeer), blood payment (diya) groups, and social support systems."⁸¹ Despite the shared ethnicity, language, and culture throughout Somalia, clan identity and loyalty hold immense importance and influence over society.⁸²

While clannism remains fundamental to Somali society, Islam provides a horizontal identity that can unify clan lines and complement traditional societal hierarchy.⁸³ Rather than challenging clan identity, Shapiro explains, "Shari'a law has historically never been a primary source of law, although aspects of Shari'a have been assimilated within xeer. Though Islamism in contemporary Somalia has soared, clannism remains the dominant political logic, within which Islamists and Shari'a courts are generally constrained."⁸⁴ Although in many ways Islam remains subordinated within the context of Somali clannism,

⁷⁹ Jacob Shapiro, "Al-Qa'ida's MisAdventures in the Horn of Africa," Harmony Project (Westpoint, New York: Combating Terrorism Center, July 2, 2007), 29–30.

⁸⁰ Mwangi, "State Collapse, Al-Shabaab, Islamism, and Legitimacy in Somalia," 523.

⁸¹ Shapiro, "Al-Qa'ida's MisAdventures in the Horn of Africa," 29–30.

⁸² Seth Kaplan, "Rethinking State-Building in a Failed State," *The Washington Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (January 2010): 82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01636600903418710>.

⁸³ Mwangi, "State Collapse, Al-Shabaab, Islamism, and Legitimacy in Somalia," 523.

⁸⁴ Shapiro, "Al-Qa'ida's MisAdventures in the Horn of Africa," 29–30.

when the clans face a common enemy, especially a foreign, non-Muslim threat, Islam can become a tool of unification and mass mobilization.⁸⁵

Al-Shabaab recognizes the challenges and opportunities that Somalia's clan system offers. As an organization, Al-Shabaab uses its Salafi-Jihadist ideology to discredit local social structures, build alliances among competing clans, and establish sharia as the source of law to gain legitimacy.⁸⁶ Hansen notes Al-Shabaab's success in this endeavor, "Various clans will try to ally with Al-Shabaab as local, regional recruitment has often meant that units recruited in a particular location retain clan allegiance."⁸⁷ Al-Shabaab is able to mitigate the negative aspects of clannism to both unify diverse clans and empower minority clans by allowing members to take on senior leadership positions and guard against traditionally oppressive clans.⁸⁸

In addition to Al-Shabaab's manipulation of clannism to gain societal control, Al-Shabaab also exploits Somalia's failed state environment by addressing poverty and establishing rule of law. On the basis of Islamism, Al-Shabaab provides social services in regions under its control.⁸⁹ According to Mwangi, "Shabaab provides education and training, justice and security, food and alms distribution, local-level administration and public works, and employment. Education is not available for many Somalis and Al-Shabaab plays a growing role in the education sector. In many areas of the country, it is the only organization that provides education – although only an 'Islamic' education, with a limited and fundamentalist curriculum."⁹⁰ The provision of these services in

⁸⁵ Georg-Sebastian Holzer, "Political Islam in Somalia: A Fertile Ground for Radical Islamic Groups?," *Geopolitics of the Middle East*, 2008, 24.

⁸⁶ Paula Cristina Roque, "Somalia: Understanding Al-Shabaab," *Institute for Security Studies Africa*, Situation Report, June 3, 2009, 3.

⁸⁷ Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group, 2005–2012* (Cary, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2013), 139, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=1364047>.

⁸⁸ Mwangi, "State Collapse, Al-Shabaab, Islamism, and Legitimacy in Somalia," 523.

⁸⁹ Mwangi, 520.

⁹⁰ Mwangi, 525.

impoverished regions enables Al-Shabaab to gain legitimacy and support from the local community.⁹¹

Al-Shabaab highlights the failures of both Somalia's government and AMISOM to uphold rule of law consistently throughout Somalia and seeks to provide an alternative forms of justice under its version of Islamic rule.⁹² As Hansen characterizes it, Al-Shabaab's strength remains "the inclination for law and order that its ideology created, highly popular amongst ordinary Somalis."⁹³ In contrast, Al-Shabaab accuses AMISOM and Somalia's government of being apostate, occupying forces intent on meddling in the affairs of Somalia's population.⁹⁴ As an additional means of enforcing Al-Shabaab's control and delegitimizing Somalia's government, Al-Shabaab successfully employs its intelligence branch, the Amniyat, throughout the country.⁹⁵ This powerful force pervades all aspects of life in Somalia and has even infiltrated the ranks within AMISOM, controlling the Somali populous through targeted assassinations and fear.⁹⁶ Al-Shabaab's quasi-state functions seek to both undermine government control as well as gain legitimacy as an organization.

2. Somali Refugees and Regional Diaspora

Throughout the East African region, a number of countries support a Somali diaspora and refugees with a wide variance in treatment. Kenya remains by far the largest and most influential host and both the Somali diaspora and Al-Shabaab play a significant role in Kenya's stability. Within Kenya, Al-Shabaab's sympathizers and affiliated network, known as Al-Hijra, facilitate Al-Shabaab through recruitment, training, and radicalization efforts among Kenya's vulnerable populations.⁹⁷

⁹¹ Mwangi, 520.

⁹² Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 140.

⁹³ Hansen, 139.

⁹⁴ Mwangi, "State Collapse, Al-Shabaab, Islamism, and Legitimacy in Somalia," 521.

⁹⁵ Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 141.

⁹⁶ Hansen, 141.

⁹⁷ Sahan Africa, "Al-Shabaab as a Transnational Security Threat" (Intergovernmental Authority on Development Security Sector Program, March 2016), 4.

For over 26 years, the government of Kenya has hosted between 300,000 to 400,000 Somali refugees consistently in Kenya's largest refugee camp Dadaab and self-settled throughout the country.⁹⁸ Kenya's overlapping cultural ties along the Somali-Kenyan border as well as Somalia's geographic proximity are driving forces behind Kenya's enormous refugee numbers.⁹⁹ Nyongesa Ikanda describes the intertwined cultural ties between the two countries: "Somali locals and refugees originate from a patrilineal, Islamic, nomadic pastoralist group divided into clans, sub-clans and lineages."¹⁰⁰ As such, when environmental disasters such as drought and famine or violent conflicts erupt in the surrounding region, Kenya often sees large increases in population movements to refugee camps or nearby communities with family ties.¹⁰¹ These historically interwoven demographic ties encourage the Kenyan government to preserve good relations with ethnic Somalis living within their borders as the security of the Somali diaspora often impacts Kenyan state security.

Unfortunately, the Kenyan state has indicated on multiple occasions its unwillingness to ensure the safety and security of ethnic Somalis. Since 2011, the Kenyan government has failed to uphold the rights of ethnic Somalis as evident in their heavy-handed counterterror operations and limited assistance against threats to close the Dadaab refugee camp.¹⁰² Consistently the Kenyan government has enacted operations that indiscriminately detain or kill suspected Al-Shabaab members and supporters among a primarily ethnic Somali population while stringently upholding ethnic Kenyan's rights.¹⁰³ In addition, Kenya's historic demographic profiling among ethnic Somalis living in Kenya

⁹⁸ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Somalia Situation 2017: Supplementary Appeal" (Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, May 2017), 26.

⁹⁹ Fred Nyongesa Ikanda, "Animating 'Refugeeness' through Vulnerabilities: Worthiness of Long-Term Exile in Resettlement Claims among Somali Refugees in Kenya," *Africa* 88, no. 3 (August 2018): 583, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972018000232>.

¹⁰⁰ Ikanda, 583.

¹⁰¹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Somalia Situation 2017: Supplementary Appeal," 29.

¹⁰² Brendon J. Cannon and Dominic Ruto Pkalya, "Why Al-Shabaab Attacks Kenya: Questioning the Narrative Paradigm," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 31, no. 4 (July 4, 2019): 844, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2017.1290607>.

¹⁰³ Cannon and Ruto Pkalya, 844.

and ultimate unjust treatment of these groups only exacerbate existing tensions between the Somali diaspora and host country.¹⁰⁴ The failure of the Kenyan government to fairly enforce rule of law along ethnic-religious lines only further incites suspicion, disenfranchisement, and animosity among the Somali diaspora.¹⁰⁵ In addition, the significance of Dadaab refugee camp to Somali refugees' survival means that threats of camp closure, overcrowding, and poor conditions foster refugees' resentment towards the state.¹⁰⁶ This social isolation whether in a refugee camp, ethnic community settlement, or neighborhood in town fuels further discontent against the host nation and receptiveness to more extreme messages to improve the situation.¹⁰⁷

Within this environment, Somali refugees and diaspora remain extremely vulnerable to exploitation, not only by state actors but also non-state actors including Al-Shabaab. The desperate conditions within the refugee camps mean that well-connected individuals—such as those associated with terrorist organizations—may be able to provide resources or opportunities and thus develop sympathies among the refugee population.¹⁰⁸ For example, there is evidence Al-Shabaab often offers youths the prospect of earning an income whereas the Kenyan state offers refugees little opportunity to provide for their own livelihood.¹⁰⁹ In other cases, Al-Shabaab has shown its ability to shift its messaging to increase the likelihood of Somalis joining the cause or providing tacit support.¹¹⁰ According to Yahya, Al-Shabaab is able to target distinct vulnerabilities among individuals through this strategy: “For the unemployed or the poor, they offer paid jobs; for

¹⁰⁴ Cannon and Ruto Pkalya, 839.

¹⁰⁵ Cannon and Ruto Pkalya, 844.

¹⁰⁶ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “Somalia Situation 2017: Supplementary Appeal,” 29.

¹⁰⁷ Daniel Milton, Megan Spencer, and Michael Findley, “Radicalism of the Hopeless: Refugee Flows and Transnational Terrorism,” *International Interactions* 39, no. 5 (November 1, 2013): 626, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050629.2013.834256>.

¹⁰⁸ Milton, Spencer, and Findley, 627.

¹⁰⁹ Avery Burns, “Feeling the Pinch: Kenya, Al-Shabaab, and East Africa’s Refugee Crisis,” *Refuge: Canada’s Journal on Refugees* 27, no. 1 (2010): 11.

¹¹⁰ Mohamed Yahya, “Africa’s Unique Vulnerability to Violent Extremism,” United Nations Development Program, January 11, 2017, <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/blog/2017/1/11/Africa-s-unique-vulnerability-to-violent-extremism.html>.

marginalized ethnic and religious minorities, they offer recourse through violence; and for the middle class, they offer an adventure, a sense of ‘purpose,’ and an escape from mundanity.”¹¹¹ This flexible approach offers Al-Shabaab a tailored technique for reaching individuals among Somalia’s displaced populations throughout the region, but nowhere is this more evident than in Kenya.

In Kenya, Petrich and Donnelly explain Al-Shabaab’s calculated actions: “Al-Shabaab is filling a governance void in coastal Kenya and in the slum districts of Nairobi by providing jobs, expelling or redirecting people the community perceives to be a threat, and offering a sense of collective identity.”¹¹² Even terrorist attacks the group conducts can be seen as opportunities for the group to obtain credibility and notoriety among the Somali diaspora.¹¹³ Successful attacks can prove Al-Shabaab’s powerful commitment towards their cause while also spreading fear against any moderates who would dare oppose it.¹¹⁴ These factors ultimately enable Al-Shabaab to exploit the Somali diaspora throughout the East African region, but especially in Kenya where the ethnic Somali minority group remains a highly vulnerable population.

In Kenya specifically, Al-Shabaab maintains a strategy of working to radicalize Somali refugees in camps as well as ethnic Somalis self-settled in Kenya’s urban center. As the unification of “Greater Somalia,” of which territory in Kenya holds a key position, remains a fervent goal, Al-Shabaab’s pursuit of jihad within Kenya is a priority objective.¹¹⁵ In contrast, although both Ethiopia and Djibouti offers Al-Shabaab a similar opportunity to pursue its goal of “Greater Somalia,” Al-Shabaab’s targeting and expansion into Kenya offers several strategic advantages for the terrorist organization.¹¹⁶ Kenya’s

¹¹¹ Yahya.

¹¹² Katharine Petrich and Phoebe Donnelly, “Worth Many Sins: Al-Shabaab’s Shifting Relationship with Kenyan Women,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 30, no. 6–7 (September 19, 2019): 1185, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2019.1649814>.

¹¹³ Cannon and Ruto Pkalya, “Why Al-Shabaab Attacks Kenya,” 839.

¹¹⁴ Cannon and Ruto Pkalya, 839.

¹¹⁵ Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, “The Strategic Challenge of Somalia’s Al-Shabaab,” October 29, 2007, 37.

¹¹⁶ Cannon and Ruto Pkalya, “Why Al-Shabaab Attacks Kenya,” 840–41.

higher visibility and large Somali diaspora allow Al-Shabaab a potential recruitment base and well publicized attacks to increase the group's notoriety—all of which serve Al-Shabaab's strategic objective of expanding their version of an Islamic caliphate.¹¹⁷ According to Cannon and Ruto Pkalya, "Al-Shabaab targets and attacks Kenya in a highly rational way based on cost-benefit analyses and the presence of ample opportunity spaces that factor in a number of geo-strategic and geo-political reasons."¹¹⁸ Additionally, Kenya's refugee camp offers Al-Shabaab a strategic location to conduct their operations with minimal interference.¹¹⁹ The isolated and separate environment that refugee camps offer allow terrorists concealment for illicit activities such as weapons proliferation, smuggling activities, and recruitment among the disenfranchised Somali youth.¹²⁰ In this way, the Somali diaspora remain a highly vulnerable but attractive population for Al-Shabaab to exploit as it furthers its strategic goals not only in Kenya but throughout the Horn of Africa region.

Unfortunately, as previously discussed, many nations including Kenya play into Al-Shabaab's hands by exacting harsh counterterror tactics and failing to uphold the rights of displaced Somalis. Cannon and Ruto Pkalya classify Kenya's difficult situation: "Kenya's heavy-handed tactics against its Somali and Muslim communities have led to widespread anger and have arguably had the effect of radicalizing a portion of Kenya's youth, assisting in the presence of terror cells within Kenya and Kenyan foreign fighters in al-Shabaab."¹²¹ As such, displaced Somalis' grievances are compounded along ethnic and religious lines, and individuals who may have been otherwise peaceful become ideologically susceptible to Al-Shabaab's message.

¹¹⁷ Cannon and Ruto Pkalya, 844.

¹¹⁸ Cannon and Ruto Pkalya, 840–41.

¹¹⁹ Milton, Spencer, and Findley, "Radicalism of the Hopeless," 627.

¹²⁰ Milton, Spencer, and Findley, 627.

¹²¹ Cannon and Ruto Pkalya, "Why Al-Shabaab Attacks Kenya," 846.

D. AL-SHABAAB’S POWER MECHANISMS

1. Financial Mechanisms

One primary aspect of Al-Shabaab’s success and resilience remains its ability to implement financial mechanisms that shift from quasi-state functions to criminal practices while appealing to the local cultural environment and exploiting religious tenets when convenient. This section will discuss Al-Shabaab’s organizational attributes and financial strategies and define how the use of internal and external funding sources allow the group to exploit local populations and continue to pose a significant regional threat.

a. *Al-Shabaab’s External Funding Mechanisms: Remittance, Hawala & Mobile Money*

Somalia’s financial environment offers an additional avenue for Al-Shabaab to exploit to their purpose. The Somali economy currently receives over \$3.1 billion annually, or approximately 20 percent of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP), from remittances sent from the Somali diaspora located in Europe, the Americas, or elsewhere in the Middle East.¹²² In the World Bank vulnerability assessment for Somalia, Pape and Karamba identify the most prevalent process by which remittances are transferred in Somalia: the informal money transfer service known as the hawala system.¹²³ El-Qorchi provides a definition for this financial transfer service prevalent throughout the Middle East, North Africa, the Horn of Africa, and the Indian subcontinent: “The hawala system refers to an informal channel for transferring funds from one location to another through service providers — known as hawaladars — regardless of the nature of the transaction and the countries involved. While hawala transactions are mostly initiated by emigrant workers living in a developed country, the hawala system can also be used to send funds from a developing country.”¹²⁴

¹²² Pape and Karamba, “Somalia Poverty and Vulnerability Assessment: Findings from Wave 2 of the Somali High Frequency Survey,” 2.

¹²³ Pape and Karamba, 129.

¹²⁴ Mohammed El-Qorchi, “Hawala: Based on Trust, Subject to Abuse,” ed. Jonathan Schaffer et al., *Economic Perspectives*, September 2004, 22, <https://usa.usembassy.de/etexts/his/ijee0904.pdf>.

This system operates outside of the traditional banking sector for practical accessibility purposes and the vast majority of hawala operators and both sending and receiving customers are legal and legitimate.¹²⁵ This is important as according to Somalia's Vulnerability Assessment: "Remittances can help reduce poverty, increase access to health and education services, and promote household savings. Remittance-receiving households are less likely to be poor compared to the households that do not receive remittances. Somalis continue to transfer funds to family left behind and invest back home to support the recovery of the country."¹²⁶ Somalia's extensive hawala system offers the nation's impoverished population an accessible remittance option due to the highly liquid and timely manner of the process.¹²⁷

Although this remittance process has widespread legitimate applications and is essential for the economic success of the country of Somalia, the international community considers this sector as high risk for terrorist financing and money laundering.¹²⁸ The limited ability to regulate remittance service providers and the absence of government oversight allows these cash transfers to take place without following "know your client" norms or knowing the legitimacy of the sender or final customer.¹²⁹

Because of the potential for anonymity and minimal tracking, hawalas have been attractive targets for individuals who seek to hide their activities including those supporting terrorist or criminal elements.¹³⁰ Looney describes the vulnerabilities of the financial transfer system: "Given its size and semi-legitimate status... it is not hard for terrorists to transfer money using the hawala channel. They are labyrinths replete with pseudonyms,

¹²⁵ Robert Looney, "Hawala: The Terrorist's Informal Financial Mechanism," *Middle East Policy* 10, no. 1 (March 2003): 166, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-4967.00099>.

¹²⁶ Pape and Karamba, "Somalia Poverty and Vulnerability Assessment: Findings from Wave 2 of the Somali High Frequency Survey," 129.

¹²⁷ Looney, "Hawala," 166.

¹²⁸ Pape and Karamba, "Somalia Poverty and Vulnerability Assessment: Findings from Wave 2 of the Somali High Frequency Survey," 130.

¹²⁹ Pape and Karamba, "Somalia Poverty and Vulnerability Assessment: Findings from Wave 2 of the Somali High Frequency Survey," 130.

¹³⁰ Mohammed El-Qorchi, "Hawala: Based on Trust, Subject to Abuse," ed. Jonathan Schaffer et al., *Economic Perspectives*, September 2004, 23, <https://usa.usembassy.de/etexts/his/ijee0904.pdf>.

middlemen and dead ends. Wealthy Arab patrons in the Middle East likely send funds to al-Qaeda through hawala organizations, as do myriad Arab charities acting as fund-raising fronts. The smaller the value of the transfer, the less attention it is likely to attract, but it is still easy to transfer large amounts of money without raising questions.”¹³¹ This vulnerable process is simply a way of life and the norm in Somalia as is the constant risk of exploitation by Al-Shabaab and any other nefarious actors.

This person-to-person money transfer service is supplemented by the growing use of mobile money transfer services in Somalia and the Horn of Africa region for the transmission of remittances. Odundo Owuor explains the history of mobile money in the region: “Mobile money initially started as a simple exchange of airtime credit between users. Over 10 years ago, mobile network operators formalized this by offering mobile money services. It was quickly perceived as a convenient and safe way of making transactions and storing money.”¹³² Currently 87 percent of international transfers through hawala networks while only 12 percent of international transfer are through mobile phones.¹³³

Domestically however, mobile money use is widespread. Odundo Owuor states, “About 155 million mobile money transactions take place every month. It’s used for a wide range of things. One of the most common is to pay bills for purchases between \$2 and \$300. Mobile money is thus far more widely used than cash. Two-thirds of those surveyed use it to pay for items like water, electricity and charcoal. A third claim to use it to buy groceries, durable goods and livestock.”¹³⁴ Despite this widespread use, mobile money transfers present similar security, tracking, and documentation challenges as hawala networks.

¹³¹ Looney, “Hawala,” 166.

¹³² Victor Odundo Owuor, “Mobile Money Transfers Have Taken off in Somalia, but It’s a Risky Business,” *Public Radio International*, October 17, 2018, <https://www.pri.org/stories/2018-10-17/mobile-money-transfers-have-taken-somalia-its-risky-business>.

¹³³ Pape and Karamba, “Somalia Poverty and Vulnerability Assessment: Findings from Wave 2 of the Somali High Frequency Survey,” xxviii.

¹³⁴ Odundo Owuor, “Mobile Money Transfers Have Taken off in Somalia, but It’s a Risky Business.”

“[Mobile money] is vulnerable to money laundering and terrorism financing. This is because there is a weak ‘know your customer’ compliance, in line with global banking standards, meaning few SIM cards and mobile money accounts are registered using a valid form of identification. Ultimately, this results in limited accountability and tractability,” according to Odundo Owuor.¹³⁵ Pape and Karamba further elaborate on the nature of mobile money transfers specifically in Somalia:

The use of mobile phone has been limited to domestic money transfers. This is mainly because of concerns about money laundering and terrorist financing related to cross-border remittances. However, these technologies have the potential to vastly improve access to both remittances and broader financial services, including low-cost savings and credit products, for Somali migrants and remittance recipients in the country.¹³⁶

Within Somalia, currently 46 percent of remittances use mobile money domestically but this number has the potential to go up dramatically as technology improves.¹³⁷ Unfortunately, international mobile money transfers face additional challenges relating to anti-money laundering regulations that have limited the number of service providers and increased costs dramatically.¹³⁸ Pape and Karamba note, “while remittances provide a lifeline for the poor, sending money to Somalia is costly” which “encourages the use of informal channels.”¹³⁹

b. Al-Shabaab’s Internal Funding Mechanism: Taxation System

Al-Shabaab takes full advantage of the use of these informal financial transaction channels, evident in their ability to adapt and exploit the changing economic environment within Somalia. Mobile money’s most significant usage for Al-Shabaab is its role in the

¹³⁵ Odundo Owuor.

¹³⁶ Pape and Karamba, “Somalia Poverty and Vulnerability Assessment: Findings from Wave 2 of the Somali High Frequency Survey,” 129.

¹³⁷ Pape and Karamba, xxviii.

¹³⁸ Pape and Karamba, xxviii.

¹³⁹ Pape and Karamba, xxviii.

structure and function of the organization's taxation system.¹⁴⁰ While external remittances decreased from Somali diaspora over the past decade, Al-Shabaab resorted to extortion and established a tax system of Somali citizen in areas under the organization's territorial control.¹⁴¹

The Hiraal Institute describes the innovative approach Al-Shabaab has taken to Somalia's financial situation: "Al-Shabab has built a resilient and far-reaching financial network that has been able to withstand regular army and Special Forces attacks. With its roots dug deep into the local communities, the group has managed to replace and reposition tax collectors as necessary. On some major roads, the group conducts its tax collection even without having a permanent presence."¹⁴² The informal financial sector allows Al-Shabaab to essentially function as a shadow government with functions such as tax collection, checkpoint operations, and Islamic court functions, all enforced through mafia-style coercion and violence.¹⁴³

Al-Shabaab's taxation system in southern and central Somalia remains systematic and centralized and is funded through a diverse set of sources including, "four distinct revenue streams: taxation of farms and agricultural produce (dalag), registration and taxation of transiting vehicles (gadiid), taxation of goods being transported (badeeco) and taxation of livestock sales (xoolo)," according to Umarov of the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea.¹⁴⁴ Al-Shabaab's taxation structure includes two departments: the

¹⁴⁰ Michelle Nichols, "Iran Is New Transit Point for Somali Charcoal in Illicit Trade Taxed by Militants: U.N. Report," Reuters, October 9, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-sanctions-un-idUSKCN1MJ158>.

¹⁴¹ Ido Levy and Abdi Yusuf, "How Do Terrorist Organizations Make Money? Terrorist Funding and Innovation in the Case of al-Shabaab," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (June 17, 2019): 15, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2019.1628622>.

¹⁴² Hiraal Institute, "The AS Finance System," Mogadishu, Somalia, July 2018, 7.

¹⁴³ Kairat Umarov, "Letter Dated 2 October 2018 from the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea Addressed to the Chair of the Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) Concerning Somalia and Eritrea" (New York: United Nations Security Council, November 9, 2018), 25–27, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2018_1002.pdf.

¹⁴⁴ Umarov, 25–27.

Zakawaat Office, which collects non-monetary tax such as agricultural goods and livestock, and the Finance Office, which manages the collection of all monetary taxes.¹⁴⁵

The Zakawaat Office directs Al-Shabaab militants and supporting clan elders to operate during a collection season, typically the month of Ramadan, and to collect livestock uniformly across southern and central Somalia, including territory Al-Shabaab does not hold.¹⁴⁶ Meanwhile Al-Shabaab's Finance Office manages the collection of monetary taxes through frequent assessments of shops and warehouses in urban centers under the organization's control and extorting 2.5% of the total assessed value of the goods, the zakat or alms rate.¹⁴⁷ In addition, the Finance Office operates roadside checkpoints, which tax all vehicles and transported goods at the same taxation rate.¹⁴⁸

"At every level, collection of revenue is tightly controlled and internally monitored and audited. Al-Shabaab's domestic revenue generation apparatus is more geographically diversified and systematic than that of the Somali Federal Government or the federal member states," Umarov explains.¹⁴⁹ Even in areas outside of their territorial control, Al-Shabaab maintains a "sophisticated accounting system" using multiple informal financial transfer systems including: "internal transfers using cash (both United States dollars and Somali shillings), mobile money, hawala money transfer and possibly bank accounts." ¹⁵⁰

The widespread use of the mobile money transfer service eliminates the need for Al-Shabaab to transport their tax revenue through territory outside of their control.¹⁵¹ In addition, Levy and Yusuf describe Al-Shabaab's methods of extorting tribal leadership and merchants in regions outside of the organization's control, "Al-Shabaab has recently begun

¹⁴⁵ Hiraal Institute, "The AS Finance System," 1.

¹⁴⁶ Hiraal Institute, 3.

¹⁴⁷ Hiraal Institute, 3.

¹⁴⁸ Hiraal Institute, 3.

¹⁴⁹ Umarov, "Letter Dated 2 October 2018 from the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea Addressed to the Chair of the Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) Concerning Somalia and Eritrea," 25–27.

¹⁵⁰ Umarov, 25–27.

¹⁵¹ Umarov, 25–27.

demanding payments from leaders of Somali clans and businesses based outside of its territory. The expansion of Amniyaat and the creation of an effective auditing system have enabled this practice.”¹⁵² The Amniyat, Al-Shabaab’s intelligence arm, enables the group to confront any resistance from uncooperative individuals with threats of kidnapping for ransom or death.¹⁵³

Al-Shabaab’s relationship with illicit charcoal smuggling in the region similarly evolved based on the conditions within Somalia’s unique environment. The United Nations Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea describes Al-Shabaab’s historical revenue from illicit charcoal smuggling: “The charcoal trade continues to be a significant source of revenue for Al-Shabaab, generating at least \$7.5 million from checkpoint taxation in Middle Juba and Lower Juba regions. The systematic taxation of charcoal exports at the ports of Buur Gaabo and Kismayo also continues to generate significant illicit revenue for the Jubbaland administration.”¹⁵⁴

Despite the continued income for the organization the Monitoring Group identified that Somali charcoal exports significantly declined with a 25% reduction in 2018.¹⁵⁵ The Hiraal Institute again provides an explanation for the situation: “While financially it would make sense for the group [Al-Shabaab] to engage in the charcoal trade, they banned it because they considered it more profitable for the authorities in Kismayo [the Somali government] than for themselves.” Instead Al-Shabaab found a more lucrative approach in checkpoint operations rather than Al-Shabaab members smuggling goods including charcoal: “[Al-Shabaab] has banned charcoal and accordingly hunts down charcoal traders, impounds their cargo and cars, and charges them hefty fines. Members who are involved in facilitating the charcoal trade have been arrested and some killed by the group.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² Levy and Yusuf, “How Do Terrorist Organizations Make Money?,” 9.

¹⁵³ Levy and Yusuf, 9.

¹⁵⁴ Umarov, “Letter Dated 2 October 2018 from the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea Addressed to the Chair of the Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) Concerning Somalia and Eritrea,” 6.

¹⁵⁵ Umarov, 6.

¹⁵⁶ Hiraal Institute, “The AS Finance System,” 8–9.

Similarly, Al-Shabaab's association with piracy in the Gulf of Aden illustrates their adaptability to link with criminality when convenient.¹⁵⁷ As true opportunists, Al-Shabaab maintains relationships with individuals involved with piracy when financially beneficial but there is no credible evidence that the group itself conducts maritime attacks firsthand.¹⁵⁸ Petrich notes Al-Shabaab's role in Horn of Africa piracy, "Rather than executing any significant command and control over the operations, al-Shabaab seems to have approached maritime piracy in the same way as it addressed all other revenue generating activity within its area of operation: by taxing those involved, based on the sums they wrestled from European and American insurance companies."¹⁵⁹ This rational approach allows Al-Shabaab to benefit from any operations while limiting any risk or resources expended to conduct the attacks.

In regions where Al-Shabaab maintains territorial control, operating checkpoints offer a viable means of obtaining necessary revenue. Although Al-Shabaab employs mafia-style tactics to coerce transiting individuals to comply with the risk of execution for noncompliance, Al-Shabaab's taxation checkpoints are implemented consistently and predictably, even offering receipts for taxes paid.¹⁶⁰ "In contrast to checkpoints controlled by the Somali Federal Government or federal member state forces, Al-Shabaab does not doubly tax drivers who have paid at another location. As a result, commercial drivers often prefer transiting via checkpoints controlled by Al-Shabaab, rather than federal or regional forces," Umarov explains.¹⁶¹ In addition, the financial benefit for Al-Shabaab remains

¹⁵⁷ Petrich, "Cows, Charcoal, and Cocaine," 14.

¹⁵⁸ Petrich, 14.

¹⁵⁹ Petrich, 14.

¹⁶⁰ Nichols, "Iran Is New Transit Point for Somali Charcoal in Illicit Trade Taxed by Militants."; Umarov, "Letter Dated 2 October 2018 from the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea Addressed to the Chair of the Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) Concerning Somalia and Eritrea," 25–27.

¹⁶¹ Umarov, "Letter Dated 2 October 2018 from the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea Addressed to the Chair of the Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) Concerning Somalia and Eritrea," 25–27.

significant. According to Nichols, the organization earns approximately \$30,000 each day or over \$10 million per year from Al-Shabaab's most lucrative checkpoint alone.¹⁶²

One of the primary reasons that Al-Shabaab's taxation system remains so successful is the organization's ability to understand Somalia's culture and then integrate within Somalia's clan-based society. In addition, Petrich explains, "To transcend Somalia's historically fractious clan relationships, Al-Shabaab seeks cohesion through the framework of Islam."¹⁶³ Al-Shabaab recognizes the preexisting order and structure within Somalia's village communities and coopts these clan leaders to implement Al-Shabaab's taxation and policing requirements.¹⁶⁴

Levy and Yusef explain why Somalia's clan elders would be enticed to follow Al-Shabaab's requests: "In return, al-Shabaab refrains from punishing cooperative clans, facilitates arbitration of inter-tribal disputes, and provides financial assistance to some clans. Some elders residing outside of al-Shabaab territory or in areas formerly under the group's control have cooperated with it out of desire for financial gain, fear of punishment, and ideological affinity."¹⁶⁵ With the loyalty and compliance of clan elders, Al-Shabaab can exploit their cultural ties and loyalty to perform a wide variety of activities on behalf of the group including: "transfer of funds collected from fellow tribesmen, sharing of intelligence, and recruitment of youth to the group" and more ominously "report the names of uncooperative community members, whom al-Shabaab may threaten with extortion, imprisonment, or death."¹⁶⁶

Al-Shabaab's Salafi-jihadist ideological appeal and religious underpinnings provide an additional lever for coercing Somalia's population to do their bidding through the taxation system. Al-Shabaab uses the term *zakah* or *zakat* to describe the tax and extortion that they impose at a fixed rate in accordance with sharia law: 2.5% tax on all

¹⁶² Nichols, "Iran Is New Transit Point for Somali Charcoal in Illicit Trade Taxed by Militants."

¹⁶³ Petrich, "Cows, Charcoal, and Cocaine," 7–8.

¹⁶⁴ Levy and Yusuf, "How Do Terrorist Organizations Make Money?," 10.

¹⁶⁵ Levy and Yusuf, 10.

¹⁶⁶ Levy and Yusuf, 10.

agricultural produce and \$50 fixed tax per hectare of land holdings.¹⁶⁷ The Hiraal Institute further explains the zakat process for traders passing through Al-Shabaab territory, “The owner is then contacted by the Finance Department, which asks him about his annual revenue (not profit). If the answer is ridiculously low, his shipment is impounded; if the answer is reasonable, it is calculated that he owns up to three times the amount he specified, and is taxed 2.5% of that amount. The second method is applied to traders in areas controlled by the government and whose goods do not go through or to AS territory. These are reported on by [Al-Shabaab] informants; finance officials then call them and order them to pay the zakah.”¹⁶⁸

An additional tax collection known as infaaq is extracted in specific regional administrations to support deficits in budget or provide support for military offensives again claims to have a religious basis but in reality can be seen as a predatory practice.¹⁶⁹ As with zakat, the use of Somali clan leadership to carry out collection allows Al-Shabaab to maintain influence throughout the region and ensures operations both military and administrative continue regardless of true territorial control. By distorting the Islamic tenet of both zakat and infaaq as justification for Al-Shabaab’s tax collection, Al-Shabaab manipulates a primarily Muslim Somali populous into compliance while maintaining the threat of property destruction and personal or family member execution for any disobedience.¹⁷⁰

2. Intelligence Apparatus

Another characteristic of Al-Shabaab’s organizational power, Al-Shabaab’s intelligence and security arm, known as the Amniyat, provides a deeply entrenched information collection and enforcement mechanism. The following section will review the Amniyat’s mission and function, its historical development, recruitment and training

¹⁶⁷ Levy and Yusuf, 10.

¹⁶⁸ Hiraal Institute, “The AS Finance System,” 4.

¹⁶⁹ Hiraal Institute, 5.

¹⁷⁰ Levy and Yusuf, “How Do Terrorist Organizations Make Money?,” 10.

processes, and specialized branches to coerce the local population and confront external adversaries.

a. Mission and Area of Operation

Al-Shabaab's clandestine Amniyat network serves as both an intelligence collection and special operations function directly answerable to Al-Shabaab's emir.¹⁷¹ According to the UN Monitoring Group, "An underlying structure, the Amniyat integrates the functions of a secret police, responsible for counter-intelligence and political control, and a clandestine special operations unit conducting assassinations and suicide attacks."¹⁷² Current estimates place Amniyat membership between 500 and 1,000 hardcore jihadists, and the network's reach spans beyond Somalia into Kenya and covertly infiltrating all levels of Somali society including government and security services.¹⁷³

b. Historical Origins

The Amniyat's origins began in the spring of 2009 in the aftermath of the Ethiopian withdrawal and the transition to Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG) control of Mogadishu.¹⁷⁴ During this period, Al-Shabaab suffered defections as disillusioned members viewed Al-Shabaab's struggle as complete with the withdrawal of Somalia's historical enemy, Ethiopia.¹⁷⁵ In this atmosphere of potential decline, Al-Shabaab established the Amniyat, comprised almost entirely of local Somali jihadists, as a secret

¹⁷¹ Ken Menkhaus, "Al-Shabab's Capabilities Post-Westgate," *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*, Africa Special Issue, 7, no. 2 (February 24, 2014), <https://ctc.usma.edu/al-shababs-capabilities-post-westgate/>.

¹⁷² Kim Sook, "Letter Dated 12 July 2013 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) Concerning Somalia and Eritrea Addressed to the President of the Security Council" (New York: United Nations Security Council, July 12, 2013), 50, <http://digitallibrary.un.org/record/752852>.

¹⁷³ Mary Harper, "Somalia's Frightening Network of Islamist Spies," *BBC News*, May 27, 2019, sec. Africa, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-48390166>; Mahad Ibrahim, "Somalia: Al-Shabaab Amniyat Branch Tasked With Protecting Godane," *allAfrica.com*, July 17, 2013, <https://allafrica.com/stories/201307170057.html>; Menkhaus, "Al-Shabab's Capabilities Post-Westgate."

¹⁷⁴ Hansen, *Al Shabaab in Somalia*, 73–74.

¹⁷⁵ Hansen, 73–74.

police to systematically track down and kill former members and their families to instill fear in any others who considered defection.¹⁷⁶

As Al-Shabaab grew in size and strength in the coming year, the Amniyat also expanded in its role and function, all under Godane's command. At the behest of the emir, the Amniyat acted as a separate entity within the organization, outside the control of Al-Shabaab's executive council.¹⁷⁷ Godane shaped the Amniyat for long-term survival as the UN Monitoring Group reports: "Financial and technical resources are increasingly concentrated in the Amniyat ... Amniyat functions mostly independently from the rest of Al-Shabaab, through its own chain of command, logistics network and financial resources. It therefore has the capacity to operate discretely, gather intelligence and strike effectively throughout Somalia, specifically in areas under AMISOM/Federal Government of Somalia control, spreading fear even within Al-Shabaab."¹⁷⁸ The Amniyat's secrecy and terrifying ability to deliver garnered Al-Shabaab increasing power, influence, and even tacit support throughout the region.

c. Recruitment and Training

Initial training for potential Amniyat members often begins with the standard training for new Al-Shabaab recruits: "New Al-Shabaab recruits initially receive three months of basic military training, which can be reduced to a month if there are pressures at the frontline for more troops. Thereafter, some trainees continue to take specialized courses in assembling IEDs, sniping, or guerrilla warfare," according to Sook.¹⁷⁹ From here, Al-Shabaab selects candidates for its elite Amniyat force based on the recruit's demonstrated skill or promise for strategic thinking, with most members around 20 years old and holding clan connections to Al-Shabaab leadership.¹⁸⁰ Once chosen, new Amniyat

¹⁷⁶ Hansen, 73–74; Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 90.

¹⁷⁷ Hansen, *Al Shabaab in Somalia*, 104.

¹⁷⁸ Sook, "Letter Dated 12 July 2013 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) Concerning Somalia and Eritrea Addressed to the President of the Security Council," 13.

¹⁷⁹ Sook, 66.

¹⁸⁰ Sook, 57–58; Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 90.

operatives will be assigned menial tasks, such as drivers for foreign fighters or strategically-placed informants until the jihadists can prove their reliability.¹⁸¹ When the junior operatives demonstrate their credibility, they receive high salaries with their expenses covered, and transition to more specialized training for placement within the Amniyat's distinct units.¹⁸²

d. Hierarchy and Branches

The Amniyat's hierarchical structure begins with the central command, followed by regional commanders, then separate units for intelligence collection, assassinations, and various suicide attacks, each supported with logistical and financial support units.¹⁸³ According to Sook, "Each Amniyat unit is autonomous... and in principle unaware of other groups, for security reasons in case of arrest and interrogation. Intelligence is collected by smaller units, or even lone operatives, and transmitted to the unit commander, who then transmits necessary information to assassination or suicide squads to prepare operations."¹⁸⁴ The high degree of operational security and specialization allows for a competent force and successful military operations.

The Amniyat's intelligence unit, also known as Mukhabarad, is responsible for surveillance for attack operations.¹⁸⁵ For long term attack planning, the Mukhabarad plants spies months in advance on strategic targets, such as the presidential palace, TFG garrisons, or AMISOM bases, to collect information on pattern of life and identify vulnerabilities.¹⁸⁶ Historically, this unit has successfully infiltrated Somali government and security services by targeting specific individuals with death threats.¹⁸⁷ As TFG institutions are incapable

¹⁸¹ Sook, "Letter Dated 12 July 2013 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) Concerning Somalia and Eritrea Addressed to the President of the Security Council," 57–58.

¹⁸² Sook, 57–58.

¹⁸³ Sook, 57.

¹⁸⁴ Sook, 57.

¹⁸⁵ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 90–91.

¹⁸⁶ Maruf and Joseph, 90–91.

¹⁸⁷ Maruf and Joseph, 90–91.

of providing internal security, the individuals often share unauthorized or classified material rather than risk their lives or that of their families.¹⁸⁸

The Amniyat's assassination or "quick reaction" units, known as the Jugta Ulus, act as well-armed commando teams.¹⁸⁹ In active battle, the unit supports conventional Al-Shabaab units by carrying out critical tactical action to favor an Al-Shabaab victory.¹⁹⁰ To accomplish this goal, Jugta Ulus members carry heavy weaponry, including RPGs, bazookas, recoilless rifles, and heavy machine guns, and have even succeeded in taking down enemy aircraft and helicopters in the past.¹⁹¹

The Amniyat's next two units focus on suicide operations, or Mutafajirad, with the subgroups of the Amaliya Ishtihad specializing in traditional suicide missions while the Amaliya Inqimas conducts suicide assaults.¹⁹² Traditional suicide operations involve one or two individuals attacking a target with bombs strapped to their bodies or vehicles.¹⁹³ Meanwhile, more complex suicide assaults include four to ten individuals with orders not to return alive.¹⁹⁴ According to Maruf and Joseph, the Amaliya Inqimas suicide tactics, first used by the Taliban, became Al-Shabaab's favored method, include "a suicide car bomber, with the rest being commandos who attacked the target with guns and grenades following the bomb blast. The attackers all wore suicide belts and were supposed to blow themselves up when they ran out of ammunition."¹⁹⁵ Attacks on targets such as the Somali parliament, UN headquarters, Presidential palace, and Garissa University followed this methodology.¹⁹⁶

¹⁸⁸ Maruf and Joseph, 90–91.

¹⁸⁹ Maruf and Joseph, 90.

¹⁹⁰ Maruf and Joseph, 90.

¹⁹¹ Maruf and Joseph, 90.

¹⁹² Maruf and Joseph, 91.

¹⁹³ Maruf and Joseph, 91.

¹⁹⁴ Maruf and Joseph, 91.

¹⁹⁵ Maruf and Joseph, 91.

¹⁹⁶ Maruf and Joseph, 91.

To become a member of the Amaliya Inqimas, recruits undergo rigorous combat training and psychological indoctrination.¹⁹⁷ Maruf and Joseph describe the separate treatment this force receives, “Just before the operation, Shabaab would assign them bodyguards to give them a feeling of importance. They were also given money and women—and told that even more women would be available in the eternal life that followed once they carried out their mission. The incentives and psychological training were so extreme that in some cases members in the unit competed with each other for the right to carry out suicide mission. Those who were chosen were congratulated by the others.”¹⁹⁸ The extreme training and indoctrination create jihadists unquestioned in their historic lethality and efficacy.

¹⁹⁷ Maruf and Joseph, 91.

¹⁹⁸ Maruf and Joseph, 91.

III. CASE STUDY 1: WITHDRAWAL POST-RAMADAN OFFENSIVE

The following case study will review the events that transpired, leading up to Al-Shabaab's notable low point, the group's withdrawal post-Ramadan Offensive in 2010, and their subsequent resurgence. The first section will provide a summary of key events and Al-Shabaab's response followed by the application of **Hypothesis 1: Organizational Attribute**, **Hypothesis 2: Political Context**, and **Hypothesis 3: Failed Counterterrorism** approaches, respectively, to examine why Al-Shabaab was able to endure after this setback. In this case study, Al-Shabaab's failed Ramadan Offensive will be considered the group's 'shock.' The major attack conducted on the Westgate mall in Nairobi, Kenya, in 2013 will be considered the group's successful rebound point. Each hypothesis will consider what factors enabled Al-Shabaab's successful rebound from the shock of the Ramadan Offensive's failure in order to determine the validity of each hypothesis. Finally, this case study will evaluate Al-Shabaab's critical variables for resiliency as assessed from each approach.

A. SUMMARY OF MAJOR EVENTS

The events leading up to Al-Shabaab's noted low point in 2010 began when the group conducted a large-scale, highly coordinated attack in Kampala, Uganda, on July 11, 2010.¹⁹⁹ In total, at least 74 people were killed and dozens more wounded as two suicide bombers targeted separate watch parties for the 2010 World Cup finals in Uganda's capital city.²⁰⁰ Soon afterward, an Al-Shabaab spokesman claimed responsibility for the attack.²⁰¹

The attack provoked widespread outrage, and Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni announced retaliatory actions, the most significant being the push for the African Union to

¹⁹⁹ Maruf and Joseph, 149.

²⁰⁰ Xan Rice, "Uganda Bomb Blasts Kill at Least 74," *The Guardian*, July 12, 2010, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jul/12/uganda-kampala-bombs-explosions-attacks>; Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 149.

²⁰¹ Rice, "Uganda Bomb Blasts Kill at Least 74."

expand its Somalia mission deployment size and upgrade its mandate from peacekeeping to peace enforcement.²⁰² “In late 2009, Ugandan officials had threatened to remove their troops unless the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia (TFG) started to stabilize the country. However, after the attacks, Museveni sounded a much more determined note. ‘We were just in Mogadishu to guard the port, the airport, and the State House,’ he said four days after the blast. ‘Now they have mobilized us to look for them. We are going to go on the offensive [against] all those who did this,’” according to Maruf and Joseph.²⁰³ Although the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) did not upgrade its mandate at the time, multiple African nations, including Uganda and Burundi, pledged additional troop deployments and reinvigorated the alliance’s resolve to eradicate Al-Shabaab.²⁰⁴

Meanwhile, Al-Shabaab pressed forward with its own goals. With the start of Ramadan in August, Al-Shabaab issued a declaration of war and a call to arms against AMISOM and the TFG via Mogadishu radio stations.²⁰⁵ Al-Shabaab’s spokesman likened AMISOM and the TFG to Christians and apostates and accused the alliances of violating Somali territory and dignity while committing atrocities against Somali women and children.²⁰⁶ With these bold accusations, Al-Shabaab sought to apply propaganda to unite Somalis against a foreign occupying force.²⁰⁷ The new Al-Shabaab Ramadan offensive would be known as Nihayat Al-Mu’tadin, or “The End of the Aggressors.”²⁰⁸

At the time, Al-Shabaab believed it could take the strategic advantage as the TFG’s forces comprised approximately 1,500 personnel and remained disorganized and poorly

²⁰² “Ugandan Leader Vows Revenge for Kampala Bombings,” July 14, 2010, sec. Africa, Archive, <https://www.voanews.com/africa/ugandan-leader-vows-revenge-kampala-bombings>.

²⁰³ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 150.

²⁰⁴ Risdel Kasasira and Solomon Muyita, “Africa: United Nations Blocks Change of Amisom Mandate,” *The Monitor*, July 28, 2010, <https://web.archive.org/web/20100731105031/http://allafrica.com/stories/201007280079.html>.

²⁰⁵ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 151.

²⁰⁶ Maruf and Joseph, 151.

²⁰⁷ Maruf and Joseph, 151–52.

²⁰⁸ Maruf and Joseph, 151–52.

disciplined.²⁰⁹ While AMISOM held between 7,200 to 9,200 troops, the placement of the troop deployment suffered logistical vulnerabilities, including its ability to quickly resupply.²¹⁰ Al-Shabaab sought to exploit this weakness.²¹¹ In preparation for the Ramadan Offensive, Al-Shabaab had stockpiled resources with weapons confiscated from AMISOM and TFG members.²¹² Simultaneously, they consolidated manpower in Mogadishu through the calculated employment of foreign fighters.²¹³

However, AMISOM and the TFG proved to be far more potent than Al-Shabaab estimated. Uganda's recent reinforcements, including main battle tanks, were highly effective.²¹⁴ In the months that followed, AMISOM was able to take control of strategic locations in Mogadishu, including the Bakara market, the former Ministry of Defense, and other vital positions formerly held by Al-Shabaab.²¹⁵ AMISOM's tactical victories succeeded in cutting off Al-Shabaab's principal income source of the Bakara market, while militarily Al-Shabaab suffered heavy losses and was unable to resupply itself.²¹⁶

For Al-Shabaab, the 2010 Ramadan Offensive ultimately ended in profound failure. According to Hansen, "In many ways Al-Shabaab was in a state of disarray; according to AMISOM sources, it had more than 25 percent of its fighters put out of action, and many top leaders were dead. It had also spent large sums on the Ramadan offensive, and increased its taxation and the use of forced recruitment. Al-Shabaab was in turmoil."²¹⁷ All in all, Al-Shabaab had overreached with grand plans and bold strikes but no positive results or strategic gains.²¹⁸

²⁰⁹ Hansen, *Al Shabaab in Somalia*, 100.

²¹⁰ Hansen, 100.

²¹¹ Hansen, 100.

²¹² Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 152–53.

²¹³ Maruf and Joseph, 152–53.

²¹⁴ Hansen, *Al Shabaab in Somalia*, 101–2, 106, 112.

²¹⁵ Hansen, 101–2, 106, 112.

²¹⁶ Hansen, 106, 112.

²¹⁷ Hansen, 102.

²¹⁸ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 162.

This failure incited a significant leadership crisis among Al-Shabaab membership, as both lower-level leaders and members of Al-Shabaab's ally Hizbul Islam questioned Al-Shabaab's emir Godane's legitimacy and capacity for command.²¹⁹ "The fact that it was Godane who planned the ill-fated offensive, and was the strategist behind the centralization efforts, meant that the September defeat damaged his status as a leader, and his leadership was now contested," Hansen writes.²²⁰ The crisis provoked schisms along both ideological and clan-based lines.

Ideologically, reformist-minded Islamists believed Al-Shabaab was a vehicle for security and sharia-based stability in Somalia.²²¹ The failure of the Ramadan Offensive brought to the surface ideological issues, including Al-Shabaab's use of forced taxation and recruitment, as well as the permissibility of killing civilians during suicide attacks.²²² The more moderate Islamists among Al-Shabaab's ranks vehemently disagreed with these activities, and multiple high-ranking members contacted AMISOM to defect in the fallout of the Ramadan Offensive.²²³

Al-Shabaab's clan-based schism also manifested under the pressure of military defeat. According to Meleagrou-Hitchens, Maher, and Sheehan, "Sheikh Mukhtar Robow—a senior al-Shabaab leader and member of the Rahanweyn clan, which makes up around 70 percent of the militia's foot soldiers—became incensed that his clan bore the brunt of the casualties."²²⁴ The majority of the 500 to 700 Al-Shabaab members killed were affiliated with the Rahanweyn clan, and Maruf and Joseph claim, "Observers noted

²¹⁹ Maruf and Joseph, 162.

²²⁰ Hansen, *Al Shabaab in Somalia*, 103.

²²¹ Hansen, 105.

²²² Hansen, 105; Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 191.

²²³ Hansen, *Al Shabaab in Somalia*, 105.

²²⁴ Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, Shiraz Maher, and James Sheehan, "Lights, Camera, Jihad: Al-Shabaab's Western Media Strategy" (London: The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, 2012), 20, <https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/ICSR-Report-Lights-Camera-Jihad-al-Shabaab%E2%80%99s-Western-Media-Strategy.pdf>.

that Robow's fighters had manned the frontlines during most of the campaigns, while foreigners and Somalis from other regions kept a safe distance."²²⁵

These accusations only further widened rifts within the group and called into question Godane's tactical choices. Previous Al-Shabaab victories capitalized on the speed and flexibility of hit and run and terror attacks while the Ramadan Offensive was fought with far more conventional tactics.²²⁶ Worse, Maruf and Joseph indicate Godane may have used the fighting to opportunistically target his internal opposition: "There were also reports that at the height of the offensive, Shabaab's Amniyat force deliberately shot wounded fighters, including some commanders, ostensibly so they would die and achieve martyrdom... But many suspected that in actuality the Amniyat was settling scores for Godane."²²⁷

Godane's next move shifted the focus away from Al-Shabaab's internal conflicts and personal leadership criticism towards Al-Shabaab's next tactical step: the withdrawal from Mogadishu.²²⁸ In August 2011, the Al-Shabaab spokesman announced the group would be conducting a tactical withdrawal from Mogadishu to usher in a new phase of fighting against AMISOM and the TFG.²²⁹ Al-Shabaab attempted to portray the decision as militarily advantageous rather than a retreat.²³⁰ Godane claimed Al-Shabaab would more effectively target their adversaries through hit-and-run and guerrilla-style tactics, but ultimately the withdrawal was a sign of defeat.²³¹

At this point, Al-Shabaab was in a highly weakened state suffering internal discord, facing significant military defeats, and retreating from major urban centers, yet within two years would go on to conduct one of the group's most successful operations: the attack on

²²⁵ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 163.

²²⁶ Hansen, *Al Shabaab in Somalia*, 104.

²²⁷ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 163.

²²⁸ Maruf and Joseph, 194.

²²⁹ Maruf and Joseph, 176–77.

²³⁰ Maruf and Joseph, 176–77.

²³¹ Maruf and Joseph, 176–77.

Kenya's Westgate mall. "On September 21, 2013, masked gunmen attacked the upscale Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi, Kenya, taking hostages and killing at least 67 people. Almost 200 people, including at least 5 U.S. citizens, were wounded in the siege, which lasted four days," according to Ploch Blanchard.²³² The success of the attack reversed assessments that Al-Shabaab was a flailing organization, overcome by internal divisions and doomed to fail.²³³ How was Al-Shabaab able to rebuild from such a severe low point, and what can be understood about the sources of the group's resilience? The following sections examine these factors.

B. APPLICATION OF HYPOTHESIS 1: ORGANIZATIONAL ATTRIBUTES

1. Organizational Cohesion

In response to the organizational fracturing after the failure of the Ramadan offensive, Godane followed a multi-pronged approach to allow the group to rebound: first, he worked to purge the group of rivals and dissidents; secondly, he refocused the group on the new phase of guerrilla warfare post-Mogadishu withdrawal, and finally, reorganized the group to external attack planning, all of which necessitated organizational cohesion.²³⁴ In purging his rivals and internal political dissidents, Godane applied the methodology outlined by Marchal to "use the conflict to covert the targeted killing of potential opponents," starting first with influential elders and civil society members, then including more moderate members.²³⁵ By expelling or killing internal opponents, Godane sought to remove an unnecessary liability and ensured the solidarity and trustworthiness of those that remained.²³⁶

²³² Lauren Ploch Blanchard, *The September 2013 Terrorist Attack in Kenya*, CRS Report No. R43245 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2013), 1.

²³³ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 224.

²³⁴ Michael Horton, "Reclaiming Lost Ground in Somalia: The Enduring Threat of al-Shabaab," *The Jamestown Foundation: Global Research and Analysis*, Terrorism Monitor, 15, no. 15 (July 28, 2017), <https://jamestown.org/program/reclaiming-lost-ground-in-somalia-the-enduring-threat-of-al-shabaab/>; Hansen, *Al Shabaab in Somalia*, 117.

²³⁵ Roland Marchal, "The Rise of a Jihadi Movement in a Country at War: Harakat al-Shabaab al Mujaheddin in Somalia," *Centre de Recherches Internationales, Science Po*, March 2011, 70.

²³⁶ Horton, "Reclaiming Lost Ground in Somalia."

To implement this strategy and prevent Al-Shabaab's fragmentation in the chaos post-Ramadan offensive, Godane required political support from local pro-jihadi scholars.²³⁷ By early 2013, Godane received his answer: a pro-Godane cleric announced a fatwa that those who defied the emir or "sowed discord among the mujahideen" would face elimination.²³⁸ This religious backing provided Godane the justification he needed for action. As Maruf and Joseph note: "Godane soon acted on the fatwa by issuing a notice to his opponents...It warned certain individuals were working with the infidels to sabotage jihad, and conspiring against the mujahideen. It was understood by all who read it that those individuals were in mortal danger."²³⁹ Among others, Godane's former deputy Afghani was assassinated, effectively silencing calls for checks on Godane's power and moderation in Al-Shabaab's hardline stances.²⁴⁰ With the elimination of his rivals and critics, Godane was able to dictate Al-Shabaab's next moves with negligible opposition.

The period post-withdrawal from Mogadishu proved to be another turning point in fostering the group's reconsolidation: Al-Shabaab's shift towards and reliance on guerrilla warfare tactics. While Godane's initial call to retreat from Mogadishu indicated the Al-Shabaab's weakness and failure of military operations, the decision ultimately had the effect of regrouping Al-Shabaab forces and refocusing the jihadist efforts.²⁴¹ Both Godane and the shura council agreed on the shift toward insurgency tactics rather than continuing the open warfare methods, exhibiting a strong unity of leadership.²⁴²

In the final step of consolidating organizational cohesion, Godane worked to restructure Al-Shabaab to plan and execute operations more effectively while minimizing internal disputes and conflict.²⁴³ Godane accomplished this by decentralizing control of lower-level commanders while expanding the role and strengthening the authority of the

²³⁷ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 201.

²³⁸ Maruf and Joseph, 201.

²³⁹ Maruf and Joseph, 201.

²⁴⁰ Maruf and Joseph, 206.

²⁴¹ Hansen, *Al Shabaab in Somalia*, 117.

²⁴² Hansen, 117.

²⁴³ Horton, "Reclaiming Lost Ground in Somalia."

Amniyat.²⁴⁴ This permitted ongoing monitoring and enforcement at all levels.²⁴⁵ According to Horton, “Commanders and sub-commanders were empowered and allowed to recruit foot soldiers, appoint junior commanders and undertake limited defensive and offensive actions on their own initiative. They were also permitted to work with one another on joint operations, with little guidance from al-Shabaab’s governing body, the executive shura council.”²⁴⁶ This non-hierarchical structure empowered harmony among Somalia’s clans while ensuring Godane maintained a position as arbiter of inter-clan conflicts and ultimate control of the organization.²⁴⁷

Godane further centralized Al-Shabaab’s strategic operations by reorganizing the group’s military wings to expand the group’s external focus.²⁴⁸ In 2013, Godane established a militant wing dedicated to attack planning against Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, while another wing focused on operations against Ethiopia.²⁴⁹ With this renewed emphasis, Godane issued express orders to the Amniyat to accelerate external attack operations against neighboring countries.²⁵⁰

In this leadership consolidation, Godane bolstered his allies, eliminated his challengers, and centralized control of the jihadist movement in Somalia.²⁵¹ Under these conditions, Al-Shabaab moved forward with attack plans against the Westgate mall in Nairobi, Kenya.²⁵² With the full support of Al-Shabaab leadership, Westgate attack planners coordinated all details for the attack, including multiple site assessments and the acquisition of supplies, including SIM cards, weapons, and vehicles.²⁵³ With the plan

²⁴⁴ Horton.

²⁴⁵ Horton.

²⁴⁶ Horton.

²⁴⁷ Horton.

²⁴⁸ Sahan Africa, “Al-Shabaab as a Transnational Security Threat,” 20.

²⁴⁹ Sahan Africa, 20.

²⁵⁰ Sahan Africa, 20.

²⁵¹ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 166.

²⁵² Maruf and Joseph, 220.

²⁵³ Maruf and Joseph, 220.

finalized, Al-Shabaab's external operations chief and Godane himself reviewed and approved the operation.²⁵⁴ While some organizational weaknesses remained, the Westgate attack cast Al-Shabaab back in the spotlight and reinvigorated the group's unity, recruitment efforts, and dedication to their ultimate cause.²⁵⁵ Al-Shabaab's dramatic shift from vocal internal dissenters liable to fracture the group to Al-Shabaab's successful reconsolidation and highly coordinated attacks indicate the role of Al-Shabaab's organization cohesion in the group's resilience and provides support to the validity of **Hypothesis 1.**

2. Power Mechanisms: Finance

In the post-Ramadan offensive environment, Al-Shabaab took steps to decrease its expenditures while increasing its income to survive as an organization. Al-Shabaab made strategic cuts by delaying salaries among non-military and Amniyat members.²⁵⁶ By cutting in this area, Al-Shabaab could divert funds from the highly loyal Amniyat to counter its growing unpopularity among the Somali population and support its ongoing military campaign.²⁵⁷

In 2011, Somalia faced widespread drought conditions, and Al-Shabaab maintained its refusal to allow international humanitarian agencies access to regions under its control.²⁵⁸ Instead, the group sought to provide indigenous humanitarian assistance, all of which required additional funding.²⁵⁹ To meet this added budgetary shortfall, Al-Shabaab increased zakat collection on small businesses and people living in public buildings while simultaneously implementing supplementary taxation measures namely, the collection of

²⁵⁴ Maruf and Joseph, 220.

²⁵⁵ Christopher Anzalone, "The Nairobi Attack and Al-Shabab's Media Strategy," *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point* 6, no. 10 (October 24, 2013), <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-nairobi-attack-and-al-shababs-media-strategy/>.

²⁵⁶ Hiraal Institute, "The AS Finance System," 4–5.

²⁵⁷ Marchal, "The Rise of a Jihadi Movement in a Country at War: Harakat al-Shabaab al Mujaheddin in Somalia," 74; Hiraal Institute, "The AS Finance System," 4–5.

²⁵⁸ Marchal, "The Rise of a Jihadi Movement in a Country at War: Harakat al-Shabaab al Mujaheddin in Somalia," 74.

²⁵⁹ Marchal, 74.

‘infaaq,’ or ‘voluntary’ contribution from traders and clansmen, and the taxation of cargo on roadways within Al-Shabaab’s control.²⁶⁰ With the confiscation of infaaq, Al-Shabaab shifted from depicting itself the arbiter of Islamic law, with zakat’s religious basis, to outright predatory action.²⁶¹ While predatory, this action was beneficial for Al-Shabaab’s resilience in that it enabled Al-Shabaab an increase in income necessary for the group’s survival.

Al-Shabaab’s merger with Hizbul Islam provided another opportunity for new income streams: the acquisition of the pirate port of Haradere.²⁶² Al-Shabaab began by occupying the city with 200 fighters and proceeded to enforce Al-Shabaab’s taxation methods on the piracy operations.²⁶³ Under threat of violence within Haradere and against the pirates’ relatives located elsewhere in Al-Shabaab-controlled regions, the pirates ultimately complied with a taxation rate of between 15% to 20%.²⁶⁴

With the loss of Kismayo port city to the Kenyan army in fall 2012, Al-Shabaab again forfeited a significant income source as a smuggling point and taxation of imports and exports.²⁶⁵ Al-Shabaab responded by restoring connections with local businessmen and exploiting corruption among the Kenyan contingent in the region.²⁶⁶ Marchal and Sheikh describe Al-Shabaab’s pragmatism: “The corruption of all [Somali] regional state apparatuses is such that only the transaction costs are higher, but no door is actually closed.”²⁶⁷ By working with disparate factions, including government and criminal elements, Al-Shabaab displayed flexibility and adaptability in the changing circumstances post-Ramadan offensive.

²⁶⁰ Hansen, *Al Shabaab in Somalia*, 114; Hiraal Institute, “The AS Finance System,” 3, 4–5.

²⁶¹ Hiraal Institute, “The AS Finance System,” 4–5.

²⁶² Hansen, *Al Shabaab in Somalia*, 109.

²⁶³ Hansen, 110.

²⁶⁴ Hansen, 111.

²⁶⁵ Roland Marchal and Zakaria M. Sheikh, “Salafism in Somalia: Coping with Coercion, Civil War and Its Own Contradictions,” *Islamic Africa* 6, no. 1–2 (2015): 162.

²⁶⁶ Marchal and Sheikh, 162.

²⁶⁷ Marchal and Sheikh, 162.

Overall, Al-Shabaab's ability to balance its income and expenditures and diversify its income streams when faced with setbacks or changing circumstances was a crucial factor in Al-Shabaab's organizational resilience and provide additional support for **Hypothesis 1**. Al-Shabaab's loss of the income-generating Mogadishu market and Kismayo port city meant the organization had far less ability to maintain and equip its fighters, let alone hold and govern territory effectively.²⁶⁸ Yet, under the catastrophic losses, Al-Shabaab successfully reprioritized its activities and restructured its organization for long-term survival.²⁶⁹

3. Power Mechanisms: Intelligence

In the period post-2010 offensive, the Amniyat's role and influence both strengthened and expanded within Al-Shabaab's organization. After Al-Shabaab withdrew from Mogadishu and lost significant income streams, the group shifted to lower risk operations which prioritized operational security, all of which relied on the Amniyat's expertise.²⁷⁰ As AMISOM pushed Al-Shabaab fighters out of urban areas, Amniyat operatives stayed behind and established an extensive network of informants that collected and fed information back to Al-Shabaab leadership.²⁷¹

Internal to Al-Shabaab's organization, the Amniyat remained Godane's personal enforcement instrument.²⁷² The Amniyat command structure fell outside of Al-Shabaab's shura council authority, allowing Godane to use the network to target his internal adversaries relatively unchecked, as he had done during the Ramadan offensive.²⁷³ According to Horton, even as Godane decentralized much of Al-Shabaab's organization, the Amniyat became more centralized and powerful in imposing Godane's will: "Amniyat operatives — who were and are seeded throughout the larger Al-Shabaab organization —

²⁶⁸ Horton, "Reclaiming Lost Ground in Somalia."

²⁶⁹ Horton.

²⁷⁰ Horton.

²⁷¹ Horton.

²⁷² Horton.

²⁷³ Hansen, *Al Shabaab in Somalia*, 104.

ensured the loyalty and discipline of regional and sub-commanders. Disloyalty to Godane, financial irregularities and ideological deviations could all lead to harsh punishments that included summary execution.”²⁷⁴

The loyalty of the Amniyat served as Godane’s enforcement mechanism in the face of mounting internal fragmentation and fomented group cohesion through fear of torture and execution of dissidents.²⁷⁵ The Amniyat’s success in providing timely and accurate information for Al-Shabaab’s leadership decisions, while reliably enforcing Godane’s decrees served as an influential factor in Al-Shabaab’s rebound. This section offers support for **Hypothesis 1** as Al-Shabaab’s organizational attribute and power mechanism of its highly effective intelligence apparatus were essential to the group’s resilience.

C. APPLICATION OF HYPOTHESIS 2: POLITICAL CONTEXT

1. Somalia’s Failed State Context

In the years before the Ramadan offensive, Al-Shabaab approached Somalia’s failed state environment as an opportunity to establish a new system of order based in sharia.²⁷⁶ As Petrich explains, “The group positioned itself as a justice provider and constructed a narrative of law and order provision for communities under its control, reducing street level violence and establishing mechanisms of justice in the absence of the legitimate government’s ability to do so.”²⁷⁷ Al-Shabaab built administrative processes while incorporating clan sensitivities and minimizing internal corruption earning the organization respect and legitimacy in the eyes of the Somali public.²⁷⁸

Al-Shabaab accomplished this through a sustained commitment to consistent governance functions and neutrality in the face of Somalia’s clannism.²⁷⁹ According to

²⁷⁴ Horton, “Reclaiming Lost Ground in Somalia.”

²⁷⁵ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 192.

²⁷⁶ Petrich, “Cows, Charcoal, and Cocaine,” 8.

²⁷⁷ Petrich, 8.

²⁷⁸ Marchal, “The Rise of a Jihadi Movement in a Country at War: Harakat al-Shabaab al Mujaheddin in Somalia,” 64.

²⁷⁹ Marchal, 64.

Marchal, Al-Shabaab's troops focused on following orders and keeping their distance from the Somali population.²⁸⁰ This allows the group to maintain its position of authority and distinct from the civilian population. Finally, Al-Shabaab offers a semblance of order and discipline, which is largely absent in the Somali government entities.²⁸¹ Marchal claims, "Working this way has an impact on foreigners and diaspora since it reinforces the credibility of Al-Shabaab and, therefore, the need to support it and endorse its political agenda overseas."²⁸² Al-Shabaab's competency in the void of Somali governance gave the group leverage over the population.²⁸³

With the onset of the Ramadan offensive, Al-Shabaab's ability to follow through with its governance commitments became severely deficient. Al-Shabaab faced military defeat and significant financial loss, but 2011 also brought a devastating drought-induced famine to Somalia.²⁸⁴ Al-Shabaab's response to the drought exacerbated an already dire situation as the group forbade any international humanitarian aid agencies from entering areas it controlled.²⁸⁵ This decision fueled growing resentment among the Somali population and contributing to Al-Shabaab's internal organizational conflict.²⁸⁶ The internal conflict fell along clan lines as Meleagrou-Hitchens, Maher, and Sheehan report, "Godane, a member of the Isaaq tribe based in Somaliland, which was hardly affected by the famine, publically refused Western aid while members of Robow's Rahanweyn clan were starving and dying. Robow's request to accept the aid was ignored, and is likely to have further accentuated tensions with Godane."²⁸⁷ Al-Shabaab's inability to provide for

²⁸⁰ Marchal, 64.

²⁸¹ Marchal, 64.

²⁸² Marchal, 64.

²⁸³ Marchal, 64.

²⁸⁴ Marchal, 37.

²⁸⁵ Marchal, 37.

²⁸⁶ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Maher, and Sheehan, "Lights, Camera, Jihad: Al-Shabaab's Western Media Strategy," 20.

²⁸⁷ Meleagrou-Hitchens, Maher, and Sheehan, 20.

the people's basic needs while refusing foreign aid provoked a significant setback in the group's popularity, legitimacy, and strength.²⁸⁸

Al-Shabaab's dramatic low point in popular standing was marked with violent public demonstrations in which some affiliated elders and youths were killed within Al-Shabaab's territory.²⁸⁹ According to Marchal, Godane reacted to this crisis by making a persuasive speech in which he expressed his priorities namely, "the militias should not overreact, education is better than punishment; the regional governors, the Amiir wilaaya, are responsible if things go wrong; public good and properties should be respected by everyone."²⁹⁰ By acknowledging the Somali's legitimate grievances and outlining a plan to remedy the situation, Godane opened the door to win back public support.

In the post-Ramadan offensive recovery, Godane backed up his words with action as he transferred ineffectual regional leaders to other positions within Al-Shabaab.²⁹¹ Al-Shabaab also made public goods and services a priority, especially with the appointment of a regional healthcare coordinator.²⁹² In areas of Al-Shabaab's control, the group established a transactional relationship with local nongovernmental healthcare organizations to respond to specific medical emergencies.²⁹³ In making these concessions, Al-Shabaab recognized that the organization required public support to function and understood that providing social services was a more effective means of gaining that support rather than solely coercive techniques.²⁹⁴ Al-Shabaab's ability to fill the void in the absence of Somali government goods and services allowed the group to retain legitimacy during a period of extreme crisis. This ultimately served as a critical factor in Al-Shabaab's organizational resilience and supports the validity of **Hypothesis 2**.

²⁸⁸ Robert Kluijver, "Al Shabaab Governance," *The Zomia Center for the Study of Non-State Spaces*, July 10, 2019, <https://www.zomicenter.org/posts/2019/4/19/al-shabaab-governance>.

²⁸⁹ Marchal, "The Rise of a Jihadi Movement in a Country at War: Harakat al-Shabaab al Mujaheddin in Somalia," 37.

²⁹⁰ Marchal, 37–38.

²⁹¹ Marchal, 37–38.

²⁹² Marchal, 72–73.

²⁹³ Marchal, 72–73.

²⁹⁴ Marchal, 37–38.

2. Kenya as a Target of Opportunity

Al-Shabaab maintained its historically antagonistic relationship with Kenya in the years leading to the group's failure of the Ramadan offensive. As the Kenyan government allied with the West in the counterterrorism fight against the group, Al-Shabaab held a vested interest not only on combating Kenya in Somalia but also supported the affiliated Al-Hijra network in Kenya.²⁹⁵ Although the extent of Al-Shabaab's direct control over Al-Hijra varies, the two groups keep close ties, especially among Kenya's extensive Somali diaspora population.²⁹⁶

Prior to the Al-Shabaab's Ramadan offensive, Al-Hijra members coordinated with Al-Shabaab for the 2010 Kampala, Uganda World Cup attacks; however, their activities in Kenya were much smaller scale at the time.²⁹⁷ While Al-Shabaab intended to conduct large-scale external attacks, especially against AMISOM members like Kenya, the group had yet to fulfill the full extent of its goal.²⁹⁸

The Ramadan offensive's failure presented a significant setback in Al-Shabaab's plans. Al-Shabaab's withdrawal from Somali urban centers and move toward guerrilla tactics put the group on the defensive and struggling on the brink of military defeat.²⁹⁹ As Al-Shabaab regrouped, its focus on external attacks lessened while the group prioritized safe havens to continue its covert activity.³⁰⁰ Many analysts assessed Nairobi was one such enclave where Al-Shabaab continued its logistical and financial operations undetected, according to Menkhaus, as quoted by Gettleman and Kulish.³⁰¹

²⁹⁵ Menkhaus, "Al-Shabab's Capabilities Post-Westgate."

²⁹⁶ Menkhaus.

²⁹⁷ Menkhaus.

²⁹⁸ Richard Barrett, "Can Al-Shabaab Deliver? Reality and Rhetoric in the Struggle for Power," in *War and Peace in Somalia: National Grievances, Local Conflict and Al-Shabaab*, ed. Michael Keating and Matt Waldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 362.

²⁹⁹ Marchal, "The Rise of a Jihadi Movement in a Country at War: Harakat al-Shabaab al Mujaheddin in Somalia," 63.

³⁰⁰ Jeffrey Gettleman and Nicholas Kulish, "Somali Militants Mixing Business and Terror," *The New York Times*, September 30, 2013, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/01/world/africa/officials-struggle-with-tangled-web-of-financing-for-somali-militants.html>.

³⁰¹ Gettleman and Kulish.

Following Al-Shabaab's 2010 failure, the organization's relationship with the Kenyan government deteriorated further as the Kenya played a major role in military operations in Somalia.³⁰² Kenya's military surge in Somalia in 2011, known as Operation Linda Nchi, established a buffer zone in southern Somalia and hit Al-Shabaab strongholds.³⁰³ While hurting Al-Shabaab militarily, Kenya's operations offered Al-Shabaab the pretext of retaliation for "bombing innocent people" in Somalia.³⁰⁴

Throughout this phase, Al-Shabaab continued to encourage lone-wolf style attacks, mainly small-scale grenade attacks, against the abundance of soft targets such as hotels, restaurants, and shopping malls in Kenya.³⁰⁵ However, the presence, sympathy, and loyalty of the Al-Hijra network combined with weaknesses in Kenya's security sector, all made Kenya an attractive target for a large-scale attack.³⁰⁶

The attack on Kenya's Westgate mall via the Al-Hijra network proved to be a triumphant success for Al-Shabaab, which detracted from its significant military defeats and internal conflicts in Somalia.³⁰⁷ Godane's ruthless decision to massacre civilians garnered worldwide media coverage and strategic gains in propaganda and recruitment opportunities for the group.³⁰⁸ Kenya proved to be a target of opportunity that paid dividends and set Al-Shabaab on the course for a rebound.

The Westgate attack proved to be one of Al-Shabaab's most successful operations. The scale and scope of the atrocities provided Al-Shabaab extensive media coverage, boosting its image as a formidable terrorist organization while significantly discrediting Kenya's security response.³⁰⁹ Al-Shabaab's ability to plan and conduct attacks within

³⁰² Scott Stewart, "Al Shabaab's Threat to Kenya," *Stratfor*, April 26, 2012, <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/al-shabaabs-threat-kenya>.

³⁰³ Stewart.

³⁰⁴ Menkhaus, "Al-Shabab's Capabilities Post-Westgate."

³⁰⁵ Menkhaus.

³⁰⁶ Menkhaus.

³⁰⁷ Anzalone, "The Nairobi Attack and Al-Shabab's Media Strategy."

³⁰⁸ Anzalone.

³⁰⁹ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 221.

Kenya offers support for the role of political context in Al-Shabaab's resilience and provides evidence for **Hypothesis 2's** validity.

D. APPLICATION OF HYPOTHESIS 3: FAILED COUNTERTERRORISM

1. The Transitional Federal Government of Somalia's Policies and Impact

In the years leading up to the Ramadan offensive in 2010, the TFG was found to be one of the most corrupt governments in the world, so much so that despite Somalia's grave humanitarian needs, most international aid agencies preferred to work around the government.³¹⁰ While external donor agencies pursued initiatives to revive Somalia's central government capacity, the rampant insecurity throughout the country made funding accountability a nearly insurmountable challenge.³¹¹ Although Al-Shabaab remained an ongoing concern, the TFG found that externally supported institution-building projects became lucrative.³¹² In the interim, however, the TFG continued to lack of capacity to confront the challenge of Al-Shabaab.

During the Ramadan offensive, the TFG's performance did little to build credibility among Somalis or the international community. Frequent reports of TFG army looting or deserting combined with recurrent incidences of TFG leadership's overreliance on foreign intermediaries and deferment of violent operations to AMISOM, hurt any possible reputation boost the government may have received from the victory of Al-Shabaab's withdrawal.³¹³ According to Menkhaus, "After seven years in existence, the TFG was still unable to exercise control over most of the capital Mogadishu, had failed to advance key transitional tasks, and had almost no functional civil service. The one critical moment when it had a chance to demonstrate some basic capacity and commitment to provide life-saving aid to its citizens—the terrible famine of 2011, in which 260,000 Somalis died and over a

³¹⁰ Ken Menkhaus, "State Failure, State-Building, and Prospects for a 'Functional Failed State' in Somalia," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 656, no. 1 (November 1, 2014): 154–72, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716214547002>.

³¹¹ Menkhaus.

³¹² Menkhaus.

³¹³ Marchal, "The Rise of a Jihadi Movement in a Country at War: Harakat al-Shabaab al Mujaheddin in Somalia," 60.

million were displaced—the TFG failed utterly.”³¹⁴ These public failures degraded the TFG’s already dismal standing domestically and among its international partners.

In the aftermath of the Ramadan offensive, the TFG initially implemented reforms to address some of its internal challenges. Marchal explains the nature of these reforms, “The decision taken by the TFG President to fire key military and intelligence officials early March 2011 is said to have been provoked by two overlapping reasons. The first one is that most of them were supporters of the Speaker and could claim their share in what appeared as a victory against Shabaab. The second is that some were allegedly suspected to cooperate with al-Shabaab either for clan reasons or money.”³¹⁵ While somewhat superficial, these reforms indicated a desire for positive change within Somalia’s government.

In August 2012, the TFG transitioned to the internationally recognized Federal Government of Somalia (FGS), and with the new centralized government, hopes were high of continued improvements in credibility and legitimacy.³¹⁶ Unfortunately, the vision did not come to fruition as the government continued to lack the capability to fill the basic needs of its citizens.³¹⁷ Instead, international non-governmental agencies manage Somali schools and hospitals and other members of the private sector support all remaining goods and services.³¹⁸

In the fight against Al-Shabaab, the FGS’s record sustained the TFG’s shortcomings. Issues of missed payments or only occasional salaries to FGS soldiers and police force created problems of poor performance, discipline, and corruption.³¹⁹ Recurrent reports of Somali government forces selling weapons and ammunition to

³¹⁴ Menkhaus, “State Failure, State-Building, and Prospects for a ‘Functional Failed State’ in Somalia.”

³¹⁵ Marchal, “The Rise of a Jihadi Movement in a Country at War: Harakat al-Shabaab al Mujaheddin in Somalia,” 58.

³¹⁶ “The Official Somali Government Portal,” Somalia, accessed June 15, 2020, <https://www.somalia.gov.so/>.

³¹⁷ Kluijver, “Al Shabaab Governance.”

³¹⁸ Kluijver.

³¹⁹ Hansen, *Al Shabaab in Somalia*, 119.

members of Al-Shabaab hurt the FGS militarily and fomented a credibility setback among the Somali populous.³²⁰ The persistent failings of the Somali government served as a valuable opportunity for Al-Shabaab exploitation and revival and indicates **Hypothesis 3** is valid.

2. AMISOM's Policies and Impact

Since 2006, the international community, including the coalition of AMISOM, ramped up its involvement in Somali counterterrorism efforts.³²¹ Al-Shabaab's 2010 Kampala attacks catalyzed troop increases among African Union members and a renewed commitment to defeating the violent extremist organization.³²² From 2010 onward, AMISOM transitioned from purely defense and training focused to offensive operations targeting Al-Shabaab and bringing security to Somalia Mogadishu.³²³

In the face of Al-Shabaab's Ramadan offensive failure, AMISOM performed well militarily but confronted challenges in strategizing its public messaging.³²⁴ AMISOM's public policy made several missteps that eroded trust with Somali civilians, specifically the decision to misstate the number of AMISOM casualties.³²⁵ According to Marchal, "The AMISOM media policy, by denying high losses, can be understood, but its impact on Somali perceptions of the situation may become quickly counterproductive: if all major actors are playing propaganda, then nothing is true. Lies and conspiracy theories may sort out Al-Shabaab problems more than AMISOM's."³²⁶ While AMISOM's strong offensive

³²⁰ Marchal, "The Rise of a Jihadi Movement in a Country at War: Harakat al-Shabaab al Mujaheddin in Somalia," 58.

³²¹ Robert Kluijver, "International Intervention and State-Building in Somalia" (Dissertation, Ecole Doctorale de Science Po, July 4, 2018), 43, <http://www.robertk.space/2018/07/patterns-of-international-involvement-in-somalia-2/>.

³²² "Ugandan Leader Vows Revenge for Kampala Bombings."

³²³ Kluijver, "International Intervention and State-Building in Somalia," 43.

³²⁴ Xan Rice, "Somali Troops Move to Secure Mogadishu as Rebels Pull Out," *The Guardian*, August 7, 2011, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/aug/07/somali-troops-mogadishu-rebels-out>; Marchal, "The Rise of a Jihadi Movement in a Country at War: Harakat al-Shabaab al Mujaheddin in Somalia," 60.

³²⁵ Marchal, "The Rise of a Jihadi Movement in a Country at War: Harakat al-Shabaab al Mujaheddin in Somalia," 60.

³²⁶ Marchal, 60.

successfully pushed Al-Shabaab out of Mogadishu, their ability to safeguard security within the city depended on popular support and compliance, primarily due to Al-Shabaab's return to guerrilla warfare tactics.³²⁷

In the period post-Ramadan offensive, AMISOM proceeded with the military victories of nominally pushing Al-Shabaab from urban areas but struggled with the local public perception of its operations.³²⁸ With limited and often ineffective Somali government involvement in reestablishing control, the military operations appeared as a foreign occupation and fed Al-Shabaab's recruitment narrative.³²⁹ Kenya's 2011 intervention into Somalia added a clan dimension to the problem of AMISOM's appearance as foreign interference.³³⁰ Kenya's reliance on the Ogadeen clan and allies to conduct its operations into Somalia meant that opposing clans were more susceptible to Al-Shabaab recruitment out of clan solidarity.³³¹ As a result of these added complications and the unsuccessful Somali political process to support AMISOM's gains, Al-Shabaab ultimately gained sympathies and recruitment opportunities among the Somali population.³³² The ineffective policies of AMISOM and the lack of legitimacy within Somalia indicate a failure in the overall counterterrorism policy to successfully prevent Al-Shabaab's resurgence and provides support for **Hypothesis 3**.

3. United States' Policies and Impact

The United States remained a strong supporter of counterterrorism efforts against Al-Shabaab in the years leading up to the group's failed Ramadan offensive. Due to Al-Shabaab's association with Al-Qaeda, the U.S. provided both financial aid and training to

³²⁷ Rice, "Somali Troops Move to Secure Mogadishu as Rebels Pull Out"; Marchal, "The Rise of a Jihadi Movement in a Country at War: Harakat al-Shabaab al Mujaheddin in Somalia," 60.

³²⁸ Marchal, "The Rise of a Jihadi Movement in a Country at War: Harakat al-Shabaab al Mujaheddin in Somalia," 60.

³²⁹ Marchal, 60.

³³⁰ Hansen, *Al Shabaab in Somalia*, 117.

³³¹ Hansen, 117–18.

³³² Marchal, "The Rise of a Jihadi Movement in a Country at War: Harakat al-Shabaab al Mujaheddin in Somalia," 63.

AMISOM and other troop-contributing countries.³³³ The U.S. recognized the substantial threat that Al-Shabaab posed in the region.³³⁴ According to Ploch Blanchard, “The United States has implemented a variety of foreign assistance and security cooperation programs to counter violent extremist threats in East Africa. These programs seek to build partner countries’ intelligence, military, law enforcement, and judicial capacities; strengthen aviation, port, and border security; stem the flow of terrorist financing; and counter recruitment.”³³⁵ To maintain stability in the region, these programs were aimed at improving partner capabilities while targeting terrorist elements.

In March 2008, the United States Secretary of State formally designated the militant group Al-Shabaab a Foreign Terrorist Organization.³³⁶ This meant this group would be prohibited from receiving financial or material support, and any known members would have property or interests in the United States blocked.³³⁷ The United States Executive Order 13224 specified the importance of confronting and eradicating the financial support network for terrorist organizations including Al-Shabaab by, “authorizing the United States government to designate and block the assets of foreign individuals and entities that commit, or pose a significant risk of committing, acts of terrorism.”³³⁸ In addition, the Order authorized the United States government to take the same measures against “entities that provide support, services, assistance to, or otherwise associate with” known terrorist organizations.³³⁹

The United States performed several military activities prior to the 2010 Ramadan offensive. Notably, the United States provided support in the form of a drone surveillance

³³³ Ploch Blanchard, *The September 2013 Terrorist Attack in Kenya*, 1.

³³⁴ Ploch Blanchard, 1.

³³⁵ Ploch Blanchard, 8–9.

³³⁶ State Department Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, “Terrorism Designations Press Releases: Designation of al-Shabaab,” Press Release, March 18, 2008, [//2009-2017.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/143205.htm](http://2009-2017.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/143205.htm).

³³⁷ State Department Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism.

³³⁸ “Executive Order 13224,” 66 FR 186 § Federal Register (2001), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2001-09-25/pdf/01-24205.pdf>.

³³⁹ Executive Order 13224. Executive Order 13224.

program with occasional combat operations against Somali targets.³⁴⁰ According to Zenko, as quoted by Woods, these strikes “were not about shaping Somalia but about going after particular individuals tied to specific terrorist plots, who happened to be there.”³⁴¹

The onset of the 2010 Ramadan offensive brought an increase in the number and types of strikes supported by the United States. In the spring of 2011, while AMISOM pressed forward with its offensive operations, the United States targeted Al-Shabaab directly as the group was perceived to be a direct threat to U.S. interests.³⁴² Multiple drone strikes on militant camps killed Al-Shabaab commanders while wounding others in a coordinated effort to eradicate the group.³⁴³ Also, the United States maintained its security cooperation and expanded its partnership capacity-building programs to support AMISOM and the TFG during the Ramadan offensive.³⁴⁴

In the aftermath of the 2010 Ramadan offensive, the United States sustained its kinetic operations and placed significant pressure on Al-Shabaab’s operational, financial, and political efforts in order to decrease the organization’s ability to destabilize East Africa.³⁴⁵ The White House spokesman Carney summarized U.S. regional counterterrorism activities: “We are harnessing every tool of American power – military, civilian, and diplomatic. The United States is strengthening its intelligence, military and security capabilities and drawing from a full range of law enforcement tools in coordination

³⁴⁰ Chris Woods, “Somalia Targeted in U.S. ‘Drone War,’” *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism*, June 30, 2011, sec. Drone Warfare, <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2011-06-30/somalia-targeted-in-us-drone-war>.

³⁴¹ Chris Woods, “Militants and Civilians Killed in Multiple U.S. Somalia Strikes,” *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism*, February 22, 2012, sec. Drone Warfare, <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2012-02-22/militants-and-civilians-killed-in-multiple-us-somalia-strikes>.

³⁴² Woods.

³⁴³ Woods, “Somalia Targeted in U.S. ‘Drone War’”; Greg Jaffe and Karen DeYoung, “U.S. Drone Targets Two Leaders of Somali Group Allied with al-Qaeda,” *Washington Post*, June 29, 2011, sec. National Security, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/national-security/us-drones-target-two-leaders-of-somali-group-allied-with-al-qaeda/2011/06/29/AGJFzrH_story.html.

³⁴⁴ Ploch Blanchard, *The September 2013 Terrorist Attack in Kenya*, 9.

³⁴⁵ Thomas Waldhauser, “United States Africa Command Posture Statement” (Senate Armed Services Committee, 2019), 4.

with partners around the globe.”³⁴⁶ With this whole-of-government approach, the U.S. sought to support AMISOM in their fight against Al-Shabaab while conducting limited strikes on terrorist entities who posed a direct threat to the United States.³⁴⁷

In early 2013, the United States formally recognized the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and began providing tentative support directly to the new government to support their security and political development.³⁴⁸ This support remained limited as the FGS faced challenges in effectively utilizing the training and funding provided.³⁴⁹ Unfortunately, the United States’ limited engagement with the group did little to deter Al-Shabaab and its regional sympathizers from successfully conducting the Westgate mall attack. The U.S. counterterrorism policy failed to prevent Al-Shabaab’s internal reconsolidation, its financial diversification, its ability to attain legitimacy among the Somali people, and its exploitation of Kenya as a target of opportunity—all evidence supporting the validity of **Hypothesis 3** and the role of the failed counterterrorism policies.

³⁴⁶ Jay Carney, “Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jay Carney” (White House Press Briefing, Washington, DC, October 28, 2011), <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/10/28/press-briefing-press-secretary-jay-carney>.

³⁴⁷ Ploch Blanchard, *The September 2013 Terrorist Attack in Kenya*, 10.

³⁴⁸ Ploch Blanchard, 3.

³⁴⁹ Ploch Blanchard, 9.

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IV. CASE STUDY 2: THE DEATH OF EMIR GODANE

The second Case Study will review the events leading up to Al-Shabaab's potential destruction after the loss of the group's emir Ahmed Godane in a U.S. airstrike and the organizational rebound that followed. The first section will provide a summary of critical events and Al-Shabaab's response to these event. This section will be followed by the application of **Hypothesis 1: Organizational Attribute**, **Hypothesis 2: Political Context**, and **Hypothesis 3: Failed Counterterrorism** approaches, respectively. In Case Study 2, Al-Shabaab's organizational decapitation, or loss of its emir Godane, will be considered the group's 'shock.' The major attack conducted on Garissa University, Kenya, in spring 2015 will be considered the group's successful rebound point. Each hypothesis will evaluate the impact of the shock, and the factors that enabled the group to rebound. Finally, this case study will again consider Al-Shabaab's critical variables for resiliency as assessed from each approach.

A. SUMMARY OF MAJOR EVENTS

The impact of Godane's death on Al-Shabaab as an organization remained closely linked to Godane's leadership legacy. In the years leading up to his death, Godane held a mixed record of successes while his executive management remained wrought with internal conflict.³⁵⁰ According to Anzalone, "During his tenure, al-Shabab reached the height of its territorial, administrative, economic, and military power. It was also under his leadership; however, that al-Shabab fell into decline, losing great swaths of territory and most major urban centers and economic hubs, and earning the displeasure of Usama bin Ladin."³⁵¹

³⁵⁰ Christopher Anzalone, "The Life and Death of Al-Shabab Leader Ahmed Godane," *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point* 7, no. 9 (September 29, 2014), <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-life-and-death-of-al-shabab-leader-ahmed-godane/>.

³⁵¹ Anzalone.

In one area of success, Godane greatly expanded joint coordination among Al-Shabaab's Kenyan affiliate, Al-Hijra.³⁵² In targeting Kenya, Godane positioned Al-Shabaab's strategy to focus on cross-border attacks and further infiltrating the disenfranchised Kenyan-Somali diaspora.³⁵³ The majority of Al-Shabaab's cross border attacks into Kenya remained small-scale landmine, IED, or grenade attacks, while the group retained safe havens in Somalia to plan and coordinate major operations.³⁵⁴ Within Kenya, Al-Hijra drew support from Nairobi's more impoverished neighborhoods, Somali-Kenyan border towns, and coastal regions populated with sympathetic ethnic Somalis, which Al-Shabaab leveraged for ideological influence and jihadist inspiration.³⁵⁵

However within Somalia, Al-Shabaab suffered near-constant internal discord, which Godane sought to remedy by eliminating rivals and more moderate members through various purges during his time in power.³⁵⁶ Godane found it essential to use the Amniyat as a "praetorian guard" within Al-Shabaab to warn him of threats, eliminate his rivals, and exact his will.³⁵⁷ While highly effective for Godane, the personalized power structure left Al-Shabaab highly vulnerable to internal breakdown with the change in leadership to Diiriye's command. Also, Godane's internal coups and hardline approach to dissent in the years leading up to his death depleted the group of potential membership, leaving the organization vulnerable to AMISOM and the Somali government's advances.³⁵⁸

³⁵² Matt Bryden, "The Reinvention of Al-Shabaab: A Strategy of Choice or Necessity?," *Center For Strategic and International Studies*, A Report of the CSIS Africa Program, February 2014, 7–8.

³⁵³ Bryden, 7–8.

³⁵⁴ Bryden, 2.

³⁵⁵ Menkhaus, "Al-Shabab's Capabilities Post-Westgate"; Kimberly Abbott, "Islamic Radicalisation Is Reaching Into Kenya," International Crisis Group, accessed June 14, 2020, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/kenya/islamic-radicalisation-reaching-kenya>.

³⁵⁶ Berouk Mesfin, "What Changes for Al-Shabaab after the Death of Godane?," *Institute for Security Studies Africa*, ISS Today, October 8, 2014, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/what-changes-for-al-shabaab-after-the-death-of-godane>.

³⁵⁷ Bryden, "The Reinvention of Al-Shabaab: A Strategy of Choice or Necessity?," 6.

³⁵⁸ Bryden, 2.

The period leading up to Al-Shabaab's near destruction with Godane's death in 2014 arrived as a compilation of setbacks. Militarily, AMISOM and the government of Somalia pursued an offensive to eliminate the group's top leadership and attack the Al-Shabaab's financial mechanisms.³⁵⁹ The immense pressure sparked large numbers of defectors from Al-Shabaab's ranks as it lost control of territory to AMISOM and the FGS.³⁶⁰ Maruf and Joseph describe the state of Al-Shabaab at the near the time of Godane's death, "The last few months of Godane's rule had been something of a disaster for the group. None of Al-Shabaab's 2014 attacks had even a fraction of the impact of the Westgate mall assault, and on the military front, the group was losing ground almost by the day."³⁶¹ Al-Shabaab's military and economic losses fed its increasing internal instability, a trend that was only compounded by the loss of Godane's charismatic leadership.³⁶²

On September 1, 2014, with the cooperation of the government of Somalia, the United States conducted a precision airstrike, which resulted in Al-Shabaab emir Ahmed Godane's death.³⁶³ The targeted killing was thought to be a tremendous victory for the U.S., AMISOM, and Somalia in that it was both a symbolic blow to the group's invincibility and an operational loss that would severely weaken the group's strike capability.³⁶⁴ After Godane's death, the government of Somalia announced the

³⁵⁹ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 237.

³⁶⁰ Isma'il Kushkush and Jeffrey Gettleman, "As Power of Terror Group Declines, Once-Fearful Fighters Defect," *The New York Times*, November 4, 2014, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/05/world/africa/shabab-somalia-fighters-leave-terror-group-behind.html>.

³⁶¹ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 244.

³⁶² Kushkush and Gettleman, "As Power of Terror Group Declines, Once-Fearful Fighters Defect."

³⁶³ John Kirby, "Statement from Pentagon Press Secretary Rear Admiral John Kirby on Ahmed Godane" (U.S. Department of Defense, September 5, 2014), <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/605172/statement-from-pentagon-press-secretary-rear-admiral-john-kirby-on-ahmed-godane/>.

³⁶⁴ Kirby.

inevitability of Al-Shabaab's imminent collapse and offered amnesty to those fighters who would renounce their ties to the group.³⁶⁵

The crushing blow of Godane's death jolted Al-Shabaab's internal dynamics, already prone to factionalism and power struggles over control of resources, territory, and military strategy.³⁶⁶ According to Maruf and Joseph, "Al-Shabaab's situation was like that of a country that has suddenly lost a military dictator or president-for-life. Not only was there not a succession plan, but the chances of a power struggle were very real given the high stakes, the egos of the potential heirs, and the fact that all those present were comfortable with the use of violence."³⁶⁷ When faced with appointing Godane's successor, ensuring universal acceptance of the new emir, and rejuvenating the group's military prowess under new leadership, Al-Shabaab appeared incapable of uniting to overcome the challenges and instead seemed doomed for implosion.

By April 2015, Al-Shabaab conducted its most notorious attack since the Westgate mall siege when gunmen massacred 148 students and injured an additional 79 in Garissa University, Kenya.³⁶⁸ In Al-Shabaab's subsequent media statement claiming responsibility for the attack, the group blamed the Kenyan government for committing atrocities against Muslims.³⁶⁹ It threatened further violence in retaliation for occupying Muslim territory: "Do not dream of security in your lands until security becomes a reality in the Muslims lands, including the North Eastern Province and the Coast and until all your forces withdraw from all Muslim lands."³⁷⁰ With the widespread publicity and by framing

³⁶⁵ David Alexander, "U.S. Confirms Death of al Shabaab Leader Godane in Somalia Strike," Reuters, September 5, 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-usa-islamist-idUSKBN0H01OO20140905>.

³⁶⁶ Anzalone, "The Life and Death of Al-Shabab Leader Ahmed Godane."

³⁶⁷ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 241.

³⁶⁸ "Life Sentence for Kenya University Massacre," *BBC News*, July 3, 2019, sec. Africa, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-48859937>.

³⁶⁹ "Al-Shabab Statement on Deadly Campus Assault in Kenya," sec. Africa, accessed July 4, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/al-shabab-statement-on-deadly-campus-assault-in-kenya/2015/04/04/4577ce52-dad9-11e4-8103-fa84725dbf9d_story.html.

³⁷⁰ Washington Post.

the attack in terms of Muslim oppression, Al-Shabaab garnered hundreds of new recruits to join the jihadist cause throughout the Kenyan region of Isiolo.³⁷¹

In the period that followed, Al-Shabaab further demonstrated its organizational strength and resilience by going on the offensive back in Somalia.³⁷² By this time, Al-Shabaab's core strategy involved targeting both civilians, including government officials, businessmen, and diplomats in Mogadishu while also conducting "blitzkrieg-like assaults" on AMISOM forward operating bases.³⁷³ No longer considered a terrorist organization on the brink of destruction, as Maruf and Joseph describe, Al-Shabaab's rebound again posed a significant transnational threat: "What was clear was that under [new] leadership, the group had found ways to rejuvenate itself without losing its identity. In business terms, he and other Shabaab leaders could be said to have "revitalized the brand."³⁷⁴

Like the extreme low point in 2010, Al-Shabaab faced a similar crossroads in the organization's survival and success in the period post-Godane's death in 2014. The loss of the highly influential commander placed Al-Shabaab in a vulnerable position with potential leadership infighting and weakened strategic vision. However, Al-Shabaab again proved capable of a violent resurgence. With the culmination of the Garissa University attack, Al-Shabaab demonstrated its resilience by shocking the world with its level of violence and sophistication. Al-Shabaab's subsequent offensive within Somalia provided the necessary evidence to confirm the group's full recovery. The following sections will explore how Al-Shabaab once more became a substantial threat to the region's stability and security.

³⁷¹ Mohammed Yusuf, "Kenyans Lament Al-Shabab's Recruitment of Youths," *Voice of America*, May 26, 2015, sec. Africa, <https://www.voanews.com/africa/kenyans-lament-al-shababs-recruitment-youths>; Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 250.

³⁷² Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 250.

³⁷³ Maruf and Joseph, 250.

³⁷⁴ Maruf and Joseph, 252.

B. APPLICATION OF HYPOTHESIS 1: ORGANIZATIONAL ATTRIBUTES

1. Organizational Cohesion

In the wake of Godane's elimination, the vacuum left by the former emir heightened the urgency for critical Al-Shabaab leadership to reach a consensus on Godane's successor and pledge the same fidelity and allegiance to the new emir for the organization to survive.³⁷⁵ Al-Shabaab's executive council managed to surmount this critical obstacle, starting with their approach to Godane's eulogy. In their public statement, Al-Shabaab leadership announced Godane's martyrdom while calling upon both Somali clans and Kenyan Muslims to reaffirm their support.³⁷⁶ By idolizing the death of the emir, Al-Shabaab leaders glorified the notion of fighting to the death as a means of demonstrating unquestioning commitment and legitimizing the cause to the group's followers.³⁷⁷

In addition to this unified announcement of Godane's martyrdom, Al-Shabaab's executive council agreed to Ahmed Diiriye within one week of Godane's death.³⁷⁸ Although Al-Shabaab lacked an official succession plan, Godane had declared his wishes for Ahmed Diiriye to replace him while still alive.³⁷⁹ Diiriye was a Somali who had previously been a member of al-Ittihad al-Islami (AIAI), Al-Shabaab's predecessor, and had risen the ranks to serve as a senior member of Al-Shabaab.³⁸⁰ This experience gave Diiriye the credibility and internal support required to be a serious contender for Godane's replacement, and by early September 2014, the council officially named Diiriye as Al-Shabaab's new emir.³⁸¹

As a protégé of Godane, Diiriye maintained a similar outlook regarding the government of Somalia and loyal relations with Al-Qaeda, but he held less experience as a

³⁷⁵ Anzalone, "The Life and Death of Al-Shabab Leader Ahmed Godane."

³⁷⁶ Anzalone.

³⁷⁷ Mesfin, "What Changes for Al-Shabaab after the Death of Godane?"

³⁷⁸ Anzalone, "The Life and Death of Al-Shabab Leader Ahmed Godane."

³⁷⁹ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 242.

³⁸⁰ Maruf and Joseph, 243.

³⁸¹ Maruf and Joseph, 242.

jihadist and weaker clan ties.³⁸² These characteristics left Diiriye a less controversial figure than his predecessor, but also more vulnerable to challengers within Al-Shabaab's lower ranks. For this reason, while Diiriye kept the majority of the upper echelons of Al-Shabaab consistent, one of his initial leadership actions included replacing lower-level commanders in key positions with trusted individuals, and then allowing for more autonomy among these leaders.³⁸³

In his immediate actions as emir, Diiriye understood the need to foment consensus among Al-Shabaab's internal dissenters and refocus the group to conduct violent operations. One of Diiriye's first acts included creating rehabilitation programs for former Al-Shabaab commanders who had been jailed for mutiny or dissent.³⁸⁴ He planned to transform these critics and disaffected Al-Shabaab members into fully-fledged, active members once again.³⁸⁵ This process enabled Al-Shabaab to increase solidarity among its membership, resulting in minimized public discord within the organization. Diiriye then redirected the group's efforts towards internal Somali attacks and external attack operations in the wider East African region.³⁸⁶

Diiriye's more conciliatory and consensus-based leadership style paired with his decision to decentralize Al-Shabaab's command structure enhanced cohesion within the organization.³⁸⁷ According to Bryden, Diiriye's emphasis on decentralization within Al-Shabaab produced a "larger number of autonomous sub-groups. Diiriye's continued leadership and the effectiveness of his forces are thus more than ever in the hands of Al-Shabaab's junior leaders and rank and file, rather than its 'Amir' and putative leadership council, or 'Shura'."³⁸⁸ The benefit of this organizational structure meant that tactical

³⁸² Mesfin, "What Changes for Al-Shabaab after the Death of Godane?"

³⁸³ Matt Bryden, "The Decline and Fall of Al-Shabaab? Think Again" (Sahan, April 2015), 5; Mesfin, "What Changes for Al-Shabaab after the Death of Godane?"; Sahan Africa, "Al-Shabaab as a Transnational Security Threat."

³⁸⁴ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 248.

³⁸⁵ Maruf and Joseph, 248.

³⁸⁶ Sahan Africa, "Al-Shabaab as a Transnational Security Threat," 10.

³⁸⁷ Bryden, "The Decline and Fall of Al-Shabaab? Think Again," 5.

³⁸⁸ Bryden, 5.

defeat or losses in one sector of Al-Shabaab had little impact on the organization's successful operations or regional presence elsewhere.³⁸⁹

Al-Shabaab's sustained attacks within Somalia and its emphasis on external operations further unified the group to a common purpose while minimizing internal skirmishes.³⁹⁰ With Diiriye's strategy for specific attack planning within Kenya, the emir was able to streamline the group's organizational structure with lethal consequences.³⁹¹ Through more effective use of manpower and responsive lower-level commanders, Al-Shabaab ramped up small scale attacks throughout the region, culminating with the devastating attack on Garissa University.³⁹² Instead of organizational weakness and disintegration, Al-Shabaab united in deciding upon a successor and ramped up the lethality of its operations against AMISOM, civilian targets in Somalia and throughout the region.³⁹³ This strong show of organizational cohesion throughout this period of crisis indicates the validity of **Hypothesis 1**.

2. Power Mechanisms: Finance

The expected impact of Godane's death on Al-Shabaab's financial mechanisms was far more detrimental than the reality of what occurred.³⁹⁴ Operationally, Al-Shabaab was viewed as capable of financing and carrying out attacks as the group's financial mechanisms were unhindered by Godane's death, however psychologically, analysts expected Al-Shabaab to experience significant challenges.³⁹⁵ The elimination of Al-Shabaab's authoritarian emir led many to believe the organization would fragment along

³⁸⁹ Bryden, 4.

³⁹⁰ Sahan Africa, "Al-Shabaab as a Transnational Security Threat," 10.

³⁹¹ Matt Bryden and Premdeep Bahra, "East Africa's Terrorist Triple Helix: The Dusit Hotel Attack and the Historical Evolution of the Jihadi Threat," *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point* 12, no. 6 (July 18, 2019), <https://ctc.usma.edu/east-africas-terrorist-triple-helix-dusit-hotel-attack-historical-evolution-jihadi-threat/>.

³⁹² Bryden and Bahra.

³⁹³ Mohammed Ibrahim Shire, "How Do Leadership Decapitation and Targeting Error Affect Suicide Bombings? The Case of Al-Shabaab," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (June 17, 2020): 12, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2020.1780021>.

³⁹⁴ Anzalone, "The Life and Death of Al-Shabab Leader Ahmed Godane."

³⁹⁵ Mesfin, "What Changes for Al-Shabaab after the Death of Godane?"

clan lines, with lower-level leaders claiming personalized control of taxation systems and economic resources.³⁹⁶

Diiriye's ability to consolidate control and foment solidarity among the group's upper echelon and regional leaders provided a minimal interruption in Al-Shabaab's financial income streams and successful military operations.³⁹⁷ Within Mogadishu and other strategic towns nominally under government control, Al-Shabaab exploited the constant insecurity by providing protection in exchange for taxation payments.³⁹⁸ Outside the urban areas, Al-Shabaab's well-established taxation collection at roadside checkpoints and opportunistic use of smuggling allowed the group diversified income streams to respond to changing conditions or potential crises.³⁹⁹ Al-Shabaab's highly effective financial mechanisms allowed the group to function regardless of its ability to administer the territory physically.

To ensure uninterrupted income streams during the crisis period, Al-Shabaab tailored its messaging for specific audiences. Al-Shabaab exploited Godane's martyrdom to leverage financial support and remittances from the Somali diaspora and Muslim communities worldwide with its "Islam versus the West" messaging.⁴⁰⁰ Within Somalia, it focused on more nationalistic grievances to acquire financial resources in the wake of Godane's death.⁴⁰¹ Road tax collection, smuggling, and taxation of businesses for protection continued to pay for its insurgency expenses, including weapon acquisitions and bribery for government officials.⁴⁰² Al-Shabaab's flexibility and adaptability in adjusting the means and methods of funding for organizational survival provide additional evidence for **Hypothesis 1**.

³⁹⁶ Anzalone, "The Life and Death of Al-Shabab Leader Ahmed Godane."

³⁹⁷ Anzalone.

³⁹⁸ Bryden, "The Reinvention of Al-Shabaab: A Strategy of Choice or Necessity?," 12.

³⁹⁹ Gettleman and Kulish, "Somali Militants Mixing Business and Terror."

⁴⁰⁰ Petrich and Donnelly, "Worth Many Sins."

⁴⁰¹ Petrich and Donnelly.

⁴⁰² Umarov, "Letter Dated 2 October 2018 from the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea Addressed to the Chair of the Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) Concerning Somalia and Eritrea," 26–27; Hiraal Institute, "The AS Finance System," 4–8.

3. Power Mechanisms: Intelligence

With Godane's death, the initial unknowns regarding the Amniyat's loyalty resembled much of the organization's fragility. Al-Shabaab's organizational survival depended heavily upon the Amniyat network to provide vital intelligence on targets of economic and military interest.⁴⁰³ While Godane had expressed his desire for Diiriye as his successor and Diiriye had previously served in a supervisory role within the Amniyat, it remained uncertain whether the secretive and powerful unit would maintain allegiance to the new emir.⁴⁰⁴

One of Diiriye's first personnel decisions as emir included preserving the much of the Amniyat's hierarchical command structure and retaining the Amniyat's commander, Karate.⁴⁰⁵ This pragmatic choice, combined with Diiriye's directives to increase attacks against AMISOM and FGS forces, effectively prevented internal tensions and focused the Amniyat on retaliatory operations.⁴⁰⁶ Under Diiriye's leadership, Al-Shabaab's attacks evolved in both the tactics used and targets selected within Somalia. According to Shire, there is evidence that Al-Shabaab's leadership decapitation resulted in increased attack potency, "[Godane's] killing spurred a massive wave of retaliatory responses, the majority of them being single suicide attacks – an increase of 84.2% compared to the period before the killing – and a slight increase in multiple suicide operations (16.6%)."⁴⁰⁷ The shift towards single suicide operations allowed Al-Shabaab to exact quick revenge and demonstrate resilience without the Amniyat's need for extensive coordination and resources to conduct sophisticated, multiple suicide attacks.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰³ Mesfin, "What Changes for Al-Shabaab after the Death of Godane?"

⁴⁰⁴ Mesfin.

⁴⁰⁵ Harun Maruf and Dan Joseph, "No End in Sight for the Al-Shabaab Threat to Somalia," *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*, CTC Sentinel, 11, no. 11 (December 14, 2018), <https://ctc.usma.edu/no-end-sight-al-shabaab-threat-somalia/>.

⁴⁰⁶ Sahan Africa, "Al-Shabaab as a Transnational Security Threat," 16.

⁴⁰⁷ Shire, "How Do Leadership Decapitation and Targeting Error Affect Suicide Bombings?," 12.

⁴⁰⁸ Shire, 12–13.

In addition to these tactical shifts, Al-Shabaab also adjusted its target selection within Somalia. Post-Godane's death, Al-Shabaab increased the number of single-suicide attacks against civilians while retaining the majority of its attacks against military targets, including AMISOM and Somali National Army forward operating bases.⁴⁰⁹ With its more complicated, multiple-suicide operations, Al-Shabaab primarily targeted civilians with the majority of its attacks aimed at hotels.⁴¹⁰ Al-Shabaab's spokesman Ali Dheere explained Al-Shabaab's rationale by claiming the group specifically targeted hotels frequented by government officials and intelligence agents, and that these attacks were intended to deter civilian spies.⁴¹¹ The measurable uptick in attacks on civilian and military targets acted as an expression of immediate revenge for Godane's death while efficiently directing the Amniyat's capabilities against external adversaries.⁴¹²

Outside of Somalia, the Amniyat ramped up its operational tempo by planning and conducting attacks in the surrounding region.⁴¹³ The autumn of 2014 saw two major Al-Shabaab attack plans foiled in both the Ugandan and Ethiopian capitals.⁴¹⁴ While the national security services in both countries were able to disrupt the attacks, Al-Shabaab demonstrated its resolve to target AMISOM's troop-contributing countries and the firm dedication to its cause despite its new leadership.⁴¹⁵ Yet of all Somalia's neighboring countries, Kenya remained Al-Shabaab's most attractive target for external attack and a major focus for the Amniyat.

The expansion of the Amniyat's mission set and diversification of intelligence sources in Kenya further allowed the group to rebound. Petrich and Donnelly describe Al-

⁴⁰⁹ Shire, 13–14.

⁴¹⁰ Shire, 13–14.

⁴¹¹ Laacib, "Cali Dheere Oo Ku Hanjabay Inaanay Hoteelada Muqdisho Ku Nabadgeli Doonin Masuuliyiinta Dowladda," Dhacdo, accessed July 2, 2020, <https://www.dhacdo.net/cali-dheere-oo-ku-hanjabay-inaanay-hoteelada-muqdisho-ku-nabadgeli-doonin-masuuliyiinta-dowladda/>; Shire, "How Do Leadership Decapitation and Targeting Error Affect Suicide Bombings?," 13–14.

⁴¹² Shire, "How Do Leadership Decapitation and Targeting Error Affect Suicide Bombings?," 12–14.

⁴¹³ Bryden and Bahra, "East Africa's Terrorist Triple Helix."

⁴¹⁴ Bryden and Bahra.

⁴¹⁵ Bryden and Bahra.

Shabaab's recruitment techniques through social media and in-person pitches as targeting a more comprehensive range of individuals of both genders, with expanded intelligence collection roles for women.⁴¹⁶ According to the authors, "In Nairobi, al-Shabaab has recognized the potential of an existing but untapped way to use women to advance their cause: sex workers as contractor-spies...Al-Shabaab had subcontracted some local sex workers as intelligence officers, paying them for information disclosed by their customers."⁴¹⁷ This innovative development allowed the Amniyat greater access to government and security sector personnel to identify vulnerabilities for more successful attacks.

With the attack at Garissa University, Al-Shabaab received powerful international publicity that enabled the redoubling of the Amniyat's recruitment efforts and targeted intimidation of Somali government members.⁴¹⁸ According to Yusuf, in the aftermath of the Garissa attack, the Amniyat actively targeted youths as recruits, "A vast network of influencers and recruitment agents freely roam around town, identifying idle youth who are their immediate targets. Once the identified youths have been lured to join the jihadist movement, another team takes over. At least 200 boys are missing from schools within Isiolo and their whereabouts remain unknown."⁴¹⁹ Also, within Somalia, the Amniyat ramped up its attacks against diplomats, businessmen, and government officials through its strategy of intimidation and constant insecurity.⁴²⁰ These factors indicated the power and efficacy of the Amniyat fully recovered from the instability and vulnerability of Godane's death and contributed to Al-Shabaab's potent resilience as an organization in accordance with **Hypothesis 1**.

⁴¹⁶ Petrich and Donnelly, "Worth Many Sins."

⁴¹⁷ Petrich and Donnelly.

⁴¹⁸ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 250; Yusuf, "Kenyans Lament Al-Shabab's Recruitment of Youths."

⁴¹⁹ Yusuf, "Kenyans Lament Al-Shabab's Recruitment of Youths."

⁴²⁰ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 250.

C. APPLICATION OF HYPOTHESIS 2: POLITICAL CONTEXT

1. Somalia's Failed State Context

With the death of Godane, Al-Shabaab lost a highly detailed manager and a uniting force within the group's structure, all severely challenging its ability to provide goods and services throughout Somalia.⁴²¹ Al-Shabaab's rebound depended upon the successor's leadership competence in managing the organization's diverse array of services, operations, and public relations. At this crucial moment, any managerial misstep or outcry of internal dissidents within Al-Shabaab's organization could severely hinder the provision of goods and services, thereby weakening the organization's power and influence among the Somali people and throughout the Horn of Africa.⁴²²

Diiriye's appointment and subsequent takeover as emir proved a critical factor in Al-Shabaab's renewal as he maintained continuity with Godane's previous strategic vision.⁴²³ Bryden characterizes Diiriye's continued emphasis on decentralized control to provide essential services throughout Somalia as "local leaders and commanders plan and conduct operations, raise revenues and – where Al-Shabaab still controls territory – administer populations under their control."⁴²⁴ Al-Shabaab's continued commitment to providing goods and services in the absence of competent FGS institutions fostered the grassroots support needed to ramp up retaliatory jihadist operations.

In taking command, Diiriye understood the need for Al-Shabaab to remain a legitimate actor within the East Africa region to govern effectively in the absence of state apparatus.⁴²⁵ Despite conducting attacks that often hit civilians, Shire notes, "Al-Shabaab recalculating the cost-benefit balance of conducting further suicide operations and its avoidance of civilian spaces as potential targets, with the exception of heavily guarded

⁴²¹ Anzalone, "The Life and Death of Al-Shabab Leader Ahmed Godane."

⁴²² Anzalone.

⁴²³ Bryden, "The Decline and Fall of Al-Shabaab? Think Again."

⁴²⁴ Bryden.

⁴²⁵ Shire, "How Do Leadership Decapitation and Targeting Error Affect Suicide Bombings?," 16.

hotels frequented by government officials and foreign visitors.”⁴²⁶ In this way, Al-Shabaab attempted to shape the Somali popular sentiment by framing attacks as targeting foreigners and non-Muslims, while continuing to provide essential services in areas of control.⁴²⁷ Nowhere was this methodology more apparent than in the attack on Garissa University as Al-Shabaab militants specifically targeted non-Muslims for death on the spot, while sparing those who ascribed to Islam, all in the name of “liberation of Muslims lands.”⁴²⁸ Al-Shabaab’s exploitation of Somalia’s failed state and disenfranchised populations indicate the validity of **Hypothesis 2**.

2. Kenya as a Target of Opportunity

Despite the expectation that Godane’s death would bring fragmentation and disarray among Al-Shabaab and its affiliate Al-Hijra, the organization’s operations tempo remained largely unhindered.⁴²⁹ According to Maruf and Joseph, one of Diiriye’s first actions as emir dictated further attacks against Kenya: “Under the new management, Shabaab also increased its attacks on Kenyan soil and areas along the Kenya-Somalia border. Besides striking back at the Kenyans, the strategy had two apparent goals—winning new jihadist recruits through high-profile attacks and inflaming relations between the country’s Muslim and Christian communities.”⁴³⁰ The goal of inciting a religious-fueled regional conflict, most notably in neighboring Kenya, served Al-Shabaab’s narrative and strategic plan.

To accomplish the reemphasis on attacks in Kenya, Al-Shabaab focused on establishing specialized planning, increased recruitment, and innovations in the roles of women within the group. Narrowing the focus on specific attack planning within Kenya required internal reorganization within Al-Shabaab. Bryden and Bahra clarify the nature of Al-Shabaab’s reform: “One key dimension of this reform involved delegating to Al-

⁴²⁶ Shire, 16.

⁴²⁷ Bryden, “The Decline and Fall of Al-Shabaab? Think Again.”

⁴²⁸ Bryden and Bahra, “East Africa’s Terrorist Triple Helix.”

⁴²⁹ Bryden and Bahra.

⁴³⁰ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 248.

Shabaab's forces along the Kenyan border the responsibility for operations into adjacent parts of Kenya."⁴³¹ Al-Shabaab's internal reform allowed dedicated cells within the group to plan and conduct strategic attacks on specific regions within Kenya, resulting in highly successful operations in the number of casualties and propaganda opportunities.⁴³²

These targeted attacks within Kenya also offered Al-Shabaab the publicity necessary to ramp up its recruitment efforts among Kenya's disaffected ethnic Somalis.⁴³³ Working through the Al-Hijra network, Al-Shabaab actively targeted Kenyan prisons and vulnerable youths, including increasing numbers of women and girls, for recruitment into the jihadist struggle.⁴³⁴ These Kenyan female recruits often played supportive roles such as serving as confidential informants or couriers of IED components, communications equipment, and other operational materiel.⁴³⁵ The use of women in supportive roles often attracted less attention than their male counterparts while enabling Al-Shabaab's capabilities to expand within Kenya.⁴³⁶

Ultimately, Al-Shabaab's successful attack at Garissa University proved a critical turning point in reestablishing the group's credibility and legitimacy among its supporters and instilling terror among its enemies.⁴³⁷ The coordination with the Al-Hijra network to conduct the attack proved Al-Shabaab's "identity and its aspirations have transcended the movement's Somali origins, transforming both the theatre and the nature of its 'jihad'" according to Bryden.⁴³⁸ Again, Al-Shabaab's targeting of Kenya proved vital in their rebound and provided further evidence for the accuracy of **Hypothesis 2**.

⁴³¹ Bryden and Bahra, "East Africa's Terrorist Triple Helix."

⁴³² Bryden and Bahra.

⁴³³ Sahan Africa, "Al-Shabaab as a Transnational Security Threat," 21.

⁴³⁴ Sahan Africa, 21.

⁴³⁵ Sahan Africa, 31–32.

⁴³⁶ Sahan Africa, 31–32.

⁴³⁷ Bryden and Bahra, "East Africa's Terrorist Triple Helix."

⁴³⁸ Bryden, "The Decline and Fall of Al-Shabaab? Think Again," 4.

D. APPLICATION OF HYPOTHESIS 3: FAILED COUNTERTERRORISM

1. The Federal Government of Somalia's Policies and Impact

Since its transition from the TFG and official founding in 2012, the FGS remained extremely limited in its capacity to control territory and provide essential services within Somalia, especially when faced with Al-Shabaab's entrenched and committed jihadist challenge.⁴³⁹ Within the FGS, internal infighting generated a loss of confidence from both members and external supporters and deepened military insecurity, allowing the space for Al-Shabaab to exploit, as evidenced by various large-scale raids on vulnerable FGS garrisons.⁴⁴⁰

In attempting to remedy the dire situation, the FGS, with the support of AMISOM, launched two large-scale offensives designed to take back territory from Al-Shabaab, Operation Eagle in March 2014, and Operation Indian Ocean in September 2014.⁴⁴¹ Although Operation Eagle succeeded in taking back 10 Somali towns and disrupting Al-Shabaab resupply routes, reports of systematic abuses damped the victory.⁴⁴² According to Charbonneau, UN reporting indicated evidence of FGS corruption, "The Monitoring Group has identified a number of issues and concerns over current management of weapons and ammunition stockpiles by the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS), which point to high-level and systematic abuses in weapons and ammunition management and distribution."⁴⁴³ With the joint FGS-AMISOM Operation Indian Ocean, the FGS hoped to address these shortfalls while significantly striking Al-Shabaab strongholds.

⁴³⁹ Menkhaus, "State Failure, State-Building, and Prospects for a 'Functional Failed State' in Somalia."

⁴⁴⁰ Bryden, "The Reinvention of Al-Shabaab: A Strategy of Choice or Necessity?," 12; Menkhaus, "State Failure, State-Building, and Prospects for a 'Functional Failed State' in Somalia."

⁴⁴¹ AMISOM, "Joint Security Update on Operation Indian Ocean by Somali Government and AMISOM," October 28, 2014, sec. AMISOM News, <https://amisom-au.org/2014/10/joint-security-update-on-operation-indian-ocean-by-somali-government-and-amisom/>.

⁴⁴² Louis Charbonneau, "Exclusive: U.N. Monitors Warn of 'systematic' Somali Arms Diversion," Reuters, February 13, 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-arms-un-idUSBREA1C1QU20140213>; AMISOM, "Joint Security Update on Operation Indian Ocean by Somali Government and AMISOM."

⁴⁴³ Charbonneau, "Exclusive."

Godane's death coincided with the commencement of Operation Indian Ocean and was accompanied by the FGS's public appeal for Al-Shabaab fighters to cease operations. In this push, the FGS and AMISOM attempted to recapture Somali coastal towns from Al-Shabaab with the hope that the loss of its emir would fragment the group.⁴⁴⁴ At the same time, Somali government officials offered a 45 day amnesty period to Al-Shabaab fighters who surrendered, pledging rehabilitation and job skills training to former fighters.⁴⁴⁵ Anzalone highlights the promising implications of the FGS's actions in the wake of Godane's death: "The strengthening of governing structures, significant reduction of blatant corruption at high levels of government, allure of the federal government's 'amnesty' offer to al-Shabab fighters, and reining in independent militias will significantly damage al-Shabab's narrative as well as bolster the confidence of local communities."⁴⁴⁶ Unfortunately, although the FGS's actions immediately following Godane's death attempted to foster a comprehensive approach to tackling the problem of Al-Shabaab, the plans fell short of lasting solutions.

In the aftermath of Godane's death, the FGS publicized lofty goals to quell violence and foster stability, but deep-set internal problems remained. The government attempted to curb illicit financing through anti-money laundering legislation, but often lacked the capacity to enforce such laws.⁴⁴⁷ Al-Shabaab's attacks against FGS and AMISOM forces continued to highlight the government's deficiencies, including troop shortages and lack of territorial control.⁴⁴⁸ Even within Somali government and security services, Al-Shabaab wielded influence, according to Barrett, "The distinction between FGS supporters and Al-Shabaab supporters is not easily drawn. Some politicians, businessmen and clan elders will have a foot in both camps, even members of the security forces may spend part of their

⁴⁴⁴ AMISOM, "Joint Security Update on Operation Indian Ocean by Somali Government and AMISOM."

⁴⁴⁵ AMISOM.

⁴⁴⁶ Anzalone, "The Life and Death of Al-Shabab Leader Ahmed Godane."

⁴⁴⁷ Hiraal Institute, "The AS Finance System," 8.

⁴⁴⁸ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 251–52.

time with one side and part with the other.”⁴⁴⁹ Ultimately, the FGS’s rhetoric failed to result in the government’s real authority over Somali territory or the required legitimacy among the Somali people and instead continued to allow Al-Shabaab’s presence and resilience throughout the region as noted in **Hypothesis 3**.

2. AMISOM’s Policies and Impact

In the period prior to Godane’s death, AMISOM significantly intensified operations against Al-Shabaab. According to Bryden, “Al-Shabaab is likely to face significantly greater military pressure in 2014 than it did in 2013. The decision of the UN Security Council to augment AMISOM to over 22,000 troops with an explicit mandate to resume offensive operations, and the military means to do so, is already beginning to shape the battlefield on the ground. Since late 2013, AMISOM had begun to maneuver more aggressively in central Somalia threatening strongholds in Buulobarde and ‘Eel Buur.”⁴⁵⁰ AMISOM’s troop increases and reemphasis on offensive missions coincided with the previously mentioned joint FGS-AMISOM operations: Operation Eagle and Operation Indian Ocean.⁴⁵¹ As with the FGS strategy, AMISOM sought to isolate Al-Shabaab militants through cutting off supply lines and eliminating the group from village strongholds.⁴⁵²

At the death of Godane, AMISOM continued its push to recapture coastal towns and exact further pressure on Al-Shabaab during the vulnerable leadership transition.⁴⁵³ During the sensitive period in the months following Godane’s death, AMISOM proved successful in nominally gaining territory, cutting off some of Al-Shabaab’s funding streams, and supporting the FGS in encouraging desertions and defections from the jihadist

⁴⁴⁹ Barrett, “Can Al-Shabaab Deliver? Reality and Rhetoric in the Struggle for Power,” 364.

⁴⁵⁰ Bryden, “The Reinvention of Al-Shabaab: A Strategy of Choice or Necessity?,” 6.

⁴⁵¹ AMISOM, “Joint Security Update on Operation Indian Ocean by Somali Government and AMISOM.”

⁴⁵² AMISOM.

⁴⁵³ Anzalone, “The Life and Death of Al-Shabab Leader Ahmed Godane.”

organization.⁴⁵⁴ While all of these developments appeared promising at face value, AMISOM's fight against Al-Shabaab proved far from over.⁴⁵⁵

The coming months shifted AMISOM's tentative success against Al-Shabaab to a stalemate with little end in sight.⁴⁵⁶ Al-Shabaab's military prowess, combined with manning challenges among AMISOM member states, stalled the coalition's progress within Somalia.⁴⁵⁷ Maruf and Joseph note how multiple attacks by Al-Shabaab resulted in some withdrawals of AMISOM forces: "Attacks like the one on El Adde have forced AMISOM and the SNA to abandon some of their forward bases, allowing al-Shabaab to retake areas it lost several years ago. The November 2018 U.N. monitors' report says the group is currently in direct control of territory along the Juba valley in southern Somalia."⁴⁵⁸

Along with AMISOM's military losses, diplomatic discussions of AMISOM's exit strategy commenced.⁴⁵⁹ According to Kluijver, AMISOM's exit plan from the Somali conflict centered around the training of the Somali National Army: "This task has been taken on by a host of actors, from private South African companies paid for by the UAE, to U.S. and UK military contractors and a small EU training force; but the largest group of trainers comes from Turkey."⁴⁶⁰ Although AMISOM chose to remain in Somalia, the announcement of potential withdrawal and delegation of training responsibilities to external states indicated AMISOM's waning political will to defeat Al-Shabaab decisively. These factors provided Al-Shabaab leadership assurances that they need only to wait out

⁴⁵⁴ Bryden, "The Decline and Fall of Al-Shabaab? Think Again," 10.

⁴⁵⁵ Bryden, 10.

⁴⁵⁶ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 250.

⁴⁵⁷ Maruf and Joseph, 250.

⁴⁵⁸ Maruf and Joseph, "No End in Sight for the Al-Shabaab Threat to Somalia"; Umarov, "Letter Dated 2 October 2018 from the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea Addressed to the Chair of the Security Council Committee Pursuant to Resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) Concerning Somalia and Eritrea," 22.

⁴⁵⁹ Kluijver, "International Intervention and State-Building in Somalia," 43.

⁴⁶⁰ Kluijver, 43.

foreign presence and renewed Al-Shabaab's commitment and capability to rebound—all further evidence for the validity of **Hypothesis 3**.

3. United States' Policies and Impact

The United States involvement in Somalia stayed reasonably consistent in the period leading up to Godane's death, with the main crux of support being training and equipment to AMISOM and intelligence sharing aimed at diminishing Al-Shabaab's strength and influence.⁴⁶¹ In addition to support for AMISOM, the U.S. maintained strong bilateral ties with Kenya, which continued air and naval operations targeting Al-Shabaab.⁴⁶² The U.S. direct military involvement remained limited to airstrikes on high-level Al-Shabaab leadership, as with Godane's predecessor, Aden Hashi Ayro, who was killed in a U.S. airstrike in 2008.⁴⁶³ In support of AMISOM and the FGS's offensives against Al-Shabaab, the U.S. would again resort to such tactics to eliminate Godane and further degrade Al-Shabaab's capabilities.

In early September 2014, the United States announced the death of Godane via U.S. military airstrike as a "major symbolic and operational loss to Al-Shabaab."⁴⁶⁴ By decapitating Al-Shabaab's organization, the U.S. expected it would inflict the greatest leadership and unity challenge upon the jihadist group since its founding.⁴⁶⁵ As many analysts predicted Al-Shabaab would suffer power struggles and infighting, the U.S. declared it would continue applying pressure to the group through diplomatic, military, intelligence, and financial levers.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶¹ Edmund Blair and Drazen Jorgic, "Attack on Somali Islamist Leader Seen Triggering Power Struggle," Reuters, September 4, 2014, <https://in.reuters.com/article/somalia-usa-islamist-idINKBN0GZ02R20140904>.

⁴⁶² Name Redacted, *U.S.-Kenya Relations: Current Political and Security Issues*, CRS Report No. R42967 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2015), 11, https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20150723_R42967_5ddd027dbd8d43e3f4b090e7904236fdffe1d7.pdf.

⁴⁶³ Mesfin, "What Changes for Al-Shabaab after the Death of Godane?"

⁴⁶⁴ Kirby, "Statement from Pentagon Press Secretary Rear Admiral John Kirby on Ahmed Godane."

⁴⁶⁵ Blair and Jorgic, "Attack on Somali Islamist Leader Seen Triggering Power Struggle."

⁴⁶⁶ Alexander, "U.S. Confirms Death of al Shabaab Leader Godane in Somalia Strike"; Blair and Jorgic, "Attack on Somali Islamist Leader Seen Triggering Power Struggle."

However, the aftermath of Godane's death marked a shift in Al-Shabaab methods and strategy, likely as a result of U.S. counterterrorism tactics. First, the United States' use of airstrikes against senior Al-Shabaab leaders including Godane, pushed the group to operate more covertly, moving in smaller groups and dispersing its militia to avoid detection and catastrophic losses.⁴⁶⁷ These tactics presented a more complex challenge to those conventional forces who sought to oppose the group, including AMISOM and the FGS.

Secondly, immediately after Godane's death, Al-Shabaab significantly increased its suicide attacks and coordinated strikes against civilian and military targets.⁴⁶⁸ Shire explains the phenomenon: "Even though the elimination of militant leaders might affect groups' strategies of target selection and preferences on attack modalities, the decapitation of terrorist leaders do not appear to reduce the frequency of these attacks, nor the number of fatalities but instead bolsters militant groups' resolve and strength."⁴⁶⁹ Ultimately, the U.S. decision to eliminate Godane failed to fragment the group and weaken the organization's solidity, but instead led to a more unified, determined, and resilient force. While the U.S. provided financial aid, training, and diplomatic engagement in support of Al-Shabaab's defeat, the limited positive impact to AMISOM and the FGS was overshadowed by the policy backfire of killing Godane. This suggests **Hypothesis 3** played a role in Al-Shabaab's resilience.

⁴⁶⁷ Maruf and Joseph, "No End in Sight for the Al-Shabaab Threat to Somalia."

⁴⁶⁸ Shire, "How Do Leadership Decapitation and Targeting Error Affect Suicide Bombings?," 15–16.

⁴⁶⁹ Shire, 15–16.

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V. CONCLUSION

A. ASSESSED CRITICAL FACTORS FOR RESILIENCY

Al-Shabaab overcame near elimination after the failure of the Ramadan Offensive in 2010, noted in Case Study 1, and the death of emir Godane in 2014, seen in Case Study 2. Al-Shabaab's reliance on its organizational cohesion, financial mechanisms, and intelligence apparatus in both case studies validates **Hypothesis 1: The Organizational Attributes** approach. The group's ability to consolidate leadership and eliminate rivals, adapt income sources and reduce expenditures, and maintain a loyal and effective Amniyat demonstrates critical factors for the group's rebound after the Ramadan Offensive. Following the death of Godane, further proof of Al-Shabaab's organizational attributes included the efficacy of the executive council in appointing the emir's successor, the flexible organizational funding methods, and the Amiyat's role in targeting new recruits. This flexibility and adaptability contributed to Al-Shabaab's resiliency.

Amid its organizational reformation post-Ramadan Offensive and Godane's death, Al-Shabaab analyzed weaknesses in the Somali state government to discover ways to fill the void. Al-Shabaab provided goods and services and became a legitimate actor among impoverished Somali populations. Kenya's proximity and viability as a target of opportunity also allowed Al-Shabaab to use major external attacks to gain credibility as a significant terrorist organization, exemplifying **Hypothesis 2: The Political Context** approach.

The validity of **Hypothesis 3: The Failed Counterterrorism** approach demonstrates Al-Shabaab's ability to exploit failures of regional counterterrorist actors for its organizational rebound. In both case studies, the inability of the Somali military forces to hold and control territory outside of urban areas, the ineffective AMISOM policies and potential lack of consistent political will to remain in Somalia, and the United States' reliance on limited indirect support and airstrikes allow the space for Al-Shabaab's resurgence.

In both severe low points, Al-Shabaab's both opportunistic and deeply-entrenched movement rebounded through the multifaceted approaches: internal organizational attributes, opportunities in the political context, and exploitation of failed counterterrorism actions. While all three hypotheses prove relevant in Al-Shabaab's revival, the strength of Al-Shabaab's organizational attributes within the failed state context were absolutely essential for the group's survival. Without Al-Shabaab's organizational cohesion, intelligence apparatus, and financial institutions filling the void of a capable nation-state and gaining the tacit approval of the Somali population, it is unlikely the group would have overcome its debilitating blows. In the absence of a legitimate and capable governance functions in Somalia, any external counterterrorism efforts, even if militarily successful, offer only limited effect on Al-Shabaab's ultimate success or failure.

B. SUMMARY AND POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Looking into the future, any counterterrorism solution should take into account Al-Shabaab's critical factors for resiliency and approach a response in a similar multifaceted fashion. Somalia, AMISOM, and the United States each hold a vested interest in the defeat of this terrorist organization. The policy implications to achieve this objective begin with the Somali government's national level, reinforced by AMISOM's regional force and the United States' multi-domain support.

1. The Federal Government of Somalia

Al-Shabaab's continued success in Somalia will depend on both its organizational strengths of adaptability and innovation, and the void left by Somalia's federal government failings. Petrich explains, "As the primary alternative government in the country, al-Shabaab is at the heart of any solution to a stable Somalia, and we cannot credibly expect progress to be made without hamstringing the group. Some of the more common conflict resolution methods will not work in this context: al-Shabaab is uniquely gifted in its ability to extort the population while maintaining its narrative of legitimate resistance."⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁷⁰ Petrich, "Cows, Charcoal, and Cocaine," 15.

Decreasing Al-Shabaab's organizational strengths including their organizational cohesion, financial mechanisms, and intelligence apparatus must take a comprehensive approach.

Al-Shabaab's power lies in that it is not only a terrorist organization, but also a militant and insurgent group which has strong cultural ties with Somalia's populous, according to an interview with Marchal.⁴⁷¹ Therefore, any policy must consider this cultural dimension and provide a viable alternative for the void Al-Shabaab can fill. For Maruf and Joseph, this solution includes a local approach to defeat Al-Shabaab: "At the moment the only feasible way to defeat Al-Shabaab is by a grassroots movement that completely rejects the organization and its objectives."⁴⁷² A common consensus among diverse Somali experts is that such a solution should not be based in war, jihad, or external manipulation, but instead domestic political development.⁴⁷³

Al-Shabaab's ability to operate internal funding mechanisms, including taxation, should be addressed through a comprehensive approach that strengthens the government of Somalia's legitimacy. Merely attempting to eliminate Al-Shabaab's taxation system in Somalia will not solve the greater concern that the government of Somalia cannot provide for its citizens' security. It will be necessary to address the deeper issues of Somalia's government failings and find ways to address them. If the structure and function of the government of Somalia can improve at both the regional state level and national level, this will have a significant impact on delegitimizing Al-Shabaab as a viable political actor in the region.⁴⁷⁴

In Pape and Karamba's Vulnerability Assessment within Somalia, the researchers identify a targeted area for improvement within the government of Somalia, the federal taxation system: "Local governments have the advantage as they are the closest to their constituents. None of the households responded that they pay taxes to Al-Shabaab. This

⁴⁷¹ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 280.

⁴⁷² Maruf and Joseph, 283.

⁴⁷³ Maruf and Joseph, 277.

⁴⁷⁴ Christopher Anzalone, "Al-Shabaab: An Interview with Christopher Anzalone," Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, January 31, 2018, <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/al-shabaab-interview-christopher-anzalone>.

may well be the case since Al-Shabaab does not have strongholds in urban areas anymore.”⁴⁷⁵ The researchers go on to note that the citizens of Somalia may be willing to pay taxes to any entity that is more likely to enforce collection and that Al-Shabaab’s ideological reach is likely superficial or unsolicited.⁴⁷⁶ This indicates the population of Somalia is highly likely to accept the Somali state if it prioritizes enacting and enforcing governance functions which incorporate local needs.

Anzalone defines the areas of improvement which need to be prioritized within the government of Somalia to challenge the Amniyat’s capabilities and Al-Shabaab’s monopoly on Somalia’s security: “Political improvements include a sustained campaign against corruption, building up reliable security forces loyal to the state instead of specific clans/sub-clans, and other related issues such as paying security forces regularly and on time as well as being held accountable for donor funds and equipment.”⁴⁷⁷ By reducing corruption and promoting competent security services, the government of Somalia paves the way for trustworthy intelligence functions of their own. Such developments are possible, as Horton describes neighboring Somaliland’s intelligence apparatus prioritization:

One of the keys to their success are the formal and informal intelligence gathering capabilities of Somaliland’s National Intelligence Service (NIS) and the army’s and police’s own intelligence officers. Informal intelligence gathering networks are extant throughout Somaliland where they are nested within local communities. Formal networks led by officers from the NIS, army, and police exist alongside and in conjunction with the informal networks that act as early detection systems or tripwires.⁴⁷⁸

Somalia’s government can likewise prioritize consistent salaries to members of the security sector and work to establish trustworthy informant networks in both urban and rural areas. Through concerted efforts to reduce the government of Somalia’s rampant

⁴⁷⁵ Pape and Karamba, “Somalia Poverty and Vulnerability Assessment: Findings from Wave 2 of the Somali High Frequency Survey,” 55.

⁴⁷⁶ Pape and Karamba, 55.

⁴⁷⁷ Anzalone, “Al-Shabaab.”

⁴⁷⁸ Michael Horton, “How Somaliland Combats Al-Shabaab,” Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, CTC Sentinel, 12, no. 10 (November 26, 2019), <https://ctc.usma.edu/somaliland-combats-al-shabaab/>.

corruption, the federal government can focus on improving the federal security and intelligence services to counter Al-Shabaab's mafia-like hold on Somali populations.

As the International Crisis Group reports: "For many Somalis, Al-Shabaab is only one, and not necessarily the most pressing, of the many problems they face; and for some communities and individuals, it offers practical solutions and benefits, including mediating local clan disputes, improving religious education, providing basic services and institutionalising consultative bodies for local governance arrangements."⁴⁷⁹ Identifying and responding to the true needs of the Somali population would allow FGS to build trust in legitimate government institutions and diminish the influence and power of Al-Shabaab as a viable political alternative.

2. AMISOM

One of Al-Shabaab's strengths remains its continued ability to hold territory and remain profitable while undermining the Somali government.⁴⁸⁰ In order to support the Somali government's ability to combat this threat, policy solutions must include a military component, specifically the support and backing of AMISOM. In a 2019 meeting with the UN Security Council, Somalia's representative emphasized the need for ongoing support to Somalia's military and security forces, especially by way of maintaining AMISOM's mandate.⁴⁸¹

Although the multinational force has made the counterterrorism fight against Al-Shabaab a priority, Anzalone points out, "Some AMISOM countries such as Kenya and Ethiopia have their own interests in Somalia and, though they are a part of the African Union force, have also pursued these interests. The international community should hold the Somali government accountable so that the process of rebuilding the country does not become a business in and of itself for corrupt politicians and other officials."⁴⁸² Also,

⁴⁷⁹ International Crisis Group, "Somalia," 20.

⁴⁸⁰ Hansen, *Al Shabaab in Somalia*, 141.

⁴⁸¹ United Nations Security Council, "Somalia's 2020 Elections Will Be Historic Milestone on Long Journey Back to Security, Stability, Special Representative Tells Security Council," Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, February 24, 2020, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sc14120.doc.htm>.

⁴⁸² Anzalone, "Al-Shabaab."

AMISOM's previous announcements of military withdrawal and minimized support efforts severely hamper defeat-Al-Shabaab efforts. Any indication of waning political will emboldens Al-Shabaab militants to continue their protracted war and simply wait out foreign presence. It is in both the United States and the international communities' interest to support a strong and stable Somalia, and providing a united response to the country's most significant destabilizing factor, Al-Shabaab, will ensure effective solutions last well into the future.

3. The United States

Currently, according to Ploch Blanchard, "The United States has provided over \$487 million in humanitarian assistance to Somalia in FY2018 - FY2019. Non-emergency U.S. foreign aid, including funding for AMISOM, totaled almost \$430 million in FY2018."⁴⁸³ Former United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) Combatant Commander General Waldhauser emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach to confronting Al-Shabaab: "United States military training and operations alone cannot defeat al-Shabaab... alongside United States diplomatic and development efforts, they provide legitimacy to the Federal Government of Somalia and create opportunity for political and economic growth, and security and stability in the broader region."⁴⁸⁴ Al-Shabaab is unlikely to be weakened without a strong, capable state alternative to provide the much needed stability for Somalia's populous and international support for this process.⁴⁸⁵

Understanding Al-Shabaab's nuanced approach to staying in power is critical for future policy implications aimed at diminishing the threat. The U.S. approach of targeted killings of Al-Shabaab leadership has thus far been ineffective at diminishing Al-Shabaab's ability to conduct attacks.⁴⁸⁶ As Maruf and Joseph note, "Even if more missiles find their

⁴⁸³ Lauren Ploch Blanchard, *Somalia*, CRS Report No. IF10155 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2019).

⁴⁸⁴ Waldhauser, United States Africa Command Posture Statement, 2019, 22.

⁴⁸⁵ Maruf and Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab*, 283.

⁴⁸⁶ Maruf and Joseph, 275.

target, Al-Shabaab seems more than capable of taking the hits. While there's no doubt some of its fighters joined for non-religious reasons—forced recruitment, money—the group also has a backbone of die-hard jihadists who have kept fighting despite years of setbacks. Al-Shabaab can fill leadership roles as needed.”⁴⁸⁷ With this in mind, potential policy solutions must go beyond U.S. kinetic operations and instead support the Somali government's ability to provide security on the ground and stability for their population

By looking at the Al-Shabaab terrorist network as more than purely a military threat, but instead as a political, economic, and governance issue within Somalia, the government of Somalia can attack the root causes of terrorism rather than perpetuate an endless conflict. This thesis demonstrates a multifaceted counterterrorism approach must address Al-Shabaab's specific organizational attributes, the local political context, and past policy missteps. In this manner, the United States and the international community can support the federal government of Somalia to prioritize a comprehensive strategy to implement viable and lasting solutions to Somalia's security issues, most importantly the pervasiveness of Al-Shabaab's terrorist network.

⁴⁸⁷ Maruf and Joseph, 277.

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