

The GLOCEPS

Policy Paper

Research and Analysis in Defence and Security

Countering the transnational mobility of the Al-Shabaab

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The effectiveness of counter-terrorism interventions in Kenya in pre-empting transnational mobility of the Al-Shabaab is yet to be fully realized. This paper suggests the closing of terrorist mobility gap as a matter of priority. Mobility is applied in this discussion to encompass movement of operatives and the related logistics that aid travel to execute terror attacks. It has facilitated the Al-Shabaab terror regime both transnationally and intra-nationally in launching attacks to support its strategic objectives. It is aided by legal and illegal travel infrastructure which include public and private modes of transport; weak border controls, corruption and criminal activities. This paper recommends, at the domestic level, strengthening of border security and countering the illicit travel infrastructure. Beyond the frontiers, it proposes international and regional cooperation, knowledge generation on terrorist mobility to counter the terrorists' funding innovations.

~Executive Summary

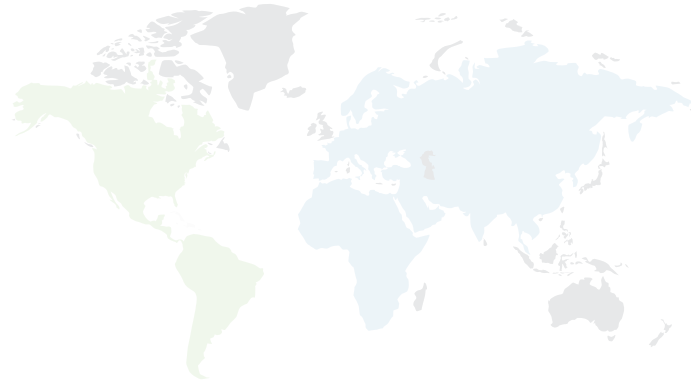


Introduction

The transnational mobility of the Al-Shabaab presents security threats in Kenya, the East African region and globally. These threats are domiciled in terrorism, the core business of the Al-Shabaab. The phenomenon of mobility remains a critical cog in the execution of the violent extremist incidences. The threat of terrorism is applied in this discussion to mean the projection of political violence to meet ideological goals by a non-state actor. These acts of violent extremism are meant to create harm, fear or force governments to submit to certain actions.

The Al-Shabaab mobility is aided by several factors. They include transnational connections, exploitation of legal and illegal travel infrastructure, corruption, and the criminality-terrorism nexus. These have enabled the terror group to project its transnational reach through such attacks as the Kampala bombings in Uganda in 2010, the Westgate in Nairobi, Kenya in September 2013, and the Dusit D2 in Nairobi in January 2019. The attacks relied on other facilitative factors such as weak border controls and localized logistics. The incidences involved the exploitation of cross-border legal and illegal entry channels by the terror operatives.

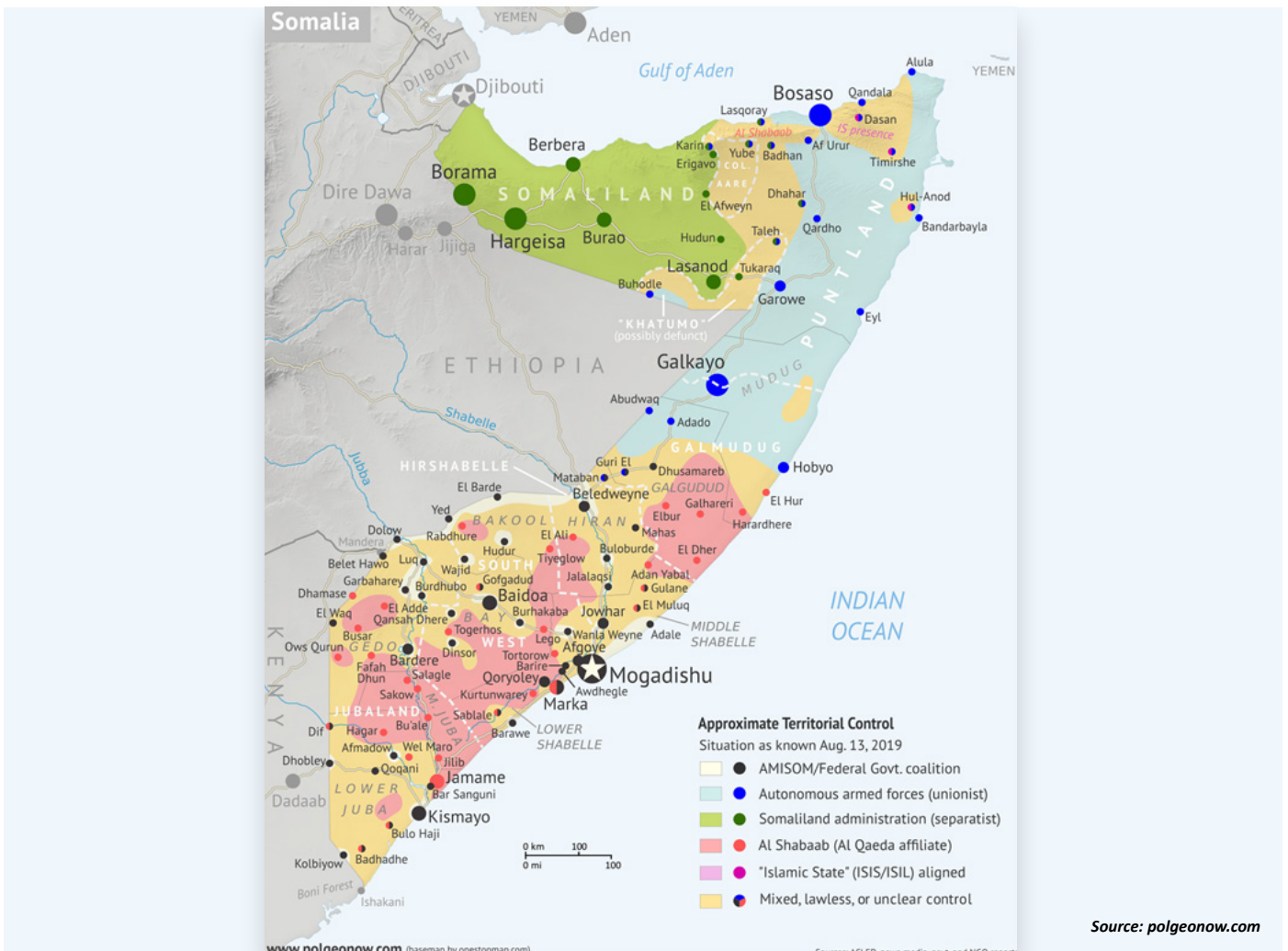


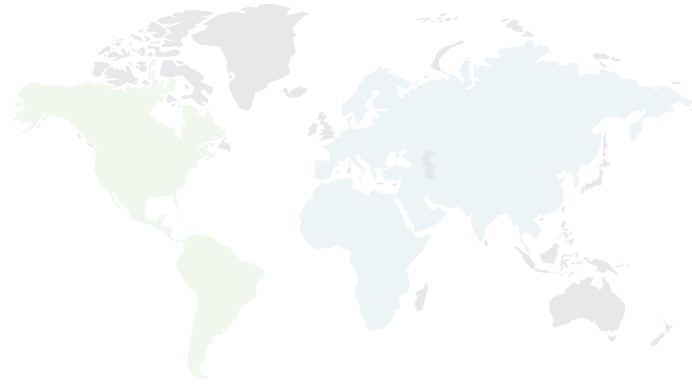


Background

The contemporary discourse of terrorism mobility in Kenya remains rooted in the activities of Al-Shabaab terror group. This is an Islamist terrorist organization with roots in Somalia and which aspires to form an Islamic caliphate in the Horn of Africa. It is affiliated to the Al-Qaeda global terrorist organization. Its recruitment capacity has gone beyond its primary base in Somalia and attracted foreign terrorist fighters from the larger East African region and beyond. As with other terrorist organizations, it has tapped the dynamics of globalization to enable recruitment, fundraising, and movement of logistics to launch terror attacks.

The operatives rely on transnational mobility to plan and execute terrorist attacks. Preceding this pursuit is an initial socialization path that requires mobilization of a political ideology in order to motivate acts of violent extremism. The resultant movement is enabled by both legal and illegal channels of cross-border mobility as the terror group capitalizes on weak state governance. This occurs in a context where counter-terrorism interventions have mostly been reactive and rely on existing laws to try terror suspects. This paper discusses transnational mobility of Al-Shabaab terror operatives with a focus on cross-border movements between Kenya and Somalia.





Key Issues

The following key issues are relevant to the discussion on transnational dynamics of the mobility of Al-Shabaab terror group.

Transnational dynamics of Al- Shabaab Mobility

Enablers	Activators
Transnational connections	Diaspora, social media platforms
Weaknesses in transnational governance	State collapse, governance gaps
Exploitation of transnational travel infrastructure	Globalization, corruption
Transnational financing	Diaspora, financial donors
Transnational crimes in financing	Globalization, weak governance, contraband trade
TheKenya-Somalia irredentism factor	Pan Somalism, 'marginalization' narratives
Security and operational challenges	Under-resourcing in security sector Varied doctrine and command structures Minimal cross border cooperation

Source: Expert Interviews 2021 and literature synthesis

Exploitation of transnational connections and transits

The Al-Shabaab terror group relies on nodes and layers of connections and locomotion across borders as enablers of its transnational movement. Given its wide appeal to defend the religion of Islam, which it perceives to be under siege by primarily western world and allied states, the Al-Shabaab has managed to recruit from the Somali population and its diaspora as well as the Horn of Africa, particularly, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. The group has also recruited foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) from western countries such as the United States of America (USA), Britain and Norway. A number of FTFs have previous battle experiences with the now defunct Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (ISIS). It has equally maintained links with the Boko

Haram terror group in Nigeria, having trained some of their operatives in Somalia.

While maintaining affiliation with the Al-Qaeda terror network since 2009, the group has transformed into a transnational actor. Its early affiliation with the Al-Qaeda was strategic in enabling the outfit to transcend its Somali identity and achieve a global appeal. It has equally kept transnational ties with the Allied Defence forces (ADF) that has bases in Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The ADF and Al Shabaab have been involved in transnational organized crimes. These crimes have in turn supported their logistical needs. Its indoctrination and recruitment reach beyond East Africa





Photo credit: dw.com

(Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania) has been boosted in part by the internet and related social media platforms such as Facebook, Telegram, and WhatsApp. These applications have been useful for communication and operational planning prior to attacks.

The terror group has also maintained affiliation with the Ahlu Sunna Wal Jamaa, also known as, Ansar al-Sunna, an Islamist organization in the Cabo Delgado region of Northern Mozambique and an affiliate of Islamic State of Central African Province (Iscap), which has drawn extremists from Kenya and Tanzania. Its recruits were principally inspired by religious ideologues such as the late Sheikh Aboud Rogo, a Mombasa-based cleric. This explains why majority of Kenyans that have joined the Mozambique-insurgency are from Kwale County. Their movements between Eastern Africa and Mozambique are supported by transnational networks built over time and the porosity of the Kenya-Tanzania borders.

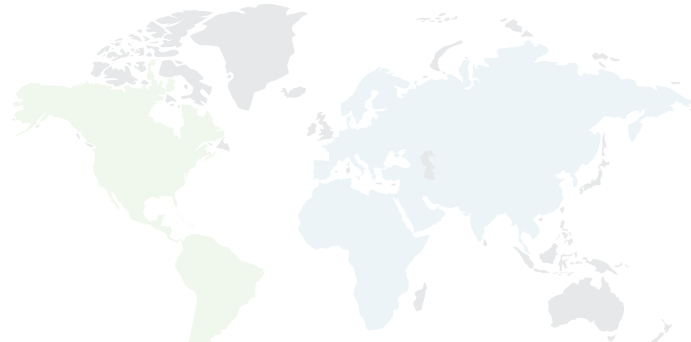
Over the years, Al-Shabaab's transnational mobility between Kenya and Somalia as from

2008 was facilitated by the Muslim Youth Centre (MYC), a Pumwani based youth organization led by Sheikh Ahmad Imani Ali, a Kenyan senior member of the Al-Shabaab who is based in Somalia. The MYC in 2012 transformed into the Al-Hijra, an affiliate of the Al-Shabaab in Kenya and managed to create several branches in Mombasa and Garissa under the stewardship of the late Sheikh Aboud Rogo. Its recruitment agents are spread in Kenya's major towns such as Nairobi, Mombasa and Garissa.

A recurrent theme for recruitment has been centered around social grievances. The operatives have relied on public and private means of transport to facilitate transit of MYC recruits between Kenya and Somalia. Key mobility routes to Somalia have included the Nairobi-Garissa-Dabaab; Nairobi-Garissa-Mandera; and the Mombasa-Lamu-Boni forest. The trans-location bases across the Kenya-Somalia border are in Mandera and Lamu, which harbor hideouts for the operatives before they move to other parts of Kenya to mount attacks.







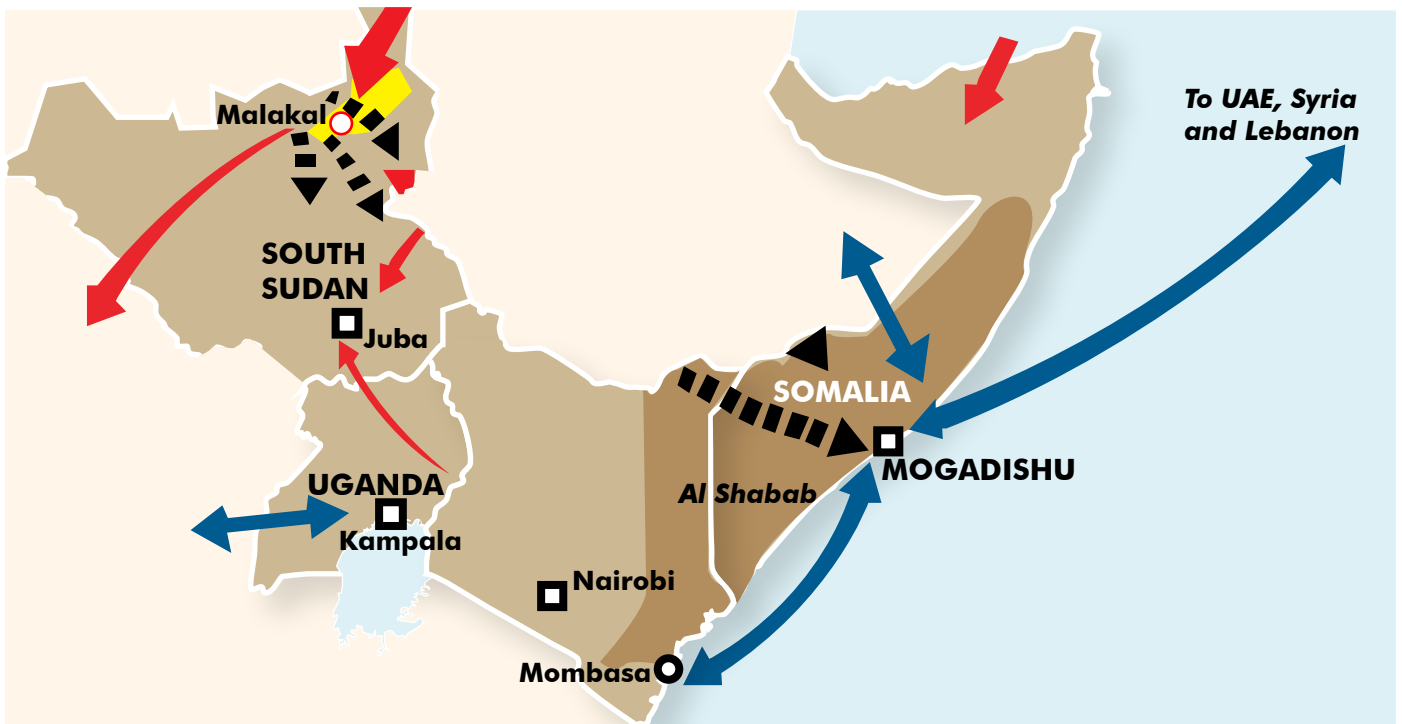
Weaknesses in transnational governance mechanisms

The connection between weak governance and terrorism has been largely discussed in literature. The discourse of failed states has been prominent in contexts where key state functions are weak or absent. The manifestations include absence of law and order and inadequate control of national borders which allows criminality to thrive. Somalia has always fitted in the categorization of failed states. The absence of law and order in the country facilitates terrorist mobility in multiple ways including local and cross border travels. While there is contestation in literature that terror operatives prefer to operate in relatively functioning states, 'failed states' like Somalia offer several vulnerabilities that aid terrorists' transnational mobility.

The challenge of weak governance has continued to aid the transnational mobility of logistics particularly across the Kenya-Somalia border. The movement of logistics such as Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (VBIEDs) from Somalia to Kenya has equally benefitted from

border porosity resulting from poor governance. Moreover, weaknesses in administration of north-eastern, Kenya, have provided opportunity for the assembly of IED constituent parts in the region, with technology imported from Somalia. This has emerged as a key aspect of terrorism mobility and an enabler of attacks planning and execution. IEDs in particular have since 2017 been widely mounted by the Al-Shabaab as a tactical strategy to dominate certain routes in the region including Manderu-Wajir-Garissa and parts of Lamu county. This has made security operations unsustainable given targeted campaigns against police and military vehicles in these routes.

Weak border controls and which are compounded by poor bilateral relations between Kenya and Somalia enable operatives to cross border points to perpetrate terror attacks. The Al-Shabaab operatives originating from Somalia use several land routes which include Somalia-Lamu-Malindi-Mombasa; Somalia-Garissa-Mombasa; Somalia-Nairobi-Busia-Uganda;



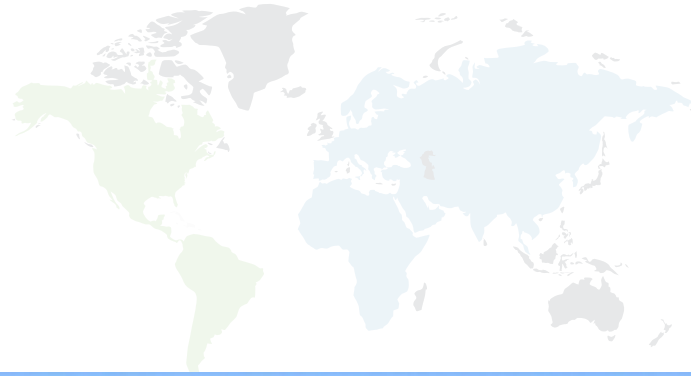


Photo credit: max-security.com

Somalia-Liboi-Garissa; Somalia-Mandera-Wajir-Isiolo-Nairobi; Somalia-Moyale-Nairobi. Governance lapses along these routes have enabled the terror operatives to exploit both public and private means of transport including motorcycles and donkey carts to evade detection.

The weaknesses in governance have equally contributed to poor community-state relations in the border counties thereby impacting negatively on the needed public cooperation to counter the transnational mobility of the Al-Shabaab. The operatives have established hide-outs among locals particularly in Mandera, Wajir Garissa and Lamu, despite increased counter-terrorism efforts. This has been manifested not only in the recruitment of operatives among locals in these counties but also in the increased cross-border attacks in north-eastern and coast regions.

The role of transnational corruption across the Kenya-Somalia border remains key in the discussion of weaknesses in governance. Somalia remains second-most corrupt country in the world after South Sudan according to World Corruption Perceptions Index 2020. Kenya is at position 124 out of 179 ranked countries. Hence, terror operatives find it easy to manipulate a section of corrupt state officials to aid their transnational movements. Those manning border points or those in states departments such as immigration have been manipulated to allow easy acquisition of legal travel documents such as passports. Kenya's State Department for Registration of Persons has been in the spotlight for issuing illegal aliens from Somalia with national identification documents. The corrupt state bureaucracy has seen government officers being compromised to allow operatives cross with their weapons and related logistics such as IEDs and VBIEDs across the borders. This has





made interception of such operatives difficult as they travel on 'genuine' documents such as national identity cards and passports. Possession of these valid documents always prevent undue scrutiny at border crossing points. A key contributor to transnational corruption is low morale among security officers working in the frontiers. The poor working conditions often create opportunity for corrupt dealings between

the terror operatives and state officials. Al-Shabaab is projected to continue using drones and further exploit the weak governance gaps to engage in surveillance across the borders in Kenya. This is serving as an additional aid to its movement. It joins a host of other insurgent groups in the DRC and Mozambique that are relying on drones for surveillance and precision targeting.

on Somalia

GTI RANK

5

GTI SCORE

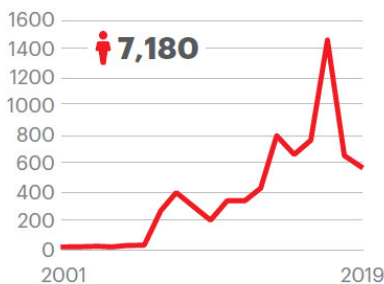
7.645

569  DEAD

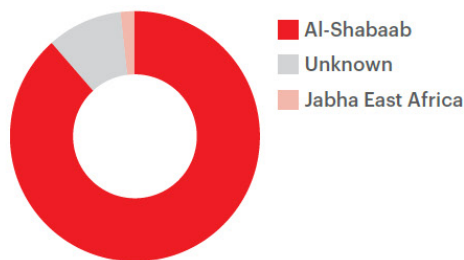
765  INJURED

239  INCIDENTS

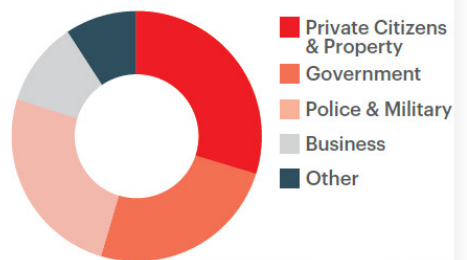
Total deaths since 2001



Deaths by group



Attacks by target



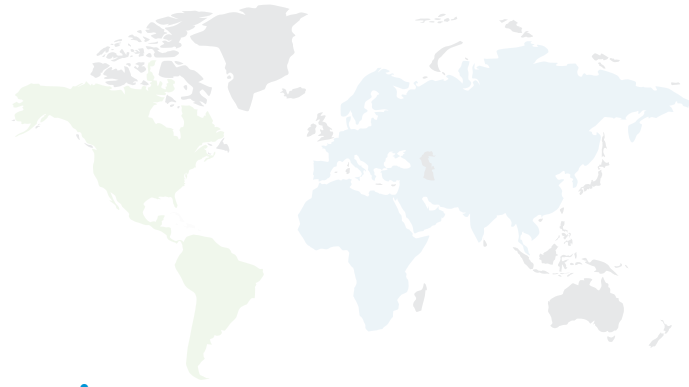
Credit: Global Terrorism Index 2020

Exploitation of transnational travel infrastructure

Terror operatives depend on both legal and illegal travel infrastructures to travel to targeted spaces for attacks planning and execution. The operatives use licit travel documents such as passports and identity cards to board planes, and cross borders to execute their attacks. They have also perfected the virtual space, which enables impersonation, and related exploitation of credit card fraud to aid their mobility. Holders of 'powerful' passports such as citizens of the USA, and Norway are able to travel with ease to over 100 countries visa free. These passports have been exploited for travel to launch terror attacks. Yet, visa applications have in many instances filtered out some terror operatives destined for international travels.

Terror operatives also exploit the illegal travel infrastructure to counter states' surveillance. This infrastructure aids their movement through the production of fake travel documents such as passports, visas, work or residence permits. Corrupt immigration officers and travel agents in Kenya have offered supportive roles in this respect. The production of illegal travel documents is supported by cartels that also facilitate transnational crimes such as human and arms trafficking. At the operational level, access to travel documents has enabled travel to different locations for training, surveillance, reconnaissance, and tactical planning. The continued rush by Somalia nationals to acquire Kenyan identification and travel documents both legally and illegally to facilitate movement across Kenya and Somalia is noteworthy.





Transnational financing

The Al-Shabaab has maintained an effective transnational financial system that has sustained its activities despite the counter-insurgency efforts. While the terror group's monetary strength is derived from its trade in charcoal, sugar, and other smuggling businesses in southern Somalia, other sources of funding include the remittances from the estimated 14% of Somali people who are living in the diaspora. This is appraised at about USD 1.2 billion per year. There is also the international aid flow of USD 834 million, foreign direct investment of USD 102 million and export trade of USD 516 million every year to the Federal Government of Somalia. While these funds are meant for the welfare of the Somali people, they have, a number of times, extended support to the Al-Shabaab.

There are also large-scale donations from overseas in form of goods which are usually sent

by Jihadist donors to businessmen linked to the terror group. These are sold and the proceeds handed over to the Al-Shabaab. There is a growing threat that some business fronts in South Sudan could be supporting Al-Shabaab in Somalia. These businesses include real estate, oil companies operating mainly in Juba with proceeds being used as additional financing source.

The groups' financial liquidity has continued to rest on the generosity of individual donors and its Al-Qaeda connection. In 2013, the US Treasury issued an alert on Qatari-based Umayr Al-Nu'aymi for channeling USD 250,000 to Al-Shabaab. The group has previously received financial assistance from Eritrea, though it is estimated that such assistance has drastically reduced following heavy scrutiny by the United Nations.



Photo Credit: baselgovernance.org





Photo Credit: intelligencebriefs.com

Since 9/11, the global community has been cooperating to curtail terrorist financing orchestrated through formal financial systems. Irrespective of the heightened awareness, the Al-Shabaab still uses formal banking systems and mobile money platforms such as M-PESA to move money for its logistics functions. This is enabled by its support from the Somali Diaspora and individual sympathizers. The exploitation of transnational financing networks is suspected to have contributed to the Dusit D2 Hotel attack in Nairobi, Kenya, in January 2019. One of the suspects linked to the attacks, Hassan Abdi Nur, is believed to have received Ksh 9 million from South Africa through 52 MPESA accounts he registered between October to December 2018. Prior to the attack, the suspect unusually withdrew USD 300,000 at Diamond Trust Bank in Eastleigh, Nairobi, which was later wired to Jilib Somalia, the headquarters of Al-Shabaab.

Even though direct diaspora remittances to the Al-Shabaab has drastically reduced due its pro-

scription as a terrorist group by the US, stopping diaspora support to the group has not been easy due the absence of a structured banking system in Somalia which is directly linked to the global financial community. Hence, most of the remittances have reached the Al-Shabaab informal networks, such as the Hawala, through which payments are made to the recipients. It involves a dealer in one country directly calling a dealer in Somalia to make payments to the client. The opaqueness of this system has made it very difficult to control and regulate by the international financial security community.

Even when the *Hawala* routes are disrupted, cash of up to USD 10,000 has normally been sent directly to Al-Shabaab using personal couriers, with the possibility of larger amounts being smuggled transnationally. There are credible projections that Al-Shabaab in line with other insurgent groups could adopt the use of crypto currencies such as Bitcoin to fundraise to support its mobility.





Role of transnational crimes in financing

Terror operatives require financial resources to support their logistic functions of planning and execution of terror attacks. Terrorist organizations such as the Al-Shabaab have extensive land and maritime smuggling links that keep the movement financially afloat. They are involved in the smuggling of contraband products such as sugar, textiles, and charcoal across borders. The contraband trade was particularly lucrative prior to Kenya's military engagement in Somalia in 2011 through its use of Kismayu port. At the height of piracy on the Indian Ocean in the mid-2000s (2007-2009), the group received a percentage of ransoms. In the recent past, the Al-Shabaab has also ventured into smuggling wildlife trophies including ivory. The group has maintained ties with poachers spread across Kenya, the DRC, and the Central African Republic (CAR). This has in turn enabled connections with Asian markets.

The terror group has exploited the disruptions of the heroin smuggling routes as a result of the ongoing Syrian civil war. It has activated connections with the Middle East and now supplies heroin to criminal networks in Kenya, Nigeria, and South Sudan. By quickly adapting to new revenue streams, the group can easily manage its logistics such as travel, and the activation of decentralized terror cells for attacks.

The Amniyat intelligence wing has been critical to Al-Shabaab's organizational effectiveness that has seen its 'tax base' expand. As the group innovates on its 'taxation base', the notable shift is its progressive transformation into a criminal enterprise rather than a religious ideology. It continues to exploit weak governance mechanisms to engage in illicit business activities to ensure financial sustainability.



Photo credit: america.aljazeera.com





Conclusion

The face of Al-Shabaab's transnational mobility is multifarious and constitutes exploitation of networks, routes, travel infrastructure, weak governance, finances, criminality, and operational challenges. This calls for counter-terrorism strategies to focus on regular mapping of the changing patterns. The terrorists will continue to rely on a decentralized operational network aided by a weak state apparatus to facilitate their mobility across the region.

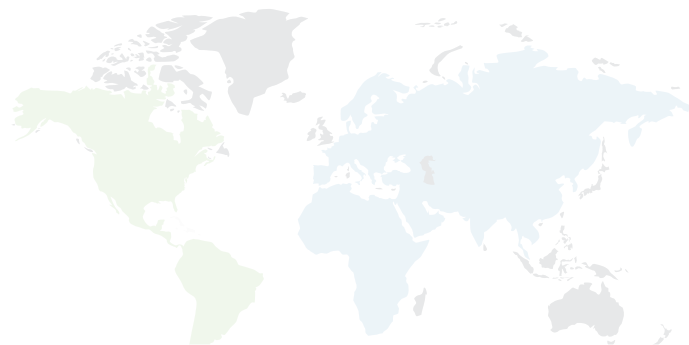


Photo credit: Samrack.com

Recommendations

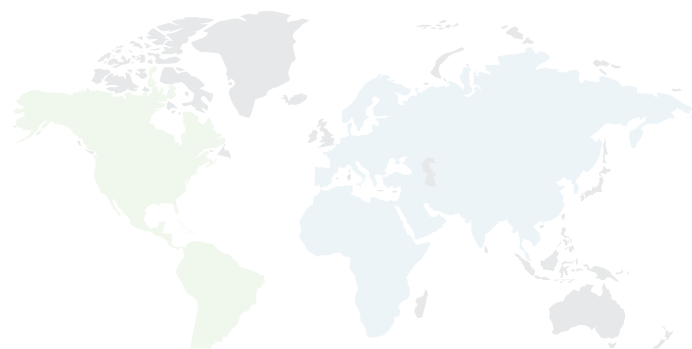
The following policy recommendations detail the immediate, short-term and long term interventions required to counter the transnational mobility of Al-Shabaab. The matrix equally links the recommended actions to the enablers (the key factors that aid the Al Shabaab transnational mobility) and the activators (the environments that trigger mobility).





Enablers	Activators	Immediate	Mid-term	Long-term
Transnational connections	Diaspora, social media platforms	Enhanced cooperation with global actors such as Interpol and UNODC through the Counter-Terrorism Centre of Excellence.	Regional and international cooperation at the AU and UN levels.	Regular analysis of Al-Shabaab mobility trends to generate knowledge and preventive interventions.
Weaknesses in transnational governance	State collapse, governance gaps	The Ministry of Foreign Affairs should improve bilateral cooperation on security matters between Kenya and Somalia.	The Ministry of Interior should intensify regular engagement and cooperation with entities such as the INTERPOL and the UNODC for information sharing and strategic interventions.	State stabilization efforts through cooperation with external agencies such as the European Union, unilateral actors, and through agencies such as IGAD and the African Union. KDF to enhance border security along Kenya-Somalia border.
Exploitation of transnational travel infrastructure	Globalization, corruption	Strict enforcement of anti-corruption laws and regulations in the public sector	The Ministry of Interior to enhance cooperation with entities such as INTERPOL.	Regular mapping of trends and patterns on exploitation of travel infrastructure at the domestic, regional and global levels.
Transnational financing	Diaspora, financial donors	Enforcement of existing laws such as POCAMLA and 'disrupting' loopholes in the informal financial systems such as <i>Hawala</i> system to counter terrorism financing.	Cooperation with global financial intelligence units to counter terrorism financing.	Global cooperation with multiple entities such as INTERPOL to counter terrorism financing. Cooperation with financial sector players.
Transnational crimes	Globalization, weak governance, contraband trade	The Ministry of Interior should prioritize cooperation with border communities enhanced Nyumba Kumi and other community policing interventions.	Enforcement of existing laws such as POCAMLA.	Global cooperation with entities such as INTERPOL, UNODC regional security chiefs meetings.





Enablers	Activators	Immediate	Mid-term	Long-term
<p>The Kenya-Somalia irredentism factor</p>	<p>Pan Somaliaism, Marginalization' narratives</p>	<p>Development of cross border multi-agency committees for security and strategic interests' cooperation.</p>	<p>The Ministry of education to lead and innovate citizenship education on Kenya- Somalia relations.</p>	<p>Progressive national and county governments development allocations in the north eastern region to counter irredentist concerns.</p> <p>Addressing progressive marginalization would change the narratives around belonging and identity in the north eastern region.</p> <p>KDF should engage in hearts and minds approach through development projects in the north eastern region.</p>
<p>Security and operational challenges</p>	<p>Inadequate resources, morale and Cross-border incursions</p>	<p>The Ministry of Interior should progressively upgrade the existing security equipment used in patrolling Kenya-Somalia border such as Armored Personnel Carriers(APCs), Ambush Protected Vehicles(M-RAP) and open back-to-back patrol vehicles. This would help counterattacks from small fires and improvised explosive devices in the region.</p>	<p>The Ministry of Interior to establish a special counter-terrorism patrol team experienced in motor-bike combat skills to complement the motor-vehicle patrol team, especially in terror prone regions.</p> <p>Strengthening a multi-agency cooperation for CT effectiveness. This would include harmonizing differences in remuneration, training, equipment, doctrine and operational culture.</p>	<p>The Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Interior should engage in continuous multiagency capacity building of the National Police Service, the KDF, NIS and Intelligence Services on the changing dynamics of counter-terrorism.</p> <p>National Counter-Terrorism Centre (NCTC) to take lead in reviewing the National Countering Violent Extremism Strategy. This would have the impact of harmonizing CT operations.</p>

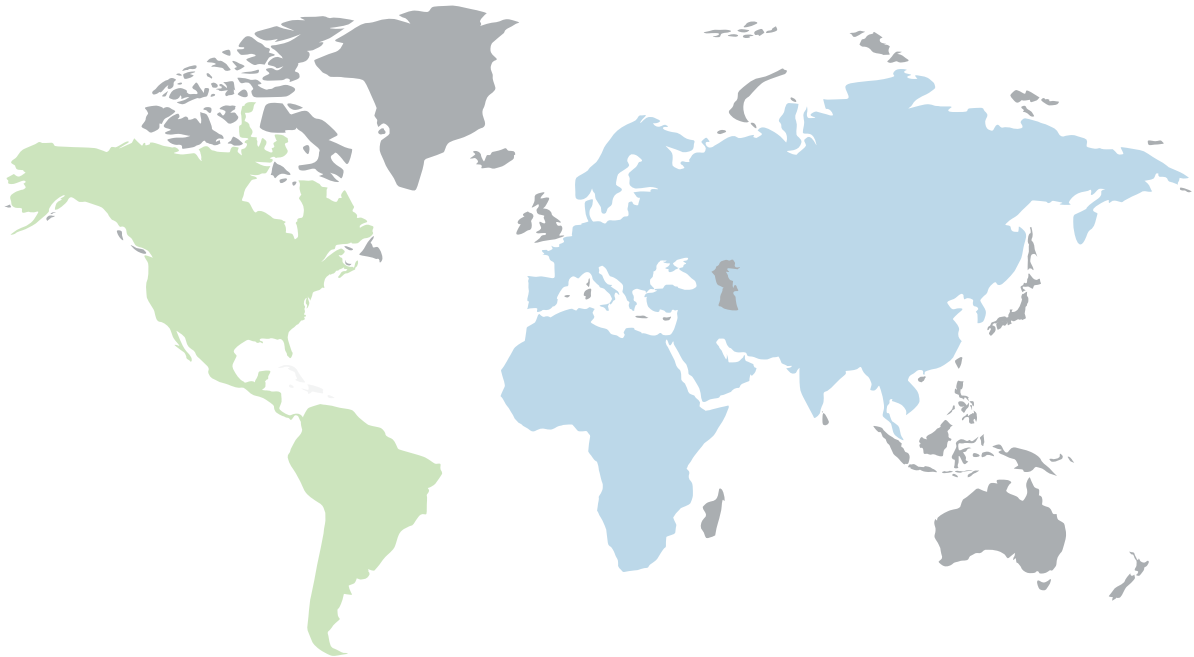
Transnational dynamics of Al-Shabaab mobility

Source: Expert interviews 2021 and literature synthesis





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